

// ESPON Seminar in Cuenca (Spain)

Small and medium-sized cities: drivers of sustainable development and urban-rural cooperation

Wednesday 15 - Thursday 16 November 2023



MUPA - Museo de Paleontología
C. del Río Gritos, 5
16004 Cuenca, Spain

// Context and objectives

The ESPON Seminar in Cuenca is organized in cooperation with the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council in the framework of the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme, which aims to support policy development for promoting territorial cohesion and harmonious development of the European territory.

Cohesion is central to European Union policies, while it was a powerful tool to respond to the COVID crisis by mobilizing additional funding, it should return to its core mission of **reducing regional disparities and promoting long term regional development**.

To achieve that goal, investments in public services, infrastructure, skills and multi-level governance have continued to drive convergence in recent years, nevertheless, some of these drivers remain concentrated in urban areas. This highlights the need to **design an appropriate region-specific investment mix, where small and medium-sized cities are differentiated from large agglomerations**.

The importance of innovation is also a **key determinant of long-term regional economic growth**, however, some countries, are clearly below the capital region and national average and lack a clear smart specialization strategy and regional innovation ecosystems failing to capture local talent and making them vulnerable and unprepared to new opportunities.

To achieve these goals, there are two milestones of special relevance, these are the **implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the promotion of a polycentric territorial system based on small and medium sized as well as on intermediary cities**.

The new challenges of urban-rural relations show how **small and medium-sized cities can act as a balancing factor** between population and territories imbalances, through the construction of a **New Territorial Contract** within the framework of common **objectives to achieve active, inclusive and functional territories, and ensuring that urban-rural cooperation** and the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals are also realized.

In this context, the ESPON seminar brings together some of the most prominent organizations and researchers in Europe. Through different presentations and plenary sessions, participants will have an opportunity to:

- Reflect on the role of small and medium-sized cities as intermediaries to build public policies to fight against depopulation and bring socio-territorial cohesion.
- Exchange and network around key policy issues for innovation, economic transition and tech transformation.
- Discuss the needs of the territories to ensure every citizen is given an opportunity and has access to public services.
- Identify challenges and opportunities within the framework of multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance.
- Foster sustainable growth and competitiveness while considering the importance of young and old people and their role as city change makers.
- Define conclusions on how small and medium-sized cities will contribute to build a New Territorial Contract to achieve active, inclusive and functional territories.

In a nutshell, the aim is to provide insights and understanding on the new challenges to territorial cohesion, revealing how, by working together, Europe can recover through crises, and emerge stronger.

ESPON territorial evidence will feed the debates and discussions, addressing the key topics surrounding the current and future policymaking processes. In particular, we will introduce new evidence on the role of small and medium sized cities.

// Audience

The event addresses European, regional and local policymakers, as well as researchers, practitioners and experts. The aim is to provide insights and understanding on the new challenges to territorial cohesion, revealing how, by working together, Europe can recover through crises, and emerge stronger.

// The programme in a nutshell

Tuesday // 14 November	
18.30- 20:00	Cultural visit of Cuenca, meeting point Plaza de la Merced, ending at Plaza Mayor

Wednesday // 15 November	
8:30- 9:00	Meeting the press (for journalists)
8:30	<i>Registration</i>
9:00- 9:50	Welcome and opening: small and medium-sized cities in the EU Presidency's Priorities and the TA2030: a new territorial contract
9:50- 11:00	Provocative cities: small and medium-sized cities and the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy
11:00- 11:30	<i>Coffee break and family picture</i>
11:30- 13:15	Policy dialogues on small and medium-sized cities and urban-rural cooperation
13:15- 14:15	<i>Lunch break</i>
14:15- 15:45	Talent Cities session 1: innovation, economic transition and tech transformation
15:45- 16:15	<i>Coffee break</i>
16:15- 17:45	Keeping talents in the territory: young and old people as city change makers
17:45	<i>End of day 1</i>
20:30	<i>Gala dinner</i>

Thursday // 16 November	
8:45	<i>Registration for new participants</i>
9:15- 10:45	Talent Cities session 2: governance and public services
10:45- 11:15	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:15- 12:00	Tools for SMS Towns and Cities ESPON LORDIMAS
12:00- 12:45	Conclusions and reflections
12:45- 13:00	Institutional conclusions
13:00- 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14:00	End of the seminar

Translation: ES-EN, EN-ES

// Programme Wednesday 15 November 2023

08:30 *Registration*

08:30–09:00 *Meeting the press (for journalists)*

09:00–09:50 Welcome and opening

Moderator: Hana Kanjaa

// Small and medium-sized cities in the Presidency's Priorities and the TA2030: a new territorial contract to generate active, inclusive and functional territories.

- Elisa Ferreira, EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms (*video message*)
- Teresa Ribera, Third Vice-President of the Government of Spain and Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge (*video message*)
- José Luis Martínez Guijarro, Vice-President of Castilla-la-Mancha
- Darío Dolz, Mayor of Cuenca
- Álvaro Martínez Chana, President of the Cuenca Deputation, Center for Technological Innovation
- Thiemo Eser, ESPON Managing Authority
- Wiktor Szydarowski, Director ESPON EGTC

09:50–11:00 Provocative Cities / keynote speeches

Moderator: Marcia Van Der Vlugt, ESPON MC Netherlands, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Spatial Development Directorate

// Key note: Intermediate cities and rurality in the socio-territorial cohesion new process

- Mercedes Molina, Emeritus Professor of Human Geography, Complutense University of Madrid

// Key note: Governance of new geographies in the perspectives of sustainable development

- Piero Bassetti, President, Globus et Locus

// Active territories and Cohesion Policy: giving opportunities to every citizen

- Merja Haapakka, Policy Coordinator, European Commission, DG REGIO
- Francesc Boya, General Secretary for Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain
- Nuria Matarredona Desantes, General Director, Ministry of transport, mobility and urban agenda, Government of Spain

// Debate with the audience and take away from the session

11:00–11:30 *Coffee Break and family picture*

11:30–13:15 Policy dialogues on small and medium-sized cities and urban-rural cooperation

Moderator: Juana López Pagán, General Director Policies Against Depopulation, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain

// Analysing EU small and medium-sized cities: global challenges and cities changes

- Valentina Corsetti, Programme Manager, Unit Spain and Portugal, European Commission DG REGIO
- Giulia Testori, Policy Officer, European Commission, Joint Research Centre, *Policy Atlas of sustainable urban development for Small Urban Areas*
- Nicolas Rossignol, Assistant Director Research and Policy, ESPON EGTC and Josep Maria Llop, UNESCO Chair on Intermediate Cities, University of Lleida, *ESPON Policy Brief "Small and medium-sized towns and cities - policies strengthening their role in achieving active, inclusive, and functional territories"*

// Policy reflections EU Presidency Trio 2014-2015 Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg

- Luisa Pedrazzini, National Institute for Urban Planning, Italy, *A strategy for inner areas*, (EU Presidency 2014)
- Kristīne Kedo, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia, *Challenges of Small and Medium-Sized Urban Areas*, (EU Presidency 2015)
- Gérard Thomas, Ministry of Energy and Spatial Planning, Luxembourg, *Integrated cross-border areas*, (EU Presidency 2015)

// Policy reflections Cities

- Marko Vesligaj, Mayor of Pregrada, member of the COTER Committee of the Committee of the Regions
- Carlos Martínez Mínguez, Mayor of Soria

// Debate with the audience and take away from the session

13:15 – 14:15 Lunch

14:015 – 15:45 Talent Cities session 1: innovation, economic transition and tech transformation

Moderator: Mathilde Konstantopoulou, ESPON MC Member Greece, Advisor for European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Ministry of Development & Investments, Special Secretariat for ERDF, CF & ESF

// Economic transition policies driven by smart specialisation and innovation

- Alexia Rouby, Policy Coordinator, EC DG for Agriculture and Rural Development
- Alba Villamor, ESPON MC Spain representative, Head of Unit, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain

// ESPON analyses on SMS cities

- Joaquín Farinós, Professor, University of Valencia, *case study Soria and Villena (ES)*
- Stefan Kah, Consultant, *case study Oschersleben (DE)*
- Rodrigo Vargas, Senior Researcher, University of Lleida, *case study Fundão (PT)*

// Policy reflections

- Heike Hagedorn, ESPON MC Germany representative, Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building
- Francesc Boya, General Secretary for Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain

// Debate with the audience and take away from the session

15:45–16:15 *Coffee Break*

16:15– 17:45 **Keeping talent in the territory: young and old people as city change makers** Intergenerational collaboration and culture. Change makers, teenagers and youth, old people, make their voices heard and build relationships for intergenerational collaboration

Moderator: Juana López Pagán, ESPON MC Spain representative, General Director for Policies Against Depopulation, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain

// Demographic challenges, ageing societies

- Deša Srsen, Deputy Head of Cabinet for Vice-president Dubravka Šuica
- Maria Gargano, Researcher, Egmont Institute

// Keeping talent in rural areas

- Carolina Gutiérrez, Deputy Director for Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture Spain
- Julián Garde López-Brea, Dean at Universidad de Castilla-la-Mancha

// Young people in policy making

- Iulia Fatu, Youth Rural Parliament Representative for the involvement of young people

// Debate with the audience and take away from the session

17:45 *End of day 1*

20:30 *Dinner*

// Programme Thursday 16 November 2023

08:45 *Registration for new participants*

09:15 – 10:45 **Talent Cities session 2: governance and public services** Multi-level governance driven by growing decision-making complexity with many stakeholders and coinciding mandates

Moderator: Eloy Cuéllar, Deputy Director, General Secretary for Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain

// Integrated multilevel governance approach in the Territorial Agenda 2030 and ESPON analyses on SMS cities

- Jan Edøy, pilot action “small places matter” Territorial Agenda 2030
- Erika Jaráiz, Professor, University Santiago de Compostela, *case study Mérida (ES)*
- Marco Del Fiore, Polytechnic University of Turin, *case study Saluzzo (IT)*

// Policy reflections

- Marcos Ros, Member of the European Parliament
- Alejandra del Río, General Director for Regional and Local Cooperation, Government of Spain
- Matteo Luigi Bianchi, Coordinator, ANCI Lombardia Department Europe
- Isabel Ferreira, General Secretariat for Regional Development in Portugal, Spanish and Portugal Cross-border Strategy

// Debate with the audience and take away from the session

10:45–11:15 *Coffee Break*

11:15 – 12:00 **Tools for SMS Towns and Cities: ESPON LORDIMAS** (LOcal and Regional Digital Maturity ASsessment tool) <https://lordimas.espon.eu> aims at helping local and regional governments to understand where they are in their digital transformation journey. The tool is developed by ESPON in cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions and the European Commission

Moderator: Marek Bobis, Policy Officer, Committee of the Regions

//ESPON LORDIMAS

- Martin Gauk, Data and Knowledge Portal Manager, ESPON EGTC

// Reflections on ESPON LORDIMAS and monitoring and measuring digital transformations in towns and cities

- Martin Gauk, Data and Knowledge Portal Manager, ESPON EGTC (EN)
- Jordi Ortuño, chair of the monitoring group of the LORDIMAS tool of Living in-eu

- Manuel Herrero, RECI coordinator from WG for digitalization and AI, city of Torrent

// Debate with the audience and take away from the session

12:00 – 13:00 Conclusions and reflections

Moderator: Hana Kanjaa

// Statements of panelists. Reflections on the seminar, lessons learned, research and policy needs identified

- Juana López Pagán, General Director, Ministry for the ecological transition and the demographic challenge, Government of Spain
- Esteban Molina, Deputy Director, Ministry of Finances and Civil Service, Government of Spain
- Wiktor Szydarowski, Director ESPON EGTC

// Key thematic priorities of the forthcoming EU Presidencies

- Renée Peters, ESPON MC Belgium, Wallon Public Service, Directorate General for Spatial Planning, Housing, Heritage and Energy
- Maarten De Backer, ESPON MC Belgium, Bureau bruxellois de la Planification (BBP)
- László Gere, ESPON MC Hungary, Prime Minister's Office, Deputy State Secretariat for Strategic Planning of Regional Development, Department for International Territorial Development Co-operation

// Institutional closing

- Jesús Alique, Commissioner for Depopulation, Castilla-la-Mancha Government
- Francesc Boya, General Secretary for Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain

13:00–14:00 *Lunch*

14:00 *End of the seminar*