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European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion - ESPON

Since its start in 2002, ESPON has undergone significant development. In the beginning the ambition was to establish a sound database for spatial planners. The first programme, ESPON 2006, mainly consisted of projects that laid the basis for such a database by collecting and producing large amounts of quantitative data. Most of the results were also presented in the form of maps, the so-called ESPON Atlas. Over the years, the ESPON programme has developed towards broader territorial issues, including subjects such as economy, sociology and governance, and also including more and more qualitative elements. Today, the motto is to inspire policy making through territorial evidence. Now preparations for the coming programme, ESPON 2020, are taking place. This is why we in this issue of Nordregio News take a closer look at the past, present and future of ESPON.

The Structural Funds are the second largest budget post within the whole EU budget, surpassed only by the funds supporting the Common Agricultural Policy. Today, only 0.01% of that money goes to research and development. At the same time, the EU's new research programme, Horizon 2020, only deals to a very limited extent with topics relevant for the Union's second largest budget area, i.e. its territorial cohesion policy. Although ESPON projects are not carrying out direct evaluations, they produce important evidence-based knowledge that supports the ambition to get most value for the money spent on the Structural Funds. Therefore, ESPON has an important strategic role to play within EU policy implementation.

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With the objective to support the EU Cohesion Policy development with European-wide comparable information, evidence, analyses and scenarios on framework conditions for the development of regions, cities and larger territories, The ESPON programme is very much in line with Nordregio's profile. In the 2013 Programme Nordregio has been involved in 16 out of 65 projects, and in five of them as a lead partner.

Nordregio is thus an important node in the ESPON territorial network. The first reason for this is the coherence between Nordregio's competences and the topics that are covered by ESPON. Another reason is the competitiveness of the Nordic countries when it comes to data accessibility. The Nordregio database, with data on the municipal and regional levels from all of the Nordic countries, regarding certain socio-economic indicators, is an important asset in projects that have the ambition of establishing similar data sets on a pan-European level. As a reward, Nordregio's active involvement in ESPON presents the opportunity for benchmarking, good practices and lessons learned from a European perspective for the benefit of the regional sector in the Nordic countries.

Nordregio is looking forward to the new ESPON 2020. We welcome the plans for a renewed and simpler administration, and the ambitions to put more effort into communication and knowledge service to the political system. Finally, we hope that the time-out between the two programme periods will be as short as possible.

In the first article of this issue of Nordregio News, **Transnational Co-Production of Territorial Knowledge: The ESPON Experience**, Peter Schmitt and Lukas Smas, both Senior Research Fellows at Nordregio, review the previous ESPON programmes. In light of that, they also reflect upon wishes for the coming programme.

Sverker Lindblad, member of the ESPON Monitoring Committee, takes a look at how Sweden has made use of ESPON knowledge during this past period in his article **The Use of ESPON in a Swedish National and Regional Context**.

The third article, **Towards an ESPON Programme for 2014-2020**, by Peter Mehlbye, Director of ESPON Coordination Unit, gives insight on the process and progress towards the third and coming ESPON 2020 programme.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Nordregio News!



Kjell Nilsson
Director
and the Editorial Board of Nordregio News

Transnational Co-Production of Territorial Knowledge: The ESPON Experience

By Peter Schmitt and Lukas Smas

The European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion, ESPON, will soon embark on its third programme period. From its start in 2002, ESPON has been conceived of as a knowledge base to support transnational spatial policy-making. The ESPON programme has produced an extensive evidence base of scientific reports, targeted analyses, thematic maps and spatial indicators. More importantly, the ESPON experience has been about the transnational co-production of territorial knowledge.

The need for a Europe-wide network of territorial knowledge was mentioned during the preparation of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in the 1990s. ESPON was carefully prepared through a Study Programme on European Spatial Planning (SPESP) between 1998 and 1999 to identify some of the main gaps in knowledge and to form collaborative networks with the aim of doing policy-relevant research on spatial planning and territorial development at the transnational scale.

An interesting feature of ESPON is the pursuit to cover what is called ‘the ESPON space’ in any territorial analysis. The ESPON space includes the entire European Union (EU-15, or more recently, EU-27 or even EU-28) plus Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. In some studies, even candidate countries or regions neighbouring the European Union have been analysed.

ESPON 2006

The first ESPON programme ran from 2002 to 2006. It was funded through the EU INTERREG programme and was therefore subject to the regulations of the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and to its specific control and management structure. As Duehr et al. (2010, 247) put it, ESPON 2006 “aimed at providing detailed spatial information for the EU territory and to set up a decentralised network of spatial research institutes across Europe”. Within the ESPON 2006 programme, 35 major studies were completed involving more than 600 researchers and 130 institutions focusing on various ways to analyse spatial dynamics across Europe. Researchers focused on quantitative methods and GIS platforms to conduct their studies (see [map](#)) (ibid). The content areas of the ESPON 2006 projects were closely aligned with the thematic scope stipulated by the ESDP, including top-



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ics such as the role of cities in regional development, urban-rural relations, polycentricity and accessibility, about which the ESPON 2006 programme has provided some robust findings.

A general ambition of the ESPON programme is, as far as possible, to use and produce Europe-wide data to assess various territorial dynamics in cities and regions. The ensuing critique voiced by the ESPON community was that advanced territorial and related analyses of European space are limited because much of the available data are for relatively large territorial units. Consequently, calls for the collection of data to enable the analysis of small territorial units (e.g., at the neighbourhood level) have been made at various opportunities.

ESPON 2013

The second phase of ESPON, the so-called ESPON 2013 programme, was aligned to the Structural Fund period and covered seven years (2007 to 2013). The budget comprised €47 million, 75 per cent of which was financed by the European Regional Development Fund under Objective 3 (European Territorial Cooperation). The rest was financed by the 31 participating countries, which comprise the 27 EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

The ESPON 2013 Programme mission was to:

“Support policy development in relation to the aim of territorial cohesion and a harmonious development of the European territory by (1) providing comparable information, evidence, analyses and scenarios on territorial dynamics and (2) revealing territorial capital and potentials for development of regions and larger territories contributing to European competitiveness, territorial cooperation and a sustainable and balanced development”.

The overall framework of the ESPON 2013 programme was restructured from its forerunner. Five so-called priority areas were defined to contribute in various ways, including data, indicators, typologies, models and maps, to the European knowledge base on territorial development and cohesion.

The five priority areas comprise Applied Research Projects, Targeted Analysis Projects, Scientific Platform Projects, Transnational Networking Activities and Technical Assistance, and Analytical Support and Communication Plan. In this article, we will take a closer look at the three first areas.

Applied Research Projects

Twenty-five applied research projects on a variety of issues relevant to territorial development from a pan-European perspective of territorial dynamics have been (or soon will be) completed. Nordregio has been involved in ten of these, twice as the lead partner. These projects respond to a number of predefined policy and research questions on issues such as ‘the territorial dimension of poverty and social exclusion in Europe’ (**TIPSE**), the ‘Regional Potential for a Greener Economy’

(**GREECO**), ‘Regions at Risk of Energy Poverty’ (**ReRisk**), the analysis of ‘European Land Use Patterns’ (**EU-LUPA**) and the development of ‘Territorial Scenarios and Visions for Europe’ (ET2050). In applied research projects, the drivers, impacts and potential of territorial development are analysed, often with quantitative data, and then visualized in a number of advanced thematic maps. One underlying question concerns the extent to which the emerging pictures correspond to the normative concept of territorial cohesion, which, at least rhetorically, underpins a number of strategies and policies that have emerged in the EU in recent years.

As mentioned previously, the European dimension is at the centre of the ESPON programme, which allows comparisons of various types of territories across Europe. Efforts have also been made to emphasize more strongly than did ESPON 2006 that ostensibly ‘sectoral issues’, such as the green economy, transport, climate change and demography, are interconnected in ways that have significant territorial impacts. Consequently, as has been argued in many ESPON projects, such sectoral issues must be addressed from a cross-sectoral perspective, and any related policies should be assessed with respect to their territorial impacts.

Other ESPON projects such as ‘European Territorial Cooperation as a Factor of Growth, Jobs and Quality of Life’ (**TERCO**) and ‘Territorial Approaches to New Governance’ (**TANGO**) examine how particular policies, programmes and even specific initiatives and projects related to territorial development issues unfold at various scales. To that end, the organization and (cross-sectoral) cooperation of various actors and their formal (or informal) relations and interests are analysed to distil drivers and determinants of collaboration as well as promoters of ‘good practices’.

Targeted Analysis Projects

The second priority area has allowed policymakers to call for specific thematic and territorial analyses. In contrast to the former priority area in which applied research is conducted solely by transnational groups of researchers and experts, this priority area seeks to integrate different kinds of stakeholders (policymakers and practitioners working at local, regional and national scales) in the projects. The stakeholders define the thematic scope of projects provided by the transnational group of researchers, and they monitor the (interim) findings with respect to their applicability to their daily work. Twenty-three targeted analysis projects have been initiated.

Nordregio has been involved in three targeted analysis projects, one on ‘Regional Integrated Strategies in Europe’ (**RISE**), one on ‘Territorial Diversity in Europe’ (**TeDi**), discussed in **Lindblad’s article**, and in the **BEST METROPOLISES** project. The goal of the latter project

was to identify trends in metropolitan development and their consequences and to assess metropolitan development policies and governance.

Scientific Platform Projects

This priority area contributes to the accessibility and use of ESPON knowledge by providing new tools and evidence for other European programmes as well as for regional and urban actors. Twelve projects have been carried out in this priority area, and Nordregio has been involved in three of them, twice as the lead partner.

The ESPON Database project is an example of one of the larger projects in this priority area. In the open database, hundreds of different territorial indicators from the various ESPON projects have been collected and organized. It is now possible to search for indicators based on themes such as economy, finance and trade; population and living conditions; labour markets; governance; territorial structure and so on, but also to access data. See [ESPON Tools and Maps](#).

A challenge in the dissemination of ESPON knowledge is the scalar level of the projects and statistics, which are mainly at an aggregated geographical level, which is rather abstract for many regional stakeholders (e.g., NUTS 2). However, some scientific platform projects, such as 'Detecting Territorial Potentials and Challenges' ([DeTeC](#)), strive to meet the demand for analytical methods and approaches and to support local and regional practitioners and policymakers who are searching for ways to find territorial potential that has a European perspective. The objective of DeTeC is to provide practical guidance on how to utilize ESPON knowledge to identify territorial potentials and to provide concrete and illustrative examples of good practices.

Another scientific platform project that attempts to bridge the gap between research and policy-making and promote territorial cohesion is the 'Territorial Monitoring for the Baltic Sea Region' ([BSR-TeMo](#)) project. This project is developing an indicator-based tool for monitoring territorial development in the Baltic Sea Region, which will allow comparisons and benchmarking with other European regions.

ESPON post 2013

The ESPON 2013 programme is coming to an end, and the future operational programme is currently being discussed. It is likely that the ESPON 2020 programme will continue with applied research on territorial cohesion and provide policy makers with targeted analysis. It is difficult to balance on the tightrope between applied research and policy consultancy, but this is the strength of ESPON, namely to collaborate on policy-making and research to create unique analyses, concepts and inspiration.

ESPON was set up to bridge knowledge gaps in European territorial development by bringing together the research and the policy communities; or, in even plainer words, ESPON is deemed to underpin

what is called evidence-based policy-making. This claim, however, can be contested, especially because empirical evidence drawn from the social sciences (as it inevitably is in ESPON) is typically open to various interpretations and policy options and thus it cannot be considered an unambiguous guide to policy-making.

Another concern is the strong focus within ESPON on quantitative analysis based on available territorial statistics, presented as maps, graphs and tables. We argue that this type of positivistic analysis is (only) a first step. To understand why cities and regions develop in different ways, in-depth knowledge is often necessary, and requires in its turn qualitative analysis. When qualitative methods are applied to support evidence-based policy-making, it is often in the form of case studies of cities and regions. This partly contradicts the aim to derive universal conclusions for the entire ESPON space. Nonetheless, to make the next step in terms of understanding the territorial dynamics and mechanisms in Europe, there should be more room for qualitative research.

The co-production of knowledge, as exemplified primarily by the targeted analysis projects in ESPON, could be strengthened through better communication between policymakers and researchers before the start of projects, or even prior to the definition of themes. This could help to increase the probability of doable research analysis, and clarify the expectations on both sides.

We also want to emphasize that increasingly, ESPON is trying to widen the target group for the results from various projects, in particular among policymakers from the local to the transnational level (e.g., within the EU Commission), and in some projects even decision-makers or other kinds of practitioners (e.g., regional analysts). This is a desirable goal, because evidence-based territorial knowledge matters at various scales (and thus policy levels), but it challenges researchers to provide tailor-made results for what is often a rather vaguely defined target group.

In the same vein, results from ESPON projects have often been criticized for not providing concrete recommendations and support for policy-making. Here again, the collaboration between researchers and policy-makers is not defined clearly enough, as the production of regional evidence might allow for various interpretations that can be easily coloured by the political perspectives of the person(s) involved. In other words, for the future of ESPON, it might be helpful to define more clearly the mandates of the various actors involved, because the line between informing policies with territorial evidence and the formulation of policy-relevant conclusions can be very thin.

The Use of ESPON in a Swedish National and Regional Context

By Sverker Lindblad

The ESPON 2013 Programme is more ambitious and has more funding than the ESPON 2006 Programme. Researchers in Sweden have been very successful both as lead partners and as project partners in securing project funding from ESPON. The use of ESPON-derived knowledge has increased over time at both national and regional levels. Nevertheless, finding a good match between knowledge production and users who can capitalize on that knowledge has been a challenge.

The most obvious benefits of the current ESPON programme include:

- A stronger research network for territorial and regional development.
- New knowledge and evidence for regional policy development, strategic programming and planning.
- Better regional data comparability and benchmarking possibilities at a European scale.

For Swedish stakeholders, the ESPON Programme has made it possible to compare development at the regional level with other parts of Europe. A current example is the analysis in the Partnership Agreement for the European Structural and Investment Funds. The programme has also served to foster a discussion of regional policy development at both national and regional levels.

An active research network

Institutions in Sweden have been involved in many of the winning applications in the ESPON 2013 Programme. In particular, Nordregio has been successful in both the lead and project partner roles in several projects. However, institutions such as the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Jönköping International Business School and the University of Umeå have also been active in different projects. Growth Analysis (the Swedish agency for growth policy analysis) and KTH hosted the Swedish ESPON Contact Point (ECP) and also formed the Swedish ESPON Network. The network provides members and others with information about the programme and promotes engagement in research projects and the use of results. Members of the Swedish ES-



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PON network meet four times a year in Stockholm. The network is open to anyone who wants to discuss or promote information relevant to territorial development.

Information that is directed towards practitioners has been high on the ECP agenda. Actors working with both EU and national regional development programmes - from analyses and writing operational programmes to implementation and monitoring - have been able to utilize brief and accessible information about what is happening within ESPON. This is managed by a **special website** that serves as a link between researchers and practitioners, and seminars and emails are also frequently used for communication. The ESPON Programme has led to a stronger and more policy-relevant Swedish research network for evidence-based regional and territorial studies.

Applied research for policy development

The main part of the ESPON 2013 Programme is devoted to applied research to develop knowledge about European territorial structures, trends, perspectives and policy impacts. For Sweden, some of the projects stand out because of the specific territorial structures and challenges involved.

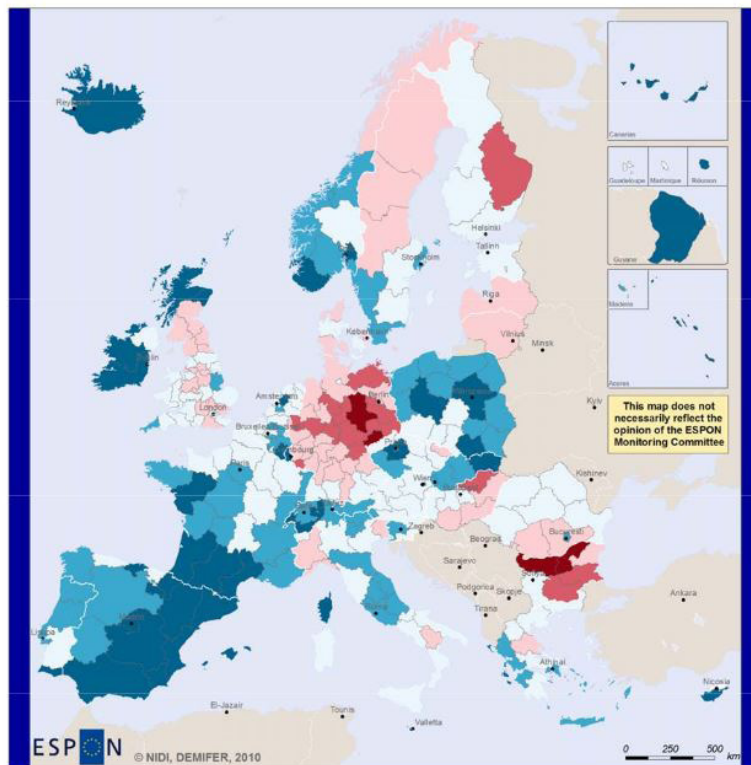
One of these projects is **DEMIFER** (Demographic and Migratory Flows Affecting European Regions and Cities), which is notable because demographic challenges are particularly strong in many Swedish regions. The analysis shows that Sweden has a decreasing working-age population in large parts of the country, which can lead to labour shortages in both the private and public sectors. This knowledge, benchmarking with European regions, and other ESPON findings about territorial structures and typologies have led to fruitful policy discussions about demographic challenges, especially in Sweden's sparsely populated areas.

Another interesting project from a Swedish perspective is **KIT** (Knowledge, Innovation, Territory), which concluded that R&D and formal knowledge in general do not necessarily lead to innovation, and furthermore, innovation does not necessarily lead to regional growth. These linkages are strongly mediated by local territorial assets. A regional "critical mass" is needed, such as the presence of research-intensive universities or companies, if innovation activities are to generate growth in the GDP. Interesting policy discussions have followed from this project as well, including whether it is feasible for every region to meet the Europe 2020 target of having at least three per cent of GDP devoted to R&D investments.

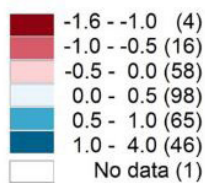
Targeted analyses based on user demand

The current ESPON Programme includes new possibilities for getting researchers closer to the potential users of the knowledge. Targeted Analysis Projects are thematically defined by the demands of policy-makers. In these projects, it is possible to focus more on certain parts

Change in Working Age Population 2000-2007



Annual Average Change in Population Aged 20-64, in %



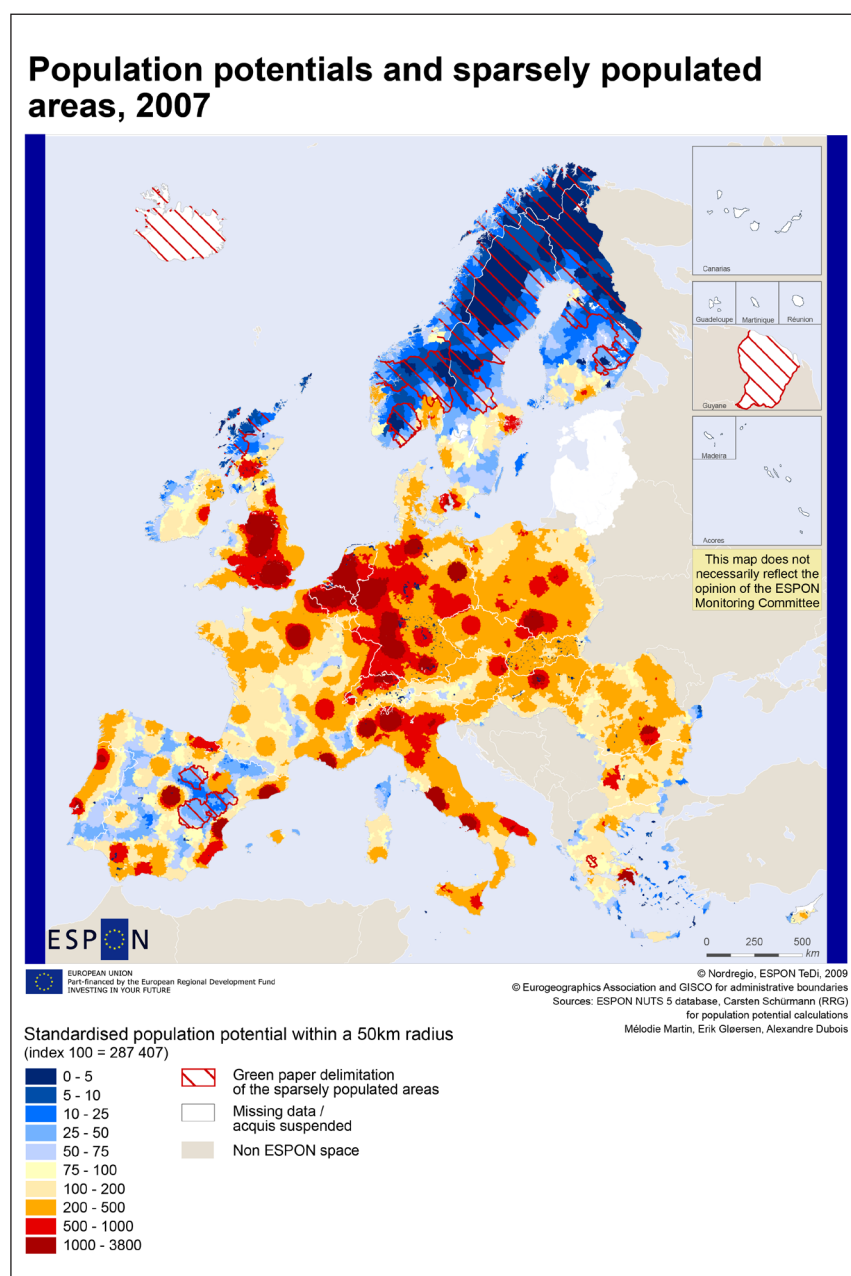
of Europe or specific types of regions or cities, as long as the knowledge is relevant for the rest of Europe. Another added value is that the users are involved with the researchers in the analysis process, which facilitates their ability to learn from the work.

One of these projects is **RISE** (Region Integrated Strategies in Europe), in which the Västerbotten Region is one of the stakeholders. Using Västerbotten and three other pilot cases, this project developed a typology of regional integrative strategies based on “Governance consolidation” and “Policy consolidation”. When these different dimensions are combined, there appears to be greater stability and regional institutional consolidation (as in Västerbotten), and greater cross-sectoral alignment of policy has been possible at the regional level and possibly greater cross-territory alignment within sectors. The project also developed a “ladder of integration” and “toolkit” to help regional actors develop more integrated strategies.

Another interesting Targeted Analysis Project is **TeDi** – Territorial Diversity in Europe, which is intended to improve our understanding of development processes in territories outside the Pentagon (delimited by the cities of Hamburg, London, Paris, Milan and Munich). Such territories are defined as insular, mountainous, sparsely populated or peripheral, and the project has produced a number of interesting maps showing these territorial specificities.

Data and maps for regional benchmarking

Another priority of the ESPON Programme is the Scientific Platform, which includes the development of the ESPON 2013 Database, Territorial Indicators and Indices, and a Territorial Monitoring and Reporting System. In particular, maps are one of the best-known features of



ESPON. The **ESPON ATLAS** (Territorial Dimensions of the Europe 2020 Strategy) has been valuable in this respect, as it has made it possible to benchmark Swedish regions for the Europe 2020 targets.

The **BSR-TeMo** (Territorial Monitoring for the Baltic Sea Region) is also of special interest for Sweden and the other Baltic Sea countries. The aim of the project is to illustrate and encourage understanding of territorial structures and trends at different scales and for different types of regions across the BSR. It should also provide evidence of the region's diversity and document progress in addressing the main territorial challenges of the BSR: the east–west divide, the north–south divide and the urban–rural divide. The project will develop an indicator-based monitoring system, complemented by some qualitative information. It allows for continuous monitoring and benchmarking of territorial development of the BSR at the European level, in relation to other macro regions, and internally at regional and local scales.

The project is scheduled to be finalized in February 2014 and a very concrete result will be the “TeMo Presentation Tool”, which will act as the standard gateway for users to access the territorial monitoring system. It will be implemented as a simple and easy-to-use local browser application. The tool will give users access to indicators, maps, data files and case studies to facilitate monitoring and benchmarking.

Requests for the future

Regional policy development and strategic interventions are complex and must build on a sound evidence base. Cross-sectoral and cross-border perspectives are becoming increasingly important. This is especially evident in an export-oriented country such as Sweden. Stakeholders at both national and regional levels need comparable indicators and high-quality analyses that are easily accessible via reports, policy briefs, maps and monitoring systems.

Even though the current ESPON Programme has high ambitions concerning usability and policy relevance, there is still much to do in this regard. For the coming ESPON 2020 programme, we must do a better job of making sure that practitioners and policymakers can use the available ESPON knowledge. More communication activities are needed in which researchers and potential users meet and discuss analysis results that are relevant to each stakeholder. Upgrading targeted analyses in which researchers and stakeholders cooperate during the whole project is also on the wish list.

The ESPON 2020 Programme also needs to be more policy relevant and closely connected to processes taking place within the EU, the member states and their regions. Including more assessments and policy recommendations in the reports could be one way to achieve this goal. Finally, another important prerequisite is a faster timeline from project conception to final results.

Towards an ESPON Programme for 2014-2020

By Peter Mehlbye

Preparing the continuation of ESPON has been part of the European cooperation process for quite some time. The general opinion has been very clear that Europe needs territorial evidence to progress territorial cohesion, implement place-based approaches, enhance the territorial dimension in policy, and focus on integrated approaches to territorial development.

The **Europe 2020 Strategy** calling for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth has a clear territorial dimension inherent in the diversity of regions and cities around Europe. This was demonstrated for a wider audience in the recent ESPON Atlas on the territorial dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy. As regions and cities are key contributors for achieving the strategy, the need for evidence on the territorial dimension is in growing demand by policy makers. This is also related to the current scarcer resources that make it even more important that resources are used as efficiently as possible.

The future European Structural Investment Funds 2014-2020 shall support the Europe 2020 Strategy in creating smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The focus is on 11 themes to be considered by programmes as their priorities for investments. This also creates demand for territorial evidence to support the choice of priorities that should be considered as the most promising opportunities and most demanding challenges that the programme area entails, also in relation to other regions and cities in Europe.

The European cooperation has also established the **Territorial Agenda 2020** for the European Territory. This policy document includes a number of policy orientations for territorial development related to urban systems, infrastructures and natural assets, among other elements. Monitoring the implementation of these policy orientations, and at a later moment updating the Territorial Agenda, are other processes where ESPON territorial evidence is meeting demands.

The need to include the larger territorial context in today's strategic considerations and policy development is a logical consequence of the ever increasing globalisation, connecting the world much closer than before and creating new markets for Europe. The growth potentials for Europe, its regions and cities, will increasingly be related to places outside Europe. This brings in a need for evidence, better understanding opportunities in the international competition, flows of goods and people, necessary transport connections and for benchmarking European territories, regions and cities in relation to trends and dynamics outside Europe.



Peter Mehlbye is Director of the Coordination Unit for the ESPON Programme since 2002. ESPON is a European observation network on territorial development and cohesion carrying through applied research that provides new evidence and knowledge on territorial structures, trends, perspectives and impacts of EU policies within the European territory.

The mission of the ESPON Programme is to support policy development with comparable evidence on all regions and cities of Europe. Normally, ESPON results cover 28 EU Member States as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Before starting up ESPON, Peter worked for more than 10 years in a Danish Ministry as Head of Unit for national spatial development and planning, regional policy and international cooperation. He was for most of his period in the ministry attached to the cabinet of the Minister. From 1997 he then worked at the European Commission, DG Regional Policy, where he was involved in the conceptual development of EU regional policy, including the test phase leading to ESPON.

By education Peter holds a masters degree in Economics and a master degree in Architecture, specialised in regional development and spatial planning.

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Process towards a renewed programme

In this policy context, the process of shaping the third generation of ESPON has started and reached a first level of maturity. However, there are still important discussions ahead and consensus to be shaped among the 32 countries that currently are involved (28 EU member states and 4 partner states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland).

This process is being carried forward by a Joint Working Group (JWG) involving all of the abovementioned countries, with the mandate to elaborate the Operational Programme for the ESPON Programme covering 2014-2020.

Basic directions for this process have been set at the level of General Directors. The line of thinking is not just to continue as before, but to renew ESPON to become more efficient, better known and recognised as a provider of European territorial evidence, as a European Territorial Observation Network, that policy development at all administrative levels may benefit from.

The renewal shall of course improve elements of the current ESPON 2013 Programme that could work better. Moreover, it shall build on the experience and substantial achievements in terms of European territorial evidence that have been gained since the start of ESPON in 2002.

The key strands that the JWG is working along in order to renew ESPON include the following:

1. Strengthening the outreach and knowledge transfer of the territorial evidence being produced, in order for this evidence to be used to a larger extent than today by policy makers at different administrative levels, as well as in other programmes funded by the European Structural Investment Funds.
2. Ensuring faster delivery of evidence to ongoing policy processes for ESPON to contribute in time when evidence is needed to nourish policy development and/or programme implementation. This activity shall capitalise on the knowledge base built up by ESPON and will require more in-house scientific, policy advisory and communication capacity than in the current Coordination Unit to become feasible and efficient.
3. Defining an ESPON operation with leaner administrative burden than today, as the current administrative system is generally seen as a major disadvantage for the ESPON 2013 programme due to the amount of financial control, certification of costs, etc. The answer seems to be a transfer to using service contracts only, which for research institutions and experts developing new ESPON territorial evidence would imply a much simpler process in relation to the payment for services rendered.

4. Adapting the institutional setup of ESPON, contributing to more efficiency and delivery in line with the envisaged renewal. Here a major change is in discussion. The idea is to create an ESPON EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) that could act as a single beneficiary of the ESPON post 2013 Operational Programme. The ESPON EGTC would be contracted by the Monitoring Committee to implement all actions decided by the Monitoring Committee on the content side and deliver the European territorial evidence envisaged. Such a transformation requires, of course, a thorough debate in understanding the detailed modalities of the change, and this is still ongoing in the JWG.

Indicative time frame for the programme

The timing of when an ESPON Programme for 2014-2020 will become operational and start launching calls for tenders currently depends on when the EC Legislative Framework is decided and made public. Currently, the JWG is basing its work on draft versions of different upcoming regulations. Also, European decisions on the final Multiannual Financial Framework for the EU and its break down, including a budget for ESPON for 2014-2020 are currently pending. Therefore, budget issues including national contributions and budget allocations to programme priority axes and actions are not yet under discussion in the JWG.

The current expectations on the timing are that the EC Legislative Framework and other related formalities will be decided and become official by November-December 2013. Only then is it possible for the JWG to finalise the proposal for the ESPON Operational Programme for 2014-2020 and to reach a final agreement among all 32 countries involved on its submission to the European Commission.

The moment of submission of the Operational Programme is indicatively scheduled for beginning of 2014. The European Commission should then be issuing their approval of the new programme by July-August 2014, taking for granted that no loss of momentum will occur due to the European level elections in May 2014.

After the approval by the European Commission, some time will still be needed to get the new programme in motion, including the changes decided for the organisational set up. Against this backdrop, it still remains to be seen whether the first call for tender of ESPON post 2013 can be opened in 2014. However, this is for sure the ambition.