

**ESPON SCALES Seminar in Bern
(4 May 2012)**

Seminar Report

Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE)
ESPON Contact Point Switzerland and Liechtenstein

1 Background and Focus

1.1 Thematic Scope of the Seminar

The Swiss SCALES Seminar has covered a very broad thematic range: accessibility, innovation and economy. At an early conceptual stage of the SCALES project, it was necessary to combine two seminars. This resulted in a seminar with 3 instead of the usual 1-2 topics.

The 3 topics are very relevant for Switzerland and Liechtenstein and they are also important factors in the national debates on spatial development, especially in the context of transportation/infrastructural planning and regional development or regional policy.

The challenging question was how to combine these topics in order to achieve an added value or additional insights. At the same time, each topic had to be well integrated into the programme structure.

The fact that ESPON (both the 2006 and 2013 programmes) offers a lot of analyses and data on these topics was very helpful for putting together a sound and attractive seminar agenda.

The Guiding Questions of the seminar were:

- What are the linkages between accessibility, economic development and innovation?
- How will these factors influence Switzerland's spatial structure in the future?
- What are the related specific challenges for spatial policy development at different spatial scales?

The seminar's aims were twofold: firstly, as there had not been a Swiss ESPON event recently, it was a valuable opportunity to generally raise interest for ESPON. Secondly, the seminar should allow further conclusions regarding the SCALES project questions (see 2.2.).

1.2 Seminar Outline and Dissemination Strategy

The Seminar took place on Friday, May 4, 2012 in Bern, Switzerland, from 9.30am until 4pm. After a general welcome address and introduction by the Swiss Monitoring Committee Representative and the Swiss/Liechtenstein ESPON Contact Point (ECP), there were 3 thematic blocks. Each one of these blocks was devoted to one of the main topics.

There were 3 presentations per thematic block. Generally, the intention was to start each block with insights and new results from ongoing ESPON projects. These presentations had – by nature – a predominantly “European perspective”. But the speakers were asked to highlight the Swiss situation as well.

In order to generate (or even provoke) a thematically overarching discussion, some of the 3 presentations per block had the implicit or in some cases even explicit task to combine or at least make references to the other main topics of the Seminar.

Last but not least, it was intended to have a good mix of European, National and regional perspectives. The European perspective was, as mentioned above, covered by the ESPON-presentations, the national perspective was highlighted e.g. by the presentation on accessibility in Switzerland from a national (planning) perspective, or the presentation of latest results from a national monitoring of regional economic development in Switzerland or with a presentation on spatial strategies and perspectives of Liechtenstein. The regional level was also present e.g. in the regional economic overview of the Swiss Capital City Region.

A special role was foreseen for the ECPs involved in the SCALES project. At the end of each block, before the discussion started, each ECP had the opportunity to present a short “spotlight” from his or her national perspective, based on ESPON results. The intention of this was to further underline the transnational character of the event, to show even more ESPON results and maps, to make the SCALES partners more visible and generally to stimulate the discussion.

There was enough room for questions and a plenary discussion after each block.

2 SCALES Approach

2.1 Main Dissemination Challenges

Like in the Luxembourg case, the rather small size of the country as well as the small-scale territorial structure (Switzerland has about 2500 municipalities on an area of roughly 41'000 km²!) as well as the transnational character of many Swiss cities and/or regions make it sometimes difficult to use the rather “coarse” ESPON results directly. There is also a political dimension: ESPON results have to deliver results and insights for European policies, potentially lessening the Swiss “interest” (as a non-EU-member) to a certain degree. So the main question is: how to bring to light the relevance of ESPON results for the national audiences? How can interest be raised? What kind of “translation” efforts have to be made in order to reach the target groups?

As elaborated under 1.1., the Swiss Seminar had a special structure compared to the other seminars: a wide range of topics (accessibility, innovation, economy). So the question was: does this variety help to tackle the challenges mentioned above – or not?

2.2 Methodology: Addressing the Scales Problematic (Co-Zi-Co)

The Co-Zi-Co approach proved to be a helpful tool during the conceptual phase of the seminar. Even some of the presentations followed this logic. This was mainly achieved by a detailed briefing of the speakers.

It became clear that the rather simple “zooming-in” approach has its limits. Especially when showing maps, this is usually raising more questions rather than giving answers. Maps showing ESPON results for a national audience should therefore – at least in the case of small or medium sized countries – not focus on the country itself, but should always show the larger regional context.

The “comparison” approach : Thanks to the seminar structure, a lot of “comparison” between Switzerland and other European territories was possible – on a national level, the Hungarian or the German examples (non-physical accessibility), on a more regional scale the Liechtenstein example. In order to deepen the comparison aspect, it would be necessary to identify regions with similar territorial assets or spatial structure like regions in Switzerland. This is not an easy task, because each region has a very individual profile. But in order to make comparisons which allow to draw substantial conclusions, this effort has to be made.

Completion: this last aspect has proved to be the most relevant and probably also the most successful. The mix between ESPON results and other national and regional data (sometimes within the same presentation) made it possible to exchange views on methodologies as well as on policy conclusions.

All in all, the seminar made clear that a multi-scale analysis is needed, which not only investigates the regional, national and international scale, but also the interrelationships between the different spatial scales. What consequences arise from economic globalization on the local and regional level?

3 Outcomes

3.1 Content Related Results

During the Seminar it became clear that, generally, the discussion on accessibility has already achieved a very „mature“ stage – there is a variety of results available, be it from scientific organizations, private consultants or the administration. And there exists at least to a certain extent a common understanding on drivers and impacts. The discussion focused rather on methodological questions.

Some central messages: the European accessibility pattern is quite stable and does not change a lot over time. But it makes a big difference whether we look at it at the European scale or from a national or regional perspective. Most investments are mainly beneficial for the core regions. The gap is widening. Switzerland is investing

in infrastructure but also profits from European investments into transportation networks. When comparing accessibility with economic performance, most regions in Switzerland seem to “overperform” (doing even better, economically, than their accessibility values would suggest), some regions even have a clear or strong overperformance. One study suggested that long term impacts of accessibility are much higher than short term impacts. Changing accessibility patterns over time due to large infrastructure projects (e.g. tunnels) were shown in another presentation. Interrelations between accessibility and population growth, differentiated by types of regions, were analyzed as well.

An Austrian perspective on accessibility was offered by the Austrian ECP, highlighting policy goals regarding national accessibility improvements and future infrastructure investments.

The block on innovation received a lot of attention. The final results from the ESPON KIT (Knowledge, Innovation, Territory) project were not yet available at that time, but expectations towards the upcoming final report were already high. There seemed to be a considerable interest from the audience to know more about innovation and its interrelation with territory. This block achieved several goals: on one hand, it showed that ESPON itself is “innovative”, by delivering results for rather new and not so well known thematic aspects of territorial development. On the other hand, the block offered many inspiring linkages with the accessibility and economy blocks.

The KIT project departs from the idea that the linkages between R & D activities, innovation and economic growth are strongly mediated by local territorial assets. First results suggest that there is a high number of regions in Europe where the knowledge economy is still in its infancy. On an innovation “scale”, focusing on regional assets (structure of the economy, employment in R & D sector etc.), most Swiss regions rank very high, as well as many regions in Southern Germany and Austria. As far as European innovation policies are concerned, there is a need for regionally and thematically tailor-made interventions. An innovative aspect presented in this block did combine economy and accessibility by introducing the concept of “non-physical accessibility”. This is a very important aspect in the context of the growing knowledge economy. Besides physical transportation networks, there are also “non-physical” communication networks and relations between companies that are shaping today’s functional regions and global networks. Starting from a conceptual background that brings together the locational behavior of multi-branch, multi-location firms with a value chain approach, the study looked at the extent to which the functional urban hierarchy in Germany is associated with the networking activities of advanced producer services and high-tech firms. The study provides evidence that the functional urban hierarchy in the German space economy is steeper than is claimed by the federal government. A non-nested hierarchy with overlapping and trans-scalar urban networks increasingly challenges the traditional view of a nested hierarchy as an organizing principle of space. A more regional perspective was offered by the example of Liechtenstein. Being situated away from large city regions, Liechtenstein has always been dependent on innovation in order to move forward. The challenge was met with a range of successful strategies, e.g. the planning across borders and investments in R& D. Liechtenstein is well-integrated into a wide range of networks. A German view on innovation was offered by the German ECP, combining Eurostat

and ESPON data to provide a spatial picture of R&D spending, patents per 1000 inhabitants and the pattern of technologically advanced, science based areas.

Economy was the most “open” block, with an immense range of potential subtopics, and it comes as no surprise that ESPON offers a wealth of information in this field. The challenge was therefore to filter and select the information. To a large degree thanks to the input from ECP Hungary, this complex task could be solved: in the first presentation of this block, ESPON results mainly on economy, but also on innovation and accessibility, were presented from a national (Hungarian) perspective. It became clear how well ESPON results can be used to show relevant economic facts and their linkages with territory for a specific country. A recent national synthesis report (Position and future of Hungary in Europe) served as a good basis.

The example of Hungary made evident one of the big territorial challenges of Eastern Europe: the strong polarization, with dominant capital regions. Studies suggest that future development might even worsen the situation. Some regions are literally “left behind”. ESPON is not always offering data fine enough to show this, but the approaches and methodologies used in ESPON projects help a lot to discuss general tendencies (in Europe and / or in comparable countries or regions) nationally. A national monitoring of the economic development of Swiss regions was presented as well. The monitoring has economy in its focus, but as it has to produce policy relevant information for Swiss regional policy actors, it is also very “territorial” in its approach. GDP and employment over the last 15 years show a growing gap between urban and rural regions. On the other hand, regarding gross value added, there seems to be a “catching up” underway. The regional perspective in this last block was focusing on the Swiss Capital City Region (Bern). From an economic point of view, the Swiss capital region (which is not the largest city in Switzerland – Zurich is much larger, Bern ranks 5th) has a mixed profile. Strengths like “presence of national and international organizations” or a well-educated population are contrasted by an image of a “non-innovative administration-dominated” region. The truth lies somewhere in between. The fact that administrative work has become increasingly complex, demanding specialized knowledge and therefore creates many attractive opportunities for private firms, has to be taken into account. The future might be rather colorful than grey.

The final presentation of the day was given by ECP Luxembourg, on how ESPON results can help fuel the national debate on cross-border cooperation.

All the presentations can be found online: www.espon.ch.

3.2 Dissemination Related Results

ESPON projects and results (and reports) are generally quite complex and cannot be interpreted without a certain basic knowledge of the methodologies, indicators, typologies behind. In other words: they must be translated in order to be understood. As there are different user demands (and scales!), there is not just one “correct” translation. One audience will prefer a deepened debate about methodologies, others

will focus on linkages with policies and causal relations, still others are mainly interested in typologies or comparisons between similar regions. Combining these aspects will be difficult, but necessary.

The Bern seminar was quite successful regarding the added value for the participants. 40 Percent of the respondents did not work with ESPON but are intending to do so after the seminar.

When compared with earlier ESPON events in Switzerland, it was remarkable that the discussion did not touch the subject of the plausibility (and relevance) of ESPON results for Switzerland.

The variety of the audience (administration, science, private companies) underlined that there is a broad and probably even increased interest in scientific and politically relevant information on European territorial development. It remains open how exactly and to what extent ESPON results are used in the daily work of the participants.

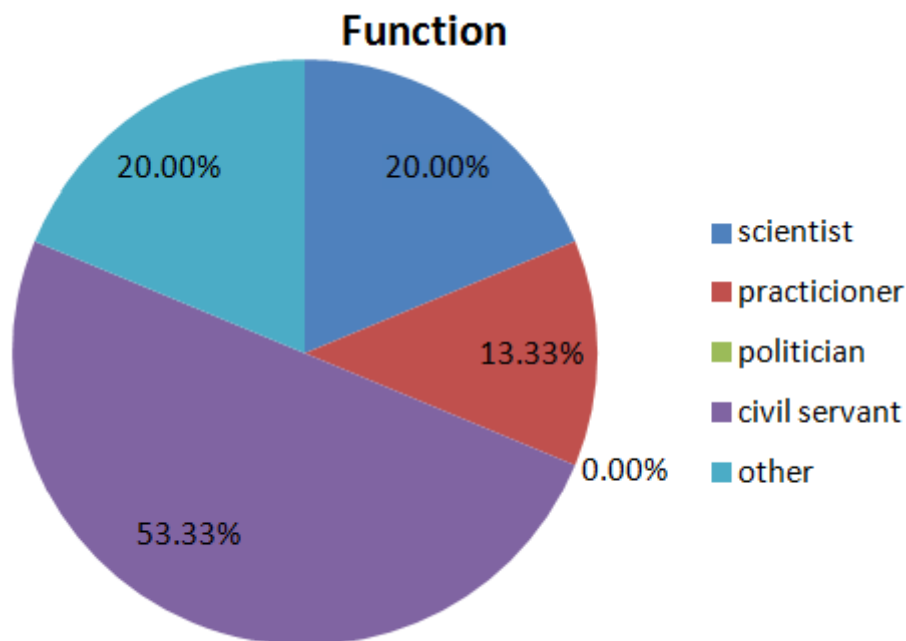
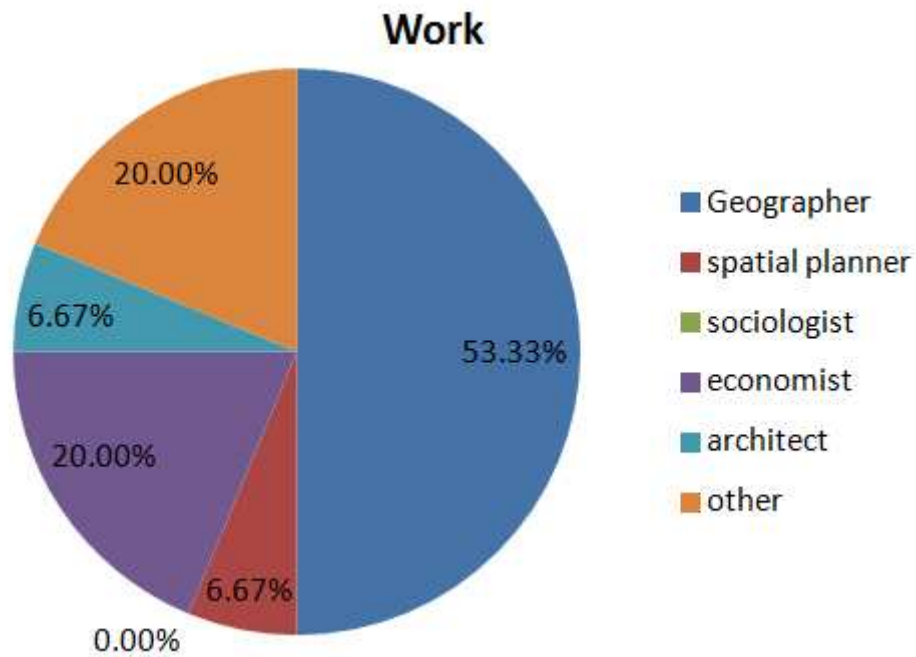
All in all, there is no doubt that ESPON results are in demand. ESPON analyses have a great potential to deliver substantial information useful for regional as well as national research and administrations.

3.3 Seminar Participants and Feedback

The participation was good, as expected based on the experience with similar conferences, there were around 40 people taking part. Roughly 3 out of 4 came from Switzerland, but it must be said that most participants from abroad were SCALES colleagues. The "surprising" factor was the diversity of the audience. Civil servants (53%) and scientists (20%) were the largest groups.

The following analysis is based on 15 questionnaires received after the seminar. As in each seminar, the SCALES members did not fill out the questionnaire.

The graphics below show the working backgrounds and functions of the participants:

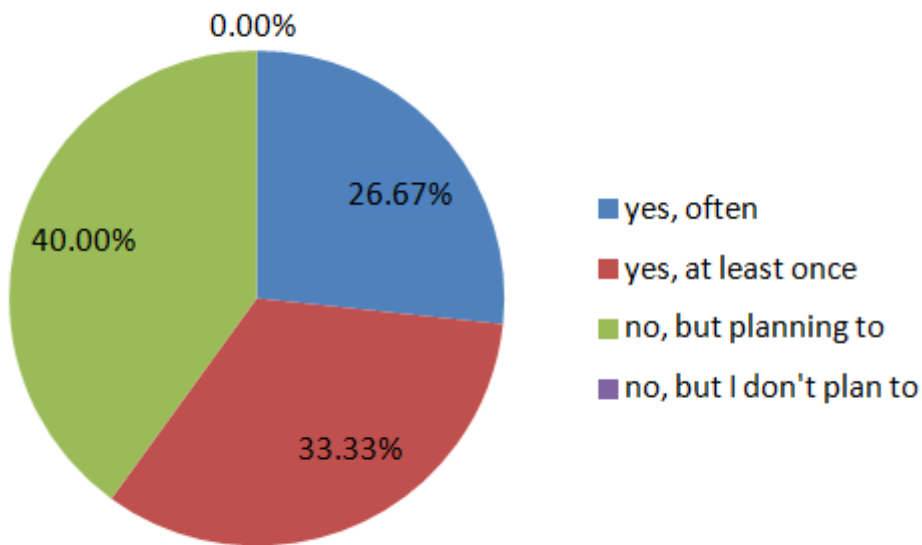


Interestingly, the majority (80%) considers the region as their main geographical level of interest. But also the national and European levels are important in the daily work of the participants.

Two thirds of the participants did already know ESPON before.

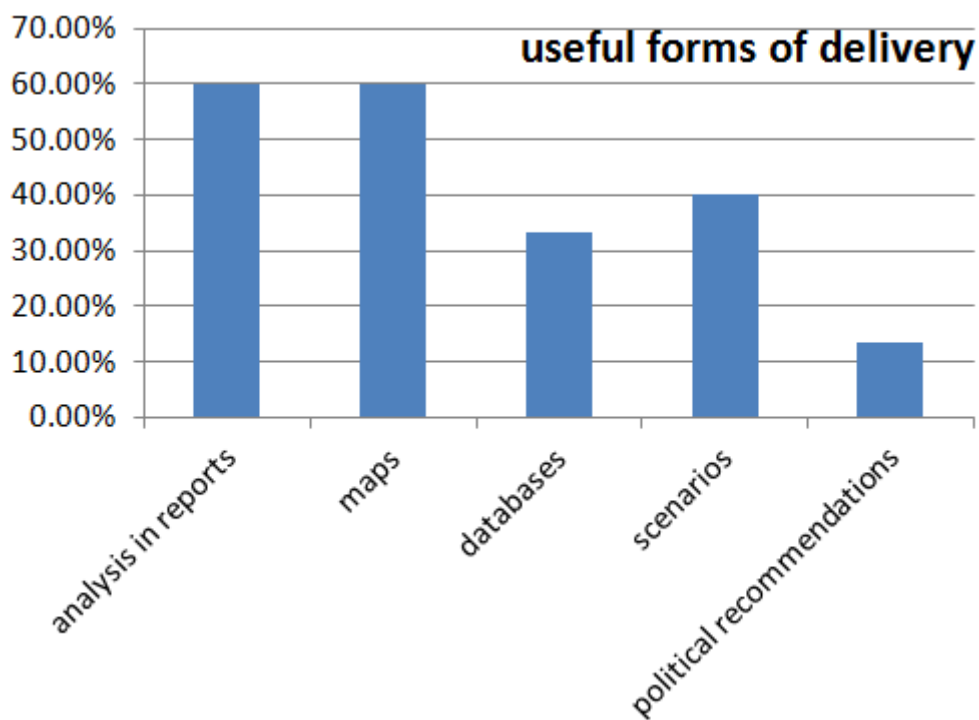
The following graphic shows how the participants use ESPON results at work:

Working with ESPON results

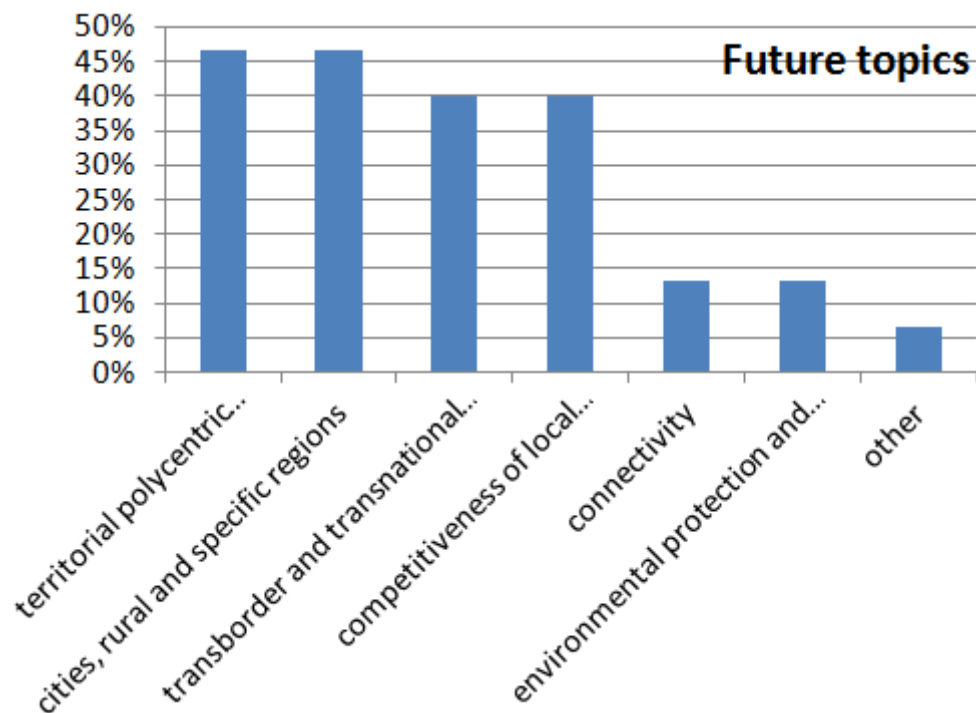


The question on the most useful form of presenting ESPON results showed two clear winners: publications and seminars (like the one presented here). To a lesser degree, also newsletters are seen as important – but not workshops!

The participants' views on the useful form of delivery is shown below – analytical reports and maps dominate, political recommendations are considered less useful:



The participants also stated their views on the relevance of future topics:



The overall feedback received both internally and from external participants after the seminar was very positive. The reactions from the audience showed a great interest to learn more about ESPON and its results and a great willingness to discuss.

4 Lessons learnt

4.1 Lessons Learnt for ESPON

ESPON results are considered valuable and they can complement or even enrich the national knowledge.

ESPON projects in the future should try to carve out the national and regional importance (or lessons) stronger in future. This would complement the European focus and might in many cases lead to more solid and plausible results. It would also provide an added value for the ESPON projects.

In order to fully understand ESPON results and to make them useful for the national spatial development context, knowledge about causalities is crucial. Since ESPON usually uses highly aggregated data, this kind of knowledge is difficult to obtain. Case studies and Priority 2 projects are valuable sources for this kind of knowledge and should be further strengthened.

It was suggested to integrate more actor-based analyses in ESPON projects. This would help to better anticipate how to implement, or deal with, the empirically identified potentials within a region or at the national level.

Innovation in the territorial context is considered very important and ESPON could deliver highly relevant new insights. The work started with KIT should therefore be continued and deepened.

ESPON basically delivers either project-specific reports or highly synthetic reports. It might make sense to create intermediated publications e.g. by "grouping" thematically related topics. The territorial observations are going into this direction. This thematic grouping would allow to make linkages and it would also help to address specific target audiences.

4.2 Lessons Learnt for National Dissemination

The bundling of (3) topics was despite some initial concern a success story and helped to attract a broad and diverse audience. At the same time, it is difficult to say to what extent this constellation also "deflected" or confused some potential participants. It was a lively and colorful event, offering a lot of new and innovative information, and there is no doubt the main aims as described under 1.1 were reached.

For future events, under the guidance of the national ECP (= not embedded in a transnational activity), it would probably make sense to integrate only 2 (not 3) topics. This would allow to focus more on the Swiss specific situation, policies etc.. Presenting international experiences e.g. by other ECPs, is a big plus.

European maps are impressive, but for small or medium sized countries it might be better to use specific "excerpts", maps that show the country but also a considerable "buffer" outside the national boundaries. These maps would be more suited to enrich and fuel the national debate. They would have to be produced by the national ECP.

The analysis of the feedback questionnaire showed a high *regional* interest. Breaking down and synthesizing ESPON results for (different types of) regions by characterizing them, or by developing Typologies etc. seems to be a top priority for ESPON users.

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