



The Importance of Transnational Cooperation for German Spatial Planning Policy

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The Political Importance of Transnational Cooperation

By **supporting balanced spatial development**, the **Community Initiative INTERREG III B** constitutes an important instrument for overcoming existing economic disparities and for better integrating the new EU members. Partners from 25 EU member states cooperate in transnational projects on economic, social, ecologic and cultural issues for (re)shaping their living space and economic area. The EU is awarding financial support of 50 to 75 % of project costs which normally amount to 1 to 2.5 Million Euro; projects mostly gather 8 to 15 partners from 3 to 5 different countries.

The **German Spatial Planning Policy supports project partners** in raising national co-financing. The Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Housing participates in INTERREG III B projects that strengthen European skills and capacities of municipalities and regions, especially if projects are linked to economic development and to the preparation of investments. The primary aim of the federal programme "Transnational Cooperation" is to promote the cooperation between the new German Länder and the new EU member states, candidate and neighbouring countries. Experience shows that this form of transnational cooperation creates forerunner projects for deepened economic contacts on European level.

Moreover, the ministry wants to stimulate a close cooperation between public sector and private investors. This represents a new approach of transnational **public private partnerships** (PPP), as spatial development policy relies more and more on private commitment. In this context the close cooperation between municipalities and regions as well as with other regional institutions and NGOs from different countries in common projects plays a special role. Since this is a very important way to let Europe grow closer together from the bottom up.

In which spatial development policy context is this transnational cooperation to be seen? The huge structural challenges require international cooperation of all stakeholders involved in regional development. Especially economically weak regions are in need of developing broad contacts to the growth regions of Europe. The national borders are becoming more and more open for the exchange of goods and services as well as the mobility of people and capital. The advantages of location and thus regional development opportunities do not only depend on infrastructure,

economic structure and geographical location, but increasingly on the ability to work on common European projects. **European skills are becoming a new location factor.**

Germany participates in five transnational cooperation areas: Baltic Sea, CADSES, North Sea; North-West Europe and Alpine Space. These programmes aim at harmonising national, regional and local concerns with European territorial interests and thereby facilitating territorial cohesion. In all cooperation areas important spatial development projects are initiated: for instance river basin management, eco friendly transport logistics and integrated management of coastal zones. Concrete results are among others development and marketing concepts, know-how transfer, transnational networks in the field of economy, culture and environment, development and education. Numerous projects provide a basis for subsequent investments.

Each partner in an INTERREG III B project realises very quickly that the European cooperation is still a quite difficult process. There are considerable obstacles for planning and implementing development projects forming a uniform and integrated whole. This is due to diverse competences between political institutions, administrative systems and procedures as well as to differing technical norms and economic standards; not to forget the language barrier and varieties in administrative cultures.

Nevertheless, German partners can take a **positive stock** of the transnational cooperation. Actually there are approximately 600 German participants working together with around 2,400 foreign partner institutions: local and regional authorities, ministries, professional institutes, associations, universities and enterprises. Thus, INTERREG III B really helps Europe growing closer together. Analyses and mid-term evaluations prove that the transnational funding shows important integration effects and achieves an improved involvement of structurally weak regions in European networks - especially in relation to the small financial volume. Territorial cooperation in larger European areas enhances the transfer of advanced experiences. This effectively contributes to approach working methods and procedures in preparing investments, promoting economic development or spatial planning and therefore can contribute to grade up regions lacking behind.

Transnational Cooperation in Practice: examples in the field of culture and tourism

INTERREG III B is implemented by concrete transnational cooperation projects working on different territorial issues related to a sustainable and harmonious development of the EU territory. Those projects translate the political objectives of INTERREG III B and the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) into practical action. Besides fostering polycentric urban development and the relation between urban and rural areas, transport, information and communication networks as well as management of natural resources, one important issue is the preservation and activation of cultural and natural heritage as well as the tourism development.

In this context the **European Route of Brick Gothic – EuRoB** (www.eurob.org) – creates a new alliance of the built cultural heritage of brick gothic. From Sweden to the Baltic States, 34 cities,

regions and other institutions from seven European countries have aligned with each others. Besides strengthening the common identity of the Baltic Sea region EuRoB especially tends to promote tourism and thus economic development by the establishment of a transnational cultural tourism route. Thus, the dominant traditional sea and nature tourism will be enriched by new cultural features, making the whole Baltic Sea region more attractive for tourists also during off-peak season.

The first part of the project running from 2002 to 2004 and having a budget of 740,000 Euro laid the groundwork for the tourism route: A stable transnational partnership was set up; the general route concept was elaborated; all information on partner cities and regions, their brick gothic monuments as well as their tourism infrastructure were gathered; a first marketing and promotion concept with corporate identity, website, folder, brochure, CD-ROM etc. was developed; a quality standard for hotels and tourism services was introduced; the major brick gothic monuments were marked by special EuRoB plates; EuRoB was presented in different media and at several European events. At the end of the first project period there were already some tour providers including the route into their destinations.

Since early 2005 the second stage of the project (1.64 Million Euro) will institutionalise the tourism route as an attractive tourist product and make it long-term sustainable and efficient in terms of participating institutions, management and coordination structures, marketing and promotion and especially financing. One important aspect of the future cooperation is to foster the exchange of experiences and know-how transfer in the field of tourism marketing and heritage preservation and activation, especially with regard to the new member states. This will be done by transnational seminars and by concrete local pilot projects testing and demonstrating new ways of heritage preservation, activation and marketing.

The project “**IdeQua**” (www.idequa.net) is located in the CADSES area and gathers 17 partners from six countries (Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece). The three year project has a total budget of 1.4 Million Euro. It is also an interesting example on how to interlink tourism and cultural heritage issues for benefiting in terms of local and regional economic development. IdeQua stands for the “**Establishment of an Identity and Quality Axis from the Baltic to the Aegean Sea**”. In this perspective the project tries to reanimate an already existing transnational tourism corridor of the former Democratic Republic of Germany. The main concerns of IdeQua are the marketing of typical and unique features of the participating cities and regions, the introduction and implementation of international quality standards in tourism services as well as the development and strengthening of regional economic cycles. This should result in an attractive tourism route with high quality offers.

A characteristic feature that links the different regions and provides an important basis for regional and transnational cultural identity is the attractiveness of the area for tourism. In this perspective IdeQua looks for distinct elements that may be used to create and strengthen the identity and attractiveness of the participating regions and the tourism axis as a whole. Therefore, it is

important to preserve the regional properties against cultural unification. This is done by strengths/weaknesses analysis and the development of concepts for the utilisation of regional potentials. Those potentials shall be better used and local sights shall be identified and activated – also to show the local inhabitants the attractiveness of their region. This will contribute to keep up traditional ways of life and production as branches of the regional industry. In addition to this the quality of the tourism infrastructure and services is considerably enhanced by introducing international quality standards. Therefore the existing tourism services and their quality standards are analysed and evaluated and pilot quality management systems are established. Finally the attraction potentials are interlinked and transnational work panels and partnerships are supported. Moreover, the whole route is promoted and marketed on a supranational level as an attractive and interesting destination.