



Results of the first thematic seminar of the EGTC¹ URBACT project

Cross-border conurbations discuss the means to strengthen their “internal governance”

More than 100 participants met in Chaves, Portugal, on 12 March 2009 for the **first thematic seminar of the "EGTC" URBACT project**, organized by one of the six partner conurbations² of the project: Eurocidade Chaves-Verín. Welcomed by the mayor of Chaves, João Gonçalves Batista, and the mayor of Verín, Juan Manuel Jimenez, the participants discussed **the means of strengthening the internal governance of cross-border conurbations**. Other public figures present included the Portuguese secretary of state for regional development, Rui Nuno Baleiras, the President of the Diputación de Ourense, José Luis Baltar, and elected representatives of the Frankfurt (Oder)/Slubice cross-border conurbation.

In his opening speech, **Portuguese secretary of state for regional development Rui Nuno Baleiras** emphasized the observation that cross-border cooperation is one of the pillars of territorial cohesion and balanced development of the regions.

The objectives of an innovative cross-border governance, that is, the institutional and operational organization enabling cooperation to work in a cross-border territory, are to **meet the needs of the cross-border populations and to improve their quality of life**.

The seminar identified recurrent problems and common solutions for **improving this “internal governance” of cross-border conurbations**.

Among the **problems or obstacles** encountered in the territories, the points highlighted by the partners included:

- cross-border conurbation projects do not receive sufficient recognition and consideration in overall policies at national and European levels;
- linkage between the political level and the operational level must be strengthened;
- the formation of a joint structure (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) for example) is not enough: the most difficult part is to make the instrument work on the basis of an overall strategy and structuring projects.

The need for a strong political commitment

The impetus imparted by political leaders is essential; their “cross-border vision” drives the cooperation. Political action is inseparable from the technical teams which implement the political decisions. The need for a stronger link between these two levels was strongly emphasized. The “EGTC” project partners recommended the organization of discussions at European level between elected representatives and civil servants of cross-border territories to strengthen this link and generate a genuine European and cross-border administrative culture (refer to the European Parliament report on the governance of conurbations³).

¹ “Expertising governance for transfrontier conurbations”: the project aims to promote innovative governance tools in a panel of cross-border conurbations in Europe. The Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) is the lead partner of the project.

² The six partner conurbations are: Eurometropole Lille Kortrijk Tournai (France/Belgium), Eurocidade Chaves-Verin (Portugal/Spain), EGTC Ister-Granum (Hungary/Slovakia), Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau (France/Germany), Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (Switzerland/Germany/France), Frankfurt on Oder/Slubice conurbation (Germany/Poland)

³ European Parliament report “Governance and partnership at national and regional levels and a basis for projects in the sphere of regional policy” of 21 October 2008, rapporteur: Jean-Marie Beaupuy - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0492+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

Practical example - The Frankfurt (Oder)/Slubice conurbation has set up a Joint City Council Committee, which allows to directly involve the political level in cross-border decisions and strategy.

The need to reinforce the operational teams

The success of cross-border cooperation is based to a very large extent on the quality of the operational teams that implement it.

Practical example – Within the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel, cooperation is coordinated by a cross-border “platform” (an association governed by French law) comprising a multidisciplinary and bilingual team of four persons: a director, an assistant and two project managers.

The impact of the operational teams must be reinforced, not only by bringing them closer to the political decision centres but also by introducing training courses intended to develop their language skills and their knowledge of the border territories, cultures, and legal and administrative frameworks.

A governance structure that must be made to work

The project partners also emphasized the fact that, beyond the establishment itself of a governance structure, the challenge lies in the definition of practical projects that the structure will implement and the financial resources available to it for its action.

EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation), Eurodistrict or straightforward cooperation agreement: the formulas vary according to political impetus, the size of the authorities and the magnitude of the projects. There is no single governance model, even though the impact and the legitimacy of the EGTC is an asset in terms of visibility in the European Union, as the partners emphasized.

In this context, the partners foregrounded the need to involve all the key entities of the territory (private sector, civil society, etc.) in the governance structure. Involvement of the local population is a fundamental factor in the success of a cross-border conurbation project. This aspect will also be one of the topics of the next project seminar, which will take place in Lille in October 2009.

Practical example – In the Ister-Granum Euroregion, the cross-border conurbation encompassing the towns of Esztergom on the Hungarian side and Štúrovo on the Slovakian side has involved civil society directly in its European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation: a regional development council brings together representatives of professional bodies, civil organizations, the largest employers of the region and the chambers of trade and industry of the three counties concerned.

Further information on the project

<http://urbact.eu/egtc>

Further information on MOT (lead partner)

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

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