



Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

## TARGETED ANALYSIS //

# LAKES

Spatial progress and integrated development opportunities of large lakes in Europe

Synthesis Report // October 2021

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This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinions of members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.

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### **Disclaimer**

This document is a final report.

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The final version of the report will be published as soon as approved.



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# Abbreviations

CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
CLLD	Community-led Local Development
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ESIF	European and Structural Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FLAG	Fisheries Local Action Group
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
LBDC	Lake Balaton Development Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

# Introduction

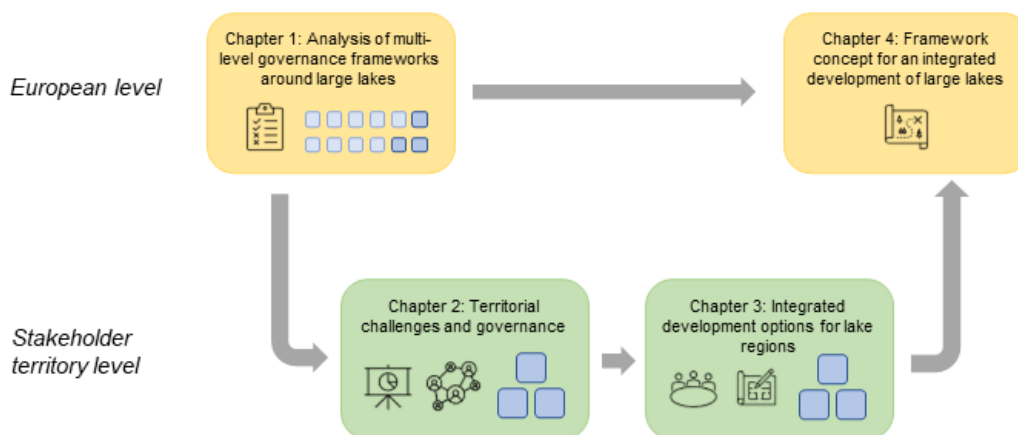
The ESPON LAKES project explores development opportunities and challenges around large lakes in Europe, and policies at different levels that effectively help addressing them.

The project was initiated by three stakeholder regions, which provide a good sample of the diversity of large lakes and progressive coordination in Europe.

- Lake Balaton has developed as a touristic resort area since the beginning the 20th century. It faces challenges related to seasonality of activities and attractiveness for year-round resident population. Agriculture (wine grape and cereals) also plays a key role in the regional identity. Territorial planning around the lake started in the 1950's with a first Regional Plan. Regional development has become more cooperative with the work of the Lake Balaton Regional Council which founded the Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency in 2000. Other soft territorial cooperation entities are linked to the lake Balaton but play a minor role in regional planning.
- Lake Vänern is surrounded by many rural and sparsely populated municipalities. Manufacturing and agricultural activities are overrepresented in the lake region, which is both an inner periphery in the shadow of Gothenburg (southern part) and the centre of the Värmland region (around Karlstad, northern part). The lake itself hosts significant freight traffic, commercial fishing and leisure activities with 18 leisure harbours. The lake region is undergoing a transition process to develop a more integrated approach to the use of its tourism potential.
- Lake Constance is surrounded by a highly urbanised landscape with large cities and a dense network of medium size towns. The lake region is economically highly innovative, based on a strong industry and a diverse university setting. At the same the region is an important touristic destination for overnight tourism and day trips as well as leisure activities in general. Furthermore, the region is an important agricultural production area (fruits, vegetables, wine grapes, hop) and provides drinking water to more than 4 mio. people.

The project explored territorial challenges, governance frameworks and integrated development options in these three lakes regions, but also in nine additional ones (Fertö-Neusiedl, Peipus, Päijänne, Lake Geneva, Maggiore, Mjøsa, Prespa, Lough Neagh, Étang de Berre) (see Map 1). It first analysed multi-level governance frameworks of large lake regions with a cross-cutting European perspective, covering all case study regions. Second, it collected quantitative (statistical, geospatial) and qualitative data for the stakeholder regions. These data were then used as the basis for a participatory process to develop “future options”. Findings from all these activities made it possible to a “framework concept”, i.e. a tool designed to help policy makers of large lake regions support integrated development and promote large lake regions (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1 A two-scale approach**

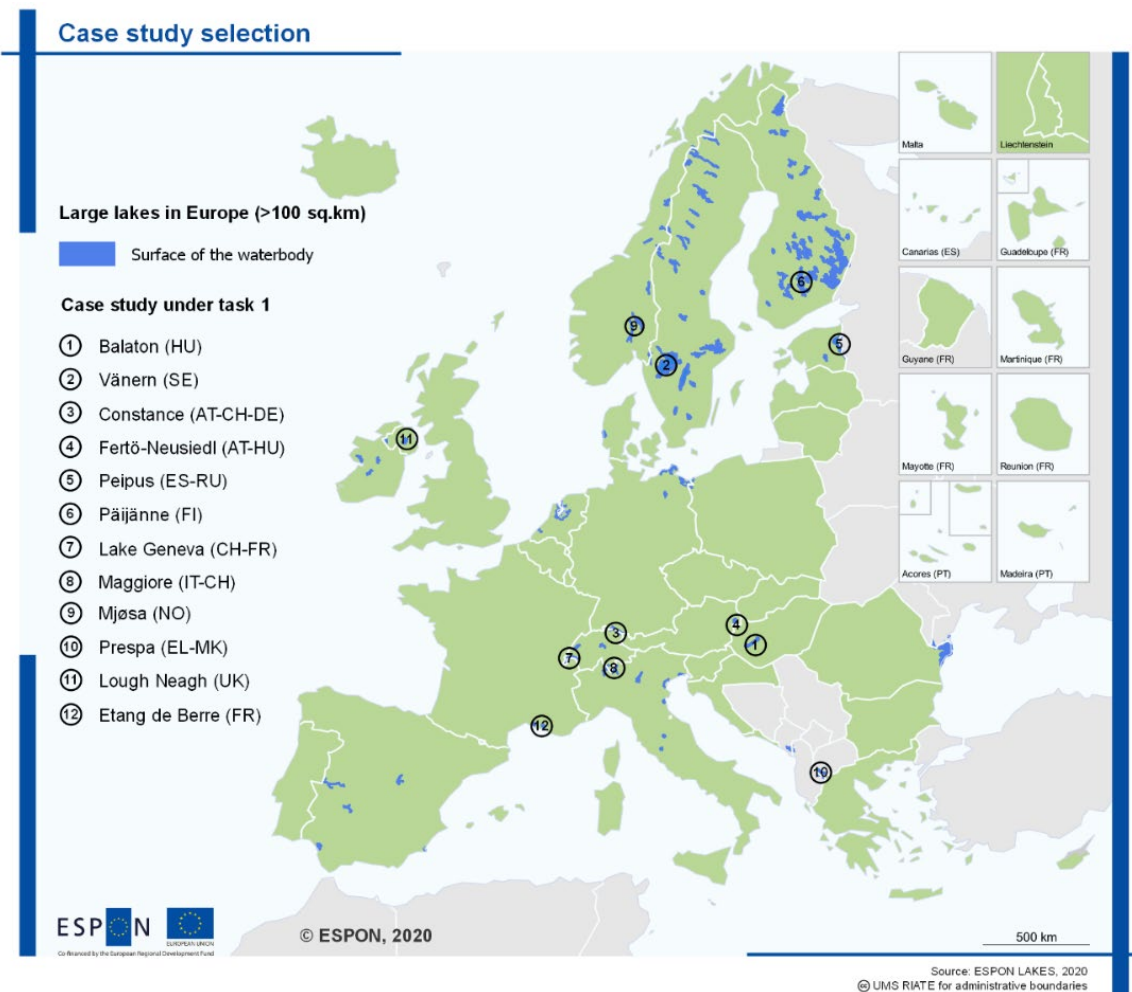




### Large lakes in Europe

There is no standard definition of large lakes in Europe. Map 1 displays ‘very large lakes’ according to a recent typology (i.e. inland water bodies covering more than 100 km<sup>2</sup>). ESPON LAKES does not promote a geographic definition (e.g. with a size threshold), but acknowledges large lakes as a category which stakeholders recognise themselves. Large lakes are not strictly defined as lakes with a surface of more than 100 km<sup>2</sup>. 144 such lakes can be identified in ESPON space (EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom). Most large lakes in Europe can be found in Scandinavia, in the Baltic States, in the Alpine Massif and in the plains of Central and Eastern Europe.

Map 1 Large lakes in Europe and case study selection



# 1 Overview of multi-level governance models around large lakes in Europe

Multi-level governance around large lakes is based on a combination of hard policy frameworks, soft institutional arrangements and more punctual cooperation initiatives. To analyse it, ESPON LAKES has identified 18 lake-related issues (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2 Lake-related issues**

Policy area	Lake-related issues
Water management	Regulation of the water level of the lake
	Regulation of the quality of lake water, limiting water pollution
Ecosystem management	Protection of lake-specific ecosystems (marchland, forests)
	Protection of lake-specific biodiversity
Agriculture and fisheries	Lake-related branding for food products
	Regulation of fish catches / support to lake-based fisheries
Economic development	Strategic measures for demographic attractiveness
	Business development policies targeting entrepreneurs in the lake region
	Access to Services of General Interest in the lake region
Tourism	Development and networking of the tourism industry
	Branding of the lake as a tourism destination
Cultural and natural heritage	Protection and valorisation of cultural and natural heritage around the lake
Transport	Regulation of navigation on the lake
	Organisation of public transport across the lake (ferry)
	Management of daily mobility
	Management of transit traffic
Spatial Planning	Limiting urban-sprawl and soil-sealing
	Promotion of urban polycentric development (functional complementarity between urban nodes)

Across the twelve cases that have been reviewed, 54 lake-based cooperation instances have been identified. These instances all contribute in one way or another to solving lake related issues. Major patterns stand-out across cases that represent different configuration of actors, with specific potentials for the resolution of lake-related issues. More precise information on specific cases mentioned in this synthesis is available in Annex 1 Case study report)

**Lake-centred territorial cooperation bodies** support the elaboration of a long-term common vision for the lake region as a whole. The spectrum of actors involved in their boards and committees, as well as the kind of activities they pursue differ from one case to the other. However, given their broad multi-sectoral perspective, they constitute a main entry point for territorial actors seeking to establish and finance cooperation initiatives around the lake. They provide a visibility to the multi-level governance of the lakes. These can be found around Lake Balaton (Lake Balaton Development Council), Lake Vänern (Väner cooperation / Vänersamarbetet), Lake Constance (International Bodensee Conference (IBK) and the related Spatial Planning Commission for Bodensee ROK-B), Lough Neagh (Lough Neagh Landscape Partnership), Étang de Berre (Public interest group for the restoration of Étang de Berre / GIPREB), and Lake Geneva (Lake Geneva Council – Conseil du Léman).

**Inter-municipal cooperation** (or cooperation primarily led by municipalities) is common around large lakes and can play a key role with regards to local development initiatives and strategic planning on lake shores. For instance, in Lake Vänern, the Väner cooperation, an association of 13 municipalities, is active in promoting tourism through concrete projects. On the Estonian side of Lake Peipsi, a group of 10 municipalities has been actively involved in the elaboration of a development strategy for Peipsi coastal area (2019-2030). In Lake Mjøsa, 10 municipalities from the north-eastern side of the lake, are contributing to the development of the spatial planning and transport strategy for the territory.

**Distinct patterns are observed around cross-border lakes compared to one-country lake.** Around cross-border lakes, the international dimension of the lake tends to draw focus on issues that specifically require a common decision-making framework for the management of the lake as a common, and on the difficulties to fund cross-border initiatives on the lake.

- The governance of cross-border lakes is primarily implemented through **international agreements**. For the 6 cross-border lakes covered by the study, 11 International binding agreements have been identified: in the fields of water management, regulation of fish stocks, transport and spatial planning, and protected sites. These agreements primarily compel national authorities of the riparian countries to cooperate. However, regional authorities may also be invited to participate.
- With regard to funding instruments, cooperation around cross-border lakes substantially rely on **Interreg cross-border programmes** (Interreg A, IPA CBC, ENI CBC depending on the type of border). Looking at the keep.eu database that takes stock of all Interreg funded projects since 2000, lakes were the core focus of 18 projects in the 2007-2013 period and 32 projects in the 2014-2020 period<sup>1</sup>. Certain lakes stand out with a high capacity to be granted support from cross-border programmes: Lake Constance region by the programme Alpenrhein – Bodensee – Hochrhein, and Lake Maggiore by the respective Italy-Switzerland CBC programme.
- The governance of cross-border lakes is characterised by **cooperation centred on the lake with a scope limited to one country**. More frequently than in 'one-country' lakes, cooperation on cross-border lake is developed on a limited portion of the riparian area (belonging to one of the riparian countries). This is the case, for instance, on Lake Peipsi where both the inter-municipal cooperation at the root of the development strategy for Peipsi coastal area and the Development Association of Peipsi Fishery Area only cover the Estonian shore of the lake. Similarly, on Lake Fertő-Neusiedl, the 'Neusiedlersee Card', tourism initiatives apply mostly on the Austrian part of the lake region.

In one-country lakes, the embeddedness of lake-related issues in national regulatory frameworks, e.g. for water management, ecosystem protection or spatial planning opens up **main room for cooperation at the interface between regional and local level policymaking**. The main cooperation question around these lakes is: Could lake-related issues be solved more efficiently with the involvement of local and regional actors interested in the future of the lake? The following patterns primarily apply to one-country lakes, although some examples may also be found in cross-border contexts.

- **Water basin management associations** are key players for the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive. These associations usually gather a wide spectrum of authorities (from national to local level), private actors, and non-governmental organisations. Their governance and scope of intervention is defined by national regulations. Depending on the national context, they perform water monitoring activities (surveillance of water quality), set objectives for water quality, and inform the general public on water related issues. These associations can play a pivotal role to foster the multi-level dialogue between actors around large lakes and could be mobilised to develop regional development projects. Stimulating cases are found on Lake Vänern and Lake Päijänne.
- **Community-led development groups** are identified around several lakes. These are used as levers for bottom-up approaches to local development. It comprises Fisheries Local Action Groups (identified in Lake Peipsi, Lake Vänern, and Lake Päijänne) as well as other configurations of actors. In Lough Neagh for instance, the Lough Neagh Partnership Ltd, a non-profit company, was established in 2003, initially for the purpose of administering a rural development grant funding. It now undertakes a wider range of lake-related responsibilities including integrated management, marketing and development of activities relating to tourism, recreation, the environment, heritage and culture.
- **Multi-stakeholder thematic alliances** are efficient levers to support cooperation processes with a well-defined target. Several such alliances are put in place for (part of) the lake to be designated

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a count of all projects with « lakes » in their title.

as a protected area or as an area of specific geo-environmental interest. Two stimulating examples were found on Lake Päijänne.

Other types of **cooperation not led by territorial authorities** include:

- **Networks of NGOs.** Three networks of NGOs were identified: a network of women associations promoting environmental awareness ('Women for the Balaton'), a federation of associations set up to reflect the views of the NGO sector, and create events for lake-based activities ('Association of Balaton Civil Organizations'), and a cross-border network of environmental NGOs ('PrespaNet'). Besides these networks, national or regional environmental NGOs (not specifically lake-focused) are active for the protection and the promotion of large lakes.
- Companies (private or public) may also contribute to the provision of services in lake regions. Besides their involvement in diverse consultative bodies in relation to e.g. water management, companies are taking part in **business consortia** that provide tourism services (see 'Lake Maggiore Express', 'Neusiedlersee Card', 'Léman sans frontière') and in **public-private schemes providing services of general economic interest** (see the 'Corsorzio dei Laghi' in Lake Maggiore, the 'Léman Express' on Lake Geneva).

Overall, different profiles of multi-level governance emerge from this European review of large lakes. One-country lakes stand out with a focus on regional and local initiatives driven either by national frameworks or by bottom-up initiatives, while the governance of cross-border lakes is characterized by bi- or tri-lateral international agreements, recurring support from Interreg programmes, and a territorially fragmented approach to regional development.

- Nordic lakes (Lake Vänern, Lake Päijänne, Lake Mjøsa) stand out with well-articulated bottom-up mechanisms for river basin management and a growing concern for regional development in the vicinity of the lake.
- Lake Balaton, Étang de Berre and Lough Neagh stand out with lake governance focusing on cross-sectoral cooperation instance (respectively Lake Balaton Development Council, Joint association for Étang de Berre and Lough Neagh Partnership).
- Alpine lakes (Constance, Maggiore, Geneva) have a long track-record of functional cross-border integration. To varying extents, cooperation formats have been put in place to produce common integrated visions, operate cross-border services (transport), and trigger economic integration.
- With few exceptions, cooperation around Fertő-Neusiedl, Prespa and Peipsi lakes is more recent and limited. Most initiatives focus on shared environmental concerns (water management and fish stocks for Lake Peipsi, landscape and biodiversity protection for Lake Prespa, protection of natural heritage for Fertő-Neusiedl).

## 2 Territorial challenges and governance of three large lake regions: Balaton, Vänern, Constance

The three lake regions provide a diversified sample of large lakes in Europe, from hydrological, socio-economic and governance point of view.

- Lake Balaton is a shallow lake in Central Europe, more precisely in Hungary. It has developed as a touristic and leisure area since the beginning the 20th century due to the pleasant temperature of the lake and the favourable climatic conditions. The touristic value of the Lake Balaton region is not only determined by the lake water quality and quantity, but also by the natural and built environment, long sandy beaches, traditional vineyards and recreational services built on local traditions. However, Lake Balaton region faces challenges related to seasonality of activities and attractiveness for year-round resident population. Another challenge is the increasing concentration of tourists (and newly built second homes) on the shoreline causing conflicts with local dwellers and with stakeholders managing the ecosystem. The spatial structure of Lake Balaton area is determined by the duality of riparian and background municipalities. The income indicators of the riparian area are higher for decades, but in background municipalities the increase is more hectic and uneven. Agriculture (wine grape and cereals) also plays a key role in the regional identity.
- Lake Vänern is a Scandinavian lake. While both riparian regions are Swedish, the water basin area extends into Norway. A significant proportion of surrounding municipalities are rural and sparsely populated areas. Manufacturing and agricultural activities are overrepresented in the lake region, which is both an inner periphery in the shadow of Gothenburg (southern part) and the centre of the Värmland region (around Karlstad, northern part). The lake itself hosts significant freight traffic, fishery and leisure activities with 18 leisure harbours. The lake region is undergoing a transition process to develop a more integrated approach to the use of its tourism potential.
- Lake Constance is a pre-Alpine lake bordering three countries (Austria, Germany and Switzerland). Cross-border governance has a long-standing tradition in the region. As a consequence, the management of water quality, fisheries and transport is regulated with intergovernmental agreements and cooperation. Besides, within the Lake Constance region cross-border commuting is a relevant phenomenon. The lake region is characterised by strong natural elements such as the Rhine river that flows through Lake Constance, the Alpine mountains in the South and the German middle mountain ranges in the North. The lake region is organised in a polycentric way with numerous medium-sized towns and rural areas. The region is economically innovative, based on a strong industry and a several universities. Agriculture (fruit, vegetables, wine grape, hop) also plays a key role in the regional identity. Furthermore, the region is an intensive tourist destination not only with regard to overnight tourism but also a high number of day.

The three lake regions share common characteristics:

- They are shared by several regions or countries (Balaton between Somogy, Zala and Veszprém counties, Lake Vänern between Värmland and Västra Götaland, Lake Constance between Austria, Germany and Switzerland and their respective subunits: Länder, cantons, municipalities). This implies distinct levels of fragmentation that may represent both challenges and opportunities for the governance of the lake.
- They have been subject to the emergence or deepening of various forms of cooperation initiatives in the last two decades. In this regards, key cooperation bodies have been specifically active to promote integrated spatial development around the lakes: Lake Balaton Development Council on Lake Balaton, IBK and ROK-B on Lake Constance, the Väner cooperation on Lake Vänern.
- The increased demand for second homes and the extension of urbanised and built-in areas, especially at the shorelines, causes more and more spatial development conflicts.

Some key recurring features, and related challenges and opportunities were identified (see Figure 3 below)

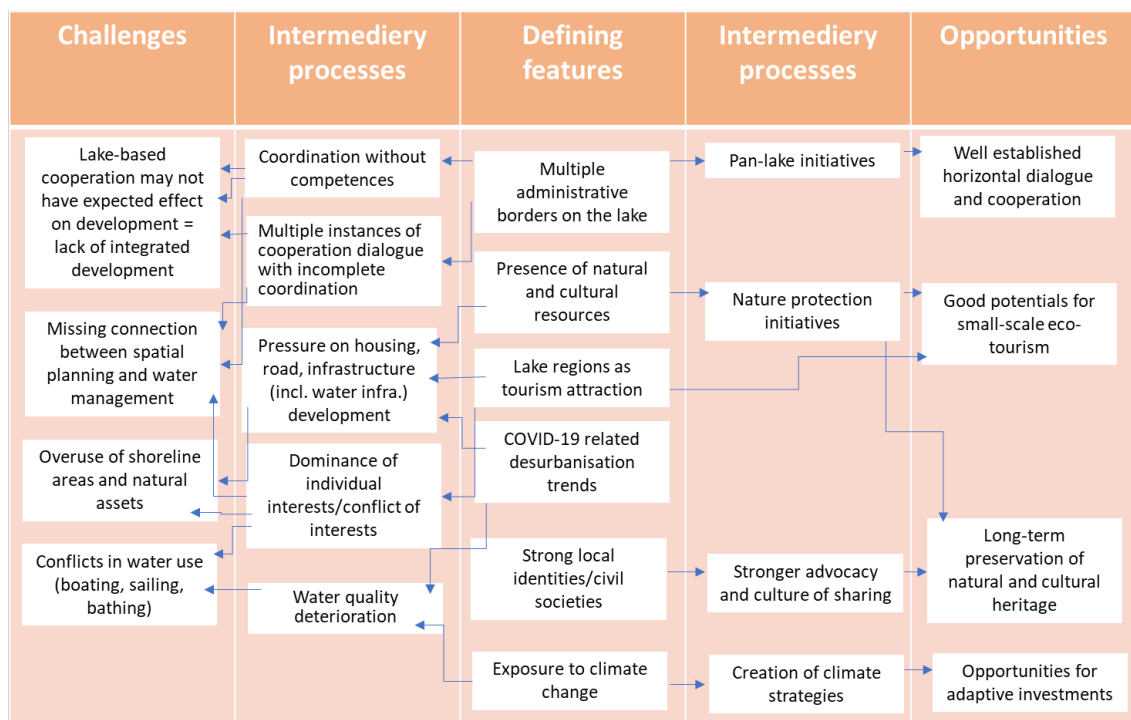
The coexistence of different political-administrative frameworks makes decision-making processes in large lake regions more fragmented. Different soft territorial cooperation initiatives are established to overcome these challenges. Their capacity to act is often limited by insufficient access to decision-making levers and funding. Sometimes, the multiplicity of geographically and thematically overlapping cooperation initiatives is also an obstacle. As a result, integrated territorial development of the lake region may be difficult to achieve. This is observed in the field of regional development, as well as with regards to the relative disconnection between the two spheres of spatial planning and water management.

The presence of natural and cultural resources and the emergence of large lakes as tourism attractions creates opportunities for the establishment of long-term conservation practices and for economic activities such as small-scale eco-tourism that fits with current trend towards “slow tourism” and “domestic tourism”. However, it also creates a pressure on housing, on infrastructure that may lead to the overuse of shoreline areas and natural assets and conflicts in the use of water. COVID-19 related deurbanization trends (countryside home office) could further emphasize these challenges.

The strong civil local identities associated with the lake and the strong civil societies of riparian regions are a lever to build the new “sharing society” that would lead to the careful use of local resources and the preservation of landscape and heritage around the lakes.

Finally, the exposure to climate change is a direct threat to water quality of most large lake (through various processes). Although it may further exacerbate conflicts for water usage, this could allow lake regions to become test beds for innovative adaptive investments.

**Figure 3 Nexus model for large lake regions**



The need for integrated approaches is particularly obvious in relation to water-related issues. For example, water management and water quality are connected to urban planning, agricultural and industrial policy. Lakes therefore help to illustrate the importance of water policies for balanced and sustainable territorial development. This observation may constitute the basis for an analytical grid to improve the understanding of how inadequate governance frameworks around lakes may limit perspectives for integrated territorial development.



### 3 Bringing integrated planning one step forward: Balaton, Vänern, Constance

The analysis of the three targeted lake regions (Balaton, Vänern, Constance) shows major differences in current planning systems (see Figure 4).

Cross-sectoral and integrated spatial planning plays the key role in the Balaton and Lake Constance region. In the case of Balaton, numerous sectoral perspectives that refer to each other, integration of sectoral aspects to the spatial development perspective. The integration of sectoral perspectives is located on the regional level (coordination by LBDC).

In the case of Lake Constance, the cross-border context is of major importance. The International Lake Constance Conference (IBK) makes it possible to address to relevant policies in an integrated way at the right scale. There are also a number of integrated planning schemes targeting national subcomponents of the lake region. However, the lake region framework concepts including spatial and transport development are still under development. There is not a spatial planning competence at the lake region level.

The situation in Vänern is very different from other two examples. As the spatial development process only started recently, sectoral planning plays the most important role whereas spatial planning is rather in the background. Regional strategic documents tend to ignore the lake. Sectoral planning is well-established for some sectors and emerging for other sectors.

The stakeholder dialogues identified **challenges** and opened up **main perspectives** for future integrated spatial development (Figure 5).

The challenges in Balaton region comprise a) sectoral overlapping and fragmentation, b) sectoral top-down communication and decision-making and c) lack of financial resources on lake region level. Addressing these challenges seems important in order to reach a more intense integrated spatial development perspective. This would come along with more spatially integrated perspectives, especially with regards to governance and funding.

In the Lake Constance case, addressing the border-related mismatches continues to be in the focus. Ensuring the consistency of planning objectives and procedures across national borders remains a challenge, despite decades of cooperation experience. Moreover, the land-lake interactions bear a potential for further development. This is true in particular for the functional dynamics across the shoreline.

The lake Vänern region has potentials in many aspects, given the early stage of cooperation and development structures. The situation is also hampered by the fact that the involved regions Västra Götaland and Värmland belong to different ESIF support areas, each having an own main sectoral interest (respectively maritime economy and forestry).

Figure 4 Current assessment of spatial development

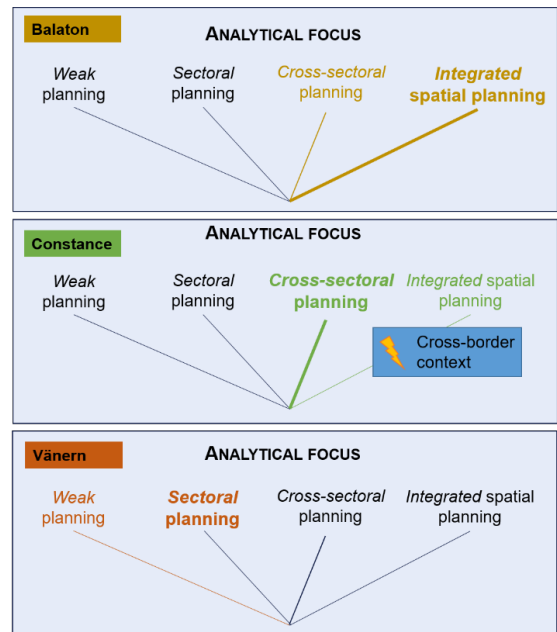
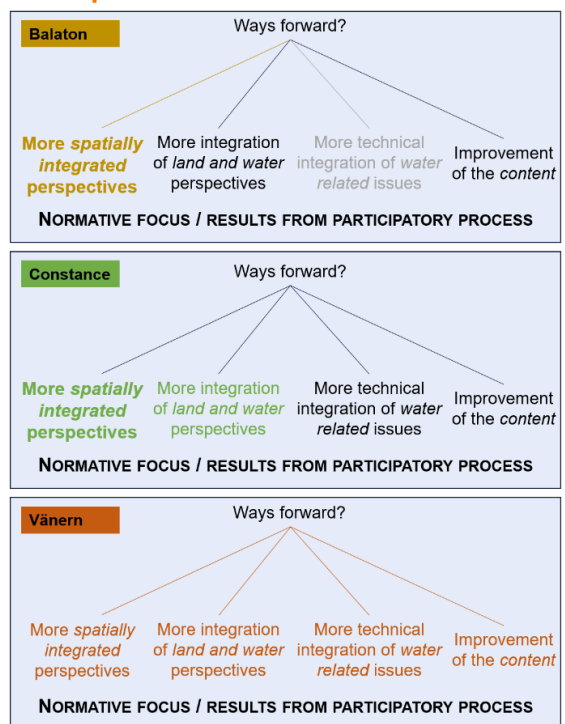


Figure 5: Future perspectives of spatial development



## 4 Framework concept for an integrated development of European large lakes

A framework concept has been developed to (1) strengthen the overall visibility of, and raise awareness for, large lake regions in Europe, especially among national and EU decision makers and (2) facilitate cooperation around large lakes and contribute to developing shared identities, especially among local and regional players in large lake regions. Its main output of the framework concept is a set of 12 “policy options” for large lake regions that stakeholders from lake regions could decide to implement on their own, based on a cooperation centred on a specific lake or in an inter-lake perspective (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1 Policy options for large lake regions**

Dimension	Denomination	Short description
Regional integration	Use EU funding to promote sustainable development	Sustainable development is an important policy objective in large lake regions. Lake regions should make use of EU Cohesion policy funding and the 'Next Generation EU' recovery instrument to support connectivity, SME competitiveness and environmental protection.
	Increase the use of integrated tools with EU Cohesion Policy	Specific tools such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), CLLD and other territorial strategies have proved effective in supporting sustainable development in various territorial contexts. Using these tools around large lakes could meet expectations from local stakeholders to be involved in implementing EU funds.
	Support cooperation beyond national borders	European territorial cooperation can support the implementation of projects in cross-border lake regions (Interreg A) as well as provide resources for lake-related transnational projects. Applying the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation instrument (EGTC) and the European cross-border mechanism (ECBM) could support services of general interest in lake regions.
Land-lake integration	Promote integrated land-lake management	Bridging the frequent gap between terrestrial planning and lake-based planning requires assessing critical land-lake interactions related to social, economic and ecosystem-based activities. The principle of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) applied in coastal regions and the ecosystem approach could both promote integration.
Policy integration	Strengthen the role of spatial planning in policy coordination	The limited availability of land around large lakes requires cross-sectoral trade-offs. Preparing a spatial plan for a lake region could trigger interactions between policy sectors and prospective thinking.
	Capitalise on integrated river basin management practices	EU large lakes are part of wider river basins whose activities are monitored through river basin management plans. Lake regions should capitalise on communities responsible for these plans to implement sustainable development beyond a strict understanding of water management.
	Establish and support lake-centred economic clusters	Economic clusters can help cooperation along territorial value chains. They can create additional value from lake resources, and the lake can be a catalyst (a common reference) to strengthen sectoral interactions.



Dimension	Denomination	Short description
Vertical integration	Link large lake regions to the Territorial Agenda 2030	The Territorial Agenda 2030 is a European strategic policy document for spatial planning and territorial development. A new pilot action with a focus on lake regions could be developed and launched with the next round of Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot actions. This would highlight the specificity of large lake regions in Europe and support place-based solutions in them.
	Illustrate contributions to policy goals	Highlighting the contribution of lake regions to EU or global policy goals would help to position lake regions in broader policy discourses. Two examples are the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Territorial Agenda 2030. This could be done by screening local and regional strategies, communication and a monitoring system for these regions.
	Empower local and regional players through capacity building	Policy integration and strengthening the position of lake regions in EU policies entails new requirements, especially for local and regional authorities. These include ensuring capacity to implement EU policies. In addition, different programmes and arenas could be mobilised by lake regions such as the EU Policy Learning Platform, Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX), the Smart Specialisation Platform and the EC Urban Development Network.
European integration	Raise a voice in Brussels	Having a unique voice in the EU policy debate could help lake regions to promote their interests in EU institutions. These regions could establish an association and set up a contact point, secretariat or office in Brussels. Such an association would provide a network for exchanging experiences, support lake-related events and be a contact point for EU expertise.
	Promote European exchange and learning	Exchange arenas and dialogue platforms can bring together local or regional development practitioners. An online platform for integrated lake development, working on joint projects and ensuring visibility at major EU events could raise interest and keep the discussion alive on the future of lake regions.







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