

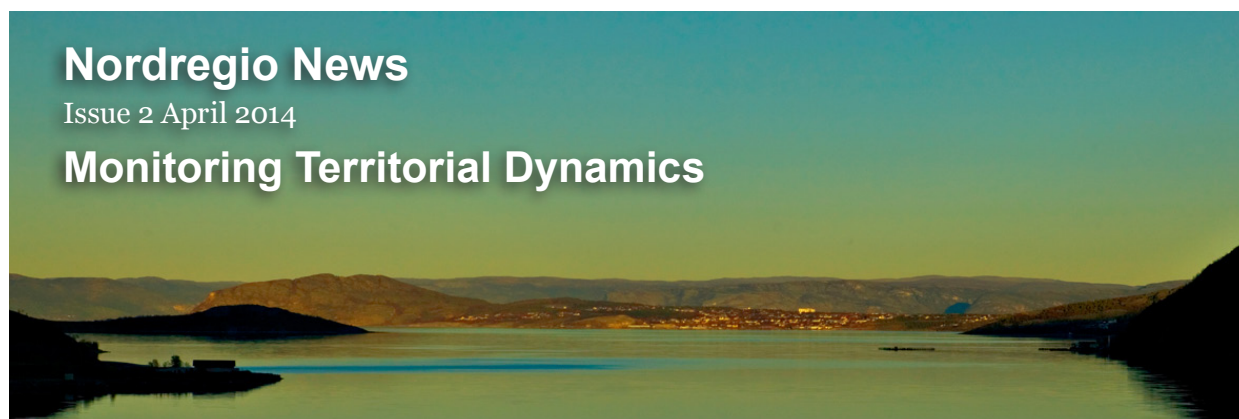


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Monitoring Territorial Dynamics

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Territorial Monitoring: Better Knowledge for Sounder Policies?

What is territorial monitoring – and who is making use of all the available evidence from monitoring systems in Europe today? How should researchers and practitioners work together to ensure that monitoring stays relevant, timely and easy to absorb by those who may benefit from better knowledge about territorial structures and dynamics? In this issue of Nordregio News, we take a tour of territorial monitoring – looking at conceptual, practical and applied aspects of producing and using such knowledge.

For a long time, the monitoring of territorial trends and structures has been a preoccupation of economists, engineers, geographers and social scientists in general. Monitoring has both an academic and political outreach. In recent years, the motto regarding the need for statistical information to support evidence-based policymaking has been “the more we know the better”. While building extensive datasets takes time and resources, there has been an increasing need to keep such statistical evidence policy relevant, timely and accessible to the widest spectrum of policymaking in Europe. A further challenge is to combine the inherent complexities of understanding territorial dynamics, with the need for simple messages.

Nordregio has been involved in many projects providing such a statistical basis for evidence-based policymaking, in Europe and in the Nordic Region. A number of Nordregio projects have focused explicitly on developing territorial monitoring systems, including ESPON **INTERCO**, **TeMo** and **ETMS**, which were specifically designed to

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produce tailor-made monitoring reports about territorial development and cohesion.

In the first article of this issue, **How to Monitor Territorial Dynamics**, we set out to explain some of the most important conceptual and practical underpinnings of territorial monitoring systems. What is monitoring, how is it tailored, and what is the future of monitoring and design of monitoring output in the world of digital platforms and easily accessible information?

The second contribution by Tomas Hanell, **Territorial Cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region**, uses a case to describe how results from an indicator based monitoring system can be made accessible and useful for policy making in the Baltic Sea Region.

Finally, Odd Godal provides some reflections from the user's point of view. The article, **Monitoring of Territorial Cohesion**, discusses how evidence from thematic projects as well as specific monitoring systems can be utilised in both the national Norwegian planning context, and for international discussions.

We hope that this mix of articles offers interesting insight into the world of territorial monitoring. And we wish you pleasant reading!



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How to Monitor Territorial Dynamics

By Gunnar Lindberg & Alexandre Dubois

Monitoring territorial development and outlining territorial cohesion are currently fashionable. Academic exercises and institutional endeavours are undertaken to determine the best ways to construct tools for these purposes. In essence, a territorial monitoring system is much more than just a statistical database. A key parameter of a territorial monitoring system is its ability to provide relevant information to inform the policy process by providing territorial evidence and analyses for policymakers responsible for cohesion across levels of government.

Monitoring systems have flourished in recent years, especially because of the increased need for efficient implementation of public policies in a drive to “do more with less”. Such systems may be conceived in many ways depending on the territorial and policy settings with which they are associated. Hence, monitoring may be conceived:

- as a way of following and analysing the development path of territories according to specific policy story-lines;
- as a bank of comparable data that can be used for multiple thematic or geographical analyses;
- as a warning system, used for systematically monitoring key trends;
- as an evaluation tool with the capacity to monitor policies and programmes, assessing their impact in various places;
- as a common basis for sharing comparative information and as a basis for a benchmarking tool supporting transnational or cross-border decision-making and negotiation.

The development of a monitoring system entails collecting a set of statistical indicators deemed most appropriate for revealing territorial trends and ensuring that the information for these indicators is well documented and traceable. It concerns ensuring the reproducibility and consistency of the statistical and analytical work over a period of years, and this process requires ensuring the comparability of data across space and time. In practical terms, it is the craft of offering this statistical information in a comprehensive and rigorous way.

The choice of indicators is arguably the critical moment in developing a territorial monitoring system, because the capacity of the system to support evidence-based policymaking effectively is related to its ability to illustrate meaningful trends that support future policy



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interventions. Furthermore, a monitoring system must be continuously relevant in both data and the inclusion of new indicators to adapt to future shifts of European and national policy debates.

A review of monitoring territorial cohesion across Europe

In the Barca Report, the idea of 'place-based' development strategies was brought to the fore of the territorial policy debate. At the same time, the notion of territorial cohesion has gained momentum as a key objective for the EU as a whole. The explicit inclusion of territorial cohesion in the recent Treaty of Lisbon and the subsequent EU2020 Strategy has even consolidated the central place that the notion holds for the design and implementation of European regional policy. In addition, the debate on geographic specificity has reinforced the understanding that territorial development is strongly influenced by geographical characteristics. Because diverse regions, cities and territories will have different development trajectories as a result of variations in challenges, assets and opportunities, the difficulty of building a coherent pan-European territorial monitoring system is obvious. How can such a system be sufficiently comprehensive to monitor territorial cohesion on various geographical scales and at the same time be adaptive to specific territorial development trajectories?

In 2010, ESPON launched the **INTERCO** project, dedicated to the elaboration of an indicator-based system for measuring territorial cohesion. Moreover, in 2011 in relation to this project, ESPON organized a workshop entitled: 'Assessing Indicators of Territorial Cohesion'. This began the recent development of the monitoring systems in the realm of the ESPON programme. Previously, there had been some scoping projects, and obviously many projects focused on indicators for specific topics in the domain of territorial development/cohesion. In the INTERCO project, a team of European researchers emphasized the need to understand territorial cohesion as a set of intertwining, and often overlapping story-lines that may each be monitored using sets of indicators. Such a focus would give policymakers the choice of monitoring territorial cohesion according to their own understanding of it, and especially the ways in which it fits the specific geographical and institutional context they represent. This was a major step in bringing together the universal nature and territorially specific aspects of territorial cohesion.

In a direct continuation of this work, the ongoing ESPON project, the **European Territorial Monitoring System** (ETMS), is intended to create a coherent monitoring platform that helps policymakers at various levels of government to identify important development trends across the continent, and interpret and contextualize these trends by integrating them into the wider context of territorial cohesion. Their objective is for such a monitoring system to assist decision-makers in defining new policy objectives, prioritize potential future policy inter-

Further reading

Dühr, S. (2007). *The visual language of spatial planning: exploring cartographic representations for spatial planning in Europe*. RTP1 library series. London, New York: Routledge.

ventions and generally anchor an evidence-based approach to policy-making.

Monitoring: from concept to practice

A monitoring system should on the one hand provide statistical evidence on past and current territorial dynamics and trends, and on the other hand, address the specific and strategic important themes addressed by the relevant political ambitions. Unless it achieves the latter, it will not be really useful except as an academic exercise.

Simple messages are easier to understand and communicate to decision-makers than complex messages. Hence, a critical factor for a monitoring system is to limit the number of indicators by focusing on those that have the most explanatory power. Furthermore, it is important both to identify indicators that measure the most appropriate policy objectives and issues, and to connect these with more specific types of territories, whether these are cities, sparsely populated areas, mountainous regions or rural regions. In that respect, the territorial nature of such a monitoring system relates to the measurement of policy objectives and issues critical to territorial cohesion, and to the operationalization of the notion of territorial diversity acknowledging the necessity to assess a territory's development path in relation to its specific geographical preconditions.

A further example of this necessity to adjust the actual content of a territorial monitoring tool to a political and geographical context was provided by the ESPON **BSR-TeMo** project. To develop a monitoring system that was relevant to the stakeholders, a participatory approach was taken. There are many ways in which monitoring as a concept can be put into practice and be relevant for pursuing territorial cohesion, for example, by:

- adding to the informed discussion between actors concerned with place-based development activities;
- improving policies by providing evidence about local circumstances and conditions;
- improving the integrated delivery of policies;
- improving the use of territorial assets/capital in the implementation of EU2020 priorities, and facilitating implementation of the priorities of the Territoria Agenda 2020;
- strengthening the decision-making process at the macro-regional level, resulting in more accurate formulation of macro-regional strategies (priorities and projects).

To meet these expectations, it becomes especially important to ensure that the policy dimensions and story-lines investigated are strongly connected to the territorial development trends that are central to the respective territory. In the example of the Baltic Sea Region, the challenges are identified by the EU BSR Strategy and the VASAB Long-

term Perspective (LTP). These are expressed by the three overarching territorial divides (north–south, east–west and urban–rural). Of course, these policy orientations should be seen from the perspective of important policies and strategies developed in documents such as the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Territorial Agenda 2020, as well as the Fifth Cohesion Report, which are important for monitoring systems at the EU level.

Clearly, an important benefit of a territorial monitoring system lies beyond the mere compilation of comprehensive statistical datasets, but rather in its role as a one-stop shop platform that enables the policy community from various government levels to ground their regional development strategies and local action plans on the same set of coherent information and connect them to the wider objectives of EU strategies.

Visualizing territorial dynamics

Another benefit of such a tool is its power to provide visualization. Visualization is believed to be a key feature supporting spatial visioning and the co-production of a shared transnational understanding of spatial planning in Europe, not least when this process engages both researchers and policymakers (e.g. Dühr, 2007). In our understanding, the recent vogue in developing territorial monitoring systems can be seen as a natural evolution of this need.

Visualization gives life to the comprehensive datasets that lie behind such tools. Hence, a factor in the success of a monitoring system is how the information is visually presented (online) and how interactive the interface is. Presentation and visualization can include displaying static maps, trend analyses based on maps, charts and stop-sign like displays. Recently (using the time dimension rather ambiguously), the fashion has been to create user-driven interactive map tools. This substitutes the visualization only of the results chosen by administrators, and allows the user to decide what and where to compare, and how to visualize (in the framework of the design of the tool).

Many such tools are being developed for territorial development monitoring, and there are many well-established ones for economic data, environmental data and many other fields. Most large institutions, such as the OECD, EU, Eurostat and the World Bank, have tools for visualizing data online or for creating one's own maps. However, one reflection is that this comprehensiveness tends to put more pressure on the user in interpreting the data. It is not clear whether this improves the usefulness of the results of monitoring compared with ready-made material. In the TeMo project, a middle way was developed whereby the material from the system was placed online and is easy to access, but it has been prepared (and often analysed) for the user.

Looking ahead: what is the future for territorial monitoring systems?

As we suggested above, developing territorial monitoring systems only makes sense if it is a durable, long-term effort by scientific contributors and the policy actors that initiate and commission them. The main benefit of a territorial monitoring system is its presentation of statistical evidence in a more or less long-term temporal perspective.

Our experience tells us that the key challenge for the long-run sustainability of a monitoring system is to turn it into a meaningful policy indicator system that responds to current policy needs and appeals to the minds of policymakers. This means that the system should address many analytical questions, in line with key policy needs, based on a limited set of routinely collected information. This is an essential condition for the success of any territorial monitoring system. The ambition to sustain a monitoring system can obviously be adjusted using a range of parameters, and data updates are only one aspect to consider. Other parameters include functions, types of analyses, and dissemination and stakeholder involvement.

It is important that those in the institutional structure around a monitoring system understand that the framing and construction of the system are only a first step in providing appropriate policy support. The relevance of the system depends on many factors; the most important may be:

- (a) the understanding among policymakers of the role and opportunities provided by the monitoring system and their ability to use them;
- (b) the permanent updating of the information at the core of the monitoring system;
- (c) a critical examination of the system's ability to meet the needs of policy-making.

Finally, it would be interesting to observe and follow the evolution of the current trend in monitoring and evaluation and how (or if) it will be integrated into statistically informed policy-making processes and the evaluation of policy programmes. So far, efforts to monitor territorial cohesion across Europe have been undertaken in a relatively ad hoc manner, that is, as one-off project activities. In current developments in research programmes such as ESPON, it is clear that monitoring is about to develop into more institutionalized tool-boxes. This obviously poses new questions about the overall sustainability of territorial monitoring systems, such as their maintenance and integration into the policy-making system.

Territorial Cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region

By Tomas Hanell

A monitoring system as such may be considered largely useless. Collection and storage of data merely enable extraction of information and are ultimately intended to provide knowledge from the system. The value-added of a monitoring system in the case below could thus be evaluated in terms of its ability to feed relevant information into a policy process and its capacity to produce supporting evidence for actual decision-making. Below is a brief summary of such an attempt performed in the context of the ESPON BSR-TeMo monitoring system for the Baltic Sea Region.

Territorial cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region: a multidimensional analysis

In an attempt to synthesize the various patterns and trends in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) into one compact and coherent package, we utilize 10 specific macro-level indicators that cover all major aspects of territorial cohesion in the BSR. These are concerned with ‘distribution’, ‘convergence’ and specifically ‘targeted BSR cohesion topics’. The 10 indicators reveal that during the latter half of the past decade, the BSR underwent a process of increased concentration of economic value-added, jobs, and population at a macro level.

The main perceived division in the BSR in the 1990s was between the east and west, stretching from the White Sea to the Bay of Pomerania. In addition, only a few scattered material welfare pockets were discernible, primarily around capital regions such as Tallinn or Warsaw, and to a lesser extent, approximately 10 other major urban nodes.

In subsequent years, this overarching pattern has changed. Arguably, the strong east–west division across the Baltic Sea still exists, but it already has a few “cracks”, such as along certain stretches of the Finnish-Russian border (Figure 1). The greatest difference from the situation 15–20 years ago is a virtual explosion of disparities between adjacent regions within countries, in particular in the eastern BSR.

A vast assortment of new ‘islands of wealth’ has emerged, typically surrounding major metropolitan areas. Moreover, other internal discrepancies are now much sharper than was previously the case. The most striking case in the eastern BSR is the increased regional disparities in BSR Russia. On average, economic border disparities in the eastern BSR are 10 percentage points greater than those in the western parts of the region. Increasing polarization in the Nordic countries is evident, and is similarly manifested in growing intraregional disparities.



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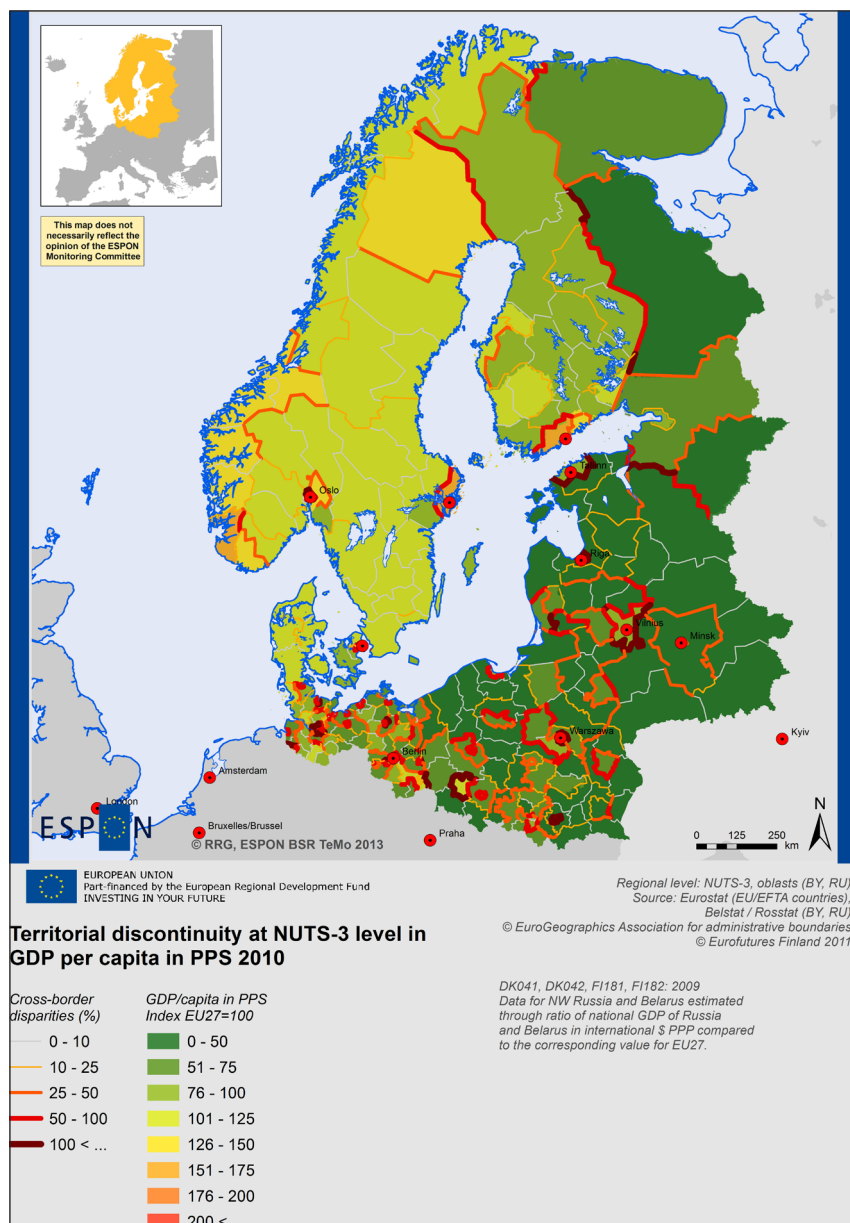


Figure 1. In contrast to the situation in the past, there are now substantially higher barriers between all capital regions and their surrounding areas.

Examination of local disparities in unemployment rates shows similarly that in the social context, the patterns are substantially different. First, the primary divide appears to be between countries rather than within them, reflecting a situation where labour market policy in general is more a national than a regional affair. Second, because high unemployment (as well as other related social challenges) does not conform to the urban–rural dichotomy (i.e. the urban paradox), for the most part, we see no particularly large discrepancies between major metropolitan areas and their surrounding territories.

Analysing the BSR divides

The indicators reveal that the BSR east–west divide is still in existence; however, particularly in issues related to economic development, it is steadily being eradicated. The sharpest divide today is discernible within the social sphere of development.

The BSR has huge internal variations in terms of well-being and quality of life. However, the development trends are cohesive, and in tandem with reduced economic differences, they tend to be reduced over time. Yet east–west differences in such a significant area as life expectancy are still substantial. Levels of relative poverty are somewhat comparable between east and west: in 2010, they included a fifth of the population of the western BSR and close to a third on the eastern side. In contrast, it is not surprising that there are huge east–west variations in levels of absolute poverty. For instance, in terms of severe material deprivation, more than 30% of the population of some eastern BSR regions in 2011 were deprived of many basic amenities. The highest corresponding regional value in the western BSR only reached 3.8% of the population.

Somewhat surprisingly, in terms of self-assessed general health, the east–west divide is not as clear. Economic welfare only partially explains patterns in health (Figure 2). Changes in the health status of the BSR population tend to level out on a large scale. By and large, we find that the worst performers have improved their relative status to the greatest extent, and the best performers the least.

Concerning the north–south divide, sparsely populated regions (together with border regions) are generally the most disadvantaged types of territories and lag behind in most aspects of socio-economic development, particularly in a national context. Evidence for this can be found in migration patterns, weak demographic structures and naturally in physical accessibility. On this last point, recent changes (2001–2006) indicate that the situation for the sparsely populated areas is worsening despite investment in transport infrastructure.

The last of the three BSR divides is in many respects the most difficult to perceive. Yet it is perhaps the most profound of the three. There are indications of a strengthening of the urban–rural divide, whereby territorial gaps in the BSR are most pronounced in terms of urban hierarchy. With very few exceptions, the rural areas generally occupy the bottom positions in most aspects of socio-economic development. Demographic structures are weak, accessibility measures of rural areas are on average some 20% lower than the BSR average, and more than 40% lower than urban areas. The core rural areas are handicapped by a lack of opportunities for economic development outside the sphere of primary production, often low levels of education, and substandard infrastructure that results in poor accessibility and connectivity to larger centres, although these are not the most peripheral regions. The financial crisis also appears to have affected rural migration harder than in any other type of region.

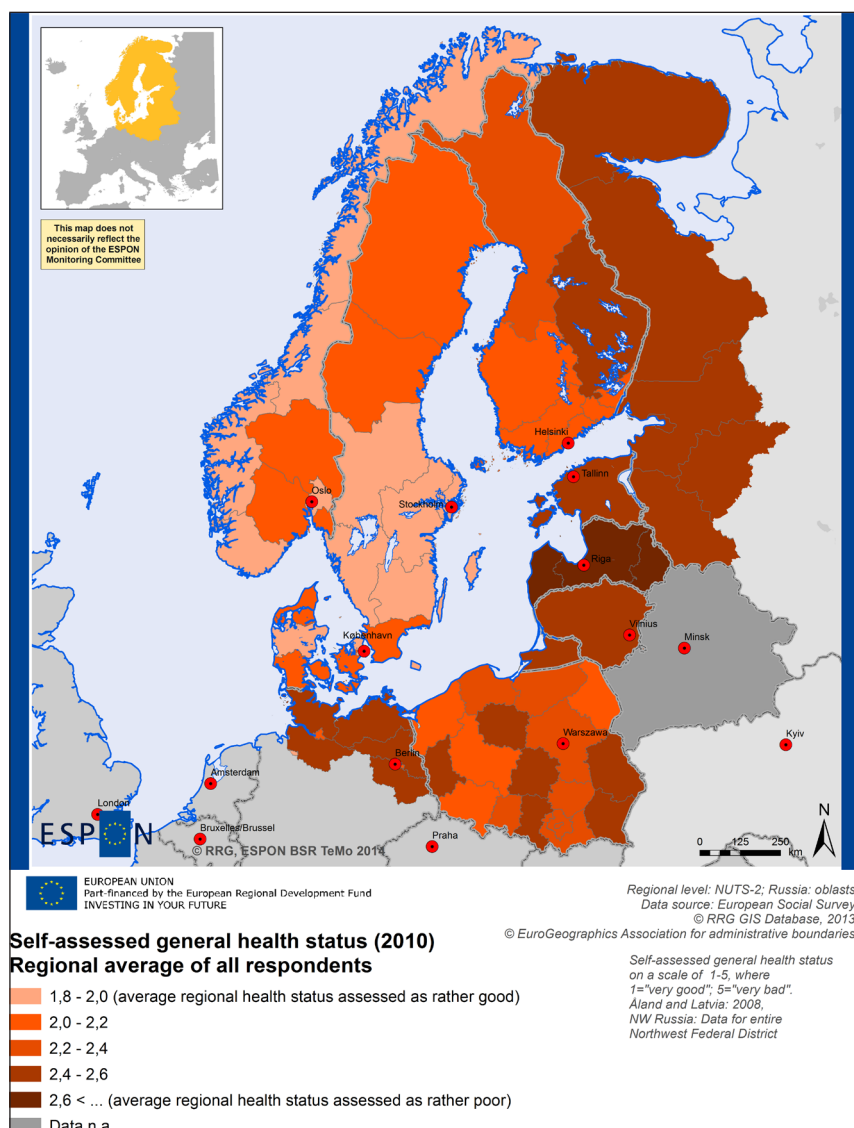
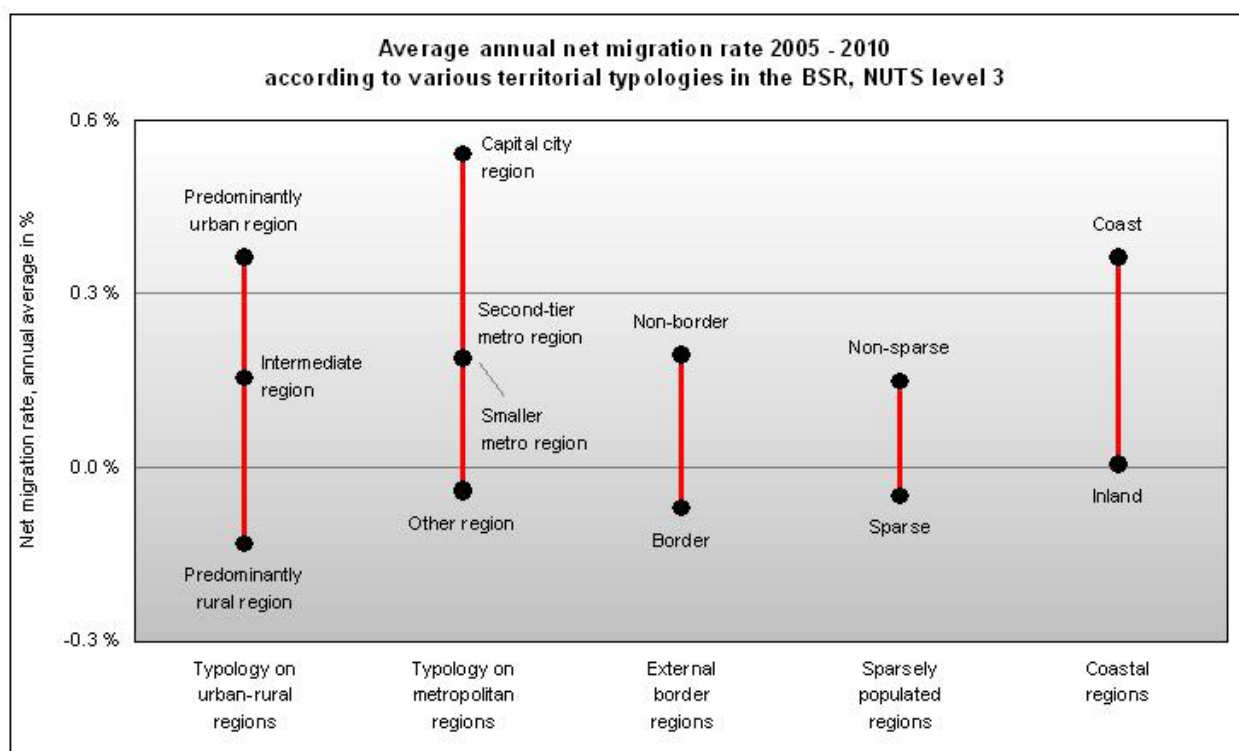


Figure 2. Self-assessed general health status does not show a clear east–west divide.

Migration and jobs: a story of increased polarization

As has been the case for the past 20 years or so, recent trends in general territorial development indicate increasing polarization. At a general level, this polarization looks surprisingly similar across most domains of society. It includes areas such as demography, economic development, economic vulnerability, innovation, entrepreneurship, the knowledge economy and social development. The general pattern of this ongoing development in the BSR is appropriately illustrated by Figure 3, which shows average net migration rates for various types of BSR territories in the period 2005–2010.

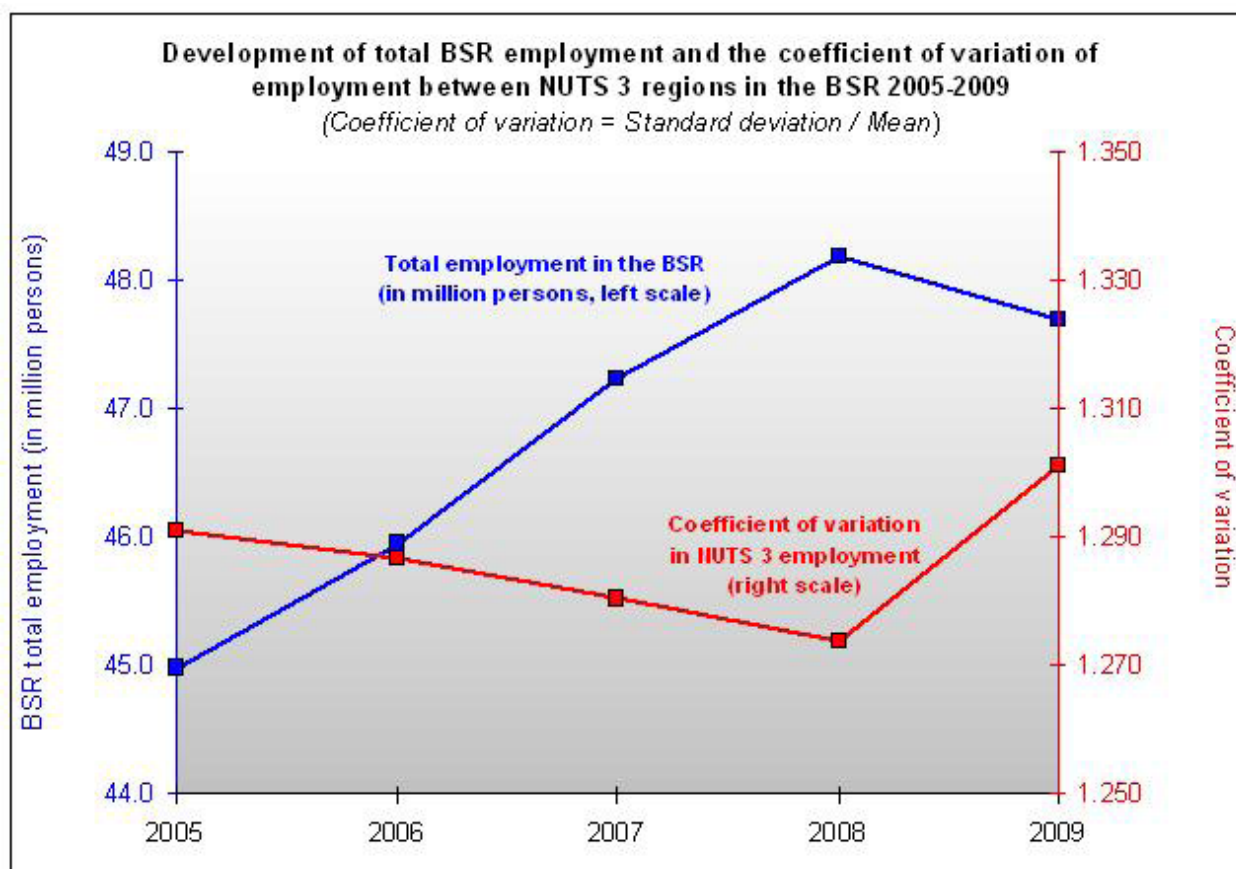


Data source: Eurostat, Belstat, Rosstat. NW Russia: 2005–2009; Finland & Denmark: 2007–2010.

Figure 3. Differences in net migration rates for various types of BSR territories, illustrating a clear trend of polarization.

On the urban–rural axis, predominantly urban regions have taken a clear lead, whereas predominantly rural regions are at the bottom end of the scale. Capital (city metropolitan) areas exceed all other types of regions, and only 10 urban regions (out of 238 regions in total) absorb 47% of all surplus migration in the BSR.

When examining the spatial distribution of economic indicators such as new jobs in the BSR, a further polarizing developmental trend is similarly apparent. Total BSR employment grew continually until 2008, after which it subsequently decreased (blue line in Figure 4). The parallel downward slope in regional employment trends (red line) indicates that when the number of jobs increased in the BSR, the increase was beneficial to most small regions in the area, because intraregional differences were reduced. However, when the number of jobs started to decrease as a result of the financial crisis of 2008, the decrease was not evenly distributed among the regions. This implied a concentration in larger regions, showing the weak resilience of rural and/or peripheral areas in response to external economic shocks.



Data source: Eurostat, Belstat, Rosstat. SNUTS 2 for Belarus and NW Russia.

Figure 4. When the number of jobs (blue line) in the BSR increased, the increase was beneficial to most regions (red line). The decline following the 2008 credit crunch mostly affected more vulnerable regions, resulting in increased concentration of employment.

In terms of locations where these jobs were created, new employment has followed a rather strict hierarchical ranking of settlement types. Capital regions have gained the most jobs, followed by second-tier metropolitan areas. Smaller metro regions have also fared well, but new job creation has not been as rapid in the remaining regions, which are primarily rural and/or peripheral.

However, more alarmingly, the post-crisis loss of jobs indicated a considerable spatially segregated pattern, because the least urbanized areas were hit hardest, revealing the economic vulnerability of smaller settlements in the BSR. During the period 2005–2009, sparse, border and rural regions in particular experienced considerably worse development than their counterparts. That coastal regions on average fared worse than inland regions is to a large extent a result of rapid employment growth in Poland (where most regions are not by the coast). The obvious urban–rural dimension of these typologies requires further examination. Regarding different forms of metropolitan regions, one may say that the division is between non-urban and urban, but for the

latter not in a strictly hierarchical manner. The heterogeneity of the BSR implies that the size of the metropolitan area in itself appears to be of lesser importance, and other factors have greater relevance.

Territorial diversity

In recent years, the issue of recognition of territorial diversity has attracted increased attention and has substantial relevance for the BSR, because the region is in this respect extremely heterogeneous in character.

In general, border regions still today perform worse than the rest of the BSR and they are particularly severely handicapped when examined in their national context. Net migration into external border areas is down to less than half that of their respective countries, unemployment rates are higher, GDP/capita is lower and accessibility is much worse. They also appear vulnerable to external economic shocks. Following the economic crisis of 2008, border regions have experienced a much steeper fall in economic indicators such as migration or a much larger relative decline in employment than the non-border areas of the BSR.

Specific territories represent not only a burden, but also an asset. For instance, external border regions represent a large economic potential that today still appears under-utilized. In 2009–2010, border regions accounted for more than 13% of the total BSR economic growth surplus, far beyond their relative share of the economy. Similar stories can be told for sparsely populated regions, remote regions and non-metropolitan regions that testify to the untapped potential of the economic contribution of such areas.

Monitoring of Territorial Cohesion

By Odd Godal

ESPON is a programme to monitor the territorial cohesion of Europe. It has a systematic European and comparative perspective. The second programme period is about to conclude, and a third programme is to be launched. The ambition for the new programme is to strengthen its user focus, which of course may be achieved in a number of ways. Below, I reflect on the experience so far.

One of the main conclusions of the report *European perspectives on regions and regional development in Norway* – in the light of ESPON written by **NIBR** (Norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning) and **Spatial Foresight** is that ESPON has made significant improvements in establishing and improving the basis of transnational analyses and comparisons of European territories and regions, and in establishing strong research networks across national borders. The picture we get of Norway and large part of the Nordic countries is that they differ from the rest of Europe with regard to geography, settlement patterns, urban structures and other structural issues. Nevertheless, in spite of or perhaps because of this, the Nordic Region is very strong with regard to many aspects of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The objective of the project on which the report is based was to increase the relevance and accessibility of ESPON results for Norwegian regional policy and planning. This included reproducing ESPON results at a more detailed regional level concerning issues of particular interest for Norwegian regional policy. But what do ESPON projects tell us about regional similarities and differences in Norway compared with Europe?

The report has revealed the difficulty of conducting transnational European comparisons at the regional level within Europe or the ESPON space. The units for comparison are defined differently in each country according to different principles. There are also great differences in availability of regional and territorial data. Moreover, there is significant variation in Europe with regard to geography, settlement patterns and economics.

Innovation in Norway

The results are sensitive to the method and choice of regional level. The use of the same methodology at a lower level than NUTS2 or even NUTS3, for example, for functional areas such as the labour market, will provide a different picture. An example is the ESPON Project on Research and Development, Innovation and Knowledge (ESPON



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KIT), which classifies Norwegian regions at the NUTS2 level as ‘Advanced services regions’ or as ‘Technologically advanced regions’

No Norwegian regions have been classified as ‘Low tech regions’ or as ‘Advanced manufacturing regions’. (see Figure 1. Technologically advanced regions in Europe, 2007.)

Reproduction at a lower level using similar indicators provides another perspective. At the labour market level, the Technologically advanced regions are found in the Stavanger/Sandnes and Sande fjord/Larvik regions. Advanced services regions are found in labour market regions in and around the larger cities. Along the coast, we find Advanced manufacturing regions, but Norwegian regions are generally very diverse with a range of possibilities. Analyses based on the NUTS2 and NUTS3 levels often do not provide a sufficiently nuanced picture for analytical or policy purposes and should be combined with analyses at a lower level.

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Technologically advanced regions in Europe, 2007

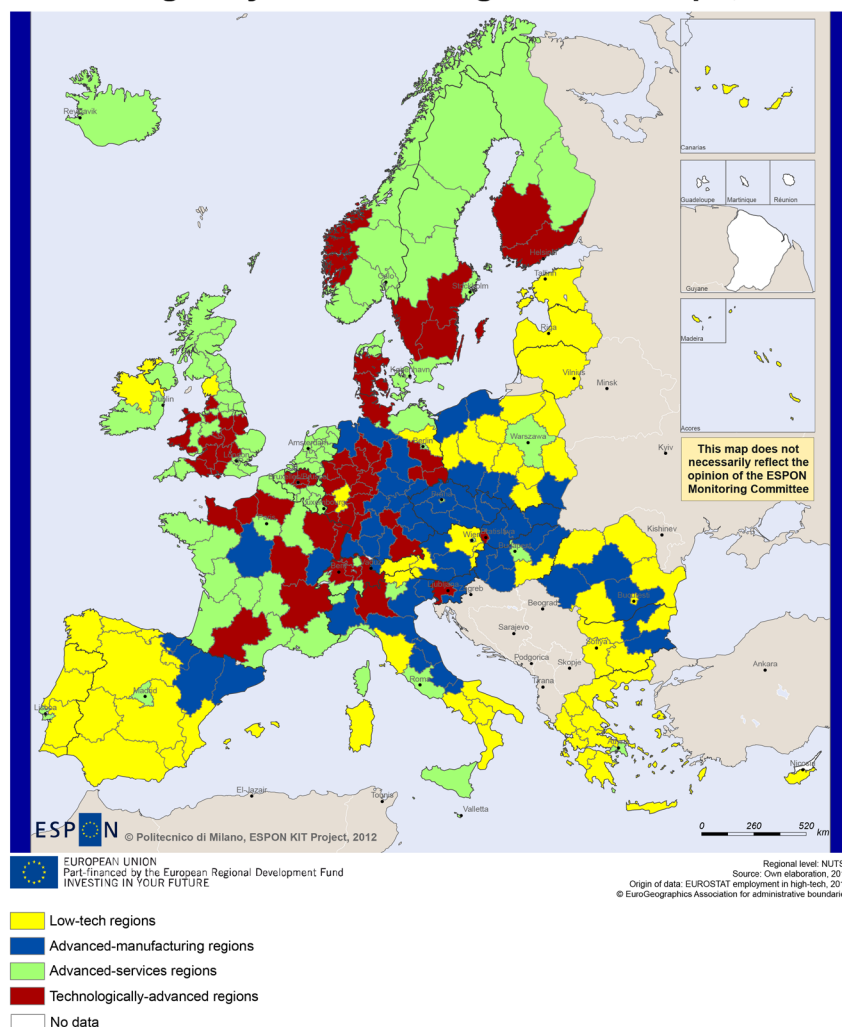


Figure 1. Technologically advanced regions in Europe, 2007

Source: *Europeiske perspektiv på regioner og regional utvikling i Norge – I lys av ESPON*, NIBR 2013:9.

A territorial monitoring system for the Baltic Sea Region (BSR)

The ESPON BSR-TeMo project is distinct from the previous project because it was originally initiated by Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB). Its purpose was to establish a system to monitor the territorial and regional development of the BSR. It therefore includes areas that are not normally included in ESPON projects, in this instance, north-west Russia and Belarus.

The aim of the project was to develop an operational territorial monitoring system on a macro-regional scale for the BSR. The project addresses two issues: the policy issue of territorial cohesion and a methodological issue of an indicator-based system for monitoring territorial development in the BSR.

The starting point for the monitoring system was the three main challenges for territorial cohesion identified in the VASAB Long-term Perspective for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea. First, there is the east–west divide that follows the administrative borders once defined by the Iron Curtain, which reflects differences in several socio-economic development aspects between the eastern and western BSR territories. Second, there is the north–south divide that results from diverse climatic conditions for human settlements in the BSR territories (accessibility is also an important issue); and third there is an urban–rural divide, which is a major challenge for cohesion in the BSR, particularly with regard to demographic development.

The methodological issues were identified on the basis of previous attempts to establish a monitoring system. The key analytical issues to be addressed included the choice of indicators according to content; at the geographical level, particular consideration should be given to the inclusion of the LAU2 or municipal levels as building blocks, and to visualization, benchmarking and maintenance. It is important to find manageable ways to perform tasks such as updating the data and statistics that go into the monitoring system, but also to develop them further based on experience so that the system will continue after the project is finished.

The project has established a territorial monitoring system for the BSR, and as such it has achieved what it was intended to do. However, the system still requires development in future years. Experience has revealed several issues that should be relevant to future monitoring systems for other macro regions. One such issue is the comparison of statistics from EU states and Norway, which use Eurostat methodology, with those from Russia or Belarus, which use other methodologies, to improve coherence between ESPON data at the European level, and regional and local data. (See Figure 2 Life expectancy at birth change 2005 - 2010: An example of good availability and comparability) A monitoring system should not only reveal trends and provide forecasts, but should also provide analysis for the decision-making process.

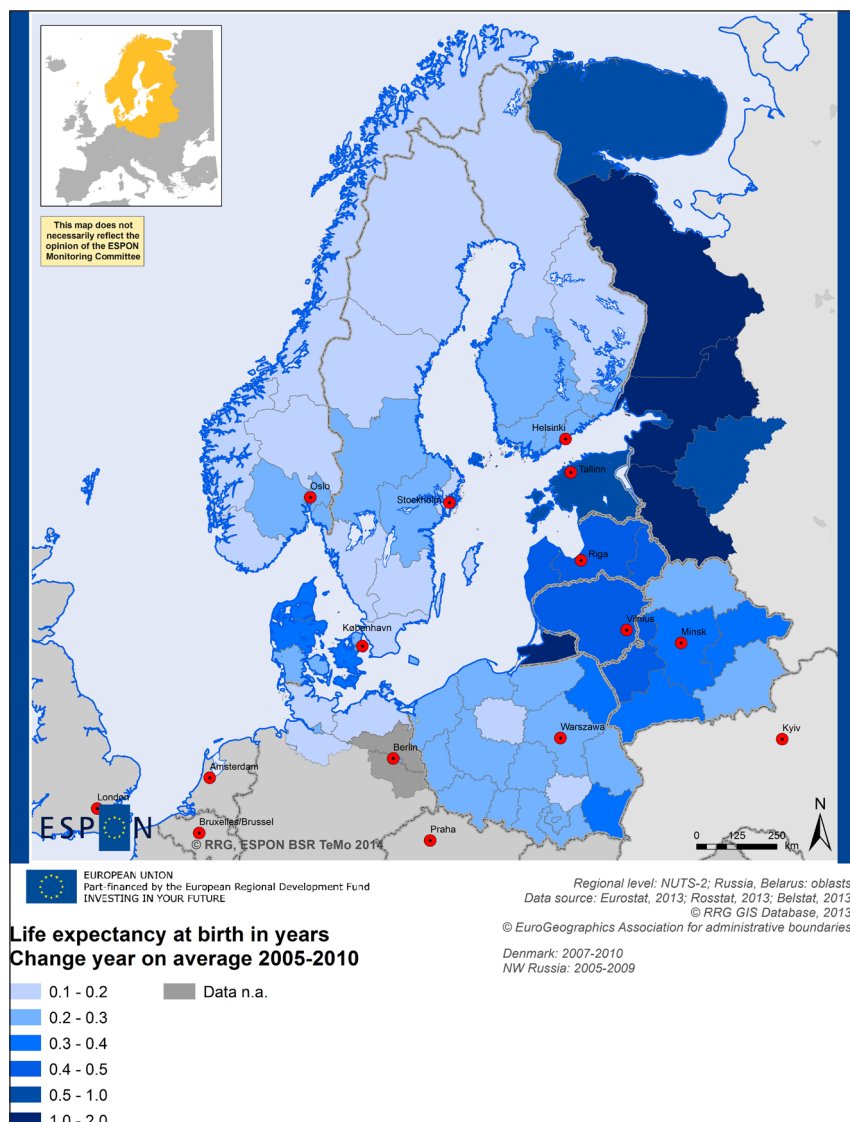


Figure 2. Example of good availability and comparability: Life expectancy at birth (change 2005–2010)
Source: Territorial Monitoring for the BSR. ESPON & Nordregio/IGSO PAS, 2013

A system such as BSR-TeMo makes it possible to understand regional and territorial trends and structures across the BSR with regard to demographic development or GDP per capita. Trends in demographic development in one part of the BSR can be compared with those in another part, and the system can assess whether the economic gaps between parts of the BSR are decreasing or increasing. This information can inform policy briefs for ministerial meetings, programme development or assessments of strategies.

The project has been conducted in collaboration between VASAB, the ESPON CU and researchers headed by Nordregio. All three parties had something to offer to the project. VASAB had the idea as well as previous experience of establishing monitoring systems stipulated in the terms of reference for the project. Because VASAB is the result of intergovernmental co-operation in which Russia and Belarus participate, it was easier to obtain data and involve Russian partners. With its regular meetings and secretariat, VASAB offered a stable framework for developing the project

and networks in which the project could be presented. ESPON helped finance the project, but has great skill in managing research projects and the ESPON database. Of course, the researchers did the hard work.

I hope that the experience gained from this project may be of use to others who plan to establish macro-regional monitoring systems, not only concerning the architecture or technical side, but also as a model for co-operation between actors. I also hope that the co-operation between ESPON and VASAB on the monitoring system will continue in the future, not only in updating the ESPON data and the indicator structure that are the foundation of the system, but also in obtaining statistics from Russia and Belarus and in promoting the system.

Reflections on the two projects

I believe that in many ways both projects illustrate two points. One is that ESPON has made it possible to make transnational regional comparisons that were previously impossible. This is probably most evident with regard to the monitoring system for the BSR, which had been attempted but not quite successfully. However, it was previously difficult to compare research and development, innovation and knowledge or other issues at the regional level, whether at the NUTS2 or another level, because comparisons were not so readily available.

The second point concerns the interpretation of data. This can be seen as an area in need of improvement within the ESPON programme that should be addressed in the new programme period. I believe this needs to be the case, but the questions are how and at what cost. There have already been several suggestions with regard to implementation, including a project between the ESPON Contact Points in Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

The NIBR and Spatial Foresight report states “that units for comparison are defined differently in each country using different principles. There are also great differences in access to regional and territorial data. There are also significant differences in Europe with regard to geography, settlement patterns and economics”. Revealing such differences in data collection and processing may be viewed as an intended or unintended effect of the ESPON programme. This brings the ESPON programme in line with other EU programmes, which are often primarily intended to upgrade procedures or standards or make them equal across borders in their respective fields by exposing differences.

Transnational comparisons or analyses are of course helpful for an organization like VASAB, whose task is to develop policy options for the territorial and regional development of transnational regions such as the BSR. The same is true for the other organizations that work at the transnational level, or for programmes such as the European Territorial Co-operation programmes, which work across borders. However, in general terms, comparable data or information should help regions assess their position, development opportunities and challenges. Perhaps we all face a challenge in using and applying this new information.