

Results of the public consultation on the strategic orientation of the next ESPON programme

A contribution from the ESPON Managing Authority

As reported in the last edition of TerritoriALL, the countries participating in the ESPON programme formed a Joint Working Group (JWG) to prepare a proposal for the ESPON programme covering the coming funding period, 2021–2027. The JWG formulated an intervention logic and its understanding of the territorial challenges ahead.

A public consultation was launched, inviting all policy-makers and practitioners at all administrative levels, researchers, academics, students and citizens, especially those who think that ‘territory matters’, to provide input, in particular on the emerging territorial challenges ahead of us and the specific needs for territorial evidence and knowledge that ESPON should meet in future.

By the deadline set, a large number of responses had been received from participants, including policy-makers and researchers, representing all the European countries (and beyond).

The results of this public consultation, summarised in the following sections, were discussed by the JWG on 10 September 2020.

Emerging challenges ahead of us

ESPON is embedded in Cohesion Policy and should contribute to its main goals while also supporting the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 and its implementation, with a particular focus on territorial cohesion.

ESPON should support policy-makers at all levels by providing territorial evidence and knowledge for policy responses. The focus should be on strengthening EU

territories’ resilience to and recovery from crises by achieving a green transition to climate-neutral economies while ensuring at the same time just living conditions for all people in all places.

Territories are exposed to diverse territorial trends, competing policy goals and contradictory sectoral policies, which may lead to self-reinforcing negative but also positive consequences those territories. Therefore, territorial policy responses have to offer integrated approaches to steering development in an effective way.

The territorial and functional perspective (as described the article on the future ESPON in last edition of TerritoriALL) is the cornerstone of ESPON’s evidence and knowledge work, which supports public stakeholders to find appropriate and coordinated policy responses across sectors and governmental levels to the advantage of European citizens.

This complexity is reflected in a number of core challenges that have to be addressed by ESPON in the future with regards to their territorial dimension.

The results of the public consultation have confirmed the relevance of the set of territorial challenges to be addressed by the programme, as shown below.

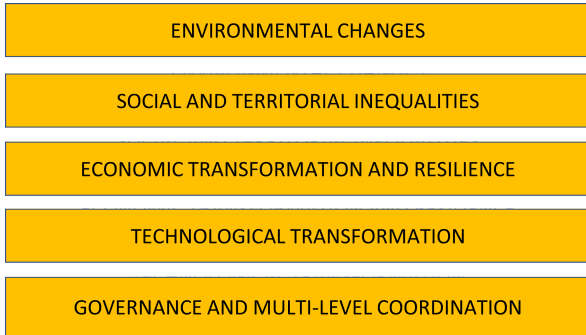
In their responses, participants gave a particular emphasis to disparities, in the larger sense:

social – between generations and age groups, in terms of access to (quality) employment, education, housing, healthcare, etc.;

territorial – core developed areas versus marginal and less developed areas, urban areas versus rural areas, small cities versus metropolitan and functional areas, etc.;

Economic: development potential, disparities in wealth ; accessibilities; etc.

ESPON shall focus on the territorial challenges of

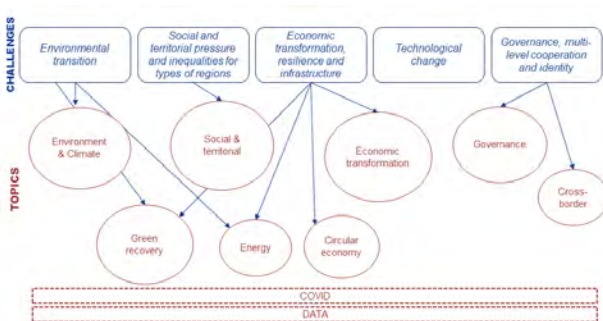


These disparities are perceived as having an impact on governance, as territories, people and economies are competing with each other, thus impacting the willingness to cooperate (between territories and between administrative levels in the same territory).

Economic transition and environmental and technological change are perceived as important tools to be considered for use in achieving cohesion and, subsequently, better governance.

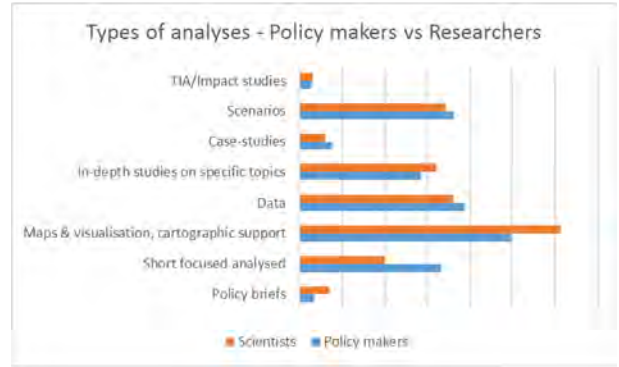
Specific needs for territorial evidence

When participants were asked about specific evidence needs, their responses were in line with the views expressed on the challenges to be faced. Many topics were proposed and the JWG tried to cluster them in a way that would ensure that cross-sectorial relations would be considered and that the territorial and functional dimensions would be properly addressed.



Specific needs for knowledge activities

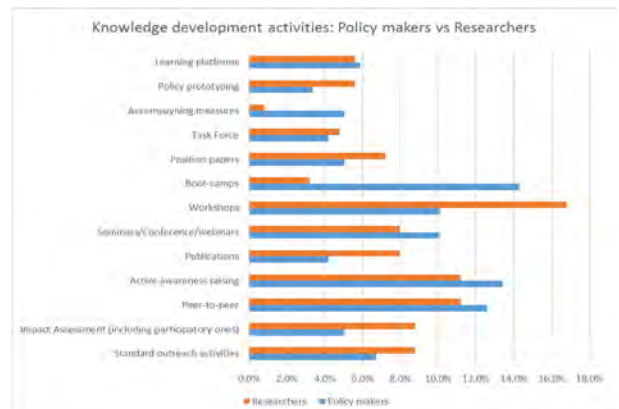
The consultation also asked about the types of analysis that are most in demand, and it was interesting to see the different preferences of scientists and policy-makers. While scientists prefer cartography and in-depth studies, policy-makers are more interested case studies, scenarios and short, focused analyses.



When it comes to knowledge development, policy-makers are more interested in interactive ways of acquiring knowledge. This is not surprising, as the JWG had already argued that the complexity of ESPON evidence calls for more interactive presentation of ESPON results.

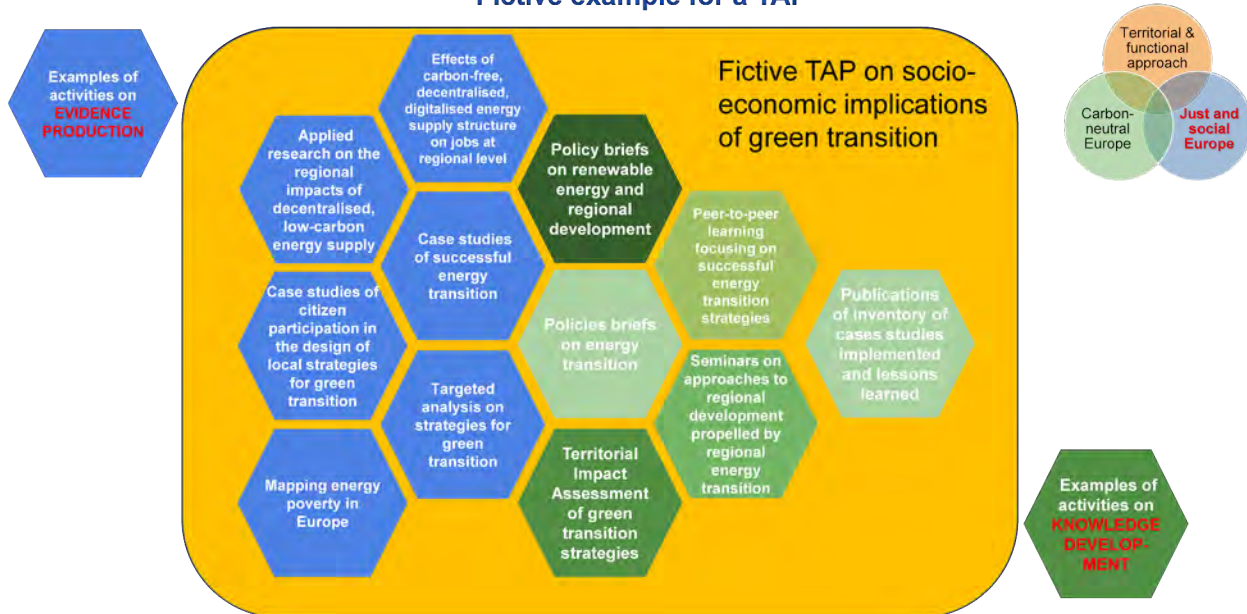
Combining evidence production and knowledge development in thematic action plans

The consultation produced much feedback for the work of the JWG, which helped in developing clearer ideas about the thematic action plans (TAPs) that will



Activities implemented through Thematic Action Plans

Fictive example for a TAP



Conclusion

set the framework and set out specific activities. The TAPs have to ensure a direct link between evidence production and knowledge development so that the best use is made of the evidence produced.

The consultation provided much valuable input to the JWG, which is now further evaluating the results and using them to formulate a first draft of the new programme, which should be ready in the first semester of 2021, depending on the timing of the publication of the regulatory framework for the 2021-2027 programming period.

Responses to the consultation

'Peer-to-peer workshops should be a strong tool to help collaborations between countries (or communities) to overcome differences and share place-based problems and solutions to reach territorial cohesion. Countries have to face together cross-border problems and solutions in any territorial situation (countryside, mountains, sea, etc).'

'Visual data such as maps are good tools when trying to understand "the big picture". Different scenarios help to consider optional paths for development.'

'Emphasise the link between environmental transition, social inequalities and economic transformation, in the sense that economic actors should be encouraged and incentivised to take into account all the other elements when thinking about their strategy, and not only their profit maximisation.'