



EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING  
OBSERVATION NETWORK

# ESPON Mid-Term Evaluation Update

Final Report

*Prepared by MVA for*  
ESPON Programme

September 2005





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# summary

Summary



SUSTAINABLE > TRANSPORT > SOLUTIONS





## Background

The European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) was implemented in the framework of the Community Initiative INTERREG III in 2002 to provide a common platform for applied research in the policy fields related to the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). Its aim being to improved co-ordination and consistency of policy actions and measures at the EU level and between the EU, national and regional levels, as well as for bilateral relations of individual States.

Although formally opened in January 2002, the ESPON 2006 Programme was only approved by the Commission on 3 June 2002. So by the time a mid-term evaluation of the ESPON programme was carried out in late 2003 many of the actions were still at a formative stage. The evaluation, however, discovered a programme that was energetically managed and making significant progress towards ambitious goals, offering good value, but constrained by limited financial resources.

This update to that evaluation provides an overview of activity since then and concentrates on:

- investigating how recommendations have been implemented;
- analysing outputs and results achieved since the MTE;
- identification of impacts achieved to date; and
- focuses on programme implementation structures and best practice.

It draws conclusions on the efficiency, effectiveness and impact observed since the MTE and offers recommendations for future developments.

## Methodology of MTE Update

The evaluation was carried out from May to September 2005 and is based on data available up to the end of June 2005. The methodology implemented for this study incorporates:

- Desk research to support statistical analysis and policy objectives;
- Assessments of developments in the background to ESPON which will feed into the appraisal of impacts and likely achievement of objectives;
- Interviews and discussions with stakeholders (e.g. Monitoring Committee members) to validate policy objectives; and
- Close co-ordination and frequent communication with the Co-ordination Unit (CU) to ensure the study responds to emerging issues.



Much of the data needed to carry out the evaluation was publicly available on the ESPON website ([www.espon.lu](http://www.espon.lu)) or in the case of financial or confidential reports through examination of the Co-ordination Unit (CU) files. Other information was gathered through:

- Consultation with representatives of the Managing Authority (MA) and Paying Authority (PA) on programme performance and management issues;
- Interviews with CU staff in Luxembourg on day-to-day implementation;
- Consultation with a sample of Monitoring Committee representatives to provide a basis for an assessment of the quality of the implementation, and to gain an insight into Member State perceptions on policy orientations for a follow-up programme; and
- Consultation with a sample of ESPON Contact Point (ECP) representatives and Trans-national Project Group (TPG) participants in respect to “best practice” in project and programme implementation.

We are grateful to the MA and CU for their active support to the evaluation which has enabled us to carry out the task in a short time period. Our thanks also go to project participants who provided comments on the operation of the initiative and highlighted key issues for the future.

### **Implementation of the 2003 MTE Recommendations**

The 2003 midterm evaluation set out 12 recommendations designed to enhance the performance of the ESPON programme. These focused on areas where strengths can be built upon and those areas of weakness where adjustments to the implementation process could add value.

The recommendations (R1-R12) summarised below have each received serious consideration and implementation:

- R1 Flexibility in the allocation of funding between priority areas to maintain the internal coherence of the programme;*
- R2 Collect, update, analysis and use of the performance indicators given in the CIP and PC, as effective tools for monitoring and managing the programme;*
- R3 Data availability as a key issue. Development of a list of missing data to be used as a base for negotiation with organisations collecting data on future changes to meet ESDP requirement;*
- R4 Carrying out of sensitivity analyses at different levels of spatial aggregation, to assess whether the resulting analyses and maps do show a consistent image at different levels of aggregation;*
- R5 Identification of non-comparable data definitions and analysis of possible effects examined;*



- R6 Further consideration of the idea of developing a small set of maps suitable for presenting ESPON results to non-specialists;*
- R7 Closer connections between ESPON and organisations carrying out spatial development (practitioners), by promoting and supporting a wider use of methods developed within ESPON, throughout Interreg and any successor programme;*
- R8 Specific action needed to create a theoretical framework for the longer term development of ESDP policy analysis;*
- R9 Definition of a clear operational structure to ensure a scientific and more policy driven assessment of projects' outputs, to enhance the quality of the results and raise confidence among practitioners and promote wider application of the results;*
- R10 Reshaping of the operational networking structure, to move towards improved networking and interactions, and greater openness, in particular the efficiency and effectiveness of the ECP network, as well as the linkages to other Interreg Programmes;*
- R11 Rigorous application of monitoring and evaluation procedures, to avoid duplication of efforts; and*
- R12 Continuity of the action after 2006.*

By the time the midterm evaluation was concluded in December 2003 the Managing Authority, Monitoring Committee and Coordination Unit were already investigating ways to put the recommendations into action. This process was formalised in proposals from the CU in February 2004.

The proposal grouped recommendations in terms of the way implementation could be, or was being achieved. Since some of the recommendations are interrelated (e.g. those dealing with networking and communications strategies) discussion and detailed consideration was linked to the ongoing development of the promotion and communication strategy. The main points of the proposal covered:

- An increased financial allocation for ECPs under Priority 4 in the revision of the ESPON budget (recommendation 1), and a strategy for strengthening ECP transnational network activities.
- Recommendation 2 to be integrated in the improvement of financial management in the ESPON programme;
- Recommendation 3, 4, 5, 6 and partly 1 (provision of meta-data) are already in process of being implemented;
- Recommendation 7 and 10 to be given further consideration in the discussion of enhancing of activities and products in support of promoting and communicating ESPON results; and
- Recommendation 9 and 11 were discussed in more detail at the MC meeting in May 2004.

Recommendation 8 and 12 are seen as identifying a continued overall need for a territorial analysis framework to update the ESDP and the spatial policy development in which ESPON is a key support structure. As such they fall



within a political arena and are not considered by the MC to be something that requires direct programme activity, although they have been followed up in a MC document entitled a **“Common understanding on the orientations of an ESPON 2 Programme for 2007-2013”** giving an assessment of the current ESPON programme and an analysis of present and future EU territorial challenges. The document was subsequently endorsed at the EU informal Ministerial meeting on territorial cohesion (20-21 May 2005, in Luxembourg).

### **Achievements since 2003**

Since the MTE the programme has moved into a phase where outputs and results have begun to flow in substantial numbers. These are being managed through clear guidelines on reporting and sensible coordination of datasets, methodologies, typologies and tools. They provide a sound basis for future elaboration of the programme and clearly identify those areas where data deficiencies continue to exist.

The CIP was updated in 2004 to include four “New” measures that complement the existing work and represent a desire by the Monitoring Committee to extend investigations into emerging fields of interest and to develop a range of applied research projects, studies and scientific support. The actions are a conscious strategy by the MC to provide a broad base to the programme so that there could be further deepening and targeting of important dimensions in an ESPON II programme. As a result the programme has moved to 30 projects by 2006.

The most notable actions are:

- all performance indicators in the CIP have been met or exceeded;
- 30 projects have been started against a target of 15 in the life of the programme. Half have already successfully completed their work;
- project outputs are helping inform policy options at community, national, regional and local level. Inputs to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cohesion Report are just one example;
- the client based approach has seen network building accelerate;
- ESPON website usage is stable at twice the level seen in 2003 and the intranet has become an invaluable tool for collaborative working;
- communication strategies have been investigated and are being implemented to further develop the scientific network; and
- financial performance is being closely monitored, with revised financial control procedures in place giving rise to the expectation that expenditure against commitments will be achieved within the N+2 constraint.

Generally, project outputs exceed expectations though in some respects this is a quantitative conclusion rather than qualitative assessment. Reports are developing a more coherent style and content is becoming more rationalised.



Implementation of the communication strategy developed with external specialist support is critical if ESPON is to have a marked impact from awareness of its work.

### **Impact and Achievement of Objectives**

The impact of ESPON needs to be measured by indicators that refer to the consequences of the programme beyond the immediate effects on its direct beneficiaries. Conventional practice identifies two forms of impact:

- **Specific impacts** that occur after a certain elapse time, but which are, nevertheless, directly attributable to the actions taken; and
- **Global impacts** that reflect the longer-term effects which affect a wider population.

Measuring these types of impact is complex, since clear causal relationships can rarely be defined and significant time needs to elapse to be able to identify a change.

ESPON is realising its immediate impact targets and in fact is beginning to demonstrate some of the global impacts. For such a modestly funded programme ESPON covers a considerable domain and is creating new datasets, maps and tools that ought to aid spatial policy development at European, transnational as well as regional/local scale.

The programme is only now beginning to reach a stage where it is sufficiently mature for specific impacts to be examined. Such impacts can be seen at the project level where application of new tools, concepts and methodologies are giving rise to presentations of policy options. Strengthening these impacts will be an important consideration in the final phase of ESPON and much will depend on dissemination actions both to increase scientific debate and engage the policy makers at all levels in a dialogue.

Policy options are touched on by all projects to support the better application of ESDP, but it is still too early to identify global impacts. Nevertheless, the extent of project activity suggests that specific impacts will emerge during the course of 2005-2006 leading to more lasting global impacts.

The creation of a scientific network in the field of spatial development is clearly being realised by ESPON with 217 participations in projects from 120 organisations across 23 countries. This is being bolstered by scientific conferences bringing in new collaborations with European academic research networks such as AESOP, ERSA, ECTP, RSA and EUGEO.

### **Additional Issues**

The evaluation has considered several critical issues related to programme implementation structures and best practice. Attention has been drawn to the problematic area of defining appropriate Performance Indicators (PI), data availability and use, funding models and financial management.



It is incumbent on all programmes to implement a monitoring system that contains a level of detail appropriate to the intervention. The monitoring system put in place for ESPON satisfies that criteria. However, the PI targets presented in the CIP are simplistic and applied at both priority and measure level without regard to increasing levels of detail. Current performance indicators are a measure of the stage reached by the programme in terms of its implementation and, therefore, have value for monitoring the efficiency of delivery, but not necessarily its effectiveness and impact. Inadequacies in the formulation of indicators in general have already been recognised by the CU and consideration is being given to how they might be improved for a follow up action. A consideration here must be practicality, avoiding an unreasonable burden on the monitoring process.

The availability of appropriate and consistent data across the 29 countries covered by ESPON has been a concern for all projects, especially in the newer Member States where harmonisation is still underway. Large gaps in the data still remain. Efforts have been made to identify sources of data (documented in the Data Navigator project) and to establish the ESPON database. Maintaining and further populating that data structure is imperative.

Inevitably projects have found it necessary to collect and manipulate data themselves where the desired information is not readily available. This gives rise to use of 'best available' data as a proxy for the 'most appropriate' and necessitates clear guidance on how it is created and its limitations on use. The situation is reported by projects to be getting better but it will be some considerable time before acceptable coverage at NUTS3 level exists.

Financial control structures can be a barrier to effective and efficient implementation. INTERREG regulations dealing with funding models and financial management have placed a considerable burden on the implementation of ESPON. Appropriate financial management procedures are now in place for monitoring and audits. However, they impose a significant overhead on small projects (and indeed on a small programme like ESPON) giving rise to frustrations and induce a reluctance to participate in future actions.

ESPON Financial Control structures have seen a significant improvement in performance. The response of the MA, PA and CU to the difficulties has been energetic, and generally supportive to projects. The proactive consultation with lead partners and the moves to instil an understanding of the financial control process through training (both for projects and auditors) is beginning to show benefits.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

ESPON has significantly moved the understanding of territorial trends and policy impact assessment forward. It has also been effective in building an embryonic scientific network with the potential to support policy option analysis. The programme has continued to make progress towards its goals



and there is a strong probability that the likely impacts will justify the initiative.

Building on the outcome of ESPON to realise sustainable results calls for a more focussed follow-up action. This needs to be underpinned by increased financial resources.

The response of the MC and CU to each of the 12 recommendations given in the MTE report has been carefully and sensitively handled. Appropriate initiatives have been adopted to remedy weaknesses and resources have been reallocated to strengthen networking and key objectives. Immediate benefits in respect to the overall delivery of the programme is evident and networking in particular appears to be working in a more effective and efficient manner. There has also been an improvement in the flow of financial and management information. Project outputs are being systematically documented in a monitoring process which is now able to demonstrate progress towards programme objectives.

Since the MTE the projects across all priorities and measures have delivered a copious quantity of data, new indicators, methodologies, new typologies and tools together with considered scientific debate.

Identification of the effect of the programme in terms of its impact across the ESPON territories is difficult to quantify at this stage. Specific impacts are becoming visible in terms of the level of awareness of ESPON results and a productive debate on policy options in spatial development and planning is taking place.

Since the MTE in 2003 there has been a marked improvement in the quality of programme implementation. The technical support infrastructure provided by the Managing Authority and Coordination Unit has continued to develop and has matured into an effective management tool for the programme. Difficulties encountered in the operation of the financial control system have been rectified.

The recommendations (*R1-R7*) summarised below are intended to encourage the Managing Authority, Monitoring Committee and Coordination Unit to develop strategies to enhance the impact of ESPON and in particular offer suggestions in respect to a follow on programme (ESPON II).

### ***R1 – Updating the CIP***

Performance indicators in the CIP should be examined to ensure that a complete list is established when the final update to CIP is published in early 2006. Ambiguities should be removed and PIs for new measures included.

### ***R2 – Financial monitoring and consolidation of residual funding***

The CU, MA and MC should continue to monitor the strategy put in place to remedy under spending. Within the constraints of priority level budget line allocations residual funds should be consolidated and used in 2006 to conduct short duration low cost promotional activity to both publicise results and to raise awareness of the need for further work in an ESPON II programme.



### ***R3 – Development of performance indicators***

More appropriate and sophisticated indicators should be identified for a follow up programme that build sequentially from Measure to Priority level and ultimately to core indicators that address the programme objectives. All performance indicators must be practical (i.e. manageable in number, consistent and coherent) with easily available data that does not place an unreasonable burden on the monitoring process. The level of detail must be appropriate to the scale of the intervention.

### ***R4 – ECP role and function***

The role and function of the ECP network should be simplified and clarified in any future programme. In future national awareness activity should continue to be supported by direct Member State contracts, but trans-national activity ought to be consolidated in a single central project.

### ***R5 – Scientific validation of results***

It is highly desirable that validation of outputs from projects be seen to be independent, and that the review process should be continuous. A properly formulated and funded 'Scientific Board' would offer a flexible approach to review output, cross fertilise projects by introducing debate on common themes/issues and provide centralised control. The Scientific Board should not be seen as a project, but as a resource pool to be dipped into by the Managing Authority and assigned to specific tasks.

### ***R6 – Model contracts for a future programme***

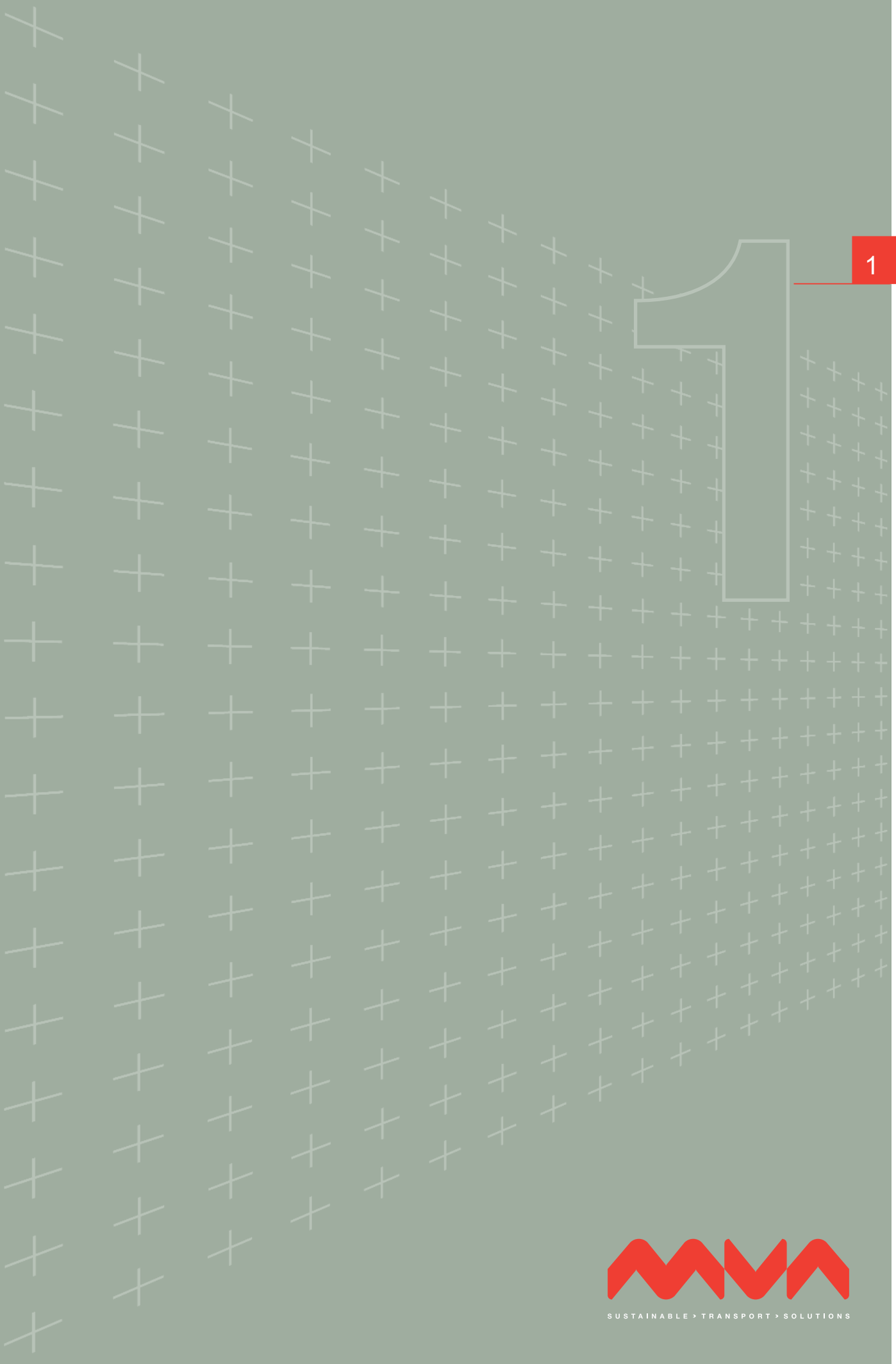
More flexibility is needed in respect to the types of contract available under a future programme. A standard service contract should be an option for central support actions that provide a facility across the programme as a whole.

### ***R7 – Project funding in a future programme***

The scale of project funding should be reviewed. Current project budgets are too low for the ambitious objectives set. In ESPON II tenders ought to envisage larger financial resources to avoid limiting the quality or depth of research carried out









# 1 Methodology

## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Mid-Term Evaluation of the ESPON 2006 programme, carried out in 2003, offered a review of the start-up phase of the programme based on a comprehensive examination of all the components, projects, procedures and dissemination activities. It adopted an approach to the evaluation based on the MEANS methodology. Consequently, the assessment examined the overall relevance and consistency of the programme strategy before considering in detail quantification of the objectives and delivery of the action.
- 1.1.2 The evaluation in 2003 discovered a programme making significant progress towards ambitious goals, offering good value, but constrained by limited financial resources.
- 1.1.3 This update to the evaluation will not repeat that work. It has a more focussed aim to appraise subsequent implementation of recommendations and to seek evidence of continued progress towards the overall programme objectives based on quantifiable project results, and impacts.

## 1.2 Evaluation Design

- 1.2.1 The terms of reference for this update to the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) provide the framework on which this evaluation design is based. A preliminary set of questions and issues have been highlighted which form the focus of individual chapters in the report. In formulating our evaluation design the scope and context for the supporting analysis has been further elaborated following discussions with the ESPON Co-ordination Unit (CU) Managing authority (MA) and Monitoring Committee (MC) representatives.
- 1.2.2 The focus of the evaluation concentrates on:
- Building on the work of the MTE in areas where it can add value, in order to ***prepare for subsequent assistance operations***;
  - The ***results and recommendations issued in the MTE Final Report***, of December 2003, and actions decided or implemented by the programme on the basis of these elements;
  - An ***analysis of outputs and results achieved since the MTE*** in the light of programme targets and financial performance;

### *Key Issues*

- Analyses of aggregated outputs and results achieved at priority level, focusing in particular on the achievement of core indicators as set out in the CIP;
- Achievement of outputs and results to date compared to the targets set in the programming documents (including reference to baselines values);



- Review of the likely achievement of outputs and results by the end of the programming period;
- The expenditures to date, linking the outputs and results achieved to the inputs, i.e. the resources spent in achieving those outputs and results.
- ***Analysis of the impacts achieved to date*** and the likely achievement of objectives;

*Key Issues*

- Extent to which global objectives have been and are likely to be met;
- Defining a more accurate list of impact indicators, with possibly more measurable impacts.
- ***Additional issues and specific questions of interest;***

*Key Issues*

- Quality of programme implementation structures and actions;
- Identification of “best practices” in project implementation.
- ***Conclusions on the efficiency, effectiveness and impact;*** and
- ***Recommendations for the future.***

1.2.3 The process of EU Programme evaluation has continued to develop since the days of the Mid-Term evaluation in 2003. The MEANS methodology has been revised and new guidance published in relation to evaluations<sup>1</sup>. Of particular interest to this evaluation is the guidance on updates to Mid-Term evaluations issued by DG Regio in Working Paper 9 which clearly draws attention to the difference between the 2003 evaluation process and the current update. This approach is, therefore, adopted in the study.

1.2.4 The principles set out in Working Paper 9 have been faithfully communicated in the brief and form a sound basis for the evaluation. This Commission guidance for conducting updates to Mid-Term Evaluations foresees the option of the Managing Authority carrying out the work with internal resources. The ESPON programme has, however, chosen MVA as an independent external evaluator. In carrying out this work we have sought to establish a close working relationship with the CU without compromising the independence of the appraisal.

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<sup>1</sup> EC 2004, “The Guide to evaluating socio-economic development”, internet publication at [www.evaled.info](http://www.evaled.info)



## **Approach**

1.2.5 The methodology implemented for this study incorporates:

- Desk research to support statistical analysis and policy objectives;
- Assessments of developments in the background to ESPON which will feed into the appraisal of impacts and likely achievement of objectives;
- Interviews and discussions with stakeholders (e.g. MC members) to validate policy objectives; and
- Close co-ordination and frequent communication with the Co-ordination Unit (CU) to ensure the study responds to emerging issues.

## **Data Sources Used**

1.2.6 ESPON has an operational website that contains comprehensive background information on the programme together with results and intermediate deliverables from projects. Most of the documentary material necessary to carry out the evaluation is accessible from the ESPON website, or in the case of financial or confidential reports through examination of the Co-ordination Unit (CU) files.

1.2.7 In order to re-establish our understanding of the development of the programme and its policy context we also consulted with stakeholders to gain their perception of priorities, objectives and expected outcomes.

1.2.8 The data sources used and original research include:

- ESPON Website ([www.espon.lu](http://www.espon.lu));
- Consultation with representatives of the Managing Authority (MA) and Paying Authority (PA) on programme performance and management issues;
- Interviews with CU staff in Luxembourg on day-to-day implementation;
- Consultation with a sample of Monitoring Committee representatives. These contacts have been used to provide a basis for an assessment of the quality of the implementation, and to gain an insight into Member State perceptions on policy orientations for a follow-up programme; and
- Consultation with a sample of ESPON Contact Point (ECP) representatives and Trans-national Project Group (TPG) participants in respect to “best practice” in project and programme implementation.



1.2.9 Particular attention has been paid to programme implementation structures through interviews with Thiemo Eser (Managing Authority), Peter Mehlbye (CU Director) and Sara Ferrara (CU Financial Management).

1.2.10 A list of stakeholders contacted in the consultation process is given in Appendix A.

### **1.3 Structure of the Report**

1.3.1 The structure of the remainder of this report follows the key issues and questions posed in the brief. It therefore comprises chapters focussed on:

- Review of implementation of recommendations made in the 2003 MTE;
- Analysis of outputs and results achieved since the MTE;
- Analysis of impacts achieved to date and likely achievement of objectives;
- Additional issues and questions of general interest;
- Conclusions on the efficiency, effectiveness and impact; and
- Recommendations for the future.









## 2 Review of 2003 MTE Implementation Recommendations

### 2.1 Context

- 2.1.1 At the end of the 2003 MTE a set of 12 recommendations were put forward to enhance the performance of the ESPON programme. These recommendations are to be seen in context. The MTE evaluation found ESPON to be a programme with a strong trans-European dimension that has great potential to support and improve the territorial perspective of EU policies. The recommendations, therefore, focused on areas where strengths can be built upon and those areas of weakness where adjustments to the implementation process could add value.
- 2.1.2 The recommendations were welcomed by the Monitoring Committee and Coordination Unit. In fact by the time of the final MTE report presentation in December 2003 the CU had already set in motion immediate plans to implement some of the recommendations.
- 2.1.3 Prioritisation of recommendations and action plans for implementation were subsequently discussed at Monitoring Committee meetings in 2004. These discussions are clearly documented in the MC minutes. The following section considers each of the recommendations in turn to assess what action has been thought practical to implement, and to understand what priority of implementation has been suggested by the MC. It also considers how those decisions were put into force by the CU.

### 2.2 Implementation of Recommendations

- 2.2.1 This appraisal concentrates on highlighting and assessing those aspects where *major actions* have been undertaken.
- 2.2.2 The MTE recommendations summarised below have each received serious consideration and implementation. The Managing Authority, Coordination Unit and Monitoring Committee are to be commended on taking a proactive approach to the MTE by addressing the recommendations, even before the report was accepted by the Commission.
- 2.2.3 The MA and CU presented proposals to the MC in February 2004 on how to implement the recommendations from the Mid-term evaluation of the ESPON programme. That proposal grouped recommendations in terms of the way implementation could be, or was being achieved. Since some of the recommendations are interrelated (e.g. those dealing with networking and communications strategies) discussion and detailed consideration was linked to the ongoing development of the promotion and communication strategy. The main points of the proposal covered:
- An increased financial allocation for ECPs under Priority 4 in the revision of the ESPON budget (recommendation 1), and a strategy for strengthening ECP transnational network activities.



- Recommendation 2 to be integrated in the improvement of financial management in the ESPON programme;
  - Recommendation 3, 4, 5, 6 and partly 1 (provision of meta-data) are already in process of being implemented;
  - Recommendation 7 and 10 to be given further consideration in the discussion of enhancing of activities and products in support of promoting and communicating ESPON results; and
  - Recommendation 9 and 11 were discussed in more detail at the MC meeting in May 2004.
- 2.2.4 Recommendation 8 and 12 are seen as identifying a continued overall need for a territorial analysis framework to update the ESDP and the spatial policy development in which ESPON is a key support structure. As such they fall within a political arena and are not considered by the MC to be something that requires direct programme activity.

***R1 Flexibility in the allocation of funding between priority areas to maintain the internal coherence of the programme***

- 2.2.5 Maintaining the internal coherence of the programme is a primary objective which requires adequate resources in each Priority and Measure. The ability of ESPON to adjust budgets is constrained by programme rules. However, the MC has acknowledged the need to react and is using additional budget income from new Member States to supplement priorities that are in need of support. For example, an increased allocation of resources to Priority 4 has been realized on the basis of a strategy paper on improvement of ECP network activities.
- 2.2.6 The MC has also found that the EU rule of 5% (maximum) of programme budget for technical assistance is too constrained for a programme for applied research like ESPON which has a small budget. Consequently, the Commission has agreed to support a MC proposal to increase this ceiling to a more realistic 8% which is contained in the revised CIP. In reality the administrative costs of operating the programme exceed even this figure and the Managing Authority has provided an additional €2,063,000 to fund the Coordination Unit.
- 2.2.7 The sub-recommendation regarding maintaining the data sets, tools and indicators produced by projects has been ensured by the MC in the implementation of the foreseen cross thematic project (3.2) to coordinate the updating of data sets from finalised projects. All projects are now also provided with stronger guidance towards provision of Meta information on data and indicators as well as information on the models, concepts, methodology, tools and particularly territorial impact assessment. These elements are now required components of final reports.



***R2 Collect, update, analysis and use of the performance indicators given in the CIP and PC, as effective tools for monitoring and managing the programme***

- 2.2.8 The impact/result/output and performance indicators (PIs) given in the CIP and Programme Complement are extensive and are associated with both the Priorities and Measures. This gives an unnecessary depth of detail at the Priority level that complicates monitoring and management of the programme. However, it does ensure a thorough assessment of progress is possible.
- 2.2.9 Current performance indicators quantify activity. Assessment of the relevance of research results is being addressed through monitoring activities carried out by the CU and MC as part of the further development of the programme. ESPON has been able to take a broad approach to initial research that is moving towards deepening of understanding and greater focus in subsequent actions.
- 2.2.10 The MTE found that PIs were being met, but that PI information was not being consistently recorded to make the management process easy. In response the CU has implemented the integration of a collecting/reporting system on performance indicators into final project reports and progress (activity) reporting. In addition a monitoring process has been instigated within the revised financial monitoring system from 2004.

***R3 Data availability as a key issue. Development of a list of missing data to be used as a base for negotiation with organisations collecting data on future changes to meet ESDP requirement***

- 2.2.11 Most projects have experienced data availability problems. These cover cost of data where it is available, the rights to reuse of data, compatibility of data at various spatial levels, and the inevitable absence at Eurostat of many regionalised data items that would be desirable. The CU has taken a positive step towards redressing these issues by guiding projects to formulate the data requirements and to catalogue the data gaps that are hampering research. This represents a first step in clarifying the problem.
- 2.2.12 The Managing Authority (MA) has investigated the legal position with respect to ESPON data. This concerned clarification:
- with TPGs, about shared ownership;
  - with Eurostat with whom ESPON has a license; and
  - clarification of the publication of the ESPON data base, which is complicated in legal terms as it is based upon other databases and licence agreements. However, as ESPON data are further developed or manipulated this could be taken to represent a new database owned by ESPON.



- 2.2.13 The MA has recommended that all subsidy contracts and the Eurostat licence agreements should be modified to cover these points. It is also in the process of developing licence agreements for use of other data than that provided from Eurostat and is addressing conditions of use for the ESPON database.

***R4 Carrying out of sensitivity analyses at different levels of spatial aggregation, to assess whether the resulting analyses and maps do show a consistent image at different levels of aggregation***

- 2.2.14 A review of the scientific content of the ESPON research was not part of the MTE, but difficulties reported by projects with data availability causes the validity of results/outputs to be questioned. This recommendation was therefore proposed to advise researchers to demonstrate how they had validated their findings. Describing how comparable the results are at different levels of spatial aggregation (e.g. NUTS3 and NUTS 5) also informs practitioners whether proxy data might safely be used where data at the desired spatial level is missing.
- 2.2.15 ESPON has not yet given this recommendation a high priority, but has attempted to guide projects towards carrying out thorough statistical tests and control procedures necessary to ensure robustness, consistency and comparability in the dataset used. The MC have also examined the broader issue of scientific credibility and validation of outputs as part of future developments of ESPON leading to consideration of establishing a “Scientific Board” in an ESPON II programme. Such a body could greatly assist the MC in monitoring project reports and should also be considered a “Think Tank” for refinement of implementation plans. As an interim step ESPON is carrying out “Scientific Conferences” as a way to bring experts together to debate results.
- 2.2.16 The need for greater scientific control/validation inside the programme has also been debated with the ECPs. The ECP network with some careful consideration of roles and competence could have the technical skills and capabilities to play a stronger role in the future. Within the current programme they have been able to assist in commenting on reports, but this has been constrained by available resources and heterogeneity of the network. Ambiguity over the role of ECPs as a network and as TPG partners also limits the extent to which they could provide scientific control and validation.

***R5 Identification of non-comparable data definitions and analysis of possible effects examined***

- 2.2.17 This recommendation arose from the general lack of appropriate data to fulfil project objectives which has emerged during the course of the programme. Projects have taken pragmatic steps to create outputs that offer some indicators for practitioners, but had tended not to be precise about the assumptions made and data definitions.



- 2.2.18 The CU has attempted to address this issue by guiding projects towards providing all the information necessary for data identification and proper testing of comparability of data set, including meta data on indicators and models. Project 3.1 has done a lot in this respect by pressing each completed project to provide the necessary metadata. This approach should continue to be enforced; otherwise results will lack credibility and scientific value.
- 2.2.19 The CU has also implemented guidelines on the construction and harmonisation of datasets and for mapping that include information on citation and quality of data contained on ESPON maps.

**R6 Further consideration of the idea of developing a small set of maps suitable for presenting ESPON results to non-specialists**

- 2.2.20 The MTE found a proliferation of maps being created by projects that distracted from the original objective of having a limited set that could clearly convey the ideas uncovered by ESPON to non-specialist end-users.
- 2.2.21 In response the CU has issued guidance to projects that recommends provision of fewer maps within the core text of final reports to emphasise the most important and significant results. The guidelines also highlight the need for executive summaries to be written in a style that is easily accessible to policy makers and non-specialists. Cross-Thematic Project 3.1 was also tasked to define an ESPON map collection.
- 2.2.22 The outcome of these actions is linked with ESPON dissemination which can be found in the series of publications generated since the MTE in 2003. These include publication of:
- “ESPON in progress” reporting preliminary results (April 2004)
  - Briefing 1 containing a selection of maps that present “Diversity within the European territory” (November 2004).
  - “In search of territorial potentials” providing midterm results (April 2005).

**R7 Closer connections between ESPON and organisations carrying out spatial development (practitioners), by promoting and supporting a wider use of methods developed within ESPON, throughout Interreg and any successor programme**

- 2.2.23 Implementation of this recommendation is important if the programme is to demonstrate an impact in the wider community. It is not a recommendation that can be seen as having one solution and the MC and CU have taken appropriate steps to move ESPON forward in this respect through various strategies that are awaiting final results by August 2005.
- 2.2.24 The general principle of connecting ESPON to a wider community interested in ESPON results is being approached through an updated “ESPON



Communication Strategy" approved by the MC. The strategy involves 9 complementary actions. These cover an updated ESPON Web-site, a scientific conference, a travelling exhibition, a high-level conference and transnational seminars involving key regional players, policy makers, and practitioners, media communication, promotional materials and identification of speaker opportunities. The ECP network is also conducting transnational project seminars around Europe.

2.2.25 A further strand in the communication of ESPON results is being realised through implementation of a Thematic Interaction together with the InterAct Point Qualification and Transfer. The main target groups for this thematic interaction are project developers and national contact points of Interreg III programmes as well as project developers and researchers involved in the ESPON programme. The elements of the action include:

- Information on European trends and policy impacts influencing territorial development and structures based on ESPON results.
- Five thematic studies analysing projects undertaken within Interreg III, synthesising key content, use of methodologies and data, relation to ESDP policy orientations. The themes included:
  - Transport, Communication and Accessibility;
  - Natural resources and Risk management;
  - Polycentric development and urban-rural relations;
  - Cross-border cooperation; and
  - Spatial Visions and Scenarios.
- Seminar discussions theme by theme based on the thematic studies involving project developers and related persons from Interreg and ESPON;
- Documentation of the thematic interaction in a report including the thematic studies as well as conclusions on good practise and potential ideas for new projects within each theme.

**R8 Specific action needed to create a theoretical framework for the longer term development of ESDP policy analysis**

2.2.26 As noted earlier this specific recommendation has been given low priority by the MC. It is questionable whether creating such a theoretical framework is realisable.

2.2.27 The Monitoring Committee has taken the view that further development of a policy document like the ESDP is not the task of the ESPON programme. ESPON is only supposed to provide knowledge and information for policy development based on ESDP objectives.

Project 2.3.1

**APPLICATION AND EFFECTS OF THE ESDP IN MEMBER STATES**

initiated in 2004 addresses some of the points raised.



- 2.2.28 However, a framework for analysis is being progressed through the scientific platform and a report is planned for the end of 2006 giving the foundation of progress achieved.

**R9 *Definition of a clear operational structure to ensure a scientific and more policy driven assessment of projects' outputs, to enhance the quality of the results and raise confidence among practitioners and promote wider application of the results***

- 2.2.29 The MTE was of the opinion that the credibility of the programme would eventually be judged by the quality of the results and, therefore, greater rigour was needed in an ongoing assessment of the tools, methodologies, indicators, maps, etc., which ought to be formalised in a clear operational structure. Several potential approaches were suggested as ways in which this might be achieved.
- 2.2.30 Actions on this recommendation have been developed notably the proposal to run scientific conferences that bring together experts to debate results and offer a stimulus for the research.
- 2.2.31 An immediate response to these evaluation points was initiated in late 2003 with the beginnings of a closer dialogue with projects on their Interim Reports drawing upon comments received from the MC and ECPs. However, this could still be further built upon through broadening the reviewer base. The process for reviewing Final Reports and signing off of the first batch of completed projects in 2005 drew attention to weaknesses in some projects which demonstrates the important of further enhancing this procedure in the earlier phases of projects.
- 2.2.32 Comments on project reports from the MC, CU and ECP have in principle covered scientific content (by ECPs) and policy aspects from national political perspectives (by MC members). However, the extent to which it is possible for projects to take on board such comments at the final report stage is limited. Comments on Interim reports have not always been followed through by projects, possibly because they reflect differing theoretical opinions which are perfectly valid. However, where there are concrete reasons to make modifications these ought to be rigorously enforced at the earliest possible point in the project lifecycle.
- 2.2.33 Cross-Thematic projects 3.1 and 3.2 were tasked to provide guidance on tools, methodologies, indicators, maps etc. They were also a response to the need to provide scientific coherence across the programme supporting the ESPON "Scientific Platform". Developments arising from the research have been documented in ESPON reports that are directed towards the European scientific community in the field of territorial development.
- 2.2.34 The MC has also introduced an external evaluation procedure (using independent researchers) for projects where final performance has been questioned. This process could be implemented for all projects at relatively



low cost, but would require the establishment of a pool of independent evaluators who could be called upon for short term tasks.

- 2.2.35 It is unfortunate that the intention to establish independent peer reviews of the scientific quality within the ESPON programme through a project entitled “Independent scientific evaluation of final reports of ESPON” was not selected by the MC and pursued in 2003. This was discussed, but was thought to be impractical given the time left in the current programme and the difficulty in finding suitable experts. In practice such a project would need to consider results prior to the final report to have any beneficial influence on programme outputs.

***R10 Reshaping of the operational networking structure, to move towards improved networking and interactions, and greater openness, in particular the efficiency and effectiveness of the ECP network, as well as the linkages to other Interreg Programmes***

- 2.2.36 The MTE found that networking and the building of a European spatial development community was not working well and needed further development. Given the overall objectives of ESPON this is an important recommendation and has implications not only for the current programme, but also ESPON II development.
- 2.2.37 Several actions have been initiated by the MC in response to this recommendation and the suggestions made in the MTE. These strands of activity are interlinked and largely centre around additional financial support to the ECP network to strengthen their role in the programme and to the implementation of the ESPON Communication Strategy.
- 2.2.38 In respect to integrating ESPON with other strands of INTERREG the CU has implemented a thematic interaction together with the INTERACT programme, in particular the INTERACT Point Quantification and Transfer (IPQT).
- 2.2.39 A facility for research groups to register their interest in ESPON has been implemented on the website, with lists of project participants and potential partners. Proactive awareness actions connecting research institutes to ESPON is already seen as the responsibility of the ECP network and has therefore not been addressed further. However, this is now developing into transnational collaborations rather than a simple national focus since additional financial support has been given to ECPs.
- 2.2.40 The Communication Strategy adopted recently will further work towards extending ESPON awareness at all levels (e.g. European, national, and regional representatives) and amongst institutions.
- 2.2.41 Support of networking and community building remains a priority that the MC must develop further; especially within an ESPON II follow-up. In this respect the role and function of ECP's needs to be reconsidered so that they are better positioned to perform clearly defined desired tasks. Funding





mechanisms should be found to bring ECPs into the core activity where coordination, monitoring and control can be strengthened.

- 2.2.42 The suggestion that a newsletter be established to bind ECP, TPG and other network members together has not been pursued yet. The function of a newsletter is perceived to be performed by enhancing and changing the information on the ESPON web site more frequently. This response does not provide the **push** component of a communication strategy intended in the recommendation.
- 2.2.43 A final ESPON conference (seminar) is planned for November 2006 in Finland. The idea of holding more open seminars has been investigated further in the communication strategy study. A move in this direction is being demonstrated through ECP transnational seminars (e.g. Northern Ireland, UK and Greece) together with the ESPON scientific conference organised by the CU for October 2005 in Luxembourg addressing a wider scientific community. ESPON seminars have been opened to all INTERREG programme participants and other organisations working in the field (eg EEA, OECD, etc.).
- 2.2.44 The suggestion of producing ESPON project reports in a series to give the programme a higher profile has been interpreted as realisable through the publications plan. This envisages a series of synthesis reports and scientific reports up to the end of the programme. Initial publications display a clear ESPON identity. Projects remain free to publish all or part of their results independently, but are required to acknowledge the ESPON programme and respect a number of conditions.

#### ***R11 Rigorous application of monitoring and evaluation procedures, to avoid duplication of efforts***

- 2.2.45 The CU and MC have not seen the need to make any major modifications to the evaluation procedures. However, the possibility to run small (one step) calls for tenders where the value is below €100,000 has been introduced. In all actions the imperative of a free and open competition is to be maintained. The tendering procedures will, therefore, only be adjusted in the event of a special case becoming apparent before publication of the call for tender. This approach is viable since the terms of reference for each call are designed to avoid overlaps or duplication of effort.

#### ***R12 Continuity of the action after 2006.***

- 2.2.46 Consideration of the continuation of the ESPON exercise is perceived by the CU and MC to be an action performed at the political level where Ministerial meetings have confirmed the view that the key challenge is to **integrate the territorial dimension** into EU policies with the aim of achieving a coherent approach to the development of the EU territory, on the basis of the concept of territorial cohesion.



2.2.47 The MC put forward a document giving an assessment of ESPON at this stage of implementation as well as orientations for the development of ESPON II. The EU informal Ministerial meeting on territorial cohesion (20-21 May 2005, in Luxembourg) endorsed the **common understanding on the orientations of an ESPON 2 Programme for 2007-2013**. A document based on the experience of the current ESPON programme and the analysis of present and future EU territorial challenges.

### 2.3 Conclusions on Implementation

- 2.3.1 The response of the MC, MA and CU to each of the 12 recommendations given in the MTE report has been carefully and sensitively handled. Appropriate initiatives have been adopted to remedy weaknesses and resources have been reallocated to strengthen networking and key objectives.
- 2.3.2 Some suggestions put forwards in the MTE have a political dimension that necessitates a longer term response. It is apparent that actions on these points will emerge at the appropriate time as the debate on continuation of the ESPON initiative builds.
- 2.3.3 The MC response has produced immediate benefits in respect to the overall delivery of the programme. Networking in particular has increased and appears to be working in a more effective and efficient manner. There has also been an improvement in the flow of financial and management information. Project outputs are being systematically documented in a monitoring process which is now able to demonstrate progress towards programme objectives.



# 3





## 3 Analysis of outputs and results achieved since the MTE

### 3.1 Progress towards Objectives

- 3.1.1 A common aim of all evaluations is the desire to be able to monitor implementation and judge performance against the objectives set at the outset. In assessing the performance of the ESPON we have based our investigation on the set of indicators documented in the CIP and Programme Complement which have been assigned target levels that correspond in aggregate to the objectives of the programme.
- 3.1.2 The quantification of operational objectives at measure level in the Programme Complement is reviewed in this update evaluation since performance against these objectives forms building blocks towards the specific and global objectives. The terms of reference for this update indicate that appraisal should be directed at the Priority level. However, in the case of ESPON the indicators and target levels for priorities have been expressed as those for measures.
- 3.1.3 Data inputs to support our assessment activity have been collected by the CU as part of the ongoing project and financial monitoring.
- 3.1.4 The 7 objectives of the ESPON programme have been implemented through 5 priorities and their associated measures. The first 3 priorities comprise applied research projects and scientific support studies initiated through calls for tender to conduct projects. Priority 4 deals with access to information, dissemination of information and networking, whilst priority 5 covers management support activities.

**Table 3.1 Priorities, Measures and Project Actions**

Activity	Status
<b>30/6/05</b>	
<b>Priority 1. Thematic projects on important spatial developments</b>	
<b>Measure 1.1. Polycentric development and urban-rural relations</b>	
1.1.1 The role, Specific situation and potentials of urban areas as nodes in a polycentric development	✓
1.1.2. Urban-rural relations in Europe	✓
1.1.3. Particular Effects of Enlargement of the EU and Beyond on the Polycentric Spatial Tissue with Special Attention on Discontinuities and Barriers	ongoing
1.1.4. The spatial effects of demographic trends and migration	✓



Activity	Status 30/6/05
<b>Measure 1.2. Access to infrastructure and knowledge</b>	
1.2.1. Transport services and networks: territorial trends and basic supply of infrastructure for territorial cohesion	✓
1.2.2. Telecommunication Services and Networks: Territorial Trends and Basic Supply of Infrastructure for Territorial Cohesion	✓
1.2.3. Identification of spatially relevant aspects of the information society	tendered
<b>Measure 1.3. Natural and cultural heritage</b>	
1.3.1. The spatial effects and management of natural and technological hazards in general and in relation to climate change	✓
1.3.2. Territorial Trends of the Management of the Natural Heritage	✓
1.3.3. The role and spatial effects of cultural heritage and identity	ongoing
<b>Measure 1.4 Filling gaps and new projects</b>	
	New
1.4.1. Role of Small and Medium Size Towns	tendered
1.4.2. Social aspects of EU territorial development	tendered
<b>Priority 2. Policy impact projects</b>	
<b>Measure 2.1. The territorial effects of sector policies</b>	
2.1.1. Territorial impact of EU transport and TEN policies	✓
2.1.2. Territorial impact of EU research and development policy	✓
2.1.3. The territorial impact of CAP and rural development policy	✓
2.1.4. Territorial trends of energy services and networks and territorial impact of EU energy policy	✓
2.1.5. Territorial impacts of European fisheries policies	ongoing
<b>Measure 2.2. Structural funds and related funds</b>	
2.2.1. The territorial effects on the structural funds	✓
2.2.2. Territorial effects of the "AQUIS COMMUNITAIRE", pre-accession aid and PHARE/TACIS/MEDA programmes	✓
2.2.3. Territorial effects of structural funds in urban areas	✓
<b>Measure 2.3. Institutions and instruments of spatial policies</b>	
2.3.1. ESDP in Member States	ongoing
2.3.2. Governance of territorial and urban oriented policies	ongoing
<b>Measure 2.4 Filling gaps and new projects</b>	
	New
2.4.1. Territorial trends in environmental and impacts of EU environment policy	tendered ongoing
2.4.2. Integrated analysis on transnational and national territories based on ESPON results	



Activity		Status
		30/6/05
<b>Priority 3. Co-ordinating cross-thematic projects</b>		
Measure 3.1.	<b>Integrated tools for European spatial development</b>	✓
Measure 3.2.	<b>Spatial scenarios and orientations towards the ESDP and the Cohesion Policy</b>	ongoing
Measure 3.3.	<b>Territorial dimension of the Lisbon/Gothenburg Process</b>	New
Measure 3.4	<b>Filling gap and new Projects</b>	New
3.4.1	Europe in the world	ongoing
3.4.2	Territorial impacts of EU economic policies and location of economic activities	tendered ongoing
3.4.3	The modifiable areas unit problem	
<b>Priority 4. ESPON Research Briefing and Scientific Networking</b>		
Measure 4.1.	<b>Data navigator: preparatory surveys on data access</b> <b>Data Navigator II</b>	✓
Measure 4.2.	<b>ESPON Contact Points</b>	
Measure 4.3.	<b>Transnational Project Groups</b>	
<b>Priority 5. Technical Assistance</b>		
Measure 5.1.	<b>Management, monitoring and implementation</b>	
Measure 5.2.	<b>Information, publication and evaluation</b> <b>Communication Strategy</b>	Submitted

Draft Final or Final Report Submitted = ✓

- 3.1.5 Since the Mid-Term evaluation in 2003 the CIP has been updated (Dec 2004) to include four "New" measures as indicated above. These measures complement the existing work and represent a desire by the Monitoring Committee to extend investigations into emerging fields of interest and to develop a range of applied research projects, studies and scientific support. The actions are a conscious strategy by the MC to provide a broad base to the programme so that there could be further deepening and targeting of important dimensions in an ESPON II programme. As a result the programme has moved from 19 projects in the CIP (2002) to 30 projects by 2006.
- 3.1.6 Annex 5 of the CIP describing the qualitative indicators for evaluation of ESPON has not been updated to cover the extended scope of these new measures. Thus there are no baseline output indicators or targets to

Whilst developing new dimensions within the priority structure demonstrates initiative on the part of the MC there is a potential concern that spreading the resource inputs too thinly over the vast domain of ESPON could result in projects delivering results based on inadequate depth of analysis.



evaluate the results of the additional projects in *Measures 1.4, 2.4, 3.3 and 3.4*.

**Table 3.2 Progress Towards ESPON Objectives**

Objective	Indicator	2002 to 2006	Current Status June 05
1. To add value to existing national research by taking a clear European and trans-national focus, by improving the understanding of the diversity of the European territory and territorial development. These would include an analysis of territorial trends in the 13 candidate countries (3 candidate countries as from the 1st of May 2004) and neighbouring countries as well as in the Member States to draw conclusions for the territorial development of the Union	Number of projects tendered and finished	15	30 tendered 15 finished
2. To specify the implications of the ESDP policy orientations on transnational-national spaces, the interpretation of existing ones (such as Interreg II/III) and eventually evolving ones in the wake of the enlargement of the EU	Number of ESDP existing policy options addressed	50	58
3. To develop orientations for instruments and institutions necessary for a better perception and application of ESDP policy option by policy actors at all levels from the EU to the local level also including a better co-ordinated application of ESDP principles	Number of projects addressing the application of the ESDP	2	2
4. To contribute to a better understanding of the enhancement of the spatial dimension of the Structural Funds, Cohesion policy and other Community policies, and national sector policies	Total projects on sectoral policies	5	10
5. To make concrete contributions and proposals to improve co-ordination of territorially relevant decisions, taken at different levels (at the Community, national, regional and local level) and in different sector policies	Number of projects regarding the co-ordination of planning policy	2	2
6. To bridge the gap between policy makers, administrators and scientists	Each project includes an executive summary which indicates the added value for practitioners and the conditions for application of results	All projects	All projects
7. To create a network of the scientific European community in the fragmented field of spatial development	How many institutes are involved	70	120
	From how many countries	30	23





- 3.1.7 The seven high level objectives of ESPON together with their results/outputs are given in Table 3.2 above. At the time of the MTE all these objectives were being met and this continues to be the case today.
- 3.1.8 ESPON has already completed 15 projects and in total (across Priorities 1-3) has initiated 30 projects with both geographic coverage and thematic content that more than satisfy the goals set in the CIP.
- 3.1.9 Examination of ESDP Policy options raised in Objective 2 is considered by all projects, but especially by projects in Priority 1. The projects in Priority 1 have collectively covered 58 policy options against the target of 50 set in the CIP by the end of 2006.
- 3.1.10 As yet there are no quantified results available from projects 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 (dealing with ESDP application in response to Objective 3) which will further strengthen consideration of ESDP. However, given that all projects address ESDP it is the opinion of the evaluation team that the projects should be capable of fulfilling the aims set in the CIP.
- 3.1.11 Objective 4 is adequately covered by all projects in Measures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4.1.
- 3.1.12 Outputs from the cross-thematic projects in Priority 3 and the scientific network building will contribute towards the better coordination of planning policy intended by Objective 5.
- 3.1.13 Both the ECP and TPG participant networks make a substantial contribution towards bridging the gap between policy makers, administrators and scientists which is a fundamental objective of ESPON. These network activities have so far involved 6 seminars in all.
- 3.1.14 Further detail is presented in the following section in terms of the targets met by individual projects.



Whilst progress is indeed being achieved in respect to improved networking, more remains to be done to draw practitioners into the “ESPON Family”. This is now underway through an enhanced Communications strategy.

### 3.2 Programme Targets

- 3.2.1 Progress towards the targets set in the CIP for Priorities 1 to 3 are tabulated below and commented on in the following text. Those for Priority 4 and 5 are covered in the discussion below, since tabulation is impractical due to the quantification omissions in the CIP. Nevertheless, we are satisfied that all targets are being addressed appropriately.
- 3.2.2 Given the importance placed on inclusion of ESPON results in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cohesion Report by the Commission some project work schedules were affected by requests for specific contributions in the first half of the programme. This appears to have created difficulties for several projects who needed to restructure work plans to meet contractual commitments

within the remaining resources. However, all affected projects have delivered results as expected.

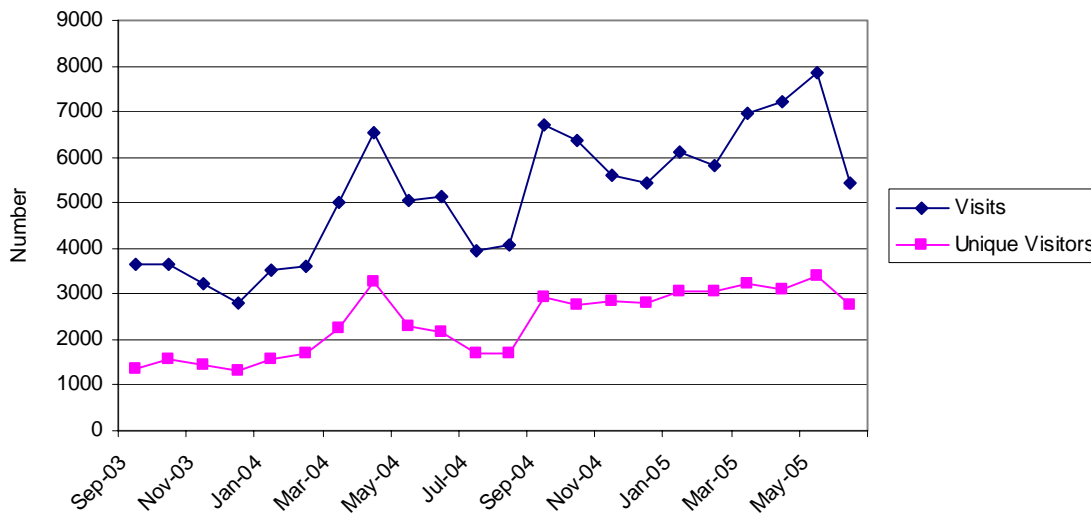
- 3.2.3 The quantification of indicators in the CIP is unclear in Priority 3 and does not mention Measures 3.3 and 3.4 since these were added after EU enlargement.
- 3.2.4 In the case of Measure 3.2 no formal tabulation of progress against CIP targets is practical at this stage. The second interim report (March 2005) offers the first indications of draft results. This shows progress towards targets, but also reorganisation of the project to adapt to changing priorities from the MC following the introduction of other projects with complementary scope (e.g. 2.4.2, 3.3 and 3.4).
- 3.2.5 Project 3.2 (which follows up the work of project 3.1) has the task of supporting the scientific coordination of the entire ESPON programme and of maintaining and enhancing the ESPON common scientific platform. Substantial coordination has been undertaken to maintain the ESPON Database and Map Kit, together with continuing guidance of projects. All this is happening in close collaboration with the ESPON Coordination Unit and through regular discussions with the Monitoring Committee and Managing Authority.
- 3.2.6 For Measure 3.1 indicators given in the CIP simply refer to the size of the integrated database and indicators without being clear what these refer to. However, the ESPON database does exist with content that exceeds the quantifications given. As evidence of progress towards targets for this Measure we present statistics on activities in Table 3.8. These demonstrate considerable progress towards Priority 3 targets.
- 3.2.7 Priority 4 is more than covering the targets set in the CIP. Measure 4.1 (Data Navigator) conducted the intended 27 national data access surveys and generated a list of 247 EU institutional statistics available through the Data Navigator. The proposed Data Navigator II will continue the work guiding researchers as to where they can get data and how to treat the data to achieve robust results. Measure 4.2 had a modest target of only 6 ECP meetings over the entire programme (2002-2006). Delivery will be more than double that figure with 4 meetings per year. Similarly, Measure 4.3 is also fulfilling its target of meetings.
- 3.2.8 Measure 5.1 has simple targets for numbers of projects contracted and MC meetings held. Progress towards both of these indicators has been fully satisfied.
- 3.2.9 Priority 5 also includes several actions under Measure 5.2 to increase awareness of ESPON and facilitate information flows through printed publications and the Internet.



3.2.10 In the previous evaluation we observed that current website usage appeared to have reached a plateau (about 1,500 unique visitors and a little over 5,000 visits), and suggested that a publicity strategy and plans to enhance the site capabilities would be an important action by the CU to aid effective dissemination.

3.2.11 The graph below shows that website use is indeed stable, but at a higher level, even though an intranet has been running throughout this period which could have abstracted users.

**Figure 3.1 ESPON Website Usage September 2003 to June 2005**



3.2.12 We maintain our observation that websites on their own cannot provide visibility for the programme and encourage the MC to press ahead with the Communication Strategy to enhance the profile of the programme.



**Table 3.3 Priority 1 - Measure 1.1 Polycentric development and urban-rural relation**

Output/Project	Number spatial indicators developed			Number spatial indicators applied			Number spatial concepts defined	Number spatial typologies tested	Number EU maps produced	Number ESDP policy options addressed
	Total	covering		Total	covering					
		EU territory (at least and/or only)	More than EU territory		EU territory	More than EU territory				
Project 1.1.1	44	44	44	44	44	44	4	3	35	7
Project 1.1.2	6	6	6	27	27	27	12	4	60	28
Project 1.1.3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Project 1.1.4	3	3	3	18	18	18	10	13	101	11
<b>Total (to June 2005)</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>CIP quantification (2002-2006)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>

Note: \* ongoing, not yet provided tables of indicators

**Table 3.4 Priority 1 - Measure 1.2 Access to infrastructure and knowledge**

Output/Project	Number spatial indicators developed			Number spatial indicators applied			Number spatial concepts defined	Number spatial typologies tested	Number EU maps produced	Number ESDP policy options addressed
	Total	covering		Total	covering					
		EU territory (at least and/or only)	More than EU territory		EU territory	More than EU territory				
Project 1.2.1	49	49	49	52	52	52	3	3	94	8
Project 1.2.2	41	41	41	41	41	41	6	18	78	4
Project 1.2.3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Total (to June 2005)</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CIP quantification (2002-2006)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15</b>

Note: \* Not yet started

**Table 3.5 Priority 1 - Measure 1.3 Natural and cultural heritage**

Output/Project	Number spatial indicators developed			Number spatial indicators applied			Number spatial concepts defined	Number spatial typologies tested	Number EU maps produced	Number ES DP policy options addressed
	Total	covering		Total	covering					
		EU territory (at least and/or only)	More than EU territory		EU territory	More than EU territory				
Project 1.3.1	32	32	32	2	2	2	2	2	33	5
Project 1.3.2	2	2	2	14	14	14	0	6	26	10
Project 1.3.3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Total (to June 2005)</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CIP quantification (2002-2006)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>

Note: \* ongoing, not yet provided tables of indicators

**Priority 1 - Measure 1.4 Filling gaps and new projects is not shown in the CIP and no projects have yet stated**

Table 3.6 Priority 2 - Measure 2.1 The territorial effects of sector policies

Output/Project	Number spatial indicators developed (in addition to Priority 1)			Number spatial indicators applied (in addition to Priority 1)			Number sector policies fully addressed	Number EU maps produced	Number charts on institutional structure of sector policies	Number policy aims mentioned in the ESDP reference made to by sector study
	Total	covering		Total	covering					
		EU territory (at least and/or only)	More than EU territory		EU territory	More than EU territory				
Project 2.1.1	9	9	6	61	61	52	1	56	0	5
Project 2.1.2	8	8	8	8	8	8	1	12	1	8
Project 2.1.3	80	80	0	80	80	0	1	27	2	All
Project 2.1.4	57	57	55	54	54	52	4	44	0	4
Project 2.1.5	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Total (to June 2005)</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>CIP quantification (2002-2006)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>All aims</b>

Notes: \* ongoing, not yet provided tables of indicators

Project 2.1.2 also tested one spatial typology.

**Table 3.7 Priority 2 - Measure 2.2 Structural Funds and Related Funds**

Output/Project	Number spatial indicators developed (in addition to Priority 1)			Number spatial indicators applied (in addition to Priority 1)			Number funds fully addressed	Number EU maps produced	Number charts on institutional structure related to Funds in their policy context	Number policy aims mentioned in the ESDP addressed by Funds investigated
	Total	covering		Total	covering					
		EU territory (at least and/or only)	More than EU territory		EU territory	More than EU territory				
Project 2.2.1	2	2	0	6	0	6	9	14	10	
Project 2.2.2	51	51	51	9	9	4	29	0	4	
Project 2.2.3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
<b>Total (to June 2005)</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	
<b>CIP quantification (2002-2006)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>All aims</b>	

Note: \* not yet provided tables of indicators

**Priority 2 - Measure 2.3 Institutions and instruments of spatial policies. Projects have not yet provided final reports**

**Priority 2 - Measure 2.4 Filling the Gaps and New Projects. This measure is not shown in the CIP**



**Table 3.8 Priority 3 - Measure 3.1 Integrated tools for European spatial development**

Output/Project	Number spatial indicators developed	Number spatial indicators applied	Number synoptic cross-thematic and synthetic spatial indicators based on ESPON results developed	Number spatial typologies introduced	Number spatial typologies tested	Number synthetic spatial indicators which can be combined with ESPON Hyperatlas	Number spatial concepts defined	Number EU maps produced	Number ESDP policy options addressed in the field
Project 3.1	89	49	24	13	14	33	53	89	15
<b>Total (to June 2005)</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CIP quantification (2002-2006)</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	n/a

**Table 3.9 Priority 5 - Technical Assistance**

Output/Project	Number projects contracted (priority 1-3)	Number monitoring committee meetings (4 per year)	Number monitoring committee meetings with participation of observers	Number publications organised (no finances available)	Number visitors to ESPON website		Evaluation Studies Tendered
					In Total	Unique Users	
Measure 5.1	30	18	3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Measure 5.2	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	113,627	52,362	2
<b>Total (to June 2005)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>113,627</b>	<b>52,362</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CIP quantification (2002-2006)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>10,000</b>	<b>2</b>

Notes: Monitoring Committee Meetings up to 30 June 2005

Website Statistics for period September 2003 – June 2005

### 3.3 Financial Performance

- 3.3.1 A detailed assessment of ESPON financial performance (but not an audit) has been conducted as a core element of the evaluation. Data to support this activity has been provided by the CU and consultations with the financial expert in the CU have clarified our interpretation of the current status of the programme.
- 3.3.2 A major constraint for ESPON is the small scale budget derived from both ERDF and Member State funds. The approved CIP budget at 28 December 2004 is **€14,464,688** (an increase from the original **€12,000,000** due to EU enlargement). The allocation of that budget to Priorities is given in the table below.

**Table 3.10 CIP Budget Allocations by Priority**

Priority	Original CIP Budget 2002	Approved CIP Budget 2004
Priority 1 – Thematic Projects on Importance Spatial Developments	€4,300,000	€4,250,000
Priority 2 – Policy Impact Projects	€3,994,000	€3,719,324
Priority 3 – Coordinating Cross Thematic Projects	€2,600,000	€3,699,502
Priority 4 – ESPON Research Briefing and Scientific Networking	€520,000	€1,106,100
Priority 5 – Technical Assistance	€1,086,000	€1,689,762
<b>TOTAL ESPON</b>	<b>€12,000,000</b>	<b>€14,464,688</b>

- 3.3.3 In addition, Luxembourg as Managing Authority offered to contribute a further €2,063,000 towards the establishment of the Co-ordination Unit under Priority 5.
- 3.3.4 Norway and Switzerland have also contributed a further €690,000 to the programme as full partners.
- 3.3.5 A potential danger towards the end of the programme might be represented by the cash flow. Funding is derived from both EC and Member States. Some Member States have been late in providing contributions. So far this has not had an impact on performance since dispersal of funds has not exceeded incoming funds, but it might be a cause for concern in the future.
- 3.3.6 The following table shows that programmed engagement of funding by the Monitoring Committee for each priority. It includes resource allocations for which a MC decision exists, but for which no engagements have been made. These engagements represent complete fulfilment of the target funding.



**Table 3.11 Engaged Funding and CIP Budget**

Priority	Programmed Engagement of Funds	Approved CIP Budget 2004
Priority 1 – Thematic Projects on Importance Spatial Developments	€4,249,540	€4,250,000
Priority 2 – Policy Impact Projects	€3,720,150	€3,719,324
Priority 3 – Coordinating Cross Thematic Projects	€3,699,500	€3,699,502
Priority 4 – ESPON Research Briefing and Scientific Networking	€1,031,451	€1,106,100
Priority 5 – Technical Assistance	€1,652,495	€1,689,762
<b>TOTAL ESPON</b>	<b>€14,353,136</b>	<b>€14,464,688</b>

3.3.7 Commitment of money is on track. Utilisation of budget has been efficiently managed within the financial regulation rules, including the movement of funding between measures and the enhancement of some priority line budgets in accordance with the recommendations of the 2003 Mid-Term Evaluation.

3.3.8 However, there are issues with project under spending (for one reasons or another). This gives rise to unused funds in small amounts per measure. Due to the financial regulation, reallocation of funds can be done between different priorities only through a heavy and long administrative procedure which requires that the revised CIP is adopted by a new Decision by the European Commission. However, funds can be reallocated within the measures of the same priority through a less complicated procedure requiring the amendment of the Programme Complement. Therefore, for practical reasons the ESPON Programme can only reuse funding within a priority and cannot fully consolidate resources to maximise use. A revision of the Programme Complement will be considered by the ESPON Programme in early 2006 after the majority of projects submit final cost claims to maximise effective use of funds in the final year of the programme. Some of these resources have already been reallocated to projects through contract addendums for the implementation of new tasks.

3.3.9 Attention has also been paid to the possibility of collecting residual amounts of money (e.g. from project under spends) and identifying small studies of up to €100K. This option has been made possible following the revised CIP and PC. It is an ideal mechanism for short duration studies in 2006. The intention to tender small studies in a single step to simplify the process is also to be commended.

3.3.10 Many of the budget lines have been modified in the revised CIP, and PC to cover new measures. The technical assistance budget (Priority 5) was found

Whilst small projects are an attractive way of filling gaps in the programme they suffer from the need to comply with a minimum 3 Member State partners in projects. Even the larger TPGs find the dilution of funding between partners a serious constraint on efficient operation.



to be inadequate and in consequence has been increased to about 8% of programme funding from the norm of 5% with approval of the Commission. On larger programmes a 5% ceiling affords considerable scope for technical support, but for ESPON this is clearly unrealistic.

- 3.3.11 Both technical implementation and financial performance are hampered by the financial restrictions imposed by the ERDF regulation, in particular financial control procedures. Due to the nature of the INTERREG funded programme, projects are financed through subsidy contracts, with the consequence that only real costs incurred for their realisation/implementation can be reimbursed (no advance payment is allowed under the ERDF regulation). This is an important difference in comparison to the conditions applicable to Commission funded studies and also to studies financed under the R&D Framework programme regime, making ESPON not particularly attractive to University and/or Research units in general. In the next programming period the possibility to implement a service type of contract should be considered.
- 3.3.12 The difficulties of conducting international audits on projects and the overall programme in accordance with INTERREG guidance create a substantial financial burden. This is unavoidable in the present programme, but in any follow up programme greater efficiency could be realised through a more simplified audit regime.

#### ***Financial Control Procedures***

- 3.3.13 Financial control procedures have been an ongoing issue within the programme. At the time of the 2003 MTE the first level financial control procedures were just being agreed and very few reimbursement claims from projects had been processed. An amendment of the implemented procedures was found to be necessary which caused some delays in payments.
- 3.3.14 On the initiative of the MA, PA and CU the financial control procedure was updated in 2004 to fully comply with Structural Funds regulations. First level financial control is now carried out for each partner in their own Member State, and not just in the Lead Partners Member States. Guidelines documenting the procedures have been published and project financial officers trained in the implementation of the procedure. In addition, meetings were organised with Member States First Level Financial Controllers to ensure a common understanding and application of the relevant EU regulations.
- 3.3.15 Experience has shown that even with training, certified payment claims still contain errors and eventually ineligible expenditures with consequent delays for the payment process. This is a source of considerable frustration for all parties concerned. The situation is gradually improving, but has required greater direct intervention than was envisaged by the CU in validating claims and advising projects on financial issues. This has placed considerable strain

The resources to support effective and efficient financial performance must not be underestimated.



on the CU to deliver the effective and efficient financial performance of ESPON that has been their goal. Personnel resources in the CU remain stretched in this respect and this has resulted in the decision of recruiting an additional person only in charge of financial and administrative matters for 18 months to cover the end phase of the programming period. This will intensify support to Lead and Project partners (including on the spot checks/assistance to ensure impeccable payment reimbursement claims).

- 3.3.16 Delays in payment are not just a problem for the project participants. These delays accumulate and become a potential de-commitment problem for the overall budget. Delays caused by the complexity of financial procedures and errors in submission (even some that were certified by the competent First Level Financial Control Authorities) must be resolved (at least for projects approved in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> rounds) by November 2005 in order to ensure sufficient spending and avoid such a problem. The CU is actively working with all partners concerned to resolve these problems with the aim of ensuring that sufficient payments to avoid de-commitment are executed by November 2005. The MA and the CU are confident that because of the extra efforts implemented the necessary level of spending will occur and that the financial paperwork from projects will be placed in good time to make payments possible.
- 3.3.17 Table 3.12 below sets out the **total actually paid and certified eligible expenditure** by ESPON. It clearly illustrates the low levels of payments overall (21%) compared to engagements set out in the table above (i.e. in the order of 24% for priority 1, 20% for priority 2, 14% for priority 3, 21% for priority 4 and 32% for priority 5).
- 3.3.18 Provision for the Second and Third Level Financial Controls have now been agreed and are currently under implementation. Similar to other INTERREG funded programmes involving the entire EU territory, a Financial Control Group (composed of two representatives per Member States in charge of second and third level financial controls) has been officially constituted. The FCG will contract an external international auditor to execute checks and prepare draft reports according to art. 4 and art. 5 of Commission Regulation 438/2001.
- 3.3.19 Provisions indicated in Commission Regulation 438/2001 establish that on the spot checks have to be performed on a minimum 5% of the total programme budget (following a risk assessment) covering all programme priorities. Once more the small scale of ESPON and the number of priorities mean that checks will be carried out in excess of this figure.



**Table 3.12 Total Payments to June 2005**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
<b>Priority 1</b>	- €	328,538.60 €	674,918.75 €	- €	1,003,457.35 €
Measure 1.1.	- €	80,017.45 €	407,780.10 €	- €	487,797.55 €
Measure 1.2.	- €	205,613.52 €	62,011.70 €	- €	267,625.22 €
Measure 1.3.	- €	42,907.63 €	205,126.95 €	- €	248,034.58 €
<b>Priority 2</b>	- €	215,361.64 €	369,491.04 €	152,678.55 €	737,531.23 €
Measure 2.1.	- €	147,280.28 €	181,607.57 €	152,678.55 €	481,566.40 €
Measure 2.2.	- €	68,081.36 €	187,883.47 €	- €	255,964.83 €
Measure 2.3.	- €	- €	- €	- €	- €
<b>Priority 3</b>	- €	358,373.39 €	- €	144,786.37 €	503,159.76 €
Measure 3.1.	- €	358,373.39 €	- €	144,786.37 €	503,159.76 €
Measure 3.2.	- €	- €	- €	- €	- €
<b>Priority 4</b>	61.13 €	133,328.85 €	61,113.56 €	17,844.12 €	212,347.66 €
Measure 4.1.	- €	91,763.08 €	21,109.87 €	6,457.95 €	119,330.90 €
Measure 4.2.	- €	12,713.90 €	16,105.86 €	9,107.45 €	37,927.21 €
Measure 4.3.	61.13 €	28,851.87 €	23,897.83 €	2,278.72 €	55,089.55 €
<b>Priority 5</b>	41,881.59 €	98,329.27 €	357,833.84 €	32,089.02 €	530,133.72 €
Measure 5.1.	41,881.59 €	53,346.82 €	236,286.72 €	27,165.27 €	358,680.40 €
Measure 5.2.	- €	44,982.45 €	121,547.12 €	4,923.75 €	171,453.32 €
<b>Total</b>	<b>41,942.72 €</b>	<b>1,133,931.75 €</b>	<b>1,463,357.19 €</b>	<b>347,398.06 €</b>	<b>2,986,629.73 €</b>
Total ERDF Related	20,971.36 €	566,965.88 €	731,678.60 €	173,699.03 €	1,493,314.87 €

### 3.4 Conclusions on Outputs and Results

- 3.4.1 Since the MTE the programme has moved into a phase where outputs and results have begun to flow in substantial numbers. These are being managed through clear guidelines on reporting and sensible coordination of datasets, methodologies, typologies and tools. These provide a sound basis for future elaboration of the programme and clearly identify those areas where data deficiencies continue to exist.
- 3.4.2 Generally, project outputs exceed expectations though in some respects this is a quantitative conclusion rather than qualitative assessment. Reports are developing a more coherent style and content is becoming more rationalised.
- 3.4.3 Communicating the activity of ESPON and its initial findings to a broader audience remains a priority, but this received a boost when a sample of



maps was used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cohesion Report. There is evidence that both the Commission and Member States scientific community are filtering output for dissemination in various policy contexts.

- 3.4.4 The development of a Communication strategy with external specialist support will further enhance the prospect of ESPON increasing awareness of its work.
- 3.4.5 In respect to financial performance the evaluation recognises the difficulties all parties have faced in arriving at a functional financial control system and efficient payment process. Although some delays in final payments have not yet been fully resolved there are reasonable grounds to expect these outstanding difficulties to be resolved quickly, thereby removing the danger of failure to use funds committed within the critical N+2 time frame.









## 4 Analysis of impacts achieved and likely achievement of objectives

### 4.1 Overview

4.1.1 The impact of ESPON needs to be measured by indicators that refer to the consequences of the programme beyond the immediate effects on its direct beneficiaries. Conventional practice identifies two forms of impact:

- **Specific impacts** that occur after a certain elapse time, but which are, nevertheless, directly attributable to the actions taken; and
- **Global impacts** that reflect the longer-term effects which affect a wider population.

4.1.2 Measuring these types of impact is complex, since clear causal relationships can rarely be defined and significant time needs to elapse to be able to identify a change.

4.1.3 ESPON is only now beginning to reach a stage where specific impacts might be examined in respect to the outcomes of the first wave of projects that are completed. Even for these projects, the elapse time is probably too short to quantify real impacts, since much will depend on dissemination of the results to user communities and their awareness of the potential value of the tools developed. The ESPON Communication Strategy is, therefore, vital to success.

4.1.4 The following diagram illustrates the relationships between Objectives, the inputs (initiatives/activities), results, Specific Impacts and the longer term Global Impact that realises the program objective.

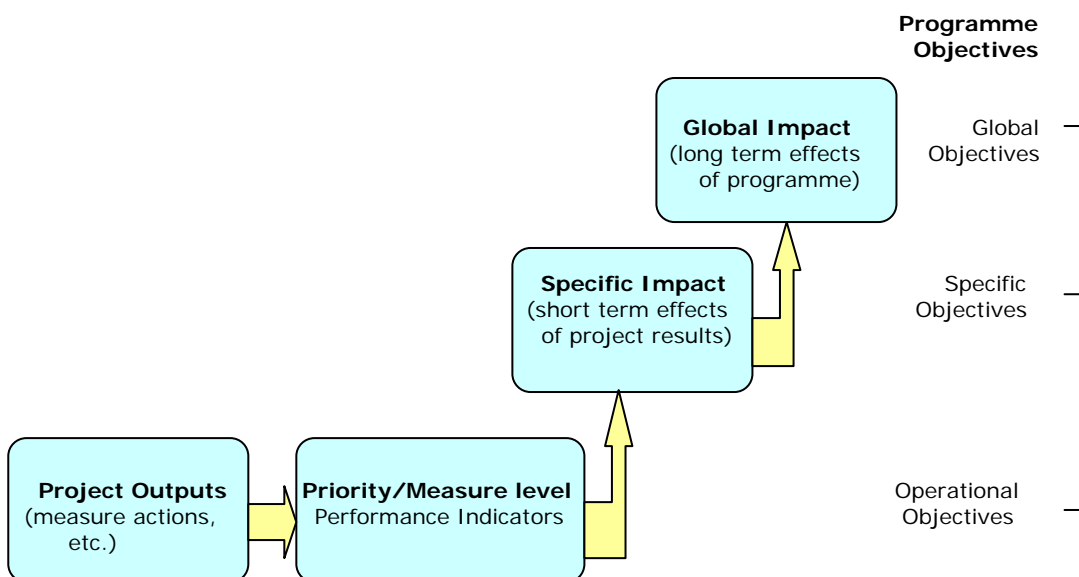
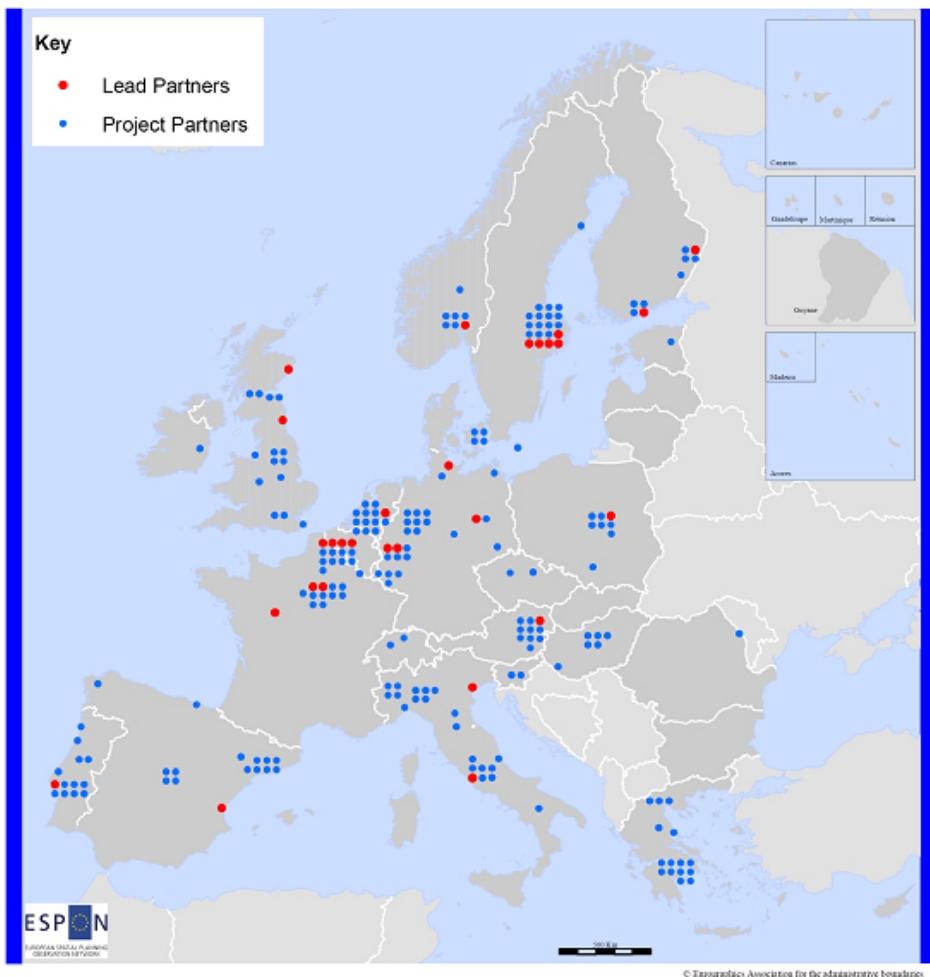


Figure 4.1 Relationship between indicators impacts and objectives

4.1.5 The desired impacts set out in Annex 5 of the CIP are described in terms that represent a mix of the more immediate **specific impacts** and the longer term **global impacts**. They consequently have indicators associated with them that concentrate on simple expressions of effort and geographic coverage (e.g. numbers of projects, and Member State involvement), leaving the more complex identification of global impact to a holistic interpretation of the specific impacts.

4.1.6 From this standpoint it is possible to conclude that ESPON is realising its immediate impact targets and in fact is beginning to demonstrate some of the global impacts. For such a modestly funded programme ESPON covers a considerable domain and is creating new datasets, maps and tools that ought to aid spatial policy development at European, transnational as well as regional/local scale. The extent of involvement in the programme illustrated in the map of ESPON participants shown below further supports the conclusion that potential awareness of results across Europe will be achieved.



## 4.2 Impacts to Date

4.2.1 There is no direct mapping of priorities to ESPON objectives. All activities contribute to a greater or lesser extent to the high level objectives, but to carry this argument too far would invalidate the performance indicator system chosen in the programme definition and the measurement concept itself. In this section we consider each Objective in turn to assess the impacts of actions taken against the expected impacts envisaged in the CIP. Achievement of performance indicators at Priority and Measure level considered in the previous chapter form the basis for the assessment.

### ***Objective 1 – Expected Impact***

4.2.2 *“Projects cover the whole EU territory and the neighbouring countries. Typologies are developed and employed which allow identifying and comparing the variety of Europe’s territory”.*

4.2.3 All TPGs have a scope that covers the whole EU territory and neighbouring countries. Their activities have either involved the use of available methods or the development of innovative approaches to analyse trends and territorial impact. Results have led to the development of new typologies that are generating specific impacts, but the longer term global impacts are only likely to become real if project outputs gain widespread acceptance and adoption by practitioners and policy makers and scientists. ESPON is working on this through the communication strategy, and seminars at national and transnational levels.

### ***Objective 2 – Expected Impact***

4.2.4 *“Projects take stock of the ESDP policy options and make proposals for the specification and advancement with particular regard to the Interreg areas”.*

4.2.5 ESDP policy options have been examined in several projects. The results of that activity are documented in project final reports. To realise impacts from this work the findings could be used as a basis for further study and elaboration of follow-up actions to ESPON which would lead to implementation. ESPON results and maps are already being used in relation to the actual policy process for scoping, to support Commission strategic guidance, national development strategies, etc.

### ***Objective 3 – Expected Impact***

4.2.6 *“Do the results of the programme support the better application of the ESDP?”*

4.2.7 The ESPON work programme shows this activity as happening in the second half of the programme. Project activity has been started that target this objective, but it is still too early to identify clear impacts. Nevertheless, the

Project 2.3.1  
ESDP in Member States



extent of project activity suggests that specific impacts will emerge during the course of 2005-2006 and with appropriate communication actions in support of the programme there are reasonable grounds to expect global impacts that would satisfy the objective.

#### **Objective 4 – Expected Impact**

- 4.2.8 *“Development of tools/methods for the territorial assessment of sectoral policies. Systematic assessment of EU sector policies”.*
- 4.2.9 Seven projects under Priority 2 from the first rounds of calls have completed their work. As the tables in Chapter 3 demonstrate these have provided an extensive range of spatial indicators applied to the territorial effects of sector policies. The full impact of these results should emerge in the remaining course of ESPON as communication and publicity actions raise the profile of the programme.

**Completed Projects:**  
2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3,  
2.1.4, 2.2.1, 2.2.2,  
2.2.3

**Ongoing Projects**  
2.1.5, 2.4.1

#### **Objective 5 – Expected Impact**

- 4.2.10 *“Results contribute to the understanding of a better horizontal and vertical co-ordination of sector policies.”*
- 4.2.11 The ESPON work programme shows this activity as happening in the second half of the programme. Initiatives are underway, but as yet there are no clear indications of outputs on which to base an evaluation of the impact. However, given the scope of projects underway it is likely that the objectives should be achieved in particular governance and ESDP applications.

**Ongoing Projects**  
2.3.1, 2.3.2

#### **Objective 6 – Expected Impact**

- 4.2.12 *“Methods and results are presented in a way which contribute to the mutual understanding of the mentioned groups using charts, maps, listing of advantages and disadvantages of approaches”.*
- 4.2.13 The scientific platform is being developed step by step. Attention has been paid to the need for completed projects to provide brief reports in the form of executive summaries that can be published to add value for the practitioner community. Guidelines for these reports have been updated. In addition, the work on scenario building demonstrates potential as a mechanism for communicating developments that should achieve specific impacts.



### **Objective 7 – Expected Impact**

- 4.2.14 *“The involvement of many institutes from all EU Member States and from the candidate and partner countries”.*
- 4.2.15 The creation of a scientific network in the field of spatial development is clearly being realised by ESPON. At the simplest level the programme has had an impact by bringing together 120 participating organisations from 23 countries working in a collaborative environment supported by regular seminars, workshops and in the near future the first ESPON scientific conference. With multiple involvement in projects this covers 217 participations. More tangibly the ECP network is demonstrating an ability to support TPG actions through commenting on outputs and by extending awareness of the programme and its results within Member States. The planned ESPON scientific conferences (e.g. Luxembourg in October 2005) also bring in new collaborations with other European academic research networks, such as the University of Luxembourg, AESOP, ERSA, ECTP, RSA and EUGEO.

### **4.3 Performance Indicators**

- 4.3.1 It is incumbent on all programmes to implement a monitoring system that contains a level of detail appropriate to the intervention. The monitoring system put in place for ESPON satisfies that criteria.
- 4.3.2 A common mistake is to over specify indicators – creating long lists that are difficult to maintain and of limited value as a monitoring tool. **Core indicators** should be very limited in number and address the overall programme objectives. **Performance indicators** should have a clear functional propose not only to measure programme performance, but also to reflect the key concerns of:
- Effectiveness;
  - Quality of Management; and
  - Financial Implementation.
- 4.3.3 The criteria used for selecting these indicators must therefore be:
- Relevance (to priorities and objectives);
  - Quantification (ability to set targets and establish baselines);
  - Reliability (clarity of definition and ease of aggregation); and
  - Availability (ease of collection for entry into the monitoring system).
- 4.3.4 Comments in previous sections indicate our anxiety that performance indicators described in the CIP for ESPON are rather simplistic and tend towards an accounting approach; quantifying the actions as targets rather than judging the quality of performance. The current CIP performance



indicators are also incomplete following adoption of additional Measures. It is therefore suggested that performance indicators for existing projects be applied to the new projects.

- 4.3.5 Indicators should be specific and mutually consistent with quantifiable targets where possible.
- 4.3.6 The current performance indicators are a measure of the stage reached by the programme in terms of its implementation and, therefore, have value for monitoring the efficiency of delivery, but not necessarily its effectiveness and impact.
- 4.3.7 Information to measure progress towards the performance indicators given in the CIP has been collected by the CU and this has formed the basis for our appraisal during the update to the mid-term evaluation. However, performance indicators presented in the revised CIP have not been fully updated to take account of additional measures and projects. This removes some of the baseline against which progress could be assessed in some areas. A solid baseline exists for 19 projects previewed but not for all the 30 projects being implemented.
- 4.3.8 Inadequacies in the formulation of indicators in general have already been recognised by the CU and consideration is being given to how they might be improved for a follow up action; and possibly also for the current programme.
- 4.3.9 Consideration was given to standard practice as described in **Working Paper 3 Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation: An indicative methodology** produced by DG XVI Regional Policy and Cohesion when the CIP was drafted. Current performance indicators were developed taking into account the indicative methodology and list of examples of indicators published in Working Paper 3 as far as they were applicable to a research network such as ESPON.
- 4.3.10 It was also anticipated that ‘impacts’ as understood in the Commission’s Working Paper 3 would be difficult or even impossible to measure in the case of ESPON due to the immensity of the co-operation area and the relatively limited size of the budget.
- 4.3.11 The following section contains comments on an approach to improved indicators that might be considered.

In general, the Performance indicators in the CIP provide an adequate basis for programme monitoring and evaluation.

#### 4.4 Proposals for Future Performance Indicators

- 4.4.1 The present performance indicators associated with the 7 “high level” objectives of ESPON offer little evidence that assists evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the programme. A more rigorous approach for the future would be to develop definitions of results/outputs with their





indicators that are closely tied to higher level EU policy objectives. This would be in line with recognised practice that core indicators ought to aid decision makers to assess how “*global*” EU policies are being achieved. They, therefore, need to be quantified in terms that can be aggregated whenever possible with indicators from other community programmes. Most importantly future PIs need to consider what the categories of indicator should be.

#### 4.4.2 An obvious set of conditions would include:

- Ensuring that ESPON is developed in a way that takes account of emerging political developments. In particular, confirming PI categories are compatible with territorial cohesion and community structure funds indicators that support the Lisbon/Gothenburg process;
- Checking that EU Directives are appropriately handled. Potential overlaps ought to be avoided, or harmonised with common indicators;
- Requiring indicators to be compatible with full EU coverage and able to be disaggregated to support analysis by regions (e.g. EU15, EU25, EU25+2, etc.); and
- Identification of sectoral policy orientations.

4.4.3 The ESPON programme presents a specific difficulty in creating the right type of indicator, since unlike typical structural fund interventions the programme does not create physical outputs (e.g. new roads) that have easily identifiable results and impacts. The Commission working paper<sup>2</sup> on indicators for monitoring and evaluation gives pointers to define indicators. For example, in a transport context a new road might be measured as an output indicator, its affect on journey time measured by time saved as a result indicator and its impact on traffic flows measured as an impact indicator. Translating this approach to the ‘**enabling**’ activities of ESPON is viable at the level of outputs and indicative results but becomes somewhat vague and impractical for the longer term impacts.

4.4.4 This situation is illustrated in Table 4.1 below with a few examples based on current ESPON priorities. Some creativity will therefore be necessary to develop indicators that can be quantified and yet retain relevance.

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<sup>2</sup> The New Programming period 2000-2006: methodological working papers. WP3 Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation: An indicative methodology. European Commission DG Regional Policy and Cohesion



**Table 4.1 Examples of monitoring and evaluation indicators**

Activity	Output	Result	Impact
Thematic & Policy Impact projects	Number of themes or policies addressed	Number of spatial indicators developed	Use of indicators in community, national, regional or local assessments
		Number of research publications	
Cross-thematic	Number of integrated tools	Number of ESDP policy options addressed	Further development of ESDP
Networking	Number of collaborative projects, or organisations involved	Increased awareness, measured in number of seminars and attendance	Increased application of new tools and concepts by practitioners
	ESPON database	Number of data sets accessed by users	Number of policies etc., influenced by information

4.4.5 Increasing levels of detail can be applied for priorities and measures to support the monitoring of specific actions, both in terms of quantifying activity, but more critically appraising whether those actions generate beneficial impacts.

4.4.6 Increasing levels of information should be available as you drill down from programme objectives through priorities to measures and ultimately individual project outcomes. This implies that indicators would not be expressed in the same terms at each level, but that data gathered at the lowest level helps build the picture that emerges at the next level up, and so on. This is not the case with the current PI set, which retains the same definition at each level.

4.4.7 Monitoring performance must occur at different levels of detail for:

- The programme against its objectives;
- Priorities and Measures to identified targets; and
- Projects against provision of core **spatial indicators**.

4.4.8 It is important to distinguish between performance indicators and spatial indicators. The latter are often little more than descriptions of data variables and could run into long lists; hence the need to define “core” indicators.

The CU and MC have grasped this concept and are currently conducting a valuable consultation exercise to identify such a core indicator list for future project monitoring.



4.4.9 A final consideration in looking for a consistent and coherent set of indicators for the future has to be **practicality**. Striving to achieve ever more precise and informative indicators must not place an unreasonable burden on the monitoring process within a programme. Ease of access to available data is critical. At the end of the day the level of detail must be appropriate to the scale of the intervention.

#### **4.5 Conclusions on Performance Indicators and Realisation of Objectives**

4.5.1 Performance indicators described in the CIP provide a reasonable quantification of progress against both priority level objectives and overall objectives. However, they lack the sophistication necessary to measure the quality of the impact.

4.5.2 Utilising the existing Performance indicators it is possible to conclude ESPON is on track and has a strong likelihood of realising its goals.

4.5.3 In the longer term, however, it would be appropriate to give greater consideration to the development of a more coherent and sophisticated set of indicators for any follow-up action.





# 5





## 5 Additional Issues and Questions of General Interest

### 5.1 Quality of Programme Implementation Structures and Actions

- 5.1.1 The manner in which the ESPON programme is being implemented was considered in the 2003 MTE. It has also been under constant review by the MA, CU and MC as evidenced by the debates on development of the ECP network, the need for scientific validation of results and improvements to the financial control process.
- 5.1.2 These initiatives show a healthy appreciation within ESPON of the need to constantly assess performance from a qualitative viewpoint.
- 5.1.3 Our update evaluation has concentrated on the three examples given above, since they are core elements of programme delivery and were areas that raised questions in the previous evaluation.

#### Financial Control

- 5.1.4 Financial control structures can be a barrier to effective and efficient implementation.
- 5.1.5 In respect to ESPON financial control structures there has been a significant improvement in performance. Financial control agreements have been slow to emerge and though apparently in conformity with accepted practice were initially flawed.
- 5.1.6 Payments in the early years have therefore been subject to delays that resulted from:
- Inaccurate cost claims by project partners;
  - Approvals in some 1<sup>st</sup> level audits of ineligible costs, resulting in a need for claims to be revised and resubmitted;
  - The need to revise the whole 1<sup>st</sup> level audit process so that it is now performed for each partner in their own Member State; and
  - A general lack of experience on the part of participants of a cost claim process that is universal in EU programmes.
- 5.1.7 The response of the MA, PA and CU to these difficulties has been energetic, and generally supportive to projects. The proactive consultation with lead partners and the moves to instil an understanding of the financial control process through training (both for projects and auditors) is beginning to show benefits. It has, however, been achieved at considerable cost in time, effort and goodwill. The CU will continue to endure a substantial burden as the programme moves into its final period.
- 5.1.8 A delay in passing funding through to final recipients has a detrimental effect on a programme. In the first instance it constrains a participant's ability to carry out contract activity; unless they come from public bodies, or

The quality of financial monitoring by all parties has increased to a point where it is now capable of delivering effective and efficient processing of claims.



unusually wealthy organisations. In the longer term it generates a bad aura that leaves current participants less willing to repeat the experience and potential participants unwilling to join the network. The present contractual regime is unlikely to break this cycle since participants have to join projects knowing there is no advance payment (as in EU RTD programmes) to cushion the impact of an undesirable cash flow model. Whilst the model is acceptable for small short term contracts it is impractical for larger long duration (24 month) contracts where each organisation has to wait for a collective cost claim.

- 5.1.9 The financial control structures in place today should satisfy the needs of all parties. It is the view of the MA, PA, and CU that the N+2 rule for expenditure does not represent a risk to financial performance. Actions are in place to ensure the backlog of issues to be addressed on claims will be resolved within the necessary timeframe.

### **Networking**

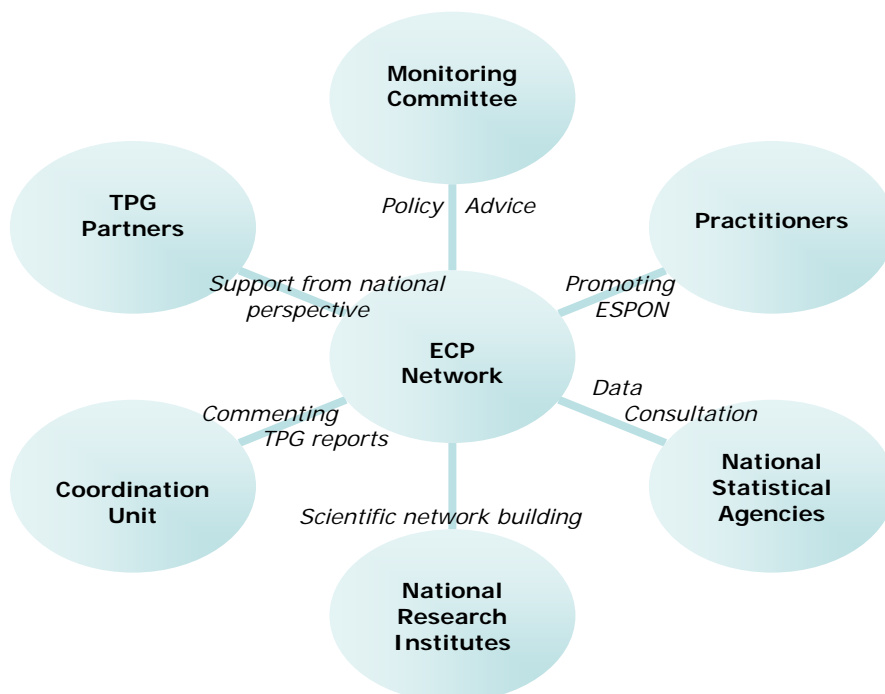
- 5.1.10 ESPON, as its name implies is a programme where networking is a core activity. It has, therefore, adopted a more 'client oriented' view of its operation. The programme has extended links across the INTERREG programme and is using direct involvement in INTERACT to strengthen that role.
- 5.1.11 To build on its initial success ESPON needs to increase its outreach by growing an ever larger community of clients for its research. Working in close collaboration with these clients is the most effective way to identify spatial issues and provide appropriate targeted analysis.
- 5.1.12 Networking can be achieved in several ways:
- Through a network of national contact points;
  - By collaborative research work; and
  - An effective communication strategy.
- 5.1.13 All these approaches are being used in ESPON. An effective ECP network is one of the pillars of the whole ESPON programme. The network we see today has expanded and taken on new responsibilities since the 2003 MTE. However, it is also affected by heterogeneity and potential conflicts of interest. There remain weaknesses in geographic coverage, the involvement of some contact points and the differing capabilities of its constituent organisations.
- 5.1.14 In its present format the network is handicapped by the dual nature of its work. ECP's are appointed by Member States and have largely been funded from national budgets with notable differences in funding. This is not an efficient model, or one that is compatible with the desire to have ECP's conducting trans-national coordination and commenting on programme results.





- 5.1.15 In the MTE we observed that ECP’s were perceived more as satellites around ESPON rather than being a central pillar, which was the apparent intention during the definition stage of ESPON.
- 5.1.16 The format of ECP funding and their contractual commitments compound the problem of achieving effective and efficient operation. It is highly desirable to have focal points in each country to promote the programme and to disseminate results. However, the transnational functions performed by ECPs necessitate international collaboration. This raises potential conflicts over utilisation of resources between national and transnational activity, especially where contact points have very different funding levels.
- 5.1.17 Considerable debate continues to take place on key issues surrounding ECP activity, both by the ECP’s and other stakeholders. Arising from that debate is a general consensus that they have an important role in ESPON which should be continued in ESPON II.
- 5.1.18 The diagram below illustrates some of the key functions and interactions in the support structure as currently applied. Tensions exist around some of these roles and it would be sensible to disentangle commitments by transferring tasks to other bodies in a future programme (e.g. commenting on TPG results / scientific validation).

The quality of ECP implementation and involvement is not homogeneous.



**Figure 5.1** Key functions and linkages in ECP support structure



- 5.1.19 The core activity of ECPs should be as one arm of the programme communication strategy operating at the national level helping to build the scientific network and disseminating results to practitioners. They could remain responsible for organising national events and could usefully contribute to the centralised transnational events described below. The format of conventional ECP meetings has changed little and could benefit from greater allocation of time for specific workshops and interaction (including free networking time).
- 5.1.20 ECPs are also generally well equipped to provide policy advice from a national perspective to the MC. Their involvement in commenting TPG reports should be reconsidered, and more emphasis should be put on provision of national support to TPGs and ESPON in general. This should focus on comments from a strict National perspective on TPG reports, in order to avoid data misinterpretation, and on liaison with National statistical offices to promote availability of compatible data sets, and the TPGs identifying those data needs.
- 5.1.21 Transnational networking through conferences, seminars and focussed presentations to regional representatives ought to be a centralised function. The MA, MC and CU should identify the calendar of events and then either invite individual tenders to run the events, or decide on an umbrella approach of having one support action event management organisation tender to cover the entire programme duration. The latter approach would be more efficient and could still interact with MC representatives and ECPs to access venues etc. in a cost effective manner.
- 5.1.22 Transnational networking activities have already been enhanced since the 2003 MTE. To improve the quality of international collaborations the MC has provided additional funding for ECPs as shown in the table below.

Budget allocated	CIP budget	Partner States budget
First round of activities	€ 168,680	€ 0
Second round activities	€ 131,320	€ 30,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 300,000</b>	<b>€ 30,000</b>

- 5.1.23 Several actions have been put forward (i.e. SEEP, Youngstars and ESPON Going Regional) involving 16 ECP's in total and typically 5 or 6 per activity.
- 5.1.24 Seminars have continued to provide an effective forum for debate. They have been well attended and supported by the local hosts. In Belfast there was a good mix of about 150 delegates from the research and practitioner community. The ESPON Going Regional London meeting on Competitiveness and Cohesion in North Western Europe 11-12 July 2005 was similarly well supported. Another meeting is planned in Greece later in 2005.



- 5.1.25 The ESPON scientific conference “**A European Territorial Research Community**” in Luxembourg 13-14 October 2005 organised by the MA and CU as part of the Communication Strategy further strengthens programme outreach. It aims to promote an open and multidisciplinary scientific debate on European territorial research and take the building of a scientific network one step further.

### **Scientific Validation**

- 5.1.26 Until now scientific validation of TPG results has been a patchy process involving commenting on interim and final reports by ECP’s (largely from a national standpoint) with guidance and coordination from the cross thematic projects 3.1 and 3.2.
- 5.1.27 Expectations that the process could be performed by a project have proven unrealistic since there ought to be an enforceable feed-back loop as part of monitoring. In this respect the CU would have to take a lead role.
- 5.1.28 Nevertheless, the outcome has had value, but lacks the rigour which could be provided by peer group reviews as suggested in the MTE. The MC may wish to consider various strategies to provide peer group scientific validation in ESPON II, including:
- Encouraging projects to publish work in refereed conferences, and journals. The difficulty with this route alone is the long delays in publication introduced by publication dates and conference schedules. However, publications could then be incorporated as a performance indicator and measure of project success;
  - Strengthening the ESPON conference components of the programme as suggested in the communication strategy. This would retain control of the activity within the programme and could be directed at regional or thematic audiences to stimulate external debate; and
  - Establishing an ESPON review process based on a scientific board (panel of independent experts).
- 5.1.29 The MC and CU have considered a peer group implementation structure and tried out independent evaluation on two projects. This process has shown the concept of a “Scientific Board” to have merit. It is our opinion that such a body could have considerable value in a follow-up programme. It also has the merit of relieving ECP’s of a role they are not always well equipped to fulfil. Within the current ESPON programme a scientific board is not a practical option, since it would take too long to establish and populate with suitable experts.
- 5.1.30 Organising a Scientific Board requires the following:
- A call for expressions of interest from individuals to go on an expert list at the start of the programme. Inclusion on the list would not



necessarily imply an individual was called upon the carry out reviews;

- Identification of a budget line for short duration service contracts for the experts to carry out reviews. Payments on a fixed daily rate including expenses; and
- Linking specific experts with a project (preferably more than one project in a thematic group) throughout its life to assess scientific quality and where possible to communicate the lessons between projects.

5.1.31 A Scientific Board to carry out validation has the merit of not being complicated by the tendering process, as is the case with a cross thematic coordination project and could avoid conflicts of interest where organisations are involved in TPG's.

5.1.32 Projects also need a point of contact to discuss and clarify scientific and technical issues. The CU is the logical location for such a person (i.e. Project Officer). However, in a small coordination unit there is little chance that all scientific aspects could be covered by the limited staff numbers. Attaching independent experts from a scientific board to projects adds value to the monitoring process. It would support the CU function and as mentioned above could also integrate with cross project collaboration and knowledge transfer if the scientific board provided a common link between several related projects.

### **Managing Authority, Paying Authority and Coordination Unit**

5.1.33 The ESPON Coordination Unit has both grown and matured as an operational team since the 2003 MTE. It now has a more substantial staff and has been able to bring stronger links to other INTERREG actions through its involvement in the INTERACT Point.

5.1.34 Despite this growth the unit still remains constrained by financial resources and turnover in staff resulting from secondments from Member States. Without these seconded staff the unit could not meet its obligations. Continuity of contact with projects however must suffer when monitoring changes hands.

5.1.35 Nevertheless, the MA and CU have efficiently maintained ESPON on a steady course. Staff have shown initiative to overcome difficulties (e.g. with financial control changes) and overall there is energetic leadership of the team.

5.1.36 The CU has managed to carry out the annual work plans and their associated calls for tender, meetings and seminars in an effective and efficient manner.



## 5.2 Identification of Best Practices in Project Implementation

- 5.2.1 The process of identifying and describing best practice in project implementation justifies a study in its own right. In the course of this update evaluation we have been able to touch on the issue in consultation with project participants.
- 5.2.2 The comments below draw upon those discussions and attempt to highlight features which distinguish successful projects. It would be inappropriate to attempt to identify individual projects as exemplars of best practice.
- 5.2.3 We have identified two specific challenges that face projects, which arise from the objectives of ESPON, to gain an understanding of how they impact on the work and to see what needs to be done to overcome the problems. These are the difficulties of handling or finding **compatible data** sets across Europe, and formulation of **policy options**.
- 5.2.4 Given that **data availability** and the need to create compatible data sets for the whole ESPON space is a major challenge reported by all projects a resolution to the problem is essential. Several projects have made explicit reference in final reports to the data difficulties. The problem can be categorised as:
- lack of data sets at various geographic levels (eg NUTS2, NUTS3, NUTS5);
  - incompatibility of data definitions used by collecting agencies;
  - quality of the data when it does exist;
  - excessive effort required to collect data from multiple sources;
  - need to conduct statistical manipulation of data to generate proxies for missing data sets; and
  - maintaining a lasting and growing data archive.
- 5.2.5 In some cases projects encountered data only at national level when greater detail was required for regional analysis. The best approach is considered to be application of statistical manipulation to attribute data (eg spending) to regions. This has offered some relief, but often the quality is questionable when discrepancies between national totals and the summation of regional data remain.
- 5.2.6 For accession countries researchers often find only relatively recent data is attributed to NUTS regions. A problem that becomes more acute as the detail increases. In the geographically smaller Member States (eg Baltic) this is especially frustrating since disaggregation below national level is important. Resolution in these cases is generally only achieved through direct contacts, although this issue will become less of a problem as time progresses and data collection harmonises around NUTS regions.



- 5.2.7 A pragmatic solution where homogeneous data is not available at a detailed NUTS level throughout Europe is to resort to national case studies.
- 5.2.8 Data collection within projects (both raw data and its processing) is a very resource intensive operation. If at all possible the need for this to continue in the future should be avoided. This calls for existing data in the ESPON database to be preserved and for greater communication with EUROSTAT and the national agencies to fill the gaps. It is imperative that the efforts expended on creating the ESPON database are not lost and that it continues to grow as a central resource.
- 5.2.9 Consistency of indicators must be continually reviewed. Projects report inconsistencies between data supplied from EUROSTAT and the latest version of the ESPON database.
- 5.2.10 The Data Navigator has demonstrable value in helping to find data and should also be maintained. This resource points to institutions that can supply data, but projects still discover differing levels of cooperation in the supply of data. This is especially true where some perceived competition to publish research first could influence responses. If at all possible, efforts need to be made at Community level to increase collaboration and to ensure more “core” data and indicators are available from a central agency (eg EUROSTAT).
- 5.2.11 All TPGs aim to offer **policy options** based on their research. Future TPG partners need to understand that the difference between policy options and policy recommendations is important. This process could be greatly enhanced by engaging representatives from the national ministries with the researchers in targeted seminars. Projects report that it is not always clear what option sets are required. This lack of specificity can lead to frustrations for both parties, but is also a source of creativity where policy orientations are shaped openly. The result of such direct interaction is generally a more productive deepening of the research.
- 5.2.12 Feedback between the MC and projects about policy options ought to occur at an early stage. It should avoid over general programme wide guidance in favour of project/topic specific commentary. The process could be managed through a CU run event. A tool to help that debate could be country specific case studies with templates of questions and options that experts and MC could respond to.
- 5.2.13 Turning to the more general implementation issues it is clear that projects which display effective management and organisation can be characterised as fulfilling the following activities:
- they display a thorough understanding of the policy context;
  - they show a thorough understanding of the ‘rules of the game’. In particular, they establish and apply from the start a routine for collecting, assuring and reporting resource utilisation. This ensures



the project manager is aware of the status of **each partners** budget utilisation and can predict resource issues before they become a problem. In so doing the manager is able to balance requests for new work or changes in direction without jeopardising the overall goal of a project;

- often project partners are very geographically dispersed and select a model for working which carves up the work into discrete units (no overlaps). This can lead to reports that do not fit together smoothly, or have contradictions. Effective projects plan for and find the time to meet and discuss objectives and results regularly. They cannot rely on bi-annual programme seminars to hold discussions. Such interchange of scientific knowledge is essential and has been found to be enhanced when third parties join in on the debate (e.g. a steering group, or invited expert);
- such projects also embrace the possibilities of electronic communication, establishing effective collaborative work environments using the internet and have visible websites;
- similarly, good projects identify channels to disseminate results (conferences, research papers, etc). Projects have little or no impact when results remain within the research group;
- establishing good liaison with a programme manager to ensure a mutual understanding of the scope and objective is essential. If possible this should develop into a broadly based steering group within the TPG so that communication flows (is filtered) from political decisions down through the lead partner to each project partner;
- too often in programmes such as ESPON participants can find the political landscape in which policy decisions are taken changes faster than they can generate research outputs to support policy options. This can lead to frustration, wasted resources (if directions change) and is only manageable where effective communication exists in the team. A solution to this perception was offered above, where greater direct engagement between the MC and projects would clarify orientations.

#### 5.2.14 The best projects also avoid common mistakes:

- They tend to have manageably sized consortia to simplify chains of command and responsibility. Each partner is there because they bring a special quality to the work. They complement each other rather than compete.
- They generally have at least one partner (preferably the lead partner) who has experience in EU collaborative research and understands the administrative processes.











## 6 Conclusions on the efficiency, effectiveness and impact

### 6.1 Overall Assessment

- 6.1.1 The mid-term evaluation of ESPON in 2003 discovered a programme that has a strong trans-European dimension with great potential to improve understanding of the territorial perspective in EU policies. The programme has continued to make significant progress towards its goals and there is a strong probability that the likely impacts will justify the initiative.
- 6.1.2 The current programme can only be seen as an opening move towards achieving and applying a better understanding of territorial trends and policy impacts at the European level. Building on the outcome of ESPON to realise sustainable results calls for a more focussed follow-up action. This needs to be underpinned by increased financial resources. In particular, current project budgets are too low for the ambitious objectives they are striving to achieve. In ESPON II tenders ought to envisage larger financial resources to avoid limiting the quality or breadth of research carried out.
- 6.1.3 In 2004 the Commission adopted the Third cohesion report [COM(2004)107] which presented a detailed proposal for the priorities and delivery system for the new generation programmes under cohesion policy for the period 2007-2013. Proposals for regulations to carry out these programmes (into which ESPON II would fit) have also been published. However, the regulations still retain many of the features of the current regime which constrain implementation of ESPON. In particular, development of the future programme must take account of the continued application of the N+2 rule designed to encourage rapid implementation, the small percentage of programme budget allocated to management, and the limited range of contract models that will exist.
- 6.1.4 There is a need to retain a clear focus on activities in the final year work plan to maximise potential impact by channelling any residual funding into short sharp actions that extend or highlight success and important impacts.
- 6.1.5 The priorities and measures adopted have proven to be an effective approach to provide information on concepts, methodologies, and tools, in particular, extending understanding of the territorial impact of EU policy. However, with such limited funding available it is not clear that optimal utilisation has been realised. The MC has worked with ambitious goals and initiated a broad sweep of projects. As anticipated this has created considerable understanding of issues (which need further attention) and initiated debate on numerous policy options. A process to identify core indicators has been initiated by the MC which ought to lead to spatial indicators before the end of ESPON.
- 6.1.6 Many fundamental problems where ESPON can help need to be addressed to support policy formation – not least of which is achieving reliable and compatible European wide data sets. ESPON is well placed to acquire and assimilate large quantities of data, summarise the content and provide policy

ESPON has significantly moved the understanding of territorial trends and policy impact assessment forward. It has also been effective in building an embryonic scientific network with the potential to support policy option analysis.



makers with manageable and easily understood information to inform their decisions.

## **6.2 Key Components of the Evaluation**

6.2.1 The following points summarise our appreciation of the key components of the evaluation brief as covered in the previous chapters.

### **Implementation of the 2003 MTE recommendations**

6.2.2 The MC, MA and CU have demonstrated a commendable approach to handling the recommendation for improvement in the ESPON programme set out in the 2003 MTE report. Each of the 12 recommendations has been given full consideration. Appropriate initiatives have been adopted to remedy weaknesses and resources have been reallocated to strengthen networking and key objectives.

6.2.3 In many cases the response was immediate and has been found to have had significant benefits for the overall delivery of the programme in an effective and efficient manner.

6.2.4 We fully accept that some of the suggestions put forwards in the MTE had a political dimension that necessitates a longer term response. Activity on these points is emerging as the debate on continuation of the ESPON initiative builds.

### **Analysis of outputs and results achieved since the MTE**

6.2.5 Since the MTE the programme has moved into a phase where outputs and results have begun to flow in substantial numbers. The projects across all priorities and measures have delivered a copious quantity of data, new indicators, methodologies, new typologies and tools together with considered scientific debate.

6.2.6 In most cases projects have exceeded their contractual commitments and programme targets.

6.2.7 Guidance provided by programme managers is being adopted in projects so that reports are developing a more coherent style and content is becoming more rationalised. Further efforts in this respect could be achieved to consolidate the key findings and promote the outcome of ESPON.

6.2.8 Results have already found their way into Commission communications (e.g. 3<sup>rd</sup> Cohesion Report) and in some Member States results that have national relevance are being published by ministries.

Even before the end of the programme it is clear to see that specific objectives are being met.



### **Analysis of impacts achieved and likely achievement of objectives**

- 6.2.9 Identification of the effect of the programme in terms of its impact across the ESPON territories is difficult to quantify at this stage. In particular, it is important to differentiate between specific (shorter term) impacts and the global (longer term) impacts.
- 6.2.10 Specific impacts are becoming visible in terms of the level of awareness of ESPON results, both within the substantial spatial development and planning community active inside the network and to a lesser extent within the Commission and Member States where the debate on policy options in spatial or territorial planning is taking place.
- 6.2.11 Global impacts may not emerge within the timeframe of the programme. However, it is evident from the scale of the action and the interest generated by the process that the objectives should be met and therefore impacts ought to follow.

### **Quality of programme implementation structures and actions**

- 6.2.12 Some aspects of programme implementation were not working effectively in the early years of ESPON. In particular by the time of the MTE there were noticeable issues with the operation of the ECP network. Since the MTE in 2003 there has been a marked improvement in the quality of programme implementation. The MC has paid attention to the need to enhance operation of the ECP network and has brought it closer to the heart of ESPON.
- 6.2.13 The involvement of the ECP network in commenting on TPG reports and the introduction of €300,000 additional funding to support transnational networking activities performed by ECP's are important beneficial actions. Seminars organised by the network are also demonstrating beneficial impacts as they open up the results of the programme to the wider practitioner community and lower administrative levels (e.g. National, Regional, Municipal, etc).
- 6.2.14 These actions, coupled with the new communication strategy will become even more important in the final year of the programme when awareness of ESPON needs special attention and the debate over the need for further developments increases in intensity.
- 6.2.15 The technical support infrastructure provided by the Managing Authority and Coordination Unit has continued to develop and has matured into an effective management tool for the programme. It remains a small tightly knit group delivering a good quality of guidance to the ESPON players (TPG, ECP, and MC).



- 6.2.16 The CU has responded quickly and efficiently to the difficulties encountered in the operation of the financial control system. It is demonstrating a thorough understanding of the issues involved and its proactive approach should ensure that the programme remains on track.
- 6.2.17 Identification of the need to extend scientific validation of TPG results is an important development. Consideration of the formation of a “Scientific Board”, independent from TPG’s and with a link to the CU for monitoring and management is an eminently sensible development for the future. It would fit happily into Priority 5 activity and could provide significant added value to ESPON.

### **Identification of best practices in project implementation**

- 6.2.18 Generally, project implementation in ESPON has worked well with tightly knit groups investigating specific thematic topics. As with all programmes examples can be found of both under performance and exemplary efforts. In this evaluation we have investigated how project structures have worked to identify from across the spectrum those elements which should be encouraged in all projects.
- 6.2.19 A clear message which comes from this study is that organisation, collaboration and openness are core components in projects that work best.
- 6.2.20 Projects that encounter least difficulties tend to be relatively small well integrated teams, that make the effort to develop effective internal communication channels, discuss the work at all stages and communicate their outputs to the wider practitioner community. They also have experienced partners that understand programme administrative practices and develop a management style to support those needs.
- 6.2.21 Projects have generally made a great effort to address the specific challenges posed by ESPON. In particular, they have demonstrated resourcefulness in tackling the fundamental issue of data availability and put forward suggestions in final reports for approaches to alleviate the problem. Most notably being the imperative that a centralised data source should be maintained (eg the ESPON database) which is supported by feeds from national and community agencies (eg EUROSTAT). The continued reliance on individual projects to find raw data, or to create proxy indicators based on statistical manipulation is not an efficient or sustainable solution.
- 6.2.22 Similarly, projects acknowledge the challenge of creating appropriate policy options based on their research and have identified the need for greater engagement between national ministries (eg represented by the MC) and experts as a mechanism for clarifying orientations at an early stage.









## 7 Recommendations for the future

### 7.1 Recommendations for Improvement

7.1.1 Overall, the ESPON programme is seen to be performing well with every expectation that the objectives and desired impacts will be realised. Nevertheless, there are some areas where residual weaknesses might be remedied and strong points that can be further developed. The comments and recommendations offered below are intended to encourage the Managing Authority, Monitoring Committee and Coordination Unit to develop strategies (some of which are already underway) to enhance the impact of ESPON.

7.1.2 The first 2 recommendations deal with short term actions that would reinforce the successful delivery of ESPON, whilst recommendations 3 to 7 contain suggestions for sustaining the longer term benefits of ESPON in a follow-up programme.

#### **Recommendation 1 – Updating the CIP**

7.1.3 Performance indicators in the CIP should be examined to ensure that a complete list is established when the final update to CIP is published in early 2006. Ambiguities should be removed and PIs for new measures included. Without this the baseline for monitoring is incomplete. The CU should ensure projects are aware of the performance indicators and that they provide the necessary data to support monitoring of progress.

#### **Recommendation 2 – Financial monitoring and consolidation of residual funding**

7.1.4 Potential under spending on the budget due to delayed claims must be avoided. The CU, MA and MC should continue to monitor the strategy put in place to remedy such under spending and encourage project to supply complete information in good time.

7.1.5 The process of financial monitoring should also establish by the end of 2005 what residual budget will remain due to cost under runs by projects. Within the constraints of priority level budget line allocations these funds should be consolidated and used to conduct short duration low cost promotional activity to both publicise results and to raise awareness of the need for further work in an ESPON II programme.

7.1.6 The CU should bring forward suggestions for spending to the MC by November 2005 so that activity can be initiated, performed and reported before the end of 2006.

#### **Recommendation 3 – Development of performance indicators**

7.1.7 It is not appropriate at this late stage in the ESPON programme to 'move the goal posts' by bring forward new performance indicators for existing



priorities and measures. However, consideration should be given to developing more appropriate and sophisticated indicators during the creation of a follow up programme. These performance indicators need to build sequentially from Measure to Priority level and ultimately to core indicators that address the programme objectives. They must also complement monitoring of broader EU policy objectives expressed in policy statements (e.g. Lisbon).

- 7.1.8 All performance indicators must be practical (i.e. manageable in number, consistent and coherent) with easily available data. Striving to achieve ever more precise and informative indicators must not place an unreasonable burden on the monitoring process. At the end of the day the level of detail must be appropriate to the scale of the intervention.

#### **Recommendation 4 – ECP role and function**

- 7.1.9 The role and function of the ECP network should be simplified and clarified in any future programme. Complicating the objectives of the network leads to perceptions of underperformance and acts as a barrier to some organisations joining the network or fulfilling some roles. It is recommended that in future national awareness activity continue to be supported by direct Member State contracts, but that trans-national activity is consolidated in a single central project.
- 7.1.10 Monitoring and control of projects would then be the responsibility of individual Member States, or the Managing Authority/Coordination Unit in the case of the trans-national project.

#### **Recommendation 5 – Scientific validation of results**

- 7.1.11 It is recommended that validation of outputs from TPG projects be seen to be independent, and that the review process should be continuous. The MC suggestion of creating a 'Scientific Board' is to be commended. Properly formulated and funded it would offer a flexible approach to review output, cross fertilise projects by introducing debate on common themes/issues and provide centralised control. The Scientific Board should not be seen as a project, but as a resource pool to be dipped into by the Managing Authority and assigned to specific tasks. It would be impractical for the work to be handled by staff from a central coordination unit and ineffective when tied to a consortium within a project. Adoption of this approach in ESPON II is highly desirable.

#### **Recommendation 6 – Model contracts for a future programme**

- 7.1.12 More flexibility is needed in respect to the types of contract available under a future programme. Central support actions that provide a facility across the programme as a whole need a standard service contract.

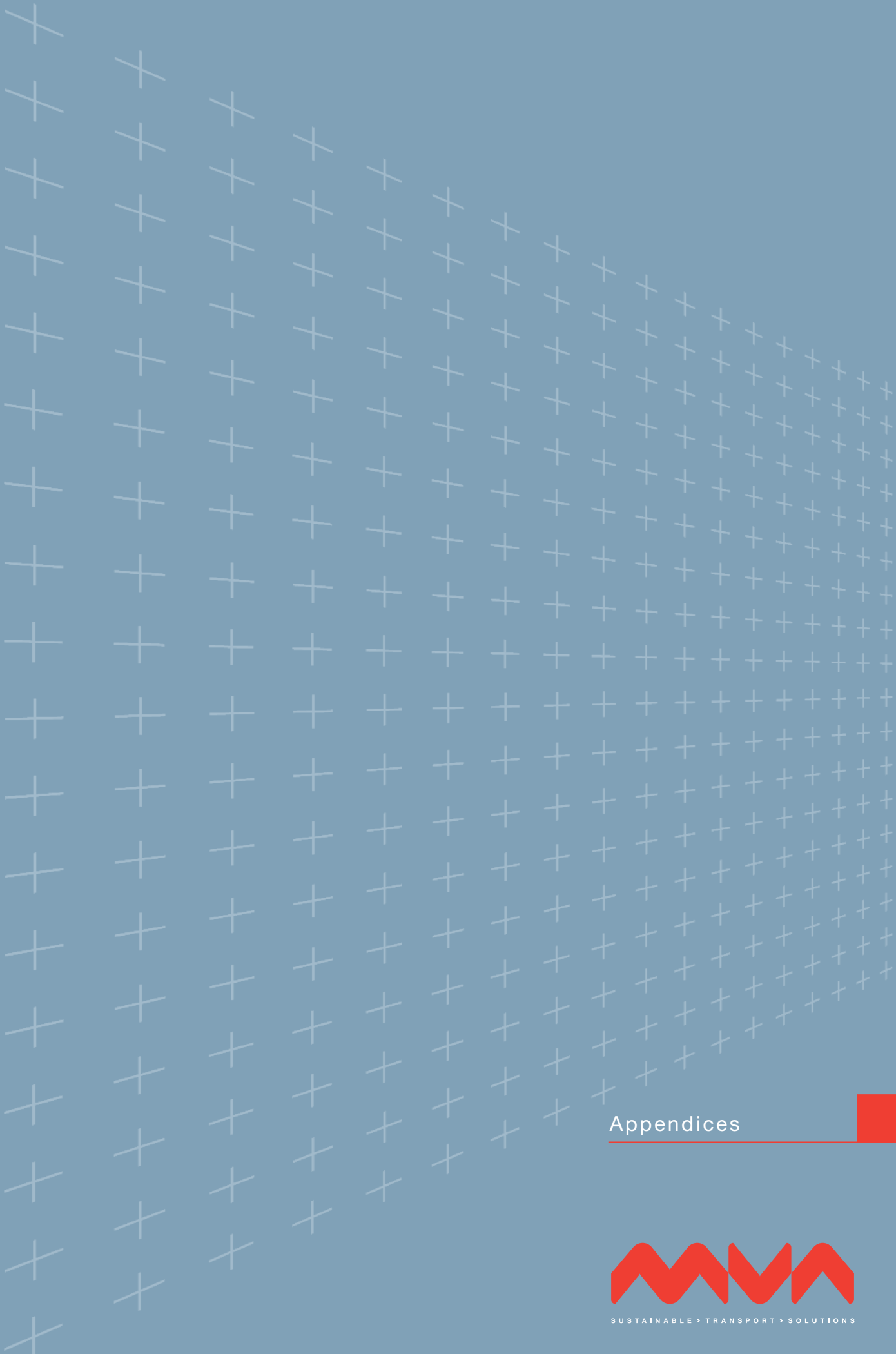


**Recommendation 7 – Project funding in a future programme**

- 7.1.13 The scale of project funding should be reviewed. Current project budgets are too low for the ambitious objectives set. In ESPON II tenders ought to envisage larger financial resources to avoid limiting the quality or depth of research carried out.







Appendices



SUSTAINABLE > TRANSPORT > SOLUTIONS



## **Appendix A**

### **List of Stakeholders Contacted in Consultation Process**





# List of Stakeholders Contacted in Consultation Process

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## **Appendix B**

### **Glossary of Terms**



## Glossary of Terms

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The following acronyms are used throughout the evaluation report:

<b>CIP</b>	Community Initiative Programme
<b>CU</b>	Co-ordination Unit
<b>ECP</b>	ESPON Contact Point
<b>ERDF</b>	European Regional Development Fund
<b>ESPON</b>	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
<b>ESDP</b>	European Spatial Development Perspective
<b>FCG</b>	Financial Control Group
<b>FR</b>	Final Reports
<b>IPQT</b>	INTERACT Point selected for Quantification and Transfer
<b>IR</b>	Interim Reports
<b>LP</b>	Lead Partner
<b>MA</b>	Managing Authority
<b>MC</b>	Monitoring Committee
<b>MTE</b>	Mid-Term Evaluation (carried out in 2003)
<b>PA</b>	Paying Authority
<b>PI</b>	Performance Indicator
<b>PC</b>	Programme Complement
<b>TIA</b>	Territorial Impact Analysis
<b>TPG</b>	Transnational Project Groups
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference







**Appendix C**  
**List of Main Documents Consulted**



## List of Main Documents Consulted

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A considerable range of documents have been used throughout the evaluation. The majority of these are accessible from the ESPON website [www.espon.lu](http://www.espon.lu)

The main documents mentioned in the evaluation report include:

- Revised Community Initiative Programme - Approved by the European Commission on the 28 December 2004  
<http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/programme/index.html>
- The Espon 2006 Programme - Programme Complement  
[http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/programme\\_complement/index.html](http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/programme_complement/index.html)
- Espon Work Programmes  
[http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/work\\_programme/index.html](http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/work_programme/index.html)
- Espon Mid-Term evaluation Final Report 2003  
[http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/Mid\\_term\\_Evaluation/index.html](http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/Mid_term_Evaluation/index.html)
- Espon Publications <http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/programme/publications/index.html>
- Espon Project Reports <http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/projects/index.html>
- ESPON 1st Level Financial Control Guidelines  
<http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/finance/index.html>
- ESPON Manual and Reporting Guidelines  
<http://www.espon.lu/online/documentation/finance/index.html>
- MC document entitled a "Common understanding on the orientations of an ESPON 2 Programme for 2007-2013" <http://intranet.espon.lu/>
- Conclusions from EU informal Ministerial meeting on territorial cohesion (20-21 May 2005, in Luxembourg). Supplied by CU
- Plan for implementing the ESPON Communication Strategy <http://intranet.espon.lu/>
- Final Report from Weber Shandwick - ESPON Communication Strategy - April 2005  
<http://intranet.espon.lu/>
- The MEANS methodology - EC 2004, "The Guide to evaluating socio-economic development", internet publication at [www.evaled.info](http://www.evaled.info)
- The New Programming period 2000-2006: methodological working papers. WP3 Indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation: An indicative methodology. European Commission DG Regional Policy and Cohesion
- The 2000-2006 Programme Period: Methodological Working Papers, Working Paper 9 The Update of the Mid term Evaluation of Structural Fund Interventions. European Commission DG Regional Policy





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