

KEY INDICATORS FOR TERRITORIAL COHESION AND SPATIAL PLANNING: THE REFORM OF EU COHESION POLICY AND THE NEW ROLE OF SPATIAL INDICATORS



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European Union (EU) cohesion policy accounts for one-third of the EU budget and is currently undergoing significant reform. Future cohesion funding will concentrate on a limited number of policy priorities, closely linked to the *Europe 2020 Strategy* and conditional on verified progress towards targets. The introduction of 'Territorial Cohesion' as a core objective of the EU in the Lisbon Treaty points to an important new role for spatial data and indicators in implementing cohesion policy. The ESPON' funded project, Key Indicators for Territorial Cohesion and Spatial Planning (KITCASP), is currently developing a core set of spatial indicators on the basis of national policy priorities in five EU case study territories, including the Republic of Ireland, and in the context of EU cohesion policy. This paper discusses the need for policy-makers and practitioners on the island of Ireland to critically engage with emerging cohesion policy and to coordinate the current emphasis on evidence-based spatial planning with the *Europe 2020 Strategy*.

Introduction

The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in December 2009, added 'Territorial Cohesion' to the twin goals of economic and social cohesion as a core objective of the European Union (EU). While the issue

of EU cohesion policy did not, for understandable reasons, generate much public or political interest during the two Lisbon Treaty referenda, the Republic of Ireland (heretofore referred to as Ireland) has been a very significant net beneficiary of cohesion funding programmes, receiving over €17 billion in investment since its accession into the EU in 1973. Cohesion policy has played an important part in the transformation of the Irish economy, in particular by bringing about the rapid convergence of Irish living standards to EU levels during the 1990s – primarily through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) (IRO, 2012). Northern Ireland too has received over €2.5 billion in cohesion funding in the past 20 years (DFPNI, 2005) and, in border regions, funding programmes such as INTERREG and PEACE have contributed over €600 million to strategic cross-border cooperation and development projects (SEUPB, 2012). Given tightening budget constraints, which will severely limit public expenditure over the medium-term, and the need to promote economic recovery, cohesion policy funding programmes are likely to continue to play a critical role in subsidising public investment across the island of Ireland into the future.

Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty states that the EU "shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among member states" (TEU TFEU post-Lisbon, 2007). In practice, the consequence of the Treaty provides that, for the first time, the EU may now specifically legislate in the field of territorial development, and adopt legally binding directives (CEC, 2011a). Further, the EU and each Member State is now required under the terms of the Treaty to conduct and coordinate their policies, particularly their economic policies, to pursue and attain territorial cohesion. Such policies must be aimed at achieving the harmonious development of the EU territory and "reducing disparities between

the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions". Regions which are singled out for specific policy focus include rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as the northernmost regions of Europe with very low population density, and island, cross-border and mountain regions (Art 174, TEU TFEU post-Lisbon, 2007).

Despite the elevation of territorial cohesion as a core goal of the EU in the Lisbon Treaty, the issue has received limited traction in the Irish policy sphere. Ireland was the only national government not to submit a formal consultation response to the *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion* published by the European Commission (EC) in 2008 (CEC, 2008); a document which launched an EU-wide debate on territorial cohesion with a view to deepening understanding of the concept, and the implications for policy and cooperation (Cotella et al, 2012). The UK government response to the Green Paper stressed the importance of integrated policies, harnessing endogenous potential, decision-taking at the right spatial level (sometimes requiring cross-boundary, sub-boundary and cross-border working) and sustainable development. In this context the U.K. submission highlighted, for example, the improving complementarity between the spatial strategies in Northern Ireland and Ireland through the use of a shared evidence-base and improved alignment of strategic policies and periods of review (DCLG, 2009).

Following this consultation exercise, which drew over 400 responses from governmental and non-governmental organisations across Europe, momentum on the territorial cohesion agenda and the reform of cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 EU budgetary period (referred to as the Multi-Annual Funding Framework) has continued apace. In March 2010, the *Europe 2020 Strategy* (heretofore referred to as EU2020) was published by the EC which establishes key targets for each Member State and the EU as a whole to achieve by 2020 (CEC, 2010a).

This was followed in November of the same year by the *Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion* (CEC, 2010b) and in 2011 by the new *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020* (TA2020) (CEC, 2011b), which is to be the primary framework to support and implement territorial cohesion policy in the EU.

The concept of territorial cohesion has been criticised for lacking definitional clarity and for having a wide range of meanings depending on one's perspective. However, it is clear that far from being an esoteric concept of EU bureaucratic jargon, the territorial cohesion agenda is quickly evolving into something far more profound and of significant importance to the future direction of territorial development on the island of Ireland. In fact, EU regional policy, which has historically been the main field of EU policy that targets financial resources geographically in order to address spatial inequalities, is now more commonly referred to as cohesion policy (Duhr et al, 2010). Rather than a focus on a definition, territorial cohesion may be more usefully understood as a broad process of promoting spatial justice and a more cohesive and balanced territory by: (i) supporting the reduction of socio-economic territorial imbalances; (ii) promoting environmental sustainability; (iii) reinforcing and improving territorial cooperation and governance processes; and, (iv) reinforcing and establishing a more balanced and polycentric urban system (Medeiros, 2010). Despite varying perspectives, a Europe-wide consensus appears to be forming around some aspects of territorial cohesion policy, including the application of the "place-based" approach (Barca, 2009), which proposes geographically tailored interventions in functional spatial units, and the need for an integrated territorial orientation in policy implementation and evaluation.

Since the publication of the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP) in 1999 (CEC, 2012a), European spatial planning policy and cohesion policy have evolved on parallel but separate paths and often without the necessary integration between both. However, the introduction of territorial

cohesion as a core goal of the EU, and the explicit recognition in a range of emerging high-level policy documents that key EU objectives can only be achieved if the territoriality of policy implementation is respected, points to a new "cross-fertilisation" of EU cohesion and spatial planning policy (CEC, 2011a). This, in turn, signals an important new role for spatial planning as a critical platform to coordinate and harmonise sectoral policy action and EU investment programmes. The current ongoing reform of the architecture of EU cohesion policy for the 2014-2020 period is, therefore, of significant importance to existing – and future – spatial planning policy on the island of Ireland². These reforms call for critical engagement by policy-makers in the field of spatial planning to ensure that cohesion policy is sufficiently reflected in implementing and monitoring national and regional spatial strategies.

Europe 2020, Cohesion Policy and the Territorial Agenda

As previously noted, in March 2010 the EC published EU2020, a new ten-year strategy for "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (CEC, 2010b). The new strategy is both a response to the financial crisis which has swept Europe post-2008 and a recognition of the strategic shortcomings in previous EU policy action. Against the background of increasing scarcity of public resources, overcoming the economic crisis together with addressing key environmental and social challenges, it is now recognised to require a much more integrated, focused and results-orientated approach. Five overarching targets have been agreed for the EU to achieve by the end of the decade in key priority policy areas of:

- Employment;
- Education;
- Research and innovation;
- Social inclusion and poverty reduction; and
- Climate change and energy.

These headline targets have been subsequently translated into national targets in each Member

State through National Reform Programmes reflecting the different situations and circumstances in each country (CEC, 2012b; CEC, 2012e) (see Table 1). Importantly, the country-specific EU2020 targets are planned by the EC to be fully integrated into the economic governance of the EU, and the proposed one-trillion euro EU budget for the 2014-2020 period. While country-specific targets have been set for Ireland, the U.K.'s – and therefore Northern Ireland's – overall approach to national monitoring and actions to be taken in support of the five headline EU2020 targets was agreed by the European Council in June 2010, and set out in the *UK National Reform Programme 2012* (HM Government, 2012). While no national targets for the U.K. have been set (except in the case of greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy), the *UK National Reform Programme* establishes a series of actions and monitoring arrangements which the UK Government and Devolved Administrations are taking towards meeting the objectives of EU2020. This includes, for example, ongoing monitoring of the current level of performance against the strategic objectives of the *Northern Ireland Programme for Government (PFG) 2011-2015* (OFMDFM, 2011).

Cohesion policy is proposed to remain as an essential component in the next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework period with total proposed funding of €376 billion (see Table 2) – amounting to approximately one-third of the total EU budget and second only to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In order to tie cohesion policy more systematically to the EU2020 objectives, the EC now proposes concentrating funding on a smaller number of policy priorities to ensure that each priority receives enough funding to deliver a significant impact (CEC, 2012c). Further, progress towards achieving targets will be monitored more closely with clear conditionalities and incentives to reward countries which have performed well.

Table 1: Europe 2020 Headline Targets for the EU and Ireland and Associated Targets for Northern Ireland

Policy Priority	EU Target	Ireland Target	Northern Ireland PFG (2011-2015)
Employment	75% of 20-64 year-olds to be employed	69-71% of 20-64 year-olds to be employed	Contribute to rising levels of employment by supporting the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs
R&D	3% of the EU's GDP to be invested in R&D	Approximately 2% of GDP to be invested in R&D (2.5% GNP)	Support £300 million investment by businesses in R&D, with at least 20% coming from Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)
Climate Change / Energy	Greenhouse Gas Emissions 20% (or even 30%, if the conditions are right) lower than 1990 20% of energy from renewables 20% increase in energy efficiency	Greenhouse Gas Emissions 20% lower than 1990 16% of energy from renewables 2.75 million tonnes of oil equivalent reduction of energy consumption	Continue to work towards a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by at least 35% on 1990 levels by 2025 Encourage achievement of 20% of electricity consumption from renewable sources and 4% renewable heat by 2015
Education	Reducing school drop-out rates below 10% At least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing third level education	8% early school leaving 60% of 30-34 year-olds completing third level education	Increase the overall proportion of young people who achieve at least 5 General Certificate Secondary Education (GCSE) at A* - C or equivalent including GCSEs in Maths and English by the time they leave school
Poverty / Social Exclusion	At least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion	At least 186,000 people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion by 2016	Deliver a range of measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion through the 'Delivering Social Change' framework

Source: CEC, 2010b and OFMDFM, 2011

Table 2: Proposed EU Budget for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion 2014 – 2020

Convergence regions	€162.6bn
Transition regions	€39bn
Competitiveness regions	€53.1bn
Territorial cooperation	€11.7bn
Cohesion fund	€68.7bn
Extra allocation for outermost and sparsely populated regions	€926m
Connecting Europe Facility (plus €10bn ringfenced inside the Cohesion Fund)	€40bn
Total	€376bn

Source: Multi-Annual Financial Framework, 2014-2020

To deliver greater coherence between headline targets and investment on the ground, the EU budget review has outlined a new strategic programming approach for cohesion policy. Firstly, the Commission has proposed a Common Provisions Regulation with a universal set of objectives, rules and procedures for all five cohesion funds. A Common Strategic Framework (CSF) (CEC, 2012d) is proposed which translates the country-specific targets of EU2020 into key investment priorities at the national, regional and local scale in the context of specific needs, opportunities and challenges. The CSF is intended to assist Member States and their regions in setting a strategic direction for the programming of multi-annual investment strategies and in coordinating cohesion funds. In order to avoid overlaps and fragmentation, and to maximise cross-sectoral synergies, a common set of eleven thematic objectives has been developed through which cohesion funding is to be mobilised and targeted, including:

- Strengthening research, technological development and innovation;
- Enhancing access to, use and quality of information and communication technologies;
- Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs, the agricultural sector, and the fisheries and aquaculture sector;
- Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy;
- Promoting climate change adaptation and risk prevention and management;
- Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;
- Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures;
- Promoting employment and supporting labour mobility;
- Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;
- Investing in education, skills and life-long learning; and
- Enhancing institutional capacity and ensuring an efficient public administration.

Secondly, each Member State will be required to prepare Partnership Contracts which will also be closely linked to the objectives of the EU2020 Strategy and set out “an integrated approach for territorial development supported by all CSF Funds” (CEC, 2012f). The partnership principle is seen as key to delivering EU2020, and implies close cooperation and a multi-level governance approach between public authorities at national, regional and local scales, private interests, and NGOs representing civil society, particularly in areas such as environment, social inclusion and equal opportunities. The Partnership Contract will be the outcome of direct discussions between the EC and each Member State on the strategy presented in their National Reform Programme, and partners will be actively involved throughout the whole programming cycle – including preparation, monitoring and evaluation.

Thirdly, and similar to previous programming periods, each Member State will be required to prepare an Operational Programme which will be the main management tool to translate strategic policy documents into tangible investment priorities accompanied by clear and measurable targets. This will be complemented by an annual reporting cycle aligned with the EU2020 governance cycle. This new regime of multilateral surveillance is proposed to improve transparency, accountability and assessment of the effects of cohesion policy (CEC, 2010a).

A key focus of attention in the emerging new cohesion policy framework, and of specific relevance to the island of Ireland context, is cross-border cooperation; particularly in confronting the challenges in outermost regions and sparsely populated areas which are specifically recognised in the Lisbon Treaty. In order to avoid fragmentation of the available cohesion funding, the new framework recognises joint coordination, cooperative action and sharing of knowledge between partners at national and / or regional levels to address shared challenges which cut across national and sub-national administrative boundaries. Examples include:

- Joint management and promotion of natural resources (e.g. river basin management), integrated risk-management and climate change adaptation strategies;
- The development of joint smart specialisation approaches as platforms to leverage co-investment;
- Strengthening cross-border labour markets; and
- Shared services and soft cooperation in, for example, health infrastructure, waste and water treatment, education facilities and equipment, research and development, accessibility, social infrastructure, ICT and green infrastructure.

The introduction of the territorial dimension to cohesion policy post-Lisbon Treaty now requires that all future EU funding programmes and policies address this objective with particular emphasis on the role of cities, functional geographies, areas facing specific geographical or demographic problems and macro-regional strategies (CEC, 2010a). This has prompted a parallel review of the TA2020. In November 2011, under the Polish Council Presidency, a "road map" with specific implementation measures for TA2020 was also adopted. The key objective of TA2020 is to put in place an action-oriented policy framework for the harmonious, balanced, efficient and sustainable development of the EU territory (see Table 3). TA2020 recognises that the EU2020 Strategy and its targets can only be achieved if the territorial dimension of the Strategy is taken into account as development challenges and opportunities in different regions vary, and calls for cohesion policy to be better embedded within national, regional and local spatial development strategies. This includes transnational and cross-border integration of regions going beyond cooperation projects and focusing on developments and results of real cross-border and transnational relevance. New macro-regional spatial strategies (also referred to as Integrated Territorial Investments) are also called for as broad-based funding instruments, and as mechanisms to draw down cohesion policy co-financing in accordance with the 'additionality principle'. Macro-regional strategies should be based on the principles of

horizontal coordination, evidence-informed policy-making and integrated functional area development, with an emphasis on a 'place-based' policy approach to unleash endogenous territorial potential and to build on specific local assets which contribute to competitiveness (CEC, 2011b). Further, TA2020 stresses the need for improved territorially sensitive spatial monitoring to better coordinate evidence-based planning efforts to achieve country-specific targets.

The Role of Indicators

It is clear that EU cohesion policy is shifting towards a new emphasis on joined-up economic governance and monitoring the effectiveness of policy intervention. As part of this process, the Analysis Unit of the Directorate General for Regional Policy has produced a 'fact sheet' for each of the 27 EU Member States to support the preparation and negotiations for the upcoming 2014-2020 programming period (CEC, 2012b; CEC, 2012e). The purpose of each of these 'fact sheets' is to allow easy comparison between the performance of each Member State against the EU average, and the best and worst performer in the Union. Indicators are provided at the national and regional spatial scales (NUTS I, II and III) and grouped around the overarching EU2020 objective of "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth". The country-specific targets for each Member State (where applicable) are highlighted together with current status and distance to target which is intended as an indication of the relative effort required to achieve targets. Indicators include, for example:

- R&D and innovation;
- IT infrastructure;
- Education;
- Climate change and energy;
- Environment;
- Transport; and
- Degree of urbanisation and remoteness.

This new dispensation will be of critical importance to future regional development in Ireland and Northern Ireland in the post-2014 period.

Table 3: Territorial Development Priorities established in TA2020

Territorial Development Priority	Policy Objectives
Promote polycentric and balanced territorial development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve settlements' performance in European and global competition and promote economic prosperity towards sustainable development; and • Contribute to reducing the strong territorial polarisation of economic performance, avoiding large regional disparities by addressing bottlenecks to growth.
Encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart development of city regions at varying scales; • Development of the wide variety of rural areas to take account of their unique characteristics; and • Recognise and promote urban-rural interdependence through integrated governance and planning based on broad partnership.
Territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a critical mass for development, diminishing economic, social and ecological fragmentation, building mutual trust and social capital.
Ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve local economies through research and capacity building of the human capital, and the development of local products and markets, business environments, locally-oriented training provision, and partial self-sufficiency; • Preserve and improve the innovation capacity of all regions; and • Diversification of the local economy to decrease vulnerability.
Improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide services and minimise infrastructure barriers (secure access to road, rail, water-based and air transport, and to other infrastructure facilities such as broadband and trans-European energy networks); and • Improve accessibility of urban centres in peripheries, rural areas, and islands and overseas territories.
Managing and connecting ecological, landscape and cultural values of regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage; Joint risk management; • Local, regional and trans-regional management of cultural and natural landscapes; and • Strengthening awareness and responsibility of local and regional communities and environmentally friendly job creation.

Source: Territorial Agenda 2020 - CEC, 2011b

Restoring macro-economic stability and reducing government deficits in the coming years is placing huge pressure on public expenditure and public investment. Cohesion funding, which has accounted for a significant proportion of regional investment

since the 1970s is, therefore, likely to become increasingly important in the future. However, accessing such funding will be dependent on clear rules of conditionality, incentives and performance requiring the setting of measurable targets and

outcome indicators which are directly linked to the EU2020 Strategy and National Reform Programmes. According to the *Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion*, “indicators must be clearly interpretable, statistically validated, truly responsive and directly linked to policy intervention, and promptly collected and publicised” (CEC, 2010a: xxvii). The report continues that “higher-quality, better-functioning monitoring and evaluation systems” are, therefore, considered crucial for moving towards a more strategic and results-oriented approach to cohesion policy (ibid). Moreover, and highlighting the relative immediacy of the task, the ex-ante setting of targets and outcome indicators for each Member State is to be agreed in joint dialogue with the EC in advance of 2014. This points to the need, at an early stage, to ensure collection and dissemination of the appropriate national and sub-national datasets, and the development and implementation of appropriate monitoring tools, including spatial indicators.

Key Indicators in Territorial Cohesion and Spatial Planning (KITCASP)

In recent years, there has been a renewed focus on evidence-based spatial policy on the island of Ireland and the development of spatial indicators and monitoring systems. Work is currently ongoing by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DoECLG) and the eight Regional Authorities in Ireland on the development of regional planning indicators which can measure how the strategic objectives and policies of the *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) (DoELG, 2002) and *Regional Planning Guidelines* (RPGs) are performing in practice. Work is also ongoing by the NUTS II Regional Assemblies on the review of the *Gateway Development Index* (GDI) (now also to include ‘hubs’³). In addition, the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) has recently published *Towards a Spatial Monitoring Framework for the Island of Ireland: A Scoping Study* (Walsh et al, 2011) which focuses on the application of all-island data and indicators for the purposes of jointly informing policy decisions in the context of the NSS

and the *Regional Development Strategy* (RDS) for Northern Ireland (DRD, 2001).

At the national level in Ireland, numerous sets of indicators have been developed to assess economic (e.g. competitiveness metrics measured by the National Competitiveness Council), social (e.g. census data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and mapped by the All-Island Research Observatory - AIRO), environmental (e.g. state of the environment reports from the Environmental Protection Agency – EPA) and sustainability criteria (e.g. indicator sets developed by the Comhar Sustainable Development Council). The Central Statistics Office have also recently published *Measuring Ireland’s Progress* (CSO, 2012) using 109 economic, social and environmental indicators covering 10 domains and 49 sub-domains. Parallel indicator sets have been developed in Northern Ireland (e.g. environmental statistics of the Department of the Environment and the economic measures of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency). The All-Island Spatial Database Project undertaken by the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), National Centre for Geocomputation (NCG) – both located in NUI Maynooth – and ICLR presented a first attempt to develop a set of priority indicators with the aim of providing an evidence-base for cross-border cooperative spatial planning. The project identified the lack of a common definition of indicators as the biggest challenge facing development of comparable and compatible datasets. AIRO carried on that initiative, devising an on-line system for the production of all-island thematic maps. Other web-based initiatives include MyPlan, SpatialNI, and the online mapping hosted by the EPA⁴.

While there is now a wealth of spatial data available, to date there has been little consideration of how spatial planning policy objectives and indicators can be aligned with EU2020 targets and National Reform Programmes, and used as a key monitoring tool in the context of reformed cohesion policy. The central focus of ESPON’s Key Indicators in

Territorial Cohesion and Spatial Planning (KITCASP) project is to bridge this gap. This eighteen-month project commenced in February 2012, is led by NIRSA, and comprises transnational project groups in Scotland, Basque Country, Latvia and Iceland.

The project aims at the identification of a core set of spatial planning indicators of significant practical use and relevance to policy practitioners in the context of EU territorial cohesion policy. KITCASP is a 'bottom-up' stakeholder-driven project (ESPO Priority 2) and a central task is to engage policy-makers and practitioners through partnership, dialogue and cooperation to develop indicators which reflect national spatial policy priorities. At the same time, KITCASP seeks to harness the considerable resources which has been developed by over a decade of pan-European ESPON territorial research to bring together the European dimension with national, regional and local perspectives, information and analysis.

However, selecting the appropriate indicators is not an easy task. There are many parameters which can be measured and there is an abundance of indicators and datasets available. Only a few, however, are able to translate complex relationships about phenomena in a simple way and in a manner which can be easily understood by policy-makers to provide usable and reliable signals of important trends (EEA, 2002). A key challenge is that in recent years an enormous range of datasets on an ever wider series of topics has been collected in the EU and at national and regional levels, but the use of these data to inform evidence-based policy-making has been sub-optimal, partly due to the sheer breadth, fragmentation and compartmentalised nature of the information available. An appropriate spatial monitoring framework must satisfy both the demands for an analytical base for sound spatial analysis, and also for the varying political demands enabling the evaluation of policy strategies and the assessment of the achievement of policy aims (ESPO, 2009). The methodological approach of the KITCASP project seeks to identify a set of user-friendly, priority indicators capable of achieving this

task through the application of a filtering process which evaluates indicator sets based on their explanatory power, availability, regional dimension and practicality.

The reform of EU cohesion policy, reorientation towards the EU2020 targets and addition of the territorial dimension underlines the current importance and relevance of the KITCASP project. All regions and Member States will be eligible for cohesion funding post-2014, but funding will continue to be prioritised on the most disadvantaged countries with a gross national income of less than 90% of the EU average. Most of these countries joined the EU between 2004 and 2007 and, with enlargement and an economic crisis across the continent, Ireland and Northern Ireland will be increasingly competing for scarcer cohesion funding opportunities. The *Northern Ireland Programme for Government* has a strategic objective to achieve a 20% target for increased drawdown of competitive EU funds over the period to 2015 (OFMDFM, 2011). Maximising cohesion funding allocation for the next EU programming period will require new innovative approaches, clear choices in the identification of policy priorities and development of a dynamic set of indicators capable of monitoring regional and sub-regional specific progress towards targets. KITCASP has the potential to provide the catalyst for the development of such a monitoring system and the identification of priorities, but can only be effective when linked to high-quality and timely available geo-referenced datasets. Moreover, given the focus in cohesion policy on transnational cooperation, KITCASP could provide the stimulus for the articulation of more meaningful macro-regional cross-border spatial strategies and the reinvigoration of a harmonised all-island approach to spatial monitoring.

Conclusion

A common understanding of what territorial cohesion means for the island of Ireland has yet to be articulated. However, analysis of the submissions by the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) Regional

Assembly, the South-East Regional Assembly (SERA) and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) to the *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion* indicate that a largely common viewpoint on the key issues, priorities and challenges already exists (see BMW Regional Assembly, 2008; SERA, 2009; NILGA, 2009). All agree for cohesion policy to be 'bottom-up' and 'place-based'; enhancing the capacity of regions to harness their endogenous territorial assets in a sustainable manner through appropriate public policies, investment strategies and governance frameworks. Similarly, there is a common consensus that a more holistic understanding of 'territory' is required which does not simply imply a geographic area but a place where economic, social, demographic and environmental factors interact together with the need for better cooperation, enhanced coordination and new territorial partnerships. There is also general recognition that national policies to reduce regional disparities and asymmetries have failed and that cohesion policy and funding will be crucial in the years ahead to subsidise public investment in regional development.

Therefore, there is a clear need to develop a shared approach to the key territorial development priorities and to deepen cooperation in the development of integrated cross-border spatial strategies. The forthcoming finalisation in 2013 of the *Spatial Strategies on the Island of Ireland: Framework for Collaboration* represents a significant opportunity to move this agenda forward. However, as noted in the draft consultation document, a key factor in facilitating better joint working is more detailed and consistent information at a local level, as well as integrating datasets in areas such as population, employment, transportation, housing and the environment (DoECLG and DRDNI, 2011). This information needs to be made widely available in a form that is understood and capable of analysis by stakeholders at all levels. The ESPON KITCASP project is already well advanced in this task and has significant potential to act as a key framework for formalising a common approach to the gathering,

monitoring and analysis of key spatial data and indicators on an all-island basis in the years ahead.

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Endnotes

¹ ESPON is the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (see www.espon.eu, www.espon-ireland.ie and www.rtpi.co.uk/espon)

² As well as the *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) for Ireland and the *Regional Development Strategy* (RDS) for Northern Ireland, this also includes the forthcoming *Spatial Strategies on the Island of Ireland: Framework for Collaboration* (currently renamed as *Framework for Cooperation: Spatial Strategies in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland*). This is expected to be published in Spring, 2013.

³ The nine towns identified in the NSS supporting the national and international role of the gateways and energising smaller towns and rural areas within their area of influence.

⁴ See, for example, www.myplan.ie; www.gistrategyni.gov.uk; and www.epa.ie.

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