

3.3: WORLD UNIFIED TERRITORIAL SYSTEM (WUTS)

3.3.1: Introduction: from NUTS to WUTS ...

The analysis of the situation of Europe in the World is realised through the compilation of statistics elaborated at state level. But the definition of state is not quite clear and one of the most challenge that ESPON project had to face in the FIR was the elaboration of a precise list of 168 states which represent a minimum of 1/10 000 of the population, GDP or area of the World. This list of 168 states provides now a clear basis for data collection in an harmonised way, all states being identified by their 3-digits ISO code (like *HUN* for Hungary or *NZL* for New Zealand).

Having secured the collection of elementary data in an harmonised way, we have then started to build a more ambitious tool with the elaboration of an harmonised hierarchical system of World division called **WUTS** (*World Unified Territorial System*) which is directly inspired from the **NUTS** (*Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics*) created by Eurostat¹⁸ more than 25 years ago in order to provide a single uniform breakdown of territorial units for the production of regional statistics for the European Union.

Many divisions of the World in "regions" (cluster of states) are actually used by international organisation, either private (transnational firms) or public (UN agencies) but the case study that we have develop on this topic demonstrate clearly the great variety of solutions which are actually proposed, making impossible to use any of them as reference for ESPON work. Moreover, it is very clear that each proposal of division of the World into regions implies the elaboration of a "*Weltanschauung*" (*vision of the World*) which is not neutral and has a strong influence on political decision.

Taking benefit from the fact that a preliminary elaboration of World region had been proposed in project ESPON 3.1 Integrated Tools, we have decided to elaborate in ESPON 3.4.1. a revised version and a more general proposal of WUTS organised in 5 hierarchical levels, from the level of States (WUTS5) to the level of the World (WUTS0). The different research developed in ESPON project 3.4.1 on the regionalisation of the World (see. part A.1) has indeed convinced us that one level of regionalisation was not sufficient and that some corrections should be realised on the preliminary attempt of regionalisation done in the project ESPON 3.1.

¹⁸ http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/ramon/nuts/introduction_regions_en.html

The WUTS system which is presented in this final report does not intend to be a perfect and definitive proposal of World regionalisation and suffers from certain limits:

- ◆ **Many criteria of regionalisation are possible** from thematic and conceptual point of view (see. A.1) and their results are sometime contradictory. As a result, it is always necessary to operate choices or compromises between alternative solutions.
- ◆ **The availability of data at World scale** limits dramatically the choice of criteria of regionalisation. For example, the fact that trade flows are more easily available and more complete than migratory flows has certainly influenced the results of the regionalisation proposed in this report and explains why the model centre-periphery plays a dominant role in the elaboration of the results.
- ◆ **The focus on areal division** rather than on networks and archipelago of World cities is also a questionable choice which is explained by the domination of database elaborated at national level. With a good database on cities of the World, we would certainly have proposed a different approach of the World division.
- ◆ **The lack of infra-national data** has also hampered the work as it obliged to consider each state as a whole despite the existence of important regional differences. It is not a real problem for small states but it is an important difficulty in the case of continental states like Russia, USA, Canada, China, Brazil, Australia or India. In the case of China, it is obvious that we should have split the territory in different regions from the very developed province of the pacific coast to the lagging regions of inland.

But despite this limitation, we hope that the WUTS system will provide in the future a useful tool for European Union policymakers, better than usual delimitations of regions elaborated by UN or other organisations. Indeed, **this division of the World has been elaborated in an ESPON perspective** which leads us to identify regions of interest for European which could be considered as not relevant in other part of the World.