The Interform project

Approved in December 2004 as part of the European INTERACT programme, the Interform project has enabled the formation of a European training and research network focusing on cross-border practices. Its objective is to develop the capability of territories to set up cooperation projects by organizing a scientific and technical corpus confronted with practices in the field through networking of training and research institutions specialized in this area.

Planned to last 3 years, it brings together partners from five different countries: the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière as lead partner, the Kehl Euro-Institute, the University of Pau and the Pays de l’Adour, the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis, the University of Genoa, The International Communication Institute in Genoa, the University of Geneva and the University of Deusto (Spain).

The project is organized around three strands:

- First, the “resources” strand must establish a documentation centre (teaching base for training and reference base for research) and a network of experts (identification of competencies, networking of practices, etc.). Another objective of this strand is to organize the complementarity of training sites by optimizing the range of courses available and strengthening the specific features of each site.

- The “production” strand is dedicated to the design of methodological or topic-based “training modules”. The new educational products developed within this framework are intended for transfer to all the borders of Europe. The first methodological module was the subject of a test seminar on 23 and 24 March in Kehl. The objective was to work on the training of cross-border project leaders. It is intended to lead to the production of a "teaching kit". The next training seminar, scheduled on 25 and 26 October 2006, will be topic-based and devoted to health.

- Finally, the “professionalization” strand is based on the organization of an annual seminar, the “Entretiens du transfrontalier” (cross-border discussions). The objective is to increase the professional competencies of the protagonists by comparing viewpoints between practitioners in the field and researchers. The first “Entretiens” took place in December 2005 in Nice on the topic of economic development. The proceedings are on line on the MOT web site www.spaces-transfrontaliers.org.

The second “Entretiens du transfrontalier” will take place on 30 November and 1 December 2006 on the French-German border. The topic will be “trades and competencies in a cross-border setting”.

In conclusion, note that an Internet site dedicated to the project is being set up. It should be available before the summer at the following address: www.interform-eu.org.

Towards a French-Italian “Euro-territory”

On March 3rd in Nice, the 10 departmental and provincial authorities associated since 2000 within the French-Italian Alps Conference* decided to constitute themselves into a French-Italian “Euro-territory”, with the ambition of becoming a recognized area of competitiveness in Europe.

This decision marks the determination to lay the foundations of a strong political cross-border cooperation project, with the ambition of responding to the challenges of the new 2007-2013 European programming period. Four major priorities were defined:

- Strengthen the territorial cohesion of this Euro-territory and its political weight in Europe, with the objective of giving it a suitable legal structure (such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation proposed by the Commission).

- Shift the balance of economic activities towards the South of Europe through better interconnection of the territory with regard to transport infrastructure (Lyon-Turin railway line, etc.) and the new information and communication technologies.

- Work on the conservation and upgrading of the resources of the territories and establish transalpine competitiveness centres recognized in Europe.

- Integrate this Euro-territory into a broader transalpine Euro-region.

* Association comprising the French departments of Alpes-Maritimes, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, Hautes-Alpes, Isère, Savoie and Haute-Savoie, the Italian provinces of Imperia, Cuneo and Turin, and the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley.
The 2007-2013 State-Region Project Contracts

The interministerial committee on territorial development and competitiveness, meeting on 6 March 2006 under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, was devoted to the completion of the “2000-2006 State-region plan contracts” and the launching of the new “2007-2013 State-region project contracts”. Through the setting up of this new mechanism, announced for 1 January 2007, the government has shown its determination to give a “new direction” to territorial development.

Coordination with the future European “2007-2013” programmes

The coordination between the future European programmes and the new project contracts for the period 2007-2013 indicates the determination to include these contracts within the European strategic guidelines of Lisbon and Gothenburg “in favour of innovation, competitiveness and sustainable development”. The three priorities of the project contracts are thus competitiveness and attractiveness, the promotion of sustainable development, and social and territorial cohesion.

More focused topics

In addition to taking into account European community strategic guidelines, the new contract arrangements are characterized by a “closer focusing on a limited number of priority topics and large-scale structural investments”. Priority will be given to projects “on a national scale, generating substantial knock-on effects for the regions”. “The limited number of projects will be identified, characterized and costed when the contracts are signed. They will be able to call upon funding from the state and the public-sector establishments concerned”. It should also be noted that development of the national road network will no longer be part of the new contracts, “so that a larger place can be devoted to public transport”. Furthermore, the medium-sized cities will be the subject of special consideration. This closer focusing of the system has led to a revision of the contractual relations between the state and the regions, the latter becoming “priority”, and no longer “exclusive”, partners of the state in the negotiation. The objective is to bring in the other levels of local authorities, such as the departments (refer to phase II of the decentralization legislation).

Territorial strand maintained

The inclusion of a “territorial strand” in the future contracts has been maintained. The principle of an “overall contractualization”, which characterized the preceding contracts, is nevertheless replaced by the principle of exclusive funding of projects: the projects. “Forming part of subregional territorial approaches”, will be chosen “in a selective manner to support territorial development progress on a finer scale”. Mobilizing “certain resources of the state-region plan contracts (CPER), together with ministry resources outside the scope of the contracts and funding of state public establishments”, these projects may concern the following topics:

- conurbation sustainable development policies, in particular contributing to the competitiveness strategies and better integration of the urban fabric;
- digital development of territories linked to economic competitive initiatives;
- territorial strategies for adaptation to climate change by the promotion of renewable energies and the control of energy demand;
- balanced management of water resources;
- prevention of natural risks;
- adaptation of services to the public, innovative initiatives in services to persons, [etc.].

Timetable

At the end of March two circulars were sent to the regional prefects defining the procedures for preparation of the future contracts. By 9 May the regional prefects must produce a territorial assessment, common to the CPERs and the European programmes, which will be used as a basis for the negotiation. It must identify the issues and the major projects likely to be contractualized, together with the major priorities of the territorial strand. Contract negotiations with the local authorities must begin in the autumn in order for the contracts to be signed before the end of the year.