

Methodological Toolkit for Functional Areas

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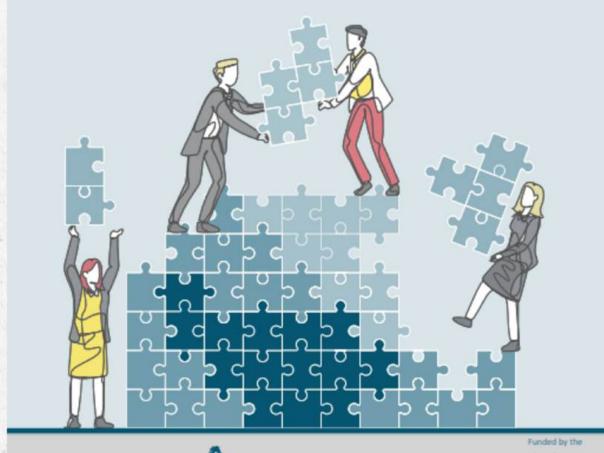
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TOOLKIT

to improve governance, coordination, planning, and implementation processes across jurisdictional boundaries







FUNCTIONAL AREAS IN THE EU





Today, citizens often interact at different spatial scales in their everyday life.

Therefore, measures that focus on local developments should be designed at the appropriate spatial scale.

New Leipzig Charter (2020)



The "Functional Areas in the EU" project

The project was launched in 2021 by the **Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and the World Bank** and was completed in 2024.

Target group: 24 Functional Areas (FAs) from 8 Member States, both urban and non-urban, including 8 FAs from Romania (5 – direct support, 3 – indirect support).

Objectives

- Technical assistance to address major development challenges;
- Dissemination of lessons learned, tools, and methods developed;
- Facilitation of knowledge exchange;
- Development of a toolkit to strengthen functional approaches;
- Insights for supporting Functional Areas in 2021–27 and beyond 2027.





The functional areas that benefitted from direct support:













CROATIA

Zagreb Urban Agglomeration Population: 1,086,000

HUNGARY

Lake Balaton Functional Region Population: 257,620

ROMANIA

Caraș-Timiș Functional Area Population: 1,072,334

ROMANIA

Oradea Metropolitan Area Population: 279,842

CZECH REPUBLIC

Brno Metropolitan Area Population: 699,856

POLAND

Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration Population: 358,437

ROMANIA

Cluj Metropolitan Area Population: 445,600

ROMANIA

West lalomița Functional Area Population: 25,566

GREECE

West Athens Population: 586,685

POLAND

Krakow Metropolitan Area Population: 1,076,117

ROMANIA

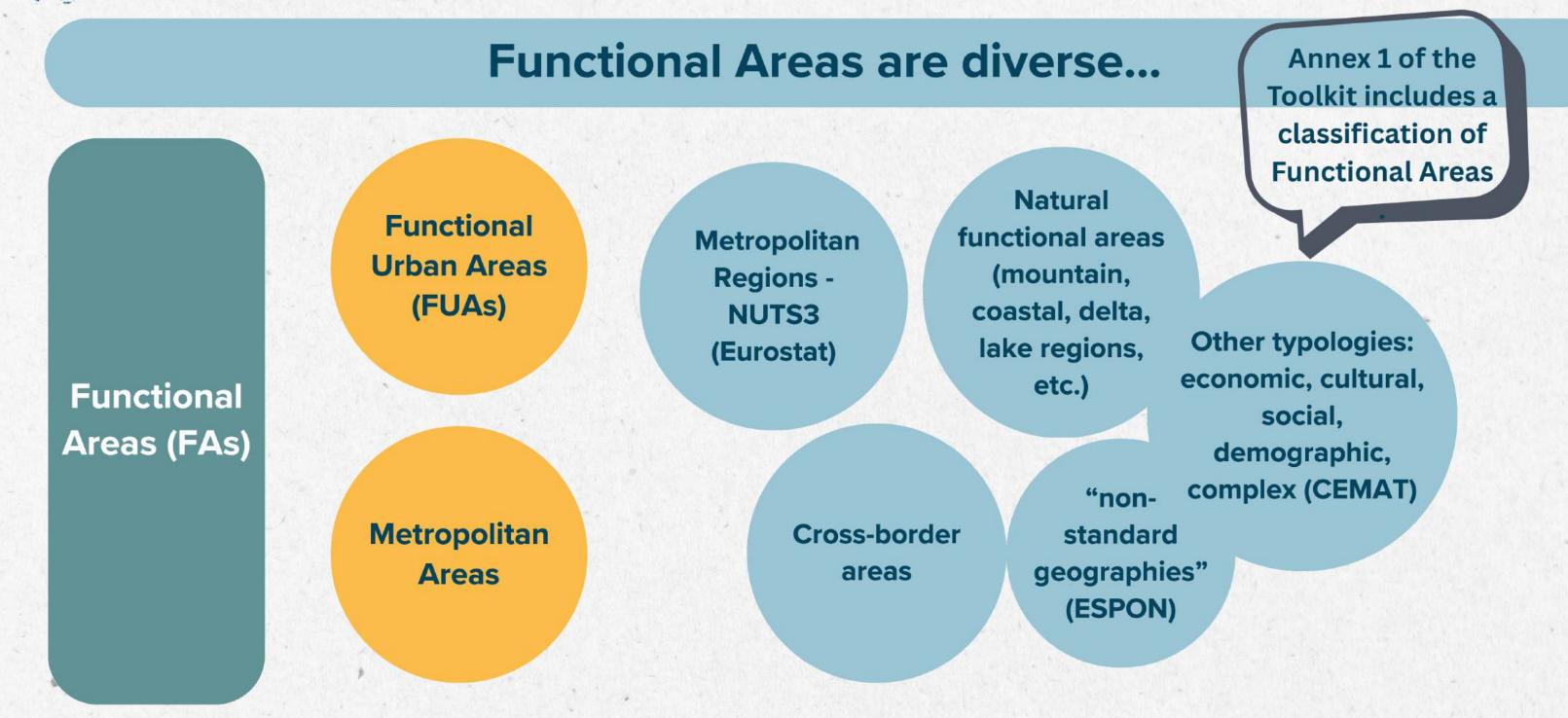
Jiu Conurbation and Jiu Valley Functional Area Population: 1,490,708

SLOVAKIA

Trenčin Functional Area Population: 73,327







...but have one thing in common: cooperation beyond administrative borders



Functional Urban Areas (FUAs)

A city and its commuting zone (a contiguous area of spatial units where at least 15% of employed residents commute to the respective urban center).

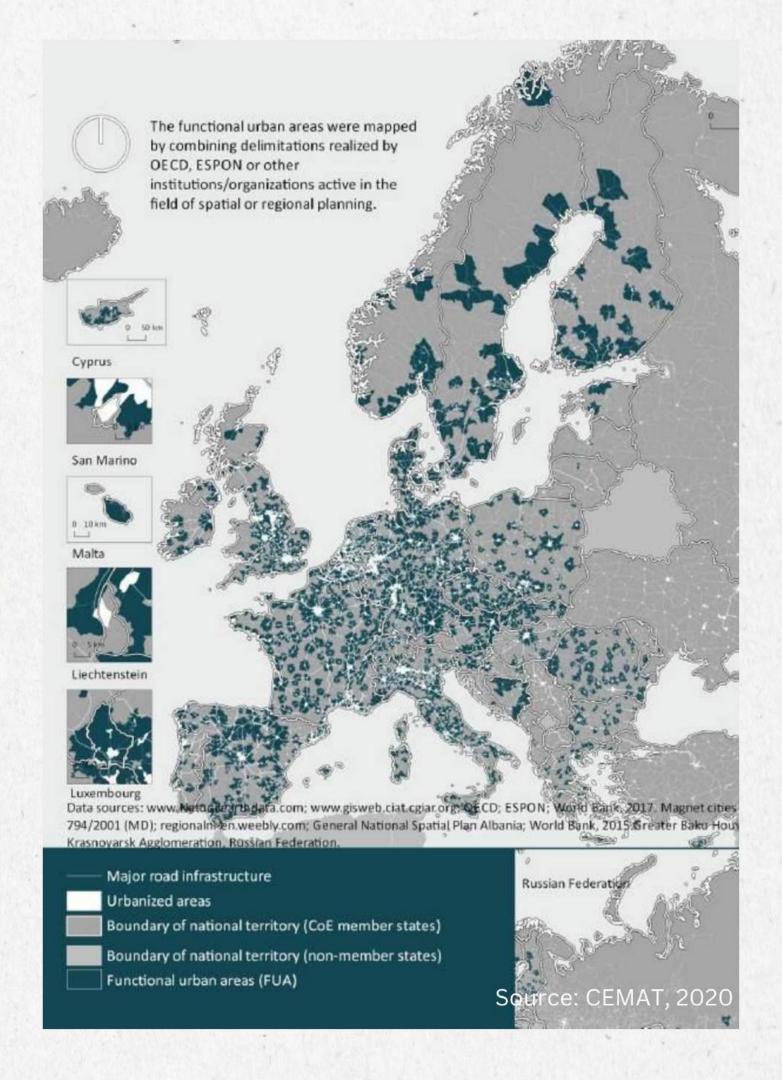
(EC-WB-OECD-UN-Habitat)

Metropolitan Areas / Regions

As statistical units, metropolitan regions are defined as FUAs with at least 250,000 inhabitants. (Eurostat)

Administrative code: defines metropolitan areas from a governance angle.

The Romanian Law (246/2022) specifies the functioning, competences, and financing mechanisms of metropolitan areas, and lists the administrative-territorial units that make up a metropolitan territory.





Interjurisdictional collaboration and Cohesion Policy

Reducing territorial disparities, stimulating economic growth, and improving citizens' quality of life are at the core of EU Cohesion Policy. Collaboration across administrative boundaries contributes directly to achieving these objectives.

Access to EU funds was the main driver behind the creation of metropolitan areas in Romania, through the **Growth Poles Policy** (seven growth poles benefited from dedicated funding under the ROP 2007–2013).

The 2014–2020 Cohesion Policy acted as a catalyst for Member States in promoting integrated territorial development and functional urban areas, mainly through the new territorial instruments ITI and CLLD.

The 2021–2027 Cohesion
Policy supports functional
areas and territorial
cooperation, particularly
through Policy Objective 5 –
"A Europe closer to citizens"
– and territorial instruments
(ITI, CLLD, OTT).

2007-2013 2014-2020 2021-2027 2027+



What are the concrete benefits and how can we create a culture of cooperation?



Integrated territorial development

- real territorial dynamics
- interventions at optimal scale (with the greatest impact on quality of life)



Addressing intricate challenges

 increasingly complex shared challenges (e.g. climate change)



Boosting the impact of EU funds

- avoiding duplicative efforts and costs
- economies of scale



Economic development and competitiveness

- FUA: the engines
 of regional and
 national
 economies
- Positive spillover effects



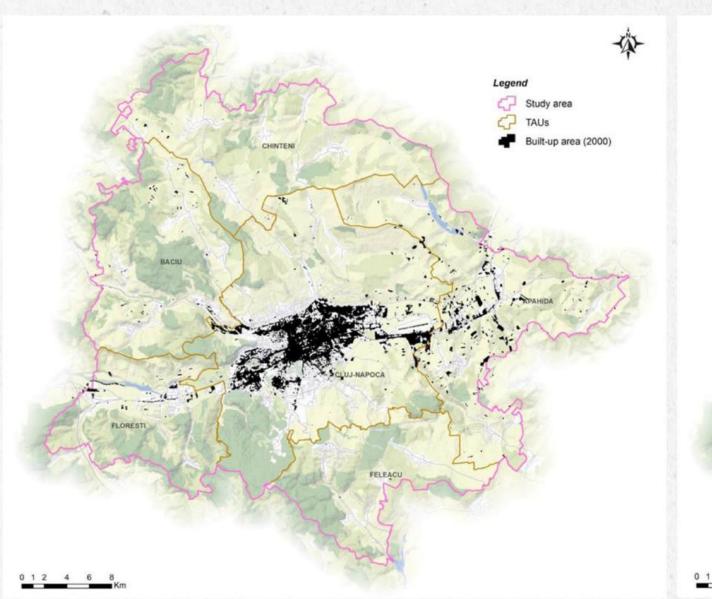
Partnership and participation

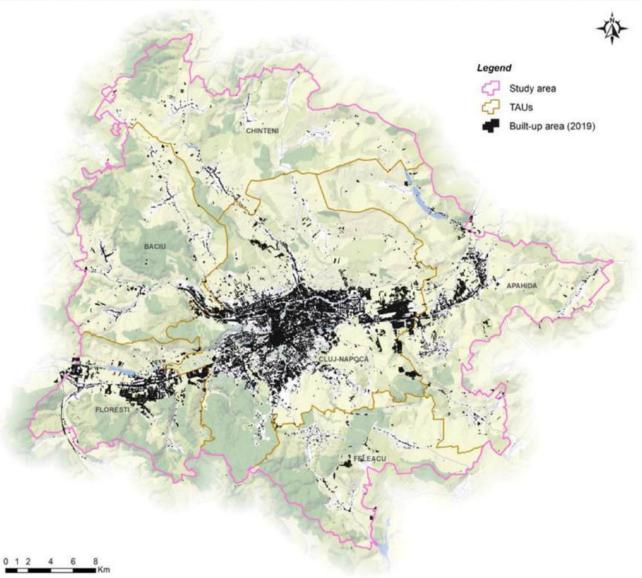
- partnership
 principle
- urban-rural linkages.



The new territorial realities call for an integrated vision and actions.

Cluj Metropolitan Area - Built-up area (2000-2018)





Citizens in the EU travel, on aveage, 34,8 kilometres every day (DG MOVE, 2022).

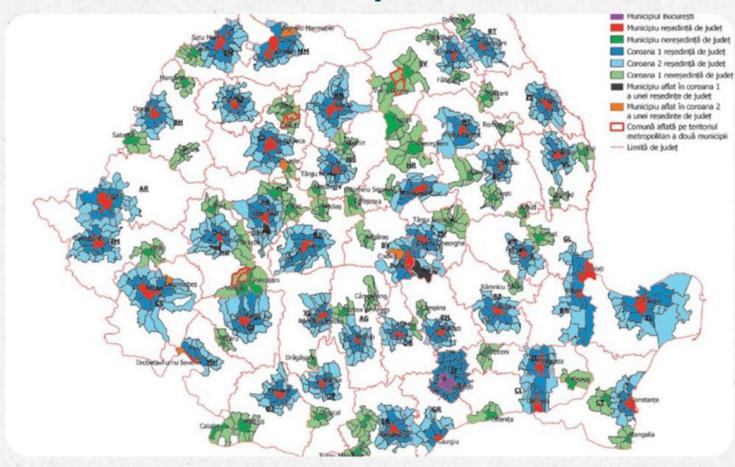


Romania has made significant progress through the adoption in 2022 of the National Urban Policy and the dedicated Law on Metropolitan Areas.

Romania Urban Policy



Law on Metropolitan Areas





Who is the target reader?

- representatives of interjurisdictional entities (e.g. Intercommunity Development Associations / Metropolitan Areas), as well as local representatives and regional and national authorities;
- both urban and non-urban areas;
- representatives of functional areas at different stages of maturity, whether established or not.

Purpose: to support interjurisdictional collaboration.

The toolkit was developed based on the activities carried out within the "Functional Areas in the EU" project (2021–2024).

METHODOLOGICAL TOOLKIT to improve governance, coordination, planning, and implementation processes across jurisdictional boundaries



What will you find in this toolkit?

Practical tools and useful information (including opportunities for capacity building and funding under the EU Cohesion Policy)

Examples of collaboration at the national level:

- Cluj Metropolitan Area
- Oradea Metropolitan Area
- Caraș-Timiș Functional Area
- Western Ialomița Functional Area
- Jiu Valley Functional Area and Jiu Conurbation

Examples of collaboration at the European level (e.g. Brno, Zagreb, Krakow, Barcelona, etc.)

METHODOLOGICAL TOOLKIT to improve governance, coordination, planning, and implementation processes across jurisdictional boundaries



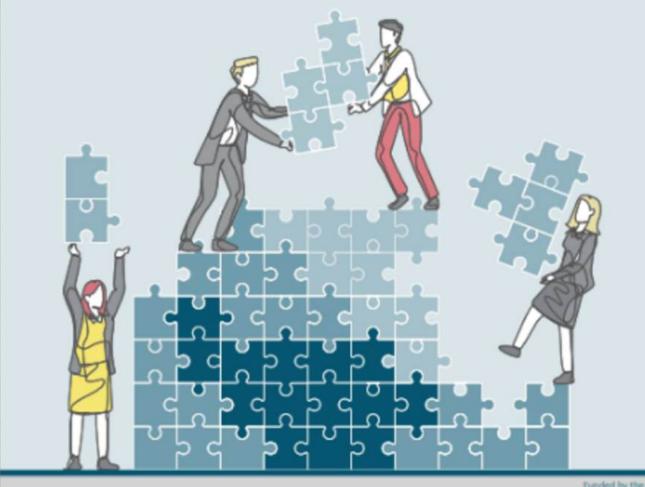
How can the toolkit support you?

The toolkit can support you in:

- developing and implementing integrated development strategies
- identifying priority projects with supra-local impact
- improving collaborative governance and participation
- mobilising funding
- strengthening urban-rural linkages
- achieving better cross-sectoral integration
- monitoring and evaluation...

...at the functional area level.

METHODOLOGICAL TOOLKIT to improve governance, coordination, planning, and implementation processes across jurisdictional boundaries







FUNCTIONAL AREAS IN THE EU





The toolkit complements two other recent publications:

Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (2020) Handbook of Territorial and Local Development Strategies (2022)



Handbook of Sustainable (2) an Development Strategies

As a complement to the work of the Urban Development Network of the European Commission, the Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies provides methodological support to cities, managing authorities and other stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of urban strategies under Cohesion Policy by creating room for exchange of experience and policy learning. In particular, it refers to Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) as supported by the European Regional Development Fund during the programming periods 2014-2020 and 2021-2027.

Explore the online platform >

Download the report [2]



Handbook of Territorial and Local Development Strategies

The Handbook of Territorial and Local Development Strategies targets different communities of policymakers (regional and national managing authorities, local authorities, local action groups, development agencies, etc.) with the aim to promote sustainable and integrated development in areas other than urban areas. It provides the readers with a number of practical tips, examples and recommendations, as well as references to existing literature, guidance and tools, to best address relevant policy challenges in the framework of cohesion policy 2021-2027.

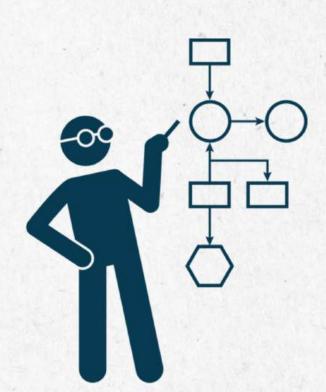
Download the report [2

published by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) in collaboration with DG REGIO



Structure of the toolkit

Elements of each chapter:



- Introduction
- Challenges, Practical Insights and Tools
- Recommendations

Annex - Classification of Functional Areas

Glossary





Challenges

How to formulate an integrated strategy at the functional area level?

How to identify and prioritise projects at the functional area level?

How to support participatory strategy implementation?

Practical insights and tools



- Brno Metropolitan Area
- Barcelona Metropolitan Area
- Zagreb Urban Agglomeration
- Western lalomiţa Functional Area
- Jiu Valley Functional Area



- Approaches for project prioritisation
- Tools to support a participatory strategy formulation process





Brno Metropolitan Area: 184 municipalities, set up in 2013

- **Advocacy**
- Role of ITI
- Going beyond ITI
- **Integrated solutions**

- Despite the absence of a dedicated legal framework for metropolitan areas, Brno has taken on a leading role in promoting metropolitan cooperation.
- ITI as impetus for metropolitan cooperation (2014-2020), leading to the creation of the Brno Metropolitan Area.
- The 2021+ Strategy reflects a commitment to expand cooperation beyond ITI priorities and includes strengthening cooperation as a strategic objective.
- Individual projects are grouped into 65 "integrated solutions."
- Limitations and vision Implementation is based on voluntary cooperation and has some limitations. The next step is to view this integrated strategy not as a set of interventions, but as a governance strategy for the entire metropolitan area.







Tools and resources for participatory strategy development and project prioritisation

- Guide on using opinion polls in strategic planning
- Methodology for urban regeneration survey
- Methodology of Romanian first urban aesthetics survey
- Alba Iulia: project prioritization for 2014-2020
- New European Bauhaus Toolbox and Compass
- Takeaways from the Knowledge Exchange on identification of flagship projects and funding opportunities



https://functionalareas.eu/solution s-for-functional-areas/



Recommendations

- The transition from ad-hoc cooperation to long-term planning is often a **gradual process**. Successful initial projects help to build trust, even if they do not involve major funding.
- Identification of **flagship** (**high-priority**) **projects** that can mobilise support from various actors across the functional area, through wide consultation processes. Such projects can strengthen a long-term culture of cooperation.
- Genuine community involvement in all stages: design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (participatory tools).
- Supporting participatory implementation (e.g., endorsement letters for projects developed by NGOs or other entities if they contribute to the strategy's objectives, or providing technical assistance to homeowners' associations for energy renovation).



Chapter 2: Territorial focus

Challenges

How to delineate the optimal territorial scale for functional approaches?

How to harness urban-rural linkages at the functional area level?

Practical insights and tools



- Cluj Metropolitan Area
- Lake Balaton Functional Region
- Tăuții Măgherăuş (Baia Mare Metropolitan Area)
- Brno Metropolitan Area
- Romania: Law on Metropolitan
 Areas



Process and indicators for delineating functional areas.



Chapter 2: Territorial focus



Brno Metropolitan Area



- The Brno Metropolitan Area collaborated with Masaryk University to delineate the functional area based on territorial data on commuting, migration, and accessibility.
- Collaboration with academia for collecting and analysing territorial data is also relevant for metropolitan areas already delineated by law (as in the case of Romania).

- Process and indicators for delineating functional areas.
 - Indicators on commuting and labour market dynamics
 - Indicators on population density
 - Indicators on accessibility (connective infrastructure, education, services)
 - Economic, cultural, social, and geographical indicators, etc.



Chapter 2: Territorial focus

Recommendations

- Applying a data-driven approach (linkages, common needs and opportunities, trends), in collaboration with academia/research institutes, private data operators.
- Ensuring representation and involvement of rural municipalities in FA governance bodies (shifting from the urban-rural dichotomy to collaboration for shared goals).
- Encouraging exchanges and the replication of best practices between urban and rural areas.



Challenges

How to establish a functional area governance body?

How to build and maintain partnerships?

How to foster knowledge and administrative capacity building at the functional area level?

Practical insights and tools



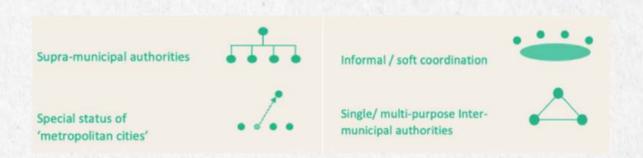
- Brno Metropolitan Area
- Barcelona Metropolitan Area
- Caraș–Timiș Functional Area
- Cluj Metropolitan Area
- Oradea Metropolitan Area
- Jiu Valley Functional Area
- Functional Areas in Poland
- Western Athens Functional Area
- Košice, Prešov, and Banská Bystrica Regions (Slovakia).



- Peer learning networks and administrative capacity-building programmes at the EU level
- Phases of civic participation and partnership-building.



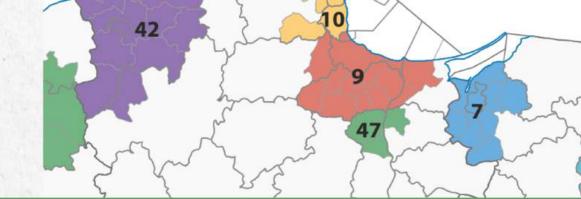
- At European level, there is a variety of governance models, ranging from informal and consultative coordination to institutionalised bodies.
 - Governance challenges identified within the project include:
 - difficulty in obtaining approval from local administrations and lack of political support for joint planning and project implementation;
 - reconciling political differences;
 - limitations of administrative and financial capacity.
- Local leaders, as well as representatives from the nongovernmental, academic, or research sectors, and international development organisations, can contribute to building coalitions that bring together actors from different sectors and jurisdictions to work towards common objectives.



Three key principles of Policy Objective 5 ("A Europe closer to citizens"):

- 1. Cross-sectoral approach
- 2. Multi-level governance
- 3. Multi-stakeholder involvement.



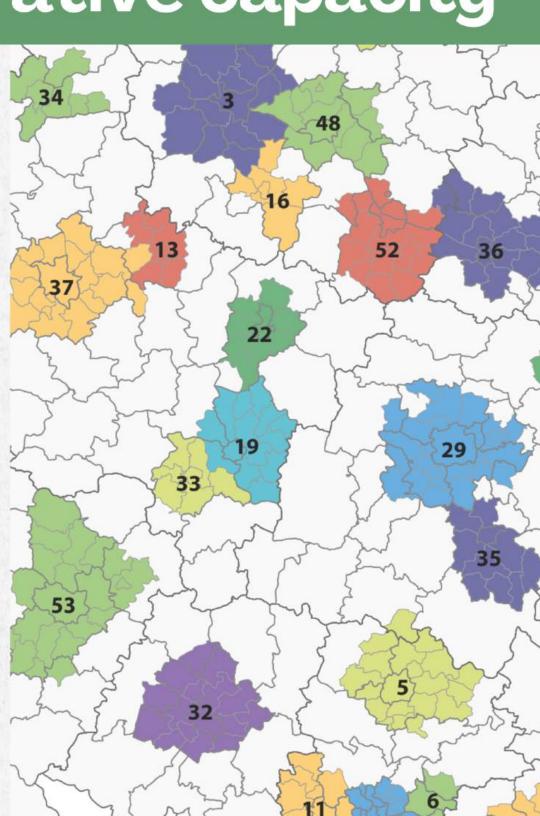


Metropolitan Areas in Poland

- "Soft" governance models
- Metropolitan shared standards

- Higher quality of investments
- Benefits

- Voluntary application of shared standards reducing disparities and spatial coherence.
- Metropolitan standards for landscaping (Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot), cycling infrastructure (Upper Silesia Metropolitan Association), accessibility for persons with disabilities (Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot), school route safety (Szczecin).
- The application is voluntary but contributes to strengthening the capacity of smaller municipalities to deliver higher quality investments.
- Developing the functional area as a "coherent space," with comparable living standards.







Caraș-Timiș Functional Area: 2 municipalities and 2 counties

- Projects
- Voluntary cooperation
- Political leadership
- Partnerships with national authorities

- Modernisation of the Reşiţa-Timişoara railway line (feasibility study approved, €850 million), with a connection to Timişoara International Airport (execution contract signed) and the introduction of the "tram-train" concept.
- Projects are implemented through partnership agreements between the Municipality of Reşiţa, the Municipality of Timişoara, Timiş County Council, Caraş-Severin County Council, and national authorities.
- The initiative was launched in 2020 under the coordination of the Mayor of Reşiţa, who brought together local and national actors.
- Collaboration with CFR and the Railway Reform Authority (support for documentation and financing).





Cluj Metropolitan Area: 19 municipalities

- Participatory mechanisms: CIIC
- Structured and recurrent involvement
- Debating metropolitan projects
- NZC Local Coalition

- The Centre for Innovation and Civic Imagination was established in 2017 as a civic laboratory for the co-creation of projects.
- It facilitates **structured dialogue** with citizens, NGOs, academia, experts, and the business community, going beyond ad-hoc consultations.
- CIIC provides a framework for consultations and debates on major metropolitan projects (e.g., the revitalisation of the Someş River banks).
- This consultation and co-creation framework further supports strategic projects at the metropolitan level. For example, the local Net Zero Coalition, the implementation of the Climate Neutrality Action Plan, developed at the metropolitan level.







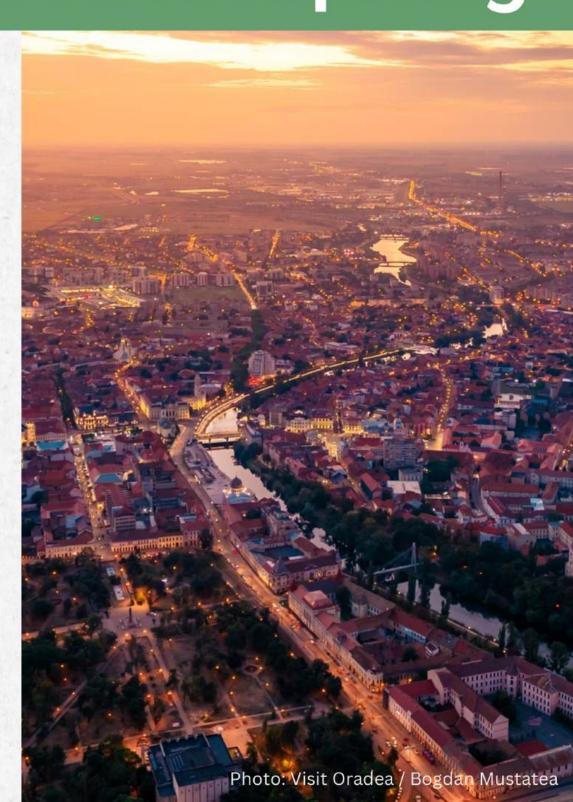


Oradea Metropolitan Area: 14 municipalities (2025: +2)

- Reducing differences in administrative capacity
- The Municipality of Oradea and the metropolitan association provide expertise and technical support to member communes in planning, preparing, and implementing projects (needs analysis, identifying and accessing funding, project implementation, project management, public procurement, IT).

Delegation of project preparation to OMA

- The signing of partnerships with the Intercommunity Development Association of the Oradea Metropolitan Area (ADI ZMO) allows the delegation of project preparation to the metropolitan association.
- New member communes
- Two new communes joined the Oradea Metropolitan Area starting from July 1, 2025, confirming an increased understanding of the benefits of collaboration.







- Jiu Valley Functional Area
 - Integrated Territorial Investments for just transition
 - Participatory governance
 - Partnerships and community involvement

- Formalised collaborative governance within ITI – The Jiu Valley Integrated Territorial Development Association. It was created through a protocol signed by six towns, the County Council, the university, the private sector, and NGOs.
- Civil society contributes with feedback, ideas, and projects, strengthening the culture of partnership and community involvement in strategic decisions.
- Public administrations, together with NGOs, artists, and private companies, have organised interventions and cultural events that transformed abandoned industrial sites into vibrant cultural spaces.





EU capacity building programmes and networks

- European Urban Initiative (EUI): peer learning (City2City Exchanges, Peer reviews) and capacity building
- Portico
- TAIEX-REGIO Peer2Peer (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange)
- Eurocities
- METREX (Network of European Metropolitan Regions and Areas)

- ESPON (European Spatial Planning Observation Network)
- Just Transition Platform Groundwork
- Policy Learning Platform of Interreg Europe
- Scalable Cities Peer-to-Peer Learning Programme



Recommendations

- Gradual expansion of the scope of competences/projects (from strategic planning to mobility, spatial planning, public service provision, and economic development, e.g. the AMB model)
- Creating an attractive and recurrent format for stakeholder engagement
- Supporting the technical and administrative capacity of smaller municipalities
- Accessing EU opportunities for capacity-building and knowledge exchange.



Challenges

How to support a cross-sectoral approach at the functional area level?

How to enhance cross-sectoral integration in project design?



Practical insights and tools

- Cluj Metropolitan Area
- Brno Metropolitan Area
- Kalisz–Ostrów Urban Agglomeration
- Oradea Metropolitan Area
- Trenčín Functional Area
- Lake Balaton Functional Area
- Western Athens Functional Area
- Brussels-Capital Region.



- GIS databases
- Land Suitability Analysis (LSA)
- Urban Heat Island Analysis
- New European Bauhaus (NEB)
- Thematic guides (urban regeneration, cultural centres).





Spatial planning tools

GIS Databases

Land Suitability
Analysis (LSA)

Metropolitan masterplans

- A GIS database enables decision-makers to analyse spatial data and understand how different sectors influence each other (e.g., Cluj Metropolitan Area, Zagreb, Constanța Metropolitan Area).
- The methodology for Land Suitability
 Analysis (LSA) is based on cadastral data,
 natural risks, transport infrastructure, utilities,
 services data etc. A complete and up-to-date
 cadastral database is necessary for accurate
 analysis.
- Metropolitan masterplans serve to guide spatial development in a coherent manner. The existence of an ambitious masterplan supports the long-term competitiveness of metropolitan areas.





Spatial planning tools

- GIS databases developed within the project:
 - Cluj: https://beta.getlayer.xyz/cluj
 - Zagreb: https://beta.getlayer.xyz/zagreb/
- Methodology on Land Suitability Analysis
- Geo-spatial & Geo-statistical open-data sources

Guides

- Sustainable Regeneration of Apartment Block Neighbourhoods
- Transforming Transit Spaces to Destination Places
- Management Models for Multifunctional Cultural Centres



https://functionalareas.eu/ solutions-for-functionalareas/



Recommendations

- Integrating spatial planning tools and analyses (e.g. GIS databases, land suitability analysis) into the decision-making process.
- Promoting the need for a supra-municipal and cross-sectoral approach to climate challenges and developing climate planning documents at the functional area scale, with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders.
- **Developing integrated neighbourhood regeneration projects** to limit urban sprawl, in line with the principles and values of the New European Bauhaus (NEB).



Chapter 5: Funding and finance

Challenges

How to optimise the use of EU funds at the functional area level and where to look for funding?

How to mobilise additional financial resources and leverage public funding?



Practical insights and tools

- Italy: Metropolitan Multi-fund Programme
- Krakow Metropolitan Area
- Jiu Conurbation and Jiu Valley Functional Area
- FLAG Northern Dobrogea
- Oradea Metropolitan Area
- Kalisz–Ostrów Agglomeration



- Database of EU funding sources for FAs
- Guide: Public-Private Partnerships at the FA level
- Financial instruments and advisory support (EIB)
- Living Lab approach to support entrepreneurial development.



Chapter 5: Funding and finance



Funds accessible through national or regional authorities



ERDF



Cohesion Fund



European Social Fund



EU Just Transition Fund



European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

Direct funding programmes (competitive calls at EU level)

European Urban Initiative



























The guide includes an **analysis of the eligibility of functional areas** (depending on their status - e.g. public authority, voluntary association, etc.).



Chapter 5: Funding and finance

Recommendations

- Identifying a mix of funding sources for integrated investments at the functional area level (e.g. ERDF, ESF+, CF) and monitoring of direct EU calls
- Supporting the financial capacity of smaller municipalities to prevent their exclusion from metropolitan-level projects (e.g. revolving fund for co-financing and preparation costs)
- Exploring opportunities for **PPPs structured at the metropolitan level** (including blending with EU grants)
- Establishing a one-stop shop for attracting private investment and developing a shared database of available plots within the functional area.



Challenges

How to ensure access to data at the functional area level for monitoring and evaluation?

How to monitor and evaluate integrated strategies?

How to facilitate participatory monitoring and evaluation?



Practical insights and tools

- Metropolitan Areas in Poland
- Cluj Metropolitan Area
- Brno Metropolitan Area
- Barcelona Metropolitan Area.



- Geo-spatial and geo-statistical opendata sources
- Short list of indicators for measuring the impact of integrated investments
- Framework for establishing a participatory monitoring and evaluation process.



7 territorial indicators for measuring the impact of integrated investments (ESPON)

The aim is to measure the impact and added value of integrated investments, beyond their direct effects. The indicators can be included in the monitoring and evaluation framework of development strategies at the metropolitan level:



- 1. Net migration rate assesses the attractiveness of the territory.
- 2. Population potential within 50 km assesses compactness, service demand, and polycentricity.
- 3. Natural population change assesses socio-economic conditions and attractiveness for families.
- 4. New private dwellings (%) assesses whether integrated investments lead to resident retention.
- 5. Modal split of transport assesses the impact on sustainable mobility.
- 6. Access to public services (schools/hospitals) assesses the impact on equitable distribution of infrastructure.
- 7. Share of long-term unemployed assesses the impact on economic development and social inclusion.

If there are no changes in these indicators, "the impact of integrated investments might be questionable" (ESPON, 2018).





Metropolitan Areas in Poland

Data observatories

One-stop-shop with +200 datasets

"Metropolises in numbers" platform

- Metropolitan Areas have developed joint data observatories to support the preparation, monitoring, and evaluation of supra-municipal strategies.
- The InfoGZM portal (Silesia) serves as a "one-stop-shop" for preparing analyses on metropolitan developments. It covers five thematic areas: demographics, finance, economy, infrastructure, and environment.
- The platform created by the Association of Polish Metropolises (12 cities from Poland's largest metropolitan areas) publishes data on key **indicators**, ranging from demographics and the labour market to culture, environment, and tourism.



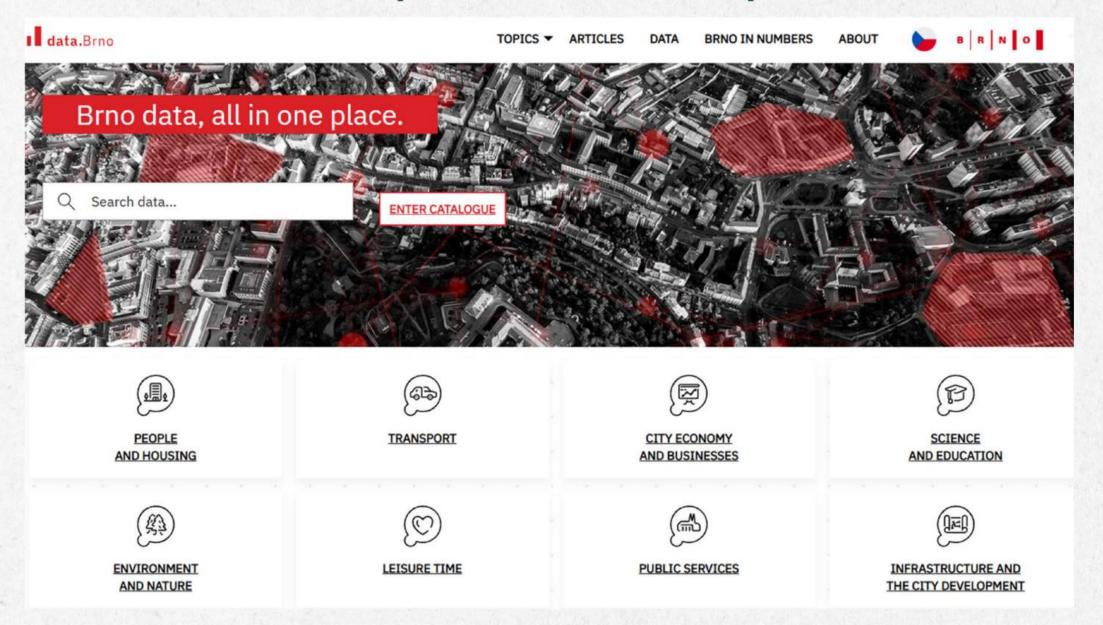


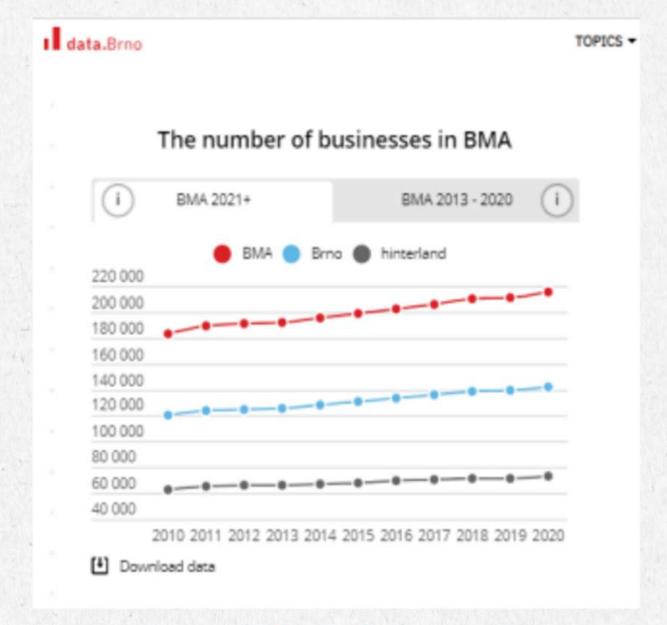
Recommendations

- Monitoring and evaluation system for the integrated strategy, based on **both** quantitative and qualitative indicators (e.g. survey on the political will to cooperate Brno, perception of quality of life).
- Partnerships with research institutes and universities to support data collection and analysis at the functional area level.
- Transparent monitoring and evaluation process, with interactive digital platforms and GIS maps for visualising progress and engaging stakeholders (including surveys).



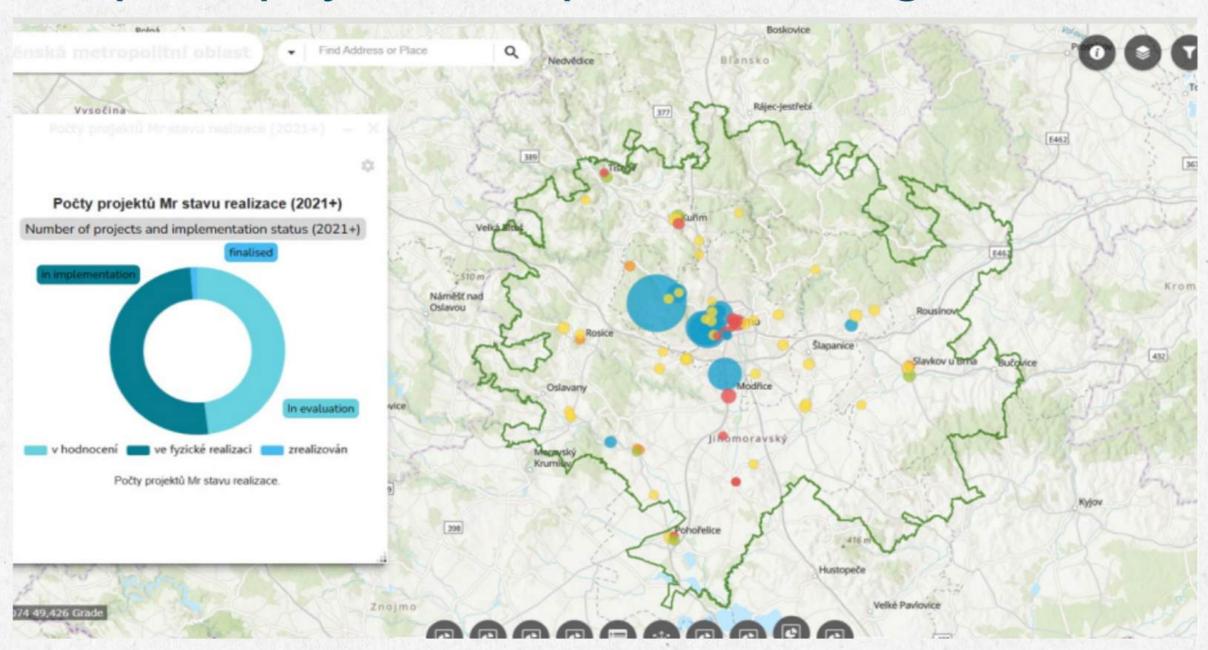
Metropolitan level data portal (Brno Metropolitan Area)





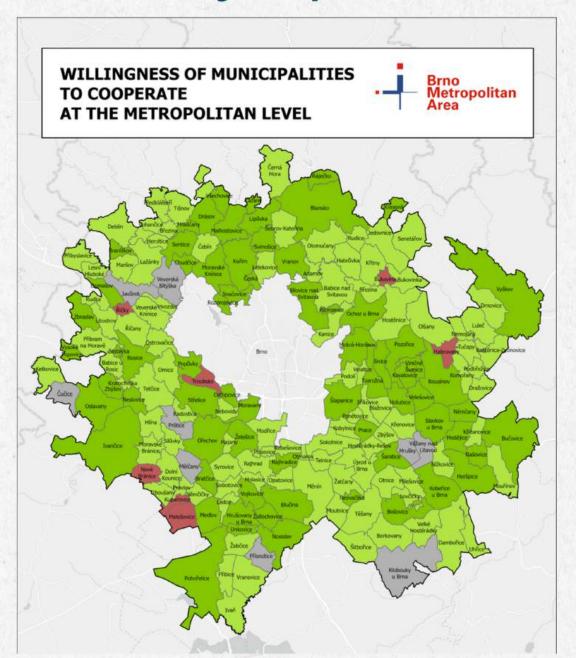


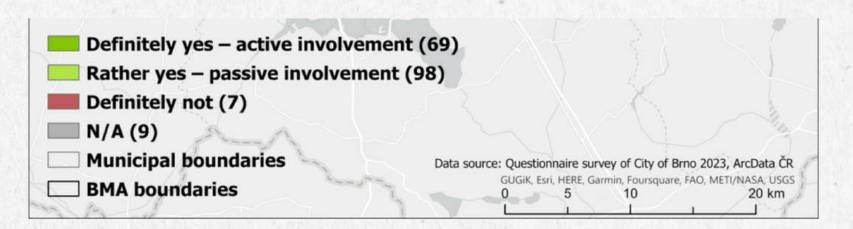
Map of ITI projects and implementation stage (Brno MA)





Survey on political willingness to cooperate (Brno MA)







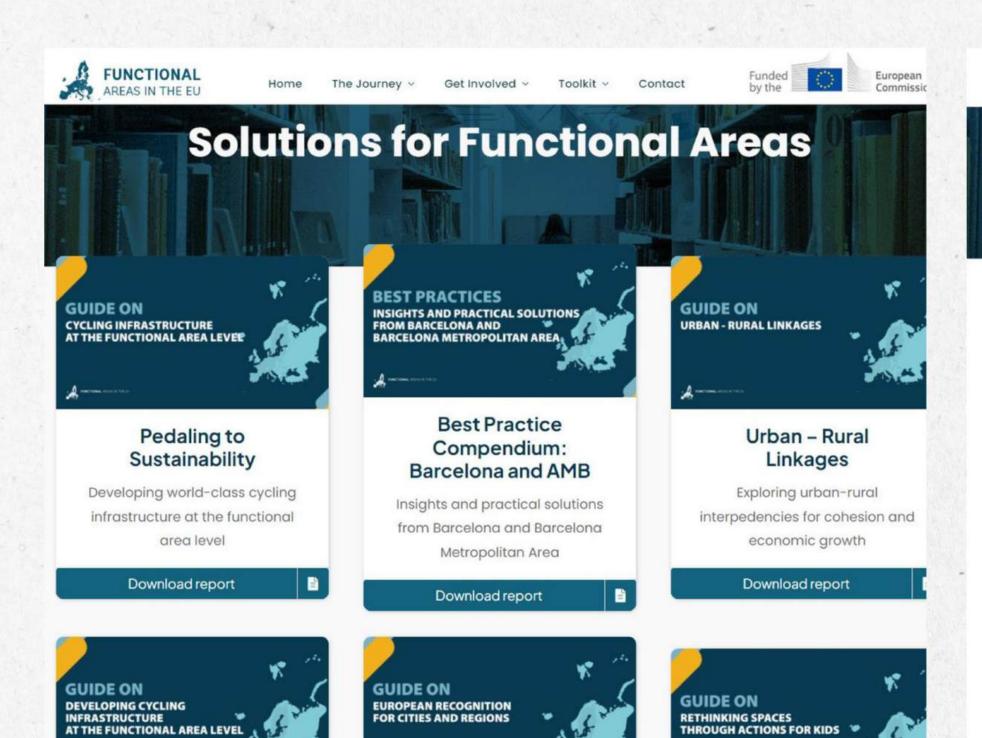
Access the toolkit here:

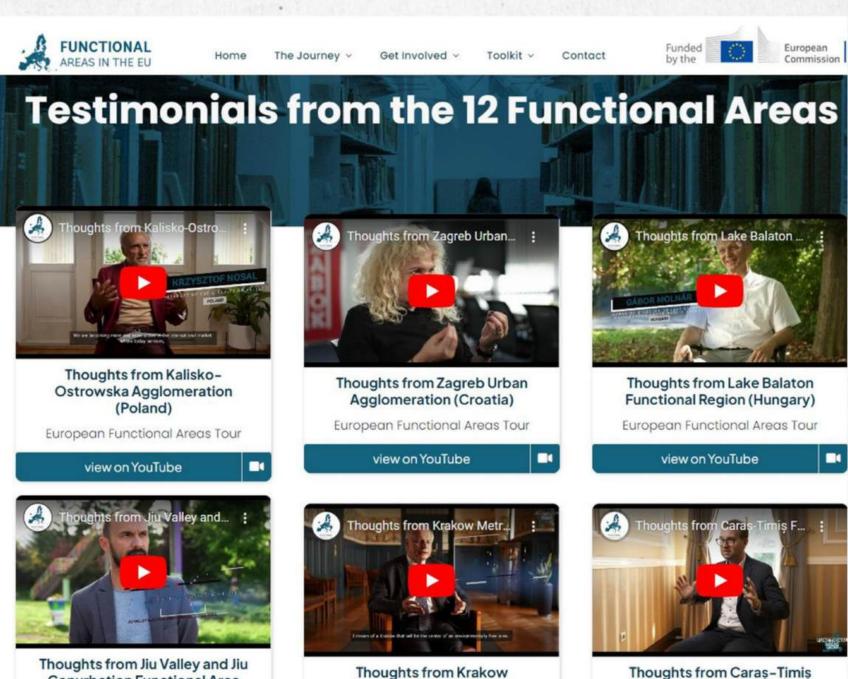
https://functionalareas.eu/ methodological-toolkit





Other resources





Metropolitan Area (Poland)

European Functional Areas Tour

Functional Area (Romania)

European Functional Areas Tour

Conurbation Functional Area

(Romania)

FUNCTIONAL AREAS IN THE EU

JOIN THE JOURNEY. ALONE YOU GO QUICK, TOGETHER WE GO FAR. VISIT THE WEBSITE AND ACCESS USEFUL SOLUTIONS!

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