

Factsheet Lithuania | Spin-off

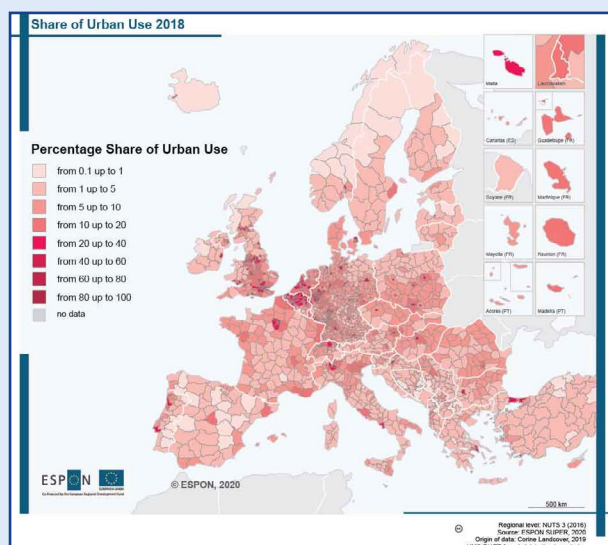
Scope and aim of the study

The ESPON SUPER project ([Sustainable Urbanisation and Land-use Practices in European Regions](#)) project provides recommendations on how sustainable land use can be promoted and unsustainable urbanisation can be avoided, reduced and/or compensated in Europe. This SUPER spin-off study was conducted at the request of the Ministry of Environment of Lithuania, for supporting the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of the Republic of Lithuania (CPRL). The spin-off addresses the following questions:

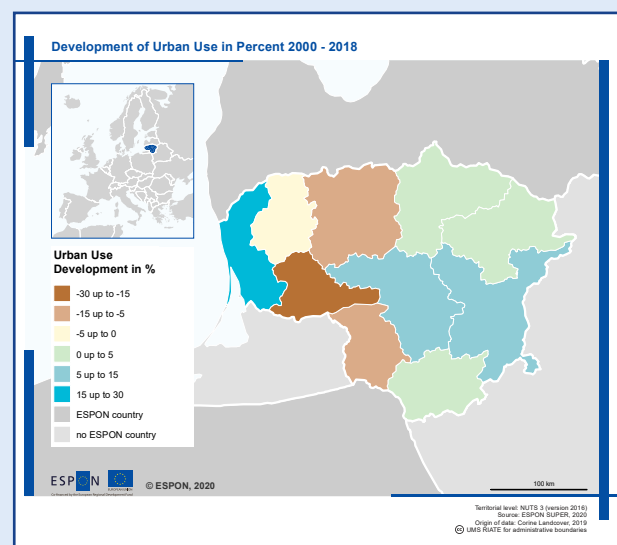
- What does land-use in Lithuania look like?
- What successful instruments can contain urban sprawl and how?
- What specific insights from the SUPER project can inform and support the CPRL's implementation?

Urbanisation and land-use in Lithuania

Lithuania is one of the least urbanised countries in Europe. All Lithuanian counties feature than 5% urban use except the Kaunas County, which is still under 10%. However, urbanisation process of the last two decades has been intense and often contradictory, and no linear relation seem to exists between demographic trends and urbanization. Various counties continue to urbanize as their population decreases. At the same time, the morphological structure of urbanisation is changing. The main urbanisation structure and substructure shows a gradual shift from a rather compact model towards more diffuse urbanization. In this concern, the main structure of most counties is compact-monocentric (5 out of 10) or compact-linear (2 out of 10); only 3 counties were classified as polycentric. Since 2000, the urbanization of 7 out of 10 counties was characterized by 'contiguous near centre' development. This is less so for the remaining 3 counties described as 'contiguous at distance', which indicates some spreading out. However, not all parts of the country are characterised by similar urban development patterns and trends. Despite urbanisation changes, land use development trends show also that there has been a net change from agricultural to natural land of about 12,500 ha over the 2000-2018 period, which corresponds approximately to 0.2% of Lithuania's total surface area.



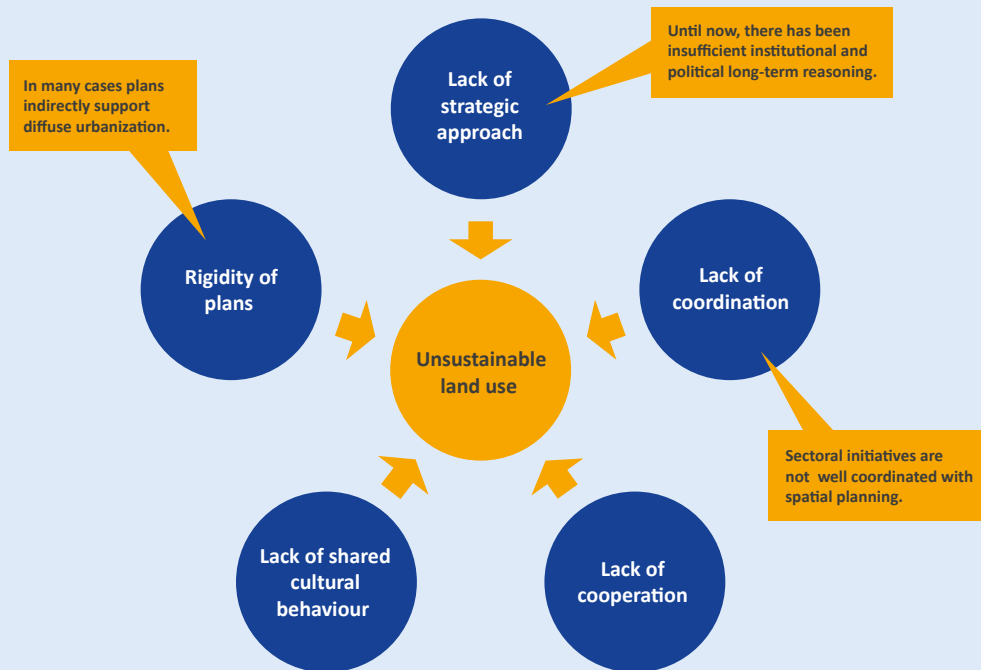
Share of urban use in Europe, 2018



Long-term development of urban use in Lithuania, 2000-2018

Main challenges

Sustainable land use is central to the CPRL's vision for 2050, this showing an increasing momentum and political will towards this end. However, a number of territorial, institutional and cultural features could hamper the capacity of the CPRL to achieve its ambitions:



Unsustainable land use drivers in Lithuania

Policy recommendations and warnings

Decisionmakers and policymakers (at national and local level) play a key role in addressing territorial development. At this scope, they should:

Decisionmakers

- **Undertake clear, future-oriented objectives.** Goal-oriented and measurable objectives should be set to address sustainable land use.
- **Contextualize objectives and policies.** Different territories have different problems and opportunities and successful initiatives in one territory may fail elsewhere.
- **Create conditions for place-based political cooperation.** Smaller cities can benefit from coordination and cooperation mechanisms such as shared development strategies and programmes.
- **be open for to and supportive of public participation.** Effective and true public participation can trigger synergies between different types of knowledge and actors and aid the development of objectives and actions coherent with the public interest and territorial specificities.

Policymakers

- **Interventions may have side effects.** Policy initiatives sometimes cause undesirable effects on urbanization. Territorial impact assessments (TIA) can be carried out to predict potential effects
- **Incentives and disincentives can impact sustainable urbanisation.** For instance, brownfield regeneration can be supported by discouraging greenfield development (e.g. imposing development fees)
- **Monitoring and assessment are crucial for reflexive policymaking.** Establishing measurable and realistic targets makes it easier to monitor performance on sustainable urbanisation indicators.
- **No single spatial planning instrument is sufficient.** Plans are incapable of reducing land consumption on their own: they must be supported by additional measures for implementation.
- **Institutional capacity matters.** The CPRL would benefit from the mobilization and empowerment of civil servants and experts within the institutions relevant to its implementation.