

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLANDS – EUROPEAN ISLANDS AND COHESION POLICY – “EUROISLANDS”

This is a Priority 2 Project, so responds to a user demand for targeted analysis. The situation of islands is neatly summarised as follows: “islands territories cannot be competitive “vis a vis” the European mainland (and the worldwide economy) if they try to compete over the same products and services, as they have to face a lot of extra costs. Islands cannot be attractive for the same reasons as the mainland and especially urban areas, as they have different characteristics. At the same time islands are costly areas for the public sector which has to provide infrastructure (e.g. ports) and services (e.g. transport, health, education, administration etc) even for a very small number of inhabitants”.

The report quotes from the Final Synthesis Report of ESPON 2006: “Attractiveness and liveability of an area do not only depend on the hard and tangible factors such as infrastructure, human capital and risk of hazards. Soft location factors are of increasing importance for an area to attract both investments and also skilled labour. Soft factors like governance, culture and high quality urban and natural environment are important parts of regions’ territorial potential and offer synergies for jobs and growth agenda”

Thus the researchers argue that islands need to turn disadvantages into advantages through integrated strategies. For example, they need to cherish small scale activities, the natural and cultural environment, and find niche markets for products. The three fundamental questions that must be answered are:

- What is the situation of Europe’s islands within the context of sustainable development?
- What has caused this situation?
- What policies would be appropriate for increasing the attractiveness of islands (to businesses and to people) and ensure that their development meets the tenets of sustainable development?

Data is to be collected for 28 islands in all, which include Orkney mainland, Shetland mainland, Lewis and Harris and the Isle of Wight, though none of the six case study islands is in the UK. The data on islands will be grouped into clusters and a SWOT analysis conducted on each cluster. A further intention is to develop an Islands Impact Assessment (IIA), drawing on the EU’s Impact assessment Guidelines and ESPON work on Territorial Impact Assessment. The IIA method will be tested on 6 islands.

The report includes a substantial review of literature on islands and on attractiveness. In addition an Islands Atlas is promised along the lines of the ESPON Atlas (2006).