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Urban-rural linkages: policy brief



Arnault Morisson
Thematic Expert – Europe
Closer to Citizens
Policy Learning Platform



Astrid Severin
Thematic Expert – Europe Closer
to Citizens Policy
Learning Platform

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Access to knowledge

- Urban and rural areas are often seen as distinct entities reinforcing a divide in policies.
- Urban and rural areas are, however, deeply interconnected through flows of people, goods, services, capital, and knowledge.
- Challenges in one area often affect the other, but solutions can also be found through this relationship.
- These interconnections, referred to as urban-rural linkages, are critical to ensuring sustainable regional development, economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability.



Urban-rural linkages

Urban-rural linkages play a pivotal role in advancing EU cohesion priorities. Explore five recommendations for leveraging their potential and impact.

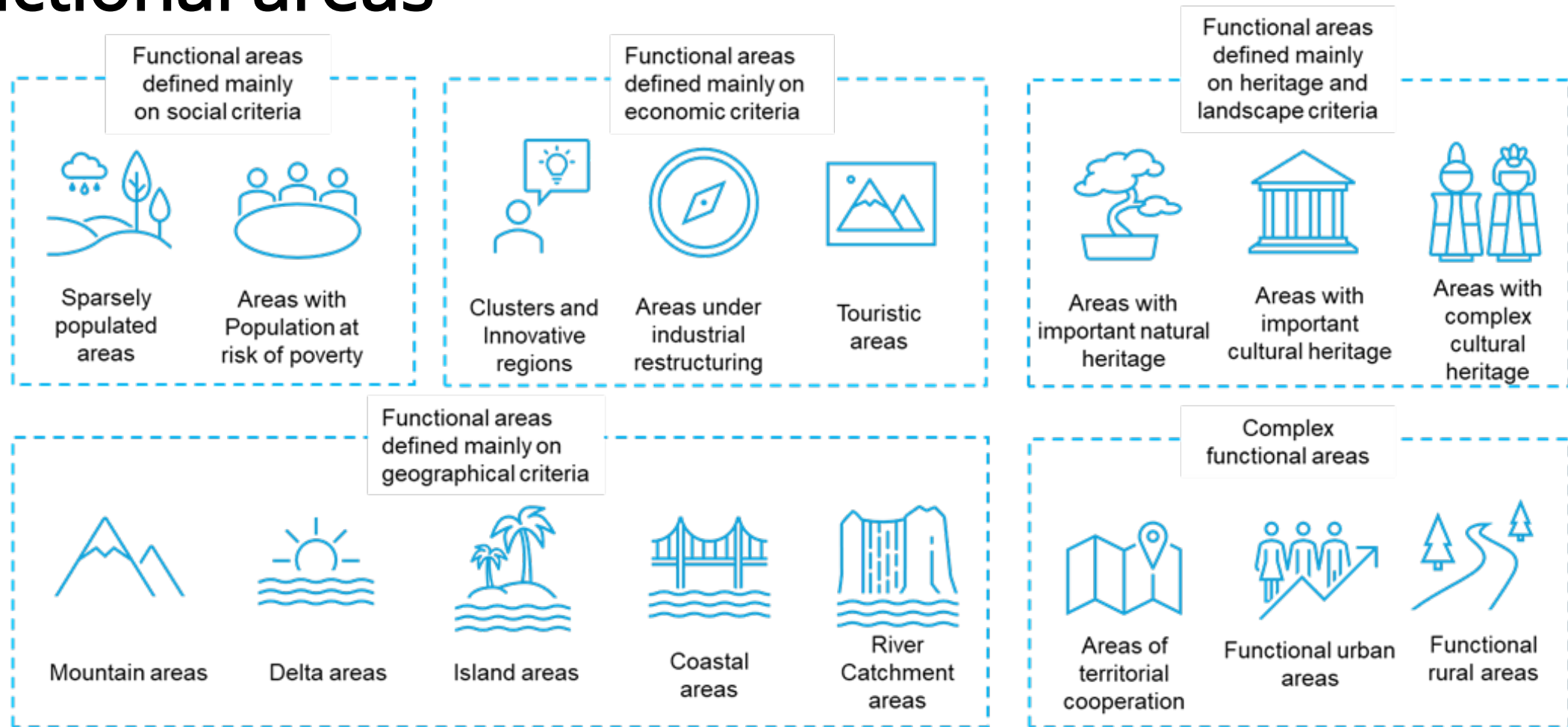
Urban-rural linkages

Interactions	Description
Economic interactions	Urban areas serve as markets for rural agricultural products, while rural areas supply food, raw materials, and other essential resources.
Labour migration	There is a continuous exchange of labour between rural and urban areas, with rural residents migrating to cities for better employment opportunities and urban residents moving to rural areas for lifestyle preferences or affordability.
Infrastructure and services	Urban centres provide rural areas with access to infrastructure, such as transportation, healthcare, education, and other services.
Environmental linkages	Urban and rural areas are interdependent in terms of environmental management, such as waste management, water supply, and resource conservation.
Knowledge and innovation transfer	Urban areas are often hubs of innovation, while rural areas contribute traditional knowledge that can enhance sustainable practices.



The concept of urban-rural linkages refers to the complex and dynamic interactions between urban and rural areas, which frequently transcend traditional administrative boundaries. It highlights the complementary roles and flows of resources, people, services, and activities between rural and urban regions, emphasizing their interdependence and mutual benefits.

Functional areas



The concept of a functional area for urban-rural linkages involves: (1) delineating the territory that clusters around urban centers and concentrates systemic relations, and (2) defining the challenges that can be addressed by enhancing urban-rural linkages.

Urban-rural partnerships

Key factor	Description
Linkages	Effective rural-urban partnerships rely on managing the connections between spatial areas, often through sectoral policies (e.g., regional transport). Integrated approaches can create synergies.
Shared problems	Beyond seeking win-win scenarios, partnerships also address shared challenges and manage conflicts.
Functional unit identity	Partners need to feel a shared identity and see themselves as part of a functional unit.
Strategy/shared goals	Clear strategies and defined goals must be agreed upon from the outset.
Governance	Both elected and non-elected members participate in decision-making to guide regional development.
Cooperation experience	These partnerships often involve actors with varying levels of experience in collaboration, which can make coordination challenging.
Time	Time is essential for building trust and maintaining cooperation. Partnerships need continuous care to remain sustainable.
Small steps	Incremental progress is key, especially when actors have little prior experience working together.
Concrete projects	Multiple projects help improve local situations, increase engagement, and mitigate the impact of failures.
Good framework	Support from regional, national, and EU levels is crucial, though partnerships remain primarily bottom-up processes
Diverse actors	Partnerships involve a range of stakeholders from different sectors and regions, making collaboration complex but rewarding.
Motivated actors	The success of rural-urban partnerships depends heavily on motivated individuals driving the initiative, especially in the early stages.



The functional area approach encourages urban and rural collaboration to enhance linkages and improve access to jobs and services. Rural-urban partnerships help manage these interactions, addressing shared challenges and improving regional outcomes through coordinated governance.

Policy recommendation 1. Establish rural-urban agreements for sustainable development



Official Agreement for local development “Milano Metropoli Rurale”



SMART

Research and innovation capacities

Key actions for policymakers: develop adaptable governance models

- Develop adaptable governance models that reflect the evolving needs of both rural and urban regions.
- Facilitate representation from a diverse range of stakeholders, including local government officials, businesses, and civil society members from both urban and rural areas.

- Good practice from Milan metropolitan area, Italy
- [Milano Metropoli Rurale](#) is an official agreement for local development focused on strengthening urban-rural linkages that transcend administrative borders, reinforcing traditional rural activities such as farming and agricultural entrepreneurship in the wider metropolitan region of Milan.
- The peripheral rural areas around Milan face strong urban and infrastructural pressures, requiring a balanced economic development approach.
- The stakeholders and beneficiaries include public administrations, the Municipality of Milan, the Metropolitan Authority, the Regional Authority, and Rural Districts, which are clusters of companies operating in rural areas.
- Milano Metropoli Rurale is an action plan comprising 118 pilot projects, with a total investment of 171 million euros.

Urban rural linkages: **Transport & Mobility**



The implementation of DRT-Services in Saarland's public transport system

On 28-29 November 2023, the Policy Learning Platform held an on-site peer review for the Saarland's Ministry for the Environment, Climate Protection, Mobility, Agriculture and Consumer Protection.



Integrated mobility and Mobility as a Service

On 13 December 2022, the Policy Learning Platform held a webinar on Integrated Mobility and Mobility as a Service.



Demand-Responsive Transport

In this policy brief, you will find what demand-responsive transport is, the European policy framework, and transferable good practices coming from Interreg Europe projects.



Zooming in: How shared mobility is organised in Flanders

On 10 October 2024, a group of 7 mobility experts from Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Italy and Portugal met for a full-day study visit on shared mobility hosted by autodelen.net at Ghent (Belgium) and organised by the Policy Learning Platform.

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Urban-rural linkages: THANK YOU!



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a.morisson@ext-interregeurope.eu

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