



VIEWPOINT

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On 17 and 18 September 2005 the Seine-Maritime department played host to the members of the *Association des Départements Cyclables* for their 9th meeting. Why hold a congress of 'cycling' departments in Rouen?

The particular feature of this congress was its France-UK focus. Profiting from the strong links established between the Seine-Maritime department and its UK colleagues within the framework of the European "Franco-British Cycle Plan" project, its aim was to exchange practices on the two sides of the Channel and enrich the discussion on cycling policies with British experiences. A feature of this congress was that it took place both in France and in England, an indication of the strong cross-border dimension of the project as a whole. The congress participants were thus able to learn about initiatives and developments by the partners on both sides of the Channel, since the two-day congress in Rouen was followed by a cycle tour of the Avenue Verte on the French side, and then a Channel crossing by ferry to continue tour on the English side. It can thus be said that the Franco-British partnership card was played to maximum effect! This congress was also an opportunity to meet the partners, exchange views on the implemented policies and discuss problems common to the French and British participants: how to encourage people to use bicycles more, how to coordinate the competencies of the different stakeholders in cycling policy, etc. It was particularly interesting to exchange views with the British partners, who have greater experience in the area of cycling policy (the first cycle plans were introduced 15 years ago in England). Moreover, certain development priorities, such as the promotion of non-motorized transport, but also of tourism in the cooperation area, are common to both sides of the Channel: the cycle plan is evidence of a declared determination to encourage balanced regional development of the cross-Channel area.

"Franco-British Cycle Plan"

The Seine-Maritime department, with its French and English partners, is contributing to the development of a network of cross-border cycle paths as part of the France-UK Interreg IIIA European programme.

The France-UK Interreg III A programme: a definite maritime character

The area covered by the France-UK Interreg III A programme (Pas-de-Calais, Nord, Somme and Seine-Maritime on the French side, East Sussex, Kent, Brighton and Hove and Medway on the English side) can be defined as forming a large maritime region composed of rural, urban and coastal areas. Given the maritime character of the border, transport systems play a primary role in facilitating the development of interchanges in all areas of cross-border cooperation.

The region also has many noteworthy natural assets, including conserved natural habitats, exceptional coastal areas and historic towns, which make it a living and working place with links to both the culture and the heritage of the region.

The Franco-British Cycle Plan project: promoting non-motorized transport

The Franco-British Cycle Plan project is the fruit of sustained cooperation between the Somme, Seine-Maritime, East Sussex and Kent

districts; its aim is to promote a coherent network of cycle routes and greenways on both sides of the Channel. It involves the construction, organization and promotion of high-quality infrastructure and the improvement of services for users.

The project, developed in several phases, began in 1999. After a period of planning and design, its 63 kilometres of route now form part of the European cycle route and greenway network. The partners have also drawn up a joint communication strategy with three objectives: develop sustainable tourism (promote cycling and walking, upgrade existing infrastructure, raise the awareness of decision-makers), develop the local economy (increase the number of tourists travelling without their cars, improve the tourism products related to the cycle route network) and improve access for all to the cycle paths (increase the amount of specific provision and make sure that there is suitable infrastructure).

By encouraging the completion of this network of safe cycle routes and its promotion to as many people as possible (inhabitants, tourists, schoolchildren, but also decision-makers), the Franco-British Cycle Plan project not only plays an essential role in incentives for the use of bicycles as an environmentally-friendly mode of transport, but also contributes to the development of sustainable tourism on the coasts and in the hinterlands.

Ariège Regional Nature Park project

Initiated in 1998, a regional nature park (PNR) project is under study in Ariège on the France-Spain and France-Andorra borders. The objectives (development of natural and cultural heritage, farming and economic resources, etc.) form part of a sustainable development approach, with the decision to draw up an "Agenda 21" charter by 2008, the planned date of effective establishment of the park.

The boundary of the future park encompasses 2,500 sq. km in Ariège, including, from the mountains to the piedmont plain, Couserans, Vicdessos, western Tarascons, Barguillère and western Plantaurel, with a total population of about 43,000.

In July 2005 a step was taken with the establishment of the *Syndicat mixte de préfiguration du parc* (joint park planning association), bringing together the Region, the Department, 133 municipalities and many concerned socio-economic stakeholders and public-sector institutions: chambers of trade, agriculture and commerce, *Office National des Forêts* (forestry commission), etc.

The partners now want to give the project a cross-border dimension. This aspect was taken into account when the park boundary was defined: the inclusion of two municipalities located in the extreme south-west appeared necessary in order to incorporate a direct



border with the Alt Pirineu park located in Spain. The other Spanish and Andorran entities likely to be partners are: the Generalitat of Catalonia, the Val d'Aran general council, the Principality of Andorra (which also has a common border), the Aigues Tortes national park and the projected Val d'Aran natural park. The topics of cooperation have yet to be defined, but might include: management of natural spaces and animal species, development of joint actions in the areas of culture and tourism, or the implementation of a coordinated sustainable development policy. The constitution of a "cross-border protected area for the Central Pyrenees" from all the natural spaces of the Central Pyrenees can be considered as a medium-term objective.



How can the population be informed and encouraged to participate in the preparation of cross-border projects?

Among the various means by which the public can be informed of and participate in major infrastructure projects and their cross-border implementation, a distinction is made between informal procedures and formal procedures laid down by legislation.

Informal procedures:

Information aims to "provide items of information without asking for opinions, using various media: print, Internet site, press conference and public meetings".

Consultation is a means of asking the inhabitants for their opinion in order to know what they think. It can be employed at any stage in the progress of a project. The information media mentioned above can be used. Workshops can also be held on particular points. For example, one of the five objectives of the charter of the conurbation of the *Pôle Européen de Développement* (France-Belgium-Luxembourg) is to improve the "brand image" of the area. The three-year communication plan included three levels: an internal plan aimed at elected representatives and technical experts, an external plan aimed at the general public and an "area marketing" plan (with topic-focused workshops) aiming to strengthen the feeling of belonging of the inhabitants and give a positive image of the area.

Concertation covers the concept of citizen participation in the projects that concern them, and in this procedure their opinions must be taken into account. It includes in the decision-making process both the local institutions involved and the inhabitants concerned by the project. The most complete system has two levels: the local institutions, a relatively widespread practice in the context of cross-border projects (e.g. the French-German "Garden on both banks" between Strasbourg and Kehl), and the general public, inhabitants and associations; few of the latter have a cross-border character, as local authorities give preference to national organizations.

Approaches within the French legislative framework (no European community documents on this subject) :

The **public inquiry** is a procedure for informing the public and collecting its assessments, suggestions and counter-proposals prior to certain decisions or operations ("Bouchardeau" act of 12 July 1983 on the democratisation of public inquiries). The inhabitants of the other side of the border can also express their opinions.

Public debates, organized by the CNDP (French national public debate commission) established by the 1995 "Barrier" act, concern the *opportuneness, objectives and principal characteristics of major development projects of national interest proposed by the state, local authorities, public-sector institutions or private individuals*. Two public debates have focused on cross-border infrastructure: the Amiens-Lille-Belgium motorway link and the first version of the France-Spain VHV connection in 2003. These two debates showed that elected representatives and the general public were consulted only on the French side of the border.

In conclusion, for each of these approaches, when applied to cross-border projects, it is necessary to respect the languages of the people involved and the different cultural approaches to the project. It is also important to note that, although the authorities undertake cross-border information or consultation exercises, genuinely cross-border concertations and public inquiries have not yet been organized, for reasons including differences in legislation and in the division of powers between the state and local authorities on either side of the borders. The organization of cross-border concertation must be based on the development of innovative solutions, which involve preparatory work at all levels by public stakeholders to define the target population, the issues to be discussed, and the purpose and the methods of the concertation. Such solutions must also be based on existing instruments such as the CNDP.

* Text taken from the CNDP Internet site (<http://www.debatpublic.fr>)

■ **Entretiens territoriaux du transfrontalier (cross-border areas conference): "How can the economic performance of cross-border areas be improved?"**

This conference will be held on Friday 2 and Saturday 3 December 2005 in Nice. It is organized by the MOT, the University of Nice-Sophia-Antipolis, the University of Genoa and the Genoa Communication Institute as part of the Interform project, the European network for training and research into cross-border practices, funded by the Interact programme.

Further information:

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

PUBLICATIONS

■ **Cooperation at the heart of cohesion: Interreg in action**

Inforegio Panorama

No. 17, September 2005

Download from: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy

■ **Journal Regio Pamina**

No. 1, September 2005

This new publication issued by the Regio Pamina local grouping is intended to explain the cross-border cooperation policy and guidelines in the Pamina area, featuring stakeholders and projects, services available to public, etc.

To subscribe, contact:

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■ **First road map of the SarLorLux/Rhineland-Palatinate/Wallonia Greater Region**

Further information:

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

In the press in October

■ **After the Atlantic Arc, the Channel Arc, Le Télégramme, 6 October**

"We've already had the Atlantic Arc, now here is the Channel Arc. Boosted by European funding for which they were not eligible previously, nine English counties and five French regions are going to blaze a trail for cross-border and maritime inter-regional cooperation..."

■ **Developing cross-border cooperation on health, La Voix du Nord, 1 October**

"The Belgian and French health ministers [...] Rudy Demotte and Xavier Bertrand, have signed a framework agreement between the two governments aimed at developing cross-border health cooperation..."

■ **37 million euro cross-border programme for northern canals, Les Echos, 12 October**

"Eleven municipalities of the Lille conurbation and southern Belgium undertake the transformation of their waterways..."

■ **Grimonpont, a cross-border water treatment plant, www.lillemetropole.fr**

"Pierre Mauroy, chairman of the Lille Metropolitan Urban Community, and the Belgian authorities inaugurated the Grimonpont water treatment station on Saturday 8 October..."

■ **Establishment of the Upper Rhine Business Club, Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 1 October**

"A new business club bringing together French and German business leaders has just been opened, chaired by Henry Baumert, head of Behr France..."

■ **Alsace and Baden-Württemberg probe the Rhine water table, La Gazette des Communes, 3 October**

"The largest reserve of fresh in Europe is being subjected to a cross-border diagnosis, which will be used as the basis for pollution control and preservation policies..."

■ **A cross-border public transport map, Le Dauphiné Libéré, 19 October**

"This first is the fruit of close cooperation between Geneva and its neighbours. A map listing and detailing the public transport of the whole France-Vaud-Geneva region..."