



Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

## POST-EVENT BRIEF

# ESPON Forum on Sustainable Urbanisation and Land-use Practices

Virtual

27th January 2022, 10.00-13.00 (EET)



## Summary



This roundtable (online workshop) took place on 27 January 2022. It brought together policymakers from Lithuania and abroad, and researchers in the area of urbanisation and land use. It discussed the findings of the SUPER project as well as the SUPER spin-off which applied these findings to Lithuania. Afterwards, two examples of interventions were presented that seek to promote sustainable urbanisation: the implementation of the new municipal infrastructure law in Vilnius and the German 30ha land consumption target. This was followed by a general Q&A session (both in the meeting itself and in the chat) and some final advice by the panellists.

### Objectives and target groups

This ESPON online roundtable discussed the results of the ESPON project SUPER (Sustainable Urbanization and Land-use Practices in European Regions) with policymakers involved in urban development. The project analysed land-use change in Europe since 2000 and provided an overview of policy interventions in Europe and their impact on urbanisation. According to the SUPER project, land-use change between nature and agriculture was roughly equal in the period of 2000-2018 but the change to urban use is generally unidirectional. In two project spin-offs, the SUPER team worked closely with policymakers in Lithuania and Croatia to help make their land-use policies more sustainable.

The discussions during the workshop addressed the following questions:

1. What kinds of interventions in Europe have proven effective in promoting sustainable urbanisation and why?
2. How can spatial planning contribute to sustainable urbanisation?

The workshop directly addressed policymakers responsible for national and regional planning in Lithuania and its neighbouring countries. It also invited researchers and stakeholders involved in the ESPON SUPER project to discuss research outcomes and share evidence of best practices.

### Overview of presentations and participants

#### Welcome and introduction

**Marjan van Herwijnen** (ESPON EGTC) welcomed the participants and introduced the ESPON programme, which provides research activities to policymakers in Europe (32 countries). Approximately 300 stakeholders and over 5000 researchers and policymakers were involved in the ESPON2020 programme. It produced around 80 territorial studies and 80 policy and thematic papers. It also provides various policy support tools and data. The ESPON SUPER project was requested by the monitoring committee of ESPON (representatives from every country). Upon completion, policymakers in Lithuania and Croatia requested direct support for their strategic planning processes from ESPON. The next programme, ESPON2030 will focus on the green transition in the light of territorial justice. At present, a broad consultation is underway to elaborate on the proposed themes.

**Karolis Kinčius** (MC and ECP for Lithuania) also welcomed the participants to the event. Karolis works in territorial planning (primarily public participation processes and sustainability) at the national level and reviews plans at state and municipal levels. The Lithuanian comprehensive plan was adopted last year, which attempted to integrate sustainable development goals in planning, renew Lithuanian planning culture, and build commitment with other sectoral ministries. He pointed out that while the participants in this roundtable were coming together from different parts of Europe with different territorial characteristics they face some common challenges as well, such as the impact of platform economies and COVID-19. Therefore, this seminar gave an opportunity to a variety of stakeholders to exchange insights and experience.

## Session 1: ESPON SUPER project results

### Evidence on past and future developments and interventions - David Evers, PBL

This presentation sketched out the most important findings of ESPON SUPER and aimed to elaborate two main lessons learned from the project: “Learn from the past and future” and “Interventions can and do affect urbanisation and land use”. David also explained that a conscious decision was made to employ neutral terminology: “urbanisation” instead of “land-take” and “urban form” instead of “sprawl”.

The presentation began with an overview of the calculations on urbanisation rates. The goal of “zero net land take” will be challenging given the 180ha daily rate of land development in the period of 2000-2018. However, this number is subject to considerable regional variation. There are countries which are barely urbanising (Romania) and others which are urbanising rapidly in absolute terms (Germany) or in relative terms (Netherlands) at national scale. Given this, a typology of the urbanisation rate per capita with respect to the European average is useful as a benchmark.

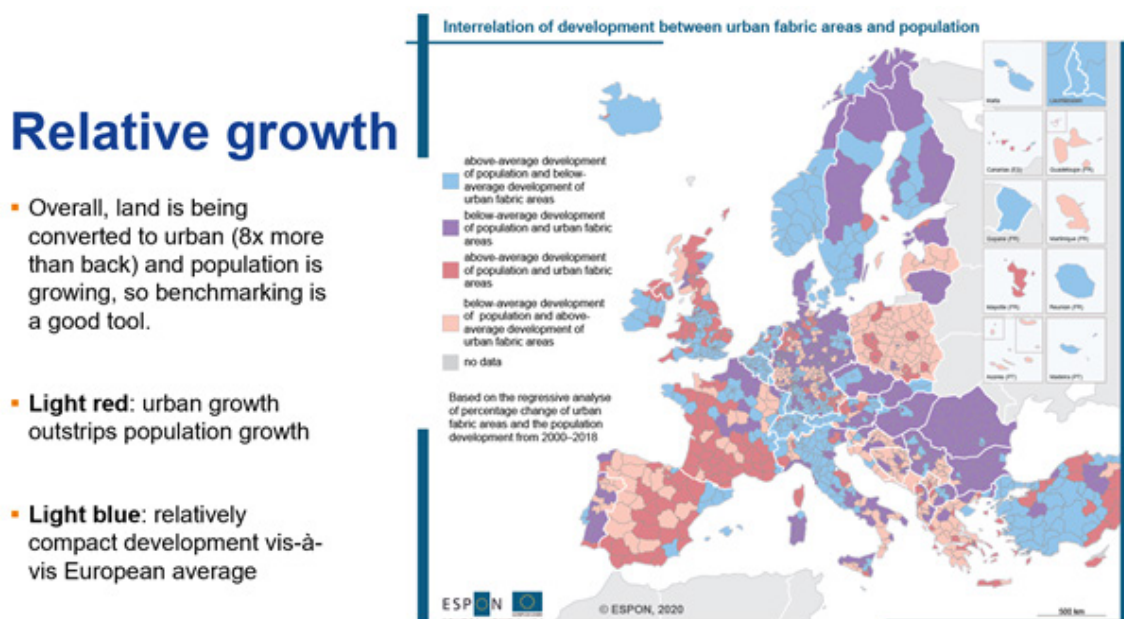


Figure 1: Typologies of population vs urban growth per NUTS3 regions identified in the ESPON SUPER project.

Urbanisation rates do not tell the entire story. For sustainability, it is extremely important to know *how* urban areas are growing. Is this occurring in a compact way in high densities, for example, via regeneration of derelict sites or is this building occurring in a piecemeal fashion along roadways? Unlike urbanisation, urban form is notoriously difficult to measure. The SUPER project performed a manual evaluation of all NUTS3 regions in Europe according to a visual “morphological analysis” template, allowing an urban form typology to be mapped out ranging from ‘compact’ via ‘polycentric’ to ‘diffuse’. This typology was also used as the basis for scenarios simulating how growth could occur up to 2050. This was performed using a land-allocation model which depicted which areas would be developed in each scenario. This output can be used in the public discussion about desired urban development.

## Compact vs diffuse in Vilnius

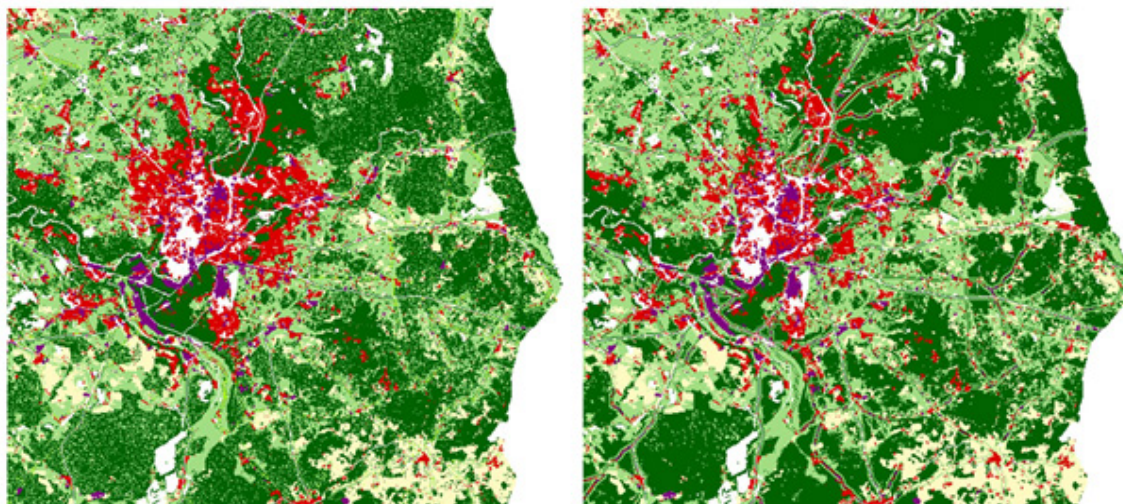


Figure 2: Example of the compact and diffuse urban growth scenarios by 2050 around the city of Vilnius.

The final part of the presentation focused on the kinds of interventions that can be adopted to promote sustainable urbanisation. Drawing on the SUPER intervention database and 11 case studies, several examples were presented. The study found that success largely depends on the territorial circumstances, although some general principles like stakeholder participation, a long-term perspective, and good coordination seemed to hold everywhere. The many lessons from the SUPER project should therefore serve as an inspiration rather than a blueprint for policy interventions.



Figure 3: Several instruments can be used in the promotion and implementation of sustainable urbanisation.

Question from the participants: What should the Lithuanian government do according to the SUPER project?

Answer: Obviously, this is a decision to be made by the Lithuanians themselves and in a way that respects their democracy. If planning decisions are mainly a local matter, for example, then the discussion should take place at this level. This does not necessarily mean that municipalities will automatically choose diffuse development. If the advantages and disadvantages are weighed up carefully, more sustainable urban forms might be preferred if, for instance, the extra costs of dispersed infrastructure and services is used for higher quality at higher densities.

Q: Doesn't COVID mean that people now want diffuse development? In Germany, this seems to be the case. People are moving to the countryside, where construction costs are also much lower.

A: This does not seem to hold everywhere. In the Netherlands, despite predictions of an exodus from Amsterdam after COVID, housing prices continue to increase rapidly, and there is great demand for development. In Italy, there was movement away from the cities but this does not necessarily entail an unsustainable development. This movement could revitalise declining rural centres (no new housing but occupying vacant houses) and if people do not commute back to the city, it can be considered sustainable.

Q: Of the two main strategies, densification versus containment, doesn't the Netherlands only focus on the former and how can you create public support for this?

A: Both strategies are complementary and most countries use both, including the Netherlands. Even though it is very urbanised, 70% is still agricultural. Around Amsterdam there is de facto containment because much land is 'off limits' for development due to UNESCO designations, Natura 2000 areas and the like. Density might sound bad, but there are many other positive qualities as well. After all, many of the most popular neighbourhoods in cities are quite dense. In the Netherlands, there is so much development pressure in big cities that the main planning issue is not how to increase density, but how to maintain liveability and urban green space. One way to create space is to reduce the number of parking spaces or putting these underground.

### Lithuanian case study spin-off study - Erblin Berisha, Politecnico di Torino

The Lithuanian government was busy drawing up a national spatial strategy and requested assistance from ESPON. In a SUPER spin-off project, a methodology was drawn up to apply the knowledge generated in the project, particularly the *Guide to Sustainable Urbanization and Land Use*, to a particular policy context. This methodology was also applied to the Croatian post-earthquake reconstruction and can, theoretically, be used for any European country or region.

## How to apply the SUPER Guide to a real context

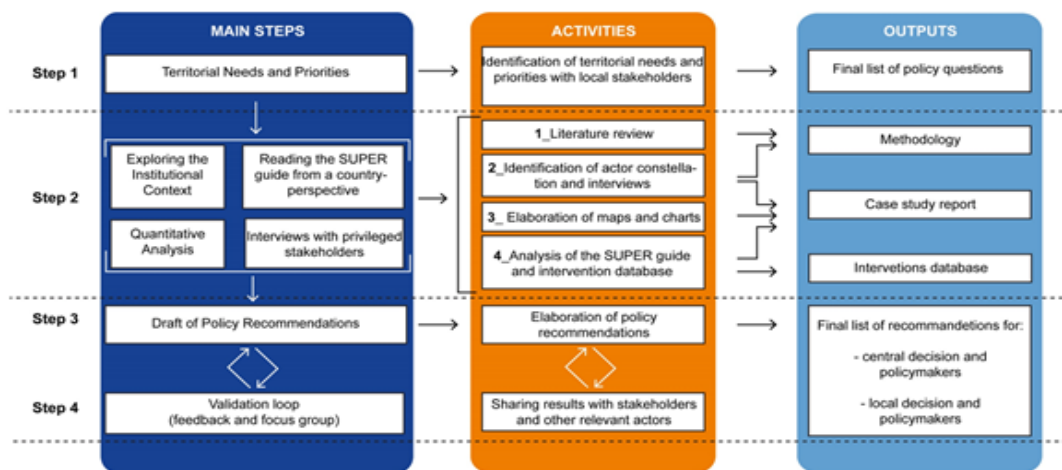


Figure 4: Schematic representation of the ESPON SUPER Guide.

The first step of the methodology is to survey the territorial needs and priorities in dialogue with the policymakers. Then an institutional analysis is performed which includes a literature review of relevant documents and some stakeholder interviews. The analysis revealed a number of governance challenges in Lithuania.

## Challenges from institutional analysis:

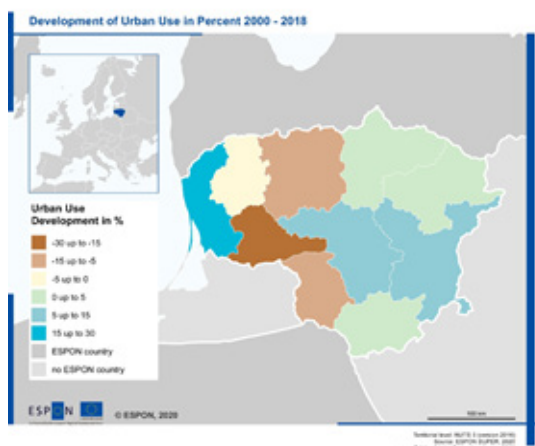
- **Lacking strategical approach** - until now there has been insufficient institutional and political long-term reasoning, which has contributed to the implementation of short-term visions.
- **Lacking coordination** - another sensitive issue is the coordination of major sectoral initiatives impacting land use. Sectoral initiatives are sometimes not well coordinated with spatial planning.
- **Lacking cooperation** - administrative fragmentation has increased economic and even fiscal competition between municipalities.
- **Lacking shared cultural behaviour** – due to a series of socioeconomic, cultural and political contingencies, sustainable land use has not been at the top of the political agenda.
- **Rigidity of plans** – in many cases plans indirectly support diffuse urbanization. This is done by overestimating demographic trends and thereby issuing too many development rights.

Figure 5: Main deficiencies from the SUPER-analysis on the institutional scale

Meanwhile, a territorial analysis was conducted by zooming in on the Lithuanian situation using the data collected in the SUPER project. This revealed large developmental differences between regions in the country – something which should be addressed in the national strategy.

## Land use change

Long-term development of urban use in Lithuania 2000 - 2018



Period of greatest development of urban use in Lithuania, 2000 - 2018

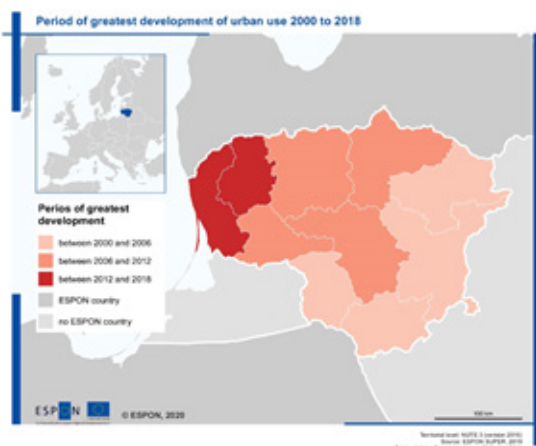


Figure 6: Cartographic representation of the spatial and time differences in urban use development in Lithuania.

The next steps were to understand current policy interventions in Lithuania and how they work in practice. These were classified according to the fields used in the SUPER intervention database in order to make them comparable. Next, international examples were selected that could provide lessons for Lithuanian policymakers. For instance, interventions which had similar aims but deployed different methods. Finally, recommendations were crafted for politicians (with decision-making authority) and officials (charged with implementation) at both the national and subnational levels. These recommendations were discussed in focus groups before being finalised.

**Q:** Given that Lithuania is not very urbanised and the population is not substantially growing, why should we care about sustainable urbanisation?

**A:** One reason is that unsustainable urbanisation is expensive. Not for the individual of course, but for the public sector, which means higher taxes in the long run. So the only way to force an individual to reconsider is to pass

on the costs to rebalance the equation. Ultimately it is a political choice or a political responsibility to steer the behaviour of people towards collective phenomena like sustainable urbanisation.

**Q: What should planners do, should they try to block unsustainable development themselves?**

A: This is not the role of planners since they are not publicly elected officials. So they need to be careful not to overstep their bounds. Sometimes planners can be influential in the political realm because of their technical knowledge and communicative skills, but the ultimate decision needs to be taken democratically.

## Session 2: Pitching session and discussion

Moderated by Karolis Kinčius (Lithuanian Ministry of Environment)

### Law of Infrastructure Implementation in Vilnius – Anton Nikitin (Vilnius city)

The Law of Infrastructure Implementation is a very new law, coming into force only 13 months ago. It seeks to create clear rules for infrastructure development and, it is hoped, can influence urbanisation. It does this by imposing infrastructure fees on different zones in the masterplan.

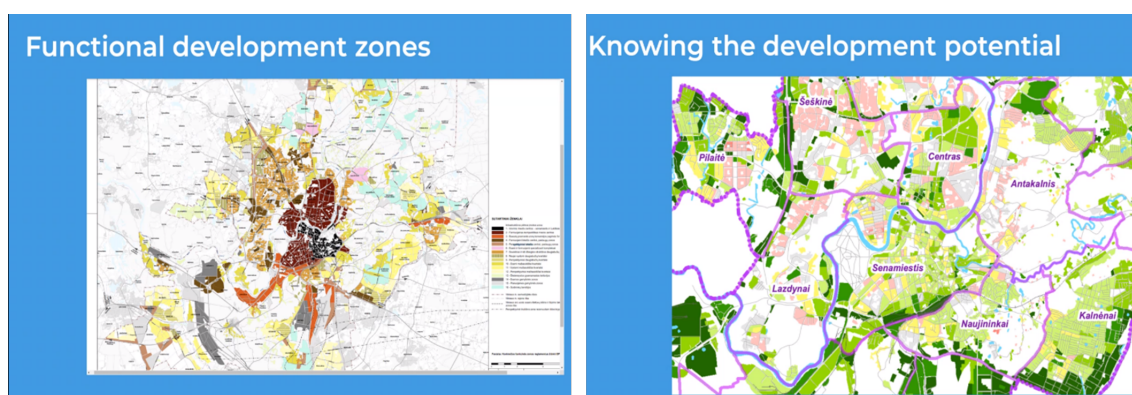


Figure 7: The different types of zone-identification depending on their importance in relation to functional development and representing their development potential.

The revision of Vilnius' masterplan included priority zones for development, which have more infrastructure in place and are already built-up. The masterplan also identified functional zones for specific or mixed-uses. A spatial analysis of development potential within the city comprised the basis for setting the infrastructure tax amounts. Vilnius has the highest prices for development in Lithuania. The price in priority areas was set at 30 euros per m<sup>2</sup> capacity and 50 euros elsewhere. Rates in non-priority areas for developments like single-family houses, conversion/regeneration, storage facilities, and parking lots (if they manage rainwater) were lower (€15/m<sup>2</sup>). Discounts are also given for commercial use on the first storey, underground parking, playgrounds, sports, etc. There is an effort to integrate this law into the wider infrastructure planning both in the short term (5 years) as well as the long term. Some of the money collected from the fees (€4m) should be used for sustainable transport, such as bike paths or in high density areas. There is also a guarantee that 30% of the funds stays in the area where they are collected. These areas are very small so it gives people a feeling that they can see effects of their payments.

The results so far show mixed results. It should be remembered that this law is just one tool, and there are many more factors influencing development. Moreover, it does not reflect real costs of infrastructure. If this were to be done, it would be too radical a change for the market. As such, it did not affect sprawl as most development still occurred in non-priority areas as single housing.

**Q: Is the price difference enough?**

A: This is an issue we are considering. We know that to be really effective and reflect real costs the fee should be €300/m<sup>2</sup> instead. The rule to spend the money in the area which they were collected also hampers certain kinds of sustainable mobility investments.

**Q: Were there side effects?**



A: The Infrastructure Law is a very new regulation and we are still working with it and are quite happy it exists. The main challenge is ironing out the details and modifying parts that don't work. In Lithuania, municipalities are very independent, and their own interests in promoting urban development can undermine the working of the law.

### The German land take reduction target – Volker Schmidt-Seiwert (BBSR)

This target may not deserve the label of 'intervention' because it is such a soft policy. Nevertheless, it fits well into the SUPER typology. Set in 2002 as a goal to reduce daily urbanisation to 30ha by 2020, it predates the EU's no net land-take target. It was revised in 2016 to "below 30ha" by 2030 because it was becoming clear that the 2020 target would not be met. One of the main issues is how to monitor and measure progress. Implementation of the national target takes place at the local level because this is where decisions on urban development occur. Some states created their own targets, such as Hessen (2.5ha) and Bavaria (5ha). Various planning law regulations support the implementation of the target, as shown in the slide below. An example of this, in addition to those listed, is that soil is now considered a protected good, so if you build over soil you should compensate for this elsewhere in the region.

#### How to implement?



- **Spatial Planning Law (Raumordnungsgesetz - ROG) § 2 Principles of spatial planning (Grundsätze der Raumordnung)**
  - Settlement activity is to be spatially concentrated (existing settlements, central places)
  - open space is to be protected by comprehensive open space, settlement and other specialist planning ... .. further fragmentation of the open landscape and forest areas is to be avoided as far as possible
- **Building Law Act (Baugesetzbuch): §13a Interior development plans (Bebauungspläne der Innenentwicklung)**
  - strengthen internal development
- **Building Law Act (Baugesetzbuch): §13b Inclusion of outside areas (Einbeziehung von Außenbereichen)**
  - less than 10,000 sqm
  - in connection to existing built-up areas
  - until 31. December 2022
- **Baukindergeld**



Figure 8: The different planning law regulations in Germany that support the implementation of national or local urbanisation targets.

The monitoring of the intervention shows a steady decline of land consumption despite significant economic growth over the same period. It is, however, unclear whether this development is caused by the target. There are also significant variations within Germany and urban growth is perceptible even in shrinking regions.

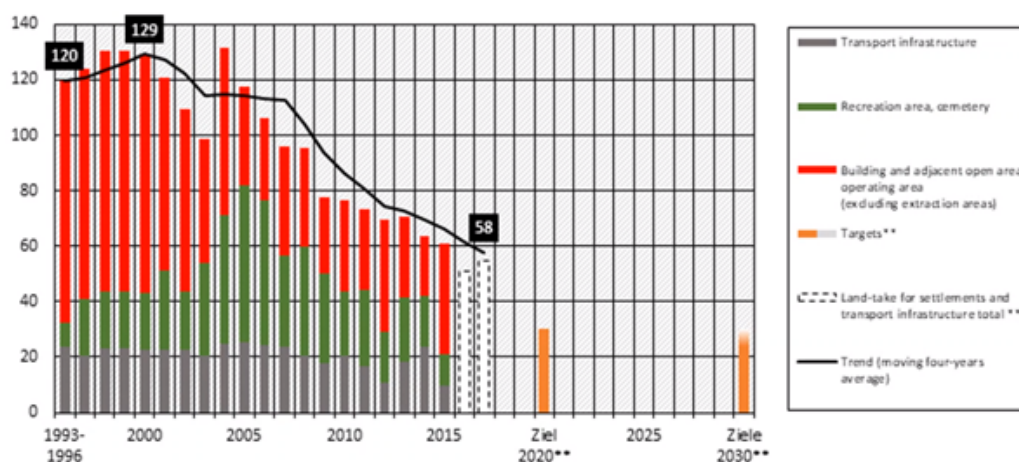


Figure 9: A decline in land consumption has been observed in Germany since 1993.

In order to understand the effects of the intervention, various stakeholders were interviewed. The respondents indicated that the simplicity of the target was both its greatest strength but also weakness. There was a great deal of support for it, but because it is not binding, other policies are adopted that conflict with the goal. In general, its performance was successful in that this national rule entered the mentality of planners on the ground and sparked local innovations in its implementation.

**Q: To what extent does the national level collaborate with developers?**

**A:** We are not involved in the implementation of the target. Local and regional planning offices do that; we just monitor progress.

### Final words of advice: how should you promote sustainable urbanisation?

- **Erblin:** There is no perfect instrument, but one promising measure is a vision at the national level. This can put planning objectives on the political agenda, which should also be made measurable and be monitored. Cooperation is also important, so that instruments that defuse competition, such as regional sharing of fiscal benefits, can be considered.
- **Anton:** We have improved efficiency at the national level. This was necessary because any delays in decision making can be very costly when you are dealing with physical challenges. To do it like this, you need to trust one another. So measures that increase trust are important.
- **Volker:** There must be a political discussion on the costs of infrastructure and services in urban development. This will reveal how inefficient car transport is. This needs to be balanced against individual preferences, which should also be considered.
- **David:** The metaphor of the doughnut economy is useful to frame the discussion on urbanisation because it is so widely known. So how can we develop cities in a way that respects both ecological and social boundaries? This can help us to break out of the logic of self-interest and underline the importance of the public interest.

## Conclusions and wrap-up by Giancarlo Cotella

To intervene well, one needs to understand a major driving force behind urbanisation: the profitability of land development. Controlling this is a political decision and requires political will. Giancarlo thinks this will is already present and growing, as witnessed by the many interventions promoting sustainable land use throughout Europe. It's important to note that each territory is doing this in its own way, so a blind policy transfer of 'best practices' will not work. We also found that single interventions do not determine success, this needs to be done as a package at different levels. There needs to be a multi-pronged approach: you need a strategy, you need a financial program, you need legal regulations, etc.

Scenarios can support decision-making because they illustrate the consequences of policy decisions on the ground. The maps provide a clear image of what your area could look like in 30 years, and you can choose which scenario is most desirable. Then you can investigate which interventions support the road towards this future the most.

## Evaluation of the event

### Delivered input (was the target group reached?)

Three announcements were distributed for this roundtable from the ESPON newsletter and passed on by ESPON contact points to a list of invitees. The first announcement was a save-the-date sent before the Christmas holidays in December 2021. A formal invitation was then sent two weeks before the event followed by a reminder one week before. These invitations were accompanied by a pre-event brief. In total, 450 invitations were sent out (not counting forwarding from ECPs and others), and 188 people registered for the event. During the event there were, on average 80 attendees, with a maximum of 112.

The vast majority of registrants came from Poland (56), followed by Lithuania (17), Portugal (17), and Croatia (16). About 49% of the registrants identified themselves as policymakers, 23% as researchers, and 8% as coming from the private sector. Of the policymakers, almost all were either from just the national level (23) or from all levels (17 from the local, regional, national, and European levels). Of the 23 people filling in the post-

event survey, 15 indicated they had learned about the event through an ESPON email invitation and 6 from the ESPON website.

## Satisfaction with the event

23 people filled in the post-event survey. The results were very positive, with 18 indicating being “very satisfied” and 5 “fairly satisfied” with the event. Elaborating on this, the content of the presentations, the pace, and the moderation were praised. The discussions were considered interesting and at a quite high level of expertise. More critical responses relate to the lack of interactivity with the attendees.

When asked whether the event lived up to expectations, the responses were almost overwhelmingly positive with 19 responses ranging from “quite well” to “more than expected”. It was also said that the event “*was enriching to be able to understand more evidence of the best interventions to combat land occupation and promote sustainable urbanisation. It certainly contributed to broadening horizons with experiences from other places*”.



Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

espon.eu   

#### **ESPON 2022**

ESPON EGTC  
4 rue Erasme, L-1468 Luxembourg  
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg  
Phone: +352 20 600 280  
Email: [info@espon.eu](mailto:info@espon.eu)  
[www.espon.eu](http://www.espon.eu)

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

#### **Disclaimer**

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.