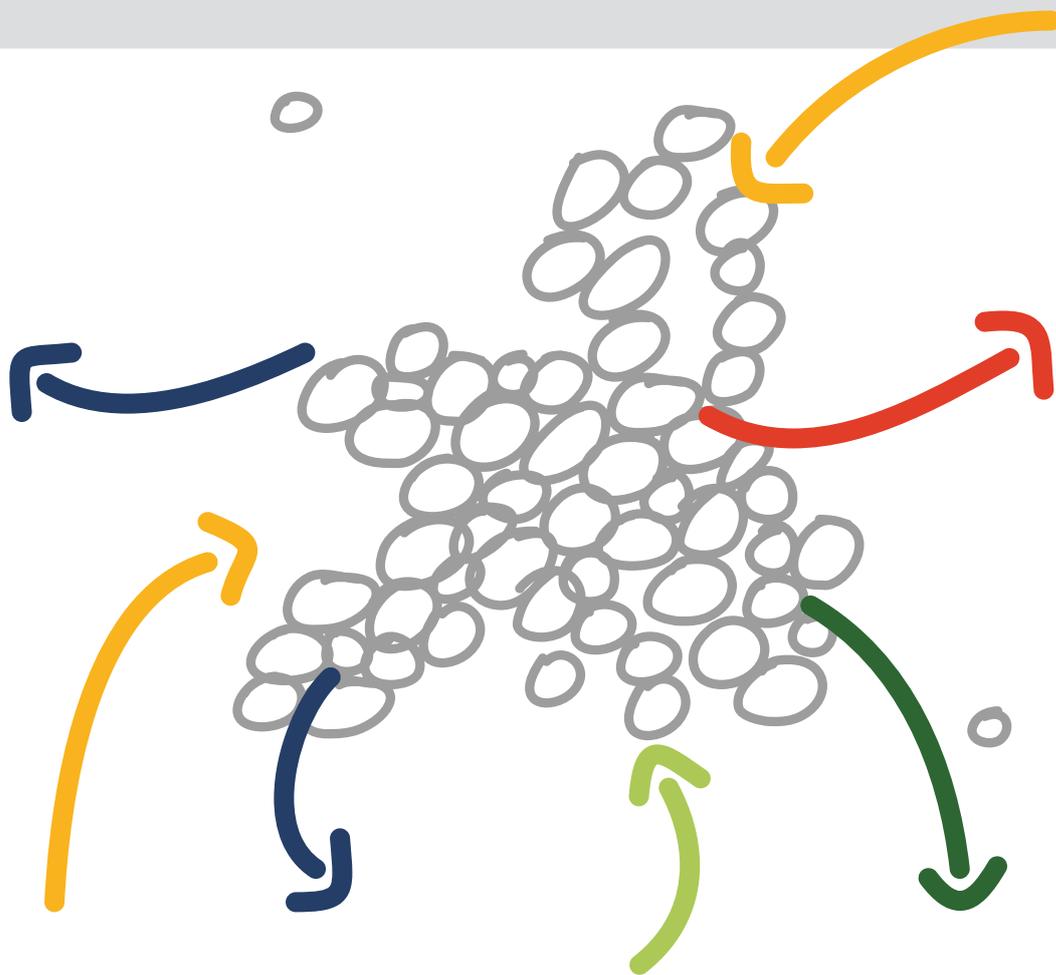


# Making Europe Open and Polycentric

Vision and Scenarios for the European Territory towards 2050



# Colophon

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This report presents the key policy relevant messages of the ET2050 ESPON project - an Applied Research Project conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2013 Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The partnership behind the ESPON Programme consists of the EU Commission and the Member States of the EU27, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Each partner is represented in the ESPON Monitoring Committee.

Information on the ESPON Programme and projects can be found on [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu). The web site provides the possibility to download and examine the most recent documents produced by finalised and ongoing ESPON projects.

The ESPON Monitoring Committee has performed as main stakeholder in the participatory process leading to the proposed vision. Other important stakeholders have been involved as well.

ISBN: 978-2-919777-76-1  
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The ESPON Programme is managed by the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, Department for Spatial Planning and Development, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Layout and graphic design by ERSILIA Foundation. Infography of policy-aims is inspired by Klaus P. Kunzmann and Michael Wegener original design from 1991 (Europe of grapes).

Printed in Luxembourg, September 2014 on paper produced environmentally friendly.

Disclaimer: The illustrations and texts presented in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the members of the ESPON Monitoring Committee.

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# **“Making Europe Open and Polycentric”**

Vision and Scenarios for the European Territory towards 2050

**“To seek Europe, is to make it!”**

Zygmunt Bauman, *An Adventure called Europe* (2004)

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This publication is based on substantial applied research undertaken within the ESPON 2013 Programme. The 31 countries behind the programme asked for a project to build prospective scenarios and a proactive vision for 2050 that could support a discussion of the long term development of the European territory.

In the publication, “Europe” is associated to the ESPON space of 31 countries except when discussing common European policies, then “Europe” is associated to the “European Union”.

The results of the project Territorial Scenarios and Visions for Europe (ET2050) are documented in the Final Report including a Main Report and 15 separate volumes taking up all important issues of the project and vision building involving a participatory process. An overview of all documentation of the ET2050 project can be consulted in the Annex of this report and downloaded from the ESPON website at [http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu\\_Projects/Menu\\_AppliedResearch/ET2050.html](http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_AppliedResearch/ET2050.html).

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## Why does Europe need a territorial vision now?

1. ***In an increasingly integrated and accelerating world, European common visions and policies are needed.*** We live in a world of emerging economies, fast population growth and massive migrations towards large megalopolises, exponential increases of flows of information, goods, energy and all kind of resources. Europe's share of the world is diminishing in relative terms. Hundreds of millions of people are moving from poverty to middle classes worldwide but, at the same time, absolute social and regional disparities grow in the most developed world, also across European cities and regions. We face amazing technological prospects and major global environmental uncertainties. With increasing global threats and opportunities, policy matters and political choices to be made at European scale will be of paramount importance to prepare a sufficiently satisfying future for all European citizens in the coming decades.

2. ***A Territorial Vision for Europe is necessary to improve the living and working conditions of all citizens.*** It is central to human well-being to know and shape ones daily living environment and having places supporting a life of quality, a life that is manageable for the household and provide for the necessary public and private services, and amenities. It is important that the European territory offers a choice of different places as preferences and needs of people are diverse, and change over time. The choice of place of location stretches from some seeing more rural settings giving the highest satisfaction, to others being firm in wanting an urban life style. Ensuring that Europe in the long term offers a multitude of territories with social and environmental quality, capable of meeting different needs, is of utmost importance for the overall well-being of European citizens.

3. ***Europe's paramount policy aims are promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: the success of such policy aims requires a more explicit common territorial dimension.*** The recent world-wide economic and financial crisis has had an asymmetrical impact in the world and inside Europe. Some countries suffered from a substantial negative impact on their economy and were forced to apply strict austerity measures, with significant social impacts. A recovery is in motion and a growing number of countries and regions have positive growth, even if a full recovery from the 2008 crisis will take a number of years. The experience of the crisis shows that there is a need to adapt Cohesion policies, both in respect of the specific development conditions of each place and to the general economic situation of each moment. In this sense, for the 2014-2020 period a number of relevant reforms have already been implemented favouring a more place-based approach, such as the community-led development and integrated territorial investment strategies, empowering local and regional governance. These initial reforms could be the basis for the new generation of Cohesion policies after 2020 required for Europe to face the new challenges and opportunities ahead.

4. ***In the economic crisis aftermath, Europe needs more place-based policy intervention.*** The European Union already has the Europe 2020 strategy for boosting economic competitiveness in a changing world, a strategy far more ambitious in social and environmental aspects than most of the rest of the world. But Europe is not a flat and empty space free from development constraints. It is an old civilised territory made of hundreds of thousands of small towns and cities of all sizes, a predominantly man-made landscape, an extremely diversified mosaic of regions with different geographic characteristics and long memories behind. Contributions to the Europe 2020 strategy need to come from all these scales of the European territory. Contributions will differ since European regions as well as cities are diverse in size and functionality. The European settlement structure, with short distances between multiple urban centres in most parts of Europe, is unique at global scale and provides the territorial base for the European Union's aim of achieving balanced territorial development.

**5. The territorial dimension of European sector policies has not yet been sufficiently recognised.**

There is a long tradition on prospective studies and policy documents in spatial development elaborated in Europe, in particular the ESDP (European Spatial Development Prospective, 1999), developed after the Europe 2000 and Europe 2000+ (DGVII, now DGREGIO, 1991, 1994), but they have had limited translation to policies. A more or less explicit territorial dimension exists in sectors such as Transport and Energy (e.g. with the Trans-European Networks) and in Environment (e.g. with Natura 2000). Cohesion and Agricultural policies have recently introduced more place sensitive policy-based criteria (e.g. Integrated Territorial Investment, Community-led development and integrated bottom-up planning, Rural development programs).

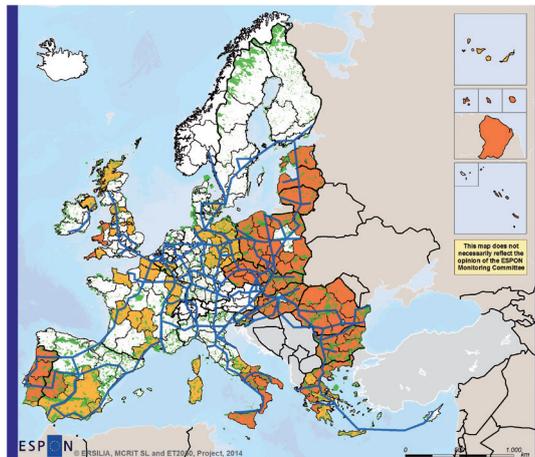


Illustration 1: Collection of European sectoral policies with more explicit territorial dimension: Nature 2000 Network, Transport Core Network Corridors and Structural Funds Objective 1 and Objective 2 regions (2014)

**6. At national and regional level, polycentricity is the most common vision incorporated in territorial development plans.**

Many countries have developed visions or development strategies for their territories. The same is the case for many regions and cities that have visions and development plans which supports coherence in their policy making and decisions for their territory of responsibility. These integrated and place-based documents for long-term policy action are a reference supporting both policymakers and the private sector in investment decisions. Despite different planning traditions and institutional frameworks, there is a remarkable common aspiration in most spatial plans and visions developed in Europe in favour of polycentric structures.

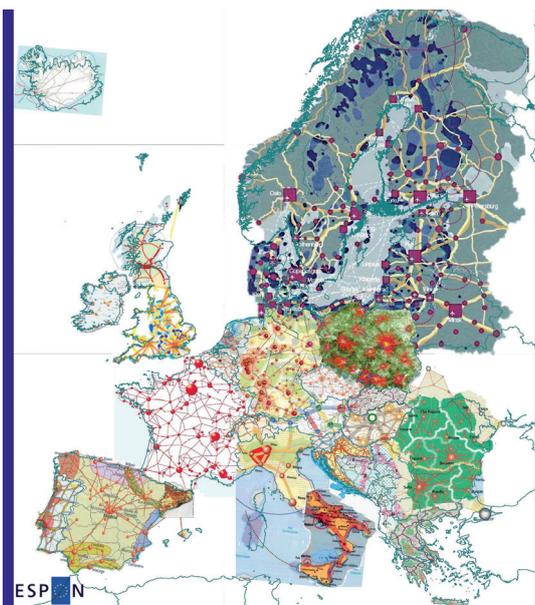


Illustration 2: Collection of territorial visions and plans (2014) (most visions and plans included in the map are not normative)

**7. A long-term vision for the European territory is a necessary reference for European policies and investments.**

A territorial vision at European level will serve as a common reference framework for the long-term and more consistent development of European policies, particularly for Cohesion policy in performing as an investment policy, as well as for better cross-border coordination of local, regional and national policies. A vision for the future of Europe needs to bring confidence to investors as well as coherence to the fragmentation which is inherent in the actual administrative structure of Europe. Cross-border relations are still very much limited to those regions where connections always existed and European's mental geographies remain heavily constrained by national narratives. Paradoxically, Europeans have become more mobile and social and economic relations between large cities across Europe and the rest of the world have increased exponentially in the latest twenty years.

8. ***The debate on a Territorial Vision 2050 for Europe has started.*** A participatory process with ESPON Monitoring Committee members representing European Union countries and countries associated to the ESPON 2013 programme was launched in Krakow (2011), followed by a number of scientific and policy-oriented workshops in Aalborg (2012), Paphos (2012), Dublin (2013) and Vilnius (2013). The European Parliament (REGI), the Committee of the Regions (COTER) and the European Commission (DG Regional and Urban Policy) have been consulted during 2013 and 2014. European organisations, stakeholders and experts were also consulted in workshops in Brussels in 2012 and 2013. "Making Europe Open and Polycentric" is the result of these debates.

9. ***Further debate on a European Territorial Vision is necessary to generate a shared ownership of the Vision, as well as an anchoring in policy.*** The purpose of this document is to nourish the deliberation process with a solid and well-documented background. Alternative scenarios towards 2030 and 2050 have been made serving as inspiration for the Vision for the European territory towards 2050 and the proposed political orientations and pathways to make it possible. The Territorial Vision 2050 has been designed taking into account the socio-economic and geopolitical reality of today, in the 2008 crisis aftermath calling for investments creating growth and jobs, and further builds in an innovative way upon policy directions given by Member States in cooperation with the European Commission in the Territorial Agenda 2020 (2011).

*The moment has come for the political arena to take the initiative, discuss and seek acceptance for a long-term territorial vision as a reference framework for Europe.*

### How will Europe develop, if current policies are not changed?

#### Europe in the crisis aftermath

10. **Overall stability.** Europe's most likely future looks relatively bright, but only in aggregated terms. The European population will grow from 510 to 530 million people in 2030, and annual economic growth will likely be just under 2% on average, if business-as-usual policies continue. Public investments in economic infrastructure may the next decades remain relatively slow, and cuts on social expenditure during the crisis will hardly be compensated in the short term in less developed regions. For these reasons, the role of Cohesion funds will likely remain as important as it has been during the years of the crisis. Transport and energy demand may be slowing down in relation to economic growth because of increasing market efficiency and technologic progress, with annual land-take just marginally reduced. Energy foreign dependency will not diminish and energy costs will remain high. Global trade will continue to grow because of emerging markets, with more divergent global trade patterns across European countries, regions and cities.

11. **Growing internal imbalances.** Internal social imbalances are likely to develop at least in the short term. Some economic sectors and social groups are recovering and growing much stronger than others from the crisis. The reduction of social expenditure in countries hit most by the crisis, forced by fiscal policies, have increased social disparities in many regions, cities and neighborhoods. The process of delocalisation of industries to emerging countries has also an important impact on salaries and working conditions in Europe. Eventhough this, Europe remains far more egalitarian than the rest of the world and social cohesion will remain a fundamental policy aim.

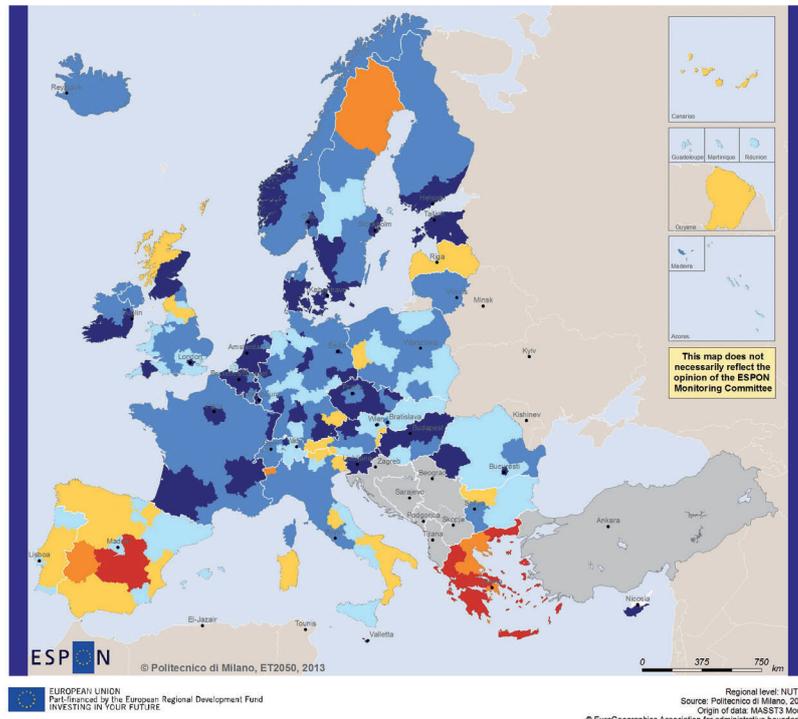
12. **Ageing becoming a common trend.** Ageing already is and will continue to be the most universal demographic trend across Europe, even if the scale of the phenomenon differs between countries and regions. From 26% of old-age dependency ratio in 2010, in 2030 may be around 39% (people above 64 years in relation to people 16-64). The ageing will result in transformation of demands for provision of social services, such as health and long term care, for which demand may grow substantially. The silver economy will be absorbed into mainstream economic activities.

13. **Increasing and more diversified migration.** International extra-Union migration will tend to mitigate the ageing tendency, whereas international intra-Union migration and internal migration will tend to reduce ageing in large urban agglomerations and affluent, highly developed regions as well as increase it in peripheral, poorly developed regions. In Eastern regions, ageing combined with migration and limited savings will place a significant burden on public budgets. In the medium term, this will be compounded by a cohort of minimum-waged or 'informal economy' residents reaching pension age. From the 0,75 million extra-EU yearly migrants in 2010, towards 2030 the volume could be 1,21 million, from more diverse origins, backgrounds and purposes than nowadays.

14. **Regional convergence turning into divergence.** The convergence process of the previous decade has been reversed with the crisis. Southern countries, large recipients of Cohesion and Structural Investment Funds, have reduced their GDP during the crisis with very high official unemployment levels, especially among youngsters. At the same time, Central and Northern countries were stagnant or had small growth. Eastern European countries have had different evolutions, some of them still growing at moderate level after carrying out extensive fiscal reforms.

### GDP Growth 2010 - 2030 (Baseline)

Measured as annual average GDP growth rate along the period



#### GDP Growth annual average rate (Units: %)

Results obtained by MASST3 forecast model

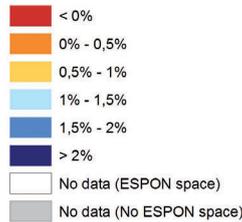


Illustration 3: GDP Growth 2010-2030 by MASST3 model for the Baseline Scenario, assuming no major changes on current policies (Politecnico di Milano, 2014)

15. **Increasing regional disparities.** Growth in Europe is expected to be more territorially unevenly distributed, with 44 regions growing less than 1% or even having negative growth over the next two decades, mostly less developed Southern regions. Regional divergence may increase from 0,5 to 0,6 (measured in terms of coefficient of variation of per capita GDP). Capital regions on Eastern European countries may grow above European average, but larger rural regions will hardly be able to do so, if their young, skilled population migrates to Eastern capitals or to more developed central regions or to aging regions with labour scarcity. Informal economy (up to 20% of GDP in many regions) explains why so many regions can afford high levels of unemployment.

16. **Slow reduction of unemployment and pressure on salaries.** The unemployment level in many European regions (over 50% youngsters unemployed in many Southern regions according to official statistics) will likely keep driving salaries down in real terms at least for the next decade. It will also induce intra-European labour migrations towards more developed and ageing regions, with higher salaries and better social welfare systems. More jobs could be created in Europe everywhere if the actual trend towards lower salaries and temporary employment continues for the next decade. In this sense, even with low growth, employment will be created.

17. **New global trade patterns.** The rise of emerging economies will result in a more multi-polar world, with companies in different European countries trading more with the rest of the world than among themselves. European companies will take advantage of the growth of emerging markets differently, based on their economic specialisation, commercial links, and historical relations. The increase of exports to the rest of the world will make European foreign policy become more difficult, since economic interests may diverge at global scale. Completion of the Single Market becomes as relevant as opening European markets globally.

18. **Expanding tourism.** New forms of sustainable tourism in areas such as education and training, health and leisure, cultural and business will emerge. Tourism will grow at similar levels as middle classes grow worldwide. Many European cities and regions will become destinations for tourism and many cities and regions will have to be able to manage massive flows to avoid devaluing their cultural and ecological assets.

19. **Decoupling of transport and economic growth at local and regional scale.** Transport demand in urban areas will not likely grow as fast as economic growth. European cities will be involved in more or less ambitious programmes to implement sustainable mobility. For long-distance transport however, particularly for intercontinental transport, transport demand may grow above economic growth resulting in increasing transport demand for long-distance travel, particularly intercontinental. Altogether, transport demand may grow about 40% until 2030 (in passengers-kilometres) and freight transport will likely grow above economic growth. On the other hand, inefficiencies in the transport market inside Europe will likely gradually diminish because of the completion of the Single Transport Market, leading to a more efficient transport system in Europe. On infrastructure provision, more limited public investment will require a more intense private participation: smaller but more profitable investments.

20. **Decreasing energy and carbon intensity.** Energy intensity will gradually decrease because of more service oriented European economies, increased energy efficiency and savings, as well as due to improved technology, especially wind and solar sources. But the process will be slow and the energy costs will still be higher in Europe than in the rest of the world. Europe will likely remain energy dependent. Energy will remain expensive, but not necessarily scarce.

21. **Increasing urbanisation.** Urbanization will increase, in many places in the form of uncontrolled urban sprawl. Main drivers for urbanisation are people migration from rural areas into cities, especially in Eastern European countries, and people using more residential space per capita. The crisis may in some areas lead to a relaxation of planning regulations. Conversion from agriculture to all other land uses is expected throughout Europe, with large changes from low productive lands to natural vegetation. Land-take may slightly reduce from the 1.208 km<sup>2</sup> of artificial urbanisation in 2010 to 1.080 km<sup>2</sup> in 2030.

22. ***Climate change hitting territories asymmetrically.*** The impacts of Global warming are uneven in Europe, and also the response capacity is different. It is higher in the North and Centre of Europe (the most affluent regions) and lower in the East and in the South (the less affluent regions). Moreover, local characteristics, as for example the exposure of a region to natural hazards, the population density and the use of land at risk, are decisive for the vulnerability of a region. CO2 emissions are expected to be reduced until 2030 by approximately 30%. There is the responsibility of Europe and all other richest countries in the world to reduce their fossil energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by 80-90 percent until 2050

## How could different policy scenarios influence Europe?

### Territorial scenarios towards 2050

23. **Three alternative territorial scenarios** for the future development of Europe towards 2050 have been developed aiming to cover extreme but realistic enough and policy relevant futures. These scenarios serve the purpose of inspiration and as reference framework for a territorial vision 2050.

24. **Market based growth favouring large metropolises (Scenario A)**. It would involve the further development of capital and global metropolitan regions, as well as existing global gateways. It follows the Europe 2020 strategy in relation to the global competitiveness of Europe by facilitating the economic development of the largest metropolitan regions of global importance in Europe, i.e. the around 76 existing Metropolitan European Growth Areas (MEGAs). The scenario assumes that for the European global competitiveness it is crucial to take full advantage of the connectivity to international networks and the agglomeration economies of larger European metropolitan regions. Moreover assumptions include a reduction of Cohesion and Agricultural funds, as well as transport investments, in this case with a concentration on long-distance infrastructure.

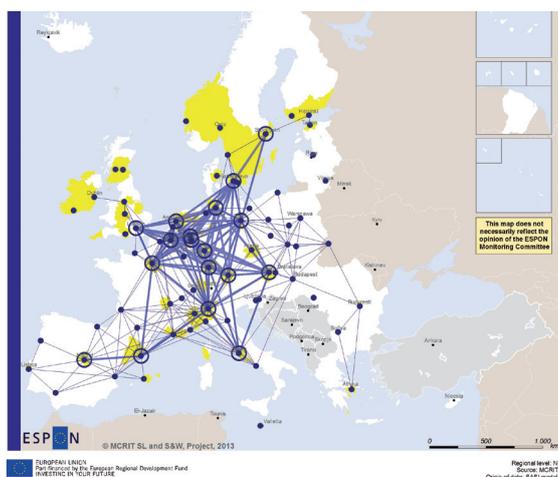


Illustration 4: Territorial Scenario A (in blue main relationships promoted and in yellow zones growing above)

25. **Public policies promoting secondary city networks (Scenario B)**. This scenario provides an image of the European territory in which economic and population growth, as well as most private and public investments, take place in state and regional capitals, involving a geographic reorganisation and specialisation of global gateways. It follows the priority of the European Spatial Development Perspective (1999) and the two Territorial Agendas (2007; 2011) for balanced polycentric urban systems at the macro-regional or national scale for the around 260 cities of European being national capitals and/or regional centres. The scenario assumes that Cohesion and Structural Investment funds investments are mostly targeted to cities, including urban renewal and re-urbanisation, R&D investments, and promotion of regional and inter-regional transport networks. The

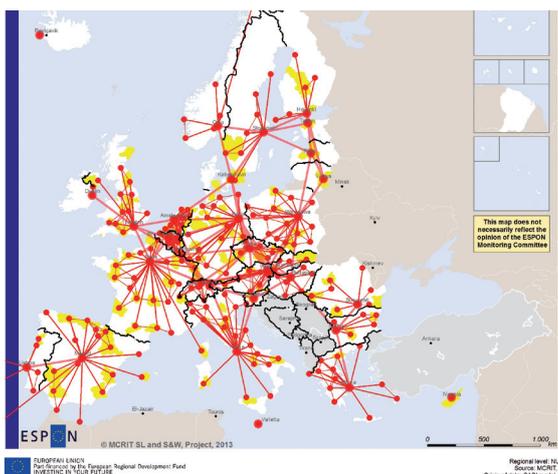


Illustration 5: Territorial Scenario B (in red relationships promoted and in yellow zones growing above average)

increasing concentration of added-value activities in cities does not necessarily imply a process of rural decline, but it is increasing their functional dependency on large cities. Internal migrations take place from sparsely populated areas to larger urban centres. Moreover, the assumptions include constant budgets for EU policies with limited reforms.

**26. Local and European initiatives promoting small cities and less developed regions (Scenario C).** Urban and rural territories form a mosaic of diverse identities supported by local and regional governments. This scenario involves a paradigm-shift and responds to the challenges of energy scarcity and climate change expressed in the Territorial Agenda 2020 (2011) by promoting small and medium-sized cities as centres of economically resilient regions with more sustainable consumption patterns, yet taking account of the necessary economies of scale of services of general interest and the prospects of an ageing society. Policies are focused on reinforcing the social and economic balance of Europe at the regional level in a strong place-based approach, promoting endogenous development and empowering regional institutions. Moreover, the assumptions include increasing budgets for EU policies, except for long-distance transport, more strict environmental policies and decentralised energy networks based on renewable energy.

**27. Demographic assumptions.** The main demographic features of the scenarios were defined as follows: Scenario A attracts more migrants from outside Europe. Scenario C expects less migration and implement policies to support natality. Scenario B lies in between both. Despite these differences, all three scenarios end up with an increase of ageing in 2030, with marginal differences around 39% (in old-age dependence ratio, people above 64 in relation to people in between 16-64). In 2010 the ratio was 26%.

**28. Economic assumptions.** Scenario A, being a market driven scenario, assumes reductions on public expenditure so public financial debt is repaid in 2030. Budget is reduced for Cohesion policies (50% reduction) and concentrated to European large cities. Scenario B assumes that welfare systems are reinforced through increased taxation and public financial debt is not fully repaid in 2030. The budget for Cohesion policies is maintained and investments concentrated in second rank cities. Scenario C is a policy variant with strong public welfare system and a more local dimension. Financial debt is not repaid until 2050. Budget is significantly increased for Cohesion Policies (100% increase, up to 0,8% EU GDP), with investments concentrated in rural and less developed areas.

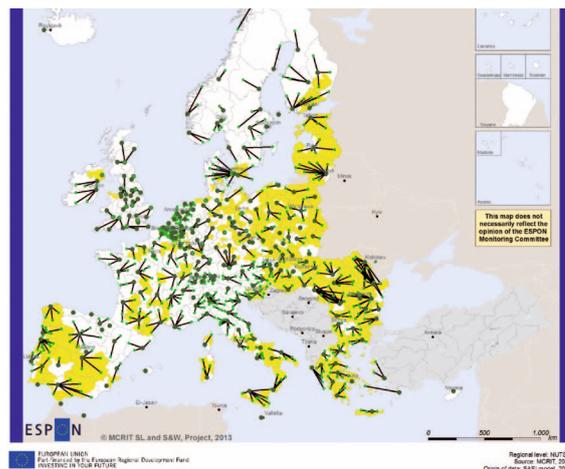


Illustration 6: Territorial Scenario C (in green main relationships promoted and in yellow zones growing above average)

## Results and impacts of the Scenarios

29. **Slightly higher economic growth by promoting and networking second tier cities.** Towards 2030, the B Scenario is slightly more expansionary in terms of GDP (2,3% yearly) than the A scenario (2,2% yearly), whereas C achieves a growth of 1,8% yearly, slightly below the baseline trend (1,9%). The higher expansion of growth in B is explained by more efficient exploitation in this scenario of territorial capital elements, of local specificities, present in second tier cities that allow local economies to achieve higher competitiveness. Development based on second tier cities implies the existence of an integrated and equilibrated urban system, made of efficient secondary cities working with primary cities in providing quality services and allowing the latter to avoid strong diseconomies of scale that can be detrimental to growth. The weak presence of equilibrated and efficient urban systems in the Eastern countries may explain why these countries register very similar growth rates between the A and B scenarios, being both the result of growth supported only by primary cities.

30. **Catching up regional imbalances remains a challenge.** A detailed analysis for Cohesion countries in the East and South of the European Union reveals the structural unbalances of the fast economic development during the latest twenty years, and the difficulties these regions may have to catch-up the development level of central and northern European regions. Regional divergence is reduced in the three scenarios in relation to the baseline trend for 2030, but just marginally.

31. **Dealing with increasing uncertainty towards 2050.** To deal with the increasing uncertainty for a longer time horizon, the three alternative territorial scenarios (A, B, C) were disaggregated into three scenario-variants covering different extreme socio-economic (1), technologic (2) and environmental (3) conditions for 2050. At the same time, all regional transfers of public funds were kept at 0,4% of the total GDP in Europe in order to assess the impact of their territorial redistribution among different types of regions.

### 32. European long-term average growth is not reduced by redistributive policies.

Economic growth in the long run is not significantly affected by the promotion of any of the three territorial strategies designed (A, B and C). Economic development mostly depends on technological changes leading to increases in productivity, and on public policies such as fiscal and monetary. Therefore towards 2050 the scenarios A, B and C would result in a similar average economic growth for Europe as a whole. This means that, under these conditions, towards 2050 agglomeration economies related to metropolises will have relatively lesser role in Europe, or at least equivalent to more balanced networks of cities and regions.

33. **Regional disparities can be reduced, but more slowly and only in relative terms.** Comparing the territorial scenarios, the results of the assessment carried out confirms that assuming a productivity increase in the coming decades (because of both new technologies and better labour skills and organisation) as well as more resource efficiency (avoiding transport and energy cost increases), redistributive policies at regional level (at the level of 0,4% EU GDP) will result in a significant reduction of relative disparity gaps while

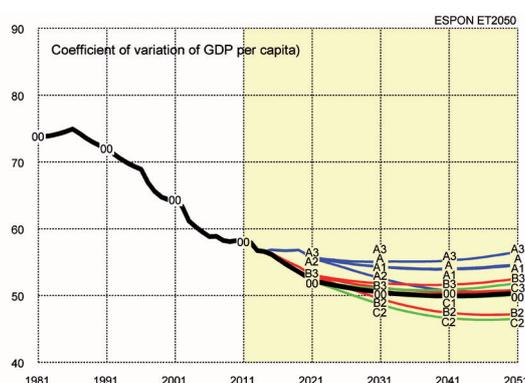
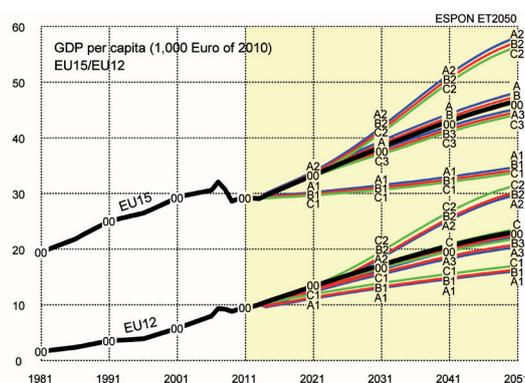


Illustration 7: Evolution of GDP/capita and coefficient of regional variation over 1981 to 2051 according to SASI model (S&W, 2014)

the overall economic growth of Europe will not be affected. The reductions of disparity gaps would not be, however, as fast as they were in previous decades. In absolute terms, regional disparities will not diminish. More ambitious regional policies are needed to achieve this goal (e.g. well above 0.4% of GDP). Different land-use challenges are expected in the different scenarios, such as a higher risk of urban sprawl from a scenario promoting larger metropolises or landscape fragmentation if a diffused land development pattern be adopted instead.

**34. Polycentric territorial structures induce more balanced distribution of growth.** If polycentricity is measured by combining population, location and growth distribution among the cities in a given region or country, then more polycentric structures provide for a better distributed growth in the long run. Where the most developed cities and regions within Europe cooperate as parts of a polycentric structure they add value and act as centres that contribute to the development of their wider regions. This means that polycentric territorial development policy should foster the territorial competitiveness of the EU territory. It can be seen that in particular in the new Member States the effects on the present dominance of capital cities are substantial.

**35. Avoiding suburban sprawl and improving all neighbourhoods matters most for larger cities.** The main threat of large metropolitan regions is associated to the higher environmental impacts associated to urban sprawl (which can be avoided only by strict land-use regulation), as well as neighbourhoods facing social conflicts (always requiring strong public intervention and public participation). On the other hand, higher urban densities provide for the necessary economies of scale favouring the development and implementation of advanced technologies to manage urban services sustainably.

**36. Social and environmental challenges would be more manageable in second tier cities.** The promotion of second tier cities will make land-use change more manageable, as well as social inclusion. Cities are expected to fulfil an important interaction with their hinterland and thus provide a balanced landscape in which both urban and rural areas can thrive and build partnership.

**37. Ecosystems are enhanced by promoting small and medium-size cities and rural areas.** The main benefit of promoting small and medium-size cities in rural areas, in both more and less developed regions, is the ability to maintain and protect valuable ecosystems and enhance a vibrant areas around cities and towns. Good stewardship of the land and cohesion can be promoted through stimulating less favoured areas. The main threat linked to policies promoting the very large number of small and medium-size cities that exist in most European regions, would be an increasing fragmentation of the landscape due to less dense and more diffused land development throughout Europe.

*These results together with insights gathered from the participatory process carried through, provide the basis for imagining and designing a European Territorial Vision towards 2050.*

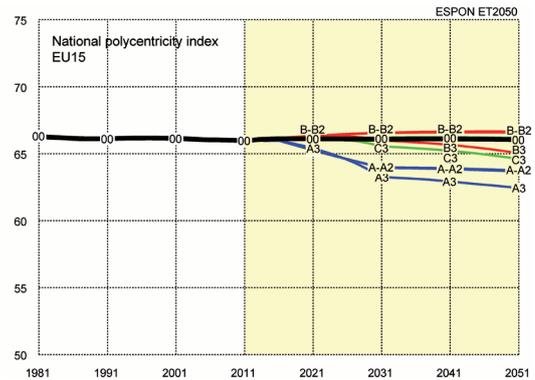
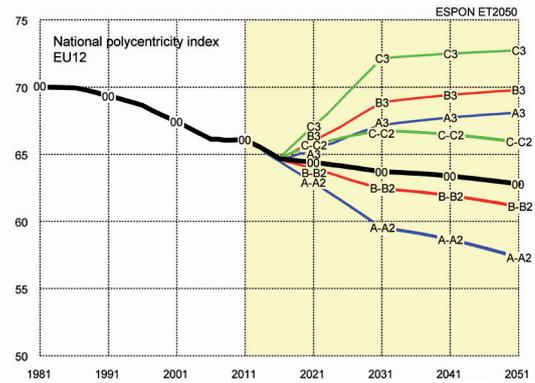


Illustration 8: Evolution of polycentricity over 1981 to 2051 according to SASI model (S&W, 2014)

### What should be paramount policy aims for a long-term development of Europe?

#### Openness and Polycentricity

38. **Making Europe Open and Polycentric** is the most coherent territorial strategy supporting the economic growth and competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainability goals promoted by the Europe 2020 and the Territorial Agenda 2020 for the coming decades. This strategy combines growth and cohesion, and it produces liveable places for people. The efficiency and quality of the European territory lies in networking cities of all sizes, from local to global level, as well as in empowering people and local activities to valorise their own assets at European and global scale. To improve its Territorial Cohesion Europe needs to become more open and polycentric, fulfilling the original aim of the Treaty of Rome (1956) saying that Europe has to become an open Community of equals with common strong institutions, and as well the aim of later Treaties to opt for a harmonious and balanced territory.

39. **Openness** to the rest of the world and to the Neighbouring countries is a necessary condition for all European cities and regions to take advantage of the development opportunities created by global growth and technologic progress. The long-term development of Europe depends on the global valorisation and exploitation of the more competitive assets of each city and region, in completing the Single Market and establishing effective co-development strategies with the Mediterranean and Eastern Neighbourhood. Making Europe more open requires connecting Europe globally and promoting co-development with neighbouring regions.

40. **Polycentricity** across cities and regional is necessary to spread development opportunities across European cities and regions, making development more resilient and diversified, further diminishing economic gaps, and differences of welfare conditions. On the other hand, increasing polycentricity will not necessarily reduce the overall long-term economic growth of Europe as a whole. Making Europe polycentric requires unleashing regional diversity and endogenous development as well as territorial cooperation as means to optimise the location of investments and reduce regional disparities, to support balanced and polycentric urban structures, favouring compact settlements and smart renewal of cities, as well as a sustainable management of natural and cultural resources.

### How to make Europe more open and polycentric?

#### 4.1 Connecting Europe Globally

41. **The aim** is providing advanced transport, energy and telecommunication networks to European cities and regions in order to make possible for them to valorise their own assets at European and at global scale, becoming important players in the world economy. It will support better links between European infrastructure to world-wide networks, and a geographical spread of European intercontinental gateways bringing polycentricity at European level. By connecting Europe globally, the European economy becomes more open, and the European society more cosmopolitan.

### Opening up European markets to global competition and promoting global sustainability

The progressive opening of the European market to global competition, in parallel to the opening of other world markets to Europe, will create fair and sustainable development for all if the higher social and environmental European standards are gradually adopted by the rest of the world. European larger metropolises and second tier cities need to reinforce their role as global cities, attractive places for global activities and services.

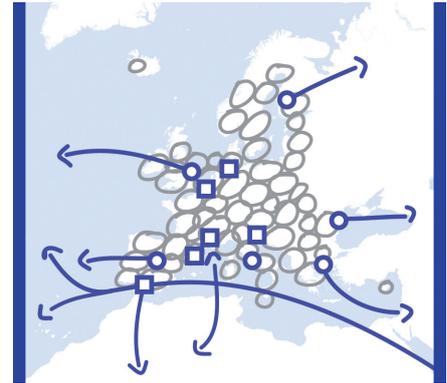


Illustration 9: Opening up European markets to global competition and promoting global sustainability

### Integration of transport and telecommunication networks and geographical spread of global gateways

The full integration of information and communication networks, facilitated by the electrification of transport systems will enhance networks interoperability and efficiency. Global connectivity through maritime routes and intercontinental air services is a critical development condition, as well as local and regional connections to them. The further redistribution of intercontinental gateways from their actual North-Atlantic concentration to more competitive geographic locations for global traffics would bring a net benefit to the European economy by reducing travel time and transport operating costs and spreading development opportunities.

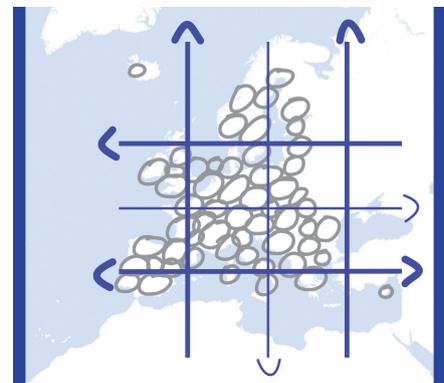


Illustration 10: Integration of transport and telecommunication networks and geographical spread of global gateways

### Intelligent energy networks connecting decentralised renewable energy

An intelligent grid covering Europe north-south, integrating renewal sources, wind in the north and solar in the south, together with other conventional sources such as hydroelectric, will reduce European energy dependency and increase economic efficiency. Intelligent energy networks will provide for more decentralised production and consumption, and will facilitate an increasing diversification of sources as well as cost reduction and price harmonisation across Europe.

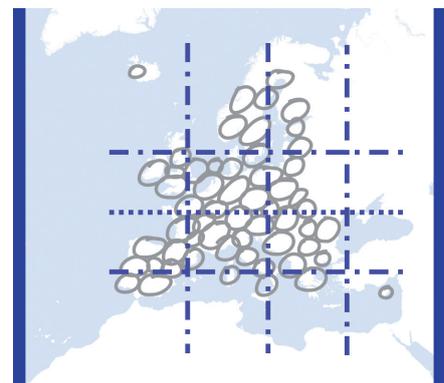


Illustration 11: Intelligent energy networks connecting decentralised renewable energy

42. **The main political actions** will be focused on completing the Single Market with the further liberalisation and harmonisation of the markets for network industries, including the internalising the environmental costs, and progressing in the cooperation and integration with Neighbourhood Countries, North-America and the rest of the world. Support to technological and management innovation and infrastructure extensions need to be planned with sound cost-benefit analysis to be financially sustainable.

43. **The responsibility of the political actions** lies mostly with European institutions and with international institutions, particularly with specialised United Nations agencies, as well as with large private corporations in the sectors involved. Local and regional institutions have the responsibility to develop development strategies consistent to their enhanced global connectivity. In the short and medium-term, policies should favour the completion of the Single European Market, giving more coherence to infrastructure planning at all scales and gradually removing the costs of market fragmentation for network industries. In the longer-term, policies should open-up European markets for network industries to global competition and internalise environmental costs as effective measures to enhance efficiency.

## 4.2 Promoting co-development with neighbouring regions

44. **The aim** is further integrate Europe and Neighbouring regions, valorising joined development opportunities and reducing excessive economic gaps, particularly across borders. This aim brings openness to European neighbours and support new markets. In addition it will strengthen polycentricity through increasing the development of cities closer to external borders.

### Linking transport, telecommunication and energy networks between Europe and Neighbouring regions

Links between European and neighbouring regions in the form of transport, telecommunication and energy services and infrastructures need to be further developed. Global gateways already emerge in some neighbouring regions, both intercontinental airports and ports. Trade and traffic across de Mediterranean, Middle East and Eastern countries will continue to grow if neighbouring countries become successful emerging economies. Beyond infrastructure provision, markets for network industries should also be gradually integrated in the framework of free trade agreements, closer association and/or European Union's full membership.

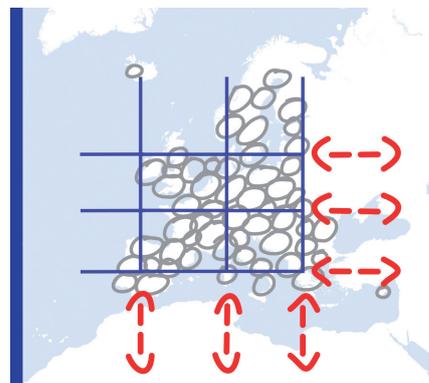


Illustration 12: Linking transport, telecommunication and energy networks between Europe and Neighbouring regions

### Promoting integrated territorial development across borders

Co-development strategies will combine the market dimension and R&D capabilities of Europe with the energy, land availability and labour assets of the south shore of the Mediterranean, as well as Eastern Neighbourhood. Cross-border areas in the West and East Mediterranean and along Eastern borders have to become priority areas for co-development since excess of economic gaps is a major source of social and political conflicts and also constraining the development of European Union's most peripheral regions.

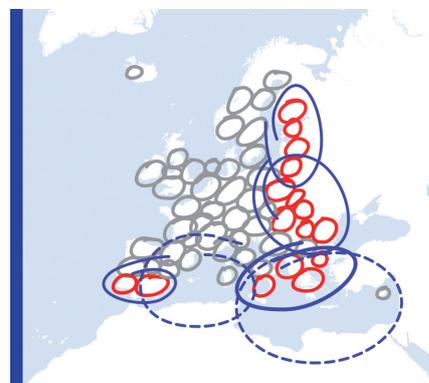


Illustration 13: Promoting integrated territorial development across borders

45. **The main political actions** will be focused on enlarging the European Union or establishing closer relations with neighbouring regions, linking and further developing transport, energy and telecommunication networks and giving priority to the integrated development plans and investment programs on cross-border areas.

46. **The responsibility of the political actions** lies mostly with European institutions as well as European countries and regions having borders with neighbouring countries. In the short and medium-term, policies should favour the gradual market integration, economic infrastructure investments and co-development plans for strategic cross-border zones. In the longer-term, policies should be addressed to deepening market integration and, whenever feasible, enlargement.

### 4.3 Unleashing regional diversity and endogenous development

47. **The aim** is to provide equivalent development opportunities among European regions and remove existing constraints to the development of their own assets. This entails taking appropriate solidarity steps towards regions that are less well-off. This aim would open for a more balanced development within the European territory which would counteract unfair differences in living conditions in parts of Europe. In addition, it would strengthen the regional and local economies, make them more attractive for people and business development and bring more cities and towns in a better position to provide or sustain services of general interest closer to the citizens.

#### Sufficient infrastructures to open up local and regional potentials

Sufficient access to transport, telecommunication and energy infrastructure is necessary not just to make a given territory attractive to exogenous investments but mostly to increase the productivity of endogenous activities sustainably. For less developed rural regions, industrial and technological infrastructure linked to agriculture, tourism, renewable energies, natural resources and cultural heritage are important assets for a more diversified economic development. Empowering local and regional governments is always a necessary precondition.

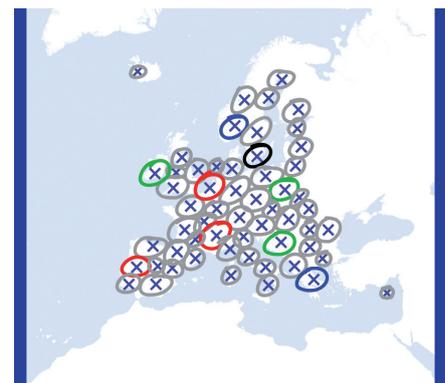


Illustration 14: Sufficient infrastructures to open up local and regional potentials

#### Universal access to services of general interest

Access to services of general interest is essential to improve social capital and economic development opportunities, as well as good enough welfare conditions for all Europeans. In sparsely populated and less developed rural regions it is also a precondition to maintain a certain number of inhabitants as critical mass and for good stewardship of the land. Innovative management strategies need to be adopted to make the provision for services of general interest which are financially sustainable everywhere.



Illustration 15: Universal access to services of general interest

48. **Main policy steps** to achieve this goal includes, together with the improvement of regional infrastructure endowments and the provision of an adequate level of services of general economic interest, the improving of local and regional governance and the implementation of innovative management strategies, especially in sparsely populated and less accessible areas. Targeted policy steps have to successfully tackle issues faced by areas characterised by a specific permanent geographic or demographic handicap, such as islands, sparsely populated, remote, including ultra-peripheral, and mountain areas.

49. **The responsibility for policy action** is shared between local/regional authorities, also in their role mobilising local private companies, Member States and the EU. In line with the principles of the place-based approach, and taking account of the availability of financial means, the EU together with Member States have to provide an appropriate framework to fund, supervise and adapt the local/regional development operations. In the short and medium-term, European Structural and Investment Funds have to be coordinated with Agricultural Funds to promote those investments that improve the productivity and competitiveness of endogenous development, in partnership with local private companies. In the longer term, cities and regions will have to develop territorial development plans for intra-regional cooperation and coordination of European sectoral policies.

#### 4.4 Supporting a balanced urban structure

50. **The aim** is reinforcing second tier cities, all over the continent, as well as achieving a more networked development of the system of European cities, at regional and continental level, enhancing their world-wide influence. Enhancing the international role of the second tier of the European urban system will increase the openness of Europe to international business. Boosting the development and prosperity of these cities will increase the number of globally important European cities substantially, and contribute a polycentric European territory.

##### Reinforcing second tier cities as important engines of growth

Europe has a number of large cities and metropolitan regions enjoying a central position at global level in a variety of sectors and activities, despite the fact that their size is relatively small, in population or surface, compared to world megalopolis. More European second tier cities must become places of global attraction, innovation and engines of economic growth, with a high degree of social cohesion, platforms for democracy and cultural diversity and with limited diseconomies from congestion. To enhance their global relevance, European cities have to adopt growth strategies based on wider market outlook, renewal and networking.



Illustration 16: Reinforcing second tier cities as important engines of growth

### Integration of functional urban regions

The growing interdependency of urban and rural and the emergence of hybrid or fuzzy middle landscapes create new functional territories where new opportunities for joining forces, harvesting synergies and achieving a higher critical mass should be explored. Working together as polycentric cities in rural–urban partnerships and in cross-border zones need the implementation of new territorial governance settings so that economic complementarities can be unleashed. Territorial cooperation arrangements and more advanced institutional cooperation mechanisms need to be developed to make an enhanced territorial integration feasible, especially in and around large metropolitan areas and larger cities with, in many cases, challenging historical administrative boundaries.



Illustration 17: Integration of functional urban regions

### Smart and inclusive revitalisation of cities and neighborhoods

The quality of European cities lies in promoting inclusive neighbourhoods and mixed land-uses, avoiding excessive spatial specialisation and segregation, and protecting cultural heritage. European cities are complex and have heavy historical inertias, making change and regeneration slow and difficult. Investing in new urban designs, public spaces and public facilities, including housing, is critical, as well as implementing smart systems for urban mobility, energy, water and waste management. Even if new technologies will facilitate improving the quality of cities, more responsible social behaviour and better governance remains indispensable to make cities better places to live and work.



Illustration 18: Smart and inclusive revitalisation of cities and neighborhoods

51. **Main political actions** have to be focused on the maintenance and smart renewal of the traditional model of the European city and region, avoiding specialised, exclusive and segregated zones. Openness for new urban designs and solutions, improving public spaces and public facilities, including housing, promoting inclusive neighbourhoods and implementing more efficient and sustainable urban systems enhanced by new technologies are necessary steps ahead.

52. **The responsibility for policy action** lies primarily with local and regional authorities, including groupings of such authorities in metropolitan areas, but policies at state and European level will also be important, particularly in cities with specific problems, such as neighbourhoods with severe deficits and/or social conflicts, cities facing depopulation or suffering from poor governance. In the short and medium-term, the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy is further developed including support to smart regeneration of cities and, particularly, renewing of neighbourhoods. In the longer-term, the progressive ecological restoration of low-density residential areas inherited from 20th century urban sprawl, as well as developing a consistent and formal system of cooperation between and within the European urban areas will be set up, involving metropolitan areas, cities/towns and their rural hinterland. The relevant policy steps are primarily taken at the level of functional areas, beyond administrative entities.

## 4.5 Managing natural resources sustainably

53. *The aim* is to protect and enhance natural assets and manage ecosystem services in a sustainable manner, both in more urbanised and less urbanised territories to the benefit of the citizens, to increase the economic attraction and to mitigate or adapt the territory to Climate Change impacts. A well kept European natural environment contributes to the vision by being open and attractive for visitors, for citizens and for economic activity. Moreover, ensuring important nature areas in all parts of the European territory is supporting regional and urban development and environmental quality in a balanced way, which again will have a positive effect on making Europe polycentric.

### Protecting landscapes from urban sprawl and renaturalising cities

European cities have to grow avoiding urban sprawl by favouring higher density urban development in strategic nodes and along public transport lines. Land is a scarce resource in many parts of Europe. There is a need to protect land to become urbanised for ecological but also for strategic reasons, to induce more compact urban settlements, to create buffer zones separating urbanised zones and to provide areas for recreation. The valorisation of the urban and rural cultural heritage and the quality of landscapes, including aesthetics, are essential economic assets to make towns in rural territories more attractive for people to live and work. Beyond that, more ambitious renaturalisation policies to renew cities, including ecologic agriculture and food production.

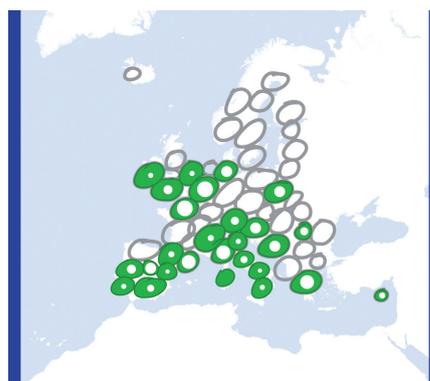


Illustration 19: Protecting landscapes from urban sprawl and renaturalising cities

### Sustainable management of green infrastructures to increase biodiversity and resilience

The European territory is made of a diversity of places, from oceanic islands, isolated mountain areas, sparsely populated regions and density populated coasts, regions with problematic access to services of general interest, to global metropolises and small historical towns. Sustainable and more efficient resource management practices must be promoted throughout all this divers territories. At European scale, a green infrastructure network should be further extended from Nature 2000 to more urbanised environments, stimulating biodiversity and ecosystem services, and increasing resilience to Climate Change.



Illustration 20: Sustainable management of green infrastructures to increase biodiversity and resilience

54. **Main political actions** that have to be taken are the renaturalisation of cities and the reduction of uncontrolled urban sprawl and promotion of more compact urban development, with well-planned urban and peri-urban environments, minimising negative impacts of soil sealing or uncontrolled development in pristine natural areas causing habitat fragmentation, as well as the reduction of highly productive agricultural soils. Special attention should be given to the protection of land under urban stress in sensitive areas, such as on the borders of existing cities and in the coastal zones. The establishment of a network of green infrastructure with reforestation and the reclamation of agricultural land is necessary in both more and less densely settled and/or depopulating regions. Overall, land-use and territorial development measures are indispensable for mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

55. **The responsibility of the political actions** lies on European, local, and regional institutions. International collaboration in the management of ecosystem services, which include river basin management and flood control, air quality, carbon sequestration and food and bio-energy production. In the short and medium-term, European Structural and Investment as well as Agricultural Funds are reformed favouring landscape and ecologic planning and management, as well as promoting public investments to buy strategic land under urbanisation stress and promote urban renaturalisation. In the longer-term, a green infrastructure network is developed linking Natura 2000 areas together with areas protected for strategic purposes. Plans for Natural Protection and Management are adopted.

## 4.6 Imagining an open and polycentric territorial vision for Europe 2050

*The cartographic image on the next page shall be perceived as a picture of an open Europe with closer links to territories and markets outside Europe, and a polycentric Europe where cities of different size and specialities contribute to growth and provide jobs and quality of living conditions in all parts of Europe.*

The image addresses the entire European continent, the Mediterranean basin and the eastern territory to the Urals, in order to visualise the growing interdependency between the European Union and neighbouring regions, and the need for co-development. No borders or frontiers are represented, to indicate that current political and administrative constraints for territorial development and governance have disappeared, and the European Union remains open to internal and external enlargement processes. The criteria behind the image are inspired by criteria used in spatial development strategies and plans, by Trans-European Networks as well as by Natura 2000 protected areas and ESPON project results. It combines three main layers.

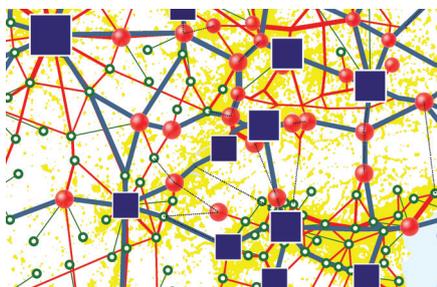


Illustration 21: A polycentric urban fabric covering the territory.

### A polycentric urban fabric covering the territory

Three tiers of cities are symbolically represented: Metropolises [ ■ ], large cities [ ● ] and small and medium size cities [ ○ ]. The levels of connections representing the scale of the relations and somehow the quality of the connecting infrastructures are also three [ ——— ]. Land urbanised with high density [ ■ ] indicating that many large cities in the centre of Europe as well as along southern coastal line form almost continuous urbanised corridors requiring integrated planning at the proper scale.

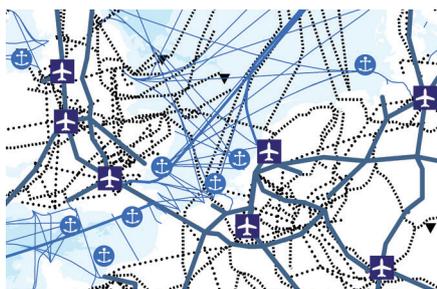


Illustration 22: Networks of intercontinental transport and energy.

### Networks of intercontinental transport and energy opening up Europe to the World

Ports [ ⊕ ] and Airports [ ✈ ] playing a strategic role at intercontinental scale are represented, as well as main deep-sea maritime routes [ ——— ] and short-sea routes [ ——— ]. Energy infrastructure is represented as oil wells [ ▲ ], gas wells [ ▼ ], and main pipelines [ ..... ] most of them in neighbouring regions.

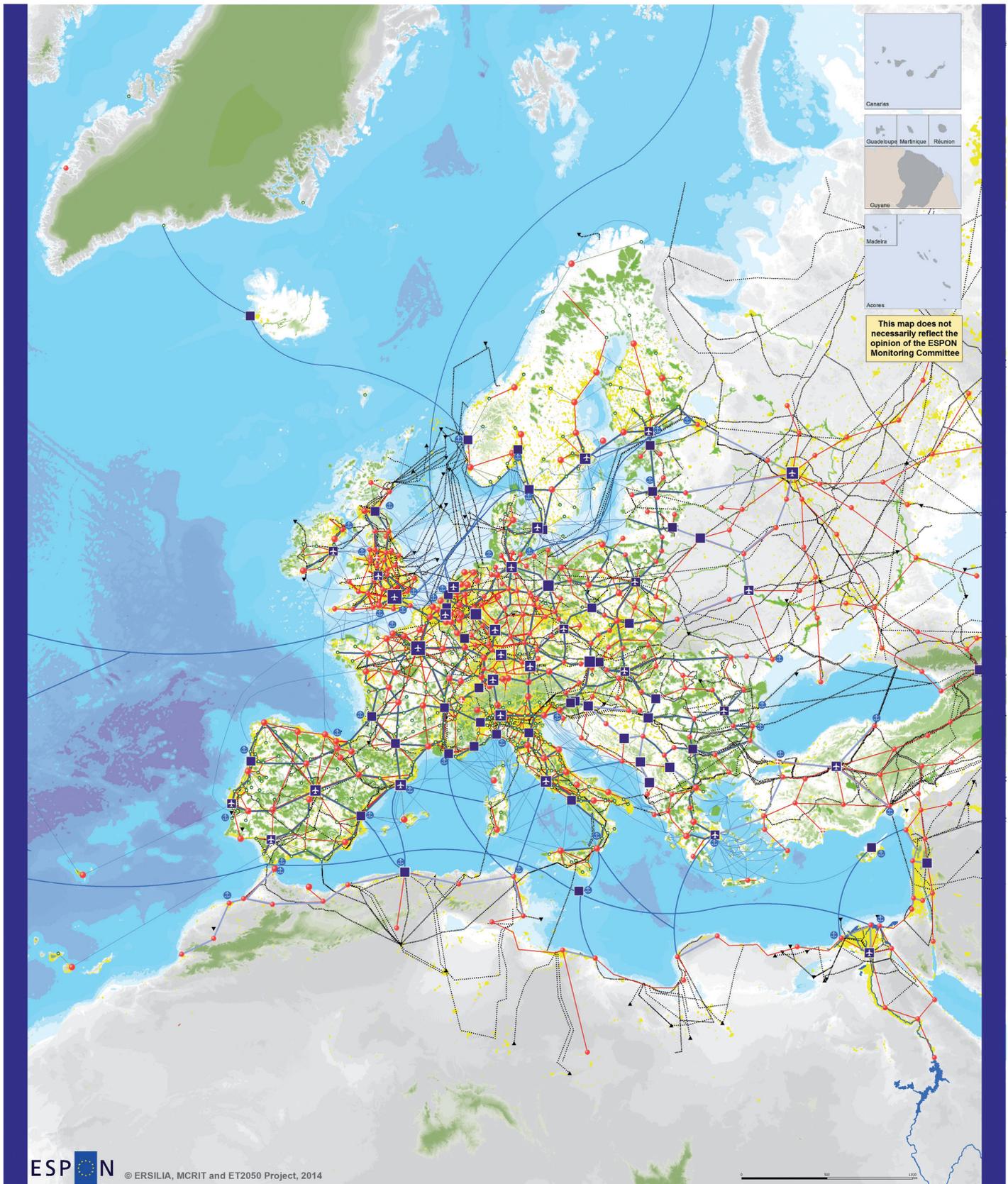


Illustration 23: Natural and cultural landscapes sustainably managed.

### Natural and cultural landscapes sustainably managed to enhance biodiversity and resilience

Land protected by Nature 2000 [ ■ ] are represented with buffer zones around [ ■ ] indicating the need for physical continuity. Zones above 1.000 m altitude are similar to green buffer zones [ ■ ] Topography until 1.000 m altitude is represented by elevations [ ■ ]. Main rivers are represented as green corridors [ ——— ]. Sea bathymetry is also represented [ ■ ]

## Cartographic image of an open and polycentric Europe



Canarias

Guadeloupe Martinique Réunion

Guyana

Madeira

Azores

This map does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ESPON Monitoring Committee

ESPON

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EUROPEAN UNION  
Part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund  
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE

Regional level: NUTS 3  
Source: MCRIT, 2014  
Origin of data: ET2050, 2014

© EuroGeographics Association for administrative boundaries

### What are the policies to make Europe open and polycentric?

56. **A “New Generation” of Cohesion Policy after 2020 should be visionary to deal with the new territorial challenges ahead.** Structural and Investment Funds should be reformed to be more sensitive to macro-economic cycles, to opportunities in neighbouring regions, to the gradual opening of European markets to global competition and the effort to achieve greenhouse gas reduction targets. In deepening the reforms already started, new Cohesion policies have to take up a stronger place-based and endogenous approach, by focusing on tailor made interventions harvesting of unique potentials of different regions, cities and larger territories. Cohesion policy should encourage the development of integrated development plans for functional areas, as well empowering local and regional government to support more business-friendly environments, investments and entrepreneurship should be encouraged. Transnational cross-border zones have to be further promoted, such as the Baltic region, the Danube region, the Black Sea, the Adriatic-Ionian region, the Alpine region, the West Mediterranean, as relevant geographic scales to define integrated territorial development policies. In terms of gaining competitiveness territorial cooperation across all type of administrative borders should be further encouraged, such as for cross-border metropolitan cooperation, the joining of several cities into polycentric cooperation zones and through enhanced partnerships between urban and rural areas.

57. **A European Vision as a Territorial Reference Framework should become available for Policies and Investment.** Building up from a common vision it is necessary to draw up an European territorial framework which ensures a set of territorial conditions on community investments of Cohesion and sectoral policies, incorporating territorial considerations into planning for development. Structural and Investment Funds should be closely coordinated with other relevant EU Policies, such as Economic and Fiscal policies, the Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Pillar II, CAP), Trans-European Transport Network, Maritime and Environmental policy. The macro-regional spheres of transnational cooperation and other similar cooperation arrangements constitute useful laboratories for related governance mechanisms and could give inspiration to the implementation of such a strategy. For Member States, regions and local authorities, such a reference framework could bring in the wider European context in their policy making. And for the private sector and their investment considerations it would bring confidence security by showing how Europe wants to develop its territory in the long term.

58. **In the longer term, European Territorial Development should become a common development policy.** Acknowledging the diversity of the European territory and further customising policies and fund allocations will no longer be sufficient to face global development challenges and reduce the costs of administrative and sectoral fragmentation. There is a need for sharing strategic policy considerations addressing the European territory, taking into account a long term overall vision of its future development to support the better coordination of European policies and local and regional plans. The aim of such a new territorial policy arena is to bring the European Union forward as a strong global economic player harvesting on potentials of all parts, regions and cities and making all parts of the future of the European territory a quality living place with fair conditions for living and working for all European citizens.

## Annex. Further reading and watching

### Reports are available at:

[http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu\\_Projects/Menu\\_AppliedResearch/ET2050.html](http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_AppliedResearch/ET2050.html)

- ET2050 Project Final Report – Executive Summary
- ET2050 Project Final Report – Main Report
- ET2050 Project Final Report – Scientific Report:
  - Volume 1 – Approach to Scenario Building and Storylines
  - Volume 2 – Demographic Trends and Scenarios
  - Volume 3 – Economic Trends and Scenarios
  - Volume 4 – Transport Trends and Scenarios
  - Volume 5 – Land-use Trends and Scenarios
  - Volume 6 – Integrated Spatial Scenarios
  - Volume 7 – Territorial Impact Assessment
  - Volume 8 – Central and Eastern European Impacts of Scenarios
  - Volume 9 – Southern European Impacts of Scenarios
  - Volume 10 – Vision Supporting Document
  - Volume 11 – Political pathways
  - Volume 12 – Territorial Governance
  - Volume 13 – Mid-term targets
  - Volume 14 – Communication and Multimedia resources
  - Volume 15 – Towards a Territorial Vision: the Value Based Process

### Other materials at:

**ET2050 webpage:** <http://www.espon.eu/et2050>

- Maps
- Video's:
  - Views by influential world leading thinkers
  - Territorial Vision for Europe in 2050
  - Europe of Metropolises: scenario A
  - Europe of Cities: scenario B
  - Europe of Regions: scenario C
- Participatory process reports:
  - ESPON Internal Seminar 29-30 November 2011 in Kraków
  - ESPON Open Seminar 13-14 June 2012 in Aalborg.
  - Joint INTERACT - ESPON workshop 25 September 2012 in Luxembourg
  - ESPON Policy Workshop 28 September 2012 in Brussels
  - ESPON Internal Seminar 4-6 December 2012 in Paphos
  - ESPON Policy Oriented Workshop 14 March 2013 in Luxembourg
  - ESPON Internal Seminar 12-14 June 2013 in Dublin
  - European Parliament 25 June 2013 in Brussels
  - European Commission 25 June 2013 in Brussels
  - European Parliament, REGI, 24 of September 2013 in Brussels
  - ESPON Workshop "Vision for Europe towards 2050" 11 October 2013 in Brussels
  - ESPON Internal Seminar 3-5 December 2013 in Vilnius
  - European Parliament, COTER, 19 February 2014 in Brussels
  - ESPON Internal Seminar 4-5 June 2014 in Nafplion
  - ESPON/DGREGIO workshop "Scenarios and modelling in the framework of exploring Territorial Cohesion" 4 September 2014 in Brussels
- Bibliographic and other references



[www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu)

The ESPON 2013 Programme supports policy development in relation to the aim of territorial cohesion and a harmonious development of the European territory. It provides comparable information, evidence, analysis, and scenarios on territorial dynamics, which reveal territorial capitals and development potentials of regions and larger territories contributing.

This Vision Report is based on substantial applied research undertaken within the ESPON 2013 Programme. The 31 countries behind the programme asked for a project to build prospective scenarios and a proactive vision for 2050 that could support a discussion of the long term development of the European territory.

The purpose of this report is to stimulate the debate on a European Territorial Vision and to generate a shared ownership of the Vision, as well as an anchoring in policy. As part of this debate you are welcome to engage with ESPON via [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).

ISBN 978-2-919777-76-1