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DRAFT PROGRAMME

// ESPON Seminar in Aalborg, Denmark 19-20 November 2025

Making Space for the Renewable Energy Transition



House of Music, Musikkens Pl. 1, 9000
Aalborg, Denmark



// Background and context

The European Union (EU) and its Member States have committed to a sustainable, low-carbon energy system as part of their overarching goal to combat climate change. The European Green Deal, alongside the objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, emphasises the critical role renewable energy sources play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and ensuring energy security. The energy sector accounts for over 75% of total EU emissions, making it vital to accelerate renewable energy deployment to meet the European Climate Law's target of reducing emissions by at least 55% by 2030. Recently, the Draghi report on EU Competitiveness also identified energy prices as a significant impediment to the EU's economic competitiveness.

Recent geopolitical events, such as the Russian military aggression in Ukraine, have underscored the urgency of reducing EU dependence on imported fossil fuels, further fuelling the momentum for rapid renewable energy deployment. Despite progress—renewable energy consumption in the EU grew from 10% in 2004 to approximately 23% in 2022—an accelerated transition is needed. The European Parliament and Council's revised Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) sets a target of at least 42.5% renewable energy consumption by 2030, requiring near-doubling of renewable energy production across the EU within this decade.

The transition to renewable energy faces significant spatial challenges, particularly concerning land use. Land is not only a vital resource for energy generation but is also subject to competing demands, including agriculture, nature restoration, and urban growth. Identifying suitable locations for renewable energy technologies will require a combination of technical assessments and integrated spatial policies that ensure sustainability, biodiversity protection and community involvement.

Recent geopolitical developments have also brought issues such as EU strategic autonomy, competitiveness and security and defence to the forefront of policy debates. These broader concerns challenge the EU and its Member States to reassess the role of the green transition within its overarching priorities. In this context, the seminar provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the dilemma of a “green transition at the crossroads” and to explore these shifting dynamics. How can the Member States respond to this evolving landscape, and what implications does it hold for spatial planning, energy sovereignty and long-term sustainability across Europe?

This seminar will explore strategies for locating of renewable energy technologies in a way that balances energy production with other essential land uses. It will also address policy challenges, innovative solutions, and the role of stakeholder engagement in facilitating a nature-positive and socially inclusive transition.

// Seminar Objectives

The seminar aims to:

- Present insights from ESPON research on the spatial challenges and opportunities of renewable energy deployment.
- Explore effective and innovative spatial planning strategies to balance renewable energy generation with competing land uses.
- Discuss policy instruments, such as land redistribution and digital mapping, that can support the energy transition while ensuring sustainable and inclusive outcomes.
- Promote best practices for stakeholder engagement and public awareness to facilitate social acceptance and community consensus.
- Foster collaboration between policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders in addressing spatial planning issues related to the energy transition.

// Key themes and topics

The seminar will focus on the following key themes:

- **Spatial Planning for Renewable Energy:** Exploring strategies to identify suitable locations for solar and wind energy infrastructure that harmonise with other land-use priorities, such as agriculture and nature conservation.
- **Overcoming Land Use Barriers:** Identifying planning policies and instruments to overcome barriers to land use changes, including land redistribution reforms and integrating renewable energy generation into existing spatial frameworks.
- **Promoting Social Acceptance and Public Engagement:** Best practices for engaging stakeholders, raising public awareness, and building community consensus for renewable energy projects. This includes compensation schemes, price mechanisms, and integrating local economic development.
- **Digital Tools for Renewable Energy Planning:** The role of digital data and mapping technologies in assessing spatial needs and identifying locations for renewable energy generation, while considering future land-use changes and fostering social acceptance.
- **Regional and Transnational Cooperation:** Addressing the interregional and cross-border challenges of land use for renewable energy, especially in areas where land availability differs significantly between Member States.

// Target audience

This seminar is designed for:

- Policymakers, planners and government representatives from EU Member States and regions.
- Energy experts, researchers and academics focusing on spatial planning, renewable energy, and sustainability.
- Stakeholders from civil society organisations, local authorities and the private sector involved in energy infrastructure development.
- Representatives from NGOs, international organizations and regional development bodies working on climate and energy policy.

// Expected outcomes

The seminar is expected to deliver the following outcomes:

- Dissemination of ESPON research on spatial planning for renewable energy and insights into best practices.
- Concrete recommendations for policy frameworks and spatial planning strategies that enable the energy transition while balancing other societal needs.
- Enhanced understanding of the spatial and policy barriers to renewable energy deployment and strategies to overcome them.
- Creation of a collaborative network of stakeholders to exchange knowledge and experiences in renewable energy planning.
- Actionable insights into how digital mapping and stakeholder engagement can support more efficient and socially acceptable renewable energy deployment.

// 19 November

Time	Agenda	Speaker
09:30	Welcome	Wiktór Szydarowski , ESPON EGTC Director Christian Vind , Danish Agency for Planning & Rural Development
09:45	The Green Transition at a Crossroads: Europe's Strategic Autonomy and Energy Future	
	Plenary	<i>The keynote speech sets the scene by addressing the big policy picture: Europe's strategic autonomy, the challenges of rapid decarbonisation, energy security, social justice and territorial cohesion in the EU level and global context and the key dilemmas ahead.</i> Connie Hedegaard , EU Commissioner for Climate Action from 2010 to 2014
10:30	Europe's Energy Dilemmas: Policy, Competitiveness and Territorial Cohesion	
	Plenary	<i>Building on the keynote, this plenary explores Europe's wider energy transition challenges: strategic autonomy, social cohesion, competitiveness and security. Panellists will share views from academia, EU institutions and civil society.</i> Vlasta Krmelj , Committee of the Regions/Mayor of Selnica ob Dravi, Slovenia Maya Perera , European Environmental Bureau Henrik Lund , Aalborg University
11:45	Family photo & lunch break	
13:15	From Policy to Place: Local Realities of the Renewable Energy Transition	
	Plenary	<i>Moving from the European level to the regional and local scale, this plenary explores how ambitious policies translate into practice. What conflicts arise when renewable energy projects meet land use priorities? What are the win-win solutions that balance energy needs with community, nature, and economic interests?</i> Anabela Marques Santos , Université libre de Bruxelles Kristian Borch , Aalborg University Helga Grønnegaard , Urland Consultants Anneloes Van Noordt , Government of Flanders
14:30	Coffee break	
15:00	World Café: Making Space for Renewables	
	<i>The ESPON MAK-RES project hosts this interactive World Café to dive into the spatial realities of Europe's renewable energy transition. Starting with case presentations, participants will then join thematic group discussions to explore the dilemmas of locating wind and solar infrastructure, from land-use conflicts to community acceptance. Together, we will identify barriers and share practical solutions, aiming to uncover what it takes to plan and deploy renewable energy in ways that are efficient, fair and sustainable.</i>	

17:00	Plenary	Moderator Moderators/rapporteurs from World Café sessions
19:00	Dinner	

// 20 November

Time	Agenda	Speaker
09:15	Policy Lessons from Across Europe: Land, People and the Renewable Transition	
	Plenary	<i>A moderated armchair discussion with policy stakeholders from different countries on how the renewable energy transition plays out in practice. The session will highlight approaches to balancing energy deployment with land-use priorities, community acceptance and competitiveness, drawing lessons from national and regional experiences.</i> • Søren Møller Christensen, Baltic Energy Island • Joaquin Villar, Andalusian Energy Agency • Jan De Pauw, ResCoop Flanders • Markus Conrad, Wörrstadt Municipality
10:15	Coffee break	
10:45	Parallel breakout sessions featuring the presentation of ongoing ESPON research activities	
	Parallel Session 1 Nature Based Solutions	Parallel Session 2 The geography of the green transition
	Moderator: Efren Feliu Torres , Tecnalia Carolina Cantergiani De Carvalho , Tecnalia Parveen Kumar , WUR	Moderator: Marcia van der Vlugt , Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations <i>Geography and social inclusion of energy communities</i> Laura Heidecke , ESPON TANDEM <i>Green energy for reindustrialization</i> Øyvind Vennerød , ESPON RE-INDUSTRY <i>Non-standard geographies of the green transition</i> Prof. Tomasz Komornicki , ESPON NOSTAGEO
		Parallel Session 3 Living, working & travelling across borders
		Jean Perony , MOT Mátyás Jaschitz , CESCO Elias Guenther , FAU Roland Gaugitsch , OIR
12:15	Coffee break	
12:45	Plenary	Reports from the break-out sessions

		Session rapporteurs
13:00	Plenary	The way forward • Thiemo W. Eser, ESPON Managing Authority • Irene Hadjisavva-Adam, Outlook on the Cyprus Presidency • Wiktor Szydarowski, ESPON EGTC Director
13:15	Lunch	

Moderator of the seminar: Julie Søgaard