

Concept on the Establishment of the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON)

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I. Introduction

I.A. RAISON D'ETRE

Since September 1994, at the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, a network of research institutions working in the field of spatial planning has been on the agenda. The Leipzig document already emphasised the necessity *"to establish a permanent system of observation of the European territory and to render systematic the co-operation and complementarity between the Member States, the Commission and the research institutes attached to the administrations responsible for spatial development"*, and to this end to create *„a European Observatory with the participation of the Member States and the Commission"* which should *„have a Community character"* and *„provide relevant expertise and disseminate spatial information"*.

Following this, the conclusions of Leipzig (Sec. 4) stated: *"The Ministers agreed that co-operation among the Member States in the field of spatial planning requires that the spatial planning research institutes in Europe providing advice on policy matters work more closely together. Based on a document submitted by the German Presidency, they recommend the establishment of a European network of suitable research institutes in the form of a European Observatory."*

However, there has not been much progress, as the possible tasks of the Observatory have not been made clear enough. The preparation of the first official draft of the "European Development Perspectives" (ESDP) revealed the big gaps in research and the possible tasks of an Observatory became clearer: *"In the drafting of the Noordwijk document, important gaps in comparable, quantified and geo-referenced data became obvious. The need for an agreement on reliable criteria and indicators for establishing the typology of regions and urban areas also became evident. Longer-term research on relevant spatial issues needs to be undertaken as a part of a continuing updating process of the ESDP. Before drawing-up the official ESDP, it is essential that the CSD has an adequate technical and scientific base at its disposal."* (ESDP, Part IV).

Since the first official draft of the ESDP was presented in June 1997, there has been a common understanding; now the time is ripe to finalise a concept for the Observatory which could be implemented in 1998. The conclusions (Sec. 9) of Noordwijk stated: *"There is a need for more research on certain subjects and for a better co-operation to ensure a more effective exchange and use of information produced by different research institutions. To this end, the Ministers approve a renewed initiative to set up the Observatory proposed at the Leipzig meeting as a network of spatial planning research institutions."*

At the CSD meeting of the 30th of June 1997 it was decided that in Echternach, on 9th December 1997, the Ministers should be provided with a complete concept of the now called *"European Spatial Planning Observatory Network" (ESPON)*. The proposed concept would be ready for the implementation under the UK Presidency in the first half of 1998. The concept has to be clear on the tasks and areas of activity (section II), the organisation (section III), the financing (section IV) and the launch of the ESPON (section V).

I.B. RECENT ACTIVITIES

Since the beginning of 1990, research has been carried out on the spatial development of Europe, the background of rising integration and the common market. The Commission has already taken its first decisive steps towards a fundamental inventory of spatial developments in the EU's territory by the preparation of the reports "Europe 2000" and "Europe 2000+".

On 2nd March 1993, a first meeting of the spatial research institutions took place in Brussels. Fundamental ideas have been discussed about how spatial research institutions could contribute to the compilation of relevant information for decision-making processes and for spatially relevant policies in the Member States and the Commission. In Bonn in October 1993, an international Conference was devoted to the preparation of a European Planning Atlas.

In addition, the Presidencies of the informal ministerial meetings compiled in co-operation with the Troika spatially relevant information, which brought about various outputs, such as the Strasbourg scenarios, just to name one. The drafting of the first official draft of the ESDP revealed further gaps in the research and the co-operation of European research institutes as it was already cited from the ESDP (Sec. I.A.).

I.C. PRINCIPLES FOR THE ESPON

Since Leipzig, the first basic principle has been agreed upon : the ESPON should consist of a network of *national focal points*, each of which co-ordinate a sub-network of research institutes in the Member State concerned, while a *permanent Secretariat* is entrusted with the co-ordination of the national focal points at a Community level. Appropriate links should be established between the basic Community network and focal points in the non member countries.

Two other principles are laid out in the Noordwijk first official draft : "*The European Observatory Network should concentrate on the technical and scientific aspects of the drawing-up and the periodic updating of the ESDP*", and "*it operates on the basis of clear mandates from the CSD*".

The ESDP will be much more than a mere document. It must be understood as a co-operation process involving numerous partners throughout Europe. Therefore, the technical and scientific assistance provided by the whole ESPON to the CSD will embrace the support when revisions and refinements of successive versions of the ESDP document are necessary, but also a wide range of possible related tasks. These are listed under heading II below. These will be not limited to a mere compilation of factual data since a planning document like the ESDP is meant, by its very nature, to address policy issues and facilitate the decision making process, but the political dimension will primarily remain the responsibility of the CSD.

Consequently, the ESPON will be based on the following structure : The CSD defines in co-operation with the permanent Secretariat a yearly work programme which is carried out by the network partners. The permanent Secretariat solely undertakes a secretariat function to

the CSD in accordance to the tasks of the ESPON and a co-ordination function for the distribution of tasks in the network of national focal points. The national focal points are responsible for securing access to the national data and spatial research and planning expertise. This task comprises, in particular, to either contribute by own research and/or set up links to national research institutions which have the best available know how of the country represented by this focal point. As such they play a major role in the development of ESPON functioning as a network. This network character of the ESPON can be developed, among other measures, through joint execution of research tasks, identified in the ESPON work programme, by groups of national focal points or their representative institutions thereby exploiting potential synergy. The highest value added to the spatial development in Europe will only be established by involving the best available resources. Details about the organisational structure are lined out under heading III below.

The CSD wishes to establish the ESPON in the most effective and efficient way. Therefore, the introduction of the ESPON in two steps is envisaged. The first step has been defined as a *test phase* which should allow to collect experience concerning the realisation of targeted studies on European spatial planning in the framework of a networking approach. This test phase, during which the ESPON will not yet exist as such, is defined as a “studies phase” in the next paragraph. It will be followed by a crucial *evaluation* realised on the basis of the gained experience. This evaluation will be used to complete the proposals for structure and tasks which are defined for the long term by the present document.

As far as the funding of these two steps is concerned, the following arrangements are envisaged.

1.

The studies phase (1998-1999) will be devoted to the drawing-up of studies required for the presentation of the ESDP in 1999. The studies ought to be carried out by research institutions in a network approach which allows to test how the ESPON could work in future. In co-operation with the CSD, a study programme will be launched under Art. 10 of the ERDF regulation and co-financed 50/50 by the Commission and these research institutions.

The present document mainly defines the concept of the ESPON in the long term perspective. The details of the solution proposed for the studies phase are described in a complementary document entitled “*Note on the launching process of a network of research institutes in the field of spatial planning.*” In this document, a total amount of 2 MECU (1 MECU / year) is foreseen for the preparation of studies.

2. *Long term (2000 and after)*: From the year 2000 onwards, a budgetline (B2 - 1820) could be proposed for the Union's budget with a view to financing the actual establishment and running of the ESPON. The level of the financial commitment will be determined on the basis of the experience acquired during the studies phase. The national focal points will be financed by the Member States on the basis of a modus individually defined according to the different options available for their organisation (see IIIC below).

II. Tasks and partnerships of the whole network for the long term

II.A. TASKS

The main task of the ESPON is to constitute the scientific and technical backbone of the work of the CSD regarding the ESDP process in all its forms. The work of the ESPON must be of high quality and must be scientifically sound and coherent. This task starts with the development of a coherent proposal for an ESDP research programme and programming method as well as the elaboration of concrete research proposals to be carried out by preferably groups of national focal points.

The ESPON should concentrate on technical assistance to the drawing-up and updating of the ESDP excluding the political aspects, which belong to the core tasks of the CSD. A number of technical tasks which have to be fulfilled in order to develop the necessary knowledge base needed in the ESDP process (including the Interreg II C programme) can be identified already:

- development of common (e.g. practicable) definitions of spatial terms;
- development of consistent spatial indicators;
- development of methodologies for typologies of areas;
- development of alternative long term scenarios for the spatial development of (parts of) the European territory and its spatial components;
- assessment of the use(fullness) of quantitative targets for European spatial development policy;
- the production of maps.

Measurable targets might also be deduced in accordance to the policy options defined in the ESDP for different components of the European territory and in accordance to the guidelines of the CSD. If so, the ESPON would be entrusted with the monitoring of the ESDP strategy, i.e. the periodic evaluation of the degree of completion of the various targets. A related task would be the assessment of the spatial impact of Community policies.

As recalled above, the ESDP exercise is not restricted to the production of documents, it also belongs to the sphere of "planning as a process". As a consequence, various additional areas of activity are envisaged for the ESPON, including:

- spatial assessment of the Community policies;
- assessment of the value added by the spatial approach;
- common research projects on e.g. cross-border issues.
- research on spatial social, socio-economic and economic effects;
- evaluation of experiences in different spatial planning systems in the EU, (periodic updating of the Compendium of planning systems and policies, including the extension to non Member countries);
- terminology of spatial planning;
- methods of measurement of spatial phenomena;
- discussion about ecological and social standards;

To ensure the broad dissemination of reliable information on spatial issues among the various partners, the ESPON could publish a periodic report on the state of the spatial development, as well as a periodical such as an "European Planning Research Bulletin".

However, it is necessary to avoid dispersion of efforts and overlapping with other research projects in progress. Therefore, the identification of new studies and programmes required for the needs of the ESDP-process remain clearly a task for the CSD, not for the ESPON as such.

II.B. PARTNERSHIPS

To a large extent, ESPON's efficiency will depend on its capacity to initiate and keep up appropriate partnerships. Among these, the most important one is of course the internal partnership between the constituent parts of the ESPON itself (see III organisation).

Close links should also be established, as an extension of the same internal partnership, with focal points and research institutes in non Member countries, despite the fact that they will probably not be formal members of the ESPON or at least of its Managing Board in a first stage.

The ESPON will actively seek the co-operation of other Community bodies and programmes, such as Eurostat, the European Environment Agency, the Common Research Centre, etc. To ensure the best complementarity, permanent contacts are necessary. Joint actions could also be envisaged, for example the gathering, recording and assessment of data relating to spatial development in Europe, or the drawing up of related expert reports. Another example could be the production of uniform assessment criteria applying to spatial data.

It has been agreed that the ESDP process and the transnational co-operation programmes in the field of spatial planning should be linked through a close cross-fertilisation relationship. As a consequence, the ESPON will have to liaise permanently with the bodies responsible for the co-ordination of the transnational co-operation, especially the secretariats of the INTERREG II C programmes, for which the permanent Secretariat of the ESPON should serve as a possible contact point. The work programme of the ESPON could also include the generation and compilation of data needed by the partners of the transnational co-operation programmes.

Links to other spatial research institutions in Non Member States, in particular, the neighbouring Countries and countries foreseen as candidates for a first round of an enlargement ought to be established such as to the Network of Spatial Research Institutes in Central and Eastern Europe.

III. Organisation and Responsibilities

The ESPON is composed of fifteen national focal points each of which heads a sub-national network of research institutes and of a Permanent Secretariat acting as a co-ordinating node. The CSD is responsible for the allocation of tasks of the EPSON.

III A. THE COMMITTEE FOR SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

The CSD, as a whole, is sovereign for the allocation of tasks and the multiannual and yearly work programmes of the ESPON. Decisions shall be taken on the basis of unanimity. However, for lack of legal existence of the CSD, it is necessary that a formal body exerts its sovereignty on its behalf. This body is the management board of the permanent Secretariat. The head of each CSD delegation ought to be also the member of the management board in order to secure the comprehensive representation of the CSD and to avoid friction with the CSD.

The CSD defines tasks and financial sources on a project related basis for the ESPON in accordance with the tasks lined out in section II. The Managing Director of the permanent Secretariat drafts a proposal for an annual work programme on the basis of suggestions and guidelines made by the CSD which has to be submitted to the management board (CSD) for confirmation.

III.B. THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

III.B.1. Legal Status and functions of the permanent Secretariat

The permanent Secretariat shall enjoy a full legal status which allows it to execute all undertaken tasks such as signing contracts with the network partners along the function of acting as a project co-ordinating and managing unit for the network. The Secretariat must be able to undertake the following functions:

- to co-ordinate all the activities of the network;
- to act as a project management institution for the network;

Thus, appropriate facilities are necessary, such as a small group of experts in spatial research including its programming and its scientific and technical requirements, ISDN connections to the Internet and direct access to all Commissions research departments and institutions.

III.B.2. Internal organisation

III.B.2.a) The management board representing the CSD

The permanent Secretariat has a management board consisting of one representative from each Member State, one representative from the Commission and the Executive Director (see below). In principle, these members of the management board are the head of delegations of the CSD. It might be envisaged to extend the attendance to representatives of non Member countries, but this seems premature at the present stage.

The Chairman of the Management Board should be the delegate from the Member State holding the Presidency of the Council. Decisions of the management board shall require unanimity. An option for the informal organisation would be, that the Troika builds the core of the management board in order to prepare and organise the plenary sessions and, if necessary, the day-to-day responsibility for the management.

III.B.2.b) Staff

The staff of the Secretariat shall be temporarily employed for a renewable period of five years. The constitution of the staff is based on a proposal made by the Executive Director to the Managing Board after an open call for applications.

Apart from the Executive Director, the staff should be composed of experts seconded by the Member States. Apart from the permanent staff, a limited number of national experts can be seconded for shorter periods of time. These should not exceed four to five experts, in addition to the Executive Director. Its precise size depends on the work programme and the agreement between the Member States and the Commission concerning the financing.

III.B.2.c) Executive Director

The permanent Secretariat is headed by an Executive Director appointed by the Management Board for a period of five years, which will be renewable. He is a member of the Managing Board, to whom he reports periodically. He is responsible for:

- the proper preparation and execution of the decisions and programmes adopted by the management board;
- the day to day administration of the Secretariat;
- the performance and tasks defined in Sec. II;
- all staff matters;
- the public relations of the permanent Secretariat, for which he acts as a spokesman;
- periodical reports to the CSD.

III.B.3. Location of the permanent Secretariat

One condition for the establishment of the permanent Secretariat has been to keep it small and simple at least possible cost which leads to two options as a location. The pre-selection of these options is based on the consideration that both options allow to use administrative capacities and services (such as the maintenance of technical equipment) and also translation services of existing EU institutions. Both locations are also thematically related to the ESPON and, therefore, would cause less permanent costs than any other location:

- a) the Secretariat is located in **Brussels**, within or outside (Commission) DGXVI's premises, using their administrative capacity but acting independently;
Advantage: Location close to the CSD and the Commission (DG 16 and other DGs), easier communication and co-ordination.
- b) the Secretariat is located in **Luxembourg**, within or outside Eurostat's premises, using their administrative capacity but acting independently.
Advantage: Support offered by Eurostat in terms of the establishment of data basis and training of technical staff, synergy by participating with Eurostat's statistical networks and facilities (Eurostat is strengthening the regional data basis).

The analysis of the advantages and disadvantages offered by each of the above -described solutions will be realised during the studies phase. On the basis of this analysis, a decision shall be taken by the CSD at the end of the studies phase.

III.C. NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS AND NATIONAL NETWORKS

III.C.1. Functions and tasks of the national focal points

The national focal points constitute the basic structure of the ESPON. They represent the national expert knowledge of the EU in accordance with the structure of spatial research institutions of each country. The added value of the ESPON to the national focal points is that, through joint programming and execution of research projects, the "national focus" of the partners will be more and more enriched with a "European focus". This evolution in itself will stimulate "European thinking" in the Member States regarding spatial development.

In any case they ought to be able to represent the Member State's research capacity by the provision of links with and knowledge about national research institutions in all spatially relevant sectors of research. These tasks could be undertaken by:

- a departmental unit of the government which has established strong links with the national research institutions;
- a state owned research institution which is appointed to undertake this function;
- an independent research institution which is appointed to represent the national focal point on behalf of the government.

A specific solution for Belgium has to be worked out taking into account the structure of this country.

Both of the latter would be able to contribute by own research to the network activities whereas the former would appoint specifically for each project or study an appropriate partner as a national representative in this specific field of research.

Furthermore, it is expected that national focal points incorporate the expertise of any national and independent research institute or consultancy, if better results are expected. In this respect the national focal point may act as a central node for a developing national networks of spatial research.

Together with their national partners, these focal points undertake specialised studies (such as data analysis, cartography, transeuropean networks etc.) in the general framework of the ESDP-process, according to the missions defined by the CSD.

III.C.2. Networking among the focal points and the permanent Secretariat

Once a year, after the decision about the work programme of the ESPON is taken by the management board and the CSD all focal points meet together with the permanent Secretariat at a conference. This conference follows three aims:

- presentation of the studies and projects prepared by the network partners in relation to the ESPON;
- presentation of the new work programme for the following year by the Executive Director of the permanent Secretariat;

- comments on the current and future research agenda of the ESPON by the focal points from the point of view of spatial research which will be reported to the CSD by the Executive Director of the permanent Secretariat.

III.C.3. Appointment of the focal points

Each Member State appoints one institution as a national focal point, which should be appointed for this task for a longer period, in order to secure the best continuity of co-operation. These institutes may be a service of the national administration responsible for spatial planning, or a national research institute whose scientific authority is unquestionable and capable to play as a catalyst for all other research institutes concerned. Alternatively, a consortium between different research centres might also be envisaged.

III.D. MULTIANNUAL AND YEARLY WORK PROGRAMME

III.D.1. Multiannual work programme

On the basis of the policy and priorities defined by the CSD, the Management Board shall adopt a multiannual work programme based on the priority areas referred to in Sec. II, using as its basis a draft submitted by the Executive Director of the Secretariat.

III.D.2. Yearly work programme

Under the multiannual programme, each year the Management Board shall adopt the Secretariat's work programme on the basis of a draft submitted by the Executive Director. The programme may be adjusted in the course of the year by the same procedure.

IV. Financing the studies phase and the long term establishment of the ESPON

IV.A. STUDIES PHASE (1998-1999): ART. 10 ERDF STUDY PROGRAMME

The studies phase will take two years. According to the above - mentioned complementary document (" Note on the launching process of a network of research institutes in the field of spatial planning") the tasks to be achieved in this period will be defined in a studies programme to be approved by the CSD

IV A.1. STUDY PROGRAMME

The studies phase will concentrate on the preparation of studies about subjects related to the issues lined out in section II A. The Commission will launch under Art. 10 ERDF a study programme in co-operation with the CSD. On the basis of a proposal by the Troika, the CSD will define themes for studies which will be included in the call for proposals published by the Commission.. This programme will be assisted by an independent body providing the necessary intellectual guidance and organisational support to the study programme carried out by a network of research institutes.

The Member States are invited to delegate experts for assisting the Commission in the selection procedure of the proposals submitted by these research institutes. No more than

one institute by Member State will be retained, with whom the Commission will engage in a contract to carry out the study in the network.

IV A. 2. Funding of the study programme

The study programme will be financed 50% by the Commission and 50% by the contracting parties (i.e. the research institutes selected). The total amount for studies sums up to about 1 MECU per year (0,5 MECU Commission; 0,5 MECU contracting parties). Table 1 indicates the tentative contributions of the contracting parties.

Table 1: Financial break down of contributions to the Art. 10 ERDF STUDY PROGRAMME in ECU PER YEAR

Member State	contracting parties' contribution 50%	Commission's contribution 50%
Belgium	26.167	
Denmark	21.667	
Germany	88.417	
Greece	20.417	
Spain	33.917	
France	61.167	
Ireland	18.917	
Italy	47.917	
Luxembourg	17.167	
The Netherlands	31.667	
Austria	23.417	
Portugal	19.917	
Finland	20.417	
Sweden	20.917	
The United Kingdom	45.417	
Total	500.000 ¹	500.000

¹ rounded as a sum of the column;

The independent body responsible for the overall co-ordination of the study programme will be selected through a separate public call for tenders. , It will be entirely financed by the Commission.

IV.B. LONG TERM (2000 AND AFTER): CONSIDERING THE ESPON IN THE COMMUNITY BUDGET

Before the ESPON will be established in the long term, an evaluation of the test phase is foreseen. Referring to the Commission's Paper on the studies phase, there is a strong need to evaluate under which pre-condition the ESPON could be established on a viable legal and institutional basis. The results will give guidance for eventually necessary changes in order to receive the most efficient and effective working mode.

1999 will be the right time to start a budgetary process in the European Parliament in order to introduce a permanent budgetline for the ESPON in the Union's budget.

V. Setting up the network for the long term

V.A. FINANCING AND APPOINTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

The decision on the location of the Secretariat and a description of the precise profile of the permanent Secretariat and staff members should be taken in 1999 on the basis of the evaluation mentioned in IVB.

To finance the ESPON related cost, the contributions of the Member States will be proportional to those of the contracting parties mentioned in table 1 for the financing of the study programme.

V.B. APPOINTMENT OF NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS

Member States designate from among the institutions referred to in I.C. their national focal point. The Member States shall inform the Troika of the main components of their national spatial information networks, especially in the priority areas referred to in Sec. II. The appointment should have been agreed upon before the Echternach meeting (e.g. at the CSD meeting in November).

The Member States may also identify the institutions or other organisations established in their territory which could be specifically entrusted with the task of co-operating with the ESPON as regards certain topics of particular interest. In that case, these centres shall co-operate with other institutions which form part of the network.

The proposals of the Member States should include the candidate Countries for enlargement in the network from the initial start and also consider links to other Non Member States.