

ESPON 2013 Database

The Inception Report discusses a number of “challenges” for the project. The first is the delivery of basic datasets derived from EUROSTAT and the European Environment Agency at NUTS 2 and NUTS 3 levels according to NUTS 2003 and NUTS 2006 divisions. The essence of the problem is that EUROSTAT is proposing use of the new 2006 NUTS divisions, though basic data like population is not complete for these units for all countries. In particular, there are gaps in countries where there have been important changes between the 2003 and 2006 units and the data for the 2003 division is no longer available. The proposed solution is to produce a provisional dataset based on the 2003 divisions, and then develop an equivalent dataset based on 2006 divisions. Fortunately, the Lead Partner had downloaded the data on the 2003 units just before EUROSTAT removed them from its website. In the longer term, though, ESPON will use the 2006 units.

Challenge 2 is the harmonization of time series data for basic socio-economic indicators for 1995-2006. Again this is a problem arising from changing regional divisions (NUTS 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2006).

The third Challenge is to harmonise data at world/neighbourhood and European/regional levels. The issue here is that beyond Europe the data is essentially available at the level of nation states, whereas in Europe we have NUTS2 and NUTS3. Harmonisation would make it possible to enlarge the scales of analysis, including in terms of time series data. The researchers propose using an expert to make the connection into the United Nations databases.

Next is the harmonization of data at European/regional and national/local levels. While ESPON has worked down to NUTS 3 level, this still entails aggregation and averaging that obscures important differences within a NUTS3 region. The ESPON 2013 database thus requires data at what is now called LAU1 and LAU2 levels, that were previously NUTS 4 and 5 –i.e. down to neighbourhood level. In the absence of data at this level from EUROSTAT, the project proposes an exploratory approach, based on work already done by Nordregio and through discussion with some national statistical institutes.

Challenge 5 is how to combine socio-economic data for NUTS units with environmental data that is available on a regular grid, most notably the Corine land cover data. This was a problem met in ESPON 2006, and addressed by use of GIS to transpose the environmental data into NUTS. However, there were still problems (see ESPON 2006 project 3.4.3 for discussion of the “Multiple Area Unit Problem”). Progress has been made at the EEA end and the aim of the project team is to enhance data exchange between ESPON and the EEA, building a common data infrastructure for ensure full compatibility of databases.

The sixth challenge is essentially how to construct spatial units for cities based on measures of spatial relations such as flows and links. As noted already, the original data could be from a grid source or an administrative unit like an LAU2. There are in fact four levels at which Europe’s cities are currently defined: sub-city districts and core cities (in

the Urban Audit in both cases); morphological agglomerations , and finally functional areas. The task of the project team will be to align what in all are 7 different databases.

The seventh challenge entails networking with external data providers, such as those already mentioned, but also national statistics offices and the OECD. Finally there is the challenge of internal networking with the various ESPON projects, for which a web-based question and answer system is being explored.

The project is also working on a map-kit tool for ESPON. It is in two separate parts – one for NUTS 2003 and the other for NUTS 2006. Each of these is backed by folders for data, geometry and layouts. The Inception Report also discusses the ESPON Database Prototype. There is also a useful annex handing down “The 10 Commandments for Data Collection”.