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ESPON 2013 Programme

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Accessibility of European regions and cities has improved during 2001-2006

ESPON has recently published "Territorial Observation No.2". This publication is looking into Territorial Trends in Accessibility in Europe and its regions. The aim is to provide updated facts to policy makers engaged with regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion for their policy development process.

Accessibility is a key component of the attractiveness of cities and regions and plays an important role in decisions on where to work, live and invest. Even in this era of the information society and virtual trade, the need for travel has not diminished, in fact, the opposite is true.

This ESPON Territorial Observation No. 2 presents new information on territorial structures and recent dynamics of accessibility within the European Union, addressing different transport modes. It also confirms a significant relation between good access and economic growth. Peter Mehlbye, Director of the ESPON Coordination unit, explains *"The term accessibility as used in ESPON expresses how easy people in one region can reach people in another region. The Potential Accessibility of a region is therefore indirectly a measure for the potential for activities and enterprises in the region to reach markets and activities in other regions."*

What should policy makers dealing with regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion be aware of and consider? Peter Mehlbye says: *"Accessibility is an important driver in the development for the large majority of regions and cities. In times of accelerated globalization the European perspective of accessibility becomes increasingly inevitable for regions and cities. We have summarized the latest trends in points that policy makers at regional/local, national and/or European level should be aware of and take into consideration in relation to their place or territory"*. Among them are:

- Transport infrastructure and transport service development during 2001-2006 has increased the overall accessibility of European regions and cities, with the highest improvement for rail accessibility.
- New high-speed rail and air services have improved the accessibility of some regions outside the core area (Pentagon) supporting a polycentric pattern.
- Road transport developments have improved the situation for many regions, particularly in Eastern Europe, benefiting from reduced border waiting times and from new infrastructure endowment.
- Some regions with high accessibility by rail diminished their dominance as other regions caught up, particularly some French regions. Regions experiencing a relative benefit are mainly located in southern Germany, Italy and Spain where new high-speed rail projects led to improvement of their position compared to

other European regions. Regions losing most profoundly their position are all situated in the western part of Europe.

- Dynamic modifications of airline destinations since 2001 have incurred changes in regional accessibility by air, both in positive and negative direction, as low cost air carriers can involve risks in terms of long-term air accessibility improvement. Only regions with large international airports seem to ensure a stable position of air accessibility.
- Economic development of a region is often related with potential accessibility. In general, regions with a high accessibility are most often also economically and competitively successful.

The ESPON Territorial Observation No.2 on Trends in Accessibility in Europe and its regions, including 10 new maps and datasets, is available at the ESPON website www.espon.eu.

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The ESPON 2013 Programme is part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

It shall support policy development in relation to the aim of territorial cohesion and a harmonious development of the European territory. ESPON shall support Cohesion Policy development with European wide, comparable information, evidence, analyses and scenarios on framework conditions for the development of regions, cities and larger territories. In doing so, it shall facilitate the mobilisation of territorial capital and development opportunities, contributing to improving European competitiveness, to the widening and deepening of European territorial cooperation and to a sustainable and balanced development.

The Managing Authority responsible for the ESPON 2013 Programme is the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures, Department of Spatial Planning and Development of Luxembourg.

More information: www.espon.eu