



## **Workshop Report**

### **Use of ESPON by European Institutions and Commission Services**

**European Commission – DG Regional Policy  
CSM 2 - Auditorium  
6 May 2009**

#### **Context and purpose of the ESPON Workshop**

The ESPON 2013 Programme organised in cooperation with the European Commission DG Regional Policy a workshop to raise awareness of ESPON results and to support their use in policymaking at European level.

The workshop brought together 37 officials and policymakers in European Institutions and regions for discussing recent ESPON results on trends in accessibility, migration as well as spatial scenarios and the position of Europe in the world. About 70% of the registered participants work for European Institutions or Commission Services.

This Workshop Report provides a synthesis of the presentations and discussions during the workshop. It first provides a short overview of the implementation of ESPON up to now, then it describes some statements and examples on the ESPON evidence delivered and it finally concludes with some lessons for the further implementation of the ESPON 2013 Programme.

All presentations given during the ESPON Workshop on “Use of ESPON by European Institutions and Commission Services” as well as this Workshop Report are available at [www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu).

You can send eventual suggestions and comments in relation to the content of this report or the workshop to [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu).



## 1. ESPON on the move

*“ESPON is moving into the good direction of becoming a reliable source of crucial information on territorial development for stakeholders at all policy levels.”*

(Dirk Ahner, Director General of DG Regional Policy of the European Commission)

The workshop provided an overview of the major steps taken regarding the development and implementation of the ESPON 2013 Programme.

ESPON was created under the last Structural Funds period in order to set up a network of scientists and policymakers to support policymaking by providing evidence on territorial development across the European continent. The ESPON 2006 Programme became operational as from 2002 and resulted in altogether 34 successfully closed thematic, policy impact and coordinating cross-thematic projects and scientific network activities and projects, e.g. the creation of an ESPON Hyperatlas and a web-GIS, that support applied research activities. The projects launched under the ESPON Programme all follow an integrated approach and have a clear territorial dimension.

The ESPON 2013 Programme builds, with at its disposal a total budget of 47 million euro, further on the achievements made during the former period. Applied research on territorial development, competitiveness and cohesion (priority 1) and the creation of a scientific platform and scientific tools like data and indicators (priority 3) remain important components of the programme. In order to reinforce the use of ESPON results a new instrument “targeted analysis based on user demands” (priority 2) has been created and a stronger focus has been laid on the capitalisation and communication of results (priority 4).

In spite of some challenges in relation to the Structural Funds regulation the ESPON 2013 Programme is facing, the implementation of the programme seems now to speed up. By the beginning of 2010 it is envisaged to have 17 Applied Research Projects in motion, 9 Targeted Analysis underway, 10 new Stakeholder Ideas on the table and 2 (out of 3) major Scientific Platform projects will have been set up. Besides that many capitalisation actions will make ESPON visible and smaller research exercises will be undertaken.

## 2. ESPON delivers evidence for territorial development and cohesion policy

The workshop confirmed that the introduction of the territorial dimension can improve the design of policy at European, national and regional/local level. Policy advisors and stakeholders in the field of territorial cohesion and development and a growing number of policy advisors and stakeholders in territorial related fields have a strong desire to know and understand territorial developments. In order to be able to recognise the levers for policy intervention it is important to have a good understanding of the mechanisms “on the ground” (information below NUTS2 level) that are behind the overall European picture of territorial developments.

The workshop discussed some key results of the ESPON Programme. The discussion provided some indications up to what extent ESPON is meeting the expectations of officials and policymakers working within European Institutions and Commission Services:

## **2.1. ESPON becomes a reliable source of crucial information on territorial development**

The workshop illustrated that ESPON has become an important tool to support territorial development and cohesion policy. ESPON intends to deliver a wide variety of support. Besides the development of territorial indicators the programme puts much effort on creating a deeper understanding of territorial developments and trends.

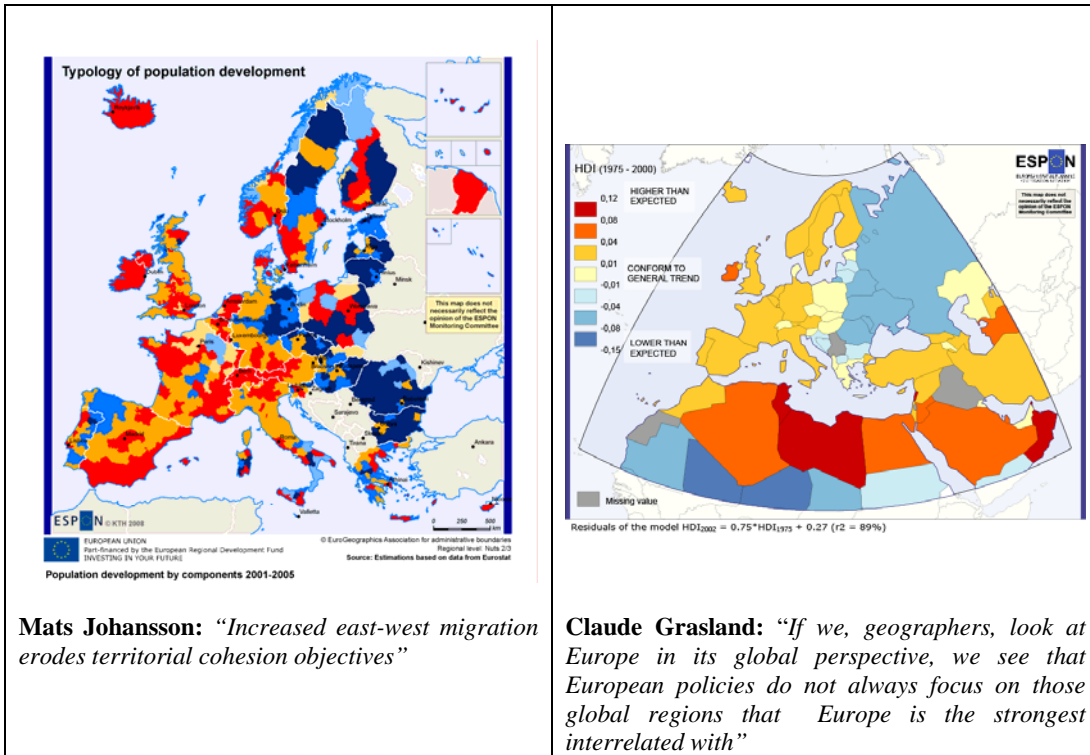
The workshop considered it positive that ESPON applies an open and transparent research process with a strong involvement of both the European Commission as well as Member and Partner States. This approach contributes to the creation of confidence in project results.

## **2.2. ESPON delivers important and novel European perspectives on territorial development that can be used for policy development at all levels**

The workshop discussion showed that ESPON is capable of delivering important and novel information on territorial development that can be used for policy development at European, national and regional/local level. The workshop mentioned the following reasons for this:

- The commitment of policy advisors from the European Commission and Member States in the formulation of the knowledge demands for ESPON applied research is regarded as an important basis for the creation of evidence that is useful for policymakers.
- The results of the ESPON Programme offer a wide variety of territorial information. The development of indicators is important, but the workshop appreciates that ESPON is also going further. ESPON provides thorough descriptive (and to a somewhat lesser extent explanative) analyses of territorial phenomena across the European continent. Also the scenario-building is considered interesting.
- The creative research attitude that was applied in many ESPON projects is much welcomed. Looking at information from different perspectives can create important and sometimes provocative eye-openers. This can be illustrated by the example given of looking at the development of accessibility of regions in relative and absolute terms. In the relative measurement new Member States gain a lot and the European core is doing not so well while looking at the absolute measurement the results are opposite.
- The ESPON results provide many examples of innovative results. Some examples of evidence that can support territorial policy development with a European perspective that were mentioned in the workshop presentations and discussions are:
  - Demographic trends and migratory flows, climate change and globalisation are posing challenges to regional development. The impact of these evolutions is for some regions stronger than for Europe as a whole and the challenges are most significant for already less favoured regions. Due to the fundamental character of these evolutions, it is almost impossible to change them. Policies therefore rather focus on adaptation to them.

- Investments in high speed rail and flight services have the capability to reshape the European continent in terms of accessibility and might hence be interesting levers for creating territorial balance and cohesion.
- Migration has favoured regions in the European core, Ireland and metropolitan areas. While southern Spain, France and Italy have been able to do better now than in the late nineties, the new Member States and important parts of Scandinavia suffer severe population loss. The increased east-west migration erodes territorial cohesion objectives.



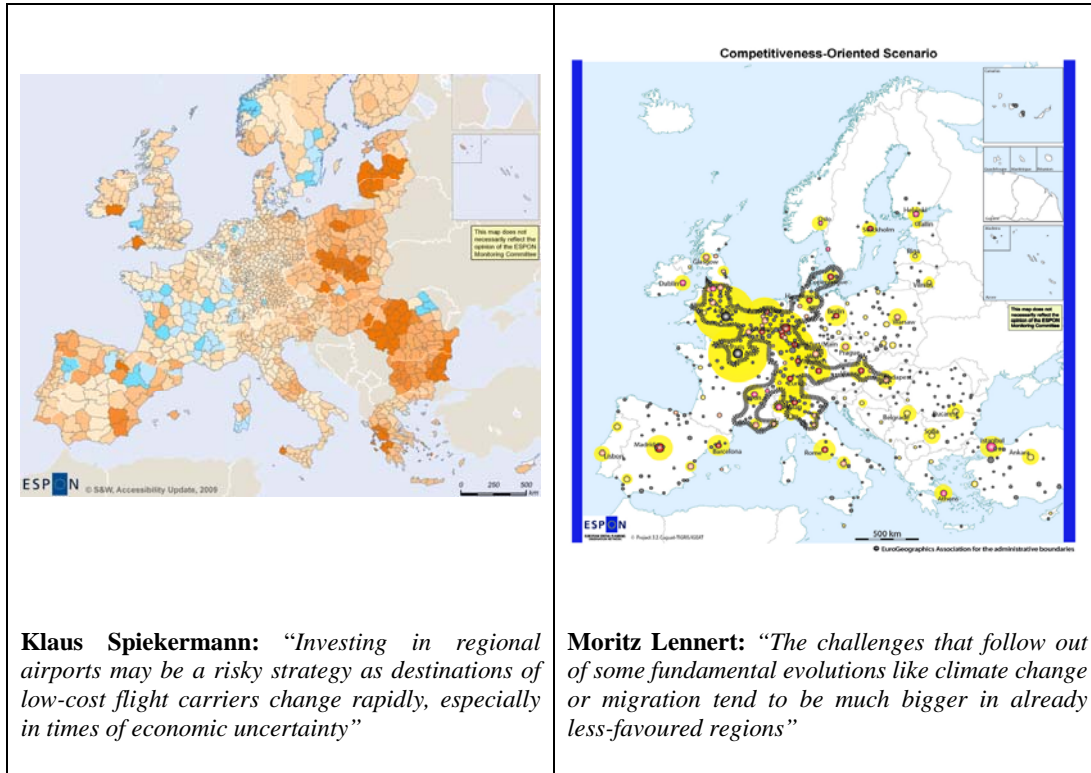
### 2.3. ESPON offers important information for regional territorial development strategies and investments

The workshop discussion showed that ESPON is capable of delivering important information for regional territorial development strategies and information. This is mostly due to the following:

- The commitment of policy advisors from stakeholders in the formulation of the knowledge demands for ESPON targeted analysis is regarded as an important basis for the creation of evidence that is useful for policymakers.
- ESPON has been able to provide some good examples of useful information for regional development. Some examples of evidence that can support regional territorial development strategies that were mentioned in the workshop presentations and discussions are:
  - Only large airports have proved to have a sustainable position. Investing in regional airports might therefore be a risky regional development strategy as

destinations of (low-cost) flight carriers change rapidly, especially in times of economic uncertainty.

- Demographic and migration trends are difficult to change. The policy question seems to be what future socio-economic conditions can be created for people living in regions faced with population decline.



### 3. Lessons for the further implementation of the ESPON 2013 Programme

The workshop discussion showed that ESPON is indeed an interesting source for policymakers at different policymaking levels dealing with territorial related issues. ESPON shows a clear capability of providing extensive, varied and policy relevant information.

The workshop participants also saw some potential for improvements in the further implementation of the ESPON 2013 Programme in order to meet up better to their expectations. The following lessons can be drawn:

#### 3.1. Delivering more targeted information

The communication of the substantial amount of scientific information to the policy process related to EU Cohesion Policy remains a challenge for the ESPON Programme. There is a clear need for targeted capitalisation actions delivering the right type and level of information to the right target group. It seems appropriate to organise more ESPON workshops targeting European policymakers but then with a clearer thematic focus.

### **3.2. Delivering more development oriented evidence**

ESPON studies should focus more on measuring the consequences of territorial trends for regional and territorial development. The relation with public investment can also be reinforced. In relation to the subject of accessibility for instance it would have been interesting to see how improvement in accessibility relates to the public investments that are being made so the value for money European citizens have becomes visible.

### **3.3. Showing better the spectrum of policy options**

ESPON studies should focus more on analysing and explaining - rather than just describing - territorial developments and thus on the recognition of levers for policymakers to steer development. It is important to detect as widely as possible the wide spectrum at different policy options so that policymakers are enabled to take well-informed decisions.

### **3.4. Creating new complementarities in evidence delivering**

ESPON studies in general take well on board knowledge that is created elsewhere. As the territorial dimension of economic, social and environmental developments have gained interest of the past years ESPON is facing the challenge of creating more complementarities, amongst others with territorial oriented research activities undertaken within the European Commission services.

### **3.5. Creating evidence on the economic crises**

The workshop provided the following suggestions and remarks that hold relation with the financial and economic crises:

- The global economic recession is having significant impacts on European regions and cities. However, a more in-depth analysis of its effects will only be possible once new statistics will become available.
- The identification of “strong territories in Europe” could be helpful in better exploiting territorial capital from a European perspective.
- The global dimension (zoom-out) should be addressed broader in ESPON applied research projects.
- The mapping of barriers in trade and commercial interaction (in and outside the EU) could sharp the political debate on free trade.