

VIEWPOINT

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What is the Dakini Project and what added value does cross-border co-operation bring?

The Dakini Project is a major participatory Anglo-French education support programme aiming to maximize teachers and pupils' understanding of key cultural, economic, social, historical and geographical issues within the Interreg IIIa region across the Channel. This is being addressed through the combined application of quality digital resources and state-of-the-art Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) such as Geographical Information Systems (GIS), 3600 virtual tours, 3-D landscape and the internet, all adapted to education. At the same time the project addresses the requirements of evolving schools' curriculums that demand appropriate use and application of high quality digital educational software and data to enhance cross curricular education.

The partnership between educators on both sides of the channel has been a major strength of the project. Different curriculum requirements resulted in the creation of a huge array of cross-curricula digital resources that allow citizens to use ICT and GIS beyond their local environment to a European platform. This could have not been created without the partnerships. The Project was recognized for its contribution to these new skills when it was awarded a prize at the prestigious Géo d'Or competition at the Géo événement exhibition in Paris.

What have the partners and citizens involved in the project learned from working with counterparts on the other side of the Channel?

Educators involved with the Dakini Project have enhanced the learning experience of school children aged from 8 - 18 years by contrasting their own environment with one as similar to theirs as it is different. The resources are used to compare and contrast topics as diverse as church architecture, the hazards of river flooding, coastal erosion, urban development and Norman castles. Teachers also use the resources to take a class virtual field trip which strengthens geographical and cultural understanding and can give an invaluable insight to life on the other side of the channel.

What hopes do you have for the future of the Dakini project?

The Project is already in its 2nd phase with nearly 1000 schools eligible for full access to the Dakini resources. As the Anglo-French Interreg IIIa region expands and includes parts of Belgium and the Netherlands there is a unique opportunity to allow young citizens access to emerging technology to equip them with analytical, enquiry and computer skills required of a future workforce whilst increasing their understanding of place and their relationship with those around them. With the opportunity of new partners comes new approaches and the project is looking to evolve over 2007-2013 period by adapting to the new technologies, educational approaches and the varied issues that affect our cross-border region. It is also envisaged that a new Centre of Excellence be created and a structured short course be developed for teachers continued profession development in this technologically exciting educational area.



A bridge across the Channel

The days of headlines like "Fog at Dover, continent cut off" are long gone. Kent is well connected to mainland Europe, not only physically by the Channel Tunnel but also more importantly through the many virtual bridges built over time on either side of the channel...

By virtue of its geographical position, Kent has always had a special relationship with the Continent. Some parts of Kent are clearly closer to Calais than they are to London. As the main point of entry and departure to and from the UK, the county has been greatly affected over the centuries by influences and pressures emanating from the Continent. To some extent, before the UK joined the European Community, Kent was perceived within the UK as a peninsula in the far south eastern corner of the country and suffered the many disadvantages of peripherality. Now, with the UK an integral part of the European Union, Kent's gateway position is undoubtedly strengthened and the county finds itself at the heart of North West Europe, with all the potential but also with all the challenges that centrality can bring.

The significance of Kent's links with mainland Europe is reflected in the breadth of projects and initiatives undertaken across the transmanche region, at all levels, of which the Dakini project is a good example. Most Kent organisations - whether local authorities, higher and further education institutions, voluntary sector, businesses, port and police authorities have developed a close working relationship with their continental counterparts. They have experienced the benefits of working in partnership to resolve common problems and develop joint initiatives.

Alongside the traditional tourism or heritage cooperation projects such as the cross-channel Historic Fortifications network, new projects in less traditional areas - such as public health -



Port of Dover, Kent County Council

have also recently benefited from Interreg funding. Kent and Medway NHS (National Health Service) are for instance working with organisations in Northern France on very topical issues such as Healthy eating and lifestyles for school aged children, and are looking at the differences in health systems in the UK and France.

Since 1991, Kent has lived through three generations of cross-border programmes (under Interreg funding) for a total of nearly € 145 Million. Over 400 projects have been funded in Kent over that period, ranging from lifelong learning, to economic development and from tourism through to environment, transport or public health. This means that a wealth of shared experience, contacts and exchange of best practice has strengthened links over the past twenty years between Kent and Northern France - and in Nord-Pas de Calais in particular.

The new Territorial Cooperation Programme for 2007-13 will extend the current eligible area even further to include parts of Belgium and the Netherlands as well as Brittany. Kent looks forward to building more bridges with new continental partners...

Marie Dancourt-Cavanagh
Kent County Council International Affairs Group Manager

A "pioneering" bridge in cross-border cooperation

On 20 May, French President Jacques Chirac inaugurated a road and pedestrian bridge over the Rhine between Fessenheim (Upper Rhine, France) and Hartheim (Germany).

This steel and concrete structure, 210 metres long and under construction for 14 months, led to the formation in 1998 of the first local cross-border cooperation grouping (LCCG). This type of entity was created under the Karlsruhe Agreement in 1996 between France, Germany and Luxembourg and expanded to include Switzerland in 2004. Two years later, the group for the Fessenheim bridge took over project management for the bridge's construction. The 16 seats on its controlling body are divided equally between the "Essor du Rhin" community of communes on the French side, four German communes and one German intercommunal organisation. The financing (representing 4.3 million euros), shared equally between the two countries (Alsace region, the Upper Rhine

General Council, the LCCG and German towns), was supplemented by an EU subsidy worth 900,000 €.

This project became the ninth road bridge over the Rhine along the border between Alsace and Baden-Wurtemberg. Intentionally narrow (just over 6 metres wide), it offers only one lane for vehicles, prohibits lorries exceeding 3.5 tonnes, and provides two lanes for pedestrians and cyclists.

Symbolically, this "link" was built to unite local populations on both sides of the Rhine. On the French side, drivers will no longer have a 30 km detour to cross the border.

For the President of the French Republic, Mr Chirac, this project "demonstrates the quality of the ties that have been woven between our two peoples and underpins the European idea. It demonstrates the reality of a living Europe embodied in concrete projects".

Geneva-Cornavin train station



Integrating public transport systems in the France-Vaud-Geneva conurbation

For a number of years, the Rhone-Alps Region, the Canton of Geneva and public transport authorities in the France-Vaud-Geneva area have been developing cross-border public transport services. On 30 March 2006, two particularly significant agreements were signed in Geneva: a regional fare agreement encompassing all public transport networks in the France-Vaud-Geneva region, including the French and Swiss railways, and a memorandum of understanding on joint ticketing.

Geneva Canton shares 100km of borders with France and only 4km with the rest of Switzerland. The flow of cross-border workers is constant, but few of them use public transport owing to the lack of adequate infrastructure. Switzerland possesses a robust rail system, with a modal share of 20-25% of public transit between Vaud Canton and Geneva Canton. However, on the French side, where around 45,000 people cross the border to Geneva every day, transit services are limited and the modal share varies between 3% and 5%. Expanding the offering of cross-border public transport thus represents a real challenge for the France-Vaud-Geneva conurbation project.

In July 2003, the partners involved (region, departments, cantons, communities of communes and transport authorities) signed a Charter for the expansion of regional public transport throughout the area. This charter sets forth the partners' intention to develop a joint fare system, identifies strategic projects and measures, and includes a cross-border transit plan for 2020.

At the end of 2004, a cross-border fare was added to existing fare schedules both in Switzerland and France. The name "Unireso", initially applied to the Canton of Geneva fare community, was expanded to include this cross-border fare offer and has been applied to the bus network on both sides of the border. As a result, the public transit sectors in the Annemasse conurbation, St-Julien/Valleiry (Upper Savoy, France) and Ferney-Voltaire/Gex (Ain, France) have been integrated into the Geneva public transport network.

The cross-border fare agreement, signed on 30 March between the Rhone-Alps Region, the French communities of communes, the Geneva and Vaud Cantons, and six Swiss and French transit operators (including the SNCF), for a total of 12 signatures, harmonises all fares in the area encompassing the Regional Express Trains (Pougny/Geneva-Cornavin and Annemasse/Geneva-Eaux-Vives). One ticket can be used throughout this zone. This is a one-year experimental agreement that can be extended with the approval of all partners. A map of the complete transport networks in the cross-border area and an Internet site (www.dtp.r.org) were also prepared.

The memorandum of understanding on ticket interoperability was entered into between the Rhone-Alps Region and the Canton of Geneva. It reflects their common goal of studying the linking of future ticketing systems by 2008. The idea is to introduce a single "smart card" that allows users to buy a ticket at any station for any mode of transport in the cross-border conurbation. This initiative shows that the French and Swiss authorities are committed and determined to take account of cross-border concerns early in the local development planning process.

In addition, all partners share the goal of creating, for early 2007, a local cross-border cooperation grouping (LCCG) dedicated to public transport. This legal structure, which was made possible by the expansion of the Karlsruhe Agreement to the French-Swiss border, will remove a major obstacle by allowing authorities on both sides of the border to issue joint public contracts for the operation of cross-border bus lines. This LCCG (a cross-border entity with decision-making and operational powers), will also offer the advantage of bringing together all the authorities that run public transports and of thus being able to develop planning and general coordination missions throughout the area.

The MOT's internet site adopts the ".eu" extension



After surpassing 100,000 visitors last April, the resource site www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu changed its Internet extension to the European ".eu". This staunchly European repositioning can also be seen in the translation last autumn of the site into English, German, Spanish and Italian.

European proposals to simplify VAT rules governing cross-border activities

At the Council meeting on 5 May 2006, the European Union Ministers of Finance discussed a new series of proposals aimed at simplifying the rules governing value-added tax (VAT) for companies engaged in cross-border activities. The Commission proposes the creation, by 2010, of a "one-stop shop" system to facilitate VAT registration and declaration for companies engaged in a cross-border activity.

The Jura Arc Cross-Border Statistical Observatory

The new Jura Arc Cross-Border Statistical Observatory has published two studies on population movements and the labour market in both the French and Swiss parts of the Jura Arc. They are available on the website: www.ostaj.org

Press review

- **Cohesion Policy 2007-2013: new draft regulations now available on line**, Europa web site, Regional Policy Info regio, 23 May
"The latest drafts of the five Structural Funds regulations have been made available on line by the Council in all Community languages following the agreement of May 5, 2006. The draft regulations are expected to be presented to the European Parliament in July. If there is agreement, they will be published in the Official Journal on July 20..."
- **Eurometropole jettisons "Copit"**, La Voix du Nord, 28 April
"On 1 June, the Permanent Intercommunal Cross-Border Conference (Copit) will cease to exist. It's official. Yesterday, the mayors and burgomasters of the communes and cities that compose Copit have welcomed what will now be the local cross-border cooperation group..."
- **The first stone**, Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 3 May
"Yesterday morning, the first stone was laid for the bridge that will link Huningue and Weil am Rhein over the Rhine..."
- **The France-Vaud-Geneva conurbation moves forward**, Tribune de Genève, 13 May
"An interim report is to be presented to the Swiss government in November. In view of political and media interest, cross-border cooperation - long stagnant - appears to have gained new impetus..."
- **The Swiss can seek health care abroad**, SwissInfo, 26 April
"Limited pilot projects set to run through the end of 2009 will make it possible to seek medical care in Germany, Italy or France and charge it to basic health insurance. On Wednesday, the Swiss government agreed to this initiative being tested in border regions to determine if cross-border cooperation has a positive effect on costs..."
- **Construction of a high-speed train link between Spain and Perpignan on track**, L'Indépendant, 19 May
"A progress report on the huge construction project between Figueras and Perpignan was presented by the prime contractors TP Ferro for the Spanish part and RFF for the French sector. The February 2009 deadline is in sight..."