

ESPON 2020
Ex Ante Evaluation
Draft Final report
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CoR	Committee of the Regions
CP	Cooperation Programme
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
CU	Coordination Unit
DG	Director General
EC	European Commission
ECPN	ESPON Contact Points Network
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EP	European Parliament
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
NTCCP	Group of National Territorial Cohesion Contact Points
JWG	Joint Working Group
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MS	Member State
MS and PS	Member States and Partner States
OP	Operational Programme
OS	Operation Specification
PS	Partner State
PST	Project Support Team
TA	Territorial Agenda
ToR	Terms of Reference
WP	Work Package

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme is to support EU Cohesion Policy and other European Structural Investment (ESI) sectoral policies and programmes, as well as national and regional policies, through the production, dissemination and promotion of territorial evidence.

For ESPON to foster policy development, enhance institutional capacity, and support efficient operation in the public administration, the Joint Working Group (JWG) has identified the following mission: *“to continue the consolidation of a European Territorial Observatory Network and grow the provision and policy use of pan-European, comparable, systematic and reliable territorial evidence”* (ESPON CP, 2014: 9).

OVERALL PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

In order to fulfil its mission, ESPON 2020 is organised around 2 Priority Axes:

- Priority Axis 1: Territorial Evidence, Transfer, Observation, Tools and Outreach
- Priority Axis 2: Technical Assistance

Axis 1 acts as ‘umbrella’ measure covering all ESPON research and knowledge transfer-related activities, while technical assistance is compounded into Axis 2. The activities envisaged under Priority Axis 1 are articulated as follows:

- Specific Objective 1: Continued production of territorial evidence, through applied research and analyses,
- Specific Objective 2: Upgraded knowledge transfer and use of analytical user support,
- Specific Objective 3: Improved observation and tools for territorial analyses,
- Specific Objective 4: Wider outreach and uptake of territorial evidence,
- Specific Objective 5: Leaner, effective and efficient implementation provisions and proficient programme assistance.

Compared with its predecessors (i.e. ESPON 2006 and ESPON 2013), the new ESPON Cooperation Programme displays a series of potentially innovative features, including:

- The creation of a new legal entity, the ESPON EGTC, which will act as a single beneficiary implementing the content of the ESPON 2020 programme,
- Simplification of the programme structure, now built around two Priority Axes only,
- The creation of Project Support Teams dedicated to steering and streamlining the production of outsourced research,
- Substantial strengthening of in-house administrative and technical capacity of the CU,
- New actions articulated under Specific Objectives 1, 3, and 4 providing ‘on demand’ and focused territorial evidence.

As discussed in fuller detail in the main body of the report, such new features are directly related to the need for renewal, reorientation and upgrade identified in previous programme evaluations, and respond to the challenges that ESPON is called upon to face in the new programming period. Hence, if on the one hand revision of the way the programme is structured and operates, and strengthening of the internal capacity of the CU, are measures deemed coherent and proportionate with the main objective of the programme, which is to take a step forward in terms of management capacity, and the steering and production of territorial knowledge. On the other hand, the expectation is that this leap forward will translate into stronger added value for the programme, particularly in terms of its contribution to the development of EU policies.

In this context, it is worth noting that at this stage there are limits to the extent to which ESPON 2020 strategy can be assessed, and for two main reasons. Firstly, the level of generality of the ESPON strategy as described in the Cooperation Programme. Since an operational strategy will be presented by the EGTC in the Operational Proposal and the Multiannual Work Plan, a part of the organisational details and content-related issues are not included in the CP. Here finalisation is in fact deferred to a second phase that will come under way once the CP is approved by the Commission. This applies, for example, to the budgetary details regarding the division of expenditure among Specific Objectives, which still have to be confirmed. It is worth noting that in order to prepare the ground, and move swiftly through this second phase, a large number of thematic documents touching upon various programme aspects were prepared by the MA and CU and tabled for discussion in the course of a number of JWG meetings. Although such documentation is not formally part of the CP, it was taken into account during the programme assessment.

Secondly, the bulk of the programming process has so far focused on organisational issues while the scoping and fine-tuning of the research topics and definition of the research programme is currently ongoing through a participatory process that will characterise the entire ESPON 2020 programme. This is clearly a crucial aspect of the programme as ESPON will need to generate the kind of knowledge sought after by various EU policy communities, and the other target groups identified in the CP. Having only limited information on the themes that will be explored inevitably hampers the depth of the analysis undertaken in the ex ante evaluation.

EXTERNAL COHERENCE AND FRAMING THE PROGRAMME ADDED VALUE

Taken as a whole, the ESPON 2020 shows a marked degree of coherence with the objectives and targets outlined in the Strategic Reference Documents. This should not come as a surprise given that the ESPON aims and goals have always proved broadly coherent with the EU cohesion policy agenda (see Section 4). Lack of evidence on the impact of Structural Funds interventions, coupled with the perceived shortcomings in their implementation, were in fact among the key drivers that led to the establishment of ESPON in the first place.

As in previous evaluations (e.g. EC Study, 2006), the analysis undertaken classified the Programme support effects as being mainly 'indirect'. In other words, ESPON is not expected to support achievement of the EU 2020 goals directly. Rather, ESPON's activities will focus on generating territorial knowledge and related tools for analysis, which in turn will contribute to delivery of EU 2020 targets and achievement of enhanced regional conversion. It follows that the effectiveness of the Programme

outcomes will be at least partially dependent on the willingness of policy-makers to consider and apply ESPON-generated knowledge within the relevant policy processes.

Europe 2020 Strategy and Territorial Agenda 2020

During ESPON 2013 a number of projects began the process of mapping and conceptually framing the territorial dynamics relevant to the achievement of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Notable examples include the ‘Spatial Indicators for a ‘Europe 2020 Strategy’ Territorial Analysis (SIESTA) study, the ESPON Atlas and the work that underpinned the preparation of the second Synthesis Report. Similarly, in many instances it was found that the development dynamics singled out by the Territorial Priorities identified in TA 2020 had already been the subject of extensive ESPON research. ESPON 2020 will therefore be in a favourable position to build upon, and further refine, a substantial body of knowledge. However, the extent to which this potential will be realised remains to be seen. Details of the research themes to be explored, and how these topics are to be translated into actions, packages of projects and project briefs will in fact be debated and agreed upon during preparation of the Annual and Multiannual Work Programmes.

Coherence with indications contained in the funds’ regulations

With regard to ESI Funds Regulations, in the main the ESPON 2020 develops positive relations of complementarity. One key underlying assumption to this judgment is that the place-based approach advocated in the CPR, which, for example, brought about local development strategies, but also macro-regional strategies and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITIs), will in turn create the need for a large quantum of territorial evidence that is to be flexible to the scale and boundaries of the territory studied.

The Programme will be implemented under the interregional strand of ETC and was found well aligned with the provisions contained in EU Regulation 1303/2013 and EU Regulation 1299/2013. The selection of thematic objective and related investment priority was deemed coherent and correctly justified. ESPON will in fact focus on Investment Priority 11. Art. 7 of the ETC Regulation (1299/2013) specifies that, in accordance with art. 5 of the ERDF Regulation (1301/2013), interregional cooperation programmes should concentrate on: *“enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration”*. With regard to ESPON, this should be achieved through: *“the strengthening of the evidence base in order to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy and the achievement of the thematic objectives through the analysis of development trends”*.

The rationale for this choice has to do with the fact that evidence-informed policy development, including a territorial dimension, will contribute to the efficiency of implementation of ESI funds and the Europe 2020 Strategy as well as other territorially relevant policies (see ESPON CP, 2014: 14). This said, it is clear that the need for territorial evidence is not sector-specific, but rather spans across the entire range of thematic objectives identified in the CPR. ESPON 2020 will therefore support ESI Fund interventions through the production of studies, briefs, data, maps and tools regardless of the mix of thematic objectives selected by the constituent Managing Authorities for their programmes.

Finally, the CPR, stresses the importance of coordinating the use of the ESI Funds with other Union Policies and Instruments. The CP specifies that under Specific Objective 2

(which focuses on tools for territorial analyses) close coordination with other institutions, such as EUROSTAT, EEA, JRC, EIB will be sought. In a similar fashion, under specific objective 4 (which focuses on outreach), the CP indicates that cooperation between ESPON and INTERREG EUROPE, URBACT III and INTERACT III should be continued and supported (ESPON CP, 2014: 25). However, information on how the annual and multiannual work programmes will build on the indications contained in the CP is not yet available.

Key points emerging from the stakeholder consultation

In order to identify the main challenges that the new Programme is likely to face during the 2014-2020 period, the evaluators conducted interviews with external stakeholders.

Among the key challenges identified, the stakeholders referred to the need for ESPON to adopt a proactive attitude strivings not only to observe, but also to help shaping the EU policy agenda. To inform policy-making more directly, the majority of the stakeholders interviewed were of the view that a more structured approach than hitherto adopted will be needed, particularly with regard to the way ESPON interfaces with other EU institutions and bodies. This aspect of the Programme is connected to a slightly different and broader relevant challenge, i.e. the need to maximise ownership of ESPON research findings across all ESPON 2020 actions.

Stakeholders pointed out that making sure that large and complex projects, supported under Specific Objective 1 and 3, deliver on time and according to the agreed specifications has proved a challenge in the past and is likely to remain so in the future. In order to ensure maximum timeliness and reliability in all research undertaken by ESPON, it was recommended that the Observatory should have sufficient technical capacity, in-house and/or with the support of external experts, to be able to work with research teams, so as to keep projects on track and make sure they deliver what it is expected of them.

Consistency with the main focal challenges

Evaluators found that the ESPON 2020 strategy addresses all of the main weaknesses that emerged from implementation of previous programmes. ESPON 2020 in fact tackles the 8 focal challenges identified through a series of actions. Among them:

- The establishment of a new EGTC as a way to foster coordination and reduce administrative burdens,
- Enhancing the in-house capacity of the Programme, as proposed and discussed in various JWG meetings (see Section 6.2),
- Introduction of Project Support Teams, as a way to achieve a closer research focus and more scientific quality,
- Greater focus on policy demands, with one of the Specific Objectives of Axis 1 (the S.O. 2) dedicated to swifter and policy-oriented targeted analysis,
- More uptake and usability of ESPON production, through a renewal of ESPON databases and online tools (S.O.3), more focus on diffusion of ESPON findings, a revised ECP network.

To conclude, the analyses undertaken on ESPON 2020 external context, and the changes made in light of the lessons learned from previous programmes, revealed a

general consensus over the aspects of the Programme that are in need of renewal, reorientation and upgrade. This being the case, the degree of change that the new Programme has been asked to accommodate should not be underestimated. There is no doubt that the new Programme features described above have brought ESPON into a closer alignment with the objectives and provisions contained in the Strategic Reference Documents.

Completeness and consistency of the SWOT analysis

The CP includes a revised SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis was adopted as a starting point to work on the successes and weaknesses identified in previous Programme evaluations, undertaken on behalf of the CU, the MA and the EC. The ESPON 2020 SWOT analysis summarizes, for each issue identified in past evaluations:

- the strengths of the new strategy, i.e. the main choices or policy tools to address the issues/focal challenges identified,
- the weaknesses of the past held to have been overcome thanks to the new strategy,
- the opportunities, i.e. how the new strategy will contribute to more effective and efficient Programme delivery, and
- the threats, i.e. the main critical factors of the strategy to be taken into account (so as to be prepared to tackle them).

The evaluator suggested the SWOT should go into further detail with regard to the issues identified, and more specifically matters related to improved knowledge transfer, swifter policy-relevant analysis, and higher scientific quality. Acting upon the evaluator's recommendation, in subsequent Programme's drafts, the SWOT was refined and now provides an overarching framework for the entire ESPON 2020 strategy detailed in the CP.

Respect of the partnership principle

A significant point in the assessment of the added value of the Programme is consideration as to whether its preparation has taken into account the opinions and contributions of the most relevant stakeholders.

The assessment of the respect of the partnership principle reveals that several steps for the involvement of ESPON stakeholders have been taken. The drafting process of the ESPON 2020 CP shows a profound and continuous level of involvement of the 32 Member and Partner States in all the phases in preparation of the Programme.

Moreover, the final version of the CP includes both clarification of the target groups to be addressed by the Programme, and a specific section dedicated to the strategy for the involvement of partners, describing the participatory process put in place before and during the CP elaboration.

In particular, one European-wide, open web-based consultation and various national consultations were organised in March/April 2014 with the focus on definition and selection of the priorities and related specific objectives, on the Programme indicators and on the proposed allocation of funds. The main results of the consultation are summarized in a dedicated report (Draft cooperation Programme: summary report of the outcome of the consultation process - 15 April 2014) and briefly described in the CP.

Additionally, a dedicated feedback session targeting the European institutions, bodies and organizations was held in March 2014. This marks a further step forward with regard to broader participation in the design of the Programme.

Horizontal principles

As specified in article 8(7) of Regulation 1299/2013, each cooperation Programme should, where deemed appropriate by the relevant Members States, include a description of the treatment of the ‘horizontal principles’. These encompass: (a) environmental protection, (b) equal opportunities, and (c) equality between men and women. While ESPON is exempted from points (a) and (b), the article foresees a different application for point (c). In this case, the text of the Regulation allows MSs - subsequent to assessment of its relevance to the content of the Programme – to decide whether or not to include a section regarding the promotion of equality between men and women (see Reg.1303/2013 (letters *a*) and *b*) of article 8.7).

The Final version of the CP accordingly entails a specific section explaining, albeit in outline, how ESPON intends to promote equality between men and women. Section 8.3 of the CP underlines that the issue of gender equality is not a primary focus of the ESPON 2020 Programme, given its nature and scope (providing European territorial evidence). However, the Single Beneficiary and the MA will adopt equal opportunities employment policies. In addition, external research teams tendering for ESPON contracts will also be questioned, and scored, on issues related to gender equality.

This provision is to be considered positively. However, the evaluator considers that a more gender-oriented perspective could be further promoted in specific and appropriate instances, i.e. in applied and targeted researches dealing with gender-sensitive topics. In order to enhance the gender orientation, the evaluator suggests appointing a member of the MC with specific delegation on equal opportunities and gender. This delegate should promote and signal the research topics in which equal opportunities and gender should be explicitly considered by ESPON activities.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

As regards the applicability of the SEA directive to the ESPON 2020 Programme, the Ministry for the Environment of Luxembourg - the authority responsible for the Strategic Environmental Assessment in Luxembourg - , recently clarified that “neither a screening nor a full assessment in the sense of the SEA directive and the “*loi modifiée du 22 mai 2008 relative à l’évaluation des incidences de certains plans et programmes sur l’environnement*” is required.

ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNAL COHERENCE

The structure presented in the CP improved the coherence and clarity of the ESPON 2020 Programme. The description of each Specific Objective has been better organised and more fully detailed, and they show a high level of consistency. More clarity could be achieved by adding information on what precisely PSTs and ECPs are, and including a list of the acronyms used.

For each Specific objective, the CP details the “*raison d’être*” of the intervention and its expected results. A strong focus is devoted to the goal of supporting target groups’ policy needs through ESPON knowledge. The goals of the four Specific Objectives are coherent with the mission of ESPON in terms of enhancing the policy-makers’

institutional capacity. Moreover, the strategy shows a clearer focus than in the past on a specific target (European level policy-makers).

The description of the Specific Objectives should be read together with the related result indicators. This information gives a clearer idea of the changes expected with the ESPON 2020 strategy: researches more relevant to policy, more usability of ESPON tools, more client satisfaction together with a larger uptake of ESPON results should reinforce the use of territorial knowledge throughout the activities related to European policy-making.

The “logic of change” of the Programme

The logic of change of the Programme has been analysed in order to pinpoint the main focal challenges of the strategy and the expected results, and place them in a sequence. The exercise helps towards identification of the main ESPON 2020 “intermediate results” which are to be considered relevant steps towards the expected final goals.

The analysis shows that user satisfaction, awareness of territorial information and higher product quality are conducive to the final goal of enhancing the use of territorial knowledge and strengthening institutional capacity.

The soundness of the strategy

The analysis, performed to verify whether the linkages between the ESPON 2020 focal challenges and the final expected changes are supported by appropriate policy features, resulted in a revised SWOT-like exercise of the ESPON 2020 strategy. The analysis shows that all the focal challenges identified for ESPON 2020 have been addressed with ad-hoc solutions, no single issue being left outstanding. However, not all of these solutions are described at the same level of detail and some possible threats should be carefully considered:

- The length of time in building up the EGTC could delay ESPON implementation and financial absorption; due to the relevance of this solution, it has to be considered as a capacity building policy and supported and assessed accordingly,
- Quality products favour confidence and use of territorial knowledge. The Programme should pay particular attention to how quality is addressed, which types of actions would require higher scientific quality than others, and how to monitor scientific quality; moreover, ESPON tool user-friendliness should also be cultivated.
- Identification needs to be made of the quantum of actions that the PSTs could reasonably support, in order to avoid the risk, as in the past, of a considerable number of knowledge providers receiving limited feedback,
- The role and scope of action of the ESPON 2020 ECP Network remains one element of the strategy that will require further detailing.

A step further: which target groups, which mechanisms promoting their cooperation

The CP classified two main groups of stakeholders: a key target group, consisting mainly of policy-makers involved in the field of Cohesion Policy and territorial policy; a secondary target group, composed by other stakeholders, practitioners, students.

The Operation Proposal will have to further detail the targeted audiences and cross-reference the target groups with the main changes expected from each specific objective. In effect, these changes could be more easily achieved if the specific characteristics of the main stakeholders are correctly taken into account.

In particular, three major questions to be discussed for a sounder strategy from now on are:

- What could promote the attention and engagement of target groups?
- What could enhance the role of a newly established organization, such as EGTC?
- What could smooth interactions among partners, in order to avoid or overcome bottlenecks and possible conflicts?

With reference to the first question, ESPON should foster the *perception of opportunity* deriving from participating in its activities; the perception of opportunity depends on the characteristics of the actor and can be seen in the form of a grant to be acquired (in the case of a knowledge-provider), or in terms of “window of opportunity” for problems to be solved (for a policy-maker or a technician), or in terms of increased reputation of actors participating in ESPON activities (for academics and professionals); attention paid to these aspects could strengthen the strategy of all the Axis 1’ Specific Objectives.

As far as the second question is concerned, the role of the newly established EGTC organization could be strengthened if the other actors perceive the effectiveness of its activity. In this respect, continuous performance feedback usually favours the perception of effectiveness of an actor's role, and the building of trust among the partners. Accordingly, achieving short-term and good quality results, together with an appropriate communication of such results, should be seen as a priority for the EGTC.

Coming to the third question, repeated interactions, recognized roles and shared rules of cooperation will favour mutual learning and commitment among partners. For example, well-planned involvement of the MC in the PST activities could favour this goal, while direct involvement of MC representatives in assessment of the EGTC could strengthen cooperation in achieving shared goals.

Consistency of financial allocation

The CP indicates for ESPON 2020 a budget of 48,678,824 Euros, in current prices. The ERDF support accounts for 85% of the budget, while the national counterpart amounts to 15%. No national private funding is provided.

The financial allocation between the two Axes (94% Axis 1; 6% Axis 2) shows a limited and reasonable amount dedicated to Technical Assistance and the major part devoted to Axis 1, entirely implemented through a Single beneficiary-Single Operation approach. Closer assessment of the consistency of financial allocations is not possible at the moment.

Even though not final, some documents discussed by the JWG preparing the Operation Specification suggest a larger part (around 50%) of available resources devoted to S.O.1, the remaining part being distributed among the other three Specific Objectives, favouring S.O.2 in particular; moreover, the Axis 1 budget seems to be dedicated mainly

to external expertise (about 70%), while the remaining part will be absorbed by the internal staff (and cover other related costs).

These, albeit preliminary, indications show a considerable financial outlay (i.e. management will cost more than in the past) aiming at a quantum leap in ESPON capacity. This enhancement should be read as a prerequisite for the overall Thematic Objective of strengthening the institutional capacity of other European administrations. The effectiveness of this choice will have to be assessed at the level of at the level of ESPON 2020 results achieved results achieved, in terms of both quantity and quality.

ASSESSMENT OF THE ADEQUACY OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

The establishment of the EGTC, with an appreciable increase in the number of human resources and competencies involved in-house in the Programme (as described in the interim documents¹), is to be seen as an **“internal” institutional capacity policy**, aiming at some intermediate results, and final goals.

The (albeit provisional) EGTC organization chart shows a clear shift from administration to content and could help overcome some of the weaknesses encountered in the past, with particular reference to the lack of steering and feedback to research providers, the under-use of ESPON tools, the need of communicating more and better ESPON findings.

The (intermediate) goal is enhancement of the ESPON internal capacity as a pre-condition for contributing to the external capacity (i.e. contributing to the enhancement of institutional capacity of other administrations which are expected to plan and implement their territorial policies better thanks, also, to the availability of territorial knowledge, facts and trends produced by ESPON). In other words, without a sound internal capacity, ESPON will hardly be able to contribute to strengthening the capacity of other administrations.

The effectiveness of the internal capacity will have to be assessed not only in terms of management costs (which will certainly be higher than in the past) but mainly in terms of quantity and quality of results achieved, including fewer burdens for beneficiaries.

The evaluator suggests that the EGTC should perform a self-assessment exercise with the goal of supporting the new organization, and more specifically identification and management of its fundamental process, stakeholders, clients and key results. A PST could be used as part of this process, taking the role of a self-assessment unit

Some risks are, however, to be carefully considered.

The new management system will require a variety of preparatory activities (for the process of preparation and evaluation of the Multiannual and Annual Programme, and for the hiring of the personnel), and as a consequence, additional time to be ready to start the implementation phase. This could also have consequences for the financial absorption of the Programme.

¹ “Second complementary information to the Note Financing the ESPON Programme presented for the DG Meeting of 3 April 2014”, version 14 April 2014.

Secondly, the new system will change the pattern of cooperation between the Monitoring Committee, the MA and the Single beneficiary (the EGTC). However, it is certainly true that the EGTC as a Single Beneficiary will result in a change in the relationships among the Partner States and the management. The direction is towards a more centralized system that will leave to the MC the role of general address and control of the Programme, while the detailed programming and all the management activities will be in the hands of the EGTC.

Well-planned involvement of PSTs, clear and continuous feedback on EGTC activities, good quality short-term results demonstrated by the EGTC (including in terms of leaner administration) could enhance the perception of effectiveness of the new management system and the commitment and steering of MC members. On the contrary, limited involvement of the MC and blurred results could fuel dynamics of suspicion or even conflict.

THE ESPON PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK AND THE SUITABILITY OF THE INDICATORS

The set-up of the ESPON 2020 performance framework and indicators has been one of the issues debated during the ex ante evaluation process.

Concerning result indicators:

- The result indicators included in the ESPON 2020 CP appear relevant to assessing progress towards achievement of the ESPON 2020 general goal.
- The CP drafters correctly reframed the wording of the five objectives, giving indication of the transformation to be achieved,
- The evaluator moreover positively welcomes the inclusion (in the final version of the CP) of a result indicator related to S.O. 5 Leaner administration (which was lacking in the previous drafts of the Programme), with the goal of assessing satisfaction with the new implementing provisions of ESPON 2020.

As for the performance framework, choosing to adopt a result indicator for Axis 1 appears more challenging than selecting output or financial indicators. Therefore, the evaluator positively welcomes this choice, as well as the selection of a key implementation step (the “full operation of the ESPON EGTC”) under Axis 2.

Summing up, the selected result indicators for ESPON 2020 appear to be relevant and capturing essential information on the progress of the Programme, and consistent with the nature and character of the Axes and Specific Objectives they refer to.

However:

- The current wording of the “indicators” in the CP properly refers to “measurement units”, while the measurement units are lacking in table 3 of the CP referring to result indicators; a small change and re-wording are suggested;
- Milestones and target values of Priority Axis 1 are not quantified, but defined only as “increases” from baseline values. Even though the lack of quantitative targets is not fully consistent with the methodological requirements of well-defined indicators, it is however reasonable in this specific case. As ESPON has not collected such information on outcomes, estimation of target values could prove far from realistic with the available information.

- All the selected indicators are qualitative in nature and they all refer to stakeholders' judgments and perceptions. This choice is not wrong in principle, even though it overlooks some relevant evaluative dimensions of the ESPON Programme's capacity (quality of products, efficiency of the management system, etc).

Finally, the multiple-layered process of defining ESPON strategy justifies a definition of targets in general terms in the CP, and consideration of indicators of a qualitative and perceptive nature. In the next steps of the ESPON programming phase, the Monitoring Committee should ask the Single Beneficiary to define more specific indicators for the Single Operation and in the Multiannual Work Plan. Indicators related to the quality of ESPON production or quantitative indicators on the reduction of burdens could fruitfully be included in the new ESPON Programme monitoring system, which will also have to collect the required information on the progress made on result indicators.

This will enable the MC to exercise a more thorough role of steering and control over the implementation of the Programme.

1 INTRODUCTION

ESPON aims to foster a European territorial dimension in development and cooperation through the production, dissemination and promotion of territorial evidence covering the entire territory of the 28 EU Members States, as well as 4 Partner States of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

A Joint Working Group comprising representatives from the 32 countries, EC representatives, the designated Managing Authority and the Coordination Unit, have been engaged in the process of drawing up the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme.

As part of this process, the MA contracted consultants for an ex-ante evaluation to be undertaken. According to Article 55(3) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) ex ante evaluators shall appraise:

- | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) the contribution to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, having regard to the selected thematic objectives and priorities, taking into account national and regional needs and potential for development as well as lessons drawn from previous programming periodsb) the internal coherence of the proposed Programme or activity and its relationship with other relevant instrumentsc) the consistency of the allocation of budgetary resources with the objectives of the Programmed) the consistency of the selected thematic objectives, the priorities and corresponding objectives of the programmes with the CSF, the Partnership Agreement and the relevant country specific recommendations adopted in accordance with Article 121(2) TFEU and where appropriate at national level, the National Reform Programmee) the relevance and clarity of the proposed Programme indicatorsf) how the expected outputs will contribute to resultsg) whether the quantified target values for indicators are realistic, having regard to the support envisaged from the ESI Fundsh) the rationale for the form of support proposedi) the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity for management of the Programmej) the suitability of the procedures for monitoring the Programme and for collecting the data necessary to carry out evaluationsk) the suitability of the milestones selected for the performance frameworkl) the adequacy of planned measures to promote equal opportunities between men and women and to prevent any discrimination, in particular as regards accessibility for persons with disabilitiesm) the adequacy of planned measures to promote sustainable developmentn) measures planned to reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries |
|---|

In order to contribute to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the new regulations for the period 2014-2020 support a more results-oriented programming process. In this context, ex ante evaluations are required to ensure that operational programmes clearly articulate their intervention logic and can demonstrate their contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy (see Guidance document on ex ante, pp. 3).

The EU framework providing context for the analysis included the following documentation, while a list containing all Strategic Reference Documents used for assessment of the external coherence of the Programme is provided in Annex 4).

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006
- Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006
- Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal
- Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings
- European Structural and Investment Funds: European Code of Conduct on Partnership (10th meeting), 21 June 2013
- EC (2013) Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation: Guidance document on Ex ante Evaluation, January 2013
- EC (2013) Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation: Draft Guidance on the performance framework review and reserve in 2014-2020, Version 3, 19 July 2013
- EC (2013) Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation: Concepts and Recommendations, October 2013
- EVALSED (2013) The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, September 2013

The ex ante evaluation exercise was conducted as a dynamic and iterative process starting in Spring 2013 and completed 15 months later with the draft final evaluation report delivered to the client group in early June 2014.

In addition to the present document, other key material generated by the consultants to provide feedback in relation to earlier iterations of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, and related documentation, included:

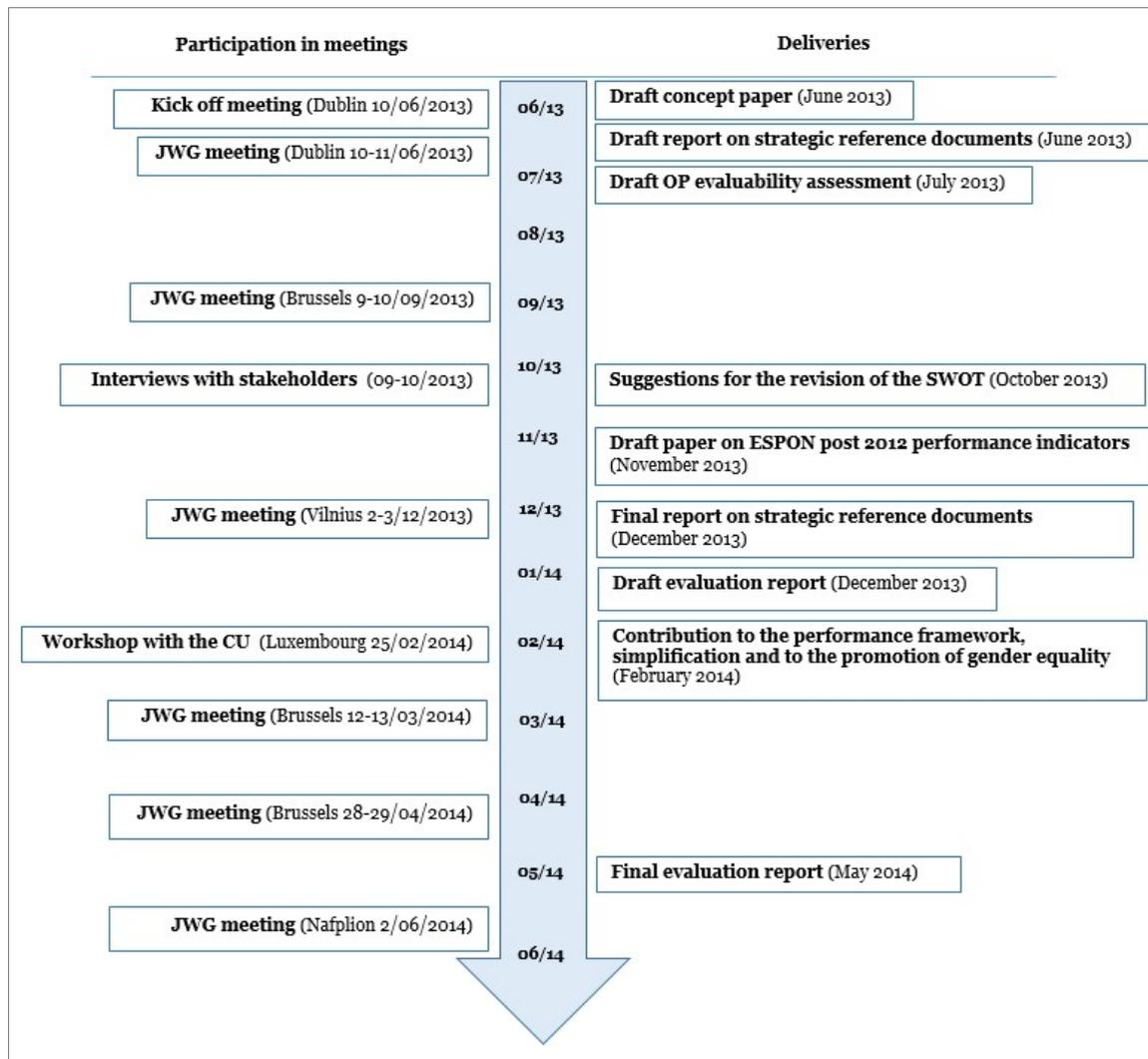
- Concept note on methodology (June 2013)
- Interviews with stakeholders (September-October 2013)
- Draft and final report on strategic reference documents (Jun. 2013 and Dec. 2013)
- First draft CP Evaluability assessment (June 2013)
- Note on draft SWOT analysis (Oct. 2013)
- Paper on Performance Indicators (Nov.2013)
- Draft evaluation report (Dec. 2013)
- Workshop with the CU on Performance framework and simplification and on the contribution to the promotion of gender equality: suggestions from the evaluators (Feb. 2014)

In order to follow progress on the CP drafting and present the ex ante evaluation recommendations, the evaluator participated in six meetings of the ESPON Joint Working Group.

Moreover, a workshop in Luxembourg was held to discuss with the ESPON CU elements of the Programme referring to the Performance Framework and simplification, and the contribution to promotion of gender equality.

Figure 1 below provides an overview of the main steps and deliveries of the ex ante evaluation process.

Figure 1 The ex ante evaluation process: an overview of the main steps and deliveries



The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 deals with the **methodology** adopted to carry out the ex ante evaluation,
- Section 3 is descriptive in nature and provides a preliminary **overview of the Programme architecture**,
- Section 4 focuses on the **external coherence** and the **Programme added value**, and explores the correlation existing between ESPON 2020 objectives on one hand, and guidance contained in the Strategic Reference Documents on the other,
- Section 5 provides an assessment of the **internal coherence and consistency** of ESPON 2020 as presented in the CP, including an evaluation of the **Programme’s intervention logic**. This means a consistency check between actions supported by the Programme, the expected outputs and results,
- Section 6 provides an assessment of **the management and control systems** put in place to monitor and steer the Programme forward,
- Section 7 focuses on the ESPON 2020 **performance framework** and **the clarity and relevance of the proposed indicators**,
- Finally, building on the results indicated in previous sections, Section 8 sums up the evaluator’s **conclusions and recommendations**.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach adopted in ESPON 2020 ex ante evaluation is theory driven. This means searching for, and rendering explicit, the key “causal claims” related to the Programme and their expected results. The main objective is to identify potential weaknesses and suggest possible improvements to the Programme logic, drawing attention to the question “why should the strategy work?”.

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the main approaches adopted for the ex-ante evaluation exercise, which are:

- The use of the **Evaluability Assessment** as a quick tool to scan the extent to which the Programme can be assessed, given the information available, and signal to the staff in charge of preparing the programme the gaps left in the Programme drafts,
- the **logical framework analysis** for assessment of the overall strategy and the community added value of the Programme;
- the **contribution analysis**, a theoretical approach supporting assessment of the internal coherence of a Programme, which splits programmes into causal packages (interventions, other external – rival or supporting - causal factors, mechanisms, outcomes) in order to render explicit the embedded theory of change with empirical evidence and conclude if the interventions foreseen should make (in an ex ante perspective) a difference. Reference to the CA was made to:
 - verify and assess the “completeness” of the theory of change embedded in the Programme;
 - analyse the extent to what each “causal package” (specific objectives, actions) is based on sound evidence that justifies the strategy, and to what extent the information is complete, the causal links can be identified, and evidence of the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the formulation process can be found;
 - set priorities among causal packages, identifying the degree to which the Programme focuses on the most important objectives/challenges and the consistency of financial allocation to axis and activities;
 - assess the appropriateness of the quality of output/outcome/impact indicators regarding each causal package of the Programme.
- the concept of **causal mechanisms**² of Barzelay (defined as “sometimes true, (partial) theorization of complex temporal phenomena in the social world”), which proved useful in analysing the policy processes with particular attention to the causal mechanisms triggered by the *design related-features* of the Programme. Through this approach possible ways to improve some parts of the ESPON 2020 strategy and organizational arrangements were considered (Section 5.4), prompted by the question: what mechanism could be applied to

² Barzelay, Michael (2007). "Learning from Second-Hand Experience: Methodology for Extrapolation-Oriented Case Research." *Governance* 20(3): 521-543.

achieve better/faster results, given the actors involved in the process? But also, are there any devices that could favour smoother implementation (for example, “performance feedback” mechanisms to monitor achievement of simplification goals)?

The assessment exercise encompassed a mixture of desk-based tasks and interviews with internal and external stakeholders. In addition to the Strategic Reference Documents, the material taken into consideration included all ESPON 2020 related documentation.

A set of 14 semi-structured interviews was undertaken with various stakeholders during September/October 2013 (See ANNEX 5. List of stakeholders contacted). The interview material helped evaluators to form a rounder view of the external pressures and challenges that the Programme is likely to face in the coming years. The results of interviews are briefly commented in section 4.1.3 and more in detail in the Final Report on Strategic Documents.

3 OUTLINE OF THE ESPON 2020 PROGRAMME

3.1 THE ORIGINS

Originally conceived during the intergovernmental process that led to the publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective at the end of the 1990s³, the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network was included in the framework of the Community Initiative INTERREG III in 2002. The ESPON programme was set up as a tool for the production of territorial knowledge, evidence and pan-European comparable data and indicators regarding the regions and cities of Europe to support policy-makers in widening and deepening the existing knowledge-base on European spatial development.

More specifically, during the period 2002-2006, ESPON was tasked with:

- Adding value to the existing national research studies by taking a clear European and transnational focus;
- Articulating the implications of the ESPD policy orientations;
- Contributing to a better understanding of the enhancement of the spatial dimension of Structural Funds and national sector policies;
- Supporting the improvement and coordination of territorially relevant decisions taken at different levels (e.g. European, national sub regional and local levels);
- Bridging the gap between policy-makers, administrators and the scientific community;
- Creating a European scientific community network in the fragmented field of spatial planning and development⁴.

Over the years, the tasks and objectives taken on by ESPON have evolved. Between 2006 and 2013, while the mission of ESPON remained broadly similar (producing territorial knowledge and evidence to be used by policy makers through comparable data, indicators, maps and analyses on issues related to the territorial dimension), its objectives were further enhanced and refined. For the 2007 - 2014 period, the overall aim of ESPON was in fact to:

“support policy development in relation to the aim of territorial cohesion and a harmonious development of the European territory by (1) providing comparable information, evidence, analyses and scenarios on territorial dynamics and (2) revealing territorial capital and potentials for the development of regions and larger territories contributing to European competitiveness, territorial cooperation and a sustainable and balanced development⁵”.

³ CSP (1999), European Spatial Development Perspective, Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union.

⁴ EC (2006), *Study on “territorial Cohesion, lessons learned from the ESPON programme projects and strategy for the future”*, Final report, prepared by Ramboll Management for the EC, p. 13;

⁵ ESPON 2013 programme, p. 27;

Consequently, the main changes from ESPON 2006 to ESPON 2013 were to consolidate and maintain knowledge, further broaden and refine the European-wide evidence, strengthen the use of evidence in policy making by offering targeted analytical support to users, enhance the capitalisation, and process evidence towards the policy level.

Accordingly, a narrower focus on territorial structures, trends, perspectives and impacts of sectoral policies was encouraged through the development of 5 typologies of research areas with the aim of reinforcing the existing operational links between applied research and policy making:

- Applied research projects, conducted under Priority 1 of the ESPON 2013 Programme, comprised thematically defined research projects, cross-thematic applied research and impact studies of EU policies.
- Targeted analysis, developed under priority axis 2, encompassed a new type of project supporting the use of existing findings in partnership with different groups of stakeholders. The main aim of this research stream was to enhance the stakeholders' understanding of the broader territorial context, allowing for informed comparison with other territories, regions and cities.
- The Scientific Platform and tools, the Platform including a number of actions such as development of the ESPON 2013 Database, the development of Territorial Indicators and Indices, as well as a Territorial Monitoring and Reporting System.
- Capitalization, ownership and participation, which provided targeted transnational capitalisation, awareness raising and dissemination of ESPON findings with the specific objective of involving a wide audience
- Technical Assistance and analytical support.

3.2 PLANNING THE ESPON 2020 STRATEGY

The ESPON 2020 Programme strategy was developed in three batches of documents: the drafts of the Cooperation Programme (CP), the draft Operational Specifications (OS), and a series of Issue Papers presented by the MA/CU to the JWG members. Discussion of the issue papers generated input for the final drafting of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, for the draft OS and for the for the draft Operation Implementation Guidelines, as well as for the formal agreements on the constitution of the ESPON EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation).

These documents were drawn up on the basis of:

- A review of the needs for pan-European territorial knowledge emerging from the most important European policy processes, including the EU 2020 Strategy, the EU Cohesion Policy 2014, the Territorial Agenda 2020, and other territorially relevant sector policies
- A review of the priorities and demands deriving from EU Cohesion Policy 2014-20, with the main focus on the result-oriented intervention logic; promotion of a place-based approach, and of the ETC goal in particular,
- Discussion of the role of the ESPON Programme in enhancing the territorial dimension of the EU strategy and its added value. This has been done with specific regard to the target groups for ESPON's activity, including the policy-

makers, authorities and administrative levels for which ESPON’s activity could be of support,

- The findings of previous Programme evaluations⁶,
- The results of a stakeholders’ survey implemented under the Polish presidency in terms of the expectations and goals for an ESPON Programme,
- An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses emerging from the evaluations of the ESPON Programmes 2006 and 2013,
- The debate and opinions issued during the meetings with DGs and JWG members.

The final Cooperation Programme was delivered for the discussion of the JWG on 12 May 2014.

3.3 THE ESPON 2020 MISSION

The results of the analyses referred to above provided a wealth of material on the needs, problems and opportunities for ESPON 2020. Through lively discussions, they contributed to definition of the future ESPON mission.

Since the lack of territorial evidence continues to be identified as a focal problem and a barrier to enhancing the territorial dimension of EU cohesion policy and related sector policies, the overall goal and purpose of the ESPON Programme has not substantially changed.

The ESPON 2020 mission is: **“to continue the consolidation of a European Territorial Observatory Network and grow the provision and policy use of pan-European, comparable, systematic and reliable territorial evidence”** (CP, p.9)

3.4 THE NEED FOR A RENEWED STRATEGY

While the overall goal of ESPON 2020 remained broadly similar to that of ESPON 2013, it was recognized that ESPON 2020 needed a number of improvements and that the strategy was to be fine-tuned in order to:

- respond to needs and contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy and to economic, social and territorial cohesion,
- meet the needs expressed for renewal, reorientation and innovation, and contribute with territorial evidence to the enhancement of institutional capacity and efficient public administration,

⁶ The main evaluation documents have been: *Mid-Term Evaluation of the ESPON 2006 Programme*, Final Report, prepared by MVA for the ESPON Co-ordination Unit (December 2003); *ESPON Mid-Term Evaluation update*, Final Report, prepared by MVA for the ESPON Co-ordination Unit (September 2005); *Study on “territorial Cohesion, lessons learned from the ESPON programme projects and strategy for the future”*, Final report, prepared by Ramboll Management for the EC (June 2006); *INTERREG III Community Initiative (2000-2006) Ex-post Evaluation*, Final Report, prepared by Panteia and partners for the EC (June 2010); *ESPON 2013 Programme External Evaluation*, Final Report, Loxley Consultancy for the ESPON MA (May 2011); *Evaluation of the European Observatory Network for Territorial Development (ESPON) programme*, Final Report, prepared by ADE for the EC (March 2013).

- address the weaknesses highlighted with the previous evaluations (see Section 4.2.1).

The ESPON 2020 strategy is further articulated (CP, p. 9) as follows:

- Contribute to enhancing the use of territorial evidence in policy development and programmes related to EU Cohesion Policy (economic, social and territorial cohesion) at the EU level and in Member States and regions, in relevant European and national sectoral policies and in relevant policy processes, such as the Territorial Agenda 2020.
- Implement applied research and analyses producing new evidence and facilitate knowledge transfer and exchange for policy processes by delivering territorial evidence to support policy development at the EU, national, regional and local level as well as in a transnational and cross-border context.
- Monitor major European territorial trends, potentials and challenges, and provide analytical tools in order to contribute actively with EU-wide territorial evidence and experience to the relevant policy processes and political debates, and indeed to territorial strategy building.
- Ensure effective, timely and prompt communication, maximisation of outreach and use by potential stakeholders together with facilitating on-going coordination and cooperation with a wide range of target institutions at the EU, national, regional and urban level and ESI programmes, in particular at the transnational and cross-border level.

3.5 A NEW PROGRAMME ARCHITECTURE

Departing from its predecessor Programme, ESPON 2013, ESPON 2020 revised its Programme architecture by reducing the number of the Axes from 5 to 2 (Figure 2), changing the organisational structure by introducing an EGTC responsible for the implementation of Axis 1, and reinforcing the internal staff in order to take a step further in Programme management and results.

According to the CP, the two Axes of the ESPON 2020 Programme are:

- Priority Axis 1: Territorial Evidence, Knowledge Transfer, Observation, Tools and Outreach;
- Priority Axis 2: Technical Assistance.

Axis 1 acts as ‘umbrella’ measure covering all ESPON research and knowledge transfer-related activities, while technical assistance is compounded into Axis 2. This choice was made in order to assign implementation of all the activities dealing with the “core business” of ESPON to an EGTC.

Axis 1 is divided into five Specific Objectives:

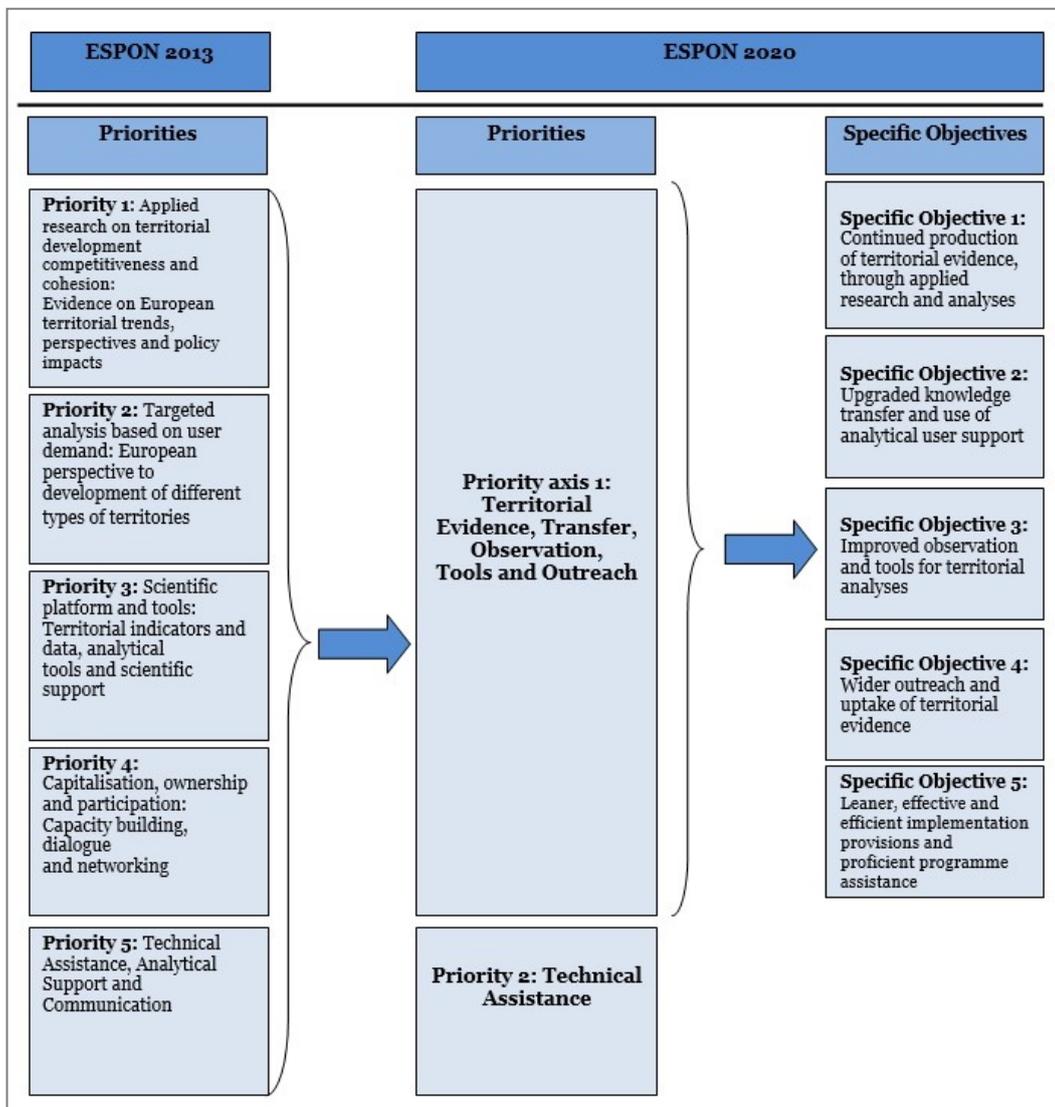
- Specific Objective 1: Continued production of territorial evidence, through applied research and analyses,
- Specific Objective 2: Upgraded knowledge transfer and use of analytical user support,
- Specific Objective 3: Improved observation and tools for territorial analyses,
- Specific Objective 4: Wider outreach and uptake of territorial evidence

- Specific Objective 5: Leaner, effective and efficient implementation provisions and proficient Programme assistance.

While S.O.s 1-4 will be implemented through various types of actions, the fifth objective “*Leaner, effective and efficient implementation provisions and proficient Programme assistance*” recalls the need for a renewed organizational arrangement in order to keep the administrative burden lighter than it used to be.

The *raison d’être* of concentrating the main lines of intervention (specific objectives) in a single Axis lies also in the simplification of the financial management. The CP financial plan has to specify, for each priority axis, the apportionment among different thematic objectives (CPR, art. 96.2 (d) point (ii)). Because of the new ESPON Programme architecture, financial revisions within each axis (i.e. among the specific objectives) will not require the Commission’s approval.

Figure 2 The ESPON 2020 strategy compared to the ESPON 2013 strategy



3.6 A REVISED ORGANIZATIONAL SET-UP

The main novelty of the ESPON 2020 CP lies in the creation of a new institutional set-up based on a Single Beneficiary (the EGTC).

The ESPON 2020 EGTC, acting as a Single Beneficiary, will carry through the content-related actions that will be defined in a Single Operation (details on the EGTC are provided in Section 6.2). The Single Operation will be drafted by the EGTC on the basis of the ESPON 2020 CP and of the Operation Specifications, and assessed by the MC. This change has been introduced in order to favour more effective management, and above all address the problem of the heavy administrative burden imposed on team partners, the national authorities and indeed the Programme authorities⁷.

Favourably viewed by the Commission in the context of JWG meetings, the constitution of an EGTC raised some apprehensions among MS and PS representatives. MS and PS concerns revolved mainly around a loss of representation by the Monitoring Committee (MC), the considerable effort involved in setting up such a new management structure, and allocation of liability among the ESPON partners. Thanks to the support of various documents, clarifications and improvements these concerns have largely been overcome.

Other organizational arrangements included in the ESPON 2020 strategy deal with:

- A significant enhancement of the ESPON internal staff, and in particular, the hiring of a chief policy expert and a group of experts with specific content-related competencies;
- The introduction of the Project Support Teams, a process-related feature intended to enhance the scientific quality and policy focus, and involving both the internal EGTC experts and MC representatives in the role of rapporteurs,
- A substantial revision of the role of the ESPON Contact Point Network, which will cooperate with the EGTC in the outreach strategy, but which will no longer be direct beneficiary of the funding streams related to communication activities.

The following Sections present assessment of the ESPON 2020 strategy from different points of view: the external coherence and added value of the Programme; the internal coherence and consistency; the adequacy of human resources and administrative capacity; the performance framework and the suitability of the selected indicators.

In this context, it is worth noting that at this stage there are limits to the extent to which ESPON 2020 strategy can be assessed, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the level of generality of the ESPON strategy as described in the Cooperation Programme. Since an operational strategy will be presented by the EGTC in the Operational Proposal, the Multiannual Work Programme, and the Annual Work Plans, some organisational details and content-related issues are not included in the CP. Their finalisation is in fact deferred to a second phase which will come under way once the CP is approved by the Commission. Among them, for example, the budgetary details related to the division of expenditure among Specific Objectives, which still have to be

⁷ See, for example, ADE, Evaluation of the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON) Programme, Final Report, March 2013.

confirmed. The same could be said of the division between actions that will be undertaken in-house, vis-à-vis actions that will be outsourced.

It is worth noting that in order to prepare the ground and move swiftly through this second phase, a large number of thematic documents touching on various Programme aspects were drawn up by the MA and CU and tabled for discussion at a number of JWG meetings. Although such documentation is not formally part of the CP, it was taken into account during Programme assessment.

Secondly, the bulk of the programming process has so far focused on organisational issues, leaving the scoping and fine-tuning of the research topics and the research Programme to a subsequent phase. This is clearly a crucial aspect of the Programme as ESPON will need to generate the kind of knowledge sought after by the various EU policy communities, and the other targets groups identified in the CP. Having only limited information of the themes that will be explored inevitably hampers the in-depth analysis undertaken in the ex ante evaluation.

4 ASSESSMENT OF THE EXTERNAL COHERENCE AND ADDED VALUE OF THE PROGRAMME

This part of the assessment focuses on with the relevance of the ESPON 2020 strategy. It assesses on evaluation of how well the ESPON 2020 CP is aligned with EU high-level strategies, covers the most important issues to be addressed and, as a result, estimates the possible added value of the Programme. The assessment is structured on four main analytical dimensions:

- a) The coherence of the selected thematic objectives, priorities and corresponding objectives of the Programme with the Strategic Reference Documents in order to promote coordination and mutual reinforcement of policies (Section 4.1);
- b) The consistency of the ESPON 2020 strategy with the main focal challenges emerging from previous evaluations. This part includes an assessment of the SWOT analysis contained in the CP (Section 4.2);
- c) Respect of the partnership principle, as stated in the CPR, art. 5 and in the draft material of the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (art. 5.3 Reg. 1303/2013). For the ESPON 2020 this means designing a strategy capable of involving major stakeholders of various types (private and public) at different levels (local, regional, national) (see Section 4.4).
- d) The extent to which horizontal principles and in particular equality between men and women (Section 4.5) were taken into consideration during the subsequent Programme drafting stages. Finally, Section 4.6 describes the reasons for the exclusion of ESPON from the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

4.1 COHERENCE OF THE ESPON 2020 OBJECTIVES WITH THE STRATEGIC REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

The main findings of the analysis regarding the external context are contained in the Final Report on Strategic Reference Documents delivered to the JWG in December 2014. The report assessed the degree of coherence existing between the ESPON 2020 Programme logic and objectives, and the aims and objectives identified in the Strategic Reference Documents, through a detailed cross-referencing exercise. An initial detailed review of the relevant documentation was conducted in June-July 2013; this was then updated in October-November of the same year and in March 2014. The desk-based component of the evaluation was complemented by a set of 14 semi-structured interviews undertaken with various stakeholders during September/October 2013. The interviews provided additional evidence and helped evaluators to obtain a rounder view of the external challenges that the Programme is expected to face during the period 2014-2020. The results of the analysis showing the magnitude of potential support effects are presented in section 4.1.3, while a list of the stakeholders contacted is provided in Annex 5.

4.1.1 Coherence with Europe 2020 strategy and Territorial Agenda 2020

With regard to the external context, ESPON 2020 was found to generate strong and widespread support effects. Several projects sponsored during ESPON 2013 began to address directly and study the territorial dynamics related to the key themes identified in the Europe 2020 strategy. Notable examples include the ‘Spatial Indicators for a ‘Europe 2020 Strategy’ Territorial Analysis (SIESTA) study, the ESPON Atlas and the work that underpinned the preparation of the second Synthesis Report. With regard to the new Programme, in addition to building on the knowledge produced so far, the Observatory’s main contribution to Europe 2020 will lie in its ability to support evidence-based policy-making. All member states have committed to achieving the Europe 2020 targets; ESPON 2020 Programme aims to support relevant EU and national actors in arriving at informed decisions on the policies needed to achieve the goals set. Territorial Agenda 2020 stresses the need to step up the production of European regional and urban data, and calls upon ESPON to take into direct account the priorities and challenges identified in the document. As proved to be the case with regard to the 11 thematic priorities defined in the CPR, the ESPON 2020 Programme was found to be well equipped to undertake research in support of all of the 6 Territorial Priorities (TPs) identified in TA2020.

The new Programme was, therefore, found to be in a favourable position to build on a substantial body of knowledge. However, the extent to which ESPON will support specific flagship initiatives contained in the EU 2020 Strategy, or the Territorial Priorities identified in TA2020, cannot as yet be assessed. The capacity of the Observatory to generate evidence in relation to, for example, Territorial Priority 1 (promoting polycentric and balanced territorial development) will in fact be largely dependent upon the themes selected for research, and the mix of actions and packages of projects that will be agreed upon as part of the Annual and Multi-Annual work programmes.

4.1.2 Coherence with indications contained in the funds’ regulations

The evaluators found the ESPON 2020 Programme coherent with the provisions contained in the CPR (Reg. 1303/2013), the ERDF and ETC fund-specific Regulations (Reg. 1301/2013 and Reg. 1299/2013), as well as the Regulations regarding the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Reg. 1302/2013). The overarching message emerging from the ESI Funds Regulations is that the Funds’ main task lies in contributing to delivery of the Europe 2020 Strategy. This said, the headline objective for cohesion policy has not changed and continues to be the levelling of regional disparities. The implicit assumption is that policies aiming at smart, sustainable and inclusive growth will in turn result in fuller convergence.

The ESPON 2020 Programme mission and objectives were found to be well aligned with the tasks proposed for ETC programmes. The ESPON 2020 Programme will in fact be implemented under the interregional cooperation strand. Art. 2(3d) of Regulation 1299/2013 indicates that the ERDF should be used to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy by promoting *inter alia*: “the analysis of development trends in relation to the aims of territorial cohesion and harmonious development of the European territory through studies, data collection and other measures”. As ESPON is not expected to provide direct support to achievement of the EU 2020 goals, but rather is to focus on generation of territorial knowledge and related tools for analysis, the assessment classified the Programme support effects as being mainly ‘indirect’.

The CP anchored the ESPON 2020 activities within the context of Investment Priority 11, which focuses on ‘enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration by strengthening of institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations and public services’. At the same time, in order to continue to support policy-makers and MAs, ESPON will produce relevant evidence and data in relation to all of the 11 Thematic Objectives identified in the CPR. The evaluators found this aspect of the Programme to be coherent with the requirements contained in the ESI Funds Regulations.

ESPON 2020 was encouraged to generate knowledge of more direct relevance to policy-makers. Hence the external coherence analysis also took into consideration the extent to which the Programme is able to define targeted audiences, identify their needs and make sure that these are linked to tailored actions. In this context, the evaluators found that, in comparison with previous programmes, significant improvements had been made, particularly with regard to the new actions provided for under Specific Objectives 1, 3 and 4.

Finally, the CPR, stresses the importance of coordinating the use of the ESI Funds with other Union Policies and Instruments. The CP specifies that under Specific Objective 2 (which has its focus on tools for territorial analyses) close coordination with other institutions, such as EUROSTAT, EEA, JRC, EIB will be sought. Similarly, under specific objective 4 (which focuses on outreach), the CP indicates that cooperation between ESPON and INTERREG EUROPE, URBACT III and INTERACT III should be continued and supported (ESPON CP, 2014: 25). However, information on how the annual and multiannual work programmes will build on the indications contained in the CP are not yet available.

4.1.3 Key points emerging from the stakeholder consultation

An initial round of interviews was conducted during September/October 2013. This consultation exercise focused on stakeholders external to the Programme, and asked them to identify what they thought will be the main challenges the new Programme is likely to face during the 2014-2020 period. In order to appraise the position of the Members and Partner States, during December 2013 the evaluators carried out an analysis of the minutes of all the JWG meetings. The findings of this exercise were presented in the Draft Evaluation Report delivered to the client group in December 2013.

Among the key challenges identified, stakeholders referred to the need for ESPON to adopt a proactive attitude that strives not only to observe, but that also helps shape the EU policy agenda. In order to be able to inform policy-making more directly, the majority of the stakeholders interviewed were of the view that a more structured approach than hitherto adopted will be needed, particularly with regard to the way ESPON interfaces with other EU institutions and bodies. This aspect of the Programme is connected to a slightly different and broader relevant challenge, i.e. the need to maximise ownership of ESPON research findings across all 2020 actions.

The stakeholders pointed out that making sure that large and complex projects, supported under Specific Objectives 1 and 3, deliver on time and according to the agreed specifications has proved a challenge in the past and is likely to remain so in the future. In order to ensure maximum timeliness and reliability in all research undertaken by ESPON, it was recommended that the Observatory should have

sufficient technical capacity, in-house and/or with the support of external experts, to be able to work with research teams and project management expectations, so as to keep projects on track and make sure they deliver what it is expected of them.

To conclude, the analyses undertaken on ESPON 2020 external context, and the changes made in light of the lessons learned from previous programmes, identified a general consensus over the aspects of the Programme that are in need of renewal, reorientation and upgrade. This being the case, the degree of change that the new Programme has been asked to accommodate should not be underestimated. There is no doubt that the new Programme features discussed above have brought ESPON into closer alignment with the objectives and provisions contained in the Strategic Reference Documents.

4.2 CONSISTENCY OF THE ESPON 2020 STRATEGY WITH THE MAIN FOCAL CHALLENGES TO BE FACED

Another point to be assessed as contributing to the relevance and added value of the strategy lies in the consistency of the Programme with the main focal challenges emerging from the past. This in turn implies that ESPON 2020 should take into account all the main messages highlighted by previous evaluations in order to set more challenging objectives and achieve more relevant outcomes.

4.2.1 Consistency with the focal challenges emerging from previous evaluations

The ESPON strategy identifies eight key issues at the origin of the need for renewal, refocus and upgrade of the Programme (ESPON 2020 CP, pp. 6-8). **The issues identified in the CP were found to be consistent with the set of messages emerging from previous evaluations⁸.**

Table 1 below shows that **all the main lessons deriving from the past are included in the new ESPON 2020 strategy.**

⁸ The main evaluation documents reviewed to this end were: *Mid-Term Evaluation of the ESPON 2006 Programme*, Final Report, prepared by MVA for the ESPON Co-ordination Unit (December 2003); *ESPON Mid-Term Evaluation update*, Final Report, prepared by MVA for the ESPON Co-ordination Unit (September 2005); *Study on “territorial Cohesion, lessons learned from the ESPON Programme projects and strategy for the future”*, Final report, prepared by Ramboll Management for the EC (June 2006); *ESPON 2013 Programme External Evaluation*, Final Report, Loxley Consultancy for the ESPON MA (May 2011); *Evaluation of the European Observatory Network for Territorial Development (ESPON) Programme, Final Report*, prepared by ADE for the EC (March 2013).

Table 1 Strengths and lessons from the past, focal challenges of the ESPON 2020 Programme

Strengths of the ESPON Programme (so far) (evaluation reports, ESPON CP, other CU/MA material)	Lessons for ESPON 2020, drawn from the past (evaluation reports)	Focal challenges identified for the ESPON 2020 strategy (ESPON CP, May 2014)
<p>Main results achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESPON delivered a large variety of pan-European knowledge and filled a real gap in providing information on territorial policy, not usually covered in the academic literature - High quality research - Creation of tools for policy making such as the ESPON database - Further strengthened, stabilized and open network around ESPON including researchers and experts as well as stakeholders from targeted analyses - Providing evidence input to other programmes and in cooperation with pan-European ETC programmes, EUROSTAT and EIB - Progress made within ESPON 2013 with the commencement of a European Territorial Monitoring system 	<p>Need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieve a closer research focus with regard to Applied Research projects - More generally, devise Programme actions that support policy-making and policy development more directly - Reduce the administrative burden of the Programme for all parties involved, including external contractors, the MA and the CU - Modify the ESPON governance system, including changes to the way the CU, MA, MC and the ECPs are structured or operate <p>Moreover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the technical capabilities of CU (see ESPON, 2011; 61, 62; EC Study, Exec. Sum.), - Increase the visibility of the Programme and its results, - Address the language barrier (English communication) for the regional and local levels - Address the lack of scientific recognition of ESPON research - More quality in place of deliverables too dense, lengthy and had to take in for non-academic audiences 	<p>Focal issues to be addressed by the Programme – to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Substantially improve the transfer of evidence, knowledge and results to the policy arena, ensuring appropriateness, timeliness, clarity, relevance and quality of the evidence, b) Offer prompt policy-relevant analyses upon demand from a defined set of key stakeholders at the EU and national level. c) Provide stronger validation of the scientific quality of results and the comparability of data, d) Ensure outreach of ESPON evidence to new users with a coordinated strategy including the ESPON Contact Point Network, e) Reinforce the in-house scientific and communicative capacity to match the delivery of improved knowledge transfer and outreach, f) Encourage other ESI funded programmes and bodies to use territorial evidence, g) Establish an institutional set up which significantly reduces the overall administrative burden of the Programme for Member and Partner States’ administrations and for beneficiaries, h) Apply administrative procedures including the use of service contracts that, through a low level of administrative requirements, will promote further academic interest in ESPON territorial evidence.

The ESPON 2020 strategy confronts all of the main weaknesses that emerged from the implementation of previous programmes. ESPON 2020 addresses the 8 focal challenges identified through:

1. The establishment of a new EGTC as a way to foster coordination and reduce administrative burdens,
2. The strengthening of the in-house capacity of the Programme, as proposed and discussed in various JWG meetings (see Section 6.2);
3. The introduction of Project Support Teams, as a way to achieve a closer research focus and higher scientific quality,
4. Stronger focus on policy demands, with one of the Specific Objectives of Axis 1 (the S.O. 2) dedicated to swifter and policy-oriented targeted analysis,

5. Greater uptake and usability of ESPON production, through renewal of ESPON databases and online tools (S.O.3), more focus on diffusion of ESPON results, a revised ECP network.

These choices represent the main novelties of the ESPON 2020 strategy (see Section 5.3), while the internal structure of the streams of actions remains broadly similar to those identified for ESPON 2013 (see Section 5.1).

Moreover, mention must be made of the thematic objective and the investment priority selected by the ESPON 2020 Programme. The Thematic Objective selected by ESPON is no. 11 “*Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration*”, while the Investment Priority, according to ETC Reg. 1299/2013 art 7 (c) iii) is “*strengthening the evidence base in order to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy and achievement of the thematic objectives through analysis of development trends*”.

All 11 thematic objectives are deemed relevant to ESPON 2020⁹ (CP, p.11), in the sense that they all have a territorial dimension or impact. However, the TO 11 (Institutional Capacity) was selected for ESPON 2020, as the Programme intends to enhance institutional capacity by enhancing the evidence bases of policy and programmes (ESI funds, Europe 2020 and other policies territorial relevant), no matter what range of thematic objectives they refer to. In other words, **the contribution to institutional capacity is to be considered the final goal and the expected added value of the ESPON 2020 strategy**. This element constitutes fundamental reference for reconstruction of the ESPON 2020 logic of change (Section 5.2) and provides a general framework for evaluation of the Programme.

In this context, it is worth noting that promoting enhancement of the *institutional capacity* is one of the overarching goals of the 2014-20 ESI Funds, the objective being to “*create institutions which are both stable and predictable, but also flexible enough to react to the many societal challenges, open for dialogue with the public, able to introduce new public solutions and deliver better services*”¹⁰.

Building institutional capacity refers to three main dimensions: **1) structures and process** (such as, institutional and administrative process reviews for efficiency gains; new business models and management practices; measures to improve policy making), **2) human resources** (securing the timely availability of skilled and motivated staff), **3) service delivery** (methods, guidelines, manuals, procedures etc, in order to make organisations less vulnerable to staff turn-over, reduce risks of malfunctioning and support staff effectively, to provide more efficient and effective public services).¹¹

Within the ESPON context, institutional capacity should be seen as having two sides:

- An “**external institutional capacity**” **side**, linked to the institutional capacity of other administrations which are assumed to be able to plan and

⁹ Art. 6.2 of Reg. 1299/2013 states that “All of the thematic objectives set out in the first paragraph of Article 9 of Regulation (EU) No 1303 /2013 may be selected for interregional cooperation referred to in point (3)(a) of Article 2 of this Regulation.

¹⁰ EC, Draft thematic guidance fiche for desk officers. Institutional capacity building (Thematic Objective 11), version 2, 22/01/2014.

¹¹ Ibid.

implement their territorial policies better thanks (also) to the availability of territorial knowledge, facts and trends produced by ESPON. The support from ESPON focuses mainly on the “structures and processes” dimension listed above;

- An “**internal institutional capacity**” **side**, related to the institutional capacity of the ESPON management structure, in order to qualify its workings, reduce its costs, enhance its outputs and results. From this point of view, the of “internal” institutional capacity goal relates to all of the three dimensions referred to above (i.e. structures and processes, human resources, service delivery).

Internal capacity is clearly a pre-condition for contributing to the external capacity. In other words, without sound internal capacity, ESPON will hardly be able to contribute to strengthening the capacity of other administrations.

Summing up, the assessment of the consistency of the strategy is broadly positive, insofar as all the main recommendations contained in previous evaluations have been included in the ESPON 2020 strategy and translated into appropriate focal challenges to be faced. The overall ESPON goal aligns with one of the overarching European priorities for 2014-20: strengthening the institutional capacity of European policy-making by providing territorial knowledge. As a precondition, this goal requires sound internal capacity (renewal of internal processes, staffing, delivery of ESPON quality products), which is a programme aspect highlighted in previous evaluations.

The effectiveness and efficiency of the renewal of the ESPON 2020 strategy will have to be assessed in the light of the results achieved, which will have to be significantly higher than in the past.

4.2.2 Main opinions of the ESPON national representatives on the focal challenges to be addressed

The present section aims at analyzing the key points raised by the representatives of the ESPON Member and Partner States in the various phases of CP elaboration¹² in order to understand the main issues around which discussion revolved and the different opinions raised. The national representatives expressed generally positive opinions on the results achieved by ESPON over the last 10 years in establishing a better and stronger basis for transnational analyses and comparison of European territories and regions, and a transnational European environment for research on territorial issues. However, some weaknesses were singled out.

More specifically, the points on the ESPON agenda that seem to lie at the heart of the JWG discussions were grouped into 3 categories:

- the role ESPON should play within the European context,
- how ESPON should favour the achievement of better outputs and results,
- the Programme’s new internal set-up.

¹² The analysis is based on the minutes of the 10-11/06/2013, 9-10/09/2013 and 2-3/12/2013 JWG meetings of the 22/10-5/11/2013 written procedure and on the JWG members’ comments to the draft narrative (28/02/2013);

Issues stemming from the first two points are addressed in the present section, while elements referring to the new ESPON set up are discussed in Section 6.4.

ESPON within the European context

With regard to the positioning of ESPON within the framework of other EU instruments, and in order to contribute to more territorially-informed policies, the JWG representatives underlined that:

- ESPON should provide more extensive and useful knowledge and information. ESPON knowledge should indicate the territory's specific positioning on a thematic priority and how a thematic priority interacts with a given territory.
- ESPON should develop stronger links between its own agenda and Europe 2020; it should moreover create a process of regular production of knowledge on topics linked to the EU 2020 strategy.
- ESPON should increase the use of ESPON knowledge by other ETC Programmes by providing new and improved services and products.

It was also noted that the EC had, in the past, made only very limited use of ESPON results for its own studies, and it would, therefore, be a great challenge for the new Programme to reverse this negative trend by developing new links with the EC and an extended and strengthened communication strategy.

Suggestions for better ESPON outputs

ESPON products are generally perceived as useful tools for territorial development, but in the future ESPON should:

- be able to mediate more between science and policy, for an increased and improved use of ESPON results,
- deliver products more quickly and in formats that are easier to understand, in order to be more useful and accessible to policy-makers, including translation of results and data into different languages according to the territorial needs,
- more focused on territorial data and on specific territorial issues, avoiding generalizations,
- stronger presence in the major scientific journals.

4.3 COMPLETENESS AND CONSISTENCY OF THE SWOT ANALYSIS

The evaluator suggested focusing the SWOT exercise on the main challenges of ESPON 2020 and new elements of the Programme intended to address them. Developed this way, the SWOT would have the potential to be used as an overarching framework for the overall ESPON CP, its focal challenges and the critical factors to be taken into account.

Taking up the advice provided by the evaluator, the SWOT is grounded on the needs and challenges for Programme renewal and upgrade identified for ESPON by MS and PS and the EC. The SWOT summarizes, for each issue identified in past evaluations:

- the strengths of the new strategy, i.e. the main choices or policy tools to address the issue/focal challenges identified,

- the weaknesses of the past held to have been overcome thanks to the new strategy,
- the opportunities, i.e. how the new strategy will contribute to more effective and efficient Programme delivery and
- the threats, i.e. the main critical factors of the strategy to be taken into account (so as to be prepared to tackle them).

4.4 RESPECT OF THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

A relevant point in the assessment of the added value of the Programme is evaluation as to whether its preparation has taken into account the opinions and contributions of the more relevant stakeholders.

Art. 5 of the CPR (Reg. 1303/2013) states that partners (regional and local authorities; urban and other public authorities; economic and social partners; and bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality and non-discrimination, art. 5.1) shall be involved “throughout the preparation and implementation of programmes, including through participation in the monitoring committees for programmes” (art. 5.2).

Moreover, the CPR empowers the Commission (art. 5.3) to adopt a delegated act in accordance with art. 149 of the CPR to provide for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership, which shall set out the main principles, procedures and good practices in order to pursue the implementation of partnerships. The preliminary directions for the drafting of the Code of Conduct state:

“for the ERDF and Cohesion Fund, partnerships will include regional and local authorities, in particular cities carrying out integrated sustainable urban development schemes as part of the integrated territorial investments, along with economic and social partners, representatives of NGOs having developed an expertise for cross-cutting issues, and for the relevant sectors where the funds are active and representatives of universities and research institutions, chambers of commerce and business organizations.”¹³

Assessment of respect of the partnership principle reveals that several steps for the involvement of ESPON stakeholders have been taken.

The drafting process of the ESPON 2020 CP involved **the EU and national policy-makers in charge of development strategies and policies:**

- Preparation of the ESPON 2020 Programme started towards the end of 2010. 31 countries participated in the ESPON 2020 drafting process, including the 27 MSs¹⁴, the State of Croatia as acceding country, and four partner countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). During the process, various

¹³ European Commission, Commission staff working document. The partnership principle in the implementation of the Common Strategic Framework Funds - elements for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership (SWD(2012) 106 final), page 9,

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/strategic_framework/swd_2012_106_en.pdf

¹⁴ Spain did not in fact take part in the ESPON programming process.

other countries (such as Serbia and Turkey) and institutions (such as the Committee of the Regions) asked to participate, either as partners or observers.

- Three meetings held respectively in November 2011, October 2012, November 2013 and April 2014 involved the group of Directors General responsible for Territorial development and planning in the EU Member States. The DGs were supported by the Group of National Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP), acting as a preparatory group for the meetings.

These elements show a **significant level of involvement of the 32 Member and Partner States in all the phases of preparation of the Programme.**

However, both the evaluations of the previous ESPON programmes and ESPON 2020 official documents underlined the need for ESPON to extend its target groups to different types of actors at all levels (not only policy-makers and academics, but also practitioners, social and private actors; actors not only at the EU and national level, but above all at the regional and local level) and to attend to their requirements in terms of territorial knowledge needed.

In order to fill this gap, the final version of the CP includes both clarification of the target groups to be addressed by the Programme, and a specific section dedicated to the strategy for the involvement of partners describing the participatory process put in place before and during the CP elaboration.

One European-wide, open web-based consultation and various national consultations were organised in March/April 2014 with a focus on definition and selection of the priorities and related specific objectives, of Programme indicators and of the proposed allocation of funds. The main results of the consultation are summarized in a dedicated report (Draft cooperation Programme: summary report of the outcome of the consultation process - 15 April 2014) and briefly described in the CP.

Additionally, a dedicated feedback session targeting the European institutions, bodies and organizations was held in March 2014.

Table 2 ESPON potential stakeholders and stakeholders involved in the ESPON 2020 CP drafting

Type of stakeholders		Stakeholders involved in the drafting of the ESPON 2020 OP
Key target group	European-level policy makers in the field of Cohesion Policy as well as other policy fields; national policy makers responsible for territorial cohesion, ETC programmes, macro regional strategies, cohesion policy preparation and implementation; authorities implementing ESIF programmes and preparing periodical reporting;	Involved (in particular, national stakeholders and European Institutions) in definition of the Programme
Secondary target group	Organizations promoting different regional/urban interests at EU level, practitioners, policy officers and planners at regional and local level, university academics and the wider audience.	Involved. Two open consultations realized. One European-wide, web-based public consultation and several national consultations

The picture emerging from the consultation process shows a generally positive appreciation of the ESPON 2020 draft cooperation Programme. Respondents underlined the need for ESPON to focus more on outreach and communication activities in order to ensure stronger transfer of research results to policy makers, and

the need to strengthen synergies with other European research networks. Thematic areas recommended for further research were also proposed by several respondents.

According to the summary report on the outcomes of the consultation process, these will be annexed to the operation specification and addressed by the Multi-Annual Work Programme and the Annual Work Plans. The “First issue paper on applied research activities under Specific Objective 1” was delivered by the CU to the JWG on 21 May 2014.

4.5 CONSIDERATION OF HORIZONTAL PRINCIPLES

According to article 8(7) of Regulation 1299/2013, each Cooperation Programme shall, where appropriate and subject to the relevant Members States’ duly justified assessment of their relevance to the content and objectives of the Programme, include a description of:

- environmental protection, resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster resilience and risk prevention and risk management;
- equal opportunities and the prevention of discriminations based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation;
- equality between men and women and “the arrangements to ensure the integration of gender perspective at Programme and operation level”.

Some Cooperation Programmes are exempted from application of the first two points of the Reg.1303/2013 (letters *a*) and *b*) of article 8.7). Among these programmes, the Regulation refers to the interregional ones, which promote “analysis of development trends in relation to the aims of territorial cohesion, including territorial aspects of economic and social cohesion, and harmonious development of Union territory through studies, data collection and other measures”¹⁵. This is the case of ESPON.

The article foresees, however, a different application for point *c*). In this case, the Regulation allows MSs - following an assessment of its relevance to the content of the Programme – to decide whether to include a section regarding the promotion of equality between men and women.

The evaluator suggested to the JWG that it should start discussion on the relevance and appropriateness of adding new elements concerning the contribution of ESPON to the issue of equality between men and women.

The Final version of the CP accordingly entails a specific, albeit brief, section explaining how ESPON intends to promote equality between men and women. Section 8.3 of the CP underlines that the issue of gender equality is not a primary focus of the ESPON 2020 Programme, given its nature and scope (providing European territorial evidence). However, it was confirmed that both the MA and EGTC will adopt equal opportunity employment policies. In addition, the programme will make sure that tenders and concluded projects include an explanation of how they intend to address (or addressed in case of concluded projects) gender equality. The above mentioned reports will also help Programme authorities in assessing how the Programme concretely contributed to gender equality.

¹⁵ See point d of article 2.3 of Reg. 1299/2013.

This provision (tenders and final reports including a description of the contribution to gender equality) is to be considered positively. At the same time, the evaluator deems that a more gender-oriented perspective could be further promoted in specific and appropriate instances, i.e. in applied and targeted researches dealing with gender-sensitive topics. In order to enhance the gender orientation, the evaluator suggests appointing a member of the MC with specific delegation on equal opportunities and gender. This delegate should promote and signal the research topics in which equal opportunities and gender should be explicitly considered by ESPON activities.

4.6 APPLICABILITY OF THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TO THE ESPON 2020 PROGRAMME

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA)

According to article 55(4) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, “ex ante evaluations shall incorporate, where appropriate, the requirements for strategic environmental assessment set out in Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council...”.¹⁶

With regard to the applicability of the SEA directive to the ESPON 2020 Programme, the Ministry for the Environment of Luxembourg - the authority responsible for the Strategic Environmental Assessment in Luxembourg - clarified that “neither a screening nor a full assessment in the sense of the SEA directive and the *“loi modifiée du 22 mai 2008 relative à l’évaluation des incidences de certains plans et programmes sur l’environnement”* is required¹⁷.

According to the analysis advanced by the ESPON MA and as subsequently confirmed by the Ministry for the Environment, the Programme does not fall under the scope of article 3(2) of Directive 2001/42/EC, which specifies the plans and programmes that require a SEA. In particular these are:

- programmes prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use and which set the framework for future development consent for projects listed in Annexes I and II to the Directive 2011/92/EC, or
- programmes which, in view of the likely effect on sites, have been determined to require an assessment pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC”.

The analysis clarifies that ESPON neither belongs to the categories of sectors listed above nor *sets the framework for future development consent for projects*. Setting the framework for future development means that the Programme contains “criteria or conditions which guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent¹⁸”. This has been excluded in the case of ESPON because, given its mission of supporting policy-makers with territorial-sensitive applied research, it does not exert any decisional power on those who use the evidence provided. A SEA is not consequently required for the ESPON 2020 Programme.

¹⁶ SEA Directive 2001/42/EC, OJ L 197, 21 July 2001.

¹⁷ Communication issued by the Minister of the Environment of Luxembourg on 24 March 2014 addressed to the ESPON Managing Authority.

¹⁸ Commission’s Guidance, p. 10.

5 THE INTERNAL COHERENCE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE PROGRAMME

5.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE ESPON 2020 PROGRAMME

The ESPON 2020 strategy makes an important choice by drastically reducing the number of Axes of the Programme, from 5 to 2. Priority Axis 1, which represents the core of the Programme, consists of five Specific Objectives: Territorial Evidence, Transfer, Observation, Tools and Outreach”. Priority axis 2 covers all “Technical Assistance”. The first Axis absorbs 94% of the ESPON 2020 budget, the second Axis the remaining 6%.

The specific objectives included in Axis 1 address different streams of intervention in order to promote data collection, research, actions upon request and diffusion of information on territorial data. **This articulation is very similar to that followed in ESPON 2013 and accordingly the streams of intervention appear consistent.** What in previous ESPON programmes were indicated as Programme priorities, in the current programming period have been lowered to Specific Objectives (see Figure 2, Section 3).

The structure presented in the CP improved the coherence and clarity of the Programme.

- First of all, and as suggested by the evaluator in the first version of the draft evaluation report, the strategy levels have been simplified, making the strategy itself simpler (the level of ‘strands’ has been deleted; the reference to ‘operations’ has been replaced with ‘actions’; in the case of Axis 2, the number objectives has been reduced to one and the actions to seven).
- The specific objective “Support from a lean, effective and efficient institutional setting” has been included under both Priority Axis 1 and 2, given its cross-cutting nature relative to the other objectives to be implemented by the Single Beneficiary and indeed its relevance to Technical Assistance.
- The description of the Specific Objectives has been improved and more fully detailed, also including the results to be achieved and the target groups to be involved. As suggested, an internal template has been followed in the description of Specific Objectives.

For each Specific Objective, the CP (CP Section 2.A.5) details the “*raison d’être*” of the intervention and its expected results. Strong emphasis is placed on the goal of supporting target groups’ policy needs through ESPON knowledge. This is coherent with the thematic objective selected for ESPON (strengthening institutional capacity); moreover, the different streams of actions represented by the Specific Objectives show a high degree of consistency. More specifically:

- the S.O. 1 “Continued Territorial evidence” has the goal of enhancing the available knowledge on territories facts and trends;
- S.O.2 Upgraded knowledge transfer and use of analytical user support is specifically focused on the demands of (mainly) European policy-makers, and it is fed by information deriving from S.O.1 and 3;

- S.O.3 “Improved observation and tools for territorial analyses” aims at upgrading the toolboxes on territorial analysis, in order to make them more useful and usable, while also including information deriving from S.O. 1;
- S.O.4 “Wider outreach and uptake of territorial evidence” contains all the communication activities dedicated to policy-makers and the public at large, in order to raise attention on territorial evidence, spread information on ESPON production, create integration among Cooperation Programmes and other sources of territorial evidence.

The goals of the four Specific Objectives are coherent with the ESPON 2020 mission in terms of strengthening the institutional capacity of policy makers. Moreover, the strategy shows a clearer focus than in the past on specific targeted audiences.

The description of the Specific Objectives **should be read together with the related result indicators**. This information read jointly gives clearer clues as to the expected changes of the strategy: greater policy usefulness in the case of the researches, more usability of ESPON tools, more satisfaction of clients together with a larger uptake of ESPON results.

5.2 VERIFYING THE LOGIC OF CHANGE OF THE PROGRAMME

The two Axes, the Specific Objectives and the various elements and policy tools¹⁹ provided in the strategy are designed to address the ESPON 2020 focal challenges (see Table 4, Section 5.3). We refer to these elements as a whole as the “ESPON 2020 strategy”.

In order to understand if ESPON 2020 strategy is sound (i.e. assess its capacity to achieve the goals), we make use of the methodological approach of the Contribution Analysis (CA). This entails reconstructing the Programme’s underlying logic of change, in order to verify how the strategy is likely to achieve the expected results. This in turn implies:

- identifying **the main focal challenges of the strategy and the expected results** and placing them in a sequence (see Figure 3 below), as well as identifying some intermediate elements that are not explicitly mentioned in the strategy;
- **verifying the linkages between the focal challenges, the ESPON policy tools (as included in the CP and the OS), and the expected changes** (see Section 5.3). This enables both identification of any ‘missing links’ in the strategy and discussion of the risks arising if links are found to be missing.

¹⁹ We refer to policy tools as all the elements of the Programme aiming to achieve general or specific goals; a common definition of policy tools is “the instruments through which governments seek to influence citizen behaviour and achieve policy purposes” (Schneider, Ingram (1990): Behavioral assumptions of policy tools, *Journal of Policy*, vol. 52, n.2 (1990) pp-510-529.

Figure 3 The “logic of change” of the ESPON 2020 Programme

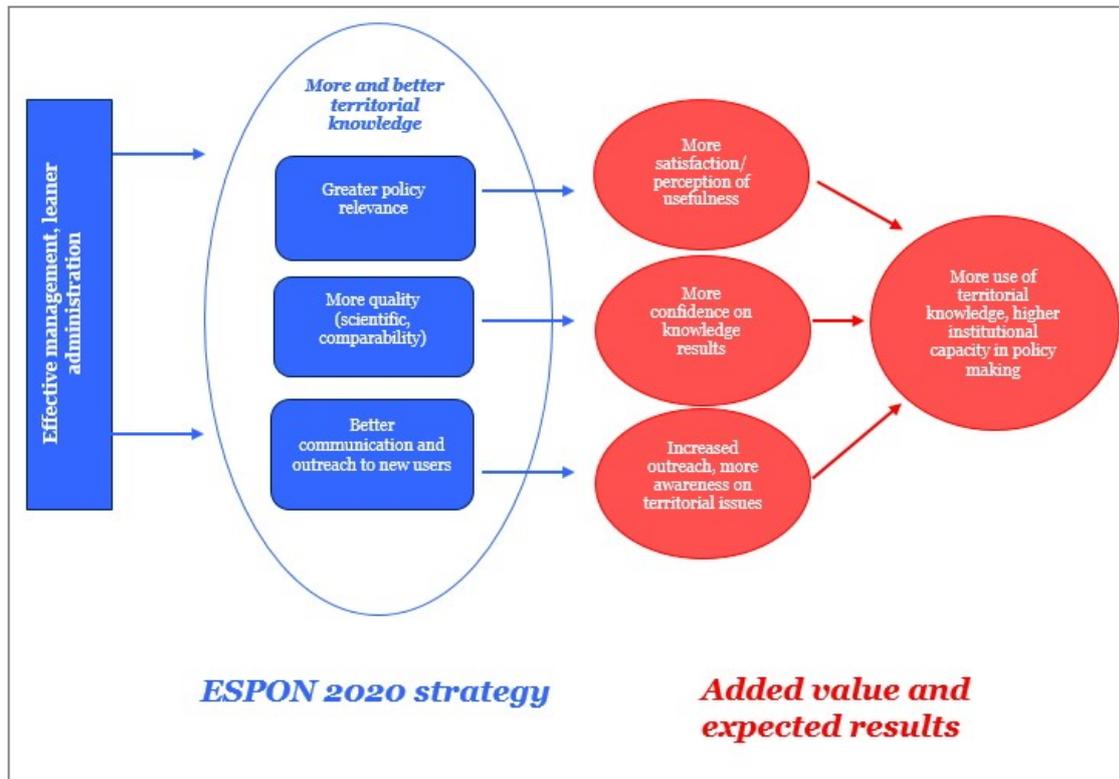


Figure 3 reorganizes the main ESPON focal challenges listed when discussing the relevance of the strategy (see Section 4.2), splitting them into two parts: elements of the strategy and expected results. The main elements of novelty in the 2020 strategy are shown in blue on the left, while some of the main final and intermediate results are in red on the right²⁰.

The three red bubbles on the right side of the diagram (more satisfaction, confidence and knowledge of territorial issues) are intermediate results not-explicitly mentioned in the first drafts of the ESPON CP; however, they may be considered steps necessary to promote an effective use of territorial knowledge and institutional capacity in policy-

²⁰ This figure partially revises the draft logic chain proposed by IRS in the internal document “Draft paper on ESPON 2020 performance indicators”, which the MA/CU commented on in the note “Development of Indicators for ESPON”, version 26 November 2013. The Draft paper indicated among the expected results an increase in demand for ESPON products as an element fostering ESPON output. Given the limited resources of the Programme, the MA/CU deemed problematic the loop between (increasing) demand and (more) output to deliver. However, the MA/CU agrees on the fact that the type and quantity of demand will influence the accuracy and selectiveness of identification of the themes for applied research actions and for the actions implemented “on demand”. The evaluator agrees with this observation. This leads to considering the activity of monitoring the demand for ESPON as a “supportive element” in the process of selecting and targeting ESPON production, in order to achieve more and better territorial knowledge. This element is now included in the figure, in the blue rectangle in the lower left part of the figure.

making (the overarching goals of the Programme) among the target stakeholders. The underlying hypotheses are the following:

- Satisfaction of ESPON product users promotes the use of the information acquired; satisfaction regards both the product content and the delivery process;
- Awareness of the available territorial information and products enhances the use made of knowledge by the target groups;
- Higher quality enhances satisfaction with and confidence in the products.

In effect, if the ESPON strategy is not able to realize outputs that satisfy the users, it is hardly likely that users will make use of territorial knowledge in their activities.

It is worth noting that these intermediate results depend not only on the quality of the ESPON strategy but also on the participation/willingness/interest of the Programme target groups; however, without the participation/willingness/interest of target groups the final goal will obviously be hard to achieve.

These aspects should, then, be considered as intermediate results of the ESPON 2020 strategy and included among the Programme’s indicators (as general types, to be adapted to the characteristics of the specific objectives) in order to control the degree to which the target groups are satisfied with/confident in/aware of ESPON products and territorial aspects. On this aspect, see also Section 5.4 and Section 7 on performance framework and indicators.

The final result of the ESPON 2020 Programme is described in Figure 3, in the red bubble “more use of territorial knowledge; increased institutional capacity in policy making”. This sums up a vast range of results proposed in the OP for each Specific Objective, listed in the table 4 below.

Following the evaluator’s advice, the final version of the CP includes a description of the results expected for the Specific Objective 5 Leaner Administration. This very important stream of action should be considered a transversal objective operating in support of the overall ESPON 2020. Because the overall strategy is based on a revision of the management system, carried out to make it leaner than it used to be, achievement of the goals under the Specific Objective 5 is a “milestone” for the entire Programme.

Accordingly, the inclusion of the key implementation step “full operation of the EGTC” among the result indicators included in the ESPON 2020 performance framework is particularly welcomed.

Table 3 Expected results for each Specific Objective (source: ESPON 2020 CP)

Specific Ob.1:	Specific Ob.2:	Specific Ob.3:	Specific Ob.4:	Specific Ob.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better understanding of medium and long term territorial trends, potentials and challenges of a wide range of territorial dynamics. ▪ Better understanding of future perspectives for Europe through forecasting and territorial scenarios. ▪ Improved pre-legislative and regulatory territorial impact assessments of EU policy proposals with a territorial impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extended use of territorial evidence adding a European perspective to policy development at national, regional and local level for different purposes. ▪ Better integration of the territorial dimension in ESIF Programme implementation and in the generation of programmes after 2020. ▪ Stronger presence of European territorial evidence and facts in the European policy debate and development. ▪ Improved uptake of results and analyses in relevant territorial, urban and sector policy at all levels of government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved territorial monitoring of policy implementation and periodical reporting based on the European monitoring system. ▪ Stronger uptake of a territorial dimension at all levels with particular focus on customised monitoring systems for macro-regions and transnational territories. ▪ An improved and more useful toolbox for territorial analyses and impact assessment offering better support and training to users at all government levels as well as by other ESI funding programmes. ▪ Greater uptake and use of ESPON data, indicators and maps in relation to different relevant policy (??) policies (??) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Higher level of outreach to a larger group of potential users of European territorial evidence, partly supported by exploring complementarities and synergies with the other pan-European ETC and ESI programmes. ▪ Greater impact and presence with territorial evidence and arguments in policy debates at European, transnational and national levels. ▪ Better uptake based on comprehensible communication towards clearly defined target groups. ▪ Strong support by the ECP Network in reaching and engaging policy makers, practitioners, stakeholders, researchers, experts and citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To establish an institutional set up which significantly reduces the overall administrative burden of the Programme for member and Partner State administrations and for beneficiaries

5.3 SOUNDNESS OF THE STRATEGY

This section is dedicated to analysing the linkages connecting ESPON 2020 focal challenges with ESPON expected results, and more specifically, evaluating whether these linkages are based on appropriate policy tools and arrangements. The goal is to verify if some strategy elements are lacking or weak, and the possible threats to be faced as a consequence.

At present, the CP defines in general terms some parts of the ESPON 2020 strategy. More details will be included in the Operation Specifications (to be defined by the MC), in the Operation proposal and in the Multiannual Work Programme, which will be prepared by the EGTC after its formal establishment. The Operation Proposal will contain a strategy developed at a finer grain in order to achieve the goals defined in the CP and in the OS.

Many of these specifications have already been discussed by the JWG on the basis of various issue papers. The ex ante evaluation makes reference to the information included in this documentation, even though not final, in order to discuss some of the specific aspects of the future Programme.

Table 4 below is based on the elements of the strategy contained in the CP and in the draft OS, and assesses the linkages referred to above.

Table 4 Checking the ESPON 2020 strategy

Focal challenges of ESPON 2020 strategy	Elements (policy tools) of the ESPON 2020 strategy	Weaknesses addressed	Expected results/opportunities	Critical factors and/or threats for the success of the strategy
Leaner Administration				
Effective management and leaner administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management through an EGTC - Switch to use of public procurement and service contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing the administrative burden of the Programme for all parties involved, including external contractors, the MA and the CU - Modifying the ESPON governance system, including changes to the way the CU, MA, MC and the ECPs are structured or operate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides for a leaner management thanks to a Single Operation-Single Beneficiary strategy; the EGTC will limit financial control from 32 countries to 1 - Management of the Programme will be easier than in the past, allowing for improved steering of the activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rapid building up of the EGTC is critical for timely achievement of results - Appropriate staffing of the EGTC is necessary to guarantee sound management of the system - Steering and control by the MC is to be ensured, i.e. defining new ways of involvement - In-house costs will be higher than in the past and quality of results should increase accordingly
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancement of the in-house capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of the technical capabilities of the CU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better definition of expected products and easier steering of researches by the management - More interest on the part of researchers and experts in offering services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A periodical assessment of the new management structure, its working and its intermediate results is recommended Short term and quality results could enhance the perception of effectiveness of the EGTC
Greater policy relevance				
Increased focus on policy making; to offer prompt policy-relevant analyses upon demand from a defined group of stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The S.O. 2 dedicated to the production of short and readily comprehensible reports, territorial briefs and packs - Reinforcement of in-house scientific and communicative capacity. Inputs will be provided in-house by the EGTC - Framework for activities on fast analytical deliveries upon request included in the OS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Devising Programme actions that support policy-making and policy development more directly - Deliverables too dense, long and not easily digestible by non-academic audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swifter, policy-focused products should reinforce the uptake/use of ESPON products in policy making (also overcoming the problem of direct consultation of databases) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timeliness and regularity of production of major importance, delivering swifter analytical responses based on the well-established ESPON evidence-base, starting from demand expressed by policy makers. - Crucial for ESPON to be recognized by policy makers - How swift a product should be delivered, depends on both the product and the person who needs the information. The different ways in which this could be done should be carefully considered in the strategy - The themes are to be identified yet
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project Support Teams: they will favour the continuous involvement of the MC and will ensure policy relevance of the themes and results of the research by supporting the EGTC in supervising larger projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Devising Programme actions that support policy-making and policy development more directly - Achieving a closer research focus with regard to Applied Research projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The appointment of MC members in the PST is intended to ensure higher policy relevance - This PST model (proposed as a simple rapporteur system) would avoid the problem that each MC member has to comment on all the various reports of all the studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presumably a significant amount of resources (time, competences, travel costs...) are necessary on the part of MC members, which could mean careful selection of the intervention areas

Focal challenges of ESPON 2020 strategy	Elements (policy tools) of the ESPON 2020 strategy	Weaknesses addressed	Expected results/opportunities	Critical factors and/or threats for the success of the strategy
To encourage other ESI funded programmes and bodies to use territorial evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy briefs and packs to be prepared for ESIF programmes - Reviews on European territorial evidence and assessment for policy makers; - A major report on the state of the European territory to be published 2-3 times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not a weakness but an extension of the strategy realized so far 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enlargement of the evidence support to ESIF programmes other than ETC programmes will increase the use of territorial information in policy making and institutional capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High number of ESIF programmes - Lack of capacity among programme secretariats to process territorial evidence is to be addressed - Right timing for feeding policy process with territorial evidence requires the necessary delivery capacity in the management of the Programme but also on the part of the ESIFs secretariats in processing the territorial evidence available
More quality (scientific, comparability and validation of results)				
Scientific quality and validation of results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimum quality standards to be achieved included in the OS (p.15) - Reinforcement of the in-house scientific and communicative capacity (hypothesis: 19 people involved in the EGTC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of scientific recognition of ESPON research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solid/reliable results for policy making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scientific quality and swift production could be conflicting - The reinforced in-house capacity will not cover all the themes of ESPON research - Lack of definition of scientific quality: is diffusion in academia a goal for ESPON to pursue? Is a citation policy for ESPON envisioned?
Coverage, Comparability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance and improvement of the ESPON toolbox for supporting research - Coordination with other European Institutions and data standards applied - Technical support for users, particularly policy officers and practitioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not a weakness but an extension of the strategy realised so far 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The possibility to make comparison between territories is one of the main added values of ESPON; the completeness of databases and availability of details are overarching requirements for knowledge to be useful/satisfactory - Greater usability of ESPON toolboxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updating and completeness of the different indicators included in the database is essential to enhance confidence and usefulness for target groups - Friendliness of ESPON toolbox as a critical factor
Better communication and outreach to new users				
Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outreach strategy to be implemented with the ESPON Contact Point Network - Enhanced use of the social media - Publication of short and readily comprehensible reports on themes of interest - More translations in different languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing the visibility of the Programme and its results, - Addressing the language barrier (English communication) for the regional and local levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The CPN could overcome the language barriers in the Member and Partner States, in particular at the regional and local level - Outreach will support a high level of knowledge brokerage, more presence of territorial evidence in policy debates, better uptake based on readily comprehensible communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A vast audience with different skills and needs to be fed with territorial evidence, - The role, involvement and the events of the ECPN will be defined as part of the Work Programme of the Single Beneficiary - Direct funding of the ECPs is no longer provided, while a re-centralization of outreach activities is envisaged in ESPON 2020.

The table shows that all the focal challenges identified for ESPON 2020 have been addressed through ad-hoc solutions and policy tools, with no single issue left outstanding. Particular attention is dedicated to the re-focus of the strategy on policy makers, and establishment of an EGTC as a way to promote a leaner administration and effective management.

Even though, as previously said, the strategy takes into account all the main relevant issues that have emerged from the past, **not all of them were addressed at the same level of detail.**

On the evidence of the table, discussion can take in some critical factors and possible threats that call for attention:

- **The length of time necessary to set up the EGTC** – crucial to the very possibility of achieving the goal of a leaner administration; the risk is of delay in the ESPON procedures and consequent risk for financial implementation.
- **How quality is addressed.** The policy relevance and the scientific quality of the ESPON products are addressed, but how to ensure scientific quality is an issue only briefly considered (i.e. in the strengthening of the in-house capacity). It is, however, a point to be carefully considered as confidence in ESPON results relies on it. Probably the OS should provide further indications to the EGTC as to which types of actions would require greater scientific quality than others, and what measures can monitor scientific quality. In the case of ESPON, quality should also be understood in the sense of the “usability” and “friendliness” of ESPON tools and knowledge. Revision and development of the tools is provided for under S.O.3, and particular attention should be paid on this occasion to make use more clearer and more user-friendly,
- **Support of the PSTs.** The PSTs will foster greater policy relevance for ESPON research findings and more structured support from the MC for the knowledge production process. The resources required by the PSTs should be carefully considered to identify the quantum of actions that the PSTs can reasonably support. Another possibility is to define the criteria qualifying researches for PST support. The risk is that, as in the past, a considerable amount of the knowledge produced will receive only limited feedback from the MC;
- **The outreach strategy**, with reference mainly to the regional and local target groups, relies on the role and activities of the ECP Network. This will lead to a greater involvement of the Partner States in dissemination in their own territories. This part of the strategy is left both to details of the Operation Proposal and to the self-organisation of the national ECPs by the Partner States. However, direct funding to the ECPs seems no longer to be provided by ESPON. The risk of limited functioning of the ECP Network is a ripple effect on the involvement of sub-national policy-makers.

5.4 A STEP FURTHER: WHICH TARGET GROUPS, WHICH MECHANISMS PROMOTING THEIR COOPERATION

As far as target groups are concerned, the strategy will be further specified in the OS and in the Operational Proposal. It is the opinion of the evaluator that this strategy should consider appropriate mechanisms favouring the cooperation of specific target groups in the achievement of ESPON 2020 expected results. The CP classified two main groups of stakeholders:

- A **key target group**, composed by European-level policy-makers in the field of Cohesion Policy as well as other policy fields; national policy-makers responsible for territorial cohesion, ETC programmes, macro-regional strategies, cohesion policy preparation and implementation; authorities implementing ESIF programmes and preparing periodical reporting;
- A **secondary target group**, composed by: organizations promoting different regional/urban interests at the EU level, practitioners, policy officers and planners at the regional and local level, university academics, the wider audience.

The Operation Proposal will have to further detail the target groups of each specific objective **and to cross-reference the target groups with the main changes expected from each specific objective**. In effect, these changes could be more easily achieved if the specific characteristics of the main stakeholders are correctly taken into account, e.g., different incentives to *participate* in the ESPON Programme are needed for policy-makers, on the one hand, and academics or private providers, on the other. Close identification of the target groups addressed is necessary to define the appropriate incentives.

This is the contribution of a “theory of change” approach to the ex ante evaluation. The goal is to provide insights for the fine-tuning of the strategy, including sound justification of the choices made. More specifically, implementation of ESPON 2020 will achieve better results if ESPON attains **three main intermediate goals, all related to institutional capacity**. The three “institutional capacity goals” for ESPON are:

1. To generate and maintain attention/engagement on the part of the target audiences (both policy makers and knowledge providers);
2. To enhance the role of the newly established EGTC;
3. To streamline interactions among ESPON stakeholders, and in particular the authorities formally responsible for implementation (the MA and the MC) and the EGTC.

The ESPON strategy should pursue activation of **specific mechanisms (i.e., incentives) favouring those above mentioned capacity building goals**. The questions for a sounder strategy are thus:

1. *What could promote the attention and engagement of target groups?*
2. *What could enhance the role of a newly established organization, such an EGTC?*
3. *What could streamline interactions among partners, in order to avoid or overcome bottlenecks and possible conflicts?*

The hypothesis is that some institutional and policy contrivances are able to *stimulate the actors to change their behavior in a way conducive to attainment of the policy goals*. This reasoning could take the form of cost/benefit considerations activated by classical “stick and carrot” mechanisms (such as the perception of opportunity deriving from a grant); or tap onto the desire to maintain or increase the actor’s own reputation (e.g. show others one’s own outstanding competencies and capabilities); or again, incentives could derive from the interpretation of the signals coming from the outside, for instance the behaviours of people of her/his own reference group (e.g. the share of the people in a community dealing with a subject).

The literature shows a vast range of mechanisms that could trigger achievement of better results. In this vast range of proposals, some mechanisms appear particularly useful in the case of ESPON:

- **ESPON should foster the perception of opportunity deriving from participating to its activities**; the perception of opportunity depends on the characteristics of the actor and can be seen in the form of grants to be acquired (in the case of a knowledge provider), or in terms of “window of opportunity” for problems to be solved (for a policy maker or a technician), or in terms of increased reputation of actors participating in ESPON activities (for academics and professionals); attention to this aspect should be paid in detailing all the Axis 1’ Specific Objectives;
- **Certification of the EGTC’s role, deriving from perception of the effectiveness of its own activity; continuous performance feedback** usually favours perception of the effectiveness of an actor's role, and the trust building among partners. **Achieving short-term quality results, together with communication of those results, should be seen as a priority for the EGTC;**
- **Repeated interactions, recognized roles and shared rules of cooperation** in order to achieve common goals, favour **mutual learning and commitment among partners**. For example, well planned involvement of the MC in the PST activities could favour this goal; while direct involvement of MC representatives in the assessment of the EGTC could strengthen cooperation in achieving shared goals.

5.5 CONSISTENCY OF THE FINANCIAL ALLOCATION

The CP indicates for ESPON 2020 a budget of 48,678,824 Euros, in current prices. The ERDF support accounts for 85% of the budget, while the national counterpart amounts to 15%. No national private funding is provided.

Table 5 below shows the ESPON 2020 financial plan.

Table 5 Financial plan of the ESPON 2020 Programme (CP, p.53).

Priority Axis	Union support (a)	National counterpart (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total funding (C)=(a)+ (b)	Co-financing rate (f)= (a)/(e)
			National public funding (c)	National private funding (d)		
Priority axis 1	38,894,380	6,863,714	6,863,714	0	45,758,094	85%
Priority axis 2	2,482,620	438,110	438,110	0	2,920,730	85%
Total	41,377,000	7,301,824	7,301,824	0	48,678,824	85%

As already noted (see section 5.1), the definition of a single Axis as the “big basket” of all the core activities of ESPON, TA excluded, will ease management of resources among the lines of activity (the changes “inside” the Axis 1 will require the agreement of the MC but will not need validation from the EC). However, as far as the ex ante evaluation goes, this structure allows only for a high-level assessment of the consistency of the ESPON 2020 financial allocation.

The financial allocation between the two Axes (94% Axis 1; 6% Axis 2) shows a reasonably limited amount dedicated to Technical Assistance and a main part devoted to Axis 1, entirely implemented through a Single Beneficiary-Single Operation approach. The financial allocation to Axis 2 TA is in line with the provisions of art. 17 of Reg. (EU) 1299/2013 regarding technical assistance: “*The amount of the ERDF allocated to technical assistance shall be limited to 6% of the total amount allocated to a cooperation Programme*”.

It is worth noting that the TA budget will cover all the costs regarding the Management Authority, the Audit and monitoring system, evaluation and communication activities, together with a budget for the Project Support Teams and the ECP meetings. The costs of the EGTC-related activities, including in-house staff for evidence production and knowledge transfer, and the management and administration staff, will be covered by the Axis 1 budget.

More fine-grained assessment of the consistency of financial allocations is not possible at the moment. The financial allocation among the different Specific Objectives of Axis 1 will be included in the Operation Specification and in the Single Operation proposal, together with specification of the amount of resources absorbed by the EGTC staff and other costs regarding the management system. Moreover, during the implementation of the actions, the Single Beneficiary (the EGTC) will be entitled to reallocate among the budget lines up to 10% of the quantum allocated to a single Specific Objective. All these provisions will allow the MC and the MA easier management of the available resources, but they postpone the information for the assessment on this topic.

Even though not final, some documents discussed by the JWG have²¹ given indications for a larger part (around 50%) of available resources devoted to S.O.1, the remainder distributed among the other three Specific Objectives, favouring S.O.2 in particular.

The other point of interest is the budget to be allocated to external expertise (through public procurement) and the budget absorbed by the range of activities implemented through in-house capacity. No final decision has been reached at the moment, although a preliminary indication²² seems to assign around 65% of resources of Axis 1 to external expertise, while the remaining part will be absorbed by the internal staff and other related costs.

These, albeit preliminary, indications show a considerable financial outlay (i.e. management will cost more than in the past) aiming at a quantum leap in ESPON capacity. This enhancement should be read as a prerequisite for the overall thematic objective of strengthening the institutional capacity of other European administrations (see on this point, Section 5.2). The effectiveness of this choice will have to be assessed in terms of results achieved, in terms of both quantity and quality, by ESPON 2020.

²¹ The indication was included in the draft OP of April 2014.

²² “Second complementary information to the Note financing the ESPON 2020 Programme presented for the DG meeting of 3 April 2013”, version 14 April 2014.

6 ASSESSMENT OF THE ADEQUACY OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

One of the main novelties of the ESPON 2020 CP, lies in the creation of a new institutional framework and leaner management, based on the establishment of an EGTC which will act as a Single Beneficiary and be entitled to a “Single Operation”. The EGTC will deliver all the actions provided for in the Axis 1, while other management provisions (the managing, audit and certifying authorities, the evaluation and monitoring requirements) will be part of Axis 2 Technical Assistance.

The expected quantum leap in terms of capacity is based on a substantial increase of the human resources and competencies involved in the EGTC. As highlighted in the CP and provisional documentation (with further details)²³, additional in-house capacity is necessary to improve knowledge transfer and outreach, and steer externalised activities on research, analytical deliveries and tools development.

The (albeit provisional) EGTC organization chart shows a clear shift from administration to content and could help overcome some of the weaknesses encountered in the past, with particular reference to: the lack of steering and feedback to research providers, the under-use of ESPON tools, and the need to communicate more and better ESPON products.

Moreover, the set up of Project Support Teams, as a specific organizational procedure composed by EGTC internal staff, members of the MC and in some instances EC representatives, is intended to strengthen the research quality and policy relevance of ESPON products and results, through continuous feedback and guidance to the research teams. The PSTs should address one of the main weaknesses faced in ESPON 2020 and moreover foster a direct involvement of MC members, as rapporteur, in the Programme implementation.

As discussed in Section 3, the creation of the EGTC is to be considered a fundamental milestone in the ESPON 2020 Programme implementation process. The establishment of the EGTC, with a significant increase in the number of human resources and competencies involved in-house in the Programme, is to be seen as an “**internal**” **institutional capacity policy**, aiming at some intermediate results, and final goals. The final goals are enhancement of “external” institutional capacity, in terms of greater awareness, usefulness and use of territorial information for policy-makers.

Its results will have to be assessed not only in terms of management costs (which will be higher than in the past) but also, and indeed above all, in terms of the quantity and quality of the results achieved, including fewer burdens for beneficiaries. The new system should prove a quantum leap in the delivery of territorial analysis.

In order to take into account the relevance of the innovation and the possible risks involved in the creation of the new management system, the evaluator suggests adding to the tasks of the EGTC a **self-assessment exercise** (based, for example, on the Common Assessment Framework developed by the EIPA: http://www.eipa.eu/files/File/CAF/CAF_2013.pdf) to provide support to the new

²³ Second complementary information to the Note Financing the ESPON 2020 Programme presented for the DG meeting of 3 April 2014, version 14 April 2014.

organization, and more specifically to identify and manage its fundamental processes, stakeholders, clients and key results.

It is worth noting that by 1 August 2018 the Commission “*shall forward to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions a report on the application of this Regulation, evaluating, based on indicators, its effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, European added value and scope for simplification.*” (Art. 17, Reg. (EU) 1302/2013, amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation.) **The self-assessment exercise could provide information on the progress of the EGTC, to be taken into account in the Commission’s Report.**

The self-assessment exercise could be carried out periodically (ideally, during the first year of implementation, with annual updating) and should involve representatives of the MC and other stakeholders in order to collect and discuss with them the most relevant issues for enhancement of the ‘enabling factors’ and achievement of the ‘key results’. The involvement of a PST could be considered in forming the self-assessment unit (the group assigned with coordination of the self-assessment exercise).

However, some aspects should be considered.

As shown by the experience of other EGTCs (see the box in Section 6.2), the new management system will require a variety of preparatory activities (formal agreements, preparation and evaluation of the Multiannual and annual work Programme, hiring of personnel), and as a consequence, **additional time to be ready to start the implementation phase**. This could also have consequences for the financial absorption of the Programme.

Secondly, the new system **will change the pattern of cooperation between the Monitoring Committee, the MA and the Single Beneficiary (the EGTC)**. Even though the CP details the roles and tasks of the MC in accordance with Article 47 (3) of the CPR, some concerns still remain in terms of loss of influence of the Monitoring Committee on ESPON activities²⁴. Two types of activities could ensure MS and PS are kept in the driving seat: the active involvement of MC members in the PST activities, and the activities related to the monitoring and evaluation of annual programmes and results. Well planned activation of PSTs, clear and continuous feedback on EGTC activities, and good quality short-term results proven by the EGTC (including in terms of leaner administration) could enhance the perception of effectiveness of the new management system and the commitment and steering of MC members. On the contrary, limited involvement of the MC and blurred results could fuel dynamics of suspicion or even conflict (as typically happens in a principle-agent structure).

²⁴ Section 6.4 presents an overview of the main opinions issued by the ESPON national representatives on the new management system.

6.1 THE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL SYSTEM

This Section provides an overview of the main provisions on the ESPON Programme management and control system, and in particular:

- the Monitoring Committee (MC),
- the Managing Authority (MA),
- the Certifying Authority (CA)
- the Audit Authority (AA).

Section 6.2 and 6.3 provide for further information on:

- the new EGTC as Single Beneficiary,
- other coordination mechanisms (Project Support Teams and ESPON Contact Points).

The Monitoring Committee

The MC is the deciding body of the OP, composed of representatives from the ESPON MA, the MS, PS and the EC, with the overall responsibility of steering the Programme. It will be set up within three months from the date of notification by the Commission of the decision adopting the ESPON 2020 Programme (article 47(3) of Reg. (EU) No 1303/2013²⁵). According to article 49 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, the MC shall review implementation of the Programme and progress towards achieving its objectives, examine all issues that affect the performance of the Programme, approve the annual and final implementation reports of the ESPON 2020 Programme, give opinions on any amendment of the Programme proposed by the MA, issue recommendations to the MA regarding implementation and evaluation of the Programme, and implement the communication strategy for the Programme.

The MC shall assume all functions detailed in Article 49 (2) (3) (4) CPR and, more in particular, the functions listed in the box below.

- | | |
|-----|--|
| (a) | Examine any issues that affect the performance of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme and of the Single Operation; |
| (b) | Examine and approve the annual and final implementation reports of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme; |
| (c) | Examine the evaluation plan drawn up by the ESPON MA for the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme at its first meeting, approve it or amend the evaluation plan at a later stage; |
| (d) | Examine progress made in implementing the evaluation plan and the follow-up given to findings of evaluations; |
| (e) | Examine and adopt a seven year Communication Strategy for the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme and the yearly Communication Action Plans as well as any amendment of this communication strategy or of a given yearly action plan; |
| (f) | Implement the communication strategy of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme closely coordinated with the outreach activities of the Programme; |
| (g) | Examine and approve any proposal by the ESPON MA for any amendment to the |

²⁵ Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund as well as general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006

- ESPON 2020 Programme;
- (h) Assess, negotiate and approve the Operation Specification which will guide preparation of the Operation Proposal;
 - (i) Establish minimum criteria for approving, if necessary under conditions, the proposal for the Single Operation elaborated by the ESPON EGTC in its role as Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme;
 - (j) Assess, negotiate and approve the Single Operation proposal submitted including the Multi-Annual Work Programme 2015-2020 for the Single Operation and the respective proposed financial allocations;
 - (k) Discuss and approve the Annual Work Plans for the Single Operation, including general principles for selection criteria, the respective proposed financial allocations and scoping notes for activities the ESPON MC considers to be of particular importance;
 - (l) Discuss and approve the Annual Implementation Report for the Single Operation and related actions and activities of the Single Beneficiary;
 - (m) Ensure monitoring of activities of the ESPON EGTC as Single Beneficiary, according to the procedures stipulated in the Grant Agreement;
 - (n) Ensure the nomination of representatives of the ESPON MC to participate in Project Support Teams, to accompany and give policy advice in implementation of major projects mainly on applied research and to act as rapporteur to the ESPON MC, as well as addressing the proposals made by Project Support Teams;
 - (o) Provide, via the rapporteur, direct feedback to the Single Beneficiary on important activities related to the Specific Objectives 1-4.

The Managing Authority

The designated authority assuming the functions of the MA is the *Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures Department for Spatial Planning and Development (DATER), Directorate of International Affairs, Luxembourg*.

One novelty of the ESPON 2020 OP lies in the provision for the MA to undertake the functions of the CA, in compliance with article 21(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013, which states that: “*Member States participating in a cooperation Programme may designate the managing authority as also being responsible for carrying out the functions of the certifying authority.*”²⁶ Consequently, the MA and the CA will be established in one body (the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures Department for Spatial Planning and Development) but the CA will be functionally separated from the MA.

Another novelty resides in the MA undertaking the functions of a **joint secretariat**. ESPON 2013 set up a Coordination Unit, which acted as Joint Technical Secretariat for the Programme in order to provide technical support to the Monitoring Committee and to the Concertation Committee as well as the MA and the AA in relation to management of the ESPON 2013 Programme. The ESPON 2020 CP provides that the MA will assume the function and tasks as a JTS and that “*limited staff necessary to support the MA will be contracted and the work space will be at the location of the MA for a smooth functioning of the secretarial function with the MA.*” (CP, point 5.2, p.59).

²⁶ See article 21.2 of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal

The Certifying Authority

The functions of the CA are, as mentioned above, held by the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures, Department of Spatial Planning and Development (DATER), Division for General Affairs and Budget, Luxembourg. Among its tasks there will be submission to the EC of all payment applications, receiving payments made by the EC, national co-financing of the MS and the contributions of PS and making payments to the Single Beneficiary and other recipients of payment.

The Audit Authority

The function of the Audit Authority is represented by the Ministry of Finance, General Inspection of Finance (IGF), Luxembourg. It is responsible for drawing up the report and opinion assessing fulfilment by the MA and CA of the criteria on internal control environment, risk management, management and control activities and monitoring.

6.2 THE EGTC AS A SINGLE BENEFICIARY

The main novelty of the ESPON 2020 Programme lies in the provision made to set up an European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) contracted as a *Single Beneficiary* carrying through the content-related actions under priority 1. The EGTC will use public procurement and service contracts instead of grants, the aim being leaner, more effective and efficient administration.

As the EGTC is a relatively new EU cooperation instrument (most EGTS have been established since 2010), the box below provides information on their accomplishments so far and their working.

The EGTC as a cooperation instrument

The EGTC is an EU cooperation instrument endowed with legal personality instituted in 2006 by Regulation 1082²⁷ with the aim of simplifying administration, cooperation and financial control of territorial cooperation in Europe²⁸. Creation of an EGTC should, in fact, reduce the difficulties faced by participating authorities in the implementation and management of cooperation activities in the context of differing national laws and procedures. The law applicable to the EGTC is the law of the Member State where the EGTC has its registered office (Art.6 of Regulation 1082/2006).

Membership of an EGTC is open to national, regional and local authorities and other public law bodies of at least two Member States, especially in the context of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) objective of Cohesion Policy.

The EGTC must set up a single registered office in the Member State under whose laws one of the members is established; moreover, each EGTC must be composed at least of the following **bodies**:

- a) an assembly, which is made up of representatives of its members;
- b) a director, who represents the EGTC and acts on its behalf.

The EGTC is governed by a **convention** - which must entail information on the duration of the EGTC, its organs and competences, the law applicable to the registered office, to other possible locations/offices, to the activities and infrastructure, to the staff and to the liability, and the procedure of adoption and amendment of the statutes and of the convention²⁹ - and by statutes.

Regulation (EU) 1302/2013, adopted on 17 December 2013³⁰, amends Regulation 1082/2006. The main novelties introduced concern the **composition** of an EGTC (departing from previous practice, EGTCs can now be made by *one entity* from one Member State and another from a non-EU Member State – article 3(a)), and the **tasks** attributed to an EGTC. According to article 7(3) of Regulation 1302, these “may concern the implementation of cooperation programmes, or parts thereof, or the implementation of operations supported by the Union through the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and/or the Cohesion Fund”. The EGTC may therefore implement a part of an ETC Programme, not necessarily the whole Programme, with or without financial support from the Union. The article further specifies that actions carried out without financial support from the EU can be limited by the Member States, but *not if they concern the priorities of the ETC*.

Some new dispositions regarding the EGTC are included in other EU Regulations on cohesion policy, mainly in the CPR and in the ETC Regulation. In particular, article 93 of Reg. 1303/2013 provides that an

²⁷ Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC);

²⁸ CoR: The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation – State of play and perspectives, June 2008, p.15;

²⁹ Article 8 of Regulation 1302/2013;

³⁰ Regulation 1302 will enter into force on 22 June 2014;

EGTC can be beneficiary of joint action plans (JAP) and, according to article 99, it can be beneficiary or intermediate body of integrated territorial investments (ITI). Moreover, an EGTC can be the managing authority of a programme and carry out the first level control in the whole area of a programme (article 9 ETC regulation). Finally, according to article 12(3) of ETC regulation, an EGTC can be Single Beneficiary of ETC operations, “provided that it is set up by public authorities or bodies from at least two participating countries, in the case of cross-border and transnational cooperation, and from at least three participating countries, in the case of interregional cooperation”. This is the case of ESPON, which will set up an EGTC as beneficiary of the Single Operation.

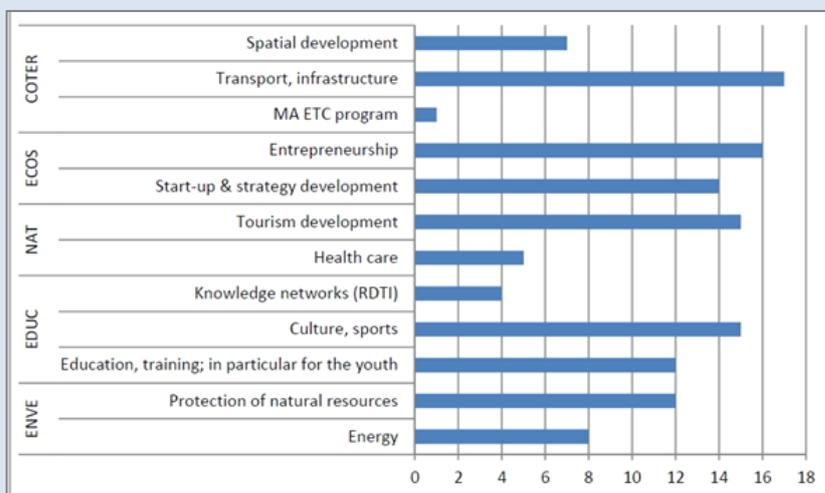
The state of the art: the EGTCs in place at present

Since the creation of the first EGTC in 2006 (Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai), 46 EGTCs have been established in total³¹. The peak in the development of the EGTCs was registered between 2010 and 2013, with an average of eight to nine groupings set up each year. Hungary, Romania and Slovakia are a group of countries notably active in EGTC creation as from 2008, followed by Spain, Portugal and France, characterized by comparatively long-standing roots of cross-border cooperation and thus strong institutional ties³².

Figure 4 offers an overview of the fields that were either explicitly indicated in the EGTC documents or have been the focus of the projects implemented by the groupings. Note that the majority of EGTCs address more than one topic. The chart divides topics according to the commissions of the Committee of the Regions.

According to the list of EGTCs under construction published on the website of the Committee of the Regions, 15 EGTCs are currently in the pipeline, four of which already have legal personality³³ while in 8 cases, the prospective members have only undertaken exploratory actions or preliminary negotiations to set up an EGTC.

Figure 4. Field of EGTC activity, grouped according to CoR Commissions (source: Metis GmbH, EGTC database)



First considerations on the operation of the EGTC

In 2010 the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, together with the 2010-

³¹ EGTC monitoring report 2013. Towards the new cohesion policy, Metis GmbH, February 2014;

³² Ibidem.

³³ Information updated in March 2014.

2011 Presidencies of the Council of the European Union (Spain-Belgium-Hungary) and the INTERACT programme conducted extensive consultation of Member States, regional and local authorities and other stakeholders on the operation and added value of the EGTC instrument. The main issue raised concerns the differences of legal status (public or private law, limited or unlimited liability) of EGTCs in MSs stemming from the divergent decisions taken by Member States as part of the national implementation process, as permitted under the Regulation. Difficulties have also been reported in defining the content of conventions and statutes as well as their approval procedures.

Moreover, in 2011 the European Parliament published an own-initiative report entitled "Objective 3: a challenge for territorial cooperation – the future agenda for cross-border transnational and interregional cooperation" which, on the functioning of the EGTC as legal instrument, states that it works satisfactorily and that "it has met the need expressed by regional and local authorities for structured cooperation covering financing, the legal status of projects and multi-level governance". However, it calls on the Commission to address some shortcomings in the implementation of the existing EGTCs. In particular it urged clarification of the status of EGTCs under national legal systems, simplifying the laws governing the staff of and the tax arrangements applicable to EGTCs; it also called for the possibility to allocate global grants to EGTCs to enable them to directly manage Structural Fund appropriations.

Again in 2011, the EC issued a report on the application of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)³⁴, which analyses both the motivations to create an EGTC and the practical difficulties encountered in the application of the EGTC Regulation. With reference to the difficulties in the process of **creation of an EGTC**, the main issues raised by stakeholders contacted by the Commission concern:

- The procedures required to set up and manage an EGTC, which are deemed time-consuming and complex (e.g. long procedure to establish an EGTC and modify the convention and the statutes, especially regarding admission of new members). **On this point, the new EGTC regulation introduces some changes, simplifying the procedure for the approval of the convention and for the amendments to the statutes and to the convention (see article 4).**
- Insufficient awareness of the instrument amongst the national authorities and Commission services when requesting practical information or applying for support.
- The differing status of local and regional bodies in different Member States. Tasks that fall under regional or local competence on one side of the border may fall under national responsibilities on the other side.
- The issue of membership of third countries: some EGTCs complained about the creation of an EGTC by one MS and a third country being ruled out. This issue has finally been addressed by the new Regulation, which, in article 3, provides the possibility for an EGTC to be set up by one MS and a third country's authority.
- It is to be noted that delays are reported in the publication process for EGTCs, signalling a possible need for clarification and improvement of the notification process.

As for the **operation of an EGTC**, the following issues are underlined in the EC report:

³⁴ See Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. The application of the Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), COM(2011) 462 final;

- The benefits of creating an EGTC are considered evident. This is the case, for instance, with the simplification of the provision of public transport or utilities, or the promotion-integrated strategy for development of the region in the context of Europe 2020.
- Nonetheless, different Member States or even different authorities within the same Member States may come up with diverse interpretations of a given legal provision and introduce different practices.
- More visibility would enable the EGTCs to support networking and allow for exchange of experience. The Commission services have not always recognized the EGTCs as eligible, for example, to participate in their calls for proposals. Similarly, national public administrations have not always been aware of the EGTCs and their capacities and legal status.

6.2.1 Rationale for an ESPON EGTC

The EGTC has been introduced in the ESPON Programme in order to tackle the limitations of ESPON 2006 and 2013, which lay mainly in the heavy administrative burden imposed on team partners, national authorities and also the Programme authorities.³⁵ ESPON 2013 required the establishment of national first level control systems for certification of the costs incurred by project partners from their respective countries. In order to claim reimbursement of costs, project partners were compelled to compile cost statements to be processed into progress reports. Similarly, the Programme authorities were required to process the financial progress reports. This management system has been accused of damping interest on the part of project teams in applying for grants, because of the large share of human resources necessary for its own administration and because it does not allow for prompt and short-notice deliveries.³⁶

A note by the Managing Authority reports some data which help understand the proportions of the issue at stake: “the ESPON 2013 Programme will in total process around 440 progress reports dealing with the finances of the projects. As the Programme includes 350-400 partners, and considering that each project has in average 4-6 partners the total number of project partner’s reports drafted and subject to individual national FLC is at the level of 2000-2500. All 440 progress reports are as well processed by the CU/MA and CA. These procedures are coming on top of a public procurement style organization of the call for proposals with thorough checks of the deliveries on the content side”.³⁷

The creation of an EGTC should overcome many of the issues previously analysed. The new system is expected to produce three fundamental improvements:

- Simplified and leaner cooperation among the managing and control authorities,
- Reduction of administrative burden for the ESPON knowledge providers,

³⁵ ADE, Evaluation of the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON) Programme.

³⁶ ESPON OP, Programme Strategy (version 21/11/2012), p. 13.

³⁷ Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructures in Luxembourg, Designated MA for the ESPON 2020 Programme, Note for the Director General Meeting on 10 October 2012, Progress and agreement in principle on ESPON 2020.

- Reinforced ESPON Programme management capacity, by hiring new personnel with specific profiles.

However, it is certainly true that the EGTC as a Single Beneficiary will lead to a change in the relationships among the Partner States and the management. The direction is towards a more centralized system that will leave the MC the role of strategic steering and control of the Programme, while the detail programming and all management activities will be in the hands of the EGTC.

This institutional revision will probably be able to foster swifter and leaner management of the Programme; however, the new pattern of relations between the management system and the Partner States will have to be properly governed in order to avoid possible conflicts and, more importantly, to allow the MS and PS to provide their contribution in terms of priorities and contextualization of the territorial dimension of the Programme.

6.2.2 EGTC set-up and procedures

With regard to the EGTC set-up procedure, the Operation Specification and the Operation Implementation Guidelines detail the conditions for the selection, evaluation and approval of the operation, identifying the Single Beneficiary, its main scope and objectives. In particular, on the basis of the provisions of the Operation Specification approved by the MC, the MA will invite the Single Beneficiary to draft and submit an Operation Proposal which will have to be firstly assessed by the MA on behalf of the MC and, subsequently, evaluated by the MC itself. The MA will draw up an evaluation report for the approval of the MC, and a grant agreement detailing the rights and duties of both parties to be signed with the Single Beneficiary. The Operation Proposal will be annexed to the Grant Agreement. Every year, the Annual Work Plans submitted by the Single Beneficiary will be included in the Grant Agreement in the form of addendum, following approval by the MC. The first Annual Work Plan will be submitted together with the Operation Proposal.

The goal of the new processes (in particular, the decisional system based on multiannual and work plans) is to make steering ESPON easier, and avoid bottlenecks and delays due to micro-management decisions. The EGTC will be the “executive” body of ESPON, endowed with more management freedom, while the MC will be less involved in day-to-day decision-making; on the other hand, the MC will be more involved in definition of the general criteria and goals of the ESPON strategy, as well as assessment of the results achieved.

6.2.3 EGTC Membership

The EGTC will be composed of a limited number of countries (Luxembourg and the three Belgian regions, as informally indicated so far) mainly tasked with internal affairs issues and questions of legality of the EGTC as a grant receiving body. Luxembourg, where the EGTC will be based and whose national legal provisions will apply to the EGTC together with its statutes and convention and to Regulation (EC) N° 1302/2013, will cover the set-up costs of the structure. The EGTC’s main financial resources will be direct contributions from its members (EGTC Structure Budget) and contracted external sources (EGTC Activity Budget) such as the grant agreement regarding the ESPON 2020 OP.

The EGTC will set up:

- an Assembly composed of the representatives of its members,

- a Director who will represent the ESPON EGTC and will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the EGTC
- a Consultative Committee (optional) in order to ensure transparency and provide advice on administrative and financial soundness of the EGTC³⁸.

Finally, as far as the issue of financial control is concerned, this new implementation logic will concentrate first-level financial control in one single country, Luxembourg.

6.2.4 The liability mechanism

A **liability mechanism** will be established in the form of a Fund supplied by all the countries participating in ESPON, and acting as a sort of insurance for ineligible EGTC expenditure. The mechanism will be financed by all the countries participating in the ESPON Programme and will cover a maximum of 2% of ineligible expenditure on the total of the ERDF funding³⁹; ineligible expenditure exceeding the threshold of 2% will be covered by Luxembourg, where the EGTC is hosted. Distribution of the liability and contributions to the Fund by country will be proportional to the national contribution to ESPON and will be paid annually. At the end of the programming period, unused funding will be paid back to all the countries in proportion to their contribution.

6.2.5 Reinforcing in-house capacity

The expected quantum leap in terms of capacity is based on a substantial increase in the human resources and competencies involved in the EGTC. As highlighted in the CP and, with further details, in provisional documentation⁴⁰, additional in-house capacity is necessary to improve knowledge transfer and outreach, steer externalised activities on research, and promote analytical deliveries and tools development.

The EGTC staff foreseen will consist of 19 persons including a Director (leading a Coordination board), two Heads of Units, 5 people involved in the Unit for Management and Administration (in particular, for the management of public procurement procedures) and 11 people involved in the Unit for Evidence Production and Knowledge Transfer. The main novelty lies in the identification of a “senior scientific officer” as a Head of the Unit for Evidence Production and knowledge transfer, with the goal of steering and controlling all of the content-related activities of ESPON.

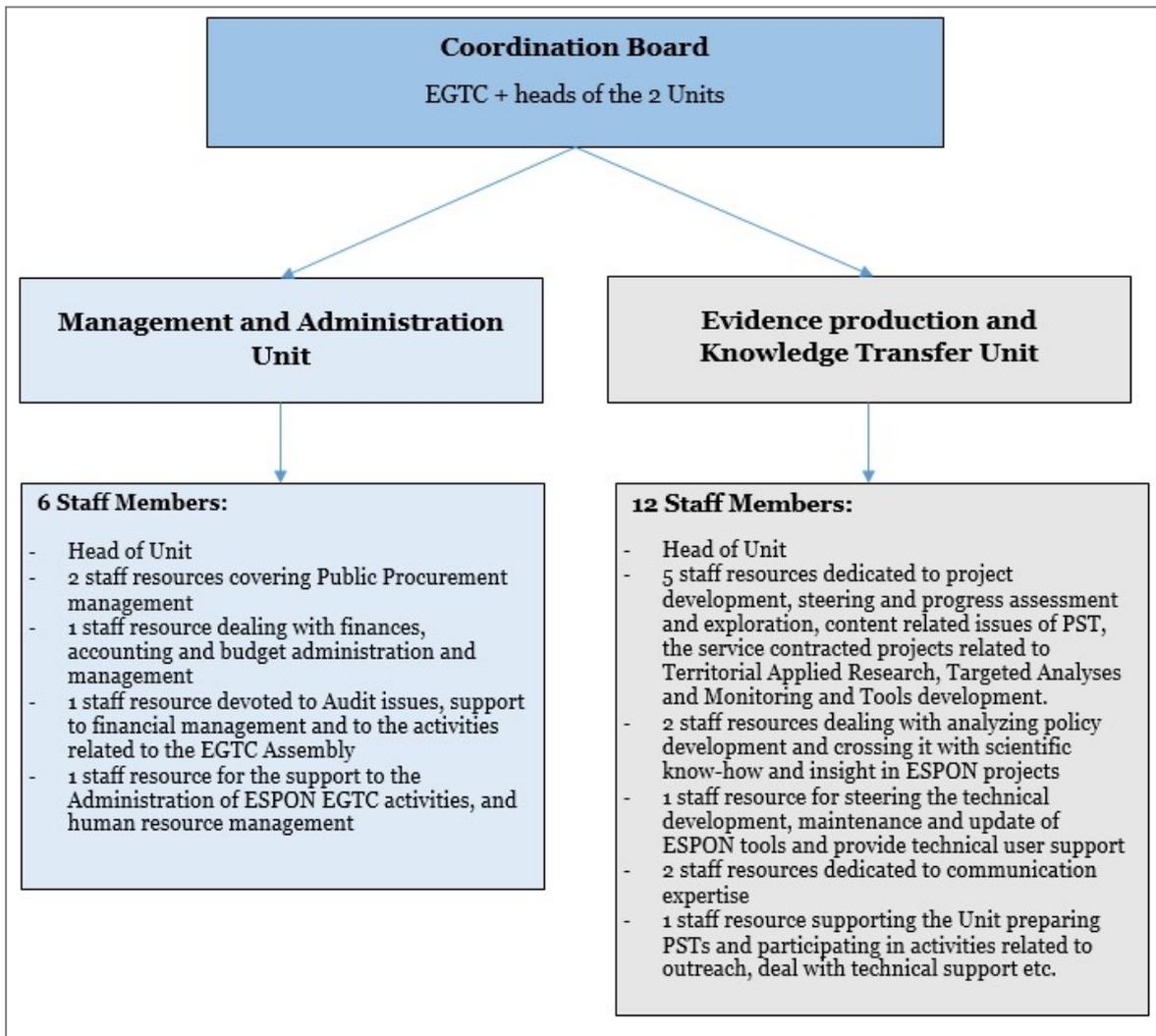
The (albeit provisional) EGTC organization chart shows a clear shift from administration to content and could help overcome some of the weaknesses encountered in the past, with particular reference to the lack of steering and feedback to research providers, the under-use of ESPON tools, and the need to communicate more and better ESPON products.

³⁸ See Issue Paper related to the ESPON 2020 OP: Draft Statute of the ESPON EGTC, 29/08/2013.

³⁹ The share of national co-financing will not be covered by the liability mechanism.

⁴⁰ Second complementary information to the Note Financing the ESPON 2020 Programme presented for the DG meeting of 3 April 2014, version 14 April 2014.

Figure 5. The internal staff of the EGTC



(Source: Second complementary information to the Note Financing the ESPON 2020 Programme presented for the DG meeting of 3 April 2014, version 14 April 2014)

6.3 FURTHER COORDINATION MECHANISMS

6.3.1 Project Support Teams

ESPON 2020 has introduced the Project Support Teams (PSTs) as a specific organizational tool. The PSTs are intended to support ESPON's main projects, from drafting the ToR to the final deliveries. The goal of the PSTs is to enhance the research quality and policy relevance of ESPON products and results through continuous feedback and guidance provided to the teams involved in researches.

As suggested in the draft Operation Specification (seventh version of 21 May 2014), the PSTs will normally be composed by one or two experts of the ESPON EGTC with high scientific and/or policy advisor profile, and by a representative of the MC in the role of rapporteur, who will provide advice and policy guidance to the PST in order to guarantee the policy relevance of the results. In addition, PSTs may include EC representatives (upon request), and in exceptional cases count on external expertise, in addition to the EGTC in-house capacity. The EGTC staff will be in charge of all secretarial tasks related to PSTs. To this end, and as pointed out in the Budget Details Note of 14 April 2014, 1 fulltime staff resource over the whole programming period should support the Unit for Evidence Production and Knowledge Transfer within the EGTC in the preparations for Project Support Teams.

The PSTs will issue recommendations to the EGTC, which can be, however, overruled by the EGTC as contractor of the service upon justification in the Annual Implementation Report.

The decision on the researches to receive the support of a PST and participation in a PST, is one of the main resources for the active involvement of the MS in ESPON's content-related activities. The PST should be seen as a new supportive process of ESPON 2020 in the delivery of quality results, and managed accordingly. Attention should be paid to:

- Shared criteria for the selection of researches to be supported by a PST, to be agreed upon by the MC members;
- A well coordinated and structured process for the PSTs' activities (e.g. through a roadmap of PST involvement) in order to define and share a common procedure among the MC members and the EGTC staff; the envisaged provision of secretarial support by the EGTC staff appears crucial to this end;
- The availability of resources for PST activities, in terms of time and competencies. The risk is that, as in the past, a considerable amount of the knowledge produced will receive only limited feedback from the MC.

As a one of the main novelties of ESPON 2020, the effectiveness of the PSTs' contribution should come in for midterm assessments.

6.3.2 ESPON Contact Point Network (ECP)

The ESPON 2013 network was made of 30 contact persons covering all Member and Partner States apart from Portugal. The ECPs were the only eligible applicants for Priority 4. Recruitment of ECP institutions was carried out at the national level by nomination followed by MC confirmation. The composition of the network was a mixture of highly skilled researchers and administrators depending on each country's provisions.

The main weaknesses underlined in the midterm evaluation indicated that the ECP network was an underused resource for ESPON; moreover, the funding of ECPs was managed very differently from one Member State to another, with some ECPs not receiving much financial support at all, in which case Priority 4 was a crucial resource. The ADE evaluation concluded that the system “raises a number of issues about transparency and the ways in which ECPs are funded in the next programming period”.

The ESPON 2020 CP still involves the ECPs in support of the outreach activities carried out under the S.O.4, but their participation in the Programme has changed. The ECPs are no longer beneficiaries of ESPON funds (the EGTC is the Single Beneficiary), but they can cooperate as national partners. The activities to be carried on in cooperation with the ECP network (composed by institutions nominated by the partner states) will be detailed in the Annual Work Plan by the EGTC. According to the Operation Specification (draft version 7A), the ESPON budget will cover meeting costs (up to twice a year) of the nominated national ECP institutions, and all the expenses related to the activities to be implemented by the EGTC in cooperation with the ECT network, in relation to transnational and national outreach activities included in the Annual Work Plan.

These changes suggest a strategy of re-centralization of the communication activities. At the same time, the role and scope of action of the ESPON 2020 ECP Network remains an element of the strategy that will require further detailing.

6.4 OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN OPINIONS OF THE ESPON NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Relations between the MC and the EGTC

Several members of the JWG expressed some concern over the possibility of the EGTC becoming an autonomous agency, some countries being endowed with more decision-making power than others (namely those sitting in the EGTC Assembly). It was underlined that the monitoring committee should retain a central decision-making role at the strategic level on ESPON activities, that concrete tools to structure communication between the MC and the EGTC members should be established and that it is necessary to keep the relations between the MC and the EGTC members as simple as possible.

A further point raised by some country representatives concerned the issuing of policy briefs by the EGTC. Given the importance of such instruments, they claim, the decision on their production should be made by the MC within the annual plan and leave decision to the EGTC on only a few policy briefs. Some doubts have also been advanced over the effective scientific in-house capacity of the EGTC, as foreseen by the OP and the OS, to produce policy briefs.

Project support teams

Several national representatives at the JWG meetings raised the issue of the profile and functioning of the envisaged project support teams. According to some (in particular of the smaller countries), this new system, meant to guarantee the policy relevance of ESPON production, could imply an additional burden on ESPON countries in terms of both human resources and administrative issues. Also in this case, some Member States still seem to be uncertain about the role of the EGTC within this set-up – fearing that it might be endowed with strong influence over the functioning of PSTs and recalling the importance for the EGTC to consider the recommendations made by PSTs in the monitoring of the projects. In order to avoid this situation, the need for the PST to be impartial is underlined. Some members also recalled the importance of ensuring

that the PST rapporteurs pursue the interest of the Programme as a whole and not their own national interest.

ESPON Contact Points

A point on which it has been difficult to reach a decision concerns the profile of the future ECPs. Some differences of opinion still exist as to whether they should be more related to science or to policy, and to what extent they should be equipped to perform more scientific tasks. Moreover, it seems to be common opinion that it would be useful for ECPs to focus on national and regional stakeholders, providing them with information on the Programme results and activities.

Liability Mechanism

One key feature of the new Programme concerns the provision of a liability mechanism acting as a sort of insurance for ineligible EGTC expenditure which will cover a maximum of 2% of ineligible expenditure, while costs in excess of the liability limit of 2 % will be covered by Luxembourg, the ESPON MA country. During discussion within the JWG this issue was frequently raised by the Member States' representatives in order to go deeper into and clarify all details concerning its functioning and possible implications. In particular, among the most discussed points were: the allocation of the liability of ERDF funds on priority axes and the amount to be transferred to the fund; the possibility for the fund allocated to the liability mechanism to produce interest; the functioning of the system set-up for the implementation and steering of the mechanism; and the re-transfer to the MS and PC - after all possible checks, controls and audits – of unused funds allocated to the liability fund.

7 THE ESPON PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK AND THE SUITABILITY OF THE INDICATORS

Like all the ESI funded Programmes, ESPON 2020 is subject to the new performance framework provisions.

The performance framework is one of the main innovations of the programming period 2014-2020. The draft evaluation report delivered by IRS in January 2014 outlined some indications for the performance framework for the ESPON 2020 Programme⁴¹. The main messages conveyed to the CU and JWG included:

- ESPON is exempted from ex ante conditionalities, as they are not applicable to ETC Programmes (art. 19.8 Reg.1303/2013).
- As part of the ETC goal, ESPON is exempted from the 6% performance reserve (Art. 23.14 Reg.1303/2013).
- Like all the other ESIF Programmes, ESPON shall define its own performance framework, and will be subject to the performance review of the Commission (Art. 21 and Annex II of Reg.1303/2013); the deadline for the performance review is in 2018; the final target is to be achieved by 2023.
- The performance review of the ESPON 2020 Programme will focus on Priority Axis 1, while Priority Axis 2 “technical assistance” is exempted from the performance review (art. 20 (b) of Reg.1303/2013).
- Output and financial indicators are the main reference for the performance review; this does not exempt from setting result indicators; result indicators will be used *ex ante*, in order to justify the added value of the Programme, and *ex post* as reference in conducting the final evaluation of the effectiveness of the Programme.
- Milestones are the intermediate targets for achievement of the specific objective of a priority, to be accomplished up to 2023. The milestones are to be relevant, capturing essential information on the progress of a priority; transparent, with verifiable targets and the source data identified and publicly available; verifiable, without imposing a disproportionate administrative burden; consistent across operational programmes, where appropriate (Annex II of Reg.1303/2013). If no measurable outputs are expected by the intermediate deadlines, it is possible to use key implementation steps as main milestones.

The set-up of the ESPON 2020 performance framework and indicators was one of the issues debated during the ex ante evaluation process. As already noted in previous evaluations, the identification of performance indicators is no mere exercise for a Programme fostering knowledge, as indeed is ESPON. Accordingly, definition of the result indicators raised discussion on the main outcomes of the ESPON 2020 strategy. This should be read as a positive effect of the new performance framework approach.

⁴¹ The information is drawn from various documents. We considered: Regulation (EU) no. 1303/2013; COM(2013) 246 final, of 22 April 2013; European Commission– DG Regio, Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation – European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund – Concepts and Recommendations (draft guidance), November 2013; European Commission, “Guidance Fiche - Performance Framework Review and Reserve in 2014-2020 version 3, (draft guidance), 19 July 2013”; European Commission – DG Regio, Position Paper on ESPON 2020, 9 July 2013.

Output indicators

The ESPON 2020 CP identifies four Programme-specific output indicators, each linked to the four Specific Objectives of Axis 1. Common output indicators were not selected, due to the specificity of the ESPON Programme.

Targets values are quantitative in nature and identify the final output to be achieved by 2023. The indicators appear consistent with the Specific Objectives they refer to, clear and proportionate.

As for the Axis 2 (Technical Assistance), the CP identifies four output indicators. Two refer to key procedural steps (the production of Guidance documents, i.e. the Operation Specification and the Operation Implementation Guidance, for the Single Beneficiary; the preparation of the Communication strategy), one refers to the provision of supportive equipment (the implementation of a computerised system⁴²), and one to the realisation of two evaluation reports. Also in this case target values are indicated and are quantitative in nature. Again, the output indicators selected appear relevant and coherent with the main activity falling under Axis 2.

Result indicators

The revision of the “logic of change” of the Programme (see Section 5.2) was the starting point of the work on ESPON indicators. More awareness of ESPON activities, perception of usefulness and satisfaction of users with ESPON products are the recognized intermediate results in addressing the overall Thematic Objective 11 “enhancing institutional capacity”, and the related Investment Priority of “strengthening the evidence base in order to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy and achievement of the thematic objectives through analysis of development trends” (ETC Reg. 1299/2013, 7 (c) iii).

Accordingly, the ESPON result indicators should incorporate this kind of outcomes.

- The result indicators included in the ESPON 2020 CP (Table 3 of the CP, p.28) are in line with the intermediate results expected by ESPON and consequently, the selected result indicators appear relevant in assessing progress towards achievement of the ESPON 2020 general goal.
- The CP correctly reframed the wording of the five objectives, giving indication of the transformation to be achieved,
- The evaluator, moreover, positively welcomes the inclusion (in the final version of the CP) of a result indicator related to S.O. 5 Leaner administration (which was lacking in the previous drafts of the Programme), with the goal of assessing the satisfaction on the new implementation provisions of ESPON 2020.

⁴² Reference here is to set up and maintenance of the computerised system ensuring the electronic exchange of data between Programme authorities and Single Beneficiary according to Art. 125 (d) d of the Reg. 1303/2013. The system is expected to contribute to ensuring the minimum level of administrative burden for all actors involved.

Table 6 ESPON 2020 result indicators and targets (source: ESPON 2020 CP, Table 3, p.28)

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)
R01	Number of users within selected target groups stating use of ESPON applied research outputs and results in policy and programming processes.	Not Applicable	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating use of ESPON applied research outputs and results in policy and programming processes
R02	Number of users in selected target groups stating they are satisfied with ESPON knowledge transfer and analytical user support.	Not Applicable	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with ESPON knowledge transfer and analytical user support.
R03	Number of users in selected target groups stating use of ESPON territorial observations and tools for territorial analyses in policy and programming processes.	Not Applicable	To increase the number of users in selected target groups stating use of ESPON territorial observations and tools for territorial analyses in policy and programming processes
R04	Number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the (1)usefulness and (2) policy relevance of ESPON territorial evidence	Not Applicable	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the (1)usefulness and (2) policy relevance of ESPON territorial evidence
R05	Number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the implementation provisions of ESPON 2020 Programme	Not Applicable	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the implementation provisions of ESPON 2020 Programme

As for the **performance framework**, choosing to adopt a result indicator for Axis 1 (Table 5, p.39 CP) appears more challenging than selecting an output or financial indicators. Therefore, the evaluator positively welcomes this choice.

Table 7 ESPON 2020 performance framework (source: ESPON 2020 CP, Table 5, p.39)

Priority axis	Indicator type	ID	Indicator or key implementation step	Measurement unit, where appropriate	Milestone for 2018	Final target (2023)	Source of data
Priority Axis 1: Territorial Evidence, Transfer, Observation, Tools and Outreach	Result	1	Indicator	Non Applicable	To increase the use of and satisfaction with ESPON outputs and results	To increase the use of and satisfaction with ESPON outputs and results	Surveys by the Single Beneficiary
Priority Axis 2: Technical Assistance	Key Implementation Step/Result	2	Key implementation step	Non Applicable	Full operation of the ESPON EGTC.	Full implementation of the ESPON EGTC Multi-Annual Work Programme.	ESPON MA

It is worth noting that the overall ESPON strategy rests on correct accomplishment of a number of key implementation steps. Of these, the most important is establishment

and well functioning of the new EGTC. Correctly, and following the suggestions of the ex ante evaluation, this aspect has been included among the indicators referred to Priority Axis 2.

Summing up, the selected result indicators for ESPON 2020 appear to be relevant and capturing essential information on the progress of the Programme, and consistent with the nature and character of the Axes and Specific Objectives they refer to.

However:

- The current wording of the “indicators” in the CP properly refers to “measurement units”, while the measurement units are lacking in table 3 of the CP referring to result indicators; the evaluator suggest changing their definition as proposed in the table 8 below.

Table 8 ESPON result indicator: proposed revision in the use of terms indicator and measurement unit

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit (indicators in Table 3 CP)	Target value (2023)
Ro1	Increased use of ESPON outputs in policy and programming processes	Number of users within selected target groups stating use of ESPON applied research outputs and results in policy and programming processes.	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating use of ESPON applied research outputs and results in policy and programming processes
Ro2	Degree of satisfaction with ESPON knowledge transfer and analytical user support	Number of users in selected target groups stating they are satisfied with ESPON knowledge transfer and analytical user support.	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with ESPON knowledge transfer and analytical user support.
Ro3	Use of ESPON territorial observation and tools for territorial analysis	Number of users in selected target groups stating use of ESPON territorial observations and tools for territorial analyses in policy and programming processes.	To increase the number of users in selected target groups stating use of ESPON territorial observations and tools for territorial analyses in policy and programming processes
Ro4	Perception of usefulness and policy relevance of ESPON territorial evidence	Number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the (1)usefulness and (2) policy relevance of ESPON territorial evidence	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the (1)usefulness and (2) policy relevance of ESPON territorial evidence
Ro5	Perception of satisfaction with the ESPON implementation provisions	Number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the implementation provisions of ESPON 2020 Programme	To increase the number of users within selected target groups stating satisfaction with the implementation provisions of ESPON 2020 Programme

Moreover:

The milestones and target values of Priority Axis 1 are not quantified, but defined only as “increases” from baseline values. The lack of target values is justified in consideration of the fact that so far ESPON has not collected this kind of information on outcomes. With the available information, estimation of target values could prove far from being realistic.

Another reason lies in the nature of the ESPON 2020 strategy, which is defined in its fundamental features in the CP, and will be detailed later on, in the Single Operation

prepared by the EGTC. Accordingly, result indicators currently included in the CP “give the direction of travel” of the expected change without entering into detail (e.g. what type of actors will be taken into consideration for analysing their satisfaction and what degree of satisfaction is held as a minimum).

In this respect, the lack of quantitative targets is reasonable in the specific case of ESPON, although it is not fully consistent with the methodological requirements of well-defined indicators.

All the selected indicators are mainly qualitative in nature and all refer to judgements and perceptions of the stakeholders.

This choice is not wrong in principle, even though it disregards some relevant evaluative dimensions of the ESPON Programme’s capacity. Measures will be collected by the EGTC with surveys and questionnaires addressed to the various types of ESPON target groups, requiring a new organisation of the Programme monitoring activities. The evaluator considers this aspect a qualifying element of the ESPON monitoring system, which was based only on a simple scoreboard of output indicators.

Some elements regarding the quality of the products, as distinct from the perceived satisfaction, should also be considered in the ESPON 2020 monitoring system. Among them, the scientific dissemination of ESPON related articles and studies (assessed, for example, through the “impact factor” of ESPON scientific documents), or the effective use of ESPON resources and tools could be considered⁴³.

Moreover, quantitative indicators on the reduction of burdens could fruitfully be included as far as S.O.5, in order to appreciate the degree of simplification deriving from the new management system for the knowledge providers.

These kinds of indicators regarding the quality of ESPON knowledge or quantitative indicators on the reduction of burdens could fruitfully be included in the new ESPON Programme monitoring system⁴⁴, which will also have to collect the required information for the monitoring of result indicators.

Finally, according to Art. 114.1, Reg.(EU) 1303/2013, “An **evaluation plan shall be drawn up by the managing authority or Member State for one or more operational programmes. The evaluation plan shall be submitted to the monitoring committee no later than one year after the adoption of the operational Programme.**”

ESPON 2020 CP includes the preparation of an evaluation plan among the activities falling under Axis 2 and makes provision for two evaluations of the Programme. The

⁴³ A detailed list of indicators has been proposed by the evaluator and discussed with the CU during the Workshop on performance framework and indicators held in Luxembourg in February 2014.

⁴⁴ The ESPON 2013 Programme used a Monitoring Scoreboard as “the tool that identifies the overall tendencies at programme development and provides a general understanding of the programme implementation”(ESPON 2013 Programme. Note in the Ongoing Internal Evaluation – Status no. 8, version 27 august 2013.). The Scoreboard was quite simple and referred to a few key indicators: output indicators, globally referring to all the priorities of the Programme; 7 indicators were identified (see table below); financial indicators, referring to each Priority of the Programme. A more detailed Background Table for the Internal Evaluation included output, result and impact indicators for each Programme priority. The result indicators referred mainly to the involvement of target groups (such as participation in conferences and information events, number of people visiting the website, etc.), but also to the number of new themes and policies extended in greater scope and detail than in the previous programming period. Impacts referred mainly to the degree of usefulness of the territorial knowledge provided by ESPON, including the European documents making reference to ESPON maps and other information produced by ESPON. Some of the data required by the result and impact indicators were not collected during the implementation period.

indications regarding the issues to be analysed in the evaluation plan have not been provided yet; however, it could be advisable for the evaluation plan to appraise the main novelties of the ESPON 2020 strategy, including:

- Assessment of the functioning of the new management system (including EGTC, PST, ECPN),
- Effectiveness in terms of strengthening the institutional capacity of European policy making.

Summing up, the multiple-layered process of defining ESPON strategy justifies a definition of targets in general terms in the CP, and consideration of indicators of a qualitative and perceptive nature. However, in the next steps of the ESPON programming phase, the Monitoring Committee should ask the Single Beneficiary to define more specific indicators in the Single Operation and in the Multiannual Work Plan. This will enable the MC to exercise a more thorough role of steering and control over the implementation of the Programme. A more complete list of indicators regarding outputs, results, qualitative aspects of the Programme, and process-related measures will moreover constitute a sound base for a well-functioning Programme monitoring system. The Programme Evaluation should concentrate on the main novelties of the ESPON 2020 strategy.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

External coherence and added value

- The evaluator found the ESPON 2020 Programme consistent with the provisions contained in the CPR, the ERDF and ETC fund-specific Regulations, as well as the Regulation regarding the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation.
- The ESPON 2020 Programme mission and objectives were found to be well-aligned with the tasks proposed for ETC programmes. However, the extent to which ESPON will support specific flagship initiatives contained in the EU 2020 Strategy, or the Territorial Priorities identified in TA2020 will be largely dependent upon the themes selected for research.
- The Programme is deemed consistent with the set of messages emerging from previous evaluations. A number of focal challenges have been identified, including: the need for knowledge production more focused on policy, prompt and on-demand analysis, leaner administration and increased in-house capacity. These were then translated into need for renewal, reorientation and upgrade, which provided the starting point for elaboration of the programme.
- The definition of the Programme fully involved the Member and Partner States, and progress was made in the involvement of other relevant stakeholders. The detailed strategy that will be prepared by the Single Beneficiary will have to further detail the target audiences of the Specific Objectives of Axis 1 and provide appropriate mechanisms for fostering their involvement during the implementation of the programme.
- Respect of the principle of equal opportunities between women and men has been adhered to in the programme.

Internal coherence of the Programme

- The internal structure of the Programme appears clearer and complete (the strategy hierarchy of levels was simplified, the description of the Specific Objectives improved with identification of types of action, outputs, results). Results regarding Specific Objective 5 of the Programme have been included.
- A brief explanation in the CP of what PSTs and ECPs are, and the inclusion of a list of the acronyms used is recommended.
- The description of the Specific Objectives, when read together with related result indicators, gives a clear indication of the expected changes deriving from the ESPON 2020 strategy: more policy usefulness shown by the researches, improved usability of ESPON tools, greater satisfaction of clients together with a broader uptake of ESPON results should reinforce the use of territorial knowledge throughout European policy-making.
- With regard to the soundness of the strategy, all the focal challenges identified for ESPON 2020 are addressed with ad hoc tools and solutions, with no single issue left outstanding. However, not all of them are defined at the same level of detail. Further specifications provided for in the Single Operation will improve the soundness of the ESPON strategy, particularly with regard to the ways ESPON is planning to involve the different target audiences.
- Some critical factors and possible threats to consider are: the length of time necessary for the creation of an EGTC and the associated risks for the financial

absorption of the Programme; how issues of quality (and in particular, scientific quality) will be addressed; the number/type of actions that PSTs can reasonably be expected to support; and possible imbalances in the involvement of regional and local target groups deriving from the fragmented nature of the national ECP Network.

Consistency of financial allocation

- The financial allocation between the two Axes shows a reasonably limited amount dedicated to Technical Assistance and the bulk devoted to Axis 1, entirely implemented through a Single-Beneficiary-Single Operation approach. More fine-grained assessment of the consistency of financial allocations is not possible at present.

The management system

- The main novelty of the ESPON 2020 strategy lies in the setting up of an EGTC, which will act as a Single beneficiary for all activities developed under Priority Axis 1. The EGTC will be strengthened with the addition of new staff, with a strong emphasis on content-related aspects. This solution aims at overcoming many of the concerns raised in previous programme evaluations in terms of excessive administrative burden and lack of adequate internal capacity.
- The setting up of the EGTC is in line with the Regulations on the ETC programmes and should be considered as a fundamental milestone for the implementation of the Programme.
- There are, however, some potential risks to be considered. The new management system will in fact presumably require additional time to be ready for the beginning of the implementation phase, and change the pattern of cooperation between the MC, the MA and the Single Beneficiary. Involvement of MC members, short-term and good quality results, as well as continuous performance feedbacks are all critical factors to foster perception of effectiveness and trust among partners.
- The evaluator suggests that the EGTC should perform a self-assessment exercise with the goal of supporting the new organization, and more specifically identification and management of its fundamental process, stakeholders, clients and key results. A PST could be used as part of this process, taking on the role of a self-assessment unit (i.e. the group assigned for coordination of the self-assessment exercise).

Clarity and relevance of the proposed Programme indicators

- The Programme performance framework has been defined.
- Analysis of the logic of change underlying the Programme suggested considering satisfaction with, awareness of and confidence in ESPON products as 'intermediate results' to be addressed in order to reach the final goal expected of the Programme. The result indicators are in line with the intermediate results expected by ESPON and thus appear relevant in assessing progress towards achievement of the ESPON 2020 general goal.
- As for the **performance framework**, choosing to adopt a result indicator for Axis 1 appears more challenging than selecting an output or financial indicators. Therefore, the evaluator positively welcomes this choice. The selection of a key implementation step as the main indicator referring to Priority Axis 2 also

appears correct. To conclude, the selected result indicators for ESPON 2020 appear to be relevant and to capture essential information on the progress of the Programme. They are also consistent with the nature and character of the Axes and Specific Objectives they refer to.

- Some revision in the wording of indicators and measurement unit is suggested.
- The multiple-layered process of defining ESPON strategy and the absence of reliable measures on outcomes justify a definition of targets in general terms, and consideration of indicators of a qualitative and perceptive nature.
- However, a more complete list of indicators regarding outputs, results and quality of ESPON products together with process-related measures are considered to be a key component of the Programme monitoring system. Future Programme evaluation could usefully concentrate on the main new features of the ESPON 2020 strategy.

9 ANNEX 1. HOW THE EX ANTE EVALUATORS' RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT AND SUMMARY OF NEW COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
External coherence and added value of the Programme strategy				
✓ Involvement of partners	At the moment the key stakeholders who have been most involved are Member States (as represented in the MC and DG meetings), and the EC through its participation in the JWG.	No progress on this point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two main categories of stakeholders are clearly defined in the Programme. Stakeholders (mainly institutional and European level actors in charge of Cohesion Policy strategies) have been involved in the drafting phase of the Programme. Two open consultations are planned in early 2014. • The involvement of partners in the implementing phase could be strengthened. The compliance with the CPR art.5 and the Code of conduct on partnership could be added among the criteria to be followed by the Single Beneficiary. • Different forms of involvement of partners are, however, provided for in the strategy (such as, in definition of the Framework for actions upon request; for the involvement of regional and local authorities through the ESPON Contact point network); these elements could be referred to in the OP (p.9) dealing with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference to article 5 of the CPR and to the European Code of Conduct for Partnership (ECCP) has been included in the section concerning the “participatory process and partnership process”. • One European-wide open web-based public consultation was carried out from 4 March 2014 to 2 April 2014 with focus on definition and selection of the priorities and related specific objectives, definition of Programme indicators and the proposed allocation of funds. The main results of the consultation are summarized in the report of the outcome of the Consultation Process (15 April 2014) and are briefly described in the OP. • In the same period, participating members and partner states organized national consultations and made results available to Programme authorities. • A dedicated feedback session targeting EU institutions, bodies and organizations was held on 27 March 2014.

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on documentation produced up to August 2013	Preliminary comments on documentation produced up to October 2013	Comments and recommendations on documentation produced up to November 2013	Comments and recommendations on documentation produced up to May 2014
			partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No mention has been included in the section dealing with partnerships (section 5.6) to the different forms of involvement of partners throughout the Programme lifecycle (as required by the ECCP) but the issue is left to the decision of the EGTC. •
✓ Relevance of the strategy			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Programme is relevant as the strategy identifies a list of key elements (in particular, the new management system, need for a knowledge production more focused on policy) as needs for renewal, reorientation and upgrade, which are fully consistent with the set of messages emerging from previous evaluations. • All the main lessons deriving from the past are included in the 2020 strategy. • However, strategy complementarity could be enhanced with more explicit reference to the other interregional cooperation programmes and the Programme Horizon 2020. 	Complementarity included in S.O. 3 and S.O. 4
✓ Update and revise the SWOT analysis.	Revision of the SWOT analysis is still ongoing. However the CU/MA	SWOT was drafted; the approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SWOT analysis could be enriched with details (policy tools and innovations introduced to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New elements have been added to the SWOT analysis linked to the new

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
	have agreed to focus analysis on the incremental achievements envisaged with an improved ESPON strategy.	appears correct although some of the observations could be articulated in greater depth	address the focal challenges, weaknesses) to be addressed, opportunities in term of effectiveness and efficiency, critical factors to be taken into account) with the potential for the SWOT to be used as an overarching framework for the entire ESPON 2020 strategy.	organizational setup
Internal logic of the Programme				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Simplify the levels of the strategy and clarify the description of objectives ✓ Fine-tuning and further elaboration of the objectives 	<p>These recommendations were partially addressed. More specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tier made up of strands was deleted • The number of <i>objectives</i> and <i>specific objectives</i> under priority 1 was reduced • BUT under priority 2, 6 new specific objectives have been created, corresponding to 15 new actions; this could be simplified in the next update of the document; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thematic objective and the investment priority of the ESPON 2020 have been selected. • The specific objectives of priority axis 2 have been reduced to one; • The distinction between <i>activities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further improvement could be made with: elimination of some inconsistencies remaining in the terminology adopted (e.g. between activities and actions; output and results) and between the OP and the OS; refinement of the description of Specific Objectives; further grouping of the types of actions envisaged in the Axis 2 Technical Assistance (types could be: management and coordination, communication, evaluation). • Reconstruction of the logic of change underlying the Programme suggests considering satisfaction with, awareness of and confidence in ESPON products as ‘intermediate results’ to be addressed in order to reach the final goal expected of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The final version of the CP is clearer with regard to the terminology used, eliminating some inconsistencies, clarifying in particular the use made of the words <i>action</i> and <i>activity</i> and <i>result</i> and <i>output</i> (both the CP and in the OS). • Actions under priority axis 2 have been simplified and many of the actions previously listed have been grouped under few major actions. • As suggested by the evaluator, a result expected under specific objective 5 has been identified and added to the final version of the CP. • The list of actions foreseen in the table on p. 24 of the OS is not always coherent with the activities listed before in the text corresponding to each specific objective (e.g. activities under specific objective 3).

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The distinction between <i>objectives</i> (p. 6 OP) and <i>specific objectives</i> (p.11-14) is not always consistent; The evaluators suggest referring only to <i>specific objectives</i> (note that the ETC Programme template does envisage identification of <i>specific objectives</i> only). They also suggest using the definition provided at the top of p. 6 of the OP as this gives an idea of the expected changes related to the Programme; At the level of the <i>actions</i>, some inconsistencies between the Draft OP version and the Draft Operation Specification were noted. See for example the Specific Objective 1 (4 actions identified in the OP but only 3 actions 	<p>(set of actions, as defined in the Updated Glossary on important terms in the ESPON context) and <i>actions</i> should be briefly referred to in the OP; however, use of the word <i>action</i> is preferable (it is the term used in the ETC template);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some inconsistencies in the use of outputs and results (p. 12, first lines), and probably in 	<p>Programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results should be added for Specific Objective 5 of the Programme, linking them to the capacity to renew the management system and simplify it for the ESPON providers. Renewal of the management system could be considered a Programme milestone (in the context of preparing the Performance Framework). <p><i>Details:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With regard to the number of specific objectives under priority axis 1, the OP and the OS are not always consistent (e.g. on p. 11 the OP refers to 4 specific objectives). The distinction between <i>activities</i> (set of actions, as defined in the Updated Glossary on important terms in the ESPON context) and <i>actions</i> still needs to be briefly referred to in the OP. Reference to actions and types of actions alone could simplify the structure. The number of actions envisaged corresponding to each specific objective could also be reported in the OS documents, as is the case in 	

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
	<p>identified in the draft Operation Specification)</p>	<p>the use of actions and outputs (p.15)</p>	<p>the OP documents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some inconsistencies remain in the use of outputs and results (OP, p. 13: “Results shall be of high quality in terms of research“ to be changed in “outputs shall be,....”), probably in the use of actions and outputs (OP p.20: “In total 15-20 actions are foreseen”... to be changed in “in total 15-20 outputs are foreseen”; p.21; p. 22; p. 23)) and of objectives and specific objectives. In the OP reference is made to both these terms but it would be preferable to keep one single terminology (we suggest sticking to the use of <i>specific objectives</i> as referred to in the ETC template). • Clarify whether PSTs will be made available (mismatch in the OP and OS; PSTs are not mentioned under Actions related to Specific Objective 3, p. 12-13 OS; not mentioned under Objective 1 in the OP). • Note that actions 2 and 17 of priority axis 2 – specific objective “Leaner, effective and efficient implementation provisions and proficient Programme assistance” are the same. • The OS document refers to the same actions listed in the OP but it does 	

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
			not make reference to the number of actions envisaged for each specific objective. This information should be included for full correspondence between the documents.	
✓ Soundness of the strategy	This part of the strategy could be improved, addressing more explicitly the different roles, policy agendas, and knowledge needs of the targeted policy audience.	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the focal challenges identified for ESPON 2020 have been addressed, with no single issue left outstanding. Particular attention is dedicated to re-focus of the strategy on policy making, and establishment of an EGTC as a way to promote leaner administration. • Even though the strategy takes into account all the main relevant issues emerging from the past, not all of them are addressed through policy tools defined at the same level of detail. • Some critical factors and possible threats to watch are: • the length of time necessary for the building up of the EGTC and the connected risks for the financial absorption of the Programme; how quality (and in particular, scientific quality) will be addressed (for example providing further information on which types of actions should require scientific 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No section in the CP/OS deals with ECPs. A brief description is recommended

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
			quality above minimum standards); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of actions (or criteria for identifying actions) that the PSTs can reasonably support in order to guarantee follow-up for the main researches; • possible limited involvement of regional and local target groups due to weak workings of the national ECP Network. 	
✓ Integration of the intervention logic with the intended effects (outcome) in order to tackle the knowledge gaps identified in the strategy (causes)	This recommendation was acted upon and is reflected in the new version of the OP. For each specific objective, the document identifies a small set of corresponding expected results. However, the results identified should be further refined in order to facilitate generation of appropriate (measurable) outcome indicators	Outputs and results have been included in the description of each specific objective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to further improve the description of Specific Objectives, the following template could be followed: • Rationale (problems to be solved/opportunities/needs) • Target groups • (Types of) Actions to be realized • (Types of) Outputs to be delivered • Expected results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An internal template has been followed in the description of Specific Objectives.
✓ Consistency of the financial allocation	No weighting has yet been applied to the various areas of intervention. It is expected that this aspect will be promptly	The budget for 2014-2020 counts €41,377 million, around 20% more than the previous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No decision has yet been taken with regard to the financial sums to be allocated to each Axis and related Specific Objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CP includes breakdown of the financial allocations to each priority axis.

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
	addressed once the 6 year-budget envelope for the ESPON Programme as whole is confirmed.	Programme. An exercise to prioritise and allocate the resources can now begin.		
✓ The management system	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to take into account the relevance of the innovation and the possible risks, the evaluator suggests adding to the tasks of the EGTC, performing a self-assessment exercise with the goal of supporting the new organization, and more specifically identification and management of its fundamental process, stakeholders, clients and key results. Involvement of a PST could be considered in order to form the self-assessment unit (the group assigned with coordination of the self-assessment exercise). • The OP-OS could detail in greater depth the support in terms of competences and profiles provided by the EGTC to the PSTs in addressing the scientific aspects of the tasks assigned to the PSTs. • It could prove useful to draw up the ‘minimum steps’ to be followed by a PST in order to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A note (budget detail note) of 14 April 2014 includes a specific section on the indicative job description of the posts at the EGTC, which specifies which profiles and competences are required for the functioning of the EGTC, in particular for steering scientific quality of ESPON products.

Recommendations from the ex ante evaluation draft report (based on the documents produced up to June 2013)	Comments on <u>documentation produced up to August 2013</u>	Preliminary comments on <u>documentation produced up to October 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to November 2013</u>	Comments and recommendations on <u>documentation produced up to May 2014</u>
			define and share a common procedure among the MC members.	
✓ Definition of appropriate output and result indicators	Indicators are still to be defined; the evaluators will suggest to the CU/MA an appropriate methodology to support the identification of indicators.	Methodological paper prepared by the evaluator, discussed by the MA/CU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A preliminary list of indicators has been drawn up following the indications of the evaluator. A refined list and full performance framework are to be added. • Reconstruction of the logic of change underlying the Programme suggests considering satisfaction with, awareness of and confidence in ESPON products as ‘intermediate results’ to be addressed in order to reach the final goal expected of the Programme. • Results should be added for Specific Objective 5 of the Programme, linking them to the capacity to renew the management system and simplify it for the ESPON providers. • Renewal of the management system could be considered a Programme milestone (in the context of preparing the Performance Framework). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The performance framework was compiled and added to the CP, together with a full list of result and output indicators • An expected result has been added for specific objective 5 under priority axis 1 which concerns reduction of the overall administrative burden of the Programme for Member and Partner states administrations and for beneficiaries. The related Programme specific result indicator concerns the satisfaction within the selected target groups with the Programme implementing provisions. • The performance framework introduces a new milestone for priority axis 2 which concerns the steering of the functioning of the EGTC as Single Beneficiary of the Programme Single Operation. Consequently, the milestone identified for 2018 is “full operation of the ESPON EGTC”.

ANNEX 4. LIST OF STRATEGIC REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

EU high-level strategies (and related material)

- Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (COM(2010) 2020 final)
- Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020. Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions, agreed at the Informal Ministerial Meeting of Ministers rESPONSible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development on 19th May 2011 Gödöllő, Hungary
- Böhme, K., Doucet, P., Komornicki, T., Zaucha, J., Świątek, D. (2011) How to strengthen the territorial dimension of 'Europe 2020' and the EU Cohesion Policy Report, Warsaw

ESI Funds Regulations:

- Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006
- Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006
- Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal
- Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings

Cohesion Policy 2014 – 2020 Factsheets

- Targeting Investments on Key Growth Priorities Factsheets:
 - Research and Innovation
 - Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
 - Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy
- Simplifying Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020 Factsheet
- Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Factsheet
- Research Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation Factsheet
- Community-led Local Development Factsheet

- Financial Instruments in Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 Factsheet
- Ensuring the visibility of Cohesion Policy: Information and communication rules 2014-2020 factsheet
- Integrated Territorial Investment factsheet

European Code of Conduct on Partnership

- Commission staff working document, the partnership principle in the implementation of the Common Strategic Framework Funds - elements for a European Code of Conduct on Partnership (SWD(2012) 106 final)
- EC (2013) Fiche no 12, Delegated act on the European code of conduct on partnership ("ECCP") Version 2, Meeting of the Expert Group on Delegated and Implementing Acts for the European Structural and Investment Funds: European Code of Conduct on Partnership (10th meeting), 21 June 2013

Guidance documents on Evaluation

- EC (2013) Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation: Guidance document on Ex ante Evaluation, January 2013
- EC (2013) Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation: Draft Guidance on the performance framework review and reserve in 2014-2020, Version 3, 19 July 2013
- EC (2013) Guidance Document on Monitoring and Evaluation: Concepts and Recommendations, October 2013
- EVALSED (2013) The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development, September 2013

ANNEX 5. LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS CONTACTED

Name	Position	When	Type of interview
Lewis Dijkstra	Deputy Head of the Analysis Unit, DG Regio	10/09/2013	Face-to-face
Thomas Wobben	Director Horizontal Policies and Networks, Committee of the Regions	11/09/2013	Face-to-face
Dagmara Stoerring	Administrator Committee on Regional Development (REGI) Directorate General for Internal Policies European Parliament	11/09/2013	Face-to-face
Daniel Mouque	Principal Administrator, Evaluation Unit, DG Regio	11/09/2013	Face-to-face
Michael Smyth	Member of the EESC	14/10/2013	Phone Interview
Elke Ballon	Head of Unit, Impact Assessment at European Parliament	14/10/2013	Phone Interview
Thiemo W. Eser	ESPON Managing Authority	10/09/2013	Face-to-face
Peter Mehlbye	Director of ESPON Coordination Unit	17/09/2013	Phone Interview
Anne Wetzel	Interreg IVC Managing Authority and North West Europe Managing Authority	4/09/2013	Phone Interview
Matteo Malvani	Head of the INTERACT Programme secretariat	5/09/2013	Phone Interview
Christiane, Breznik	Head of the Central Europe Managing Authority	13/09/2013	Phone Interview
Monica Schoenerklee-Grasser	JTS Head of Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, Central Europe	13/09/2013	Phone Interview
Emmanuel Moulin	Head of the URBACT II secretariat	18/09/2013	Phone Interview