



On behalf of the European Commission, DG Regional Policy  
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**Study on “territorial cohesion, lessons learned from the ESPON  
programme projects and strategy for the future**

**Appendix C – Case Study on ESPON  
Transnational Project Groups**

June 2006

This document is based on the following information sources:

- primary information:
  - the ECP-questionnaires
  - the expert panel
  - Telephone interviews with 5 lead partners of transnational project groups.<sup>1</sup>
  - Interviews with ECPs
- Secondary information:
  - ESPON website
  - the Survey
  - The Delphi-questionnaires,

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<sup>1</sup> The results of the TPG lead partner interviews will be treated in a confidential manner, which means that we will neither indicate the respondents name or organisation

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## 1. Introduction

Telephone interviews with five lead partners of ESPON TPGs were made for this case study. The interviewed lead partners were chosen applying following criteria: the different rounds of projects, finished and ongoing projects, geographical situation of the lead partners, size of the project group, experienced and non-experienced institutes regarding the ESPON-programme.

Transnational project groups (TPGs) have to comply with the following criteria according to the ESPON 2006 Programme.

- The transnational project groups are the research groups doing the actual ESPON study projects. They should include spatial research institutes from at least three Members States. The transnational project groups are formed in a self-organising way. The formation of TPG should be facilitated by the ESPON contact points.
- Each transnational project group should employ the Lead Partner Principle where one partner undertakes the financial liability for the whole project and involved partners. The Lead Partner could be a research institute or an ESPON Contact Point.
- The transnational project groups have to involve one ESPON Contact Point, preferably from the Lead Partner country, as a project partner in order to secure constant involvement in the ESPON network. In projects under priority 3 (Co-ordinating cross-thematic projects) the transnational project group should be composed of research institutes from at least six Member States and three ESPON Contact Points need to be partners.
- The task of the involved ESPON Contact Point is to secure the networking and the exchange of opinions with other projects and the Co-ordination Unit.
- Transnational project groups are obliged to stick to the topics outlined in the annual work programme and the project defined in the contract. The transnational project groups should meet in relation to their ongoing research tasks and when they require it.

## 2. TPGs and countries

### 2.1 Partners per country

In the table below the number of institutes involved per country are listed. All the lead partners, project partners, associated partners and subcontractors are counted. Institutes that worked on more than one ESPON project are counted more than once. This gives an image of how many times a country was involved in the ESPON programme.

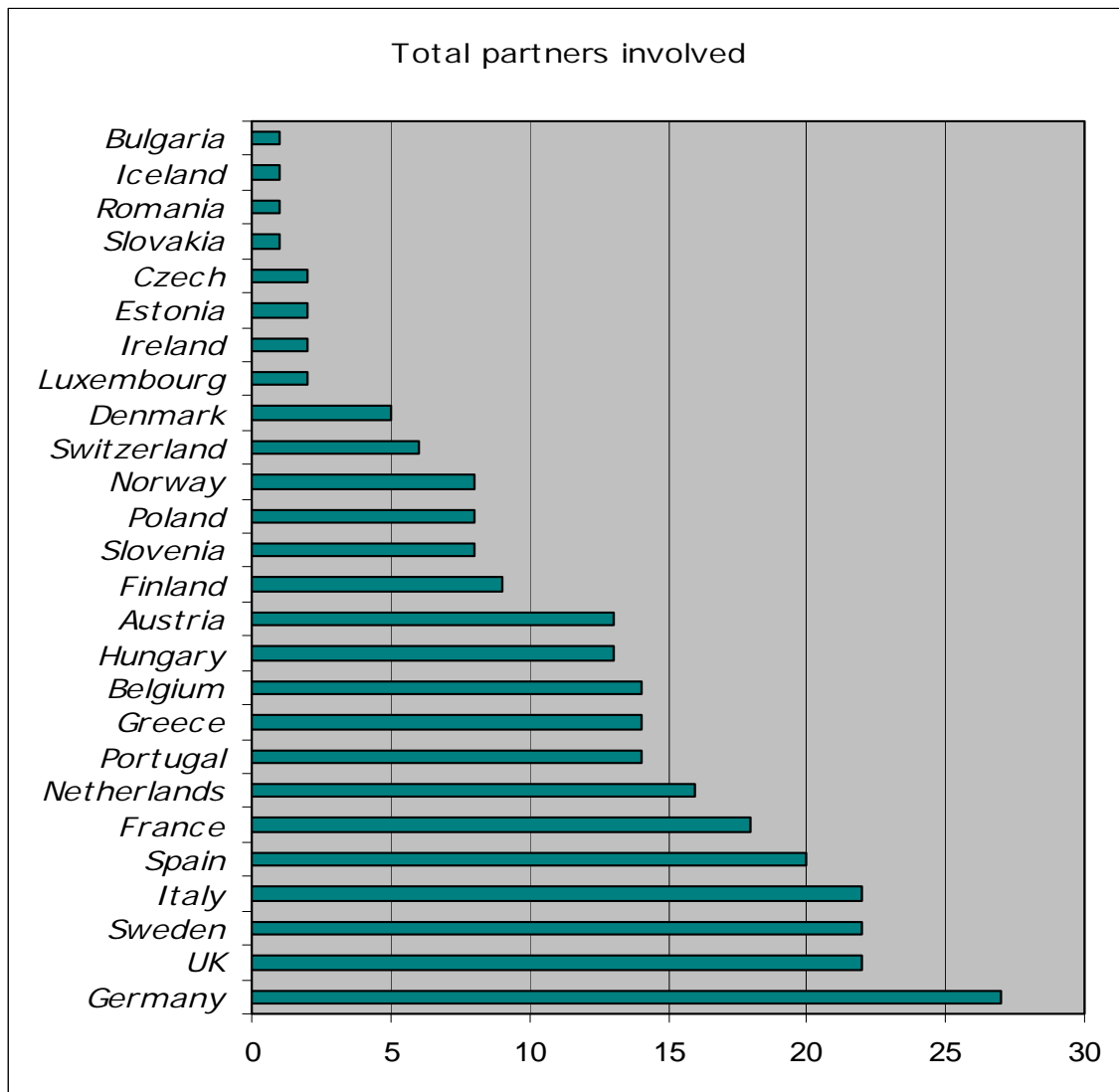


Table C1 Partners involved per country; data source: provided by the ESPON CU

It appears that there is a slight dominance of North-West-European institutes in the TPGs although Italy and Spain also have a strong rate of participation. Germany is the country that is the most involved in the TPGs.

Based on the graph it can be deduced that the new member states and accession countries are underrepresented in the TPGs. In total there were 271 institutes involved, whereas 36 of them originate from new member states or accession countries (=13.28%) This conclusion has to be put in perspective in regard to the date of accession to the EU

(May 2004). These countries were not yet member of the ESPON programme when some projects began.

In the rounds of projects five and six, which were started after May 2004, a total of 76 institutes are involved. (Study projects 1.3.3; 2.1.5; 2.3.1; 2.3.2; 2.4.2; 3.3; 3.4.1). From those 76 institutes, 12 of them come from new member states or accession countries. In percentage this means that those countries represent 15.79%. This is a slight improvement in regard to the percentage of the whole programme that is 13.28%. The picture seems to stay the same: institutes originating from new member states and accession countries are underrepresented in the ESPON programme. There are also some indications that institutes from these countries are attributed small tasks in the project and thus receive a small amount of the allocated budget.

## 2.2 Budget repartition per country

In the table below an indicative budget repartition per zone (northern Europe, southern Europe and new Member States) in the ESPON-programme is listed. It has been made on the basis of projects financial breakdown per lead/project partners as indicated in the proposals and/or signed subsidy contracts. No information on the subcontractors is provided, as subcontracts are counted in the budget of the partner (usually the Lead Partner) incurring the costs.

Countries	Budget repartition	Population
<b>Northern Europe</b> (Germany, Sweden, UK, Netherlands, Finland, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Ireland, Luxembourg, Belgium)	8.792.817,90 €	207.240.345
<b>Southern Europe</b> (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland)	3.680.290,64 €	189.409.864
<b>New Member States</b> (Lithuania, Slovakia, Latvia, Malta, Cyprus, Estonia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary)	568.270,00 €	80.774.794

Table C2: Budget repartition per zone

This division is an arbitrary and provisional one. From table C2 it can be deducted that most of the budget goes to institutes based in northern Europe. Institutes originating from southern Europe have received substantially less budget. It seems clear that the New Member States have received a small part of the budget, around 4,3% of the total budget.

## 2.2 Lead partners per country

On the map below the number of lead partners in ESPON TPGs is indicated through the number and colour shading. This enables an overview of the spread inside the European Union.

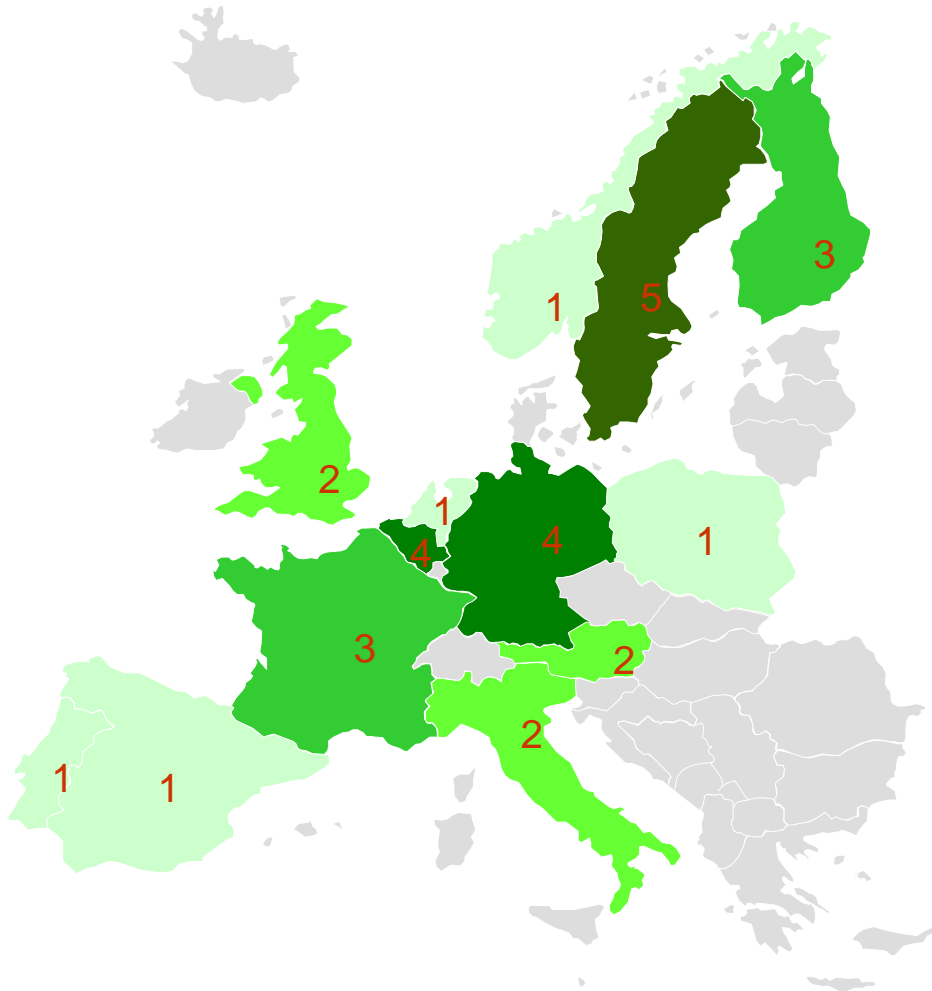


Figure C1 Lead partners per country;  
Data source: provided by the ESPON CU

Out of this map a tendency of the lead partners coming mostly out of North-West Europe can be seen. Sweden is at the head of the group with five lead-partners in the ESPON study projects. Belgium and Germany have both four institutes that were lead partners. Portugal and Spain have one lead partner and Italy two in the ESPON programme but in general the southern countries appear to be underrepresented.

The new member states and accession countries have a lack of lead partners in the ESPON study projects. Only Poland has one institute that is lead partner in the ongoing study project 1.2.3 Information society.

### 2.3 Conclusions

In global there seems to be a dominance of institutes from North-West-Europe involved and leading ESPON study projects. This dominance was greater in the beginning stages of the current ESPON programme, as stated in the Mid-term evaluation of the ESPON 2006 Programme and in the update of this evaluation. However, the southern countries are gaining ground in the composition of the TPG's. In the actual leading of the ESPON study projects the southern countries are still underrepresented.

The new member states and the accession countries are greatly underrepresented in the TPGs. Although there is less experience in the new member states in participating in ESPON study projects, institutes from these countries should be encouraged to participate in the ESPON programme. This could also be an excellent incentive to develop a strong scientific community on spatial development in these countries.

A possible remedy to involve more countries from accession countries and new member states in TPGs, is defining a quota. A simple quota on how many institutes from these countries should be involved is not an effective measure. This could lead to even more minor tasks attributed to these institutes. A proportionate percentage of the total project budget that should go to new member states or accession countries seems to be more effective. As the income level in these countries is lower than the income level in the EU15, the percentage should be calculated annually on basis of the differences in income level. The task division in a TPG should then be a reflection of the budget allocation. The same measure could be implemented to raise the contribution to TPGs of southern European states in the ESPON-programme. However, the implementation of a proportionate-percentage-method could prove to be difficult. The calculation of the percentage is a complex and delicate task that should be fulfilled every year.

Another possible way of implementing a quota in order to distribute the TPG members more evenly throughout Europe is dividing the ESPON-map in several zones as is done for example in the INTERREG III C programme. This method is less complex and delicate than the proportionate-percentage-method. In the current ESPON-programme Transnational project groups should consist of at least three members from different countries. In an ESPON II programme, Europe could be divided into three or possibly more zones. Transnational project groups should then have at least one full project partner, so not only responsible for data gathering, in each zone. In table C3 a proposition is made for the division of Europe in three zones although the division could as easily be made into four zones. For this proposition the following factors have been considered: adjudication in the current programme, population and developed competences. Moreover, the division in zones is based on the discrepancy of the budget repartition described in paragraph 2.2 and the arbitrary division made. For this zoning possible new countries that can be included in an ESPON II programme (Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Turkey and Iceland) are taken into account.



Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3
Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Iceland, Norway, Belgium	Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Malta, Spain, Switzerland	Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Turkey

Table C3: Potential zones for adjudication of studies

However, defining a quota per countries or per zones proves to be a difficult exercise. As a future ESPON II programme should try to achieve the highest scientific quality of the reports and studies, defining quota's is not desirable as restrictions could hamper the quality of the ESPON products and results. Although, it should be kept in mind that the participation of institutes from all over the ESPON space in study projects will lead to an evenly distributed capacity building throughout the ESPON space. Capacities will increase in regard to financial situation, knowledge building and experience. This capacity building should be a main objective for an ESPON II programme.

Achieving a greater geographical distribution of lead partners should only be a long term objective. ESPON is not a programme that seeks to improve capacities of institutes but is mainly aimed at doing European studies on spatial development. Introducing in an ESPON II programme a quota on institutes leading TPGs is not in the best interest of the programme. First of all it goes against the regulations of public procurement. Secondly, it could have a negative effect on the quality of the study projects. The lead partner has a great influence on the quality assurance inside a TPG and thus only institutes fit to this task should be lead-partner. A greater geographical distribution of lead partners is should thus be a long-term objective, maybe even for a possible ESPON III programme. This long term objective can be achieved through the capacity building, described above.

**Any approach for an equal distribution of project partners and leaders within an ESPON II-programme should always bear in mind that the main objective is the selection a highly qualitative transnational project group.**

### 3. Typology of TPG

#### 3.1 Present ESPON-programme

In the TPGs that collaborated in the ESPON programme there are three kinds of institutes involved: universities, research institutes and consultancies. Universities make out the bulk of the institutes involved in the TPGs with 52%, closely followed by research institutes with a representation of 42%. The percentage of consultancies in the ESPON study projects is only 6%.

The number of institutes involved in each study project is listed in the first table below. The data source for these tables was provided by the ESPON CU.

Project Number	Number institutes in TPG
1.1.1	15
1.1.2	14
1.1.3	13
1.1.4	7
1.2.1	9
1.2.2	5
1.2.3	7
1.3.1	8
1.3.2	14
1.3.3	12
1.4.1	8
1.4.2	4
2.1.1	9
2.1.2	7
2.1.3	8

Table C4 Institutes involved per project

Project Number	Number institutes in TPG
2.1.4	6
2.1.5	8
2.2.1	9
2.2.2	7
2.2.3	9
2.3.1	10
2.3.2	17
2.4.1	6
2.4.2	10
3.1	8
3.2	9
3.3	8
3.4.1	11
3.4.2	8
3.4.3	5

The 'average TPG' has 9.03 institutes involved in the project.

In the following table the number of countries in every study project is given.

Project Number	Number countries in TPG
1.1.1	14
1.1.2	14
1.1.3	11
1.1.4	7
1.2.1	6
1.2.2	4
1.2.3	7
1.3.1	5
1.3.2	6
1.3.3	12
1.4.1	8
1.4.2	4
2.1.1	7
2.1.2	6
2.1.3	7

Project Number	Number countries in TPG
2.1.4	4
2.1.5	7
2.2.1	7
2.2.2	6
2.2.3	8
2.3.1	9
2.3.2	14
2.4.1	6
2.4.2	9
3.1	7
3.2	8
3.3	7
3.4.1	8
3.4.2	5
3.4.3	4

Table C5 Countries involved per project

The 'average TPG' does have 7.57 different countries represented in the study project.

In the 30 study projects there were in total 14 associated partners. These are partners that came into the TPG during the study project and have the status of full project partner. In total there are 176 project partners and 51 subcontractors. In percentages this gives the following distribution: associated partners 5.2%, project partners 64.9% and subcontractors 19.9%.

Concluding it can be stated that in the ESPON programme the average TPG was composed of 9 institutes originating from 7 different ESPON-countries. More than half of the institutes were universities, the rest were research institutes. Occasionally there was a consultancy involved in the TPG.

### 3.2 Opportunities in an ESPON II programme

In the interviews with the lead partners, a question was asked about their idea of an ideal TPG. Two out of five interviewees did plea for a low number of partners in a TPG. They suggested something around five project partners. Three out of five argued that bigger TPG's would be good for the ESPON-programme. They all raised the idea of having an institute involved in every country covered by the ESPON study. Not all the project members should be given the status of full project partner. Some institutes should only have the task of data gathering in their country of origin. This could have the advantage that they are well aware of the requirements of the study projects regarding to data issues. They could therefore be able to supply the full project partners with accurate and project-adapted data.

On the composition of a TPG the interviewees didn't have a clear or distinct opinion. The most cited was that it all should be qualitative and reputable institutions. All the interviewees did mention the different approach of consultancies to research institutes and universities. Two of the five interviewed lead partners did elaborate on this subject. Their opinion seemed to be that for the main 'scientific' body of the study consultancies have an approach that lies to far away from the universities and research institutes. In contrary, in regard to forging policy recommendations, they are better placed and have bigger experience than research institutes and universities, following the opinion of the interviewees.

Two out of five lead-partners made a point about trying to include institutes from new-members states and accession countries in ESPON study projects. They expressed their feelings that this could be a great incentive to build up a scientific spatial development community in these countries. In these countries this scientific network seems to be not that strong because they don't have a long tradition in this field.

## 4. Relation of TPG with the ESPON-bodies

### 4.1 ECP-network

In the interviews with several lead-partners of different TPG's it was asked how the collaboration with the ECP-network was perceived. The responses were very varied.

One of the main collaboration aspects between the TPGs and the ECPs is the facilitation of data gathering in the ECPs country of origin according to the ESPON 2006 Programme. According to the perception of the lead-partners that were interviewed, some members of the ECP-network provided excellent assistance in data-facilitation. Some ECPs seem to have been very helpful and proactive in getting data, in providing contact points for data gathering and even in a little, country specific, data-analysis. Apparently, some ECPs only provided contact-data for gathering the necessary data for the study projects. On the subject of data gathering, it seems that there are also some complaints. It appears that some ECPs provided almost no help in data-facilitation in their country. Two lead-partners even expressed their opinion that a few ECPs didn't even answer to questions and requests concerning the data-facilitation in their country of origin.

It was cited two times that it is difficult to make a good scientific study project with such a varied help in data-facilitation from the ECPs. It was apparently not only the data-availability that played a role in some study projects but also the quality of the provided data or data entry points. One interviewee cited the impression that the data-facilitation by some of the ECPs was not relevant for the study project. The ECPs did provide the data to the TPG but the kind of data they supplied was not fitted to data requirements of the study project. This was not because of 'bad-will' of the ECP but because of the impossibility of the ECP to know all the requirements and study specifics for every study project.

Two interviewees suggested that it seems to be helpful to build a consistent network for data-gathering in a possible ESPON II programme. This could be of help to the TPG's in the course of their data gathering. One suggested the possibility of standardising the ECP-network. It would be helpful that in every country the ECP's should more or less have the same resources to work with. This does not only implicate material resources but also human resources. This could possibly lead to a more homogenous data gathering in the entire ESPON-space. The other lead partner suggested that there could be given a thought on removing this task out of the obligations for the ECP-network. This task could be replaced by having a partner in every country covered by the ESPON study. Some partners could then collaborate to the actual study while some others would only provide data.

One roles of the ECP-network is aiding the lead-partners in building the TPG for the study projects according to the ESPON 2006 Programme. Four out of five interviewees stated that they didn't get help from the ECP-network in forging their TPG. This surely has to be put in perspective because three of those four didn't ask any help in order to forge their TPG. The one that did ask help only had a short contact with two ECPs asking them for possible partners. But when there came no immediate response, he took the matter into

his own hands and searched for partners himself. There was one lead-partner that seemed to be satisfied with the help of the ECP-network in forging the TPG.

The option of building a database with possible partners for every ESPON-country was suggested three times. This could be a helpful tool for the lead-partners and for the ECPs to get an overview of possible interested partners.

All the interviewees did agree that the principle of having at least one ECP in the TPG is helpful for both the actual study project and the whole ESPON-programme. It helps in getting into the ESPON-programme for non-habituéés because the ECP's have an excellent overview of the programme. For the ESPON programme it helps in providing the link between the ESPON programme and the project groups of the study projects.

There seem to have been four TPG's who didn't have an ECP involved in the study project (1.4.2; 2.1.2; 2.1.3; 2.2.3).

#### 4.2 Coordination Unit

All the lead partners that were interviewed did state that they had regular contact with the ESPON CU in Luxemburg both in formal and informal way. All the interviewees did seem to be satisfied with the quick and proactive responses of the CU to their questions and remarks. The opinions of the five interviewed partners should only be seen as a sample of the opinion of all the partners involved in the ESPON programme and conclusions should thus be drawn carefully.

Three out of the five interviewees expressed their opinion on the multiple requests from the CU during the study projects. It appears that the TPG's were asked to change or to alter the objectives of the study that were initially stated in the ToR or the contract. This apparently made the work for the TPG's much more difficult. Two project partners indicated that they had to speed up some parts of their study in order to reach the deadline for the Third Cohesion Report of the Commission. They both indicated that they had the feeling that the global quality of their study project seemed to have been negatively affected by this demand.

Related to this last point all the five lead-partners did ask for clear terms of references for the study projects. The objectives seem to be sometimes very hard or almost impossible to achieve especially within the foreseen budget. Some tasks that are demanded in the terms of reference appear to the lead partners to be hard to achieve, even with more funding. The adaptation of the objectives in the course of the study projects made it sometimes more difficult for the interviewed lead-partners to comply with initial contract and its objectives. The three lead-partners who encountered requests from the CU during the project phase specifically suggested that it could be helpful, in the point of view of the project partners, for a possible ESPON II-programme to avoid changes of the requirements and objectives asked of the TPG's in the contract.

## 5. TPG and Budget

### 5.1 Project budget

In the graph below the number of institutes involved in the TPG is correlated with the money awarded to the study project.

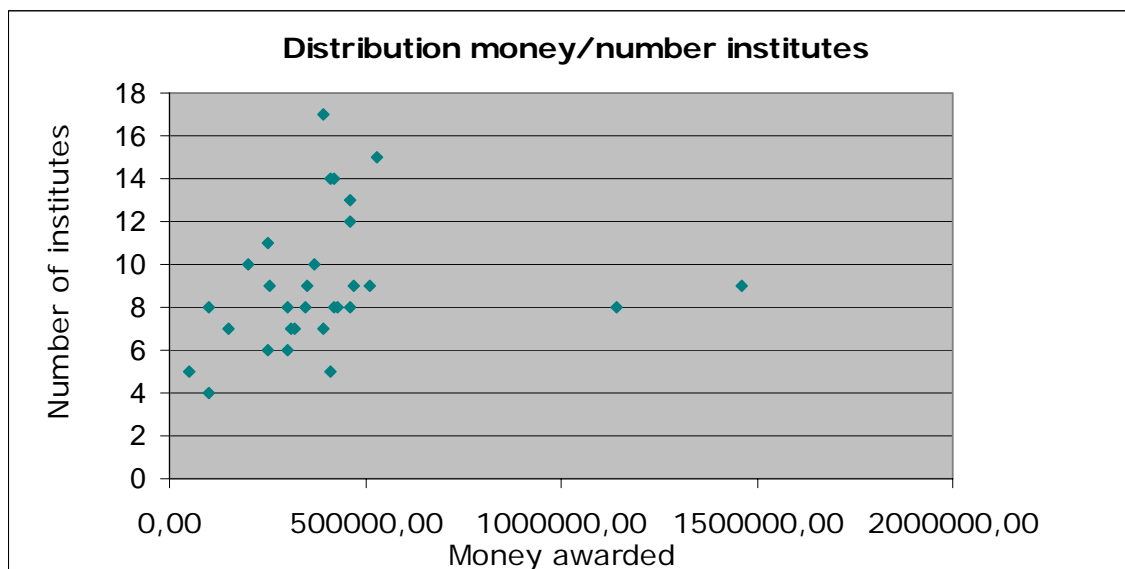


Figure C2 Money awarded per TPG in relation to number of institutes involved

The graph shows clearly that there is no linkage between the money awarded and the size of the TPG.

All of the five interviewees did mention that the budget for the ESPON study projects is in their opinion not corresponding with the workload demanded by the ToR and the contract. Four out of five mentioned that, from their personal point of view, they don't say this with the intention of getting more money for a project but because of the impression that exists that the discrepancy in the ESPON-programme between demands and awarded money is bigger than in other EU-related study or research projects. Although it has to be mentioned that the ESPON programme works under a different framework than most of the other European study and research programmes and projects.

Two lead-partners said that in total they put money into the study projects instead of making any profit or be break-even, only seen from the monetary point of view. Three out of five mentioned the impression that ESPON is kind of free riding on the back of the scientific spatial development community in Europe instead of helping to build a scientific community. One interviewee did say that other project partners, also outside his own TPG, expressed their opinions to him that they were slightly reluctant to collaborate again in a ESPON study project because of the very tight budget and their incapacity to spend some of their own resources into an ESPON project.

## 5.2 Subsidy contracts

In the interviews with the lead-partners it was asked for their experience and thoughts about the administration related to ESPON projects and about the contract.

All the lead-partners seemed to be unanimous in their judgement that the subsidy contract is an important drawback for the ESPON-programme.

Three interviewees did express their comments about the impossibility of keeping the overview of the spending and budget during the study project. The legal aspects of the subsidy contract make it very hard for the lead-partner to know how the budget evolves during a project.

One lead-partner seemed to be very harsh in his comments. He stated that there appears to be a discrepancy in the relation between the TPG and the ESPON-bodies. He had the impression that his TPG complied with the from the ESPON bodies demanded changes and adjustments while on the other hand the contract rules seemed to have been followed to the last dot.

## 6. Global thoughts of the interviewed lead-partners

During the interviews with the selected lead-partners we asked for their global thoughts and appreciation of working as lead-partner in the ESPON study projects. As stated earlier, the five interviews are only a sample of the opinions of all the ESPON partners and should thus be analysed with care.

One interviewee did not express an opinion on this matter. Two of the interviewees appear to have been satisfied with their collaboration in the ESPON programme. They both cited the fact that working on the ESPON study projects gave them new contacts and a network in the scientific community of spatial development in Europe. Looking back on the output of their project team they were happy with the results.

Two interviewees viewed their collaboration as being rather negative. One cited payment issues and administrative burden as the most negative aspect of working on ESPON projects. Beside that he felt that the changes in the work plan caused by extra demands from the ESPON-bodies appeared to have had a negative impact on the quality of their work.

The other interviewed lead-partner seemed not entirely satisfied with the scientific quality of the work he delivered. The reasons he mentioned were: the political context he had to work in; the extra demands of ESPON-bodies during the study project. The main reason appeared to be, according to the interviewee, the difficult tasks they had to fulfil. With the term difficult he meant the lack of data, the difficulty of getting data, the sometimes not entirely sufficient data-facilitation and the data that was gathered sometimes proved to be not completely useful for the study project.