

FOCI INTERIM REPORT SUMMARY

This project is concerned with Europe's cities as the major drivers of growth. As the authors note, the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion recognised the need to support cities and the agglomeration economies they create, but also the problems posed by their diseconomies such as congestion.

The report starts with a literature review on “the current state of knowledge concerning trends, driving forces and perspectives in the fields of demography, economy, accessibility, social cohesion, environment, city-hinterland relationships and polycentricity”. Key point from this are:

- The European Commission's emphasis on competitiveness. The research team argue that competitiveness needs to be related to cohesion and sustainable development;
- Metropolitan areas are younger than average and have higher rates of natural increase;
- Urban competitiveness is closely related to regional competitiveness, but remains an elusive concept, with many of the key drivers rather difficult to measure;
- Involvement in diverse networks is important for a city's resilience in the global economy;
- Knowledge produces growth and growth attracts knowledge;
- There is growing congestion in Europe's major transport networks;
- Public policies at national and city levels are major determinants of social exclusion in cities;
- Urban sprawl in Europe since 1990 has added an urban area about the size of Luxembourg;
- The spread of metropolitan areas is changing city-hinterland relations, with cities less dependent on hinterlands for resources other than labour;
- The key to polycentric development at any scale is the potential complementarities between the network of settlements.

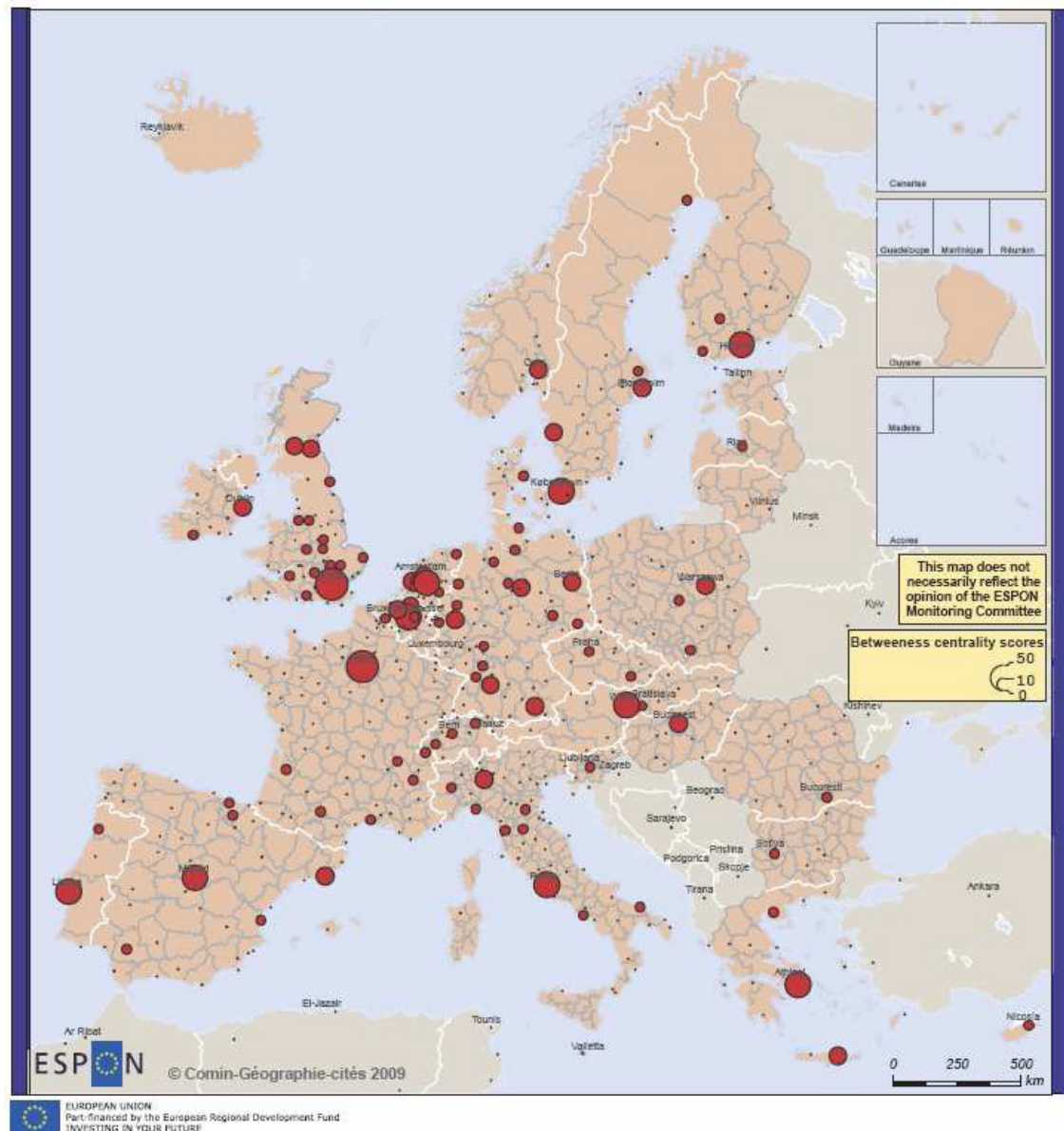
The report also recognizes that the economic crisis may fundamentally reshape our understandings. While some drivers of growth will remain valid, others could change. For example, there could be a revival of endogenous growth, a shift to a green economy or an EU turning inwards and away from enrolling new members or neighbourhood co-operation programmes and towards stronger links with USA.

The review of drivers of urban change does seem to leave some key aspects unexplored. For example, there is discussion of urban sprawl, but the relation between the supply of brownfield land, household formation and planning policies is not set out in Figure 2 (p.16). Similarly, household formation / age specific headship rates are not picked up in the section / table on driving forces (pages 21-22). The issues are not just about population. In the recession, for example, we might expect falls in headship rates as people economise by sharing properties for longer. Similarly, the significance of participation in higher education as an urban driver is also not mentioned explicitly,

though certainly in UK the growth of student populations in the last 15 years has been important in the housing, leisure and labour markets of many urban centres.

Like many other ESPON projects, this Interim Report laments the data problems that the team is struggling with. The expectations of data from the Urban Audit have been frustrated. This raises questions (rehearsed in the report) about the capacity of EUROSTAT to deliver the quality of data required when it is required. The team's response is to "sacrifice exhaustive coverage for understanding".

The section on empirical findings gives a flavour of what is to come and it looks very interesting. There is original work on cities in networks that focuses on financial networks and research networks. We are promised not just static analysis but dynamic analysis and a dynamic typology of cities in the European urban system. This type of work should be of interest to those producing integrated regional strategies, for example.



The map shows the centrality of cities’ involvement in what are seen as the most innovative sectors - nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive sciences. The team has looked at links between research organizations within European funded research and technology development projects dedicated to these technologies. The data came from the EC database CORDIS RTD-PROJECTS drawn from the 2nd to 6th European Framework Programmes for Research and Technological development. The authors observe that “We can then create urban networks, by aggregating CORDIS data at the city level for measuring the links which are created between cities by these networks.”

There is discussion of the problems of getting data to look at the important issue of social cohesion within cities. The team proposes to make use of case studies and lists a number of proposed case study cities, based on a simple 2 dimensional matrix of the city’s

position in global networks and the kind of ideologies of welfare that define the relevant national system of welfare provision. London is one of the proposed cities, which are mainly capitals, but include two cities from some countries (e.g. Sweden and Belgium) but none from others (e.g. Ireland). The rationale for the actual choice of cities is not given.

There are also to be case studies of city-hinterland relationships. Glasgow is chosen for one of these.

FOCI proposes to launch a participative scenario building process. This will mean that they will be engaging with “a carefully selected group of stakeholders from across Europe, representing a wide variety of interests and perspectives”.