

Press Release – 12 May 2010

Final Conference of the “EGTC”¹ URBACT Project

Cross-border conurbations keen to pursue their exchanges at the European level

How best to establish the experiment?

At the Final Conference of the “EGTC” URBACT Project in Esztergom, Hungary, on 6 and 7 May 2010, the cross-border conurbation partners, together with the MOT as lead partner, tabled **the results of the work they have been carrying out on cross-border governance for nearly two years**. They also discussed ways in which they would like to see the project evolve in future.

Following the invitation of one of the partners, the Ister-Granum EGTC, around 80 people from 16 border regions in Europe convened at the conference, including representatives of European institutions such as the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, and the Council of Europe. The debates were open to other partners (such as the AEBR) and cross-border agglomerations.

Results on the ground

First result: each conurbation presented its “Local Action Plan” aimed at improving the way in which its own cross-border governance is organised. All the sites underscored their willingness to put this work to good use at the local level and to capitalise on the leverage afforded by the project and the URBACT programme more generally.

The project also showcased the local challenges shared by all partners, i.e.:

- The need for a strong political determination to sustain the cooperation
- Projects to be adapted to the scale and needs of each particular conurbation: in highly urbanised areas, issues such as transport, employment, education, economic development, the environment, etc., predominate, and here creating a governance structure such as the EGTC, which brings legal and financial stability to “weighty” projects, can be very useful. The pooling of the “critical mass” for justifying new facilities (for sports, health, etc.) is another challenge facing the development of cross-border territories, some of which are less urbanised.
- One question emerged among all the partners across the board: the importance of involving civil society. Indeed, it is essential to carry out cross-border work not just “for”, but also “with” the inhabitants, and examples of participatory cross-border democracy were highlighted throughout the project. The need to highlight and identify the cross-border cooperation and territory to everyone emerged almost as a prerequisite for the success of the project as a whole.

Underscoring the need for national and European support

The project emphasised that the local sites had a very definite need for genuine support and involvement on the part of national and European players. Indeed, it is an expectation that

¹ **Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations – the project networks six cross-border conurbations:** the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (France/Germany/Switzerland), the Eurodistrict of Strasbourg-Ortenau (Germany/France), the agglomeration Frankfurt (Oder)-Slubice (Germany/Poland), Lille Metropole for the Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai (Belgium/France), the Euroregion Ister-Granum (Hungary/Slovakia), and the Eurocidade Chaves-Verin (Spain/Portugal). MOT is the lead-partner of the project.

came through clearly in the recommendations drawn up by the partners. At the European level those recommendations are three-fold:

- Adapt European policies to the needs of cross-border conurbations
- Improve the dialogue with the European Commission
- Ensure a better understanding of cross-border challenges and provide technical support at the European level to cross-border conurbations.

The representatives of the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the Council of Europe present in Esztergom all underlined the quality of the work, their determination to monitor the results and to work with the partners on the best means for implementing the project's recommendations. Meetings are to be scheduled soon.

A brochure with the results of the project has been published (available on request from the contacts below). It contains a CD-ROM with all the documents including a *Handbook* on the methodology, good practices, the local action plans, the European recommendations, etc.

A second project in the offing?

In conclusion, the partners wish to pursue the exchanges and even broaden the partnership. With the support of the URBACT programme, which also commented favourably on the quality of the work and the project, the partners mentioned the possibility of setting up a second URBACT project, with a broader partnership. This project might focus on a more precise issue: that of employment², addressing in particular the cross-border links to be promoted between the training and educational institutions, the needs of businesses, and the workers on either side of a border.

So the project is by no means over, with the follow-up already proving just as interesting!

Further information and contacts:

For more information on the project:

<http://www.urbact.eu/egtc>

For more information on the MOT:

<http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu>

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² The URBACT programme's next call for projects is to be initiated in January 2011, with a narrower remit focusing on urban issues linked to employment.