

CECICN

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER AND INTERREGIONAL CITY NETWORKS

ANSWERS 5ht COHESION REPORT

0. Introduction

CECICN, founded in April 2010, is formed by six networks comprehending more than 500 cities.

The networks included in CECICN are:

RIET (Iberian Network of Cross-border Cities) brings together nearly the totality of the cross-border entities from the Spanish-Portuguese frontier developing their work in the area of cross-border cooperation.

MedCities is a network of Mediterranean coastal cities created in Barcelona as an initiative of the Mediterranean Technical Assistance Programme (METAP), whose main objective is the environmental improvement in the Mediterranean territories.

MOT (Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière) a network which involves all the French borders works in the realization of cross-border projects towards the adaptation of the territories in different countries.

FAIC, Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities in order to achieve its institutional goal, and in order to facilitate and develop the activity of its Members, undertakes the fostering of economic, social, cultural and scientific integration in the Adriatic and Ionian areas, in order to endorse the transborder flows.

UBC, Union of the Baltic Cities a voluntary is a proactive network mobilizing the shared potential of over 100 member cities for democratic, economic, social, cultural and environmentally sustainable development of the Baltic Sea Region.

CAAC, Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities intends to give Atlantic cities a voice in Europe by promoting their interests, in order to favor a balanced and polycentric organization of the European territory. The CAAC chairs the CECICN network in the person of the Mayor of Santiago de Compostela, Mr. Xosé A. Sánchez Bugallo.

Thus, areas of urban cooperation (inter-regional, transnational and cross-border) are the common elements grouping all the networks associated to CECICN as well as to look for a better and more effective cooperation system between the different European territories.

An infrastructure for constant communication and cooperation, analysis and implementation of common solutions to common problems has been created through CECICN, a platform involving six different city networks representing more than 500 cities located in maritime, peripheral and border areas.

All networks gathered by CECICN recognize a number of common problems associated with their specific territories. In this sense, CECICN considers essential to put forward the vision of its 500 cities concerning this consultation of the Commission on the future of cohesion policy.

From CECICN's standpoint, as cities are key players in cohesion policy in all its aspects (economic, social and territorial) three essential areas are to be examined: the close relationship that binds citizens and cities, the challenge of a greater coherence and concentration of programs and measures and the need for a better understanding between the different levels involved. These axes have been articulated in the responses to the proposed questionnaire:

1. Cities and citizens: key for cohesion policy

QUESTIONS 1, 6, 7 ,12, 13

Main aim: Widening the participation of cities and citizens in EU cohesion policy, through a thorough application of the subsidiary principle as it is developed in the Lisbon Treaty.

Proposals:

- Setting up a multi-level governance system that allows complete involvement of the cities, especially of those confronted to particular geographical features.
- Defining bottom-up tools that ensure direct input from cities and citizens, building on examples as URBACT local action groups.
- Fostering networking, especially between local authorities, in order to allow them to pool resources.
- Benefiting from local best practices and finding synergies at European level.

Q. 1:

It cannot be ignored that, while Europe 2020 is a political strategy, the territorial, social and economic cohesion are a principle enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Thus meaning that, Europe 2020 should contribute to achieve the objectives of cohesion.

Therefore to improve the political strategy and implementation of international cooperation initiatives at EU level, it becomes imperative to have exchanges with transnational networks already established. Networks search for a more *European, Citizen-oriented and Cohesive* EU; so the problems e.g. for cooperation at borders will no longer be an obstacle to full development.

From CECICN, a network of interregional and cross-border area that represents more than 500 cities within and outside the EU and through the six different networks that form, It has

already created an infrastructure for ongoing communication and cooperation, analysis and implementation of common solutions to common problems.

Beyond the border, the territorial or the urban characteristics of specific territories, CECICN, and its members associated, is searching to improve the quality of life of European citizens.

Q. 6:

Urban areas concentrate 70 percent of the population in Europe. Also, in the vast and diverse territory of Europe, there are cities with common characteristics, constrained in their quality of life by its specific geographical condition (border, peripheral, maritime, land-locked...). CECICN, through its associated city networks is working on reducing the effects of those geographical restrictions, to allow EU to function beyond national borders.

As stated by Articles 174 and 349 of the Treaty, special consideration shall be given to spaces with specific challenges that require the appropriate responses. The management of these spaces is all the more complex when they are located in borders, sea basins, peripheral regions, most remote territories, etc.

Consequently, the European common strategic framework and the national development and investment partnership contracts must include a component on territorial co-operation, which will entail strategic co-operation by the Member States concerned at each area. Thus, significant and meaningful territorial dynamics such as integrated territory projects should be encouraged, based on a common strategy drawn up by local partners.

In this respect, both on-going and proposed macroregions (Baltic, Danube, Adriatic, Mediterranean, Atlantic, North Sea...) demonstrate the importance of the territorial dimension of cohesion and are an interesting example of multi-level co-ordination beyond the borders themselves.

With regard to drawing up operational programmes, more emphasis ought to be placed on territorial approaches. This could be achieved by integrating territorial rather than just theme-based aspects in the programming of cross-border co-operation.

Specific territories whose cohesion potential has not been exploited such as cross-border and peripheral territories and sea basins must be the subject of particular incentives, for example through earmarked global credit arrangements. These territories can represent sites for experimentation and innovation.

In the new programming period, a significant budgetary increase should be considered for territorial co-operation, given its value added and its potential for job creation. All three components of cooperation are pertinent and thus ought to continue in the future.

Following the example of the new developments of INTERACT, technical assistance shall be enhanced by the multi-level governance approach. Thus, technical assistance shall target operational programmes and, being the case, macro-regions, favouring good practices and flagship projects. In this sense, the new Interreg IVC shall give special consideration to networking in territorial priorities so as to fully develop Lisbon Treaty. Moreover, As local authorities' organizations, which claim to be the direct vehicle of the citizens' opinions, networks like CECICN should become part of the official advisory councils working on the development and implementation of initiatives from the EU's institutional bodies.

Q. 7:

Following this pattern, acknowledging that cities are the first point of contact with citizens and that, under the principles of subsidiary and participation, city networks should play a key role in the process of interregional cooperation; interaction must spring from the bottom and not be created, imposed and fostered unilaterally from the top to all territories.

Given their peculiarities, cities shall and are able to influence on the choice of the most effective strategies and tools, through continuous interactions, as shown by CECICN work last year.

Similarly, cohesion policy should draw on local expertise and best practices, defining mechanisms for citizens, to build a future based in successful examples such as the local support groups of URBACT networks.

Q. 12:

The future design of the cohesion funds should integrate EU2020, giving it a human face. When considering ESF volumes, both the causes and the consequences of the crisis are to be taken into account, thus aiming at stability and accuracy.

Sustainable development is not just economic or environmental, but also and especially social. Citizens, and therefore cities, must be the target for ESF. The urban dimension and the geographical handicaps are to be included in the previous analysis and decisions concerning ESF. Thus more coordination with other funds, simplification and coherence shall define the successor.

Q. 13:

Effectiveness of cohesion policy can be measured by indicators such as comprehensive balance and exclusion. Thus, the relative weight of the different regions should be examined carefully, paying attention especially to areas with distinctive geographic characteristics that determine their level of growth.

Hence, interregional cooperation is essential. Stable policies of cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation are to be set, to avoid marginalization.

Pan-European cooperation networks like CECICN, are already working and developing initiatives for the welfare and development of cities located in areas with special geographical characteristics; through collaborative and joint work, by setting priorities and by anticipating the new problems brought by the socio-political context of the 21st century.

2. Coherence and Concentration

QUESTIONS 2, 3, 5, 10

Main aim: Creating scale economies by pooling European, national, regional and local resources, facilitating the involvement of the private sector. Coordinating action by establishing a system of priorities by a wide range of sources.

Proposals:

- Understanding cohesion policy as a fundamental tool to respond to external shocks and thus ensure balanced development.
- Incorporating the territorial dimension in EU 2020 mainstream: enhancing support and interaction with local and regional initiatives through cohesion policy.
- Defining integrated strategies: searching for a coherent use of the different funds that allows the development and the efficiency of wide-scale initiatives. These strategies shall be made compatible with Convergence, Competitiveness and Co-operation objectives.
- Selecting priorities for these integrated strategies, through dialogue and active consultation.

Q. 2:

The scope of the development and investment partnership contract should consider the potential of "integrated strategies", proposed or on-going, for diverse areas, such as the Baltic, the Danube, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. As they are intended to circumvent the lack of a precise and quantified definition of the objectives, these strategies ensure, from a bottom-up perspective, coherence and synergies. The consistency given by integrated strategies to EU policies solves the inefficiencies resulting from the lack of coordination.

A single document, drafted through a wide consensus, should contribute to a better coordination.

Q. 3:

Once again, the territorial dimension should earmark both the choice of priorities and the execution level.

In the search for greater thematic concentration, and therefore a smaller and affordable range for the implementation of initiatives aimed at solving the problems which are affecting the EU, it is necessary to consider interregional associations (as CECICN) that are able to compare and assess which are the priorities in the different European territories, while facilitating a better coordination between national and EU levels. So, taking into account the consensus about sustainable development as a common framework in Europe, overlapping and dispersion of individual efforts shall be avoided.

Q. 5:

Identifying and quantifying concrete common needs is essential to get a cohesion policy more orientated to results, thus the aim for clearer and more workable indicators, both qualitative and quantitative. These indicators should orientate prioritization and guidelines. For instance, some indicators concerning CECICN territories could be:

- Accessibility, mobility and contactability.
- Efficiency of infrastructures, relative to location and population access.
- Employment and other social needs (as health and ageing).
- Environment.
- Intra-regional differences in standard of living (per capita GDP, etc.).
- Concertation, participation, networking and governance.
- Integration.

Cohesion policy should promote the adaptation of the diverse territories favouring a development which is democratic, economic, social, and cultural and environmentally sustainable, while promoting effective partnerships between cities and citizens in order to contribute to the emergence of a substantive area of solidarity for cooperation and development. Projects focused on facilitating cross-border and transnational structuring strategies have been identified by CECICN as a key for the future. Projects shall go ahead from “study actions” to “implementation initiatives” through benchmarking of best practices.

Q. 10:

Seemly, so as to achieve improvements on quality, effectiveness and optimization, a thorough assessment of the diverse programmes is a pre-requisite. Future requirements and procedures shall be based upon the programme that has had better results, not only in its objectives, but also in its implementation. “Administrative benchmarking” shall serve as a basis for simplified guidelines. Particularities must be emphasized concerning specific objectives and funds, but the rest of bureaucratic requirements should be similar and much clearer.

Consistency among requirements would make participation and dialogue easier and more attractive, thus promoting a more cohesive Europe.

3. Better understanding

QUESTIONS 4, 8, 9, 11

Main aim: Facilitating participation of local and regional authorities reducing the administrative burden. Favour results over procedures.

Proposals:

- In general, procedures shall be made understandable, efficient and adapted, so as to encourage participation and appropriation. Discouragement is truly related to excessive requirements.
- Implementing simplified rules for eligibility of expense in cohesion programmes: ex. Lump sums, adapted percentages for indirect costs, coherence with budgetary constraints of stakeholders, etc.
- Greater coherence between the rules of the different programmes should improve participation of regional and local authorities, thus widening the territorial dimension of the European Union.

Q. 4:

These instruments do not automatically induce a more favourable context for Cohesion (or cohesion policy). In the contrary, a more restrictive framework will only punish project promoters, who will perceive how their risk and uncertainty increase. Geographical obstacles to development of the cohesion potential, such as borders, periphery or sea basins offer significant opportunities to fulfil EU objectives.

So, in the search for effectiveness, programmes intended to implement initiatives for the enhancing of the socio-economic progress of all Europe's territories, should be more open and offer more financing options. More important budgets shall also be considered, especially for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Future programmes shall be synthetic, defined by concrete topics and based on actual issues. An EU periodic review, conducted in a participatory and consensual way, shall be envisaged.

Q. 8:

As they only add obstacles, reducing the number of controls is fundamental for an efficient development of cohesion policy.

In the same way, the control levels must be the same between the various Member States, ensuring at least a common quality minimum and avoiding disturbances caused by heterogeneity of the rule. In order to integrate audits between Member States and Commission joint (horizontal) work has to be privileged over hierarchy by enhancing non-formal learning experiences and a more intense exchange between institutions, specially for the first level audit.

Q. 9:

Concerning the link between EU and citizenship, in order to clarify the audit process and relieve the administrative burden on management and control, the specific simplification of the territorial cooperation programs is essential. They should become simpler and more accessible and visible. As far as possible, bureaucratic burden should be minimized, while setting cooperative processes which could promote non-formal learning and a more positive vision for stakeholders.

Suggestions for the future shall consider:

- 1- Reduction of the number of levels of intervention.
- 2- Avoiding too complex and diverse systems of monitoring.
- 3- Standardization.
- 4- Accounting facilitation: cash flow, lump sums / global grants, micro- projects

Q. 11:

To enable the realisation of complex projects, as is the case with projects on integrated cross-border territories, it will be necessary from the outset to define strategies based on real needs on the ground. Major territory projects can then be incorporated in the operational programmes, which means the complex projects can be launched the moment the programmes are launched. To this end, a genuine partnership approach needs to be initiated

among local players, including policy makers, legal experts and the other players involved in the cross-border territory.

As they are mainly the case in territories with distinctive geographical features, complex projects have to be effectively grass-rooted and set by a bottom up approach that would define concrete initiatives. Thus, operational programmes shall include major territory projects and integrated strategies based on an inclusive partnership. Again, a cross-cutting perspective of work is to be imposed, where the connection between the different strands would facilitate a common understanding on the requirements, while reducing problems in implementation and in the justification of expenses.

This way, financial discipline should be based on a really effective and realistic cutback of the budgets of the projects to be developed, adapting it to the new economic situation and to the priorities determined through the mechanisms suggested in the preceding paragraphs; and subject to a continuous review by stakeholders.