



# The RSA Research Network on EU COHESION POLICY

RSA workshop on the EU Cohesion Policy: Focus on The Territorial Dimension

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## ASSESSING TERRITORIAL IMPACT AT VARIOUS SPATIAL LEVELS: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ESPON TIA

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### Abstract

*This abstract is based on the ESPON TIA project (2014), available via: <http://tiatool.espon.eu/tia/>*

#### Background and frame

Impact assessment (IA) is a standard procedure to prepare “*evidence for political decision-makers on the advantages and disadvantages of possible policy options by assessing their potential impact*” (EC, 2009: 4). The basic idea behind the IA procedure is that ex-ante impact evaluations of policy proposals, when carried out in parallel to the policymaking process, will improve the ideas and result in robust, effective, efficient and widely supported policies (see ESPON, 2012b: 19). Territorial impact assessment (TIA) enriches the IA procedure by showing a regional differentiation of the impact of policies. This includes analyses of different administrative and political levels, types of regions as well as functional areas (see EC, 2013: 2).

Territorial impact<sup>1</sup> has been part of different EU documents and policies, illustrating the “*rising interest and concern amongst governments and policymakers with the impacts of processes of European integration on European space and its constituent territories*” (Fischer et al., 2014: 4). In the last year, the ESPON programme has put forward numerous projects in the field of TIA (ESPON 2006 Programme, ESPON 2013 Programme), focusing especially on the territorial impact of directives. These projects cover on the one hand aspects from an ex-post point of view, on the other hand a number of ex-ante assessments were implemented, including ESPON TIPTAP (2010), ESPON ARTS (2011), ESPON EATIA (2012) and finally ESPON TIA (2014). The numerous initiatives during the last two programming periods underline the role of ESPON in improving existing TIA methods and techniques.

#### The ESPON TIA tool

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by the ESPON EATIA project as being “*essentially considered to be any impact on a given geographically defined territory, whether on spatial usage, governance, or on wider economic, social or environmental aspects, which results from the introduction or transposition of an EU directive or policy*” (Fischer et al., 2013: 3).

The main objective of the ESPON TIA project was to develop a practical and user-friendly web tool based on the 'Quick Check' developed by the ESPON ARTS project, which allows policy makers and practitioners the identification of potential territorial impacts of new policies. Methodologically, the tool is based on the vulnerability concept developed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The potential territorial impacts are modelled by combining the estimated effects deriving from a particular policy measure (exposure) with the characteristics of a region (territorial sensitivity, regions at NUTS3-level).

The conceptual framework of ESPON TIA combines a web-based tool with an expert discussion on the territorial effects of an EU policy by checking all relevant indicators in a workshop setting. One key element of the guided expert discussion is the development of a systemic picture, depicting the potential effects of the policy at hand on territorial development in the fields of economy, society, environment and governance. The focus lies on the translation of the policy proposal into cause/effect relations describing the intervention logic of the directives. These relationships are depicted as flowcharts showing the links between the regulatory elements laid down in the policy, its specific targets and the different fields in which it will potentially show direct or indirect effects. These effects are then further broken down into more detailed thematic fields, measured by indicators.

The results of the guided expert discussion are judgments about the potential impact of an EU policy in different thematic fields for a range of indicators; these judgments are fed into the web-based tool. Based on the different sensitivity of regions the expert judgments are translated into maps showing the territorial impact of EU policy on NUTS3 level. These maps can serve as starting point for further discussion of different impacts of a concrete EU policy on different regions. The visualisation fosters the discussion on the input parameters, the underlying conceptual model and the results. By combining statistics with interactive elements and facilitating an iterative process, the tool fosters multi-level governance and decision making.

#### Main findings and a possible future role of ESPON

Main advantages of the tool are the combination of qualitative and quantitative information for IA. The assessment is not only based on a statistical model but also considers the input of stakeholders as equally important. Furthermore, the tool assessment can easily be conducted in a short period of time and offers the possibility of an *ex-ante* analysis of the potential impact of a specific policy on the development of regions by checking all relevant indicators. Finally, the result of the tool is more than just one map of territorial impact; it is also a process, and a discussion leading to a written summary on territorial effects, fostering the effective implementation of TIA procedures in the EU.

The ongoing discussion on the need for developing new models and strategies for balanced regional development, the need to deepen the territorial dimension of Cohesion Policy and the call for a better understanding of different geographical regions across Europe to assist in identifying the right policies also has implications for the further development of territorial impact assessment, the future role of ESPON and vice versa. There is a general trend of higher divergence within the Member States as a direct result of the recent economic and financial crisis. To understand the very different impact of the different challenges at regional level, the EU and national figures used for defining these challenges need to be analysed and mapped at NUTS 2, NUTS 3 or even LAU level. For example in the field of poverty, NUTS2- and NUTS3-level indicators hide the concentration of extreme poverty in particular in case of micro regions (LAU1-level), localities (LAU2-level) and segregated neighbourhoods especially in urban areas.

The amount of data available at the subnational level has been improved over the last few years by the OECD and the EC (Eurostat, DG Regio, Joint Research Centre, ESPON). However, to Assessing territorial impact at various spatial levels: Contributions from ESPON TIA further improve the database, new methods and structures for data collection and small area estimation (e.g. disaggregating data produced for larger territorial levels) need to be developed. The ESPON TIA methodology with its approach of combining and critically

reviewing existing data with regional expertise can in this case serve as positive example and guidepost for future projects in this field. In return, TIA will benefit from a further breaking down of the analysis to lower territorial levels, which will foster integrated place-based programmes and projects.

### **Sources**

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