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SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT FOR SMALL URBAN AREAS

Leveraging European funding for small urban areas – Policy Learning Platform, 08 February 2024

INTRODUCTION

- **Small urban areas (SUAs)** have been for a long time **overlooked** in the EU 'urban discourse'.
- **Things have changed:** convergence of urban, territorial and rural policies, growing networks of SMSTs, acknowledgement that the 'left behind places' do matter...
- **Growing interest for SUAs** in the **EU policy** discourse (Riga Declaration, 2015- Territorial Agenda 2030...)

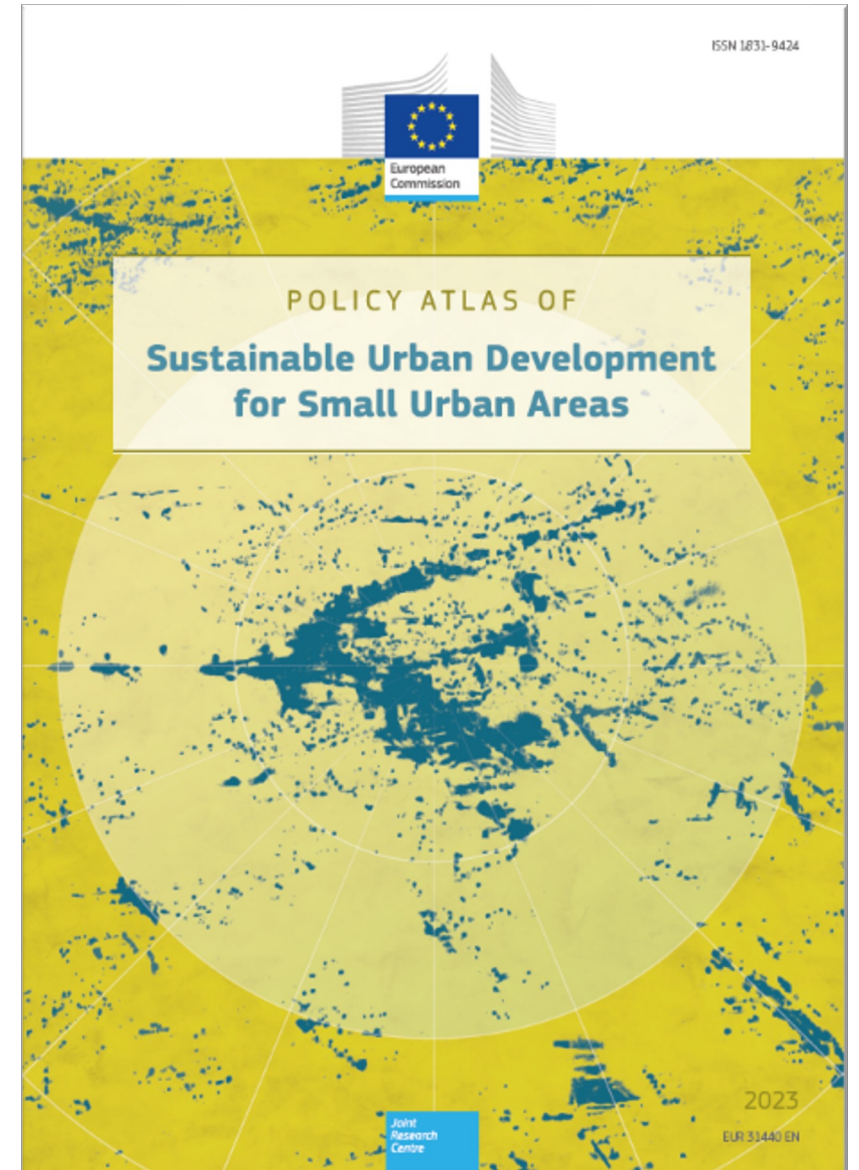


POLICY ATLAS OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT FOR SMALL URBAN AREAS

Joint Research Centre - DG REGIO publication
(2023)

Focus on **Small Urban Areas** within the framework
of EU **sustainable urban development**

SUAs = Towns: settlements with a population >5000
and <50.000 inhabitants and a density > 300
inhabitants/km²

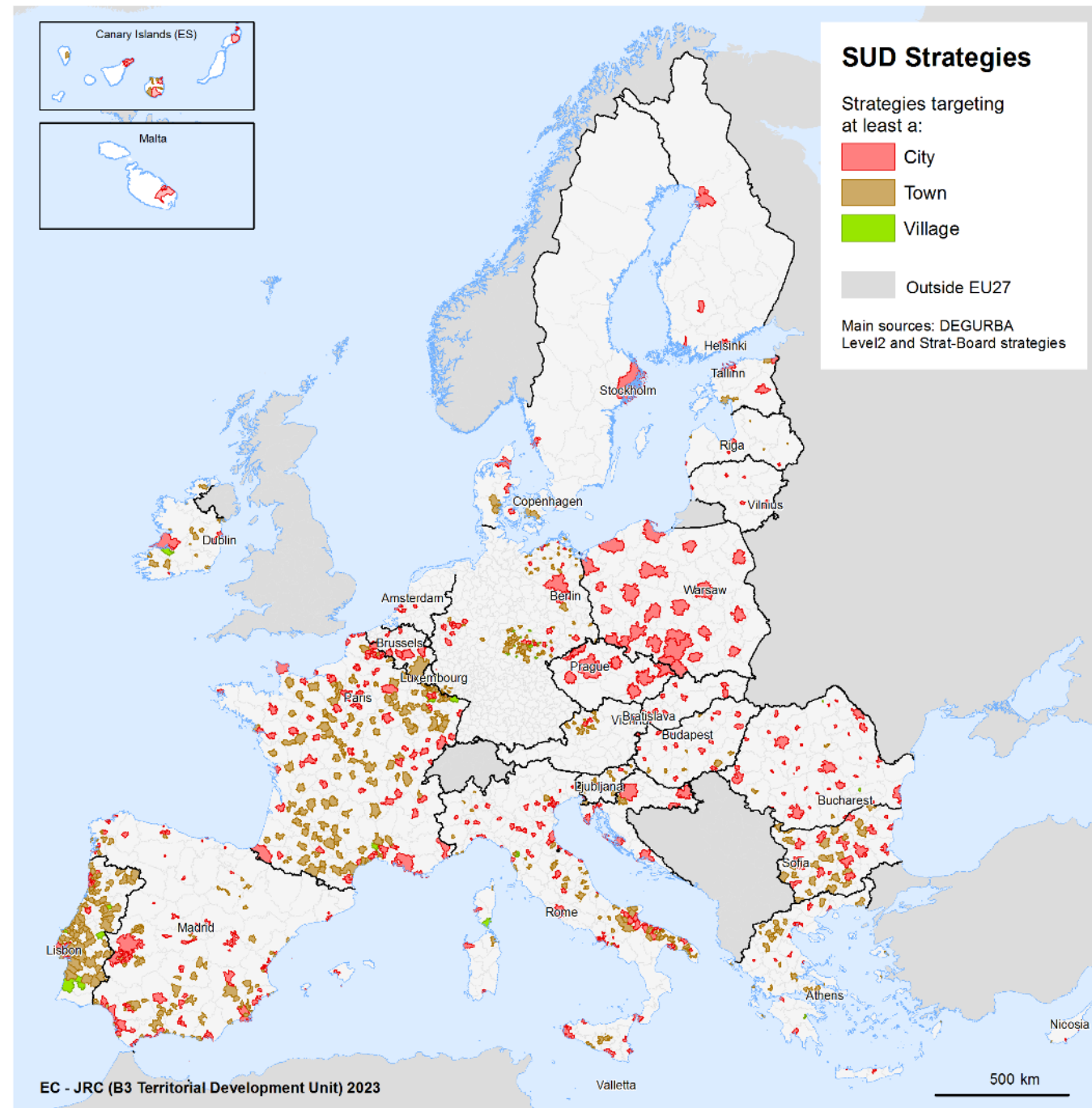


DIRECT FUNDING PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES

- Analysis of existing **databases** of **projects** and **good practices** in urban development:
European Green Leaf Award, URBACT, Urban Agenda partnerships, Urban Innovative Actions, New European Bauhaus, Territorial Agenda 2030, Covenant of Mayors...
- Although no specific initiatives, **growing participation of SUAs**
- SUAs put forward **5 main policy approaches**:
Re-activating places for people and community; Re-discovering uniqueness; Re-connecting with nature for a sustainable future; Re-inventing smart public services; Re-imaging governance and partnerships.
- More than **tailored** for small towns, often they seem to be **adapted**.

COHESION POLICY: SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- ERDF promotes **integrated** territorial development targeting **all types of urban areas**, through **strategies** designed by Urban Authorities.
- **Compulsory** for member states (in 21-27 **8%** of ERDF around 17 billion- EUR)
- Classification of 1021 Sustainable Urban Development strategies (2014-2020) according to the degree of urbanization of their settlements.
- **Half of the SUD strategies** analysed, namely 507 strategies (49.7%), **targeted a small urban area - town** (or more than one)



KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF STRATEGIES IN SUAS

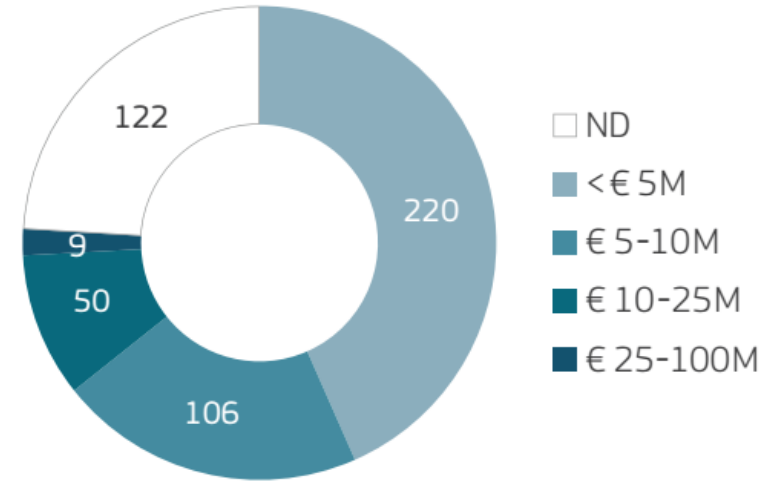
Small budgets: 51.7% of them allocated less than 5 million EUR of ESIF

Most recurrent keywords: mobility, social inclusion, energy, culture and heritage.

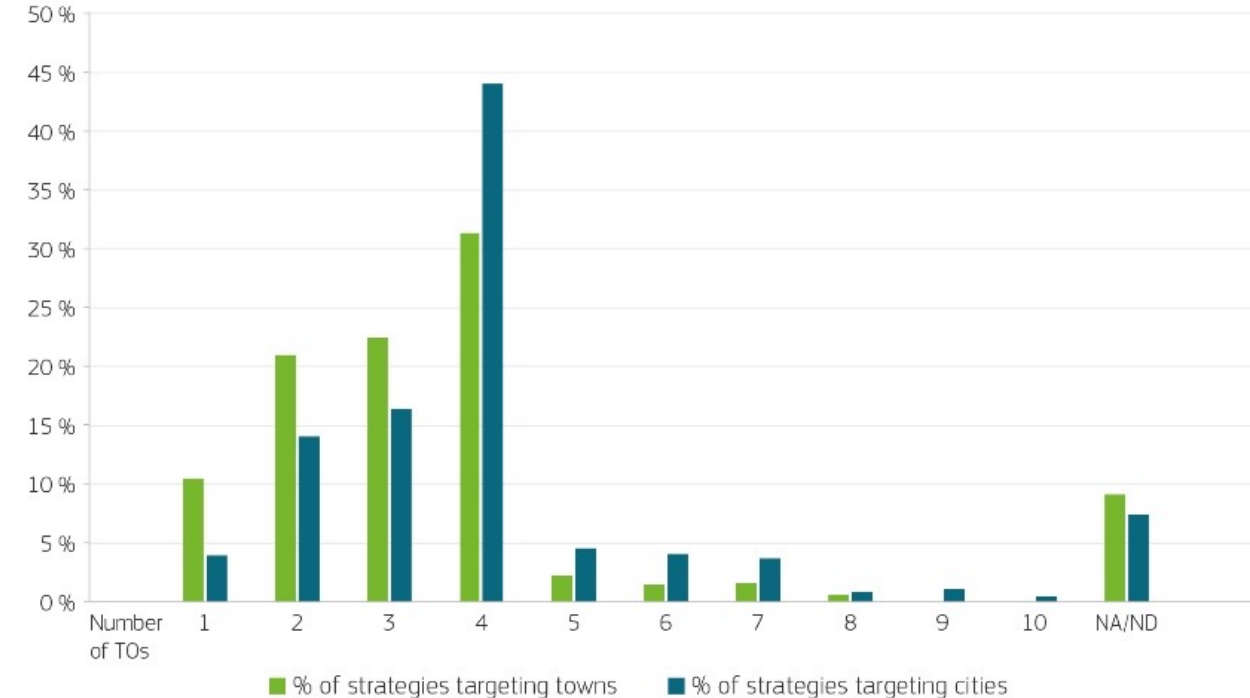
In comparison with strategies in cities:

- focus more on topics linked with the **rehabilitation of the physical space**
- **combine smaller numbers of thematic objectives and funds**

Number of strategies targeting towns per amount of ESIF (EUR million)

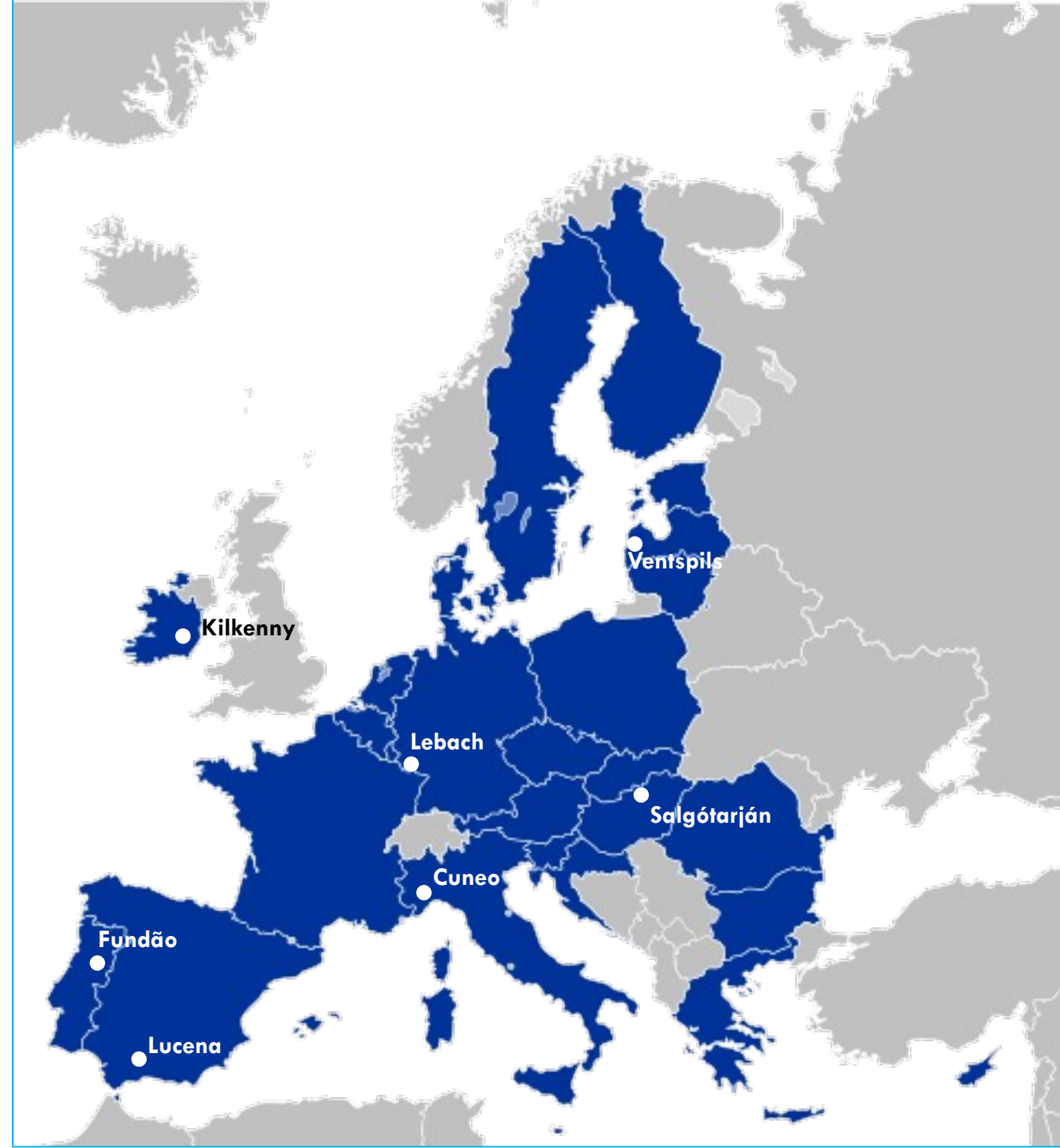


Percentage of strategies targeting towns and cities per number of thematic objectives



CASE STUDIES OF STRATEGIES IN SUAS

1. **Diversity** of the small urban areas, in terms of typology and trends.
2. Limited **administrative and strategic** capacity.
3. Recurring **policy challenges**: citizen participation, stakeholder involvement, mix of funding sources
4. Many projects of “**Re-activating places** for people and community”



CONCLUSIONS

- **Window of opportunity for Small Urban Areas** at the EU level:
 - Acknowledgment of the role and assets of SUAs
 - Funding opportunities open to SUAs both in terms of direct and shared management
- Some **obstacles** prevent SUAs from strategically developing strong and innovative responses to today's global challenges.
 1. Lack of data and knowledge on specific trends characterising SUAs → Need for more research on SUAs
 2. Policy tools and initiatives are not specific → Need for new methodologies and policy instruments better tailored to SUAs.
 3. SUAs lack of expertise in accessing and managing funding and strategic capacity → Need for more capacity building and networking.



THANK YOU!

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