



Christian Lamour

URBACT "EGTC"
project expert
CEPS/INSTEAD,
Luxembourg



What is your assessment of the project launch conference?

The EGTC project launch conference was an opportunity to learn about the specific characteristics of the cross-border territories involved in the operation and to initiate a process of constructive interactions between political leaders and experts eager to define a cross-border governance system combining effectiveness and democratic legitimacy.

The presence of local elected representatives from 10 countries shows clearly that the establishment of partnerships ensuring the sustainability and competitiveness of cross-border urban areas is not just the subject of a technocratic debate, but clearly an issue mobilising politicians and institutions ready to ensure the attractiveness of their territories through a codecision process going beyond the national framework.

European integration is facilitating the emergence of functional urban areas astride the internal State borders of European Union by freeing the flows of goods, people and capital. In parallel with this, the political territory, basis of public choices and centred on the two-pillar system of citizenship and solidarity, is strongly rooted in national histories. The exchanges between the EGTC project partners on governance issues and the future drafting of local action plans for cross-border partnerships are not intended to eliminate state borders, but rather to define a more flexible network of boundaries generating organisation, security and collective trust.

The interest of this conference and future public exchanges in the coming seminars and local working groups meetings set up in the six partner conurbations is to encourage the emergence of a European public sphere, source of debates, public opinion and deliberative processes regarding European territorial cohesion. This project contributes to the weaving of the multi-level transnational web of competences and legitimacies acting as substrate for living together in local communities.

Strasbourg launch of the URBACT "EGTC" project on cross-border conurbations

140 participants from 15 countries in Europe met on 19 November at the European Parliament in Strasbourg for the launch of the "EGTC"¹ project on the governance of cross-border conurbations in Europe.

The Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) is lead partner of this project that networks cross-border conurbations² at European level. The objective is to exchange and to work on the developing of their cross-border governance tools.

The launch was attended by public figures including Michel Delebarre, President of MOT, Roland Ries, Mayor of Strasbourg, Vice-President of the Urban Community of Strasbourg, Alain Lamassoure, MEP, Vice-President of MOT and Jan Olbrycht, MEP.

The conference foregrounded the objectives and the desired results³ of the project and presented the expectations of each partner. The project runs for a period of 10 months until May 2010.

Michel Delebarre underlined that urban matters are crucial and concern 80% of the European population. The development of a common technical and political governance is essential for those urban areas that are situated on borders. In this context, cross-border conurbations may become "areas where local, national and European policies converge at a local scale." They constitute "motors for European integration and European citizenship".

Roland Ries, who made the Eurodistrict "Strasbourg-Ortenau" a main objective of his programme, expressed his will "to move from cooperation to codecision". He also stressed the necessity of a better involvement of the citizens in order to demonstrate that "the construction of Europe is not an independent process undertaken by specialists". This citizen involvement is one of the principal issues of the Eurodistrict project.



Signature during the conference of a cooperation agreement between the border towns of Slubice (Poland) and Frankfurt (Oder) (Germany).

Agreement signed between Frankfurt (Oder) and Slubice (Polish-German border)

The Mayor of Slubice, Ryszard Bodziacki, and the Lord-Mayor of Frankfurt (Oder), Martin Patzelt, signed during the conference a new cross-border agreement that provides a basis for an intensified cooperation for their Polish and German cities. This symbolic agreement seals a common future for the two cities which have been separated by the history for a long time.

¹ "Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations", project financed by the URBACT programme.

² Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai (France/Belgium), Frankfurt (Oder)/Slubice conurbation (Germany/Poland), Eurocidade Chaves-verim (Portugal/Spain), Ister-Granum EGTC (Hungary/Slovakia), Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau (France/Germany), Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (Switzerland/Germany/France).

³ Further information: <http://urbact.eu/egtc>



A Catalan middle school in the Pyrénées-Orientales

A 100% Catalan-speaking middle school opened its doors recently in the Pyrénées-Orientales department near Perpignan.

The "Pompeu Fabre" middle school was inaugurated last August in the small town of Le Soler, about six miles from Perpignan. It is the first school funded by the Generalitat of Catalonia outside its territory. In October 2007 the Generalitat paid 2.916 million euros to the association La Bressola for the construction of the building. This association manages 7 nursery and primary schools in the Pyrénées-Orientales department with teaching in Catalan. 77 pupils in five classes started the school year in September

2008 in this middle school, where all teaching is in Catalan. The school will be able to accommodate up to 180 pupils. The plot was made available by the municipality.

For the principal of the school, Nadège Mallafré, the objective is to give the pupils a total immersion in the Catalan language, "while following the curricula of the French education system". This means that the pupils "will subsequently, if they wish, be able to go and work in Gerona. They will also speak several languages, which will encourage them to be open-minded".



The Catalan cross-border space: an ambitious but practical project

The political steering committee for the constitution of a Eurodistrict of the Catalan Space met in Gerona on 21 November. At the meeting the representatives of the twenty-five institutions making up the territory confirmed their determination to organise themselves in a joint cross-border body.

The Catalan cross-border space is a territory with more than a million inhabitants covering 10,000 sq. km, from the Pyrénées-Orientales department on the French side (Northern Catalonia) to the Gerona Region in Spain. There are many similarities between these two spaces separated by the French-Spanish border: similar morphology, with the Mediterranean coast to the East,

Gerona, Spain

urbanised plains around the two main conurbations of Perpignan and Gerona, and in the West a much more sparsely populated mountainous area. The territory is also characterised by a high attractiveness for tourists, many jobs and a common culture in the Catalan identity. However, there are also many differences between the two sides. The economy of the southern part is more industrial than that of the north, which is more reliant on farming and services. Cultural differences are also marked with regard to housing: on the northern side house rental is predominant, whereas on the southern side the majority of apartments is owner-occupied.

Despite the weight of history which has contributed to a distancing between these two territories, their cross-border links remain very strong. Today the inhabitants do not hesitate to cross the border for reasons mainly relating to trading practices and leisure. Some have even moved permanently to the other side of the border, such as the many Catalans from the south who live in French Cerdagne.

It is these characteristics, these points in common, these divergences and these cultural and historical links which make this space a genuine cross-border living area. And it is this territory, under the name "Catalan cross-border space", that the local authorities on both sides of the border want to cover with a genuine joint cross-border project, based on practical actions.

For just over a year now the twenty-five institutions that signed the Céret declaration of 27 July 2007 have been working in a steering committee to attain the objectives they set when signing the declaration: to structure and harmonise this space through a joint spatial planning and sustainable development policy with the aim of solving the day-to-day problems of the populations in areas as varied as employment, the economy, services, means of communication, tourism, education, etc. The intention is to set up a cooperation entity for the Catalan cross-border space with legal personality and financial autonomy.

This is the context in which the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) was given the task of providing guidance for the organisation of this Eurodistrict. The MOT has worked for nine months in collaboration with the University of Gerona on this project: it has gone over the cross-border territory with a fine-tooth comb, meeting more than sixty protagonists on the two sides of the border, analysed the functioning and the issues of the territory and identified the topics and projects contributing most to structuring, with the aim of producing a proposal for joint cross-border governance. The conclusions of this study were presented on 21 November 2008 in Gerona at the meeting of the Eurodistrict's political steering committee. At the end of this meeting Christian Bourquin, president of the Pyrénées-Orientales department council, and Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, vice-president of the Generalitat of Catalonia, on behalf of all the attending elected representatives, confirmed their determination to set up a joint legal structure for the Eurodistrict by the end of 2009 in the form of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Entretiens territoriaux de Strasbourg: a workshop on cross-border cooperation



On 3 December the MOT and the CNFPT organised and ran one of the 26 workshops of the Entretiens territoriaux de Strasbourg, a conference which took place on 3 and 4 December 2008.

The workshop on "Cross-border cooperation: competences for building a common territory project", threw light on the latest developments in European programming and recent national and Community legal changes with regard to cross-border cooperation. It also highlighted the necessity for joint action by all the protagonists of a cross-border territory to build a common territory project meeting the expectations of the population.

All the issues raised were illustrated by practical examples involving the following three territories:

- a mixed infra-regional space: the Catalan cross-border space,
- a cross-border conurbation: the West-Vlaanderen/ Flandres-Dunkerque-Côte d'Opale cross-border platform,
- a cross-border development structure: the AGAPE (Longwy European hub conurbation urban planning agency, on the France-Luxembourg border).

Press review

- **We are SaarMoselle! On the way to the establishment of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation**, *Entreprises magazine*, Nov.-Dec. "Welcome to this region between Saar and Blies, between Merle and Rosselle, either side of the French-German border, which in practice is no longer really a border..."
- **Eurodistrict – Identity papers in Strasbourg**, *L'Alsace*, 21 November "On Wednesday in Strasbourg the mayor, Roland Ries, signed a convention with the State enabling French citizens domiciled within the Eurodistrict area to renew their papers, identity card or passport in Strasbourg..."
- **Border workers trapped by their insurance**, *L'Est républicain*, 13 November "The European cross-border grouping reminds border workers that, with regard to health insurance, they have a right to opt for the Swiss health insurance system (LAMal), the French system (CMU) or private insurance schemes. Once made, the choice of health insurance is permanent..."
- **A marine nature park being established for living with and of the sea**, *L'Indépendant*, 15 November "By 2010 a marine nature park should be established off the Catalan coast. It will be managed by those who make their living from marine activities. At the moment a task force is examining the perimeter of the future protected area..."
- **A Grande Europe with plenty of borders**, *L'Humanité*, 14 November "It's a new magazine appearing this month: Grande Europe. Fully online, it is published by La Documentation française. Its first issue is free. Every three months an electronic magazine will cover a particular topic: this month, 'borders'..."