

Summary of the Inception Report of the Targeted Analysis project on the Potential of Rural Regions: PURR

Three of the five stakeholders in this project are from the UK (North Yorkshire, Dumfries and Galloway and the Welsh Assembly Government) and the University of the South Bank is part of the project team. In addition the project will draw heavily on the findings and concepts developed in the EDORA project on the diversity of rural regions within Europe, which was led by the Millennium University Institute of the Highlands and Islands. Thus this is a project likely to be of particular interest to UK practitioners, especially those dealing with rural regions.

The central challenge for the project is to develop a methodology to enable the territorial potential of rural regions to be assessed. The Report says that the methodology will evolve through the course of the project. The emphasis is on providing practical outputs that can be used by the stakeholder regions.

Benchmarking the Stakeholder Regions

Early work in PURR has focused on benchmarking the five stakeholder regions (the other two are in Norway and Latvia) in their European context. The Report commends the value of such “spatial positioning”. It notes that “The results of numerous ESPON projects have increased opportunities for domestic actors throughout Europe to attempt spatial positioning at the national and sub-national levels and projects seeking to do this are being or have been carried out in Austria, the Flemish Region of Belgium, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands (Böhme and Waterhout 2008).”

The benchmarking is expected to deliver:

- A quantitative description of the structures of each of the Stakeholder regions in a European context. The description will be based mainly on Espon typologies and indicators, and it will include relevant structural information. Each Stakeholder region will be benchmarked to relevant “averages” in the ESPON data.
- A quantitative/qualitative description of each of the Stakeholder regions based also on the documents and data already provided by the Stakeholders.
- A more qualitative analysis of the potentials of each of the Stakeholder regions based on the two preceding bullet points, supplemented by information from EU and national policy documents. This will seek to isolate factors that influence the regional potential in a negative and a positive manner, respectively. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the Stakeholder regions, when it comes to regional potential?

- A comparison between the Stakeholder regions' potentials, aimed at isolating similarities and differences between the regions.

Regional Workshops with the Stakeholders

The research team are holding a series of regional workshops – one with each stakeholder. These involve visioning exercises and semi-structured interviews and / or focus groups. They will generate qualitative data about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the region, challenges, potentials and priorities and also assess the appropriateness and consequences of various policy options.

Methodological challenges

Key methodological issues to be addressed in PURR are how to balance quantitative and qualitative measures; how to balance “hard” objective data and “soft” perceptions data to provide detailed and reliable information for further analysis; how to balance aggregate and individual indicators, how to balance universal and context specific measures.

Lead Partner: The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research

Other Partners: London South Bank University and Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences.

Related ESPON projects: EDORA and TeDi from 2013 programme and the ESPON 2006 Project 2.3.2 “Governance of territorial and urban policies from EU to local level”.

Future Reports: Interim Report December 2010; Draft Final Report July 2011; Final Report November 2011.

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