

# Seminar on the Role of Small and Medium Cities: Drivers of Sustainable Development and Urban-Rural Cooperation

November 15 and 16, 2023 in Cuenca, Spain

Museo Paleontológico, Río Gritos street, 5, Cuenca



# Context

This Seminar is organized in cooperation with the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council in the framework of the ESPON 2030 Cooperation Programme, which aims to support policy development for promoting territorial cohesion and harmonious development of the European territory.

Cohesion remains central to European Union policies, and though employment has been growing and has fully recovered from the crisis reaching its highest value in 2019, regional disparities remain larger than before 2008, as the 8th Cohesion Report reveals. While Cohesion policy was a powerful tool to respond to COVID 19 crisis by mobilizing additional funding, it should now return to its core mission of reducing regional disparities and promoting long term regional development.

To achieve that goal, investments in public services, infrastructure, skills and multi-level governance have continued to drive convergence in recent years, nevertheless, some of these drivers remain concentrated in urban areas. This highlights the need to design an appropriate region-specific investment mix, where small and medium-sized cities are differentiated from large agglomerations.

The importance of innovation is also a key determinant of long-term regional economic growth, however, some countries, are clearly below the capital region and national average and lack a clear smart specialization strategy and regional innovation ecosystems failing to capture local talent and making them vulnerable and unprepared to new opportunities.

To achieve these goals, there are two milestones of special relevance, these are the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the promotion of a polycentric territorial system based on intermediary cities, social inclusion, access to public and private services, the promotion of the role of women and the dignity of work.

As we can see, the new challenges of urban-rural relations show how small and medium-sized cities can act as a balancing factor between population and territories imbalances through the construction of a New Territorial Contract within the framework of common objectives to achieve active, inclusive and functional territories, and ensuring that urban-rural cooperation and the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals are also realized.

In this intricate context, the ESPON seminar brings together some of the most prominent organizations and researchers that are working on in Europe. Through different presentations and plenary sessions participants will get an update on the latest ESPON evidence and research related to how strengthening urban-rural links and the role of small and medium-sized towns and cities could boost economic development and improve quality of life in urban and rural areas. Hence, during the Seminar, we will have an opportunity to:

- ➔ Debate on the implementation of the “do not harm to EU cohesion” (DNHC) principle, to raise awareness of demographic challenges and growing urban-rural imbalances.
- ➔ Find an space where to exchange and promote networks creation around key policy issues for innovation, economic transition and tech transformation.
- ➔ Discuss the needs of the territories to ensure every citizen is given an opportunity and has access to public services..
- ➔ Reflect on the role of small and medium-sized cities as intermediaries to build public policies to fight against depopulation and bring socio-territorial cohesion.

- ➔ Identify challenges and opportunities within the framework of multilevel and multi-stakeholder governance.
- ➔ Foster sustainable growth and competitiveness while considering the importance of young and old people and their role as city change makers.
- ➔ Define conclusions on how small and medium-sized cities will contribute to build a New Territorial Contract to achieve active, inclusive and functional territories.

Inputs and evidence from ESPON territorial findings will fuel debates and discussions, addressing the key issues surrounding current and future public policy formulation processes.

In a nutshell, the aim is to provide insights and understanding on the new challenges to territorial cohesion, revealing how, by working together, Europe can recover through crises, and emerge stronger. ESPON territorial evidence will feed the debates and discussions, addressing the key topics surrounding the current and future policymaking processes.



# Programa

## Wednesday, November 15

- 8:30 Press conference only for journalists
- 8:30 Registrations
- 09:00 **Welcome and opening:** Small and medium-sized cities in the Presidency's Priorities and the TA2030: a new territorial contract
- 09:45 **Provocative cities:** Small and medium-sized cities and the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy
- 11:00 *Coffee Break and Family picture*
- 11:30 Policy dialogues on small and medium-sized cities and urban-rural cooperation
- 13:00 *Lunch break*
- 14:00 **Talent Cities session 1:** Innovation, economic transition and tech transformation
- 15:30 *Coffee break*
- 16:00 **Keeping talent in the territory:** young and old people as city change makers
- 17:30 End of Day 1
- 20:30 *Dinner at Parador, Cuenca*

# PROGRAMME

## Thursday, November 16

8:45	Registration
09:00	Welcome
09:15	<b>Talent Cities session 2:</b> governance and public services
10:45	<i>Coffee break and family picture</i>
11:15	The new ESPON research and SH's policy needs
12:00	Concluding panel talks
12:45	<b>Institutional conclusions:</b> Cuenca declaration
13:00	Lunch
14:00	End of Day 2

# Wednesday, November 15

## 08:30 – 09:00 Press conference

- **Teresa Ribera**, Third Vice-President of the Government of Spain and Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge
- **José Luis Martínez Guijarro**, Vice-President of Castilla-la-Mancha
- **Darío Dolz**, Mayor of Cuenca
- **Thiemo Eser** and **Wiktor Szydarowski**, ESPON

## 09:00 – 09:45 Welcome and opening

**Moderator:** Marta Fernández Vázquez, journalist (master of ceremonies).

### Small and medium-sized cities in the Presidency's Priorities and the TA2030: a new territorial contract

- **Elisa Ferreira**, EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms (video message)
- **Teresa Ribera**, Third Vice-President of the Government of Spain and Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge
- **José Luis Martínez Guijarro**, Vice-President of Castilla-la-Mancha
- **Darío Dolz**, Mayor of Cuenca
- **Wiktor Szydarowski**, ESPON EGTC

## 09:45 – 11:00 Provocative Cities / keynote speeches

Moderator: **Macia Van Der Vlugt**, ESPON MC Netherlands

### Small and medium-sized cities and the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy

- **Piero Bassetti**, Globus et Locus (online)
- **Mercedes Molina**, Emeritus Professor at Universidad Complutense

### How to make an attractive small and medium-sized city?

- **Francés Boya**, General Secretary for Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain
- **Nuria Matarredona Desantes**, General Director, Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda
- **Representative of the European Committee of the Regions, EU**

### Debate with the audience

## 11:00–11:30 Coffee Break and Family picture

## 11:30 – 13:00 Policy dialogues on small and medium-sized cities and urban-rural cooperation

Moderator: **Juana López Pagán**, General Director for Policies against Depopulation, General Secretary for Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain



## Analysing EU small and medium-sized cities: global challenges and cities changes

- **Giulia Testori**, Policy Officer JRC, Policy Atlas of Sustainable Urban Development for Small Urban Areas
- **Josep Maria Llop y Nicolás Rosignol**, ESPON policy paper on SMS cities
- **Valentina Corsetti**, DG Regio, European Commission
- **Carlos Martínez Mínguez**, Alcalde de Soria

## Policy reflection

- **Gérard Thomas**, Ministry of Energy and Spatial Planning Luxembourg
- **Kristine Kedo**, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia
- **Rita Taraschi**, Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Italy

## Debate with the audience

**13:00 – 14:00 Lunch**

**14:00 – 15:30 Talent Cities session 1: innovation, economic transition and tech transformation**

Moderator: **Mathilde Konstantopoulou**, ESPON MC Member Greece

## Economic transition policies driven by smart specialisation, innovation and technological transformation

- Major of city case study: **Alba Villamor** (ESPON MC Spain)
- **Joaquín Farinós** (online,) / **Stefan Kah** (online) / **Rodrigo Vargas**

## Policy reflection

- **Dr. Heike Hagedorn**, European Spatial Planning Policies, Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Spatial Cohesion, Germany
- **Alexia Rouby**, European Commission, DG for Agriculture and Rural Development
- **Jeppe Høst**, Ministry of the Interior and Housing, Danish Housing and Planning and member of ESPON MC DK
- **Representative of the Provincial Council of Cuenca / Territorial Innovation Center of Cuenca**

## **15:30 – 16:00 Coffee Break**

## **16:00–17:30 Keeping talent in the territory: young and old people as city changemakers**

Modera: **Juana López Pagán**, General Director for Policies against Depopulation, General Secretary for Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain

**Intergenerational collaboration and culture. Changemakers, teenagers and youth, old people, make their voices heard and build relationships for intergenerational collaboration**

- **Carolina Gutiérrez**, Deputy Director of the General Directorate of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Spain.
- **Deša Srsen**, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Vice President Dubravka Suica
- **Julián Garde López-Brea**, Rector of the University of Castilla-la-Mancha
- **María Gargano**, Egmont Institute
- **Iulia Fatu**, Youth Rural Parliament Representative for the involvement of young people

**Gala Dinner at 20.30 at the Cuenca Parador**

# Thursday, November 16

**09:00– 09:15 Welcome**

**09:15– 10:45 Talent Cities session 2: governance and public services**

Moderator: **Eloy Cuéllar**, Deputy Director of the General Directorate of Policies against Depopulation, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge

**Multi-level governance driven by growing decision-making complexity with many stakeholders and coinciding mandates**

- **Marcos Ros**, Spanish Member of the EU Parliament
- ESPON analysis on SMS cities: **Erika Jaráiz y Marco del Fiore**
- Major city study case: **Matteo Luigi Bianchi** ANCI Lombardia
- **Isabel Ferreira**, General Secretariat for Regional Development in Portugal, Spanish and Portugal Cross-border Strategy
- **Alejandra del Río**, General Director of Regional and Local Cooperation, Spain
- **Jan Edoy**, Pilot Project TA2030 Small Places Matter

**10:45–11:15 Coffee Break**

## 11:15 – 12:00 ESPON's new toolbox: SMS Towns and Cities LORDIMAS project

Introduction of new and forthcoming research projects that will provide evidence-based support in policy-making

## 12:00 – 12:45 Conclusions and reflections

Reflections on the seminar, lessons learned, research and policy needs identified

- **Juana López Pagán**, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain
- **Esteban Molina**, Ministry of Finance and Public Function, Government of Spain

Key thematic priorities of the forthcoming EU Presidencies

- **Pascale Fouchs**, Valonia, ESPON MC BE
- **Laszlo Gere**, Office of the Prime Minister, Undersecretariat of State for Strategic Planning of Regional Development, ESPON MC HU

ESPON Moving Forward

- **Thiemo Eser**, ESPON Programme Managing Authority, LU
- **Wiktor Szydarowski**, Director ESPON EGTC, LU

## 12:45 – 13:00 Institutional closing: Cuenca Declaration

- **Jesús Alique**, Commissioner for Depopulation, Government of Castilla-la-Mancha
- **Francés Boya**, Secretary General of Demographic Challenge, Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, Government of Spain.

## 13:00 – 14:00 Lunch



**ESPON**



Co-funded by  
the European Union  
Interreg