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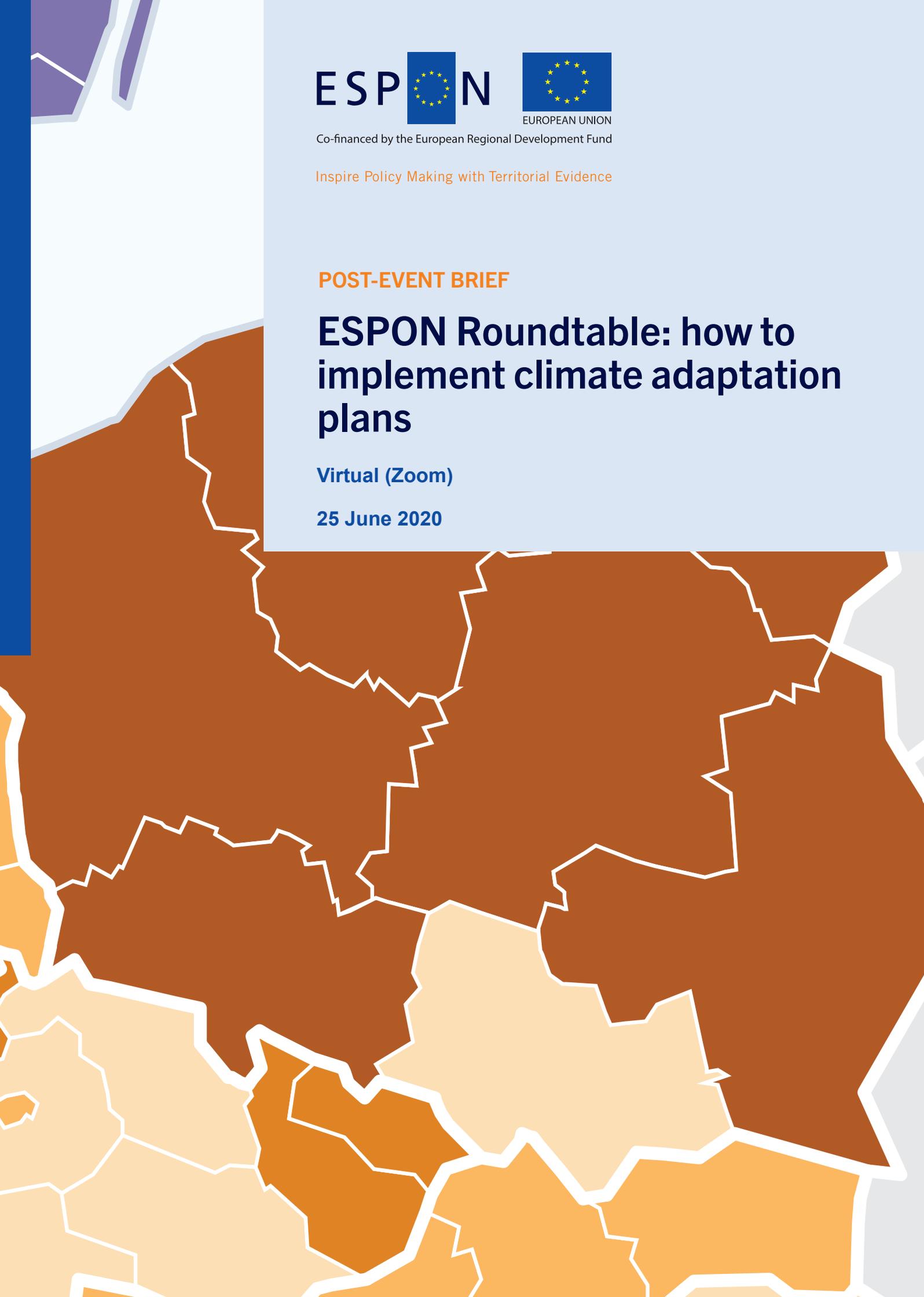
Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

POST-EVENT BRIEF

ESPON Roundtable: how to implement climate adaptation plans

Virtual (Zoom)

25 June 2020



Summary

The ESPON virtual roundtable focused on the implementation of climate change adaptation measures in the peri-urban Eurodelta Meuse, Scheldt and Rhine regions and was held on 25th of June 2020. The roundtable addressed European national, subnational and local policymakers executing sustainable territorial development strategies that are interested in climate adaptation implementation in the Benelux region. Particular attention was paid to plans dealing with the urban heat island effect, droughts, and excessive runoff and erosion.



All targeted regions have implemented some good practices. Brussels is trying to increase green spaces in the city as one of the solutions reducing the urban heat island effect. Flanders has implemented a 4-level escalation scheme on drought and water scarcity which allows for a fast response in tackling drought hazards. The Walloon case presents good examples for prevention and correction of erosion damages.

The roundtable presentations and discussions showed a need for European cross-border cooperation in elaborating adaptation measures and in learning from mutual experiences. There is a need to make data transparent, which serves as a good input for raising the awareness of climate change within different scales of governance and with various stakeholders in the public, civic and business spheres. In order to improve implementation of these measures with this broad range of stakeholders on various levels there is a need to a.) further enhance the general mindset for action ,b.) to improve collaboration on specific cases, and c.) to guarantee consistency with related policy domains. Further ESPON evidence and outreach activities (especially with regard to a. and c.) could play key roles in improving implementation of climate change adaptation measures.

Objectives, target groups

Climate change is disrupting national economies (especially with regard to floods and mudslides) and is affecting local wellbeing (especially with regard to urban heat island effects). It is vital to safeguard climate-vulnerable sectors such as food production, socio-economic resilience, accessibility, and public health, as well as to articulate specific actions to empower and support more vulnerable areas and groups. Territorial strategy-making at both regional and local scales needs various measures to mitigate, adopt and reduce the impact of climate change.

The ESPON roundtable focused on the implementation of climate adaptation measures in the peri-urban Eurodelta of the Meuse, Scheldt and Rhine. Similar challenges with regard to fluvial and pluvial floods, the urban heat island effect in urban areas, and droughts and erosions in low mountainous countryside areas are expected in this region. The roundtable addressed:

- (inter)national, subnational and local policymakers exercising executive powers in territorial sustainable development strategies, planning and governance;
- representatives of city networks, intermunicipal and interregional associations;
- the network of ESPON Contact Points;
- academics in sustainable development and climate change.

With this respect, participants from Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and the neighbouring countries such as France and Germany were invited.

Although each of the regions in the Eurodelta have already implemented climate adaptation plans at national, regional, and provincial levels, some regions seem to be more expeditious than others. As all targeted regions have implemented some good practices so far, the ESPON roundtable on the implementation of climate adaptation measures aimed to serve as a background or basis for further elaboration of the plans and participants were expected to share good practices in order to learn from each other's experiences.

The ESPON roundtable addressed two policy questions:

1. How should regions and cities cooperate to ensure the efficiency and coordination of climate adaptation measures at wider geographical scales?
2. Can we learn from each other how to implement (inter)national/regional climate adaptation plans efficiently and in close interaction with each other?

Agenda, short overview of presentations and participants

The roundtable on how to implement climate adaptation measures started with a welcome of **Zintis Hermansons** (ESPON EGTC), who also introduced two ongoing ESPON projects that serve as a beneficiary to provide input for the policymakers dealing with climate adaptation. The first project, ESPON TITAN, provides an overview of the territorial and economic impact of hazards. The initial results regarding the calculation of the economic impact generalised via the type of hazard showed that coastal areas, in particular, are to be considered as a major implementation site for climate adaptation measures. Secondly, the ESPON SDG Localising Tool was introduced, that allows users to compare different regions based on their achievements in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The introduction was followed by short presentations from the three Belgian regions of Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia. Representatives of each region explained one of the hazards and their adaptation strategy.

Presented by **Etienne Aulotte** from **Brussels**, the **urban heat island effect** and pollution are very critical problems in central Brussels. Authorities in Brussels have used the increase of green space in the city as one of the main solutions to tackle the problem. Two plans apply measures to mitigate against the urban heat island effect: the Brussels Regional Air-Climate-Energy Plan (2016) and the Water Management Plan (2017). The main strategy is to keep existing green areas – both protected and unprotected – and develop new green areas. On regional and transregional level, Brussels has developed four green corridors that would connect the city with the surrounding areas. On a local level, the management of green spaces and the cooperation with different sectors – both public and private – will be developed. The most challenging aspect for implementation is the cross-border cooperation with the adjoining regions and the private land ownership, which pushes the cooperation into the private sector.

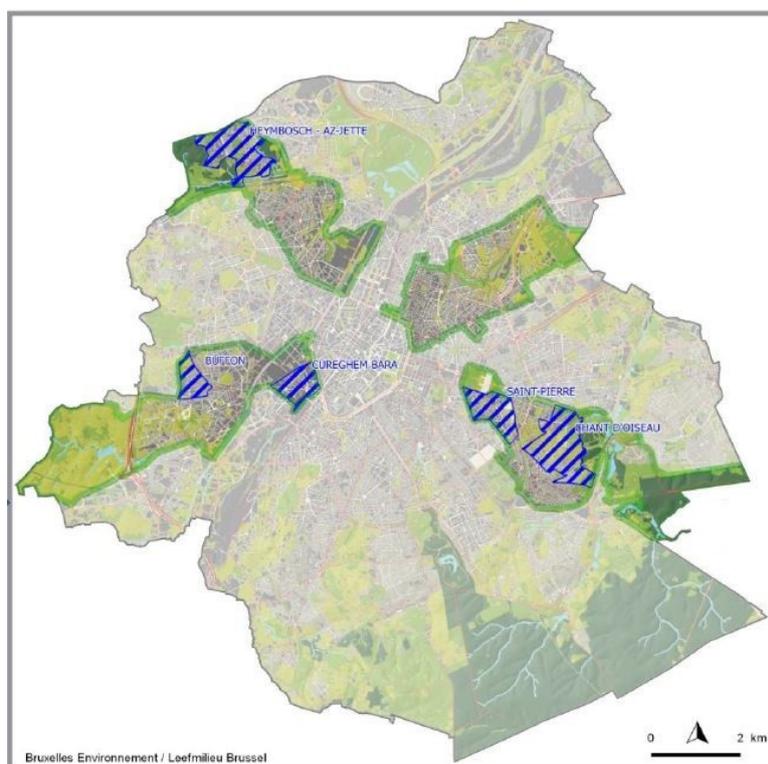


Figure 1: Four main green corridors in Brussels. (Source: Etienne Aulotte)

Griet Verstraeten and Edward Van Keer presented the **Flemish** approach to droughts. In Flanders, various measures are used, e.g. the decrease of paved spaces, limitation on water use and more (natural) space for water storage in wet periods, to be used in dry seasons. Flanders has implemented an escalation scheme on drought and water scarcity. It is a good example of how to respond with timely actions by using a 4-level escalation: level 1 by water managers, level 2 by drought commission and level 3 by provincial or federal crisis coordination committee. Level 0 represents a normal situation (see figure 2). In pressing times, a multilevel decision group evaluates the situation every week based on collected data and, according to the level of hazard, necessary actions are taken.

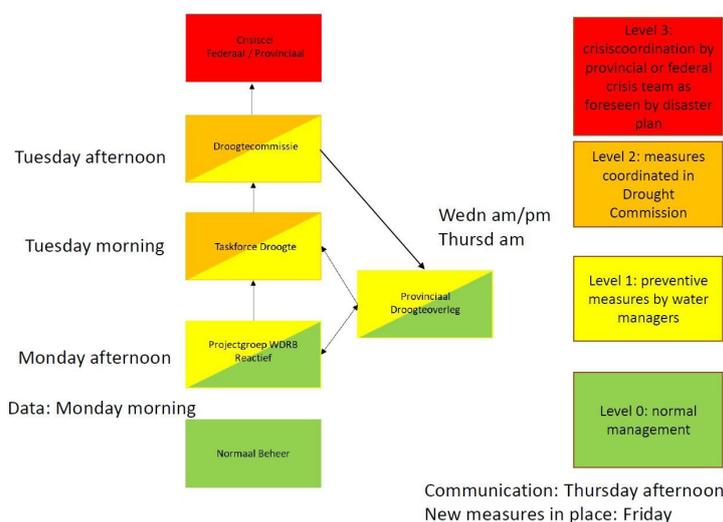


Figure 2: The four-level escalation scheme on drought and water scarcity: the order of meetings between different consultation structures. (Source: Griet Verstraeten and Edward Van Keer)

Julien Hoyaux from **Wallonia** explained the **water and erosion** target in climate adaptation plans. The problem has been tackled both on regional and local scale: flood maps and management plans give the overview on the regional scale, and diagnosis tools and detailed evaluations are implemented at a local scale. Wallonia has cooperation projects between regions, municipalities and citizens, and specific business sectors such as local farmers. Two important aspects to fight against erosion are prevention and correction, e.g. considering floods before construction and conducting watershed analysis.

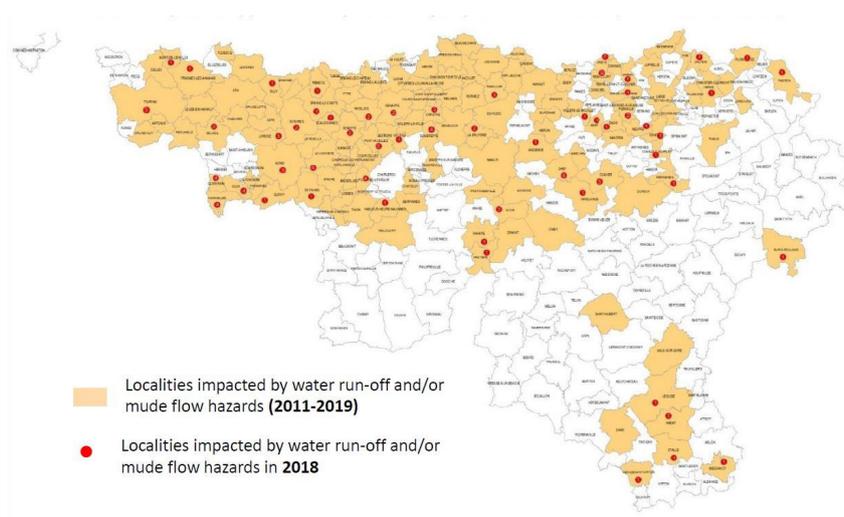


Figure 3: A map of water run-off and/or mud flow hazards in Wallonia: impacted localities. (Source: Julien Hoyaux)

In the second part of the roundtable, representatives of neighbouring regions and the Benelux Authority, namely **Bruno Alves** (Luxembourg), **Willem Jan Goossen** (The Netherlands), **Félix Vève** (Région Hauts-de-France) and **Yvonne Havenga** (Benelux Authority) reflected on their thoughts about the issues handled before and shared similar experiences. Time for questions and discussion was available after each speaker.

Luxembourg has a climate adaptation strategy from 2018 where different issues – temperature rise, effect of snow coverage, decrease of ground water and erosion – are taken into consideration. One good example of co-involvement is the PacteClimat project which has a list of around 90 measures for which municipalities can get a reward if they accomplish a certain amount of them.

The Netherlands have the Delta programme, where state, regions, water institutions and other institutions cooperate not solely on climate adaptation, but also on common territorial issues. The programme started about 10 years ago, when it was mainly focused on floods, but it has developed to also include fresh water supplies, climate adaptation and its implementation in other realms of planning; sustained by a massive governance budget.

Hauts-de-France in its turn emphasises on the role of scientists: they have a research centre, which can turn raw data to a tool and is therefore useful for authorities. The biggest city in the region – Lille – is struggling with urban heat island effects. Different measures are being implemented. For example, each new building should be built on extensive criteria with regard to climate adaptation.

Benelux authority has a good insight in the cooperation of all three countries. The topics vary a lot – from transport to food safety and from waste to health care. Cooperation is regarded as very useful while three countries frame the common ideas and objectives. From 2014, there is also a climate adaptation working group, that has been successful in wisely influencing decision-making institutions. This could also enhance further cross-border implementation of climate adaptation measures.

Delivered input (was the target group reached)

The outreach of the virtual event was much larger than originally expected as a physical event (some 70-80 participants instead of 25-30 participants). Some 50% of the participants engaged were from the region of the Benelux and its neighbouring countries. The other half came from Italy, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Ireland, Estonia, Portugal, and even Albania, Greece, Malta, and Sweden. Next to the regular and ECP-related audience (around 15-20%), 20% were academics, and the rest local stakeholders and policy makers working on different governance levels. Therewith the target group was sufficiently reached.

Three main types of input were provided. First the roundtable provided an overview of climate change adaptation measures targeted to the urban heat island effect, droughts, water and erosion being implemented in the three Belgian regions (Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia) as well as the reflecting discussions held by representatives from Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Région Hauts-de-France. Secondly, two ongoing ESPON projects were introduced by the representative of ESPON to provide input for the policymakers and practitioners dealing with climate adaptation. Thirdly, the roundtable engaged stakeholders from the Eurodelta area and urged for ongoing cooperation. The roundtable was integrating different cross-border participants that had also been active in the so-called Table-Top Meetings organised by the Benelux Authority and served as a milestone in developing further cross-border cooperation in the region.

The efficacy of the proposed structure

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, ESPON outreach activities were adapted to be held virtually. The roundtable on how to implement climate adaptation measures served as a first virtual ESPON event to take place after the pandemic started to spread across Europe.

The initial list of presenters and the agenda of the event was followed as it was planned before the adjustments to virtual event. A half-day event focusing on regional evidence and mutual shared lessons was an efficient format. Three presentations on the urban heat island effect, droughts, water and erosion provided necessary frames for setting the scene on the implementation of climate adaptation measures. The reflections by neighbouring regions of Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Région Hauts-de-France on the subject of the roundtable provided useful input in drawing attention to similarities and differences in climate adaptation measures as well as allowing the sharing of good practices by participants. As such, the structure of the reflections turned out to be an efficient way of getting the larger picture without having more than three main presentations. For virtual events, the diverse forms of activities in a meaningful time format can effectively hold the attention of virtual participants.

At the same we received several positive reactions on the event; sometimes even with further elaborations with regard to similar experiences in other regions. However, attendees remained predominantly passive during the roundtable, without adding new insights or reflections of their own to the discussion. Therefore, one could wonder if a virtual event would be suitable for a real roundtable.

Moreover, and with respect to technical affairs, we recommend implementing some testing mechanism for the internet connection of presenters that should be taken before the actual event takes place. Some technical issues occurred due to the relatively poor connection of some presenters that could be easily avoided if internet connection would be tested before the event, which would leave participants the necessary time to choose another location to give the presentation or to try to use another type of connection (if possible). The quality of video is an important factor in working in a multilingual setting.

Main conclusions

The roundtable on how to implement climate adaptation plans ended with the conclusion by Professor Luuk Boelens (University of Ghent) who shared the concern that the implementation of climate adaptation measures is not going fast enough and elaborated three main lessons learnt based on presentations and roundtable discussions:

1. **Make actors aware that climate change is the problem. Make data transparent.** Measurable indicators play a crucial role in delivering the message of sustainability and need for actions that should be accessible by all involved. Downscaling and refining the SDGs and selecting the relevant indicators could be challenging and need some scientific input that could be provided in different ways, such as engaging with further ESPON surveys and outreach activities. A coherent data platform would be useful.
2. **Make good tailor-made solutions on local and regional level.** There is a need for cooperation between different partners in order to put the measures into action, be these private landowners or cross-border governmental institutions. Good examples in some regions in this respect could also influence the implementation in other regions. Moreover, it could enhance spin-offs for other SDG-related challenges as well.
3. **Be consistent within the administrations.** Climate change is not just an issue for a specific department but relates to all administrations, from the prime minister to the employees of a city's engineering department. Not all are convinced about climate change and efforts are needed to change the way of thinking within administrations about the scope of the problem, the seriousness of resulting economic damages and need for rapidly implemented actions.

To conclude the presentations, reflections and roundtable discussions, droughts will become a main challenge for not only the Benelux region, but other cross border regions as well. Water during rainy days needs to be retained and filtered to supply groundwater. The climate change adaptation measures need to include all levels of governance, including local farmers who own the land where the actions should be taken, civil society representatives who can increase the awareness of the climate change and also different levels of administrations to catch the cross-sectoral impacts of climate change. Adaptation thus requires a close collaboration between the public, civic and private sectors.

Further recommendations

Based on the roundtable on climate adaptation three recommendations are provided for further implementation of climate adaptation plans:

1. **A fast and flexible response is needed in order to tackle impacts caused by the changing climate.** The concept of resilience found its place into the discussions on policy development that is not just being able to adapt to changes but also being able to withstand and quickly recover from various unforeseen challenges related to health, environment and economy. Through this, we can be prepared for the worst scenario that may occur after events such as an extremely dry period, heat wave, floods, etc. As presented by Griet Verstraeten, the Flemish practice provides a good example of how to respond with timely actions using a four level escalation scheme - the framework of actions taken with respect to the

circumstances. As demonstrated with a Flemish example, it takes two days to gather the drought commission responsible for level 2 events.

2. As the years 2016-2020 have been drier than before, the awareness of climate change impacts is high. This situation can possibly be used in order to **increase the involvement of different stakeholders**. Climate adaptation plans need the engagement of all stakeholders from the public, civic and private sectors and has to be activated by different types of measures targeting each regarding their competence and readiness to act.
3. **Invest in cross-sectoral and cross-border actions.** There is no one-size-fits-all solution for climate adaption, and it requires tailor-made responses at different governance levels. Coordinated policymaking in cross-border areas and cross-sectors can reduce the investments on elaborating local tailor-made measures. Transboundary risks need to be assessed and taken into account in a coordinated manner. There is a direct need to strengthen adaptive capacity across borders and have similar territorial specificities in EU macro-regions that share common climate risks and territorial conditions (e.g., Benelux region for floods, droughts and water scarcity).



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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.

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