

Summary of the Interim Report of the ESPON Targeted Analysis project on Territorial Performance Monitoring (TPM)

Although none of the five stakeholder regions are from the UK, this is a report that should be of interest to anyone involved in regional planning, benchmarking and monitoring. The project's main objective is to develop tools in order to support regions in their attempts to monitor their performance in addressing the main European challenges identified by previous ESPON projects (demography (ageing), new energy paradigm, climate change, and globalisation) in their regional policies. A regional dimension is seen as crucial to achieving resilience in the face of these challenges.

The project involves a qualitative analysis of the regional planning systems and policies in the five stakeholder regions (Flanders, North Rhine – Westphalia, Navarre, Dublin and Catalonia) in order to provide an overview of how they deal with the European challenges listed above. There is also a quantitative EU-level benchmarking exercise to position a region in a comparison with all other EU regions.

The team is working on, but has not yet completed, a draft monitoring tool kit which any region should be able to use.

Performance of Planning Systems

With much debate about planning in the UK at present, the discussion of the planning systems in the stakeholder regions is interesting. The project looks at the capacity of the five different planning systems. The assessment of a planning system in relation to its capacity to tackle macro challenges (e.g. globalization, climate change, demography, energy, etc.). This entails their capacity to generate feasible strategies, and adopt flexible measures. Vertical and horizontal coordination are considered to be important, as well as conflict resolution. "If the spatial strategy is shared among different stakeholders and embedded in a multi-scalar approach it can become a powerful tool to coordinate and to frame sectoral approaches" (p.20-21).

Not surprisingly, the assessment finds that "The more the planning system is limited to physical aspects, the less it presents strategic and coordinative capacities."

There is a useful discussion, with examples, of ways to use surveys, Dephi methods and focus groups to collect "pseudo-quantitative data".

Benchmarking and the ESPON Hyper Atlas

The ESPON Hyper Atlas potentially provides a vehicle for use in benchmarking. However, the report notes a number of limitations that currently restrict its usefulness to practitioners. In response, the project is developing a benchmarking tool that could have a wide application. However, the report emphasises that the value of any benchmarking depends on the quality of the available data. The draft monitoring tool kit should fit for most regions in Europe. However, it has to be adapted in each region to the specific situation in terms of governance system, resources, already existing tools, etc.

The aims and objectives of monitoring need to be debated within each region. Monitoring is not a policy-neutral exercise.

The report recommends that in the long-run the ESPON programme should create a support structure for regions that want to elaborate their customised Hyper Atlas input files.

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