Support polycentric development

It is widely agreed that polycentric development paths help to increase efficiency of rural-urban interdependencies and reduce economic and territorial polarization. The vision of polycentric development relates on the one hand to objectives for the organization of human activity in space and on the other hand to objectives in terms of sustainable settlement development. With regard to spatial organization, the objective should be to support an urban network of cities and towns of different sizes that is based on functional complementarities. By balancing growth and linkages (commuting, service and shopping access) between centres of national, regional and local importance, territorial cohesion and resource efficiency might be increased.

The alpine urban system consists of large peri-alpine metropolises, large to medium-sized inner-alpine agglomerations and smaller sized cities and towns. Although to a different degree, all of these centres are and should remain the hubs and links which provide their hinterland and remoter regions with goods and services.

It is crucial to strengthen the urban system as a whole in light of the objectives of territorial cohesion and equality of living conditions. Here, especially small and medium-sized centres play a crucial role due to their predominance in the alpine urban system (see → Strengthen small- and medium-sized urban centres). Second, for the objectives of sustainable settlement development, polycentric development has also triggered the interest of planners to counter the wide-spread phenomenon of urban sprawl. Contemporary urban and regional planning guidelines and practice should aim at concentrating urban development around centres alongside the urban system and along major transport axes. In this context, polycentric development is also based on inter-municipal cooperation and overcoming administrative boundaries (see → How to overcome borders), for instance through pooling of local resources and joint development strategies. In the last AS programming period, several projects addressed a polycentric development and provided recommendations:

- Capacities: recommendations for small centres in an integrated urban system
- InnoCité: increasing competitiveness of small centres
- Moreco: tools for a resource-friendly settlement development addressing a variety of stakeholders
- Comunis:recommendations for inter-municipal commercial location development as an integrative planning task and
- Poly5: it provides a polycentric development toolkit for local development in TEN corridors.

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