

UPTAKE ARTICLE

ESPON Peer Learning Workshop: Sustainable urbanisation strategies

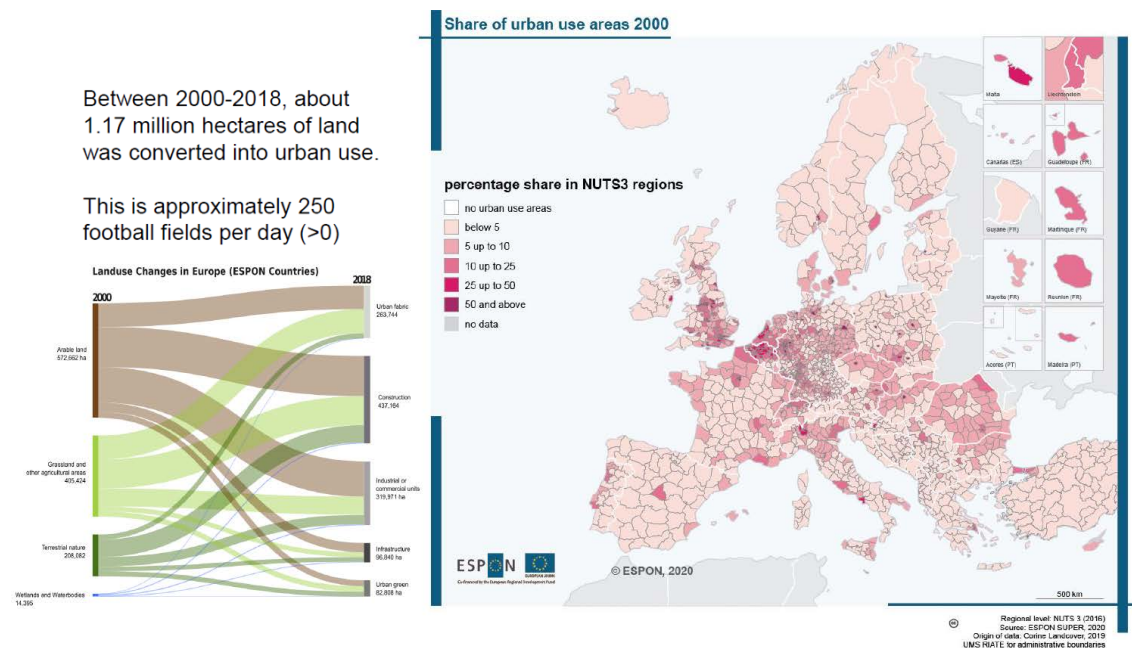
Virtual

20 May 2021, 9.30-12.30 (CEST)



The ESPON Peer Learning Workshop on sustainable urbanisation strategies gave insights into the results of the ESPON project “Sustainable Urbanization and Land-use Practices in European Regions” (SUPER), which analysed land-use change in Europe since the year 2000 and gave an overview of different interventions and their impacts on urbanisation.

According to the SUPER project, land-use change between nature and agriculture was roughly equal in the period of 2000-2018. However, land-use change to urban use occurs mainly in one direction. The goal of the EU is to have no land-take (i.e. no land-use change to urban use) by 2050. The SUPER project proposed three scenarios for 2050 for how urbanisation can occur: diffuse, polycentric, and compact. The results can be used to evaluate the sustainability of different forms of urban development.



Land use changes in Europe and share of urban areas. Source: David Evers/SUPER.

Pitches from the Netherlands and Italy followed the project introduction. Participants obtained insights into Dutch urbanisation strategies, which have four steps for developing urban areas and also emphasise cooperation on a regional level. One of the most astonishing projects was in Utrecht where the plan is to develop a compact area for 10,000 homes without space for parking cars. The Italian pitch introduced institutional cooperation on land use and how to manage competition between municipalities.

The most crucial part of the Peer Learning Workshop included the exchange of ideas and experiences. The group discussion allowed participants – practitioners, planners, researchers, and policymakers – to share their stories about interventions and outcomes in their countries. Participants found common ground on many different aspects, e.g. how to manage the land use on a regional scale and in cross-border areas, because urbanisation does not stop at the border. The discussions also revealed that in other countries, such as in Croatia, Romania, Italy, Poland, and Estonia, urbanisation is not tightly controlled. In this sense, the Dutch practice was seen as inspiring for a wide range of topics starting from land-use planning principles, legislation, and strategic regional approaches.

There are three main takeaways from the plenary discussion that can be drawn from the Dutch interventions targeting urbanisation. First, the legal framework is of key importance for providing tools to tackle urbanisation. An example from Romania showed that retroactive legalisation of illegally built housing decreases the effectiveness of land-use policies. Secondly, zoning that grants temporary rather than permanent building rights can help tackle oversupply of land zoned for urban use. Participants from mainly Southern and Eastern European countries reported that once the landowner has purchased the land and received development rights,

it is almost impossible to reverse or stop the process without compensation. While a legal framework is of key importance, temporary building rights could increase the flexibility of land-use policies. The third takeaway regards increased demand for suburban and rural housing. Before the pandemic, several plans were made for a compact city structure but signals increasingly show that people would prefer to live in more spacious places. This will have an impact on sustainability as compact development is about 30-40 % more energy efficient than dispersed settlement structures. Housing demand and supply are, however, different in each country and thus require a different policy focus. The discussion also revealed the importance of context – housing preferences depend on culture, age, or unexpected occasions like a pandemic.



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