



ESPON-INTERSTRAT Workshop on Strategic Planning in Scotland

The first UK ESPON-Interstrat workshop, on 1 April 2011, brought together strategic planners in Scotland with ESPON researchers to consider how outputs from the ESPON programme might be used in the development of Scottish strategic planning policy. ESPON offers policymakers the use of indicators, scenarios, reports, benchmarking, data, concepts, methods, typologies, targeted analysis and maps. The specific aim of the ESPON-Interstrat project is to promote and support, through interactive approaches, the use of ESPON findings in the creation of strategic spatial development plans and to share good practice between European partners. This aim was reflected in the design and facilitation of this action-packed event.

Strategic Planning playing a lead development role

Craig McLaren (RTPI Scotland's National Director) kicked off the day highlighting the Scottish context in which planning is regarded as a solution, rather than an obstacle to the present challenges of economic growth and sustainability. This attitude towards planning was certainly reflected in the day's proceedings, with participants keen to discuss the ways in which strategic planning has responded, and can continue to respond, to the issues of climate change and sustainable growth in line with the Scottish Government's mission to create "a Scotland that is wealthier and fairer, smarter and greener, healthier, safer and stronger".

The first interactive session of the day focused on conducting a SWOT analysis on Scotland from a European territorial development perspective. Participants were divided into four groups and asked to discuss Scotland's main strengths, main weaknesses, main opportunities and main threats for short term (five years) and long term (post 2030) scenarios.

Key strengths and opportunities include Scotland's strong higher education research base (education/skills); devolved planning powers and capacity to direct own future (governance); integration of climate change objectives into national policy and high levels of renewable energy resources. Weaknesses and threats include the challenges of remoteness; a tendency to insular thinking in the European context, gaps in energy distribution infrastructure and an ageing demography.

National Planning Framework

As Graeme Purves (Assistant Chief Planner, Scottish Government) emphasised, the approach taken in the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework (NPF) has strong links to the original European Spatial Development Perspective. Partners from other European backgrounds commented on the striking emphasis of NPF2, published in 2009, on renewable energy and infrastructure and a comprehensive strategic approach. The review of the current framework to develop National Planning Framework 3 is currently underway. Key challenges include population decline affecting certain areas, the protection of fragile rural economies and the Celtic heritage.



Delivery of infrastructure is key challenge

The relationship between the NPF and the strategic development plans being prepared for Scotland's main cities was the focus of much of the workshop discussions. Polycentricity plays an important part of the strategic approach to urban development. For example, new cities such as Inverness are playing an increasing role in the overall economy. There is recognition of both advantages and disadvantages in agglomeration, including the dispersion of critical mass. At the same time there has been wide acknowledgement of the new rural economy as consumption space rather than a production space. One of the main challenges in NPF2 for both the Scottish Government and the strategic development planning authorities in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen is the delivery of the big infrastructure projects identified in the NPF and the achievement of economic and social cohesion between the urban centres.

The workshop identified key resources that can help strategic planning authorities deliver these objectives. These include a central reference point for information; reliable data and visualisation tools; tools to discriminate between policy options and between critical and secondary issues; understanding of energy and climate; advanced population growth/depopulation models; the ability to conduct effective monitoring and the exchange of good practice.

New resources

In this context the workshop explored the relevance of the four energy risk scenarios as analysed in the ESPON ReRisk project. These suggest that European regions and cities will follow different development paths in the energy sector both in the medium and long-term. Marc Nielsen, a member of the Belgian contact point team for ESPON (Belgium National CP) assisted the discussion by reporting on the use of the scenarios in a Belgian context. This suggested that carbon leakage is a major threat with low (mainly offshore) potential for renewables in Belgium. This contrasts with the emphasis on renewable energy in Scotland, which aims for 80 per cent of Scottish electricity consumption to come from renewables by 2020.

David Jennings (Aberdeen City and Shire SDPA), Pam Ewen (TAYplan SDPA) and Joseph Scott (Glasgow and Clyde Valley SDPA) presented their strategic development plans. These are embracing the national planning reform agenda, focusing not only on vision and spatial strategy but also on outcomes and delivery. They welcomed the opportunity to draw on ESPON outputs for this work and the workshop identified opportunities for new cross-border linkages, strategic infrastructure, understanding of economic potentials and development of climate change policies.



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