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## **From policy design to place-based action in functional areas: challenges for cohesion policy in times of global change**

### **Abstract**

Functional areas are becoming an increasingly important arena for public policy intervention, testing new development approaches, governance mechanisms, building territorial coalitions, and transforming institutions across administrative boundaries.

On the one side, functional areas—delimited through evidence-based methods that integrate socioeconomic interdependencies, mobility flows, and environmental linkages—are essential to overcome administrative fragmentation and enable tailored, place-based interventions.

Though, on the other their effective governance in practice requires strategic planning and consistent action in the social, economic, transport, environmental, educational, and image domains. Support for such actions within the framework of EU cohesion policy gives local and regional authorities the opportunity to respond more effectively to new development challenges.

This special session is dedicated to highlighting the role of the EU's cohesion policy in shaping the sustainable development of functional areas in the face of growing global challenges. Key contexts include climate and energy transition, digitalization, demographic change, territorial inequalities, economic and geopolitical crises, and the need to strengthen resilience to climate change.

We intend to pay particular attention to specific territorial instruments such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community-led Local Development (CLLD) for place-based cohesion, Interreg for cross-border projects, and tools for the outermost regions and external actions addressing specific challenges of functional areas. We are interested in both the conceptual and institutional frameworks of these tools and their practical implementation in various types of functional areas: urban, urban-rural, metropolitan, and peripheral.

The main topics include new approaches to building territorial cohesion, multi-level governance mechanisms, inter-municipal cooperation, the transformation of cohesion policy instruments, strategic planning, institutional capital, new models for project implementation and evaluation tools.

Empirical research on the socioeconomic and spatial effects of cohesion policy interventions, including their impact on territorial cohesion, quality of life, access to services, urban mobility, economic and social transformation, and spatial changes, is particularly welcome. Another important topic of the session is the evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of cohesion policy instruments in the face of global change.