



ECP TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKING

ESPON Going Regional

Synthesis Report

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The Lead Part was the School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, where the UK ESPON Contact Point was based.

Other partners were:

ECP Ireland, National University of Ireland Maynooth/National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), Ireland;

ECP Belgium, Institut de Gestion de l'Environnement et d'Aménagement du Territoire (IGEAT), Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium;

ECP Hungary, VATI, Budapest Gellerthegey, Hungary;

ECP Netherlands, Ministry of VROM, Directorate General for Spatial Policy, the Hague, Netherlands;

ECP Czech Republic, Ministry for Regional Development, Institute for Spatial Development, Czech Republic.

This report was written by Cliff Hague

The content of this report does not necessarily represent the opinion of the ESPON Monitoring Committee.

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Executive Summary

- The aims of the *ESPON Going Regional* transnational ECP activity were “to disseminate ESPON findings to the research and policy communities, and to foster greater understanding of the trans-scalar aspects of spatial planning.” (1.1)
- *ESPON Going Regional* held two seminars. The first was “Spatial Development of Europe’s North Western Periphery: The implications of ESPON findings for territories beyond the London-Paris-Milan-Munich-Hamburg “Pentagon”. The second was “Competitiveness and Cohesion in North Western Europe: The implications of ESPON results”. Each attracted scientists, students and practising spatial planners. (1.2)
- The goal of achieving balanced competitiveness across the EU territory by promoting strong polycentric zones beyond the Pentagon may in fact lead to locally stronger tendencies towards monocentricity in peripheral countries with a strong, dominant metropolis such as Ireland. (2.8)
- Polycentric development has been adopted as an aim in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and appears to underpin the thinking in the North of England. In Scotland and Wales, the physical geography and the existing patterns of settlement mean that the polycentric concept has not been formally endorsed in spatial planning at national level. (2.8)
- There is continuing decline in remoter rural areas in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but in some areas of Ireland such decline has been reversed. (2.12).
- ESPON results provide a rationale for the integration of agricultural and rural policy, environmental policy and regional development policy, through imaginative spatial frameworks.(2.14)
- The ESDP triggered major new spatial planning initiatives; in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the North of England there have been first ventures into a form of planning that is consciously different than the traditional regulation and land use base of the statutory planning systems.(2.26)
- Concerns for sustainable development, social inclusion, regional cultures and identity, and use of clusters to promote growth figure more strongly in spatial planning practice than they do in ESPON. (2.28, 2.29, 3.17, 3.19, 3.21)
- Networking amongst stakeholders and community involvement are more significant in spatial planning practice than is recognised by the ESPON projects. However, in Ireland and Northern Ireland there has been collaboration with researchers in developing spatial strategies. There is interest in ESPON results. (2.9, 2.30, 3.4).
- Polycentricity has been in spatial visions, though understanding and interpretation of the concept differs significantly amongst different stakeholders (3.7, 3.8).
- Current theories of regional competitiveness emphasise “soft” factors such as human, cultural and institutional capital, environmental quality etc. (3.11, 3.12).
- The increasing spatial extent of labour and housing markets is a key theme in ESPON, e.g. in project 1.1.1 (‘MEGAs’ etc.). Practitioners recast the same processes in very different ways – concerns about sustainability, affordable housing, small town identity, rural decline and revival, scattered development and intrusions on the landscape.(4.7)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The aims of the *ESPON Going Regional* activity were “to disseminate ESPON findings to the research and policy communities, and to foster greater understanding of the trans-scalar aspects of spatial planning.” The partners in the activity hoped to foster “a scientific debate about the ESPON findings and a policy debate and to build links between them.” The focus was on North Western Europe as a macro-region, though the partners also recognised that to better understand the situation in North Western Europe, perspectives from elsewhere in Europe are also helpful.
- 1.2 There were two *ESPON Going Regional* seminars. The first of these was held in Belfast on 22-23 February 2005. The title of the event was “Spatial Development of Europe’s North Western Periphery: The implications of ESPON findings for territories beyond the London-Paris-Milan-Munich-Hamburg “Pentagon”. The second seminar was in London on 11-12 July 2005, and its theme was “Competitiveness and Cohesion in North Western Europe: The implications of ESPON results”. Each attracted an audience that was a mix of scientists, students and practising spatial planners. Each seminar was designed so that the speakers were a mix of researchers (mostly drawn from ESPON projects) and practising spatial planners (mostly from ministries or from INTERREG projects).
- 1.3 The seminars were planned so that the first would have a special emphasis on peripheral and rural regions, while the second would concentrate on urban-metropolitan regions within the Pentagon. Thus the two main spatial development contexts of North Western Europe would be covered in a focused manner.
- 1.4 A key feature of *ESPON Going Regional* was that two Position Papers were prepared, one for each seminar. The intention was that the Position Papers would be an integrated digest of key ESPON findings, with some commentary pointing up questions the findings pose for research and policy. Thus each Position Paper provided an overview of ESPON findings in relation to the theme of the seminar. Professor Walsh (Ireland ECP) wrote the Position Paper for Belfast and Professor Hague (UK ECP) wrote the one for London.
- 1.5 *ESPON Going Regional* benefited from the support of others outside the ESPON network itself. The ministries responsible for spatial planning in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Netherlands and Luxembourg all gave significant assistance in terms of providing speakers, and other forms of help. In addition, Queen’s University Belfast hosted the first seminar. INTERREG projects also provided speakers and other forms of support, and we are particularly grateful to the Strategic Planning Action Network (“SPAN”) for all its support in Belfast.
- 1.6 One of the objectives of *ESPON Going Regional* was to produce a Synthesis Report. It was intended to be a scientific record of the discussions in the two

seminars and to include a final chapter that would reflect on the scientific findings and policy responses. This is the Synthesis Report. It is structured as follows. The next section is about the Belfast seminar, and therefore is concerned with ESPON findings and spatial planning practice in relation to peripheral parts of North Western Europe, which also tend to be rural. Section 3 is then about the London seminar, and so focuses on ESPON findings and spatial planning practice in the urban and metropolitan parts of North Western Europe, which mainly lie within the Pentagon. Finally there is the section reflecting on the scientific findings and policy responses. Separate from the Synthesis Report there is also an Activity Report that focuses more on the organisation and delivery of the project.

2. ESPON findings and Spatial Planning on the North Western Europe Periphery

- 2.1 As Figure 1 shows, the majority of the 76 Metropolitan Growth Areas (MEGAs) identified by the project on **the potential of polycentric urban development** (1.1.1) are located in or close to the Pentagon. The Position Paper (Walsh 2005) noted the paucity of such centres in the UK and Ireland, and expressed some surprise that “Belfast is not identified as even a Category 4 MEGA”. The paper also questioned the arguments in project 1.1.1 that Ireland is one of Europe’s most polycentric urban systems. Since the Dublin area is home to 40% of Ireland’s population, accounts for 48% of the country’s GVA and 70% of major company headquarters Ireland (data quoted by Davoudi in her presentation) there is a case for arguing that Ireland is monocentric. This example shows how much more work is needed to really develop a convincing scientific case about the nature and application of the idea of polycentric development.
- 2.2 Simin Davoudi, a member of the project team on 1.1.1, told the meeting that polycentric development should not be mistaken to be a panacea for solving regional problems: rather it is best used as part of a strategy that could be summarised as “collaborate to compete”. In other words polycentric development strategies seek to address regional disparities by optimising the potential of regions through effective functional networking, rather than through reliance on a “redistribution model” in which resources are diverted from better off regions to poorer regions. Davoudi made the important point that investment in hard infrastructure, such as transport links, is a necessary but not a sufficient step towards a polycentric development strategy. There also **has to be investment in “soft infrastructure” such as building a shared regional identity and developing effecting institutions for regional governance**. Local government has a pivotal role to play in this process.
- 2.3 The presentations from the spatial planning practitioners demonstrated that the calls in the European Spatial Development Perspective (Commission of the European Communities, 1999) for the “development of a polycentric and balanced urban system” had been taken up. Niall Cussen (Department of Environment, Republic of Ireland) outlined Ireland’s **National Spatial Strategy** (NSS). It aims for more balanced regional development through realising potentials based on unique advantages, rather than by seeking to force growth away from Dublin. To this end, nine gateways have been identified (see Figure 2).
- 2.4 There has been cross-border co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland. **Northern Ireland’s Regional Development Strategy** (see Figure 3) was described by Jim Hetherington from NI’s Department for Regional Development. The Strategy was published in 2001. A major thrust of the strategy is to promote more **sustainable patterns of development based on: a polycentric network of growth poles integrated with the transport corridors** incorporating enhanced

public transport; compact urban forms; more housing within existing urban areas; and the wise and sensitive use of the built heritage and the rural environment.

Figure 1: MEGAs and the Pentagon

Source: ESPON Project 1.1.1

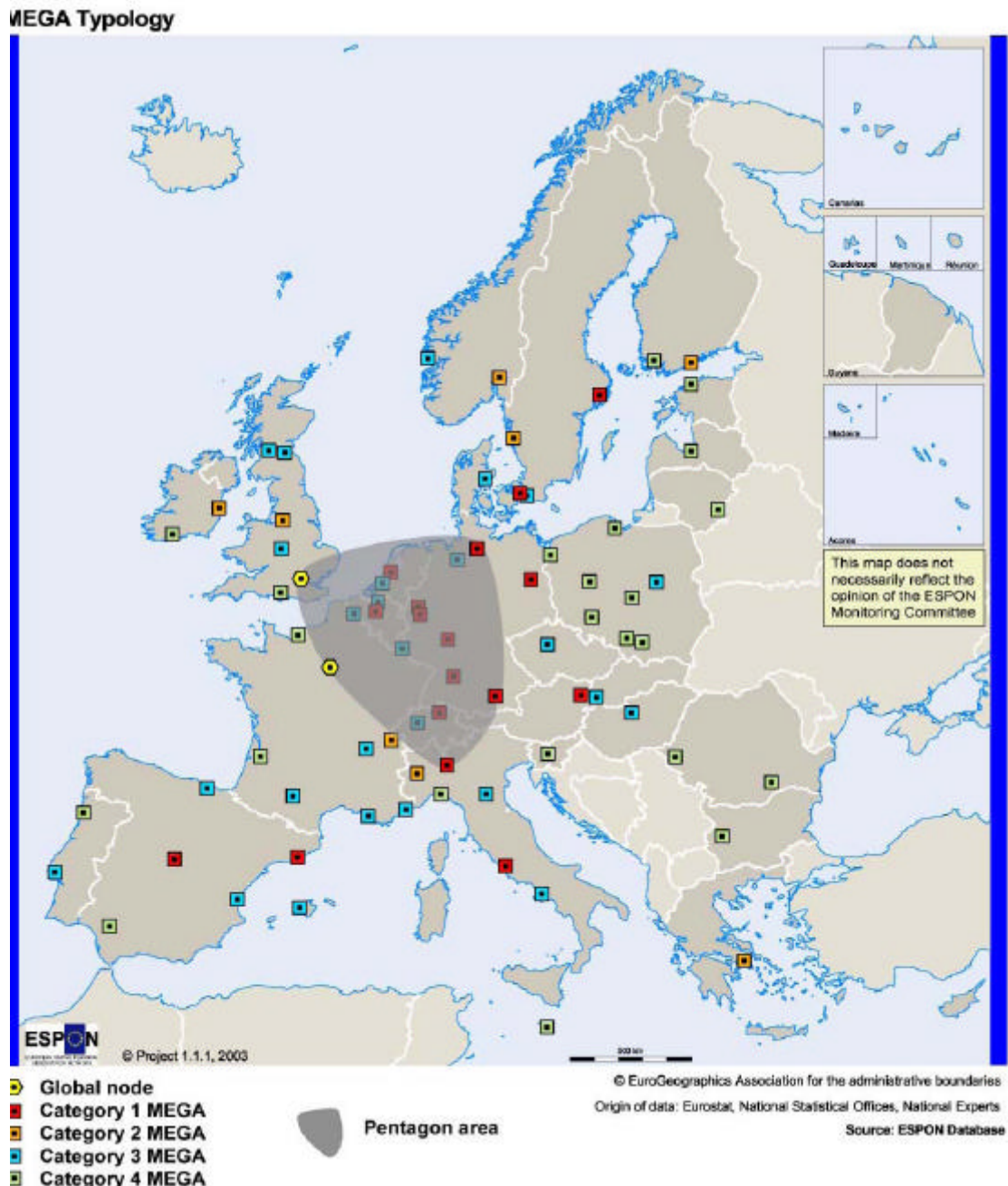
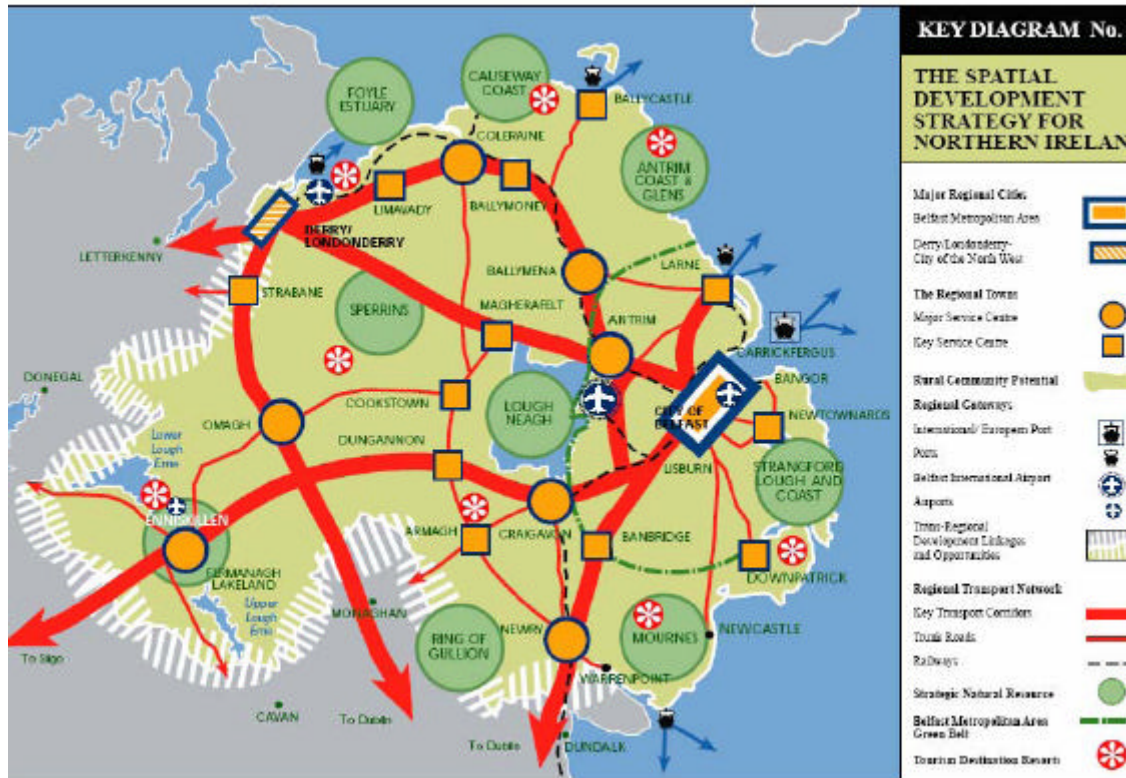


Figure 2: Ireland's Gateways
Source: National Spatial Strategy



Figure 3: Northern Ireland's Spatial Development Strategy

Source: Regional Development Strategy

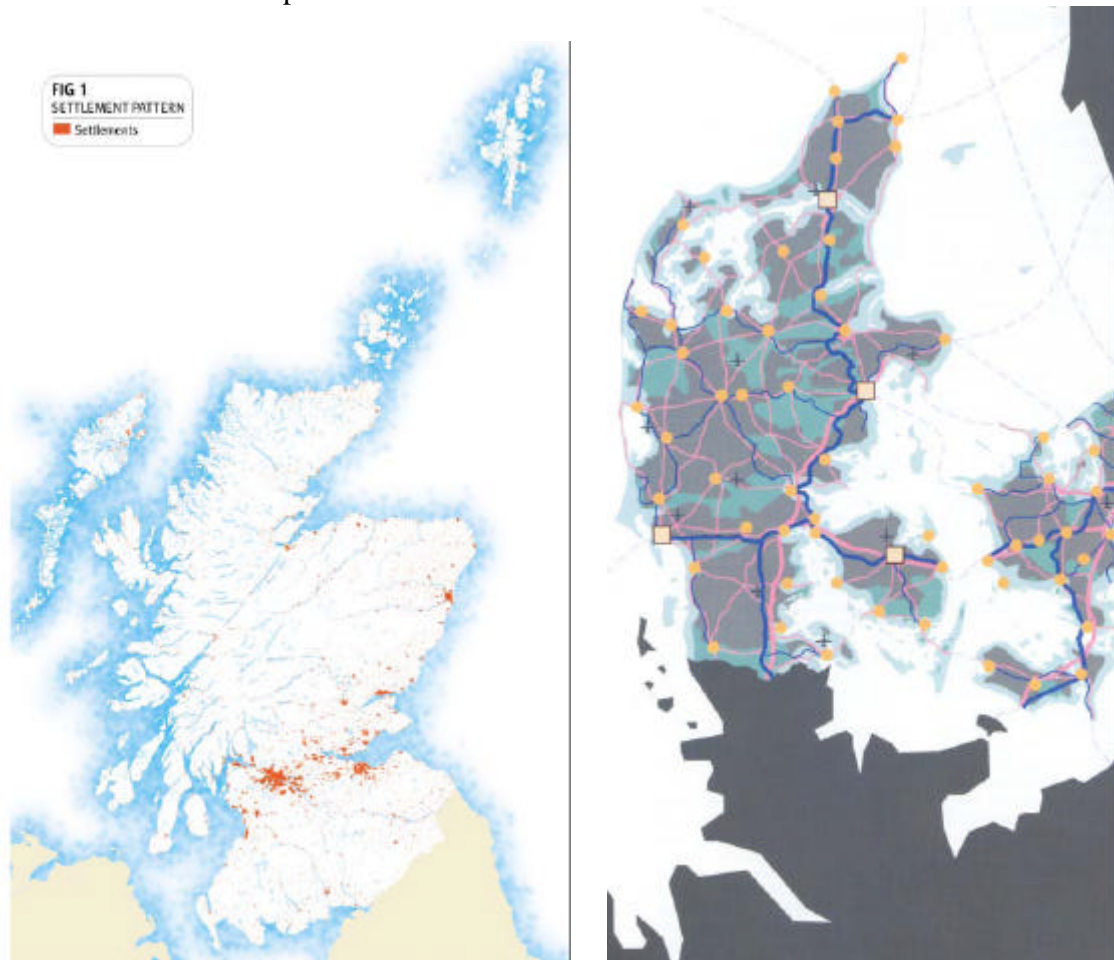


2.5 Scotland produced its **National Planning Framework** in 2004. Dr.Graeme Purves from the Scottish Executive, explained that the notion of **polycentric development did not match up to the topography of Scotland**, where most of the population is concentrated into the central lowland area, a corridor with upland areas to the north and south of it. Figure 4 shows the contrasts between Scotland and Denmark, where the relatively flat terrain is associated with a settlement pattern that looks much more polycentric. Not surprisingly, the Scottish strategy recognises the key role of the cities as driving the economy, and in particular the potential of the Glasgow – Edinburgh area that the ESPON research picked out as a MEGA in Category 3.

2.6 In Wales the topography is also a key factor in shaping the settlement system. Upland areas have long been a significant influence on patterns of interaction. North Wales is more functionally linked to North West England than to South Wales. Dr.Grant Duncan from the Welsh Assembly explained the approach in the **Wales Spatial Plan**. He stressed how zones of influence overlap so that many towns have connections in more than one direction. Therefore the plan identifies six regions, but leaves them with deliberately fuzzy and overlapping boundaries.

Figure 4: Scotland and Denmark – influence of topography on settlement patterns

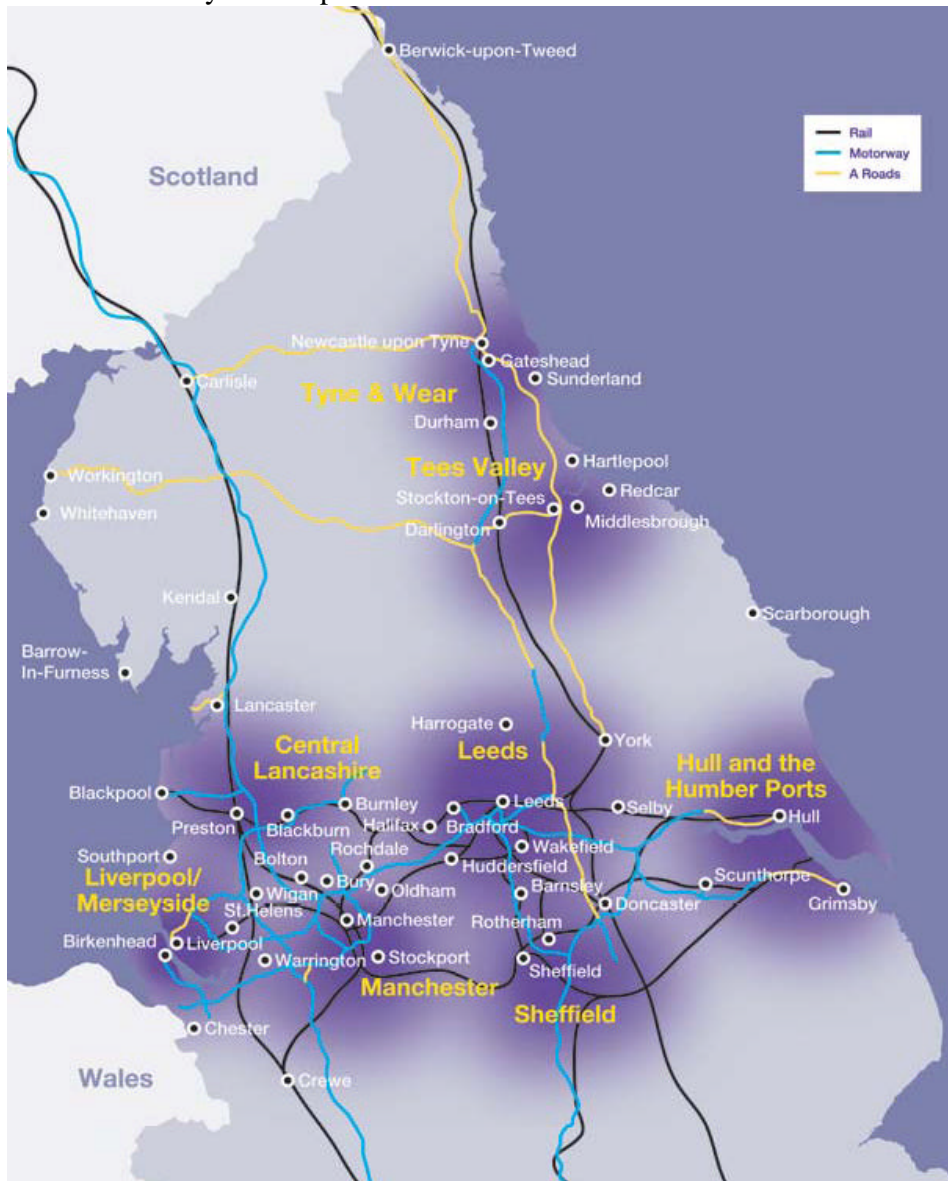
Source: G.Purves' presentation.



Key towns are recognised as hubs for development, but **the plan emphasises policy integration and sustainable development rather than polycentric development.**

- 2.7 **The Northern Way** appears to be a strategy that has been shaped very much by the ideas of polycentric development. It is a cross-regional strategy that covers three regions in the North of England, and links eight city regions (see Figure 6). John Heywood from the Government Office for the North East described this initiative. A central aim is improve economic performance and so **reduce regional disparities between this part of England and the South East**. This is precisely the logic behind polycentric development that Davoudi expressed as “collaborate to compete. However, the explanation of the approach that was given at the Belfast seminar made few references to the ideas of polycentric development. Rather the similarities were closer with the Welsh Spatial Plan, particularly in the emphasis given to the aim of building sustainable communities.

Figure 5: The Northern Way
Source J.Heywood's presentation



- 2.8 So what **conclusions** can be drawn from the discussions in Belfast about polycentric urban development? Project 1.1.1 pointed out that the goal of achieving balanced competitiveness across the EU territory by **promoting strong polycentric zones beyond the Pentagon may in fact lead to locally stronger tendencies towards monocentricity** in peripheral countries with a strong, dominant metropolis such as Ireland. It is not surprising to find that policy makers have not explicitly reflected on this uncomfortable point. However, the claims made for **polycentric development as a growth/potential alternative to “traditional” redistributive regional policies** do appear to have been persuasive in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and appear to underpin the thinking in the North of England. In Scotland and Wales however, the **physical geography and the existing patterns of settlement mean that the polycentric concept has not been formally endorsed** in spatial planning at national level. Furthermore, discussion amongst the audience revealed doubts about whether the idea of polycentric development could really be made operational in sparsely populated rural areas. Equally important, we should note that **in none of the examples is polycentricity an over-arching end in itself** in the way that sustainable development is, for example.
- 2.9 While it is too soon to evaluate the impacts of the spatial planning documents that were discussed, it seems clear that there is **a lot of networking and institution-building going on which constitutes the “soft infrastructure” that Davoudi sees as important for polycentric development**. The SPAN project is an example. This governance dimension is important and should feature in any future ESPON research agenda, though it is a topic that is best approached by the use of qualitative research methods rather than through generation of statistical indicators.
- 2.10 The focus of the Belfast seminar on rural areas meant that the ESPON projects on urban-rural relations (1.1.2) and on management of the natural heritage (1.3.2) were of particular interest. Walsh (2005) noted that project 1.1.2 had produced a harmonised **typology of six rural area types** based on two dimensions: the degree of urban influence and the degree of human intervention. He commented that beyond the larger cities, most of the rural areas of Ireland, Wales and Northern England are classified as areas with low urban influence and medium human intervention. By contrast, extensive areas of Scotland, especially the highlands and islands, are classified as areas of low urban influence and also low human intervention. Walsh commented that the typology provides a helpful summary of the variety of conditions across rural Europe. However, its usefulness as a policy tool is limited by the range of indicators available and the fact that most of the data are available only at NUTS2 or NUTS 3 levels.
- 2.11 Addressing the **trends in rural Ireland** in particular, Walsh observed that over the past decade population deconcentration, increased levels of personal mobility, and new consumption patterns have given rise to increased demand for tourism and leisure related facilities in some rural areas. These areas and other areas of

countryside within commuting distance of the main towns and cities have experienced considerable development pressures.

- 2.12 Referring to project 1.1.4 on demography, Walsh commented that **there are extensive rural areas across Europe where populations are decreasing**. Within North Western Europe's periphery, "most of rural Scotland appears to be in decline due to a combination of natural decrease and net out-migration. In Wales there is a distinct east/west divide with population continuing to decline in the western parts which are more rural and less accessible". Similarly there has been very modest growth in Northern Ireland. These patterns contrast with high demographic growth experienced in the Republic of Ireland, where there has been "very significant growth in some rural areas associated with increased levels of long distance commuting (which is in part due to lower house prices in small towns and rural areas), a more vibrant rural economy and a transition to strongly service oriented local economies in high amenity rural areas". However, even in Ireland there are extensive areas, roughly half of the rural territory, where the populations are either in decline or only marginally increasing.
- 2.13 Walsh drew the important conclusion that **the traditional trend of rural decline can be reversed in some areas**. However, he suggested that comprehensive integrated frameworks for spatial development at the local level are important. "Otherwise, there are risks of development trends that are environmentally unsustainable and situations where contestation rather than harmony becomes the norm in relations between different sections of the rural population".
- 2.14 Dr. Mark Scott (University College Dublin) in his presentation took up the theme of sustainable rural development. He pointed to the practical difficulties of reconciling economic growth, social vitality and ecological integrity. After reviewing the ESPON reports on urban-rural relations, the territorial impacts of the Common Agricultural Policy (2.1.3) and management of the natural heritage, Scott concluded that the ESPON research provided a "crucial link" between the ESDP policies and their practical application. He argued that the ESPON studies provide a clear **rationale for the integration of agricultural and rural policy, environmental policy and regional development policy, through imaginative spatial frameworks**.
- 2.15 These issues provoked a lively debate in the conference, with a particular focus on the situation in Ireland. Participants debated whether planning should follow people's lifestyle choices. Some felt that planners were too restrictive in opposing development in the countryside and that a steady supply of housing at affordable prices was critical in retaining young families. Others suggested that landscape quality is under threat from inappropriate development which undermines tourism potential. The **need to promote a 'living and working' countryside** was highlighted. The audience recognised that rural areas are not homogeneous, and that different policies are needed for different rural areas.

2.16 The Irish White Paper for Rural Development was viewed as an important first step in providing a structure within which these issues could be addressed. However, some were critical of the lack of political commitment to ‘making it work’. It was noted that the Irish National Spatial Strategy adopts a more spatially differentiated view of rurality. Traditional Development Plans were perceived to be largely negative as a technical, regulatory instrument, which do little to promote vitality of rural areas. There was a need to **consider the economic and social health of rural settlements as aspects of sustainability alongside environmental dimensions**. High quality, ‘niche’ products targeted at an international market was suggested as one means of addressing relative peripherality of local markets, requiring targeted capacity building/joint marketing. Sustaining local services (e.g. transport and higher education/employment) was viewed as critical in ensuring socially mixed communities in rural areas.

Figure 6: Rural development in Ireland

Source: Mark Scott’s presentation



2.17 The importance of rural areas was emphasised in the presentations on Scotland’s National Planning Framework and on the Wales Spatial Plan. Economic

diversification and environmental stewardship are key themes in Scotland, where 26% of the land areas is covered by measures aimed at environmental protection. In Wales one of the key themes is “respecting distinctiveness” which includes concerns for the cultural heritage and particularly the Welsh language.

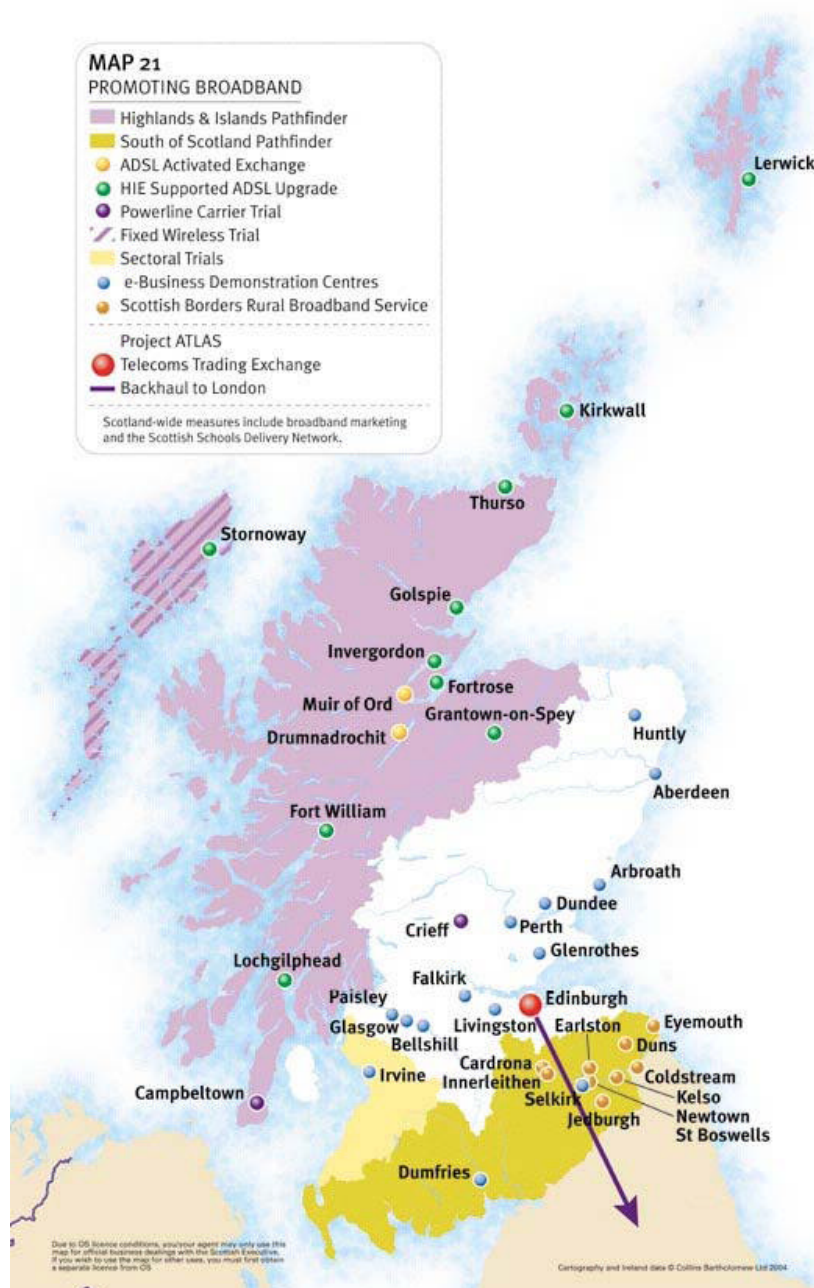
- 2.18 Transport and accessibility are major issues in peripheral regions, and feature in all the spatial strategies that were presented. As Walsh (2005) noted, there are significant contrasts in accessibility levels between core and peripheral regions in Europe, and the gaps are continuing to widen. The ESPON studies show that **rural areas of Ireland and Scotland are particularly disadvantaged on almost every accessibility index**. The higher journey costs and longer journey times impose extra costs on businesses in these areas if they need to reach the main European markets.
- 2.19 Professor Roger Vickerman argued that poor accessibility also provides a measure of protection for firms in peripheral areas, and that the growth of budget airlines has led to improvement in access for some peripheral regions. Furthermore, congestion is a problem in metropolitan regions, with associated costs in terms of unreliability of journey times.
- 2.20 Vickerman’s presentation focused on the findings of the ESPON projects on transport networks (1.2.1) and the territorial impacts of EU transport and TEN policies (2.1.1). The latter project had shown that **the overall effects of transport investments on regional development are relatively small** compared with the range of other factors that influence regional economic development. Vickerman argued that while there was indeed a need to improve the accessibility of rural and peripheral areas to transport networks, accessibility is relative, and so enhanced peripheral accessibility may also mean further improved accessibility for core regions. Rational pricing policies could aid sustainability and reinforce networks in peripheral areas. Vickerman’s case is that **pricing policies should have a role in reducing demand in congested areas**, but that such measures are not evident in current spatial strategies.
- 2.21 All the spatial strategies discussed recognised the importance of sustainable accessibility and external transport links and several of them highlighted the scope for using **transport networks as the basis for a promoting gateways and development corridors**. The Northern Way is fundamentally structured by the main west-east and north-south transport systems, and the international importance of Manchester airport. However, there has been some stepping back from the initial emphasis on growth corridors, in favour of a stress on the city regions. In Ireland, the National Spatial Strategy has been reflected in investment from the Department of Transport into Cork which will lever in new housing and boost the critical mass of the town. Overall though, one problem in Ireland was that the high rate of economic growth has meant that transport investment often is coming after development, rather than before it. These two examples show that both politically

and in terms of management the abstract concepts that spatial planners use carry limited influence with other policy makers.

- 2.22 Research and development and access to some **telecommunications** technologies and networks are further areas of disadvantage in the rural periphery. Walsh's Position Paper reviewed the relevant ESPON findings from projects 2.1.2 and 1.2.2. Telecommunication developments in principle seem to offer solutions to the 'friction of distance' and problems of remoteness from which many peripheral regions and rural areas have suffered. However, the ESPON findings reveal a complex picture in which the "roll-out" of different technologies differs in territorial terms, and where national differences in "telecom cultures" appear to have significant impacts.
- 2.23 Overall in telecommunications, UK regions are more advanced than those in Ireland. Most of Northern England is classified in ESPON project 1.2.2 as 'advanced' while Scotland and Wales are 'moderately advanced'. The level of development in Ireland is described as 'moderate'. As Walsh highlighted, in most regions there are **pronounced differences between urban and rural areas in relation to the take up of new technologies**. This is especially the case in Ireland, though there have been some recent initiatives to assist provision of infrastructure in small towns and rural areas. Scotland's National Planning Framework recognises that lack of broadband coverage can impede economic development. Scotland had 90% coverage by 2004 and the Executive are promoting alternative technologies to extend coverage to rural areas (see Figure 7).
- 2.24 Walsh also noted that the peripheral parts of North Western Europe performed relatively poorly in terms of **Research and Development**, according to the findings of project 1.2.2. In the typology of 5 regional types, Northern Ireland is classified as a Type 1 region ("Weak at undertaking R&D and innovation") with Scotland and Wales only marginally better. Unfortunately no data were collected for Ireland, though Walsh said that it would probably be classified as a Type 2 region ("Average strengths in R&D and innovation"). However, he added that there have been significant initiatives over recent years to build a stronger research capacity with innovative programmes to establish a small number of world class research centres funded by a new agency, Science Foundation Ireland.
- 2.25 The importance of R&D and innovation was not reflected evenly in the different spatial strategies that were presented at the seminar. Strengthening the knowledge base to support innovation is one of the ten priorities of the Northern Way project. Similarly, there is recognition of the need to strengthen the knowledge economy within Scotland.

Figure 7: Promoting Broadband in Scotland

Source: National Planning Framework



- 2.26 A number of points emerged from the practitioner presentations that should be of interest to ESPON. Firstly, it is clear that the ESDP triggered major new initiatives; indeed, we have seen **the first ventures into a form of planning that is consciously different than the previous, regulation and land use base of the statutory planning systems**. Hetherington described how the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025 represents a shift in thinking by adopting a long term strategic vision to guide the future development of the region

in order to promote a balanced and equitable pattern of sustainable development. Similarly, Cussen noted that there had been a growing realisation in the late 1990s that Ireland needed a more strategic approach to planning, in part because of concern about regional disparities, but also to ensure more effective and integrated public investment. Similarly, Duncan spoke of the Welsh Spatial Plan as going well beyond traditional land use planning. It is about “what can and should happen where”, and sets out a strategic framework to guide future development and policy interventions. The Plan therefore provides a framework for collaborative action by the Welsh Assembly, local authorities, other public agencies and others. Purves said that the National Planning Framework had raised the profile of spatial issues in Scotland. The Northern Way is not a spatial strategy as such, rather each Region produces a Regional Spatial Strategy, a Regional Economic Strategy, a formal Spatial Planning Strategy and a Sustainable Development Framework (as well as 17 other strategies!). Thus the Northern Way itself is something like a meta- vision that can steer a network of co-operation amongst the different city regions. What is clear though is that again it is a new approach.

2.27 It is not only the Northern Way that is different – **each of the strategies has important unique points**. Based on the presentations, it would appear, for example, that integration with other public sector bodies and outreach and stakeholder consultation have been more central to the Welsh Spatial Plan and Ireland’s National Spatial Strategy than to the others. Similarly, Ireland’s National Spatial Strategy appears to be the one that has most fully drawn upon spatial concepts, notably the idea of polycentricity. The SPAN project is sharing experiences in strategic spatial planning amongst its partners, but this is an area that ESPON could usefully pay more attention to. What can we learn from the diversity of approaches?

2.28 Issues of **sustainable development** figure strongly in the language of the different strategies, though this is a theme that has not been a central focus for ESPON. Similarly, the Northern Way, the Welsh Spatial Plan, and to a lesser extent Scotland’s National Planning Framework put quite a strong emphasis on **deprivation and social inclusion**, a topic that has so far received little attention in ESPON. The idea of sustainable communities, subsequently aired at the informal Ministerial Meeting in Bristol in December 2005, is a key concept in the Welsh plan and in the Northern Way. Similarly there are a number of examples of conscious use of **clusters** as spatial tools to foster economic growth, e.g. in Scotland. How widespread is this approach across Europe, how is the idea interpreted and how effective is it?

2.29 Another leitmotif running through several of the presentations was the importance of **regional cultures** in spatial development. The Northern Way lists the distinctive culture of the North as one of the region’s key strengths; language and culture figure strongly in the Welsh plan. The origins of the Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy are in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 which included a commitment to prepare a new regional development strategy “tackling

the problems of a divided society and social cohesion in urban, rural and border areas, protecting and enhancing the environment, producing new approaches to transport issues, strengthening the physical infrastructure of the Region, developing the advantages and resources of rural areas, and rejuvenating major urban centres". Cultural heritage in relation to spatial planning involves more than preserving old buildings and classical statues. This needs to be reflected in spatial planning research.

2.30 There have also been different degrees of **collaboration between spatial researchers and policy-makers** in developing the strategies. The links seem to have been much stronger in Ireland (both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland) than has been the case in Scotland and Wales or the Northern Way. There is interest in ESPON results, but the real aim should be to build an on-going basis of collaboration so that policy-making is evidence-based but also rooted in causal assumptions that can be shown to be robust in more theoretical terms.

2.31 In summary, *ESPON Going Regional* in its Belfast seminar was able to range widely over the emergent fields of spatial planning practice and research, with a particular emphasis on rural and peripheral regions and on the first round of final reports from ESPON. As Hetherington noted, in the past planners have relied heavily on intuition. The challenge to ESPON is to make them in the future to want to rely on well-researched concepts and empirical findings.

3 Competitiveness and Cohesion: ESPON and urban-metropolitan regions in North Western Europe

- 3.1 Much of North Western Europe lies within the Pentagon, Europe's only "zone of global economic integration" according to the ESDP. The *ESPON Going Regional* seminar in London therefore focused on urban-metropolitan regions, and was able to draw on some ESPON reports that had appeared after the Belfast seminar had been held. It also had the advantage of being able to draw on the comments compiled by the ESPON Contact Points on the first round of final reports. The Position Paper for the seminar began with a discussion about ESPON findings in relation to polycentricity. It then had a section looking at competitiveness, then one of cohesion, followed by one on sustainable development. This chapter of the Synthesis Report will follow that same structure.
- 3.2 To some extent the Position Paper reviewed points made in Belfast about **polycentric development**. However, it also raised some critical questions. The Position Paper argued that "while ESPON rather started with the innocent assumption that polycentric development was a desirable goal and a means to reach competitiveness and cohesion, there are signs that, as the research has progressed, a degree of scepticism is now evident towards the concept." It drew attention to the statement in the Second Interim Report of ESPON project 3.3 (on Lisbon-Gothenburg) that many of the conclusions and policy recommendations in ESPON reports so far imply "a need to move away from previous trajectories about competitiveness in particular. The most notable change...is a **spatial repositioning, away from an association of competitiveness with the capabilities with (sic) capital cities towards a broadening of the economic base and an explicit promotion of polycentricity**" (p.110). The Position Paper noted that such a shift would have direct implications for the capital cities in North Western Europe.
- 3.3 Professor Robin Thompson, an advisor involved in developing the London Plan, explained that the sheer **global importance of London effectively precluded any development strategy that sought to divert commercial development in particular to other centres outside the city**. Polycentricity in these circumstances was used as a strategy to boost retailing and similar functions in the many sub-centres that make up London as a metropolitan region.
- 3.4 Director Romain Diederich (Ministere de L'Interieur et de L'Amenagement du Territoire, Luxembourg Government and Managing Authority of ESPON) gave a presentation of the **SarLorLux+ cross-border region** to illustrate a practical application of a polycentric strategy. Luxembourg is the economic core of this region. The strategy has included the strengthening of city networks, transport links and the building of networks between the various universities and research institutes in the region. ESPON results have been a useful source of information. Because of large investments in R&D, Luxembourg is seen as a potential MEGA in this region.

- 3.5 Erzsébet Vajdovich Visy, Hungary's ESPON Contact Point, presented a summary of the current **situation in the new member states**. This confirmed the strong growth that has taken place in the capital cities. They have benefited from being key nodes in revitalised transport networks, and from being the locus for the new administrations as well as being the most attractive locations for foreign direct investment. However, in helping Europe to become more polycentric they were in danger of leaving their other national cities behind. She described the strategies in the Czech Republic and Hungary that sought to promote the integration of the capitals into European space whilst also promoting metropolitan regional growth.
- 3.6 Adrian Healey, University of Cardiff and ECOTEC, had researched the impact of Structural Funds in Urban Areas as part of the ESPON (project 2.2.3). He pointed to the **lack of progress on urban issues at EU level since the late 1990s**. Structural Funds appear to have benefited urban areas in an almost "accidental" manner, by being spent on actions that happen to have an urban location. It seems likely that DG Regio will continue to focus on regions, rather than urban local authorities. Though urban areas are crucial to Europe's competitiveness and cohesion, they remain substantially beyond the remit of the Commission.
- 3.7 The Position Paper drew attention to work by Zonneveld, Meijers and Waterhout in one of the annexes of the final report of project 1.1.1. This team of Dutch researchers pointed to **three ways that policies seeking to promote polycentric development are being implemented**. The first of these they call "spatial implementation instruments". These are regulations, programmes or budgets over which the "policy subject" has relatively strong control. Second are "non-spatial instruments" – i.e. measures that produce increased polycentricity as an effect, though it is not a main aim. Examples are general government decentralization programmes, or budget equalization measures. Through this second kind of instrument, Finance **Ministries** may be more important (though unwitting) agents for polycentric development than are the planners or regional development agencies. Finally there are strategic planning instruments, such as spatial visions, regional plans or national planning guidance. **Spatial visions were found to be more concerned with polycentric development than any other strategic planning instrument**. This finding is consistent with points that emerged in the Belfast seminar about the use of polycentricity in spatial strategies.
- 3.8 Monica Tanaka from the North Western Europe INTERREG Secretariat spoke about the **North Western Europe Spatial Vision** that was produced in 2000. Current work is reviewing the application of the ESDP through the Vision. This includes a study of polycentric development. This has revealed that stakeholders' **understanding of polycentricity differs significantly**, and that its abstract nature makes it a weak concept to counter-pose against local interests, which in relation to development tend to be clear and strongly held. Tanaka argued that there was a need to break down "polycentricity" into a set of actions that are understandable at regional level. Despite these reservations the research had found that the challenges

facing North Western Europe had made spatial visions increasingly important, and she argued for synergies between spatial visions and ESPON's research. In fact ESPON is involved in a project in the INTERACT programme that looks at Spatial Visions. Magali Bayssiere described this work which was still in its preliminary stage at the time of the seminar in London.

3.9 Another finding from the work of Zonneveld, Meijers and Waterhout that the Position Paper highlighted was their view that **traditional land use planning restrictions issued by national or regional governments “cannot easily be related to cohesion or competitiveness objectives”**. This seems to be consistent with the finding in the Belfast seminar that recent initiatives in spatial planning constituted a significant break with past approaches to local land use planning. So what insights has ESPON provided on the territorial dimension of competitiveness and how is spatial planning practice operating in this area?

3.10 The Position Paper noted that in general the metropolitan regions of North Western Europe performed relatively well in terms of **competitiveness** within Europe. However, it also stressed the need to see “Europe in the World” as ESPON project 3.4.1 does. Furthermore the paper drew attention to the problem regions that ESPON has shown to exist within North Western Europe. These not only include remote rural regions such as those discussed in Belfast, but also **old industrial areas**, such as parts of Walloon.

3.11 Professor Jim Walsh gave an overview of **current research on place competitiveness**. He argued that the competitiveness of firms is mainly influenced by productivity. In turn this depends on technological change, sectoral specialization, the skills of the labour force, and R&D and innovation. Place competitiveness is seen to be influenced by additional **place-specific factors**:

- Localised assets: physical infrastructure, financial capital, education, R&D capacity;
- Networks: entrepreneurial support networks, knowledge transfer (formal and informal);
- Culture: collaborative tradition, openness to outsiders, not risk averse, innovative;
- Quality of life: cultural vitality, provision of amenities, strong civic society, quality of natural and built environment.

3.12 Walsh drew attention to the explanation of regional competitiveness in a recent paper by Kitson, Martin and Tyler (2004) that is reproduced here as Figure 8, and the related work by Gardiner, Martin and Tyler (2004), which is here as Figure 9. He commented that these recent explanations of competitiveness put a strong emphasis on “soft” factors, such as cultural capital and social-institutional capital.

Figure 8: Regional competitive advantage

Source: Kitson, Martin and Tyler, 2004.

Bases of regional competitive advantage

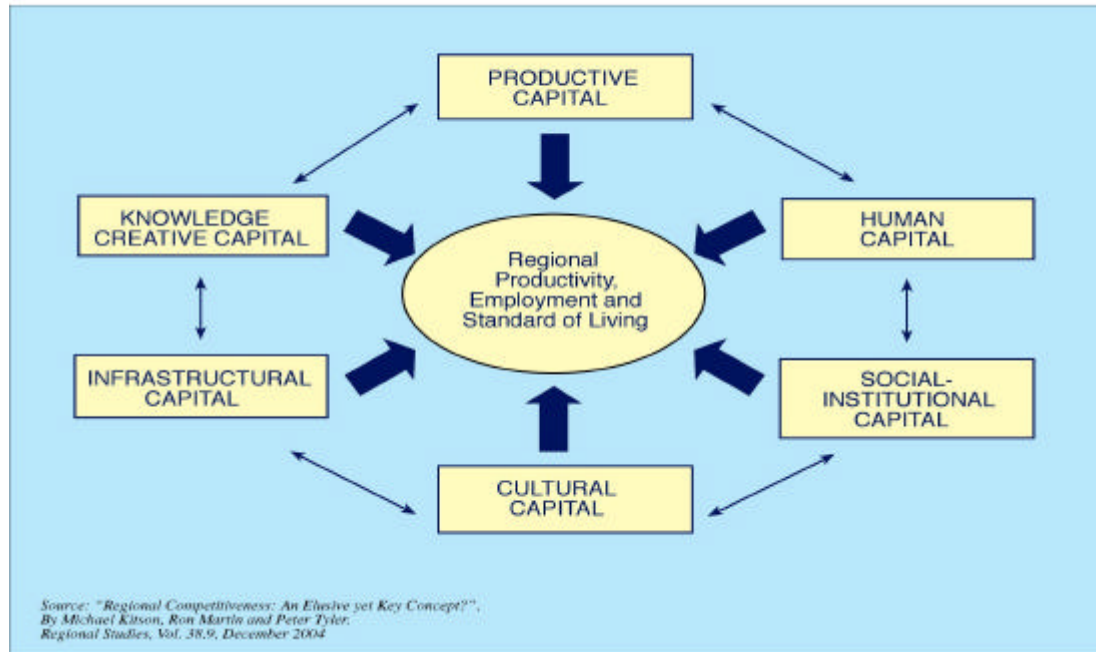
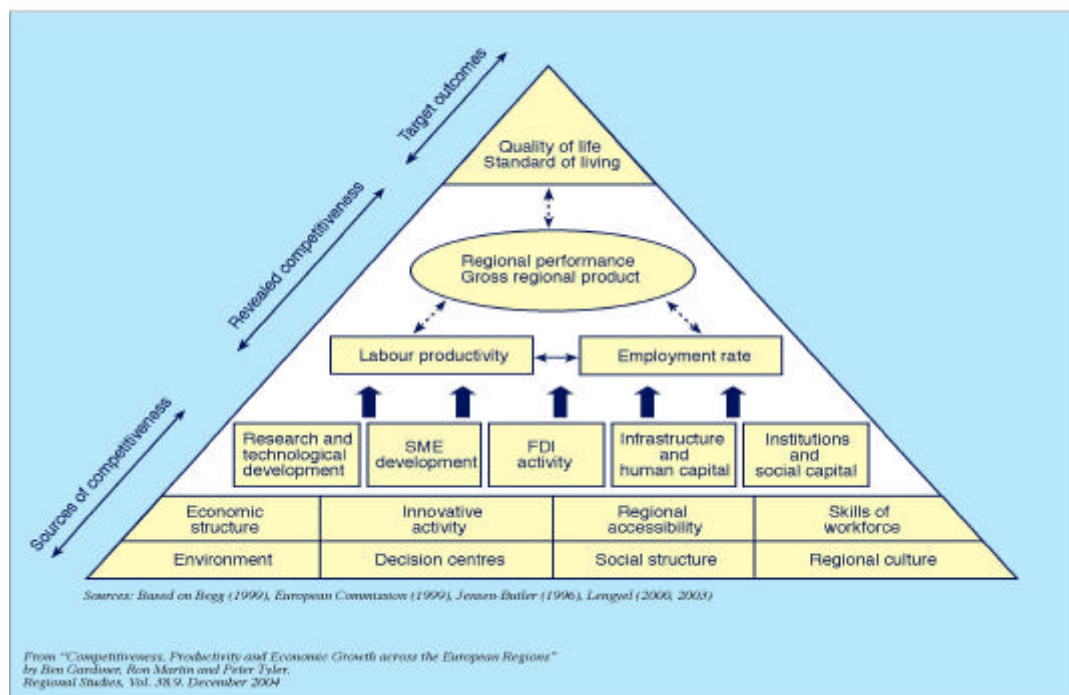


Figure 9: Regional competitiveness

Source: Gardiner, Martin and Tyler, 2004

A 'Pyramidal model' of regional competitiveness



- 3.13 The Position Paper drew attention to ESPON findings about the links between accessibility and competitiveness. As he had in Belfast, Professor Roger Vickerman summarised his findings from the two transport related ESPON projects (1.2.1 and 2.1.1). He argued that the **TENs projects tend to reinforce the metropolitan regions**. While some peripheral regions have experienced large relative gains as a result of TENs, it is the core regions of Europe that enjoy the largest absolute gains from those projects. However, Vickerman again stressed the significance of **congestion** as a dis-economy within urban-metropolitan regions in the Pentagon.
- 3.14 Detlef Golletz, from the South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA), showed how some of the problems of congestion are being tackled through an INTERREG project called High Speed Train 4 Integration (HST4i). London and the South East of England are the gateway to Europe for much of the UK and even Ireland, yet the region is also the “single, largest super-connected bottleneck in North Western Europe.” Golletz quoted from the Third Cohesion Report, which said “The TEN-T policy has improved accessibility perceptibly since 1991 and even greater effects are expected over the coming years, especially in the accession countries. This investment, however, needs to be accompanied by substantial expenditure to **improve the secondary network and its connections with the TEN-T.**” To this end, he described a number of major developments that the project is helping to deliver, and which will extend network linkages and be integrated with other forms of development.
- 3.15 In reviewing ESPON findings for North Western Europe with respect to territorial **cohesion**, the Position Paper commented that in pan-European terms “North West Europe looks relatively cohesive – the main gaps are between Pentagon and the periphery, especially after the Union grew to 25 members in 2004. However... within North West Europe there are important differences between metropolitan regions and rural fringes, and significant problems confronting old industrial regions undergoing restructuring.” The paper also noted that relatively little of the spending in Structural Funds has gone to the cities and metropolitan regions of North Western Europe. However, ESPON project 2.1.3 has shown that the rural areas of North Western Europe are huge beneficiaries from the Common Agricultural Policy.
- 3.16 Kevin Scobell, the Chief Executive of the **SmartLife project**, described how the project was contributing to cohesion by developing and constructing modular buildings, so that, for example, affordable housing could be quickly provided in metropolitan growth areas. The project was also contributing training and creating manufacturing jobs, and so increasing social cohesion.
- 3.17 Sustainable construction was a theme of the SmartLife project, but the idea of **sustainable development** figured prominently in several of the other presentations. The Position Paper probed the relations between sustainable development and competitiveness, especially in relation to urban form, regional development

patterns and housing markets. The paper pondered whether the kind of low density urban sprawl found in California was a factor in providing regional capacity rapidly to absorb more urban development without creating the kind of housing shortages that characterise more rationed European housing land supply systems. The paper also noted that “the rapid growth achieved by Ireland in the 1990s was also accompanied by substantial peri-urban growth that looks suspiciously like ‘sprawl’, accompanied by heavy commuter flows and a growing congestion problem”.

- 3.18 Cliff Hague summarized the findings from the ESPON project on **management of the natural heritage** (1.3.2). Not surprisingly, this had found that urban and metropolitan North West Europe was the most built-up area of ESPON space, and the area with the least semi-natural areas. However, the researchers had also stressed that even in these regions there were substantial amounts of land in non-urban uses, including agriculture. While urbanisation and agricultural intensification posed major threats to natural heritage, there are important national differences in development patterns, most notably either side of the border between Belgium and the Netherlands. The presentation concluded by stressing the importance of effective planning and management of the natural heritage in metropolitan regions.
- 3.19 This theme was then demonstrated by another transnational INTERREG project. Clive Fox spoke about the SAUL Project, the acronym for **Sustainable and Accessible Urban Landscapes**. Clive is the Head of Policy and Programmes (London) for Groundwork UK, the Lead Partner of the project. The project focuses on parks and open spaces, but sees these as integral to regional identity, competitiveness, social inclusion and sustainable development. Like many of the other INTERREG projects presented at *ESPON Going Regional*, SAUL puts a strong emphasis on partnerships and community involvement. SAUL includes a range of measures amongst the different partners, including actively engaging youths from poor areas of Amsterdam and London in redesigning local parks, and using the wooded landscapes to build a new and attractive image for the run-down industrial centres of Saarland.
- 3.20 The Position Paper also drew attention to the ESPON project on **natural and technological hazards** (1.3.1). This highlights the hazard “hot spots” running from the north eastern coastal areas of France through Belgium and into the Netherlands, and a similar stretch down the east coast of England. The statistical analysis identified a cluster of NUTS3 regions that were coastal areas threatened by storm surges/winter storms and floods. These were mainly in North West Europe.
- 3.21 Rachel Hill and Oliver Grant showed an example of a project that is tackling one hazard – flooding. The approach in the **FloodScape INTERREG project** is to accept that floods are a natural phenomenon which cannot be prevented. The aim then is to design new floodplain landscapes so that floods can be accommodated without damaging properties and people’s lives. Spatial planning is important – it

is better to locate new development in areas that are not vulnerable to flooding. Innovative flood risk management also involves extensive public consultation. Hill and Grant described projects that had been undertaken on the Thames and on the Scheldt.

- 3.22 Last, but not least, Pieter Bloemen, ECP for the Netherlands, was invited to put some reflections forward on the theme of “Towards a **European Research and Practice Agenda** – a Member State’s View”. He recognized that ESPON has achieved a lot within limited resources. It has helped everybody gain a better understanding of what is happening and provided a basis for improvement in policy-making. He recommended that in the future there should be **fewer but larger, more in-depth projects**. He also called for better resourcing of the summarising of projects and their findings, more flexibility in financial aspects and within the projects themselves.

4. Scientific results and policy responses

- 4.1 While this report has had to be selective in describing four intensive days of presentations and discussions, it should be clear that *ESPON Going Regional* generated a substantial exchange of leading edge research and practice. The task now is to ask critical questions about the relation of the research to the practice and the practice to the research. Of course, such questions presume a set of values and assumptions about what the relationships should be. Not everyone will agree on those values and assumptions. Therefore, what follows, even more than the rest of this synthesis report, is personal opinion from the author.
- 4.2 Research should be rooted in theory, robust in respect of evidence and informed by practice. It should be critical in the sense that it should challenge practice (and other researchers) with new ideas, uncomfortable facts, and unforgiving logic. Research should be daring but also self critical and self aware, and never self absorbed or self satisfied. Researchers should be able to explain their findings and the limits of those findings to practitioners in ways that practitioners (and indeed civil society) can understand. Researchers also need to listen to practitioners, ask them questions and learn from them.
- 4.3 Practice should also be self-aware and self critical, and willing to experiment while ensuring that risks are managed, lessons are learned and explicitly reflected upon. Practice should be hungry for research and evidence, inquisitive about new idea, sceptical about experts, but active partners of them.
- 4.4 *ESPON Going Regional* showed that research/practice dialogues are possible and desirable amongst the spatial planning community, but so far they are underdeveloped. The ESDP and the INTERREG programme have triggered real innovations amongst some practitioners and their institutions; though the picture is inevitably uneven, the diversity of responses and interpretations is something that itself should be a focus for research. If ESDP and INTERREG have been catalysts, the real drivers of innovation have been concerns for sustainable development, social inclusion, regional identity and the new challenges of governance and competitiveness.
- 4.5 ESPON has been very successful in compiling maps and indicators, and there has been imaginative cartography. Early ESPON projects have revealed some of the complexity that exists in spatial development:
- within urban-metropolitan regions in the Pentagon, much of the land is in agricultural use;
 - some rural areas on the periphery have been able to reverse their decline, others have not;
 - improvements in road or rail accessibility on the periphery mainly benefits the accessibility of the core;
 - the Common Agricultural Policy works against cohesion objectives;

- 4.6 So far ESPON has been less original in developing critical explorations of the concepts that came from the ESDP. There is now a huge amount of information about territorial trends and impacts at different scale, but there has been insufficient time to absorb it all and to really explore the consistencies and contradictions between different scales and between different regions.
- 4.7 *ESPON Going Regional* has started a process of enquiry. Perhaps the main finding that has emerged is a questioning of the meaning, application and applicability of polycentric development as a spatial development strategy – both between scales and across territories with different physical forms and histories. Another important theme to emerge from discussions was the increasing spatial extent of labour and housing markets. ESPON has tended to subsume this reality within the mechanical categorisations of project 1.1.1 ('MEGAs' etc.) and the rhetoric of new urban-rural relations. However, discourses with practitioners recast the same processes in very different ways – concerns about sustainability, affordable housing, small town identity, rural decline and revival, scattered development and intrusions on the landscape.
- 4.8 *ESPON Going Regional* showed that researcher and practitioners who took part are now well attuned to European networking and are increasingly able to think outside their own national contexts, to learn from others and to innovate. There has been very significant progress over the last decade. There is still some way to go to build a common platform for a two-way interchange of ideas and findings between research and practice, but a real start has been made.

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ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME FOR THE BELFAST SEMINAR

Tuesday 22 February 2005

11.00 Registration / Coffee

Chair- John Martin (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Ireland and Ireland's representative on the ESPON Monitoring Committee)

11.30 Welcome -Dr. Ken Sterrett, (Head of Queens University Belfast School of Environmental Planning)

11.40 What is ESPON? – Professor Cliff Hague (Heriot-Watt University, UK ESPON Contact Point)

12.00 The SPAN INTERREG project – Dr.Michael Murray (Queens University Belfast)

12.15 Cohesion and Spatial Development of Rural and Peripheral Areas – findings and issues – Discussion led by Professor Jim Walsh (National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, Maynooth) based on his Position Paper for the conference

13.00 Lunch

Chair – Dr.Brendan Murtagh (Queens University Belfast)

14.00 Can polycentric development enhance competitiveness and cohesion? Professor Simin Davoudi (Leeds Metropolitan University)

15.00 Infrastructure, accessibility and peripherality – Prof. Roger Vickerman (University of Kent)

16.00 Tea

16.30 Rural development and the natural environment - Dr.Mark Scott (University College Dublin).

17.30 International perspectives on peripherality: Pieter Bloemen (Netherlands ECP); Elizabeth Vajdovich –Visy (Hungary ECP); and Sarah Luyten (Belgium ECP).

Wednesday 23 February 2005

Chair – Mike Thompson, Department for Regional Development, Northern Ireland.

09.00 The Northern Ireland regional development strategy -Jim Hetherington (Regional Planning & Transportation Division, Department for Regional Development)

09.30 Ireland's National Spatial Strategy – Niall Cussen (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government)

10.00 Scotland's National Planning Framework – Dr.Graeme Purves (Scottish Executive)

11.00 Wales Spatial Plan – Dr.Grant Duncan (Strategic Policy Unit, Welsh Assembly)

11.30 The Northern Way – John Heywood (Head of Regional Strategy, Government Office for the North East)

12.00 Towards new collaborations – practice & research and transnational networking
Contributions from Pierre Cornut (Belgian ECP), Lubor Fridrich (Czech ECP), Jim Walsh (Ireland ECP) and Cliff Hague (UK ECP).

12.45 Conference closes

ANNEX 2: POSITION PAPER FOR THE BELFAST SEMINAR

**SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPE'S
NORTH WESTERN PERIPHERY:
implications of ESPON results**

Position Paper prepared by Professor Jim Walsh for

ESPON SEMINAR

Queen's University, Belfast

February 22-23, 2005

Spatial Development of Europe's north-western periphery: implications of ESPON results

Professor Jim Walsh, Department of Geography and NIRSA, NUI Maynooth, Ireland

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an overview of the main findings from the ESPON research programme as a background for more detailed presentations and analyses at the first international seminar organised by a network of ESPON Contact Points. The purpose of the seminar is to disseminate ESPON research outputs and to stimulate further discussion of issues related to European spatial planning especially in north-western peripheral areas beyond the Pentagon. Following a brief outline of the structure of the ESPON research programme the paper focuses mainly on the principal research conclusions and the associated policy implications that have been identified in a selection of research projects. This will be followed by some more general observations on the ESPON programme.

Throughout the 1990s considerable progress was achieved in advancing the role of spatial planning in Europe. The first phase of the voluntary collective international effort to develop basic principles and objectives for a territorial approach to economic and social development in the EU culminated with the adoption of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in Potsdam in 1999. The publication of the ESDP was a major milestone in the history of European spatial planning, notwithstanding the many internal contradictions in relation to policy objectives which it contained. This resulted in goals such as 'balanced competitiveness' which is an outcome to accommodate compromises in the political sphere, and concepts such as 'polycentric urban networks' which in practice may be applied at different geographical scales but with contradictory implications for territorial planning at different scales (Faludi, 2002).

The momentum unleashed following the publication of the ESPD was maintained by the Study Programme for European Spatial Planning 2000-2001 (SPESP) which laid the basis for a European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON). Funding for the ESPON Programme for the period 2002 – 2006 is provided jointly by the INTERREG 111 Community Initiative and the member state governments. The broad aim of the ESPON research programme is to increase knowledge about territorial structures, trends and policy impacts in the enlarged European Union.

The need for this programme has been reinforced by more recent developments, most notably the introduction of Territorial Cohesion as a significant complement to the previously adopted EU goals of economic and social cohesion, and secondly the inclusion of Territorial Cohesion as a goal (article 3) in the Constitution for Europe. Strategic territorial planning is widely regarded as an essential component of public policy frameworks required to support the goal of territorial cohesion. A further impetus to advancing the need for detailed research on the processes underlying the territorial dimension of development, and for identifying new strategies to accommodate more

complex sets of objectives, has come from three different sources: enlargement, the Lisbon Declaration (2000) re the challenges and opportunities presented by the transition to knowledge based economies, and the Gothenburg Declaration (2001) on environmentally sustainable development. Each of these initiatives, coupled with efforts to reposition the EU in the global economic framework, will bring new challenges which are likely to have differential impacts across the regions of Europe. In recognition of this possibility new visions for spatial development are already being formulated for new macro level transnational regions (e.g., *A Vision for Northwest Europe*) as well as within several countries, e.g., Ireland, Scotland, Wales.

THE ESPON RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The ESPON research programme consists of several strands including:

- Eleven **thematic projects** on a broad range of topics such as polycentrism, urban-rural relations, enlargement, demographic trends and migration, transport services and networks, telecommunications services and networks, natural hazards and climate change, natural heritage, cultural heritage, the information society, role of small and medium size towns,
- Twelve **Policy Impact projects** on policies such as the CAP and rural development, EU transport and TENs policies, Research and Development, Energy Services and Networks, Structural Funds, EU Fisheries policy, Governance systems, and application of ESDP concepts and principles,
- Five **Coordinating and Cross thematic projects** covering Integrated tools for European spatial development, Spatial scenarios, Territorial dimension of Lisbon and Gothenburg processes, Territorial impacts of EU economic policies, Europe in the World.

This is an extraordinarily ambitious programme undertaken across 29 countries with a strong focus on regional level (NUTS 2 and NUTS 3) analyses and a very restricted timeframe requiring all projects to be completed by the end of 2006. Ten projects were completed by the end of August 2004. The interim and final reports for each of the projects can be accessed on the ESPON website, www.espon.lu. Collectively the reports provide a very considerable amount of new insights into the multi-faceted nature of development trends when viewed from a territorial perspective that will be of use to policy makers, programme administrators and academic researchers at all levels throughout Europe. The programme has also demonstrated the very large gaps that exist in the current state of knowledge concerning spatial development indicators, as well as the diversity of inherited governance frameworks, natural and cultural heritage, settlement patterns and infrastructural provision throughout Europe which together can contribute to tensions concerning spatial development objectives in different regions and at different geographical scales.

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS FROM THEMATIC RESEARCH PROJECTS

This section draws together the main conclusions from the first round of projects with a special focus on the implications for peripheral regions in North-West Europe outside the Pentagon. The outcomes from the thematic projects are considered first.

Projects 1.1.1 and 1.1.2: The potential for polycentric urban development and new urban – rural relationships.

One of the key spatial development guidelines contained in the *European Spatial Development Perspective* was the ‘development of a polycentric and balanced urban system and strengthening of the partnership between urban and rural areas’ (ESDP, 1999 p. 19) as an alternative to the outdated dualism between city and countryside. These ideas were explored further within the SPESP and became the first two thematic research projects in the ESPON programme.

Project 1.1.1. commences with an attempt to operationalise the concept of polycentricity relying on indicators to measure three dimensions: the *size distribution* of cities/towns in each national urban system, *relative location* measured by distances between centres, and *connectivity* measured by levels of accessibility. Using measurements for the chosen indicators countries are classified according to the level of polycentricity of their urban systems. This analysis has produced some surprising or even counter-intuitive results such as the claim that Ireland has one of the most polycentric systems while the UK system is less polycentric than might have been expected.

Using data compiled by national statistical agencies on the size of centres and estimates of the size of hinterland labour markets the project identifies almost 1600 Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) which are treated as the basic building blocks of the European urban system. Those FUAs that achieve the highest scores on indicators representing key urban functions are designated as MEGAs, Metropolitan European Growth Areas, of which there are 76. These are further analysed in relation to their levels of critical mass, competitiveness, connectivity and knowledge basis which results in a four level categorisation.

Dublin and Manchester are identified as Category 2 MEGAs, e.g. cities that are relatively large, competitive and often possessing strong human capital. They are differentiated from Category 1 MEGAs (which are absent from the UK or Ireland; London, along with Paris, is recognised as belonging to a separate category of Global Nodes) mainly in relation to size, competitiveness and accessibility. Comparator Category 2 MEGAs include Stockholm, Gothenburg, Helsinki and Oslo. Each is regarded as having a very important role in future efforts to build polycentric networks.

There are no examples of Category 3 MEGAs in Ireland or Wales. However, Glasgow and Edinburgh, along with Birmingham, are recognised as belonging to this category which includes centres that are described as smaller and more peripheral, having lower competitiveness, and weaker human capital endowment. The paucity of such centres in the UK and Ireland contrasts with the south of France, and northern Italy. There is an extensive distribution of Category 4 MEGAs especially in the Baltic and east European countries that have recently acceded to the EU. However, only Cork is identified in Ireland and Southampton in the UK.

Going beyond the MEGAs the project identifies several FUAs that are regarded as having either a national or transnational level of importance. However, the most striking feature of

their distribution (Map 5.1 Final Report Project 1.1.1) is the relative paucity of such centres in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and northern England and the extensive zones beyond the functional hinterlands of the MEGAs. Finally, it is worth noting that Northern Ireland is very poorly represented in the analysis. It is very surprising that Belfast is not identified as even a Category 4 MEGA.

The analysis is taken further by attempts to model the geographical extent of future FUA hinterlands using estimates of the populations that can reach the FUA centres within 45 minutes by car. New areas called Potential Urban Strategic Horizons (PUSHs) are identified, along with Potential Polycentric Integration Areas (PIAs). A Polycentric Integration Area includes those FUAs which share at least one-third of their potential commuter catchment area with another larger FUA. The report recommends that spatial planning strategies should support the development of PIAs especially in regions outside the Pentagon. The analysis shows that of the top 21 PIAs five are located in the UK: London, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield and Leicester. When the PIAs are compared with the PUSH areas the population of the Greater Manchester PIA exceeds that of the Global node centred on London. These findings merit further discussion within the UK. For Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England the analysis presents further challenges. There is a strong suggestion that there could be additional benefits if Glasgow and Edinburgh cooperated on establishing a PIA. In the case of Northern Ireland some potential gains for Belfast are noted by establishing closer links with Derry. It might be more appropriate to consider the potential that might emerge from a Dublin–Belfast PIA which may become more of a reality over the next twenty years. Elsewhere in Ireland the potential for a strong PIA based on linkages between Cork, Limerick and Galway should be considered.

The findings from the project on polycentrism point towards the possibility of some policy contradictions between different geographical scales. Specifically the goal of achieving balanced competitiveness across the EU territory by promoting strong polycentric zones (e.g. PIAs) beyond the Pentagon may in fact lead to locally stronger tendencies towards monocentricity and less territorial cohesion within some member states. This is clearly a possibility in Ireland and elsewhere unless long-term spatial strategies are implemented.

The project on **urban rural relations (Project 1.1.2)** was the first systematic attempt to measure urban-rural relationships on a pan European scale. Despite enormous constraints imposed by data gaps in relation to flows and exchanges between urban and rural areas the project team firmly reject the traditional dichotomy between urban and rural areas. Numerous types of interactions are identified and proxy variables are used to establish a two-pronged approach leading to a typology of areas based on the dominant types of rural-urban relations. Attention is focussed on both the structural properties (landuse patterns, settlement structure and population distribution) and functional relations (uses of the physical environment such as various forms of production and consumption) of territorial units.

A harmonised typology of six rural area types was produced based on two dimensions: the degree of urban influence and the degree of human intervention. Beyond the larger cities most of the rural areas of Ireland, Wales and Northern England are classified as areas with

low urban influence and medium human intervention. By contrast, extensive areas of Scotland, especially the highlands and islands, are classified as areas of low urban influence and also low human intervention. The typology provides a useful summary of the variety of conditions across rural Europe. However, its usefulness as a policy tool is limited by the range of indicators available and the fact that most of the data are available only at NUTS2 or NUTS 3 levels.

The macro level pan European analysis was complemented by several case studies, including one from Ireland and one also from Ryedale in Yorkshire. These provide evidence of many different types of linkages between urban and rural areas ranging from traditional roles where rural areas provide food and labour for the urban centres, to new relationships organised around new consumption patterns in which certain aspects of rural living are given higher priority than previously. The report argues that the urban and rural must increasingly be seen as mindsets and not as something that can be fully captured by indicators defined outside of the localities (p. 208). In the context of North West Europe there have been extensive changes with far reaching implications in Ireland over a relatively short period. Many of the rural issues identified in parts of the UK in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to be of little relevance to the Republic of Ireland then. However, over the past decade the situation has changed in many rural areas as a result of population deconcentration, increased levels of personal mobility, and new consumption patterns, that have given rise to increased demand for tourism and leisure related facilities in some rural areas. These areas and others within commuting distance of the main towns and cities have experienced considerable pressures in relation to single dwellings in the countryside.

The study recommends stronger roles for villages and small towns in relation to the provision of services, more emphasis on diversifying rural economies, an overall focus on sustainability including the liveability of rural areas, and institutional arrangements to support horizontal and vertical coordination and integration of policies. The diversity of rural areas is emphasised throughout the report. All of the issues identified are of particular relevance in the more sparsely settled parts of North West Europe and they point towards a need for more comprehensive rural development programmes that take account of local conditions and which are implemented within frameworks for strategic spatial planning at the regional level.

Project 1.1.4: The Spatial Effects of Demographic trends and Migration

The long term consequences of sustained rural-urban migration and the outcomes from the second demographic transition are evident from analyses of recent trends in population change. **ESPON Project 1.1.4** has shown that there are extensive rural areas where populations are decreasing especially in parts of Scandinavia, the southern regions of Eastern Europe, northern regions in Spain and inland parts of Portugal. Most of rural Scotland appears to be in decline due to a combination of natural decrease and net out-migration. In Wales there is a distinct east/west divide with population continuing to decline in the western parts which are more rural and less accessible.

On the island of Ireland there is a significant contrast between the very modest growth recorded in Northern Ireland compared with exceptionally high rates of just over one

percent per annum in the Republic of Ireland. There the growth is fuelled by a reversal of long term migration patterns combined with levels of fertility that are relatively high when compared to most other parts of Europe. There has been very significant growth in some rural areas associated with increased levels of long distance commuting (which is in part due to lower house prices in small towns and rural areas), a more vibrant rural economy and a transition to strongly service oriented local economies in high amenity rural areas. There are, however, extensive areas covering approximately half of the rural territory where the populations are either in decline or only marginally increasing.

The demographic experiences of different parts of Ireland and Scotland demonstrate that the traditional trend of rural decline can be reversed in some areas. However, there are many issues related to settlement patterns and economic development that need to be addressed within the context of comprehensive integrated frameworks for spatial development at the local level. Otherwise, there are risks of development trends that are environmentally unsustainable and situations where contestation rather than harmony becomes the norm in relations between different sections of the rural population.

Projects 1.2.1 and 1.2.2: Transport and Telecommunications Networks and Services

Physical infrastructure networks are essential to facilitate communication and exchanges between cities and territories of resources, goods, people and information. Access to networks is becoming an increasingly important factor in territorial development which is recognised in the ESDP where ‘parity of access to information and knowledge’ is identified as a key objective. **Project 1.2.1** on transport networks has used several models to guide extensive analyses of inter-regional accessibility according to different modes of transport.

Significant contrasts in accessibility levels between core and peripheral regions are evident and furthermore the gaps are continuing to widen. Ireland and the more remote parts Scotland are shown to be particularly disadvantaged according to almost every accessibility index with the situation somewhat less severe in Wales and Northern England. In relation to the Functional Urban Areas the research found there are only a few FUAs beyond the Pentagon with accessibility indices greater than the ESPON average. These include Manchester and Liverpool while Dublin like many other peripheral capital cities has an index between 80-100% of the ESPON average.

These contrasts in accessibility via transport networks pose a major challenge for the weaker and more peripheral regions. Higher transport costs and longer journey times from these regions to the central market areas impact on the economic competitiveness of businesses. Further investments in infrastructure are required but these need to be accompanied by investments in the other factors that also contribute to regional competitiveness. These include public sector investment in human and knowledge capitals as well as private sector investments in new areas of production with a shift towards higher value-added goods and services. The experience of Ireland since the early 1990s demonstrates that very significant economic convergence can be achieved despite continuing infrastructural deficits (Walsh, 2000).

This project notes the importance of the unequal legacy of transport infrastructures, and also the discordance between the short and medium term policies responding to political objectives on the one hand and the longer term timeframes required for major infrastructural development. This reminder is very necessary in relation to devising realistic scenarios that take account of the ESDP objectives.

A number of recommendations in the report provide practical proposals that are appropriate to high level pan European spatial planning. As such the projects that are identified merit specific EU level co-financing. The transport proposals will contribute to the goal of strengthening the possibilities for strong polycentric networks beyond the Pentagon while at the same time facilitating more interaction with that core mega region. However, attention will also be required to enhancing the accessibility of rural areas, especially the more remote areas, in order to strengthen rural-urban linkages and to avoid further marginalisation of large tracts of the European rural landscape and its residents. There is also a need for greater coordination of the proposals re transport corridors with the recommendations from the report on management of the natural heritage (Project 1.3.2).

The policy recommendations are generally supportive of the broad ESDP objectives. Specific proposals to improve connectivity especially between the larger centres will help to strengthen the concept of polycentric urban networks and increase the level of critical mass in some networked areas and thereby contribute to the objective of a more competitive European economy, while at the same time facilitating a transition to more geographically balanced development. The proposals re greater use of sea routes should help to reduce congestion on the land corridors. The recommendations re lower speeds on the road network, and a shift towards high speed freight trains are in accordance with the ESDP objectives concerning efficient and sustainable use of infrastructure. More attention to regional and local transport infrastructure will be required to ensure that improvements to international infrastructures will be supportive of the ESDP goal in relation to parity of access.

Project 1.2.2: The territorial impacts of telecommunications infrastructure and services

Within the context of EU enlargement, liberalised telecommunications markets, rapid technological change and the anticipated roll-out of next-generation digital mobile and broadband networks, there is a need to review the evidence concerning the extent to which the EU's diverse territories are sharing in the benefits of ICT uptake and usage. From a territorial perspective, such developments offer enormous opportunities for reducing the 'friction of distance' and/or the problems of remoteness from which many peripheral regions and rural areas have suffered. However, in this period of rapid change, it is not clear whether the 'digital divide' between favoured and less-favoured regions, or between cities and rural areas, is widening or narrowing. The answers to these questions have considerable importance from a territorial development perspective.

The focus of the research project was on the ICT-infrastructure, namely fixed telephony networks, mobile telephony, the Internet, broadband and the underlying backbone network

technologies to which all other networks are ultimately connected. The project findings were analysed at three scales: macro, meso and micro.

The study demonstrates that each technology exhibits a different territorial pattern. Furthermore, national specificities remain crucial in understanding the territoriality of telecoms. In the field of telecommunications the EU core-periphery distinction does not generally hold true. At the macro-level, a “North-South divide” could be perceived in EU15 + 2, with the strength of the Nordic countries representing a key component of this. In addition, there is a “West-East divide” in the EU15 + 2 + N12, though some individual N12 countries outpace individual EU15 countries. Of all technologies, mobile telephony shows the most even territorial spread and to some extent exhibits a “reverse core-periphery” pattern. Most meso-level analysis had to be confined to EU15 since data were extremely limited for the accession countries. The continuing importance of national specificities is reflected in the narrow “category spread” between regions within countries. Factors explaining such regional differences beyond the national effect are complex and vary between technologies, e.g. high PC and internet take up is associated with development status, with non-Objective 1 regions and those with higher GDP. At the micro-level there is a metro-urban-rural divide both, in the supply of as well as in the demand/uptake for telecommunications.

A typology of regions based on the take up of telecommunications technologies by businesses and households shows the UK regions generally more advanced than those in Ireland. Most of Northern England is classified as ‘advanced’ while Scotland and Wales are ‘moderately advanced’. The level of development in Ireland is described as ‘moderate’. In most regions there are pronounced differences between urban and rural areas in relation to the take up of new technologies. This is especially the case in Ireland, though there have been some recent initiatives to assist provision of infrastructure in small towns and rural areas.

Based on the analysis a series of policy options is set out. According to the project team the “aspatiality” of regulatory policy could be amended, i.e. European and national telecommunications regulations should be adjusted in a way so that they could be used as a tool for regional development. Other suggestions refer to the aggregation of public (and private) sector telecommunications procurement, as well as to the subsidy or construction of telecommunications networks. In addition, greater symmetry of information should be established between public authorities and providers of telecommunications. Common indicators should be developed and their collection needs to be improved and standardised. Finally, a regional observatory is recommended for each Member State.

In summary the policy proposals provide a basis for a coherent approach to achieving the goals of the ESDP but they need to be implemented in full to achieve the results wished for. Further developments in line with ESDP objectives will have to be preceded by significant changes in the roles of governments, private sector companies and regulatory frameworks.

Project 1.3.2: Territorial Trends in the Management of the Natural Heritage

This project highlights the negative impacts of the CAP on the natural environment. While these and other impacts are reasonably well documented the project found that the policy responses are rather piecemeal and not sufficiently coordinated. The project recommends closer attention in strategic spatial planning to environmental impacts of development. In particular more care is needed in the selection of transport corridors for development and more encouragement should be given to developments at high accessibility nodes in order to reduce impacts on the wider rural territories. The report also recommends that greater appreciation be shown to the value of natural assets as a positive support factor for stimulating regional development. Like many other projects it is recommended that enhanced management of the natural heritage will require better horizontal and vertical coordination in the preparation and implementation of spatial development strategies.

The natural heritage is a major asset in Ireland and the UK. The introduction of agri-environment programmes and the decoupling of production subsidies may help to reduce the impacts associated with agriculture. More generally, there is still a need to promote greater awareness and adoption of sustainable development principles, and to put in place structures to resolve conflicts between environmental, economic and social dimensions of development that take account of local circumstances and also the wider public interest to reflect the 'public good' aspect of the natural heritage.

TERRITORIAL IMPACTS OF EU SECTORAL POLICIES

Almost every policy area has potentially some territorial impacts either directly or indirectly. Thus far research projects have been completed on three major EU policy areas: the CAP and Rural Development; Transport; and Research and Development. Each of the three projects encountered significant problems in relation to data availability at appropriate geographical scales and there were also issues around developing models to examine impacts separately from the geographical incidence of spending under different policies. Each project attempted to measure both incidences and impacts and they also assessed the extent to which the policy outcomes were in conformity with the ESPON objectives.

Project 2.1.3: The territorial impact of CAP and rural development policy

The CAP has traditionally been the policy with the largest EU budget and potentially the largest territorial impacts. The main conclusion from Project 2.1.3 is that in aggregate terms the CAP does not promote the ESDP objectives of balanced development or territorial cohesion. The geographical distribution of Pillar 1 CAP expenditure (market price supports and direct income payments) is shown to be systematically and significantly higher in more accessible and prosperous regions, and lower in more peripheral and less developed regions at all scales. Furthermore, the analyses demonstrate that the recent transition to single direct payments and the related decoupling of production subsidies is unlikely to change the inherited uneven spatial patterns of expenditure under this policy.

The shift towards more emphasis on rural development under Pillar 2 of the reformed CAP, is found to provide an opportunity for harmonizing the outcomes from this policy area with those of ESPON. The territorial impacts of Pillar 2 (including the Less Favoured Areas

Programme, agri-environmental schemes, and other rural development measures) are more dispersed and are to some extent more consistent with the territorial cohesion objectives of the EU. Case studies undertaken in relation to some specific areas of rural development highlight the differences in implementation between regions and also the methodological challenges of isolating CAP and Rural Development policy effects from others. The report also highlights the very significant negative environmental impacts associated with the productivist model that has underpinned the modernization of European agriculture, and is cautious about the capacity of current agri-environment programmes to overcome or ameliorate the damage that has already occurred.

The report strongly supports the 'European model of agriculture' as espoused by European leaders and recommends a rebalancing of the CAP & RDP budgets with more resources directed towards Pillar 2 measures, though there needs to be a shift from the current agri-dominated perspective informing rural development policy measures to one that is more inclusive. The experience gained from the LEADER programme should be built upon with more resources allocated towards integrated rural development programmes that facilitate greater levels of local participation and which are supported by institutional structures that can provide both horizontal and vertical coordination of several distinct policy areas. These proposals present major challenges to the policy domain at the European level as well as more locally.

Future EU approaches to agriculture and rural development policy are of very great significance especially in Ireland, Scotland and Wales where the sector still has a major role in some rural areas. The evidence from the case studies shows that patterns of adaptation vary between different types of rural areas for many reasons. Economic diversification towards activities relying on local markets seems to be most successful in rural areas that are relatively more accessible. There may be fewer opportunities in intermediate and more remote areas, with the exception of places with strong tourism potential as in the west and southwest of Ireland. There are many challenges remaining in relation to the transition towards a multifunctional agriculture and rural development policy as promoted by the EU.

Project 2.1.1: The territorial impact of EU transport and TEN policies

The study of territorial impacts of EU transport and telecommunications policies is mainly conducted via a series of scenario analyses (Project 2.1.1). The main general result is that the overall effects of transport infrastructure investments and other transport policies on regional development are small compared with those of socio-economic and technical macro trends, such as globalization, increasing competition between cities and regions, and ageing of the population.

The second main result is that the magnitude of the effect seems to depend strongly on the already existing level of accessibility. For regions in the European core additional gains in accessibility through more motorways or high-speed rail lines may bring only little additional incentives for economic growth, while in the regions at the European periphery or in the accession countries, however, a gain in accessibility through a new motorway or rail line may bring significant progress in economic development. But also the opposite

may happen if the new connection opens a formerly isolated region to the competition of more efficient or cheaper suppliers in other regions.

The analysis of cohesion effects shows that the distinction between relative and absolute convergence or divergence is important and that the spatial level at which cohesion is measured matters. The same holds true also for the comparison of polycentricity of MEGAs at the European level and polycentricity of FUAs in individual countries. Transport policies which reinforce polycentricity at the European level, may increase the dominance of capital cities within their national urban systems and so contradict the goal of the ESDP to achieve a balanced polycentric urban system.

Regarding pricing policies increased private transportation costs clearly work against the general objectives of cohesion and polycentricity. Not only regions in the European periphery, but also regions in the periphery of their respective national markets suffer from increasing transportation costs, because their interaction with the markets is more dependent on transportation than that of more central regions.

Regarding ICT policies the study is able to demonstrate that within the two typologies of regions (objective 1 regions, advanced regions), different reactions to a specific ICT policy exist. Within non-lagging regions, some areas are able to take advantage from both indiscriminate and efficiency policies, while others react exclusively to efficiency policies; similarly, there are lagging regions that react dynamically to cohesion policies, while others seem unable to react.

Among the policy recommendations two are of particular relevance. The first is to continue with the TEN and TINA plans despite their anti-cohesion effects at the meso level, but to stimulate the poorer regions for development of their secondary networks. The second one is that the lagging regions, rural regions and peripheral regions should be compensated for negative effects of pricing policies. These findings are particularly relevant to the rural and less developed regions in North West Europe where there are significant deficits in infrastructure provision. The need for comprehensive national or regional level spatial development strategies is also evident in order to ensure that more balanced and sustainable patterns of development can be achieved in both the stronger metropolitan and weaker rural regions.

Project 2.1.2: The territorial impacts of EU research and development policies

The final report this ESPON project concludes that:

- research, innovation and high technology ‘hotspots’ tend to be concentrated in core areas of North West Europe and Scandinavia,
- there are extensive areas in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe where R&D and innovation levels are low, with the exception of some of the capital city regions.
- many new member and accession states perform strongly in terms of human capital, which is regarded as an important component of innovation systems.
- there is some tentative evidence of regional ‘catch-up’ in that growth rates in lower performing regions tend to be higher, (however the plateau effect has to be taken into account).

The research for this project confirms a positive relationship between GDP, levels of tertiary education and employment in high tech manufacturing and R&D expenditure. In the case of participation in the research Framework Programmes, a negative relationship was found between participation rates and levels of high tech manufacturing employment. This result may reflect the reality that high tech manufacturing in a given territory does not necessarily require a local presence of R&D capacity.

While these results shed some light on which types of region are more likely to engage in R&D, they tell us little about the mechanisms that affect R&D activity. This reflects the explanatory limitations of the quantitative data available (particularly at regional level) and highlights the importance of the qualitative aspects of this study. By combining the regional data that were available, however, it was possible to construct typologies of regions, according to their R&D and innovation “profile”. This gives a more complete picture of regional disparities (by combining indicators rather than viewing them in isolation) and provides a sound basis for further research into the policy implications.

While two different approaches were used, giving somewhat different results, there were enough common features to allow regions to be assigned to one of five types:

- Type 5 exceptionally strong system of R&D and innovation
- Type 4 strong system of R&D and innovation
- Type 3 mixed fortunes in undertaking R&D and innovation
- Type 2 average strengths in R&D and innovation
- Type 1 weak at undertaking R&D and innovation

With 13 regions each, Types 5 and 4 contain the least number of EU regions (just 8%). These are located in Germany, Finland, France, the Netherlands and the UK. The long ‘tail’ of poorly performing regions in the context of R&D and innovation activity is clearly evident in this analysis. Most regions are found in Type 1 (32%) closely followed by Type 3. Most member states have at least one region in each of these categories. The weak positions of Greek and Portuguese regions are clearly evident, as is the position of Austrian regions. In this case it is the position of Vienna that is ambiguous as it is performing well on some counts, but less well on others. Northern Ireland is classified as a Type 1 region with Scotland and Wales only marginally better. Unfortunately no data were collected for Ireland. While it would still probably be classified as a Type 2 region there have been significant initiatives over recent years to build a stronger research capacity with innovative programmes to establish a small number of world class research centres funded by a new agency Science Foundation Ireland.

Framework Programme participation is widely dispersed across the European territory, with project participants under the 4th and 5th Framework Programmes in all areas of the EU- 27 +2. The analysis shows a relatively strong ‘cross’ of regions focused on the north of

Italy extending north-south from the Benelux countries to Rome and east-west from Slovenia through to northeast Spain. There are also strong 'islands' of activity in the Iberian peninsular; northwest France and central Europe. Although Ireland, the UK, Sweden and Finland demonstrate general strengths, in the case of the UK and Sweden, pockets of weak participation can also be identified, especially in Scotland and parts of the north of England. In FP5 rates of participation in Eastern Europe were generally low, reflecting their status as third country participants in the Programmes at the time.

The analysis of regional participation in the Framework Programmes in relation to GDP suggests a significant correlation between participation rates and levels of GDP per capita. Regions in the lowest quartile based on the level of GDP per capita tend to have the lowest levels of participation in the Framework Programmes. Between FP4 and FP5, there is, nevertheless, some evidence that participation by organisations in Less Favoured Regions is increasing.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The ESPON programme is a highly ambitious attempt to describe, explain and provide policy proposals in relation to the territorial aspects of all dimension of development measured over 29 countries. Within a short time frame considerable advances have been made. Despite very significant data limitations, language barriers, and different approaches to spatial planning there have been significant achievements. Many new cartographic images of the enlarged EU plus four additional countries have been produced and several scenarios / simulations have been evaluated for different policy areas. Despite the many limitations the outputs from the ESPON programme have already been used to influence the future of Cohesion policy (see the Third Cohesion Report) and undoubtedly they will influence future national and regional spatial strategies. There is also a very strong consensus that the work needs to be continued under a second ESPON programme. Over the medium to longer term a more permanent European Observatory will be required to support European spatial planning and development programmes. Similar initiatives are required in member states/ regions where there has not been a tradition of systematically organized research on strategic spatial planning.

The outputs from the research projects challenge the traditional core-periphery model of Europe and especially the blue banana metaphor. The territorial structure of Europe is much more complex and furthermore it is very dynamic as evidenced by the research on for example demographic trends; adoption of new technologies; and the transition to more knowledge based economies. The processes underlying the changing dynamics at the European, national and regional levels need much more systematic investigation.

The internal conflicts between the ESDP / ESPON objectives, especially at different territorial scales are becoming more evident. This has policy implications at all levels and may necessitate a revision of the objectives and favoured policy options. Furthermore, the status of spatial planning objectives within the broader framework of public policy objectives needs to be clarified; for example, what is the status of the territorial cohesion objective *vis a vis* the goal of economic competitiveness?

Finally, there is a need for much more analysis of governance structures to support spatial planning and regional development. The limitations of current arrangements in many countries / regions are well known. There is a strong imperative to devise new models appropriate to local circumstances that can effectively overcome issues related to participation, advancing development agendas that are not primarily about increasing economic growth rates everywhere, facilitating genuine cooperation and integration and that are capable of on-going engagement with long term planning.

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ANNEX 3: PARTICIPANTS AT THE BELFAST SEMINAR

The list below does not include about 25-30 students from Queen's University who also attended.

Allan	John	Cllr	Midlothian Council	Kathleen.Bertram@midlothian.gov.uk
Andrews	Kelly	Ms	Green Party	s.mccann@qub.ac.uk
Bayssiere	Magali	Ms	ESPON	magali.bayssiere@espon.lu
Beirne	Sean	Mr	Roscommon County Council	cquinn@roscommoncoco.ie
Berkery	Tom	Cllr	North Tipperary Council	bmryan@northtippcoco.ie
Berry	Jim	Pf	Uni of Ulster	jn.berry@ulster.ac.uk
Birthistle	Niall	Mr	Department for Regional Development	jim.hetherington@drdni.gov.uk
Bloeman	Pieter	Mr	Ministry of Housing Env & Planning	pieter.bloemen@minvrom.nl
Bonnel	Jean-Pierre	Mr	AUDRR France	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Byrne	John	Mr	Mid East Regional Authority	mera@eircom.net
Callanan	Brian	Mr	Shannon Devt.	callananb@shanondeev.ie
Carroll	John	Cllr Rt	North Tipperary Council	pbrisan@northtippcoco.ie
Conaghan	Michael	Hon	Lord Mayor of Dublin	lordmayor@dublincity.ie
Considine	Peter	Cllr	Clare County Council	fburke@clarecoco.ie
Cornut	Pierre	Mr	Free Univ. of Brussels	p.cornut@ulb.ac.be
Counsell	David	Dr	University of Hull	d.counsell@hull.ac.uk
Crawford	Jenny	Ms	Royal Town Planning Institute	jenny.crawford@rtpi.org.uk
Creamer	Caroline	Ms	NUI Maynooth	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Creed	Michael	Mr	South West Regional Authority	Michael.Creed@CorkCoCo.ie
Cunningham	Christina	Ms	Queen's University Belfast	s.mccann@qub.ac.uk
Cussen	Niall	Mr	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	cathal_mcnulty@environ.ie
Daly	Pat	Cllr	Clare County Council	fburke@clarecoco.ie
Davoudi	Simin	Prof	Leeds Metropolitan Univ.	tcpbh@sbe.hw.ac.uk
Deas	Iain	Mr	Manchester University	Iain.Deas@manchester.ac.uk
Donachy	Paul	Dr	Queen's University Belfast	
Drew	Paul	Mr	ODPM	Paul.Drew@odpm.gsi.gov.uk
Dunn	Alistair	Mr	RICS Northern Ireland	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Dunsmuir	James	Cllr	Midlothian Council	Kathleen.Bertram@midlothian.gov.uk
Essex	Richard	Mr	RICS Wales	ressex@rics.org
Farthing	Stuart	Mr	Uni of West of England	stuart.farthing@uwe.ac.uk
Fitzimmons	Diana	Ms	Turley Association	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Forkan	Patrick	Mr	Sligo County Council	pforkan@sligococo.ie
Fridrich	Lubor	Mr	Institute for spatial development	fridrich@uur.cz
Gibson	Gerard	Mr	Laois County Council	ggibson@laoiscoco.ie
Gingles	Ronan	Mr	Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly	rgingles@seregassembly

Grimes	Ivan	Mr	Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly	igrimes@seaegaassembly
Hague	Cliff	Prof	Heriot Watt University	tcpbch@sbe.hw.ac.uk
Hanrahan	Bernard	Cllr	Clare County Council	fburke@clarecoco.ie
Harmer	Terry	Mr	Queen's University Belfast	s.mccann@qub.ac.uk
Harper	Gareth	Mr	Rural Community Network	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Harrington	Tom	Myr	North Tipperary Council	tom.harrington@northtippcoco.ie
Hayes	Pat	Cllr	Clare County Council	fburke@clarecoco.ie
Hendon			Royal Town Planning Institute	
Jones	Debbie	Ms	Department for Regional Development	irishpolicy@rtpi.org.uk
Hetherington	Jim	Mr	Government Office for the North East	jim.hetherington@drdni.gov.uk
Heywood	Jim	Mr	North Tipperary Council	jheywood.gone@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk
Hogan	John	Cllr	Queen's University Belfast	bmryan@northtippcoco.ie
Houston	David	Mr	City of Edinburgh Council	D.Houston@qub.ac.uk
Inman	John	Mr	Clare County Council	john.inman@edinburgh.gov.uk
Keane	Pat	Cllr	Westmeath County Council	fburke@clarecoco.ie
Kehoe	Barry	Mr	Clare County Council	bkehoe@westmeathcoco.ie
Kelly	Michael	Cllr	Limerick County Council	fburke@CLARECOCO.IE
Kennedy	Pat	Mr	Dublin City Council	jim.keogan@dublincity.ie
Keogan	Jim	Mr	Heriot Watt University	tcpbch@sbe.hw.ac.uk
Kirk	Karryn	Ms	Clare County Council	bdevanny@clarecoco.ie
Lafferty	Martin	Mr	South West Regional Authority	michelle.kelleher@corkcoco.ie
Lombard	Tim	Cllr	Catholic Univ. of Leuven	Sarah.Luyten@geo.kuleuven.ac.be
Luyten	Sarah	Mr		
Mack	Nick			
Markvart	Josef	Mr	Institute for Spatial Development	markvart@uur.cz
			Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	
Martin	John	Mr	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	cathal_mcnulty@environ.ie
			Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	
Matthews	Finian	Mr	Queen's University Belfast	cathal_mcnulty@environ.ie
McCann	S	Dr	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
McEldowney	James	Mr	Queen's University Belfast	james.mceldowney@dardni.gov.uk
McKay	Stephen	Dr	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
			Clare County Council	
McKeown	Gabrielle	Ms	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	cathal_mcnulty@environ.ie
McMahon	Pat	Cllr	Clare County Council	fburke@clarecoco.ie
			Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	
McNulty	Cathal	Mr		cathal_mcnulty@environ.ie
Moore	David	Mr	Department for Regional Development	david.moore@btinternet.com
			Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly	
Moore	Lynsey			lynsey.moore@drdni.gov.uk
Moylan	Kieran	Mr		KMoylan@BMWASSEMBLY.IE

Murray	Ian	Mr	RICS Northern Ireland	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Murray	Michael	Dr	Queen's University Belfast	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Murtagh	Brendan	Dr	Queen's University Belfast Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Myres	Christabel	Ms	Local Government	cathal_mcnulty@environ.ie
Neill	Bill	Mr	Queen's University Belfast	B.Neill@Queens-Belfast.AC.UK
Niarchos	Catherine	Ms	ULB Belgium South Tipperary County Council	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Norris	Pat	Cllr	Special EU Programmes Body	june.ryan@southtippcoco.ie
O'Connor	Jack	Mr	Body	jack.oconnor@seupb.ie
O'Connor	Noel	Cllr	Mallow Town Council Department for Regional Development	noel.oconnor@corkcoco.ie
Other	AN1	Mr	Department for Regional Development	jim.hetherington@drdni.gov.uk
Other	AN2	Mr	Department for Regional Development	jim.hetherington@drdni.gov.uk
Purves	Graeme	Dr	Scottish Executive	Graeme.Purves@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Rodgers	Sheila	Ms	Manchester University	sheila.rodgers@student.manchester.ac.uk
Ryan	Denis	Cllr	North Tipperary Council	bmryan@northtippcoco.ie
Scott	Mark	Dr	University College Dublin	Mark.Scott@ucd.ie
Scully	Eimear	Mr	An Foras Forbatha	eimear.scully@forfas.ie
Sokol	Martin	Dr	University College Dublin	martin.sokol@ucd.ie
Stafford	Peter	Dr	University College Dublin	Peter.Stafford@ucd.ie
Sterrett	Ken	Dr	Queen's University Belfast	m.r.murray@qub.ac.uk
Sykes	Olivier	Mr	University of Liverpool Department for Regional Development	ollys@liverpool.ac.uk
Thompson	Mike	Mr	Department for Regional Development	jim.hetherington@drdni.gov.uk
Thuriot	Fabrice	Mr	Reims University	fabrice.thuriot@univ-reims.fr
Van der kamp	Hendrik	Mr	Dublin Institute of Technology	henk.vanderkamp@dit.ie
Vickerman	Roger	Mr	University of Kent	tcpbh@sbe.hw.ac.uk
Visy	Elisabeth	Ms	VATI, Budapest National University of Ireland, Maynooth	evisy@vati.hu
Walsh	Jim	Prof	Ireland, Maynooth	jim.walsh@nuim.ie
Wiley	Colm	Mr	North Tipperary Council	tom.harrington@northtippcoco.ie
Wiley	Colm	Cllr	Clare County Council	fburke@clarecoco.ie
Wu	Zi Ping	Mr	Queen's University Belfast	
Wyatt	Tim	Mr	Government Office for the North-West of England	twyatt.gonw@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk

ANNEX 4: PROGRAMME FOR LONDON SEMINAR

Monday 11 July

- 10.30 Coffee and Registration
- 11.00 Welcome from Chairperson for the morning: Lisette Simcock from the UK's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- 11.15 Welcome from Peter Mehlbye on behalf of the ESPON Co-ordination Unit.
- 11.20 Position Paper "Challenges and opportunities for Europe's metropolitan core: findings from ESPON", by Cliff Hague (UK ECP).
- 11.35 Response from Director Romain Diederich (Ministere de L'Interieur et de L'Amenagement du Territoire, Luxembourg Government and Managing Authority of ESPON). M.Diederich will also discuss the experiences of transnational co-operation in the Saar-Lux region
- 11.50 Further responses to the Position Paper from different European urban and metropolitan areas: Robin Thompson (GLA and University College London) London and the South East of England; Pierre Cornut (Belgian ECP), Brussels; Elizabeth Vajdovich-Visy (Hungary ECP): capital cities in new member states..
- 12.15 Discussion of Position Paper
- 12.30 Lunch
- 13.30 Introduction by Chair, Gerard Flament, Prefecture Nord Pas de Calais, to the theme Transport and Inclusion.
- 13.40 "Transport and inclusion in metropolitan Europe: ESPON and Spatial Visions" Roger Vickerman, University of Kent.
- 14.00 "The HST Link INTERREG project" Detlef Golletz, UK Lead Partner/South East Development Agency (SEEDA)
- 14.20 Discussion
- 15.00 Tea
- 15.30 Introduction by the Chair Jim Walsh, Ireland ECP, to the theme of Place Competitiveness.
- 15.40 "The role of sustainable housing" Kevin Scobell, Lead Partner, Smartlife INTERREG project/Building Research Establishment UK
- 16.00 Discussion

- 16.30 Introduction by the Chair, Robin Thompson, to the theme of Spatial Visions as means to promote competitiveness and cohesion.
- 16.35 “Implementation of the North West Europe Spatial Vision”, Monica Tanaka NWE INTERREG IIIB Secretariat.
- 16.55 “Planned ESPON/INTERACT thematic study on Spatial Visions”, Peter Mehlbye / Magali Bayssiere, ESPON Co-ordination Unit.
- 17.05 Discussion
- 17.30 Close of Day 1.

Tuesday 12 July

- 09.10 Introduction to the theme of Structural Funds and Restructuring to Increase Competitiveness by chair for the session, Jim Walsh (Ireland ECP)
- 09.20 “Structural Funds and Urban Areas” Adrian Healey, University of Cardiff.
- 09.40 “The role of Open Space Environments in Metropolitan Regional Development”, Clive Fox, Head of Policy and Programmes (London) Groundwork UK Regional Office, INTERREG IIIB SAUL project Lead Partner.
- 10.00 Discussion
- 10.30 Coffee
- 11.00 Introduction to the theme of managing conflicts between development and environment within metropolitan regions by the Chair for the session, Harry Knottley, ODPM
- 11.05 “Managing natural heritage in metropolitan Europe: Findings from ESPON” – Cliff Hague
- 11.20 “Co-operation to tackle flooding and water management through INTERREG”, Rachael Hill and Oliver Grant, Environment Agency.
- 11.40 Discussion
- 12.15 Towards a European Research and Practice Agenda – Peter Mehlbye ESPON Co-ordination Unit and Pieter Bloemen, Netherlands ESPON Contact Point.
- 12.45 Close of conference.

ANNEX 5: POSITION PAPER FOR THE LONDON SEMINAR



COMPETITIVENESS AND COHESION IN NORTH WEST EUROPE: THE IMPLICATIONS OF ESPON RESULTS

Position paper by Cliff Hague (UK ESPON Contact Point)

Introduction and approach

The aim of this paper is to set the scene for the conference in London organised by the ESPON Going Regional project. The project is a networking activity among the ESPON Contact Points from Ireland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary and the Czech Republic, as well as the UK. It is part of a number of initiatives that seek to disseminate ESPON findings, and in particular to build dialogues between researchers within ESPON, the wider research community and the policy and practice community involved in spatial development and planning. However, the opinions and interpretations within the paper are my own and not those of the other ECPs or the ESPON Monitoring Committee or the UK's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

In February 2005 a similar conference was held in Belfast. It concentrated on the implications of ESPON findings in respect of more peripheral and rural parts of North Western Europe. The focus of this second conference, and of this paper, is on urban and metropolitan regions within North West Europe.

This paper does not seek to go through each ESPON report and cut and paste each reference to urban areas in North West Europe. Rather the paper begins by discussing the significance of polycentricity for urban areas and metropolitan regions from this part of Europe. The next section looks at what ESPON has been saying about the territorial aspects of competitiveness and how these relate to the theme of the conference. Cohesion is then considered in a similar way. There is then a section on Sustainable Development, which seeks to integrate the earlier discussion and emphasise the importance of planning practice. Finally conclusions are drawn and questions posed for consideration through the conference.

Polycentricity and North West Europe's urban and metropolitan areas

ESPON is an offspring of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999), which itself followed a series of studies (CEC, 1991, 1994, 1997) that built an understanding of patterns of spatial development within the parts of Europe that were then in the EU, and of planning systems that sought to influence development patterns within the various member states. Two aspects stand out from the ESDP. The first is the extent to which its analysis of Europe's development was essentially one of core and periphery. The second is the extent to which the solutions that it offered were crafted in a language that could achieve a political consensus, rather than being derived from academic research.

The ESDP should be understood as one of the legacies of the era when the EU was to all intents and purposes the Western European Union – even if it did include a chapter on what were then the Accession Countries. It is a product of the period before the Euro and is the culmination of the years of progression to a Single Market. Perhaps most fundamentally it is part of the Delors' vision that integration into a single market could lead to regional convergence through investment flows and falling transport costs. This was the context in which the idea of polycentric development became the core of the ESDP's message: "a polycentric settlement structure across the whole territory of the EU with a graduated city-ranking must be the goal. This is an essential pre-requisite for the balanced and sustainable development of local entities and regions and for developing the real locational advantage of the EU vis-à-vis other large economic regions in the world" (pp.20-21). In short, polycentric development was pre-judged to offer competitiveness and cohesion. It was a counter to the core-periphery model that had underpinned earlier thinking in EU regional policy, and which was reflected in the fact that in the EU of 1999, the Pentagon, the area demarcated by London, Paris, Milan, Munich and Hamburg, accounted for 50% of the GDP, 40% of the inhabitants and 20% of the territory.

Much (but not all) of North West Europe lies within the Pentagon identified in the ESDP. The ESDP identified this area to be Europe's only "zone of global economic integration". The aim has been to develop other such zones within the European territory, and part of the work of ESPON project 1.1.1 was to analyse the urban system at a European scale and identify urban regions with the potential to co-operate and grow in this direction. The project called these Potential Polycentric Integration Areas. The project recommended that these "PIAs" should be supported, especially those outside the Pentagon.

In this vision of Europe as a network of internationally accessible metropolitan regions, the assumption remains that a "win-win" solution is the likely outcome: growth of other regions outside the existing Pentagon will contribute to both competitiveness and cohesion, growing the European economy as a whole without undermining the existing major centres. ESPON projects have not been asked to challenge or test this proposition, but it is one that this conference might deliberate. Certainly the Belgian ECP has noted

that any transfer of EU investments and institutions away from the Pentagon and to the periphery would have “dramatic impacts on Belgium” (Biot, Luyten and Cornut, 2005).

At the very least polycentricity at a European scale must imply some diminution in the relative importance within the European urban system of those metropolitan areas of North-Western Europe that currently are leading in indicators of size and significance. In the meantime, might it also be reasonable to posit that the nascent zones of global economic integration outside the Pentagon may provide serious challenges to secondary centres within the national urban systems of the countries of North West Europe? A theme that emerges from several of the ESPON studies is the growth and potential of the capital city regions within the states that joined the Union in 2004. However, the nature of the analysis being undertaken is such that we do not know how far this growth involves opening new markets or a relocation of activities from North West Europe, and perhaps particularly from countries sharing a border with the new members.

ESPON has worked to a pattern of analysing data at what it calls “macro” (i.e. European) scale, “meso” (transnational regions within Europe) and “micro” (national/intra-national) scales. Similarly polycentricity was projected by the ESDP to be a nested concept, a desirable aim at each and every one of these scales. However, project 1.1.1 pointed to possible conflicts between the applications of the concept at different scales. The dilemma is most marked in the newer Member States, where European scale polycentrism implies the connection and growth of their capital regions, but that process further marginalises remoter and less prosperous regions within the country. These less favoured regions often are having to cope with the restructuring of traditional primary and secondary industries.

Within North West Europe, the situation of Ireland is interesting in this respect. As an area outside the Pentagon, but within North West Europe, Ireland could contribute to European polycentricity by growing its major metropolitan area – based on Dublin. However, this implies a further unbalancing of the urban system within Ireland. The situation in terms of ESPON findings is complicated by the fact that the data and methodology used by project 1.1.1 to calculate the polycentric potential of an urban system resulted in an interpretation that the Irish system was already scoring highly on polycentricity. The Irish ECP noted that this view “does not accord with our knowledge of the reality” in a country where the Dublin Functional Urban Area (FUA) has over four times the population of the next FUA in the hierarchy (Walsh and Meldon, 2005).

Like all ESPON projects 1.1.1 had to cope with many data problems in its attempts to forge indicators from incomplete data sets, different national definitions etc. However, this does mean that policy makers should not put too much weight on the statistical findings and tabulations in this and other projects, fascinating as some of the maps can be. A conference such as this one should explore more rigorously the nature and application of policy at different territorial scales, using ESPON findings and the practical experience of policy professionals from different countries to create a critical dialogue that can enrich understanding at all levels. In this respect, in an annex of 1.1.1 is an interesting piece of analysis by Zonneveld, Meijers and Waterhout (2004). It

researches how far polycentricity is an aim (either major or minor) of national and regional policies within each of the countries.

Zonneveld, Meijers and Waterhout found that polycentricity policies within the different member states could be grouped into two clusters. Sometimes such policies seek cohesion, by reducing disparities between different urban areas; while the second cluster is polycentricity policies seeking to enhance the competitiveness of the national urban system or groups of cities within that system. The cohesion aim is addressed through grouping cities, either on the basis of their location in a peripheral or lagging region or their size. The analysis found that Germany, France and Ireland had cohesion as a main objective of their polycentricity policies, and that for Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the UK enhancing the competitiveness of the urban system was a main aim. These differences, which are further compounded by differences in emphasis given to polycentricity policies in the different NW Europe countries, could provide interesting grounds for discussion in the conference. In France, for example, the dominance of Paris has meant that there have been significant policy aims over the past 20 years to narrow the gap between the capital and the rest of the country. In Germany the spatial disparities are mainly between East and West, rather than a feature of the urban system itself. However, investment to combat these differences has gone mainly to the cities of the East, and thus actually sustains the overall polycentric character of Germany. Ireland has sought to counter the dominance of Dublin through its National Spatial Strategy (NSS), which was the focus of a session in the ESPON Going Regional event in Belfast. The NSS identifies gateway cities to be “strategically placed engines of growth”.

The researchers found a number of ways in which countries were using polycentricity policies to boost competitiveness. For example, they note classificatory systems in which “appealing metaphors are developed for the centres that have to compete internationally”. These include Germany’s “European Metropolitan Regions” or the ‘*Centres de Développement et d’attraction*’ (Luxembourg). Are these words anything more than marketing tools? In France, Germany and the Netherlands, national governments seek to foster inter-municipal co-operation. Zonneveld and his colleagues refer to the increasing importance attached to urban networks. In particular, they note that in NW Europe, designation of urban networks has been a means of concentrating development and avoiding future urban sprawl through the application of traditional “classic” planning goals.

These reflections lead directly to the question of how polycentricity policies are applied in practice – a question that this conference is well placed to discuss. Zonneveld et. al. pointed to three ways that the policies are implemented. The first of these they call “spatial implementation instruments”. These are regulations, programmes or budgets over which the “policy subject” has relatively strong control. Second are “non-spatial instruments” – i.e. measures that produce increased polycentricity as an effect, though it is not a main aim. Examples are general government decentralization programmes, or budget equalization measures. The crucial point here is that Finance Ministries may be more important (though unwitting) agents for polycentric development than are the

planners or regional development agencies. This would appear to be an under-researched area generally. Finally there are strategic planning instruments, such as spatial visions, regional plans or national planning guidance. Spatial visions were noted by these Dutch researchers to be more concerned with polycentric development than any other strategic planning instrument. That is one reason why we have a session on them in this conference.

It is interesting to note that these researchers came to the view that traditional land use planning restrictions issued by national or regional governments “cannot easily be related to cohesion or competitiveness objectives”. In this we see something of the on-going problems faced by traditional spatial planning approaches since the passing of the era of Fordism and strong states. There are interesting attempts in England to “change the culture of planning” and recent legislation will result in the preparation of regional spatial strategies; however, one wonders how far the traditional legislative structures within which restrictive planning controls still operate will eventually block attempts to make the planning system a more dynamic agent for fostering place competitiveness.

Project 1.1.1 is not the only ESPON project to consider polycentricity. Indeed there is what might be (unkindly) termed “ritual genuflection” to the concept in most, if not all, the reports. However, while ESPON rather started with the innocent assumption that polycentric development was a desirable goal and a means to reach competitiveness and cohesion, there are signs that, as the research has progressed, so a degree of scepticism is now evident towards the concept. For example, several ECPs called for a stronger critique of the polycentricity ideal within project 1.1.1 (Biot, 2005) and Wallet and Ritsema van Eck (2005) argued that the report of project 1.1.1 fails to make the case on which to base recommendations for more polycentricity at European level. Similarly, the ESPON project on TENs and Transport Policy (2.1.1) questioned the notion that a single design of transport policy could optimise economic competitiveness, efficiency, environmental sustainability and balanced spatial development.

It is important to debate some of these criticisms, since, as the Second Interim Report of ESPON project 3.3 (on Lisbon-Gothenburg) observed, the implications of the “conclusions of the ESPON projects to date are, if accepted, substantial. They suggest a need to move away from previous trajectories about competitiveness in particular. The most notable change...is a spatial repositioning, away from an association of competitiveness with the capabilities with (sic) capital cities towards a broadening of the economic base and an explicit promotion of polycentricity” (p.110). Such a shift would have direct implications for the capital cities in North West Europe. However, it may be some consolation for them to know that, as project 1.2.1 found, if transport policies set out to reinforce polycentricity at a European level, by better connecting large urban centres, this is likely to reinforce the dominance of capital cities. Similarly, project 2.1.1 (on Transport and TEN Policies) found that the degree of polycentricity of national urban systems has declined, and is likely to continue to decline.

Nevertheless, as the quote above from 3.3 shows, the underlying narrative from ESPON so far is that polycentricity is the way ahead. This influences recommendations in reports

dealing with the future approach to Structural Funds. For example, project 2.2.1 recommended a concentration of funding on Functional Urban Areas which have the potential to become European hubs. The report promoted the creation of strong urban poles outside the Pentagon, with special emphasis on building trans-national functional regions between the old EU15 and the newer members. This strategy could be to the disadvantage of areas in North West Europe outside the big cities within the Pentagon that have been eligible areas for Structural Funds, but are unable to offer this wider spatial and European growth perspective.

The current discord within the EU has seen a new propensity to challenge what was previously the accepted wisdom of elite European policy-makers. At least since the ESDP, the idea of polycentric development has been reiterated rather than probed in European spatial planning. ESPON has embedded a positive view of polycentric development in its research, but also it has begun to expose some of the questions that now need to be asked. A dialogue between researchers and practitioners on the values of polycentricity could be a useful input for more fundamental assessments of the concept in the next stage of ESPON.

Competitiveness

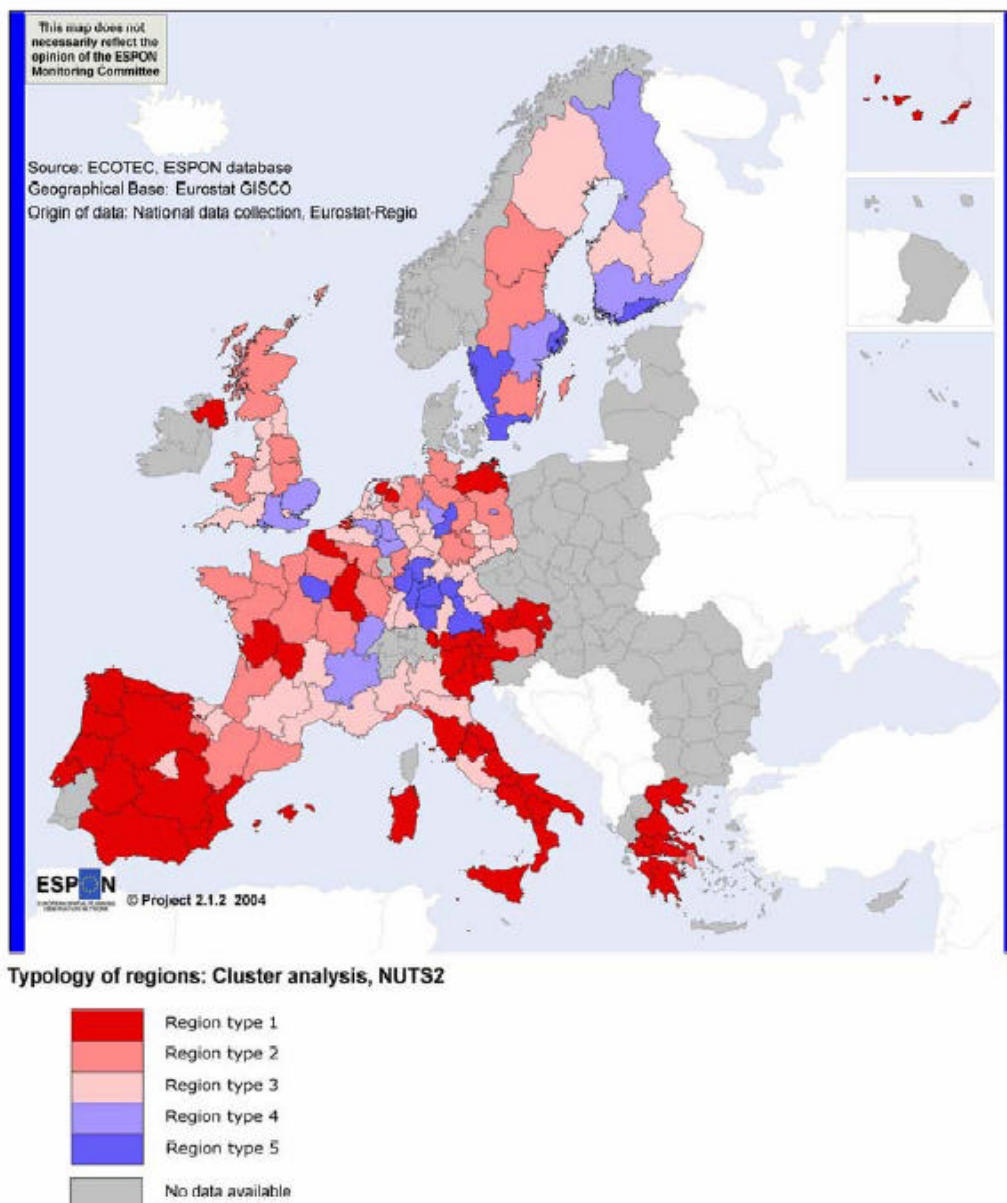
As noted above, there has been a tendency to equate a polycentric urban system with competitiveness, though the evidence to support this is not all that robust. For example, Walsh and Meldon (2005) noted that “There have been several assessments of the factors that have contributed to improved competitiveness that has underpinned the spectacular performance of the Irish economy since the early 1990s; not one assessment has identified polycentricity as a contributory factor”. However, there are also other, more conventional, perspectives on the territorial aspects of competitiveness that have been looked at in ESPON. Project 3.3, for example, is currently in progress and is exploring a number of economic indicators of competitiveness – GDP per capita, labour productivity, total employment rate, employment rate for older workers, spending on human resources, research and development expenditure and information technology expenditure. On this basis, and at national level, the Scandinavians come out at the top of the league, in a group that also includes Luxembourg; while France, the Netherlands and the UK appear in the second highest category. This suggests that the countries in North West Europe should not feel complacent about their national competitiveness, and can probably learn from the Scandinavians.

The attempt to make Europe competitive globally is at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy, which puts a special emphasis on the importance of the knowledge economy. The Lisbon Summit in 2000 adopted the strategic goal of creating a European Research Area (ERA) as a step towards making the EU the world’s most competitive knowledge economy. Since then the EU has agreed the Barcelona Objective. This aims to increase investment in R&D in the EU to 3% of GDP by 2010, of which two-thirds should come from the private sector.

How are the urban areas of North West Europe faring? The Third Cohesion Report (2004) pointed to significant disparities in R and D across Europe. Two completed

ESPON reports are very relevant here – those on Telecommunication Services and Networks (1.2.2) and on the Territorial Impact of EU Research and Development Policies (2.1.2). Although direct spending through EU policies accounts for only a small part of the total spend on R and D, there appears to be a clear territorial pattern to these aspects of investment for increased competitiveness. Project 2.1.2 found that the main “hotspots” for research, technology and innovation are currently located in the core areas of North West Europe and in parts of Scandinavia.

Map 1: Summary Typology of Regions for R and D and innovation



Map 1 shows a typology of regions produced by the project on R and D. The five types are as follows:

- Type 5 exceptionally strong system of R&D and innovation
- Type 4 strong system of R&D and innovation
- Type 3 mixed fortunes in undertaking R&D and innovation
- Type 2 average strengths in R&D and innovation
- Type 1 weak at undertaking R&D and innovation

The map shows that there are regional disparities within the North West Europe area. For example, within the UK, the South East of England scores highly, but other regions such as Northern Ireland and rural regions of Wales and Scotland score badly, as does the North of the Netherlands, for example. Overall the project found a positive relationship between GDP, levels of tertiary education and employment in high tech' manufacturing, and R&D expenditure, though high technology manufacturing in a territory does not necessarily require R&D capacity.

Again the policy recommendations have some strong implications for the large metropolitan areas in North West Europe. For example, there was a proposal that regions that have an exceptionally strong system of R and D and innovation within the European context should be promoted as focal points of a "European innovation system".

Project 3.1, which was the first Integrative Project of ESPON, developed a compound indicator system that it used to measure and map the Regional Classification of Europe (RCE). This work has since been taken further by project 2.4.2 (known in ESPON-speak as "Zoom in"). As part of the process of developing the RCE this current project, in its Second Interim Report, has devised an indicator of economy that combines GDP in purchase parities in 2002 with the development of GDP between 1995 and 2002 (thus capturing growth/stagnation characteristics of regions). This resulting map (not reproduced here) highlights the leading role played by Ireland and Luxembourg, and the regions based on Paris, London, Brussels and the Randstad, while also picking out the rapid growth in the new member states from the Baltic.

The "Zoom in" project has also devised and mapped a composite Lisbon indicator, based on the combination of productivity, labour participation, R&D expenditures, personnel in the private sector and the educational level. Viewing the results, the researchers identified five "Lisbon zones" in the ESPON space, two of them in the Nordic area, one in England, based on and wrapping round London, and another zone running through the Netherlands, North Belgium and West Germany, though the largest such zone ran from Munich through Switzerland to the Mid-Pyrenees. Paris stood out as a "Lisbon island", a "hotspot" in its own right but not part of a contiguous zone. However, there are also regions in NW Europe that score only as "average" on the Lisbon indicator, or even in the case of Pas de Calais "below average". In particular there is a major challenge to grow the knowledge economy in the old industrial regions, and to find appropriate forms of innovation for the more rural areas, such as West Wales.

One valuable contribution of the project on R and D policy was its discussion of the way that social scientists have rethought the nature of the innovation process. Traditionally innovation was explained through a linear process leading from basic research through

product and process development; production and finally to marketing and diffusion. Now the theory recognizes that there are many interactions and iterations in the process of technological change, with adjustments and learning through the production process, for example. A key concept is “tacitness”: since knowledge is new and uncoded, instead of being standardized and easy to disseminate, it is often centred on key persons or groups of persons, and shaped by the context. Face-to-face contacts, spillovers, networks, linkages, synergies – these are the words that describe the serendipity-like qualities from which innovations arise. Crucially this way of looking at the drivers for the Lisbon Agenda highlights the importance of the territorial dimension. Specifically it underpins the idea that regional clusters, linking key institutions really matter. This echoes Porter’s (1996, 1998) work, which has been summarised as follows:

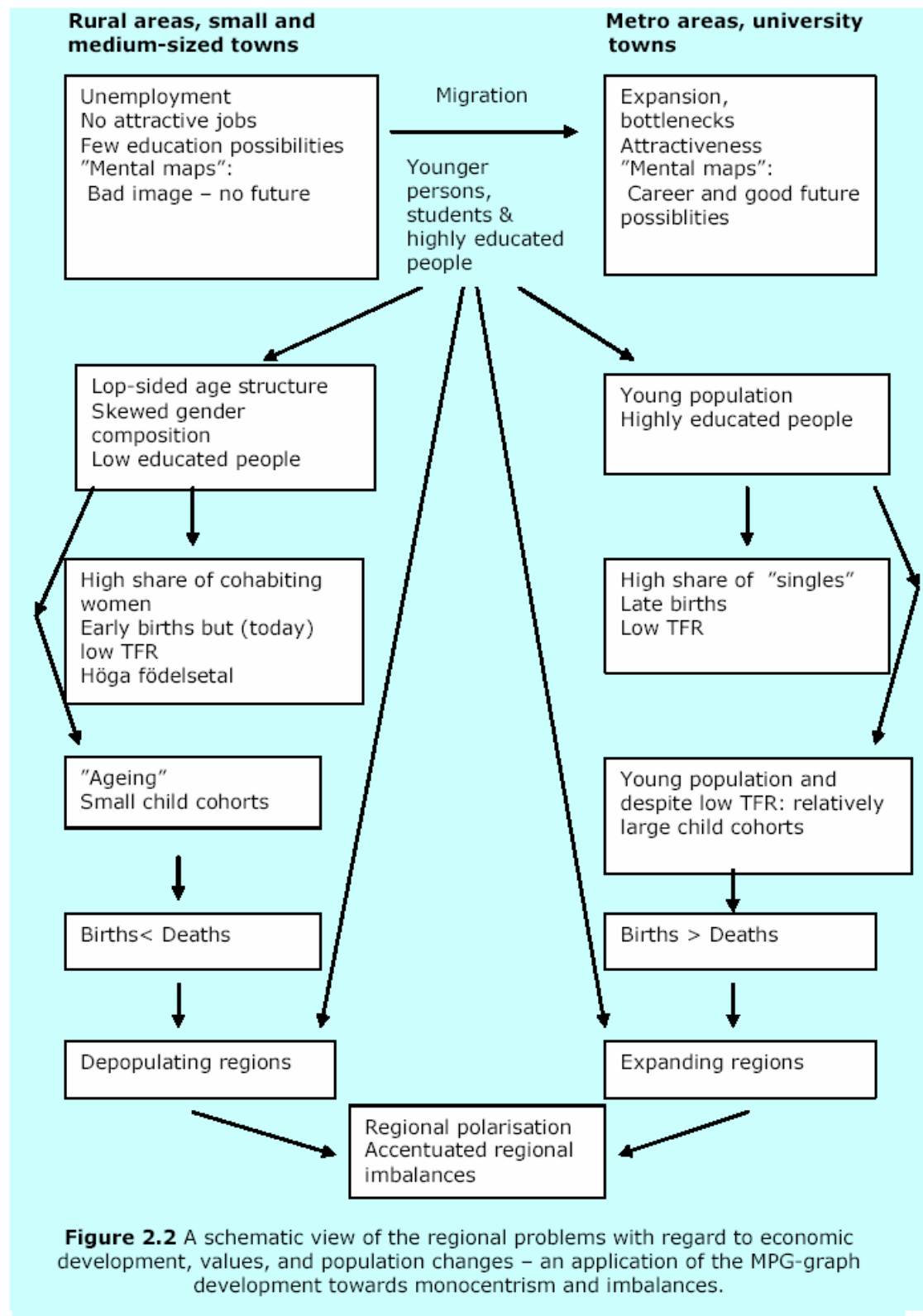
‘...places that are successful economically have concentrations of specialised knowledge, support institutions, rival firms, related enterprises and sophisticated customers. Proximity leads to special access, closer relationships, better information and powerful incentives to innovate.’ (Lever and Turok, 1999).

Porter’s “diamond” also features strongly in the efforts of project 3.3 in its Second Interim Report to conceptualise what the project calls “territorial capabilities” (for more details see the later section on Sustainable Development). Montgomery (2005), however, has noted that the Porter model does not explain why some cities are much better than others at exploiting the relationships that Porter’s theories commend. Montgomery speculates that the future lies with those cities where innovation is part of a creative milieu that encompasses modernity in the arts, fashion and architecture, together with a lifestyle and environment. On this basis he suggests that cities that define themselves through their history – a culture that is conserved, but in the past – will fail. The world cities of Paris and London should continue to thrive through a process of cumulative causation – indeed part of London’s global significance derives from its strong position in design, publishing and television – but the creative, up-and coming cities in NW Europe spotted by Montgomery include Manchester, Antwerp, Dublin, and Bristol.

ESPON project 1.3.3 is concerned with culture, but if Montgomery’s arguments are right the project seems to be missing some important points. Fundamentally 1.3.3 is about cultural heritage, and its Second Interim Report shows that the research team has embarked on an extensive 29 country search for data on cultural monuments, landscapes, their degrees of protection, lists of museums, theatres etc. The aim then is to establish the territorial pattern of tangible reminders of the past. In contrast, if we follow Montgomery’s line of argument, the key questions are about creativity and experiment in cultures, the dynamics and flows rather than the inherited stocks. One might even suggest that the weight of packaged cultural heritage in Europe, and the ESDP and ESPON focus upon it, is indicative of a major weakness in relation to innovation and competitiveness. Montgomery says that “The cities that have most to fear are those with low levels of new wealth creation and who place too much emphasis on the past, to the detriment of the new.” Looking at Europe in the World (the brief for project 3.4.1) rather than concentrating on patterns within Europe, Montgomery’s characterisation of places with “most to fear” describes Europe as an entity when it is compared with Asia or North

America, for example. ESPON needs to further probe the territorial relationships between creative cultures and competitiveness.

Diagram 1: The demography of regional polarisation



Migration can be a factor in fostering a culture of innovation. Social scientists have long recognised that voluntary migrants tend to be younger, more ambitious and more skilled than their counterparts who stay at home. Diagram 1, taken from the Draft Final Report of the ESPON project on Demographic Trends (1.1.4), explains how the migration process tends to favour urban areas and monocentric growth patterns. The research team on this project developed a typology of regions, based on a combination of age structure, fertility and migration.

In European terms, the maps of this demography-based typology show North West Europe in a positive light. With the exception of a few more peripheral and rural parts, these areas are not facing the challenges of depopulation that are a central theme of the project. However, a couple of short Belgian case studies in the Demography project highlight some of the issues outside the biggest cities. Sparsely populated rural districts in the south of Wallonia are repopulating following the arrival of families with young children or young pensioners. The summary of the case study notes that economic growth has been a cause and a consequence of demographic renewal. There are a lot of small firms and high levels of self-employment, and the labour force is very flexible, and the environment is also good. However, many of the wage earners here commute to work in the cities, and have been drawn to the area by its affordable house prices.

The second Belgian case study uses the old industrial part of Wallonia to present a vignette of the problems such regions face within North West Europe. These are areas that attract few in-migrants, while losing some of their own people, especially the young, to other regions. Poor environment (a legacy of the industrial era), poor image and a lack of entrepreneurialism underpin these old regions. Liege has the only French language university in the area. This helps to boost the numbers of young people, but the problems begin when they graduate and find that to get the best returns for their qualifications they need to move elsewhere. In the province of Hainault, the economic problems are even worse, but its proximity to Brussels allows people to remain there but commute to work. These all too brief case studies raise very important questions about the territorial parameters within which regeneration strategies should be designed and implemented. This is a topic where there could usefully be dialogues between practice and research. Do we consider commuting within more spatially extensive labour markets a key strategy to achieve economic, social and territorial cohesion?

For those in urban and metropolitan North West Europe one important challenge is going to be how to cope with problems of congestion and pressure on property markets? ESPON has paid little direct attention to the interactions between commercial floorspace, housing markets and territorial competitiveness. This is a theme we will return to in the discussion of sustainable development in a later section of this paper.

The importance of accessibility as a factor in city growth has long been recognised. Here again the integrative “Zoom in” project is interesting. Even though it is still at an early stage, it is combining and mapping data from previous ESPON projects that have been completed. This exercise involves developing an indicator combining accessibility by rail, road and air along with accessibility to markets at different scales by rail and by road

(in each cases related to a population figure). This exercise shows the highest scores are evident in a central part of the Pentagon that includes areas of France, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, with nuclei outside this in London, Paris, Hamburg and Berlin.

So it may appear from a NW Europe perspective that all is well. However, the Final Report of project 2.1.1 made two particularly important points that the conference may like to consider. Firstly, it argued (on the basis of results from modelling) that “for regions in the European core with all the benefits of a central geographical location *plus* an already highly developed transport and communications infrastructure, additional gains in accessibility through even larger airports or even more motorways or high-speed rail lines will bring only limited incentives for additional economic growth” (p.140) Indeed the research suggested that overall the impacts of European transport policy on regional economic development have been small. Should national policy makers therefore adopt a stance of benign neglect when faced with the calls from the metropolitan regions of NW Europe for support for new transport infrastructure? Would such a policy be compatible with one that (tacitly?) encourages long distance commuting as the means to access and sustain the wealth creation engines of the major metropolitan centres?

The second, and related, point of significance from 2.1.1 is that access to the network is as important as the quality of the network itself. This raises some very fundamental questions about secondary networks and services within countries. For example, Peter Hall (2005, p.187) has noted that “England is effectively a very small space-economy, a bit more like the Netherlands than like its obvious big country European competitors: France, Germany or Italy”. This insight was sparked by his study of the new 2005 summer train timetables, which show that Birmingham, Bristol, Nottingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Liverpool are all connected to London at peak business times by services of up to 2 hours 15 minutes travel time. However, as Hall pointed out, there is a huge difference between the accessibility of these core cities and places on their regional fringes. Thus while central Manchester is 135 minutes from London’s Euston station, Rochdale, some 15-20 kms from the centre of Manchester is about another hour’s travelling time, in part because it requires a change of stations and in Hall’s words “a clunky rail car” ride for another 30 minutes. The result, he argues, is that the investment made in reducing the journey times between the core cities and London has had the effect of making these cities the only places in which to invest within their regions, and creating a permanent competitive disadvantage for national and regional peripheries. The centres of these connected English provincial cities are thriving economically, while the “disconnected” towns within their regions still lag. Again polycentricity works at one scale, in this case national, but at the cost of undermining polycentricity at a more local scale.

In summary, ESPON has begun to demarcate some of the key factors that contribute to territorial competitiveness. While critics might argue that its efforts have concentrated overly at the European scale, and on indicators and data, the projects have contributed not only to an understanding of the patterns but also to some of the underlying explanations

for them. The on-going projects continue to do this. What emerges is a picture in which the urban and metropolitan areas of NW Europe are performing well in general compared to the norms in the 29 country ESPON space. However, there are major problems for old industrial areas and for places that are not connected to the core space economy. Equally important is the extent to which Europe's global competitiveness hangs heavily on the international performance of these core cities. The real comparators for the metropolitan areas of NW Europe should be Beijing, Tokyo, Los Angeles, not Tallinn or even parts of southern Europe (though it does look like we could learn some tricks from the Scandinavians!). The challenge in NW Europe must be to sustain and grow this network, and that is likely to mean looking at embedding a culture of innovation and modernisation in all aspects of policy making, whilst also building the network connections and removing barriers to access to networks. How this might be done should be a central concern for research and practice, and vital for the success of the regional co-operation process in the post-2007 Structural funds regime.

Cohesion

The discussion of competitiveness has already highlighted some of the issues of cohesion at different territorial scales. A key role of ESPON has been to state the statistical case for territorial cohesion policies and to provide DG Regio with the data from which it might be possible to make "objective" and "scientific" decisions about future eligibility for cohesion funding. At this European scale North West Europe looks relatively cohesive – the main gaps are between Pentagon and the periphery, especially after the Union grew to 25 members in 2004. However, as already indicated, within North West Europe there are important differences between metropolitan regions and rural fringes, and significant problems confronting old industrial regions undergoing restructuring.

A major aim of project 2.2.1 was to see how much impact, if any, the Structural Funds programmes had on territorial cohesion and polycentric or balanced development (mainly through interaction between urban areas to create synergy and equity). The Final Report highlighted two ways in which cohesion and polycentricity have been influenced by Structural Funds programmes: through spending on particular measures; and in defining Structural Fund programme areas. The main source of data was the previous structural funds round (1994-99). The findings were somewhat mixed and qualified. Generally, the programme strategies were found to have a certain consistency with the objective of territorial cohesion. However the Structural Funds programmes have been drafted as regional economic development programmes. While spatial considerations inform their design and are explicit in many instances, a variety of approaches are apparent across different programmes. The degree of correspondence with the goals and concepts of European spatial development policies could be seen to be coincidental. In effect the programmes do contribute to polycentric development and territorial cohesion, but in an indirect manner. Similarly, the project that explored Structural Funds in Urban Areas pointed to the gap between the geographical targeting of the funds to a regional level and the targeting at a neighbourhood level within urban areas.

Relatively little Structural Funds spending had been in the cities and metropolitan regions of North West Europe. At a European scale these are mainly found to be areas where per capita spending on the Structural Funds has been low, but per capita increase in GDP has been high. Similarly, cross-border differences are relatively small within North West Europe, the main exceptions being the discrepancy between metropolitan Paris and its surrounding regions, and between Luxembourg and its neighbours.

Project 1.2.2 looked at telecommunications services and networks as infrastructure for territorial cohesion. This is an interesting area for two reasons. Firstly, there is a common assumption that IT in general and wireless technologies in particular has the potential to obliterate traditional locational disadvantages – e.g. remoteness. Secondly, this is an area that tends to be overlooked in spatial planning practice (except in relation to local attempts to restrict the development of masts etc.). So can we sit back and rely on the telecoms providers to usher in a new level of territorial cohesion across Europe, as we become a continent of tele-cottage workers? Well, probably not is the answer from the project.

The findings from 1.2.2 are difficult to summarise and easy to distort: the research team said that their “overall message” was that the supply and demand for telecommunications in Europe is “complex”. Nevertheless they did volunteer some comments that should be of interest to this conference.

There is a north-south divide in telecoms across EU 15+2, mainly because of the strength of the Nordic countries who lead the way in uptake of most of the technologies. This means that there is not a classic core-periphery pattern. Indeed, Spain and Portugal have outpaced the UK and France in broadband uptake. National policy and traditions, “national telecoms cultures”, are reflected in many of the patterns. This tends to mean that inter-country differences are more evident than inter-regional differences within any country. At the level of NW Europe, there is again a pattern whereby on a synthesis of factors, most of urban NW Europe is at the upper end of the European spectrum (“highly advanced” or “advanced telecom regions”), though again metropolitan Paris stands isolated in this category from the regions that surround it. However, at the micro level the research revealed disparities between metropolitan, urban and rural regions. Metropolitan areas have denser and better quality services, and these are also the places where new technologies get rolled out first. There is also evidence of a persistent urban-rural divide in internet use, though the UK is an exception to this rule.

In general regulation policy for all forms of telecoms was found to be “spatially blind”. So what can regional and local authorities do to increase access to leading edge telecoms for their area? The project advises them to get together with the private sector and public agencies to aggregate demand, thus creating the cost savings that can then be used to improve supply (and further stimulate demand). In effect the local and regional government has the potential to make itself the “anchor tenant” to a telecom provider. As

a postscript, it is interesting to note that the National Spatial Strategy for Ireland has recognised the relatively weak position of the more rural parts of Ireland, especially in provision of leading edge technologies. One result has been government efforts to assist the roll out of broadband infrastructure beyond the larger urban centres (Walsh 2005).

The challenges of moving towards greater territorial cohesion in telecoms are part of a much wider problem. Even if the concept of territorial cohesion was not so nebulous, and even though it is championed by DG Regio, and was written into the ill-fated Constitution, the fact remains that most policy making at European, national and regional levels remains “spatially blind”. In terms of ESPON results so far, for example, it is no great surprise to find that the Common Agricultural Policy (the focus for project 2.1.3) in aggregate terms does not promote balanced development or territorial cohesion. Significantly, the analysis in this Final Report also shows that the reforms implemented within CAP in recent years will still not change the existing uneven spatial pattern of spending. Thus spending in Pillar 1 in particular (i.e. market price support and direct income payments to the agricultural industry) is systematically and significantly higher in the ore accessible and prosperous regions. In so far as North West Europe as a whole can be seen as a beneficiary from such agricultural policy there may be a temptation to leave well alone. However, from the point of view of the urban areas and metropolitan regions, this is clearly an unsatisfactory situation and one that contradicts cohesion aims at regional level, where the main concentrations of social need (a field not yet researched by ESPON) are in the cities, and where, as we have seen, the main European hopes for global competitiveness lie.

The wider point here is that there is a need for effective integration of policy across sectors, and also between tiers of government. Only through such efforts will the EU progress in the direction of territorial cohesion in the way that it intends to do. Increasing attention is now being paid in ESPON to issues of governance and to the extent to which policies are integrated vertically across different territorial scales. However these are very much areas where research needs to work closely with the policy and practice community. It is notable, for example, that the Final Report of the project on urban-rural relations (1.1.2) spent much longer on trying to define urban and rural than it did on demonstrating the kind of urban-rural harmony that the ESDP wished to conjure into being. Indeed the case studies done by the project tended to show that there were conflicts, e.g. as urban areas sought to locate housing or major facilities like water treatment plants in rural areas. Similarly national policies tended to accord urban-rural relations at best a subsidiary role in relation to the main aims of policy.

Sustainable Development

Only one of the first round of ESPON projects was centrally focused on environment, and that was the thematic project dealing with natural heritage (1.3.2). It laid the blame

for the loss of biodiversity and semi-natural areas within Europe on to intensive agriculture (i.e. another unconsidered side-effect of the CAP) and urbanisation. Infrastructure development was also shown to fragment natural heritage. The main European policy to protect flora, fauna and habitats is Natura 2000, but this was found to be much less influential than Structural Funds, for example. The urban areas of North West Europe show up as some of the least natural of any in Europe. Furthermore, the natural areas in this part of Europe were also deemed by the researchers to be under the most intense pressure.

A case study of the Thames Basin Heaths Potential Special Protected Area (pSPA) was undertaken to show some of the detail of environmental conservation practices in an area under pressure. It is an area that is recommended as a SPA under the EU's Birds Directive and therefore receives protection equivalent to European status. Furthermore, the area has experienced severe development pressure over the last 50 years, which has resulted in a fragmentation of important open heath habitats and a peripheral pattern of residential development. The site is in a part of South East England where there is a high demand for housing. The study shows how a government agency, English Nature, has been able to use statutory powers to achieve a strong level of protection in the face of development pressures. These kind of stories are the day to day practice of environmental protection work in North West Europe, though because of different national legal systems and institutions little coherent transnational sharing of good practice seems to go on. This is clearly an area that can be developed through INTERREG, but it is also something that ESPON should address more fully as we move to ESPON Mark II after 2006.

The problems posed by congestion and housing market pressures in the economically strong urban and metropolitan regions of NW Europe was alluded to in the section on Competitiveness in this paper. These problems directly challenge the ESDP wish for a new urban-rural relationship based on harmony. The UK, for example, has seen in recent years the growth of rancorous protests from self-styled "countryside" pressure groups, who allege that policy-making, not least in relation to urban and regional development, carries an "urban bias". There is also anecdotal evidence of an increasing urban-rural divide in the Netherlands focused around lifestyle and ethnicity. The aspiration to apply the ESDP, together with the strong pressure, e.g. from Scandinavian researchers, to highlight the issues of rural depopulation and peripherality, mean that these conflicts within the metropolitan regions of NW Europe have arguably been under-researched; yet the capacity to understand them and to develop evidence based policy and practice is vitally important to the overall aims of sustainable development.

The Urban-Rural Relations project reproduced a table summarizing some of the key issues. These included:

- Population and migration
 - improving preferences for urban living
 - protecting greenfield sites from development
 - encouraging the use of brownfield sites
 - tackling the isolation of less mobile rural residents

- Education and training
 - improving education standards in urban areas
 - improving access to education and training in rural areas
 - combining provision and use of buildings for educational and other services in rural areas
- Recreation, tourism and cultural activities
 - promoting joint marketing for main attractions
 - providing more sustainable transport services and facilities (for public transport, walking and cycling) between main attractions
 - promoting more sustainable tourism and recreation routes, not only for visitors but also for local residents
- Food, water and other natural resources
 - promoting self-sufficiency in the use of resources within the region and with near neighbours
 - promoting local markets for local produce to reduce food miles
 - promoting water efficiency in homes and businesses
- Waste and pollution
 - promoting waste minimisation and recycling as ways of reducing the demands for waste disposal
- Shopping and commerce
 - maintaining and enhancing the position of city-centre shopping areas
 - reducing the dependence on the car for out-of-town shopping
 - maintaining rural shops and commercial services
- Work
 - addressing the demand for new housing in accessible rural areas generated by new urban employment growth
 - introducing green travel plans for businesses
 - promoting sustainable transport routes for walking and cycling to work

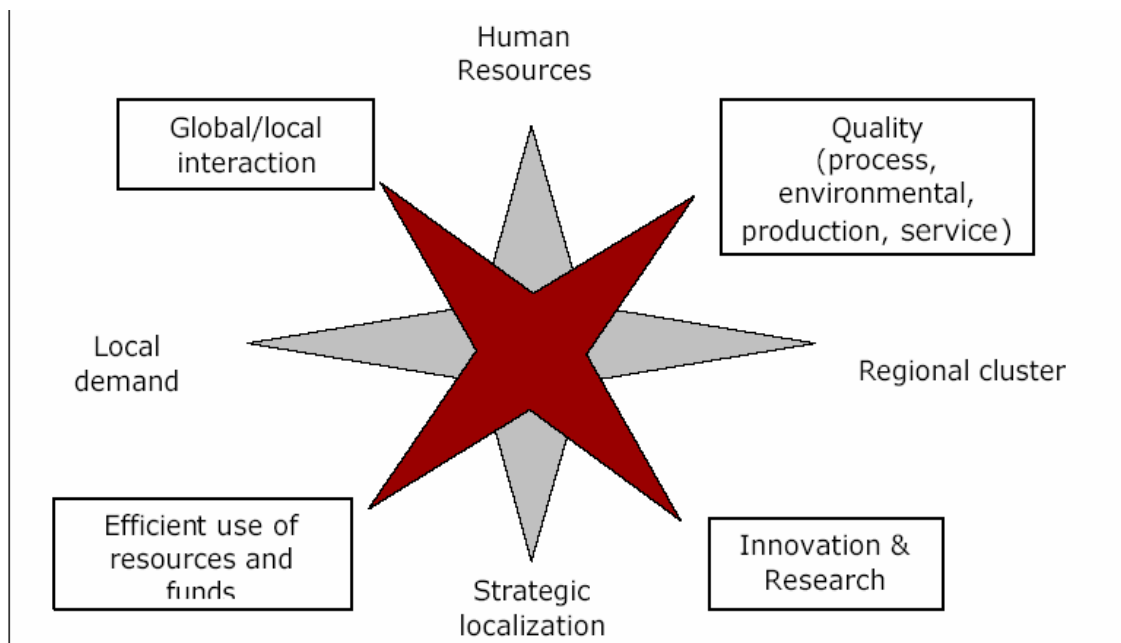
In setting out this list of positive actions that could be taken to develop urban-rural relations towards sustainable development, the project also took a firm stance against “urban sprawl”. In general planning policies in NW Europe have endorsed the idea of urban containment and these policies have been implemented, so that the most extreme examples of urban sprawl in Europe are not to be found here. However, development patterns in Belgium are very different than those in the Netherlands, for example, as the former tolerates much more ribbon development.

Perhaps more fundamental is the need for some international comparisons that project 3.4.1, “Europe in the World” is planning to conduct. In particular, in looking at the Global Economic Integration Zones in the USA it is clear that in California especially, what Europeans would call “urban sprawl” has been a sacrosanct form of development.

Of course this very low density spread is associated with high car dependency and high levels of fossil fuel consumption. This is not the “compact city” favored by the ESDP, rather it is an urban form that is generally regarded as the antithesis of sustainable development. Against that one of the strengths of the region has been its enduring capacity rapidly to absorb more urban development without creating the kind of housing shortages that characterise more rationed European housing land supply systems. Is it significant that the rapid growth achieved by Ireland in the 1990s was also accompanied by substantial peri-urban growth that looks suspiciously like “sprawl”, accompanied by heavy commuter flows and a growing congestion problem? More research is needed in this field, and so are more dialogues between practitioners from different countries.

The Lisbon-Gothenburg project, 3.3, clearly has to give central consideration to the sustainable development agenda. Though its work is on-going, some interesting ideas are emerging. In particular the project is seeking to develop the notion of “competitiveness in sustainability” and is trying to apply ecological concepts such as carrying capacity to economic, territorial and environmental systems. The idea of territorial capabilities is central to the methods being developed in this project. The research team defines territorial capability as “the capacity of a territory to produce value and to own competitiveness / rank in sustainability at different levels.” The concept is expressed in the diagram reproduced here as Diagram 2. It basically supplements Porter’s “diamond” (local demand, human resources, regional cluster and strategic localization) with four new, but integrative concepts from sustainability: global/local interaction; quality; innovation and research and efficient use of resources and funds.

Diagram 2: Porter’s Diamond modified to link competitiveness and sustainability



Source: Project 3.3 Second Interim Report (2005).

Potentially this can be used as a check list by spatial planning practitioners in developing their approaches at a local/regional level. However, it is important to note that the ESPON research applying these ideas is not yet complete.

Finally, it is important to mention that ESPON has shown that the urban and metropolitan regions of North West Europe are exposed to a number of hazards. Project 1.3.1 has reviewed the territorial dimension of a number of natural and technological hazards across the 29 ESPON countries. By combining 15 natural hazards and 4 technological hazards on the basis of the most recent comparable data, an aggregated hazard map was produced. This highlights the hazard “hot spots” running from the north eastern coastal areas of France through Belgium and into the Netherlands, and a similar stretch down the east coast of England. The statistical analysis identified a cluster of NUTS3 regions that were coastal areas threatened by storm surges/winter storms and floods. These were mainly in North West Europe. Water management will be an important element in a sustainable development spatial planning approach to this part of Europe.

Conclusions

ESPON shows North West Europe’s metropolitan and urban areas to be leading forces in the territorial development and competitiveness of Europe as a whole. Many of the reports depict a situation where the capital cities of the new member States will become increasingly connected into the networks of the NW Europe urban system, and will continue the fast growth that they have exhibited in the run-up to accession. However, an argument can be made that the competitive advantage enjoyed by the cities of the core may be eroded if investment is steered elsewhere in the name of polycentricity and cohesion. Conversely, the less regulated the mode of provision then the more likely the market is to “back winners” and concentrate on places like Paris, London and Brussels. This is evident, for example, from the roll out of leading edge technologies and the patterns of migration into and across European space.

The very largest metropolitan areas seem to be threatened from a number of different directions. There is global competition, particular from similar centres in North America and Asia. There is a European challenge to their current dominance that calls for more balance and cohesion. There are national calls also (but also opportunities) for better connections and secondary transport networks so as to share the access to the metropolis. Also significant are the problems of affordability on housing and threats of congestion and pollution and loss of open space and biodiversity to “urban sprawl”. All these could be interpreted as the price of success. However, the need to move towards more sustainable forms of development is one that cannot be ignored in urban North West Europe. ESPON shows why this region needs effective evidence-based spatial planning.

Spatial planners still aspire to a higher rationality that can transcend the divides created by sectoral planning, different scales of governance and market forces. The vision of balanced and harmonious development remains a siren call. The challenge for ESPON now should be to probe more critically the processes that underpin the statistics, the

conflicts at the heart of policy options. The challenge to practice is to engage with ESPON in a process of mutual learning.

Finally, here are some questions that might help to focus discussion and debate over the coming sessions of the conference:

- Are metropolitan areas of NW Europe threatened by policies recommended in some ESPON reports to transfer investment and EU institutions to more peripheral countries? Would the growth of new zones of global economic integration outside the Pentagon undermine the strength of major urban centres within the Pentagon?
- What have been the practical applications of polycentricity policies in NW Europe and how might these be evaluated? In particular, how has the advocacy of polycentric development through spatial visions impacted on development?
- What institutions can help forge a milieu within which innovation is likely to flourish? Given that innovation is now seen in much less linear terms, and that tacitness and networks are recognised as being important, can policy makers do much more to encourage innovation other than creating science parks and wishing for regional clusters to form?
- What can be done to increase the competitiveness of the older industrial towns where there is poor environment and out-migration? Can they provide an attractive living environment for the 21st century?
- What are the research and practice questions that we need to tackle to capitalise on the potential spin-offs from a creative cultural milieu? Are territorial interventions themselves driving such change in the world cities of North West Europe?
- Can we achieve more joined-up government to pursue the aims of territorial cohesion at all levels?
- Is the compact city and European notions of sustainable urban form undermining competitiveness? What should be the spatial planning strategies in metropolitan regions?

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Note all ESPON reports referred to are on the ESPON website: www.espon.lu. None are published in hard copy.

ANNEX 6: PERSONS REGISTERED FOR THE LONDON SEMINAR

This is the list of those who had registered as at 7 July, the day that bombs exploded in London. Consequently not all these people attended.

List of persons attending

Magali Bayssiere	ESPON Co-ordination Unit	Magali.bayssiere@espon.lu
Pieter Bloemen	Ministry of Housing, Spatial Development and the Environment, Netherlands	Pieter.bloemen@minvrom.nl
Gillian Bristow	University of Cardiff	BristowG1@cardiff.ac.uk
Juliet Carpenter	Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University	jcarpenter@brookes.ac.uk
David Chapman	University of Central England	David.Chapman@uce.ac.uk
Yun Chen	Salford University	Y.Chen@pgr.salford.ac.uk
Claire Colomb	Bartlett School of Planning, University College, London	c.colomb@ucl.ac.uk
Pierre Cornut	Free University of Brussels	pcornut@ulb.ac.be
Jenny Crawford	Royal Town Planning Institute	Jenny.Crawford@rtpi.org.uk
Romain Diederich	Ministere de L'Interieur et de L'Amenagement du Territoire, Luxembourg	Romain.diederich@mat.etat.lu
Paul Drew	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Paul.Drew@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Jan Edoy	Mission of Norway to the EU	jan@mfa.no
Michael Edwards	Bartlett School of Planning, University College, London	m.edwards@ucl.ac.uk
Richard Essex	Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, Wales	ressex@rics.org
Ian Everall	The Black Country Knowledge Society	everalli@walsall.gov.uk
Gerard Flament	SGAR, Nord-Pas-de-Calais	Gerard.flament@nord-pas-de-calais.pref.gouv.fr
Clive Fox	Groundwork UK Regional Office	cfox@groundwork.org
Lubor Fridrich	UUR, Brno	fridrich@uur.cz
Sara Fuller	University of Sheffield	s.fuller@sheffield.aca.uk
Michaela Gensheimer	University of Trier	gensheimer@uni-trier.de
Nthato Gobodo	London Development Agency	nthatogobodo@lda.gov.uk
Detlef Golletz	South East of England Development Agency	detlegolletz@seeda.co.uk
Oliver Grant	Environment Agency	Oliver.Grant@environment-agency.gov.uk
Nick Green	Nick Green, Urban Research and Consultancy	C_nick_green@mac.com
Nina Gribat	University of Sheffield	ninagribat@web.de
Cliff Hague	Heriot-Watt University	C.B.Hague@sbe.hw.ac.uk
Adrian Healy	University of Cardiff	healya@cardiff.ac.uk

Geoff Henderson	RG Consulting	geoff@rgconsulting.co.uk
John Heywood	Government Office for the North East	jheywood.gone@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk
Rachael Hill	Environment Agency	Rachael.hill@environment-agency.gov.uk
Gordon Hood	King Sturge	Gordon.hood@kingsturge.com
Gaynor Hughes	South Hams District Council	Gaynor.Hughes@southhams.gov.uk
Yingzi Hua	Shanghai Pudong Audit Bureau / London School of Economics	huayingzi@hotmail.com
Wout Janssen	South East Regional Assembly	woutjanssen@southeast-ra.gov.uk
Ian Johnson	MVA Associates	ijohnson@mva.co.uk
Francesca King	URBED	f.king@urbed.com
Karryn Kirk	Heriot-Watt University	K.Kirk@sbe.hw.ac.uk
Harry Knottley	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Harry.Knottley@odpm.gsi.gov.uk
Vassiliki Kravva	URBED	vassiliki@urbed.com
Leonidas Liapis	Bartlett School of Planning, University College London	lliapis@gmail.com
Douglas Lindsay	University of Glasgow	
Robert Lowenstein	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	
Suzanne Maguire	Bartlett School of Planning, University College London	suzannethemaguire@hotmail.com
David Massey	University of Liverpool	dwmassey@liverpool.ac.uk
Peter Mehlbye	ESPON Co-ordination	Peter.mehlbye@espon.lu

	Unit	
Hamish McGillivray	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Hamish.McGillivray@odpm.gsi.gov.uk
Gabrielle Mckeown	Department of Environment, Ireland	Gabrielle_mckeown@environ.ie
Abid Mehmood	University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Abid.Mehmood@newcastle.ac.uk
Liz Mills	Liz Mills Associates	lizmills@ukgateway.net
Houari Mired	Sorbonne University, Paris	Houari.Mired@newcastle.ac.uk
Joao Mourato	Bartlett School of Planning, University College London	j.mourato@ucl.ac.uk
Christian Muschwitz	University of Trier	muschwitz@uni-trier.de
Christabel Myers		Christabel-myers@tiscali.co.uk
Sean Nethercott	GVA Grimley	Sean.nethercott@gvagrimley.co.uk
Emma Richardson	Glasgow and Clyde Valley Joint Planning Committee	Michelle_mcarthur@gcvcore.gov.uk
Tim Richardson	University of Sheffield	Tim.Richardson@sheffield.ac.uk
John Rigby	Sheffield City Council	John.rigby@sheffield.gov.uk
Per Roen	Rogaland County, Norway	Per.Roen@rogfk.no
Elizabeth Ruffell	Bartlett School of Planning, University College London	Elizabeth.ruffell@westsussex.gov.uk
Michael Sanders	Michael Sanders and Associates	Michael.nweurope@btconnect.com

Nicole Schaefer	BBR – Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, Germany	Nicole.Schaefer@bbr.bund.de
Kevin Scobell	Smartlife INTERREG Project	Kevin.scobell@cambridgeshire.gov.uk
Lisette Simcock	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	
Martin Simmons	Regional spatial planning consultant	Jmartin.simmons@virgin.net
Andy Smith	Warwickshire County Council	andysmith@warwickshire.gov.uk
Ben Stalham	Atisreal Ltd	Ben.stalham@atisreal.com
Monica Tanaka	INTERREG IIIB NWE Programme	monica@nweurope.org
Sandy Taylor	Birmingham City Council	Sandy.Taylor@birmingham.gov.uk
Robin Thompson	Bartlett School of Planning, University College London	Robinthompson50@aol.com
Michael Thompson	Advantage West Midlands	Mjt1066654390@aol.com
Tony Travis	Tourism Consultant	tony@e-w-tourism.demon.co.uk
Richard Tuffs	Kent County Council	Richard.Tuffs@kent.gov.uk
Wouter van der Heijde	Ministry of Housing, Spatial Development and the Environment, Netherlands	Wouter.vanderHeijde@minvrom.nl
Roger Vickerman	University of Kent	r.w.vickerman@kent.ac.uk
Erzsebet Vajdovich Visy	VATI, Budapest	evisy@vati.hu

Jim Walsh	National University of Ireland, Maynooth	Jim.walsh@may.ie
Garry White	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	garry.white@odpm.gsi.gov.uk
Bernadette Williams	University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Bernie.Williams@newcastle.ac.uk
Vivian Winterhoff	London School of Economics	V.Winterhoff@lse.aca.uk
Michelle Wishardt	CUDEM, Leeds Metropolitan University	M.Wishardt@leedsmet.ac.uk