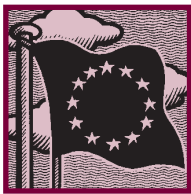


THE EVOLVING CONTEXT FOR EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL CO-OPERATION



THE EMERGING landscape of the new European regional and cohesion policy presents an interesting and important context for those engaged in spatial

planning in Europe's varied territories, particularly given the renewed emphasis being placed on cross-border territorial co-operation. Reflecting this, this month's 'Euro-Files' focuses on this evolving context for territorial co-operation and cross-border working in Europe, and will be followed up next month by consideration of the work of the French association la Mission opérationnelle transfrontalière in building the capacity of territorial and local authorities to successfully develop and implement cross-border co-operation projects.

The evolving context

The recently published Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion¹ set the framework for European cohesion policy in the forthcoming 2007-2013 funding period, during which approximately €308 billion will be available to support national and regional aid programmes. The guidelines are intended to provide an indicative framework for the preparation of national strategic reference frameworks (NSRFs) and subsequent operational programmes (OPs) which will establish the parameters for how Structural/Cohesion Funds are spent in the different EU member states.

The guidelines stress that future cohesion policy should contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies for jobs, growth and sustainable development in the EU, and should make clear that programmes and projects co-financed with the support of cohesion policy and Structural/Cohesion Funds should target resources on the following priorities:

- improving the attractiveness of member states, regions and cities by improving accessibility, ensuring adequate quality and



'The importance accorded to cross-border co-operation is reflected by the fact that it will attract 74 per cent of the funding allocated under the new Objective 3, European territorial co-operation'

level of services, and preserving their environmental potential;

- encouraging innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of the knowledge economy by research and innovation capacities, including new information and communication technologies; and
- creating more and better jobs by attracting more people into employment or entrepreneurial activity, improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises and increasing investment in human capital.

Emphasis is also placed in the guidelines on the 'territorial dimension of cohesion policy', which is seen as having the potential to help with the development of sustainable communities and 'prevent uneven regional development from reducing overall growth potential'. The three new objectives for cohesion policy – 'convergence', 'competitiveness and employment' and

'European territorial co-operation' – which will guide the new round of Structural/Cohesion Funding reflect this renewed emphasis on territorial co-operation, which is now a mainstream objective of cohesion policy.

The new 'Objective 3' on co-operation replaces the current INTERREG Community initiative and will attract funding of €7.75 billion in the forthcoming programming period – approximately 74 per cent of which will be dedicated to cross-border co-operation; 21 per cent to transnational co-operation; and 5 per cent to inter-regional co-operation and networking (particularly, it seems, around the themes of the Lisbon Strategy).

The co-operation objective is seen as having an important role to play in ensuring the balanced and sustainable development of the Community, reducing so-called 'barrier effects' through cross-border, transnational and inter-regional co-

operation and the exchange of best practice. Such actions should be based on 'shared development strategies of the territories concerned at national, regional, and local level and on networking especially to ensure the transfer of ideas to mainstream national and regional cohesion programmes'.

To facilitate the implementation of territorial co-operation, in July 2006 a new Regulation on the establishment of a 'European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation' (EGTC) was passed by the European Parliament and the European Council.² This is intended to 'overcome the obstacles hindering territorial cooperation' by instituting a 'cooperation instrument at the Community level for the creation of cooperative groupings in Community territory, invested with legal personality, called 'European groupings of territorial cooperation''. It is hoped that this will facilitate the implementation of the new territorial co-operation objective and address the problem of the inappropriateness of existing instruments such as the European Economic Interest Grouping for organising co-operation, which became evident under the INTERREG initiative in the 2000-2006 programming period.³

In addition to the renewed emphasis on, and enhanced funding available for, territorial co-operation in the new EU Structural/Cohesion Fund regime, the EU member states have been working on a parallel process of developing a new 'Territorial Agenda of the EU'. This is being pursued through the same informal channels of intergovernmental co-operation between European Ministers for Spatial Development that developed the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in the 1990s. While there are currently no plans to develop an 'ESDP 2' as such,⁴ member states have been working on an expert document entitled *The Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union: Towards a Stronger European Territorial Cohesion in the Light of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Ambitions*⁵ (TSPEU) and an accompanying guidance note entitled *Territorial Agenda for the EU 2007-2010*.⁶

It is hoped that agreement will be reached on these documents during the forthcoming German Presidency of the EU at the Informal Meeting of European Ministers for Spatial Development to be held in Leipzig in May 2007. The TSPEU document emphasises the territorial dimensions of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies and aims to suggest ways that the 'territorial capital' of European cities and regions can be enhanced. This is seen as requiring policy approaches that aim at:

- exploiting the endogenous potentials of an area – including natural and cultural values;
- promoting an area's integration and connectivity to other areas that are important for its development; and

■ territorial governance – promoting horizontal and vertical policy coherence.

The document also suggests that putting the concept of territorial cohesion into practice will involve, *inter alia*, the 'better positioning of regions in Europe, both by strengthening their profile and by trans-European cooperation aimed at facilitating their connectivity and territorial integration'. The emphasis on co-operation is also reflected in the structure of section 4 of the document, which links the different 'priorities for strengthening the structure of the EU territory' it identifies to relevant illustrative examples of territorial co-operation.

Speaking at a conference in Amsterdam in June 2006, the German Minister of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs addressed the evolving territorial agenda for Europe in the lead-up to the German Presidency of the EU and the Informal Ministerial Meeting planned for Leipzig in May 2007.⁷ He stressed that the German Presidency will want to send a strong message on 'how the various territorial opportunities we have in Europe can be better mobilized by harnessing cross-border and transnational cooperation', and he suggested that the new Territorial Agenda of the EU documents should not get 'bogged down in declarations of intent' but should explain their recommendations with reference to 'concrete spatially differentiated analyses and examples of successful cross-border and transnational co-operation'.

Similarly, at the same conference, the President of the European Committee of the Regions (COR) argued that 'It is precisely in territorial cooperation and all its aspects – cross-border, trans-regional, and interregional – that the link between the imperatives of cohesion and the Lisbon objectives is best expressed',⁸ thus reaffirming the COR's long-standing commitment to co-operation, which has seen it lobby for territorial co-operation to become a mainstream objective of cohesion policy.

Therefore both within the formal EU process of developing a new cohesion policy regime, and the informal process of member state co-operation around territorial and spatial development issues, renewed emphasis is being placed on cross-border territorial co-operation. This is seen as being an important aspect of the territorial dimension of cohesion policy and of the contribution that this can make to the objectives of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies. The importance accorded to cross-border co-operation within this wider context is reflected by the fact that it will attract 74 per cent of the funding allocated under the new Objective 3, 'European territorial co-operation'.

The availability of increased co-operation funding, and the renewed emphasis on the

role of co-operation in contributing to European policy objectives, point to the necessity of territorial authorities and member state governments becoming conversant with the opportunities available through this channel of potential policy and project support. An interesting example of building such capacity in relation to cross-border co-operation is the work of the French association the Mission opérationnelle transfrontalière – which will be subject of the next 'Euro Files' article, in the November 2006 issue of *Town & Country Planning*. ■

Dr Olivier Sykes is with the Department of Civic Design at the University of Liverpool.

Notes

1 *Proposal for a Council Decision on Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion (SEC(2006) 929). COM(2006) 386 final. Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 2005. Available online at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/com_2006_0386_en.pdf*

2 *Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 Jul. 2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Official Journal of the European Union, 31 Jul. 2006, L 210/19. Available online at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_210/l_21020060731en00190024.pdf*

3 A useful English language summary of the EGTC is available at http://www.espaces-frontaliers.org/en/articles/article_06juilletaout_ftech.html

4 K. Kunzmann: 'Spatial development and territorial cohesion in Europe'. In U. Altrick, S. Güntner, S. Huning and D. Peters: *Spatial Planning and Urban Development in the New EU Member States*. Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2006, pp.2-30

5 *The Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union: Towards a Stronger European Territorial Cohesion in Light of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Ambitions. Draft (as of 18 Sept. 2006), based on Scoping Document discussed at the Informal Ministerial Meeting, Luxembourg, May 2006. Available online at http://www.bmvbs.de/Anlage/original_972721/The-Territorial-State-and-Perspectives-of-the-European-Union-Document.pdf*

6 *Territorial Agenda for the EU 2007-2010: Towards a More Competitive Europe of Diverse Regions. Note (Draft as of 18 Sept. 2006) to be Presented for Adoption at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Territorial Cohesion, Leipzig, 24-25 May 2007. Available online at http://www.bmvbs.de/Anlage/original_972722/Territorial-Agenda-of-the-EU.pdf*

7 Wolfgang Tiefensee: *A Territorial Agenda for Europe – Looking Ahead to the German Presidency. Report for the EU Stakeholders Conference, Amsterdam, 28 Jun. 2006. Available online at http://www.bmvbs.de/Anlage/original_967320/A-Territorial-Agenda-For-Europe-Looking-ahead-to-the-German-Presidency.pdf*

8 Michel Delebarre: *The Lisbon Strategy and Territorial Cohesion: Towards a New Kind of European Governance. Speech at the Conference on Territorial Cohesion and the Lisbon Strategy: Exploiting Local and Regional Potential, Amsterdam, 28 Jun. 2006. Available online at http://www.bmvbs.de/Anlage/original_970788/Lissabon-Strategie-und-Territoriale-Kohaesion-Rede-des-AdR-Praesidenten-in-englischer-Sprache.pdf*