



## ESPON 2013 Programme/**Article**

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### **Recovery and resilience in the spotlight of the ESPON Open Seminar 2013**

The ESPON programme, in collaboration with the Irish Presidency of the European Union, held its annual Open Seminar on the 13th and 14th of June in the Dublin Castle. The event, which brought together policy-makers, members of the ESPON Monitoring Committee, Contact Points, Project Partners and a variety of stakeholders, focused on the role of Territorial Cooperation towards the recovery of the current crisis as well as its potential to building a more resilient European Union.

#### **The Irish Presidency of the EU focused on growth potentials**

The representative of the Irish Presidency and Minister of State in Ireland, Ms. Jan O'Sullivan TD, opened the session with a speech centered on the key role of Territorial Cooperation for restoring competitiveness and fostering sustainable development. She declared: *"I believe that territorial cooperation across the European Union is critical for delivering sustainable growth and jobs, and for the achievement of the ten-year strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth"*.

In fact, the Irish Presidency made the promotion of jobs, stability and growth its focus. For its achievement, and on the face of *"scarce resources and more complex economic, environmental and social issues"*, the Minister recommended to *"focus on opportunities rather than disadvantages"* and on the strengthening of local and national performance in order to enable national and sub national actors to make the most out of their particular growth potential.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, the Presidency of EU has been taken over by Lithuania. On this respect, Mr. Gordevicius, ESPON Monitoring Committee member from Lithuania, brought forward the impending new priorities related with territorial development, which will include a stronger attention to migration processes and their effects in urban development.

#### **The economic crisis is not over yet**

As pointed out by Mr. Dijkstra, in representation of the European Commission's DG Regional and Urban Policy, the economic recession is not over yet and its effects are likely to continue to impact the regional picture of the EU during 2014. His presentation, based on the 8<sup>th</sup> Progress Report, showcased the decline of the European economy both in terms of GDP and employment rates.

The multiple negative effects of the current economic turmoil have also affected the objectives of Cohesion Policy because, as pointed out by Mr. Dijkstra, *"the long term trend of convergence has stopped and reversed"*. Among other trends, he has indicated an increase in poverty and social exclusion and indicated *"a significant impact on the capacity of cities and region to fund its public investment"*.

Along the same lines, Andreu Ulied, Lead Partner of the Project ESPON EU2050, seconded the prognosis of the Mr. Dijkstra, highlighting this as likely to accentuate the gap between the North and the South, the East and the West of Europe.

For fostering recovery and improving resilience in the future, the researcher upheld a Cohesion policy which is sensitive to economic cycles. *"Maybe it was good to invest in infrastructures in Poland, but maybe it was not so good to invest for the same purpose in Southern Europe in the times of the real estate bubble"*- explains Ulied. To top off his intervention, he highlighted the link between effective public administration and growth, as well as the need of more local-global infrastructure in order to improve accessibility and local development.

### **Forward-looking for addressing upcoming challenges**

From a more general perspective, the ESPON Open Seminar discharged a series of conclusions related with the economic crisis.

- First of all, it clarified the uneven impact it has in different regions and territories, but also across different economic sectors.
- Secondly, it show a generalized support for strategic investment, as well as for know-how sharing across territories in order to deliver convincing and tailor-made responses to the challenges triggered by the crisis.
- Thirdly, it brought to the table the need to formulate long terms territorial strategies oriented to build a more resilient European Union, able to face future economic shocks, as well as social and environmental challenges, thereby ensuring a sustainable model of development.

*"How do we develop responses to the economic crisis through territorial cooperation?"* wondered Ms. Festas, ESPON Monitoring Committee member from Portugal. *"Looking on how other regions in Europe deal with issues helps in developing responses towards the economic crisis; therefore, territorial cooperation has an important role to play"*- she claimed. *"It is not that we cannot do things alone, but we can do it better together"*- she remarked.

The next generation of territorial cooperation programmes will be characterized by a stronger focus on thematic investment priorities and results, contributing with the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the future Cohesion policy goals. On this context, emerging growth potentialities such as the so-called Blue Growth and Green Growth will remain important for the political agenda, as elements enabling regions and localities to define how they can contribute to the reconditioning of the European economy.

### **ESPON has an important role to play**

The ESPON Open Seminar, to which some of the speakers referred as *"a map festival"*, worked also as a showcase where project results, maps, publications and tools were displayed, gathering a rather positive reaction among the attendants.

In brief, the ESPON tools were defined as “very useful” for inspiring regional strategies at the political level, enabling policy-makers to compare the position of their country or region in a wider European context. The data accessibility and the easy understandable way of communicating results through the ESPON tools, as well as their interactive possibilities were also applauded by researchers and academics. In turn, representatives of other Territorial Cooperation programmes highlighted the usability of the data offered through the tools in the process of project selection and development as well as in designing future Operational Programmes.

The latest steps of the ESPON Programme, exploring the upcoming maritime spatial planning and the synergies between land and sea, the offer of new data on prevention of natural hazards and adaptation to climate change, together with the delivery of crisis-related indicators such as risk of poverty, were also well received.

In conclusion, the speakers agreed upon the fact that present and future political challenges for regions and cities in Europe would benefit from the sharing of good practices and the disclosure of the territorial evidence. For this reasons, the next ESPON Programme will have an important role to play in the period 2014-2020.

### **More information**

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- ESPON Open Seminar “Territorial Cooperation for growth and jobs”, Dublin, 13 and 14 June 2013 [http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu\\_Events/](http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Events/)

### **Interested in ESPON?**

The ESPON 2013 Programme is part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and 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](http://www.espon.eu). Follow ESPON on [Twitter](#), [Linkedin](#), [RSS feed](#)

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