

MEMO:

## **ECTP-CEU COMMENTS ON ESPON'S FUTURE**

The NTCCP meeting in Budapest discussed the post 2013 future of ESPON.

A new organisational framework is considered, the establishment of an EGCT has been proposed and many questions appeared to be still open.

From the side of the European planning practitioners, organized in ECTP-CEU next considerations clarify our standpoint.

The importance of the continuity of the activities of ESPON and the resulting large quantity of information about Europe's development, may not be underestimated:

In the rather few years that ESPON organised and guided studies, an impressive quantity of knowledge and information has been created which supports evidence based development policy decisions.

Besides, the newly produced and gradually growing information enables monitoring and, where needed, adjusting current and future developments.

This greatly supports and will further support the effectiveness of investments in projects, not only of the EU co-funding.

The produced facts and figures, together with qualitative information about cultural and natural aspects of regions and cities, are essential to discover and unleash the potentials for economic developments and innovation. The diversity of specific qualities in Europe's regions and urban areas, which is an asset for innovation and development, requires adequate information for functional areas on the regional and urban levels.

ESPON gradually produces that information which is necessary to meet the Europe 2020 goals of smart, inclusive and sustainable development.

Continuity of the ESPON organisation as producer of information and understanding of developments on the regional and urban levels is essential since it has been widely acknowledged that cities and (city) regions are the engines of the economic development and innovation in Europe.

However, the organisation of the first phase of ESPON which related to Interreg and its procedures, created next to some starting problems, a drawback.

The institutions, able to carry out high quality ESPON studies are confronted with extraordinary bureaucratic burdens. These result from the compilation of the requirements for justifying activities and expenditures by beneficiaries of subsidies, with the regulations and procedures related to the public procurement of services.

This accumulation of procedural requirements caused reluctance among non-academic institutes to get involved in ESPON projects. As a result almost all ESPON studies are contracted to academic and national research institutions, which unavoidably tend to take a quite theoretical, abstract approach, even on the targeted analyses on stakeholders demand.

The applicability on the ground in European regions and cities of the results of ESPON studies necessitates a balanced involvement of high quality practitioners and academics. A more intense relation to spatial planning practice increases the understanding as well as the acceptance on the ground to utilize the results of the studies.

This would enhance the relevance of ESPON studies for regional and urban decision makers.

Against this background, the council of European planning practitioners (ECTP-CEU) welcomed the proposal to reorganise ESPON in future in a somewhat more independent way, away from the extraordinary bureaucratic requirements. This would enable ESPON to conclude contracts in a more “normal” way. ESPON could for instance, like proposed, take the form of an EGTC.

A type of organisation allowing for less bureaucratic sets of requirements for carrying out ESPON studies, would thus support the continuity as well as the relevance of future ESPON work. Quite understandingly the steering by national representatives remains important. But since ESPON proofed in the rather short period of its existence to be effective, a more flexible and lean remote steering would enhance the efficiency of the procedures of the organisation as well as its attractiveness for the involvement of practitioners.

Hopefully, this helps the continuation and relevance of ESPON’s success.

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