The NEXUS model for sustainable territorial development of South regions in a European context

The role of regions in the EU2020 strategy: Smart, sustainable and inclusive territorial growth

The European Structural and Investment Funds 2014-2020 seek an integrated approach to achieving “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”. The sustainable territorial development is a key priority of the forthcoming Greek Partnership Agreement 2014-2020. The Government has asked Regional Authorities to assess their regional needs and develop strategies for using European Structural and Investment Funds allocations aiming also to territorial cohesion of their areas. Sustainable growth and the recovery of the economic crisis are at the heart of the policy-making of almost all the newly regional authorities since 2010. As 2014 is a year of regional elections, the Greek regional authorities should also draft a strategic policy document with the overall aims and strategic priorities for the next four years.

The ESPON Programme can assist policy-makers to detect their territorial potential, grow their regional economies and enhance territorial cohesion. Each region is different, encompassing different territories and needs to address its specific strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. Each region could contribute to a varying extent to a different headline target of Europe 2020, depending on their territorial potential. The analysis carried out by ESPON projects can assist programmes and policy makers to improve their territorial targeting and regional economies. This will also help to strengthen a place-based approach for the development of future ESIF Programmes, as well as the selection of the projects to be funded.

Map 5 - Change in GDP per capita in PPS in relation to the EU average (EU=100), 2000-2010

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INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE
Opportunities, challenges and regional characteristics for territorial development

Greek regions present a number of geographic specificities either in terms of mountainousness or their border/coastal character or recently in terms of poverty and social exclusion. A key challenge is to overcome their disadvantages inherited by their geography and conditions and facilitate an integrated approach to their development. “SWOT” analysis is extensively used in business and by policy-makers in Greece as well to scope the range of factors that shape decisions. However, it is a generic method and does not necessarily focus on either the characteristics of a place or on the need for integrated solutions within a territory.

Thus, another tool entitled NEXUS model, created by a team of European researchers could be an alternative. This tool promotes a shift in the strategic focus of regional policy from convergence to the realisation of growth potentials and promotion of sustainable development.

For a number of regional types, ESPON has developed “nexus models”, which explore the links between the defining features of a place and its challenges and opportunities.

These can help policy-makers to identify possible fields of action. They can be used to build a shared understanding amongst stakeholders of the most promising interventions for the development of a locality or region.

Using the Nexus model – A synthetic Nexus model for an island region

Source: GEOSPECS project
Building your Nexus model for territorial sustainable development

**Step 1: Define the area’s features and legacies**

In an island region at a GEOSPECS case study, the main features outlined are: its low population density, strong identity or idyllic image. Other regions will have different defining features: either negative or positive. What are the features and legacies in your area? Judgements are involved, so there are not necessarily ‘correct’ answers. The eleven investment themes in the ESIF might help to identify features that are inherited or formed by geographical and historical characteristics of a place and build your Nexus model. Data from ESPON and other sources can be used to inform this stage by benchmarking your features nationally or in relation to the rest of Europe. However, brainstorming can also be used before hard data is analysed.

**Step 2: Connect these features of the area with specific socio/economic development processes either negative (limitations) or positive (opportunities).**

The next step is to think about the processes that derive from or relate to these preconditions, and which impact on achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in your area. All these processes could reflect either economy, social or environmental challenges and opportunities.

Examples might include market trends favouring or inhibiting local businesses, planned new infrastructure, vulnerability to rising energy costs, or the ways in which climate change might affect the city or region.

“What are the factors (challenges or opportunities) linking your area’s characteristics and desired outcomes?”

**Step 3: Creating logical chains of links between the defining features of a place and its challenges and opportunities for sustainable territorial development**

The final step involves creating logical chains that follow on from the area’s features and legacies, and the processes identified in Step 2. Connections can be made to opportunities and challenges for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the area. A more policy-oriented approach might be to identify connections in terms of how they relate to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The logical chains can show connections, but more importantly can be used to spot potential synergies and the scope for integrated actions that deliver on more than one of the aims – for example the challenge or opportunity to grow green businesses than can provide local training and employment opportunities for young people. A large city might need to find ways to overcome problems of traffic congestion while also decarbonising its transport system and improving safety. This step could be done using evidence (such as that generated by ESPON) or as a brainstorming exercise amongst experts.
Implications for policy development

Each region should analyse its regional system, and use the findings to shape policy and investment to match in its own ‘pattern of territorial development’. The Nexus model is a way of analysing the characteristics of geographic area by linking challenges and opportunities and thus identifying synergies of actions.

One key message emerging from ESPON research is that territorial governance is very important. Regional governance in Greece should understand that a number of agencies and stakeholders agreeing with joint solutions will favour their territorial growth. Successful territorial development can no longer be achieved through top-down public sector action. This also means that planning for regional development must be done in a more inclusive, less hierarchical way, with cooperative networks and partnerships. In addition, action at the regional scale needs to be aligned to policy at national and transnational scales, as well as at the local scale. These principles are very important for effective use of ESIF.

The Nexus model can be a way to engage multiple stakeholders and an active search for integrated solutions aiming to deliver jobs and growth in a city or region. This model focus on a more integrated place-based growth could evoke the region’s resilience to economic and social crisis while on the same time save money through the synergies envisaged.

More information

Other applications of the Nexus model

The Nexus model built on the work of another ESPON project, ESPON TeDi, which studied territorial diversity in Europe: http://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Projects/Menu_TargetedAnalyses/espontedi.html. Its initial method, named as a syndrome approach, was trying to elaborate different factors that act upon the territorial disadvantage of a region. The name Nexus approach was adopted in the ESPON project GEOSPECS, which looked at development potentials in specific types of territories.

The ESPON programme

The ESPON 2013 Programme is part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. It supports policy development in relation to the aim of territorial cohesion and harmonious development of the European territory.

ESPON supports Cohesion Policy development with European-wide comparable information, evidence, analyses and scenarios on framework conditions for the development of regions, cities and larger territories. In doing so, it facilitates the mobilisation of territorial capital and development opportunities, contributes to improving European competitiveness, widening and deepening of European territorial cooperation and sustainable and balanced development. More information on ESPON and all of the research outputs can be found on the ESPON website: www.espon.eu.

The USESPON project

The USESPON project aims to encourage and support the use of findings from the ESPON 2013 Programme. It supports stakeholders across Europe by providing guidance on using ESPON results in
policy-making and practice. For more information on USESPON, have a look at the project website: www.espon-usespon.eu

Texts and maps stemming from research projects under the ESPON Programme presented in this leaflet do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the ESPON Monitoring Committee.