



Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

PRE-EVENT BRIEF

ESPON Roundtable on Post-COVID settlement patterns across urban and rural areas in Sweden

Virtual (MS Teams)

16 December 2021, 13.00-16.35 (CET)

Introduction



The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected people's lives across Europe. Policies enacted to protect public health, including reduced business operations, lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and border closures have had major, but uneven, impacts on where people call home. Nordic countries saw the rise of a renewed appreciation for the outdoors, domestic travel, and the blurring of public and private spaces for work and leisure. One important consequence has been the growth of home ownership in rural areas from urban buyers, which has affected the territorial and infrastructural linkages between the two areas.

This ESPON online roundtable will specifically focus on impacts related to social cohesion, spatial planning and territorial development in Sweden:

- **Since the COVID pandemic began, what new types of urban and rural settlement patterns are emerging?**
- **How has housing access itself been affected by the pandemic?**
- **In what ways will these dynamics have an enduring influence on rural-urban settlement linkages?**

Current housing market and policy needs in Sweden

Sweden has been experiencing significant macroeconomic imbalances tied to its residential property markets. The combination of overvalued housing prices and the continuous rise of household debt has increased the risk of disorderly corrections in the real estate market. This situation can have an adverse impact on the Swedish economy and banking sectors as well as on those in neighbouring countries. Some measures have been taken in recent years to address these imbalances but have had a limited impact so far. Key policy needs have been left unanswered, especially regarding tax incentives for debt-financed home ownership, processes affecting the national housing supply, and opportunities to improve the existing rental sector (EC, 2020).

These challenges are magnified by long-standing economic and social imbalances between urban and rural settlement patterns in Sweden. Forecasts anticipate the emergence of four multi-core urbanised regions: the Öresund region, the Stockholm/Mälardalen region, the Göteborg/western Sweden region, and the Norrland coastal region that will continue to place social and economic pressures on rural livelihoods (Boverkets, 2014). In Nordic countries, people compensate for living in dense urban environments by using second homes in rural areas. Sweden, however, is revising its Rural Development Programme (RDP) including performing analyses of trends affecting sparsely populated, intermediate and rural areas close to cities, as well as rural-urban linkages. In the present context of COVID-19, the RDP raises important questions regarding the possible long-term effects of the pandemic and its implications for housing and transportation planning, public service provisioning, labour markets and economic activities, among others. These challenges further add to pre-existing imbalances between urban-rural areas, which affected the shape of territorial development and planning even before the pandemic. These factors included, for example, demographic mobility and migration dynamics, rates and types of urbanisation patterns, an ageing population, as well as the creation of jobs and businesses. Such interrelated factors influence the growing interest in rural housing markets, but at the same time contribute to an ongoing lack of suitable housing in areas where services and needs tend to be localised (Qvist Eliassen *et al.*, 2020).

ESPON evidence

ESPON recently launched a research project to investigate the territorial impacts of COVID-19 and to analyse different policy responses among European regions and cities. This research project, from June 2021 to June 2022, is being carried out by a consortium of 11 partners from across Europe. It focuses on the geographical patterns of the pandemic and its territorial and socio-economic characteristics, the factors influencing the level of exposure to the virus, its impact on poverty, social inequalities, and social exclusion, the efficiency of various

policy approaches across European regions, the importance of multi-level and cross-sectoral governance mechanisms, and the means by which territorial cooperation can be strengthened during such moments of crisis (ESPON, 2021). The findings that arise from this project seek to bring insight into the current evolution of settlement patterns in the Nordic region.

Outline of the event

The online event will take place over a 3-hour period, divided in three 1-hour sessions with each focusing on a specific aspect of urban-rural settlement patterns since COVID.

The first session will focus on different territorial indicators that feature in emerging urban and rural settlement patterns across Sweden and the wider Nordic region. The session will include the results from ongoing and completed ESPON-projects. The second session will address territorial challenges that have arisen from these settlement dynamics, such as infrastructure and service provisioning, transitory non-resident populations, unstable employment trends, transportation, and infrastructure development considerations. Responses from local and national actors, their experiences and best practices from concrete cases, will be discussed in the third session: these will include spatial planning across urban and rural contexts, cross-border territorial cooperation, local tax revenue considerations, actions to rebalance owner-occupation/rental dynamics, efforts to rebalance long-term employment, infrastructure and service provisioning. Each of the sessions will be divided into 40 minutes for presentations from various regional experts followed by 20 minutes for an extended discussion and debate between audience members and presenters.

The final 15 minutes of the event will focus on tying together the various points and insights that emerged across the respective sessions.

Agenda (CET)

13:00 - 13:10	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Welcome note by Sverker Lindblad (Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation)</p>
13:10 - 14:10	<p>Session 1: Mapping emerging urban and rural settlement patterns in Sweden (ESPON RESULTS)</p> <p>Moderated by William Kutz (UMS RIATE, University of Paris)</p> <p>“Post-COVID settlement trends in Sweden and their impacts on service provisioning in urban and rural areas” by Elin Slätmo, Gustaf Norlén, and Linda Randall (Nordregio, Stockholm)</p> <p>20-minute Q&A discussion</p>
14:10 - 14:20	<p>Break</p>
14:20 - 15:20	<p>Session 2: Territorial challenges</p> <p>Moderated by William Kutz (UMS RIATE, University of Paris)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Local governments’ policy responses to long-term decline” by Josefina Syssner (Linköping University) 2. “Counter-urbanisation and development planning” by Erika Sandow (Umeå University) <p>20-minute Q&A discussion</p>
15:20 - 15:30	<p>Break</p>

15:30 - 16:20

Session 3: Territorial Responses

Roundtable Discussion: Territorial actors respond: testimonies and practices since the pandemic.

- **Tomas Ekberg** (Chief Analyst for Regional Development, Västra Götaland Region)
- **Camilla Ottosson** (Community Planning, Kronoberg Region)
- **Lina Wedin** (Head of Regional Planning, Skåne Region)
- **Daniel André** (National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, Sweden)

Presentation: “How to rebuild the Nordic cooperation after COVID-19 and closed borders” by **Niels Boye** (EU Interreg Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak)

20-minute Q&A discussion

16:20 - 16:35

Concluding Remarks

Brief synthesis and wrap-up of the three sessions (**William Kutz**) followed by closing remarks (**Sverker Lindblad**)

References

Boverket (2014). Vision for Sweden 2025. Published in April 2014. 58 pages. ISBN 978-91-7563-135-6

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Qvist Eliassen, S., Ormstrup Vestergård, L., Rut Sigurjónsdóttir, H., Turunen, E. & Penje, O. (2020). Rural Housing Challenges in the Nordic Regions. Nordregio report 2020:7. 76 pages. Online: <http://pub.nordregio.org/rural-housing/>



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ESPON 2021

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The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

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