

VIEWPOINT



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What do you consider the current state of affairs of cross-border cooperation in the Catalan Cross-Border Area ?

Two years ago a global and structural territorial cross-border project had not yet been thought of for the Catalan Cross-Border Area, i.e. the Eastern Pyrenees department and the province of Girona. Gradually, and especially after the entrance of Spain in the European political arena in 1986, numerous sectorial institutions have seen the light of day: twinnings, 70 Interreg IIIA projects bringing together partners from both Northern and Southern Catalonia, a policy to bring the town of Perpignan closer to those actors in the «South», a partnership between Pays Pyrénées-Méditerranée and the Consell Comarcal de l'Alt Empordà, exchanges linked to the specificities of Canigó and the Cerdan plateau, etc. Cooperation between our two institutions, begun within the framework of the Interreg Programme became a formal cooperation two years ago with the signing of an ambitious Framework agreement for Cooperation into which the Eurodistrict project is integrated.

How will the arrival of the TGV change life?

The Perpignan-Barcelona High Speed Line (LGV), which will not arrive in 2009 as predicted but 2 or 3 years later, will no doubt have psychological effects on cross-border populations as it will help change the view they have of their territory and will help bring populations physically closer. It is however still too early to foresee exactly all the effects of the LGV. Nevertheless its arrival must be prepared by means of an overall territorial strategy which shall consider the TGV as a tool, but not the only one, which can help us develop this space together for the benefit of our populations.

Are there any priority projects to be carried out by this Eurodistrict ?

The work of the steering committee of the Eurodistrict project will determine this. The steering committee shall meet at the end of July. All the political institutions of the Catalan Cross-border Area shall be represented. We can nevertheless mention some of the essential goals to be considered: to draw up a true joint territorial development strategy, to harmonise all the public services offered to the populations, to produce common tools of mutual exchange, knowledge and information.

Catalan Cross-border Territory

The Catalan Cross-border Territory, consisting of the districts of the region of Girona and North-Catalonia, is an area both historically and geographically connected to complementary economic axes. It has a population of 1 million inhabitants residing in over 450 communes covering an area of close to 10 000 km².

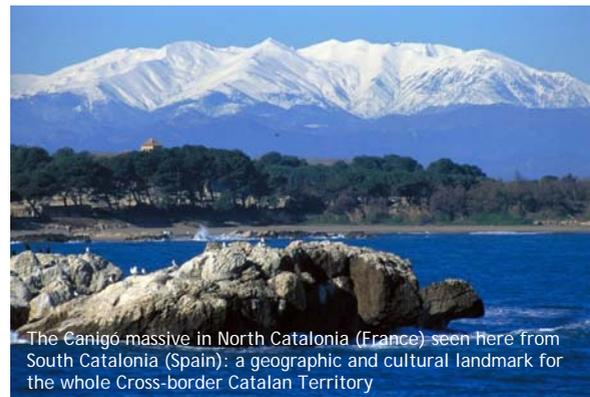
On 29 June 2006 the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Conseil général des Pyrénées-Orientales signed a framework agreement for cross-border cooperation for a period of three years (supplemented by conventions to be applied on a yearly basis) which establishes close cooperation between both institutions with a view to building a true cross-border life territory and to globally structuring this space through the establishment of a Eurodistrict.

The goal is to start a shared policy of town and country planning and local sustainable development. The structure established will result in actions which will help solve and progressively overcome all the cross-border problems and overall differences (administration, tax, infrastructures, mobility, etc.) resulting from its being a cross-border territory.

Actions carried out by the Eurodistrict can be of different natures: cross-border studies, common spatial planning documents, service provision, implementation and commission of works, facilities or infrastructures of public interest, encouraging exchanges, etc.

The following are some of the concrete goals to be attained:

- to facilitate collaboration between the different administrations,



- to establish a cross-border network of competitiveness and technology poles,
- to set up a common fund for the establishment of business incubators,
- to form a cross-border free zone (or partly tax free),
- to structure a common employment market,
- to foster the establishment of cross-border media,
- to structure cross-border postal and telephone services,
- to promote cross-border and bi-lingual teaching establishments,
- to devise common policies for the promotion of tourism,
- to develop concerted policies in terms of rural, urban and environmental planning,
- to enhance the coordination of Interreg projects in the zone, etc.

From a legal viewpoint, this project is included in the legal framework in force, that of the Treaty of Bayonne of 1955, the French legislation on the European District (August 2004) and European Union regulation on "European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation" (July 2006).

The cross-border hospital of Cerdagne

Run by the French State and the Generalitat de Catalunya, the first cross-border hospital in Europe should open its doors in 2009 in Puigcerda, a small Catalan commune of 9,000 inhabitants located in Cerdagne, two kilometres from the French-Spanish border. The first stone of the building should be placed sometime before the end of 2007.

The goals of this new establishment are to help make up for the absence of a hospital in this isolated mountainous region where the population during the winter is of 30,000 inhabitants but in summer grows to 150,000. It will be a local, short-stay hospital, specialising in emergency care and obstetrics and should have 68 beds.

The goal of the programme is to establish a real cross-border entity both in terms of construction and management and based on

a single culture body integrating the advantages of both systems (the French patients will for example be provided with the same conditions as in France).

An important step was taken on 19 March last with the signing of the Agreement between the French Health Minister and the Health Department of the Generalitat de la Catalunya. This agreement establishes the principal criteria for the constitution of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation for the Hospital, as well as the participation of the French State and the Generalitat in the investment and running of the Hospital.

Initially, and in order to manage the construction phase of the establishment, a structure, the Cross-border Private Hospital of Cerdagne, was established under Catalan private law. It should be replaced by the EGTC in 2008.



The participants of the Metz seminar on the EGTC

Publication of the Metz seminar on the EGTC

The regulation establishing the new European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 31 July 2006. This new community tool geared towards Trans-European cooperation accompanies the implementation of objective 3 "European territorial cooperation" for the 2007-2013 European programming period. The MOT organised a seminar on this topic on 16 November 2006 at Metz, the Minutes of which have just been published and are now available online at www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu.

The purpose of this seminar which hosted over 200 participants who came from many different European borders was to present this new structure, its interest and the prospects it has to offer for cross-border cooperation.

The EGTC can also be used in all the European territory to carry out cross-border, trans-national or interregional actions of cooperation. It covers all fields of relevant cooperation between territories and public actors from different EU States. Participation by members from third countries is considered favourably by the regulation. Like all cooperation tools, it is of a broad nature: "to undertake missions on its members' behalf". The European Commission wanted to provide it with a dual objective: to create a community programme (an area in which there was no other "dedicated" structure) and to undertake a territorial cooperation project.

As to which partners could belong to an EGTC, the regulation privileges a free partnership and is open to all "entities awarding contracts": member states, local authorities, public-law bodies and associations involving these actors.

The EGTC is provided with a legal personality which grants it a great deal of autonomy. It can act as "contracting authority" of a territorial cooperation project.

The EGTC is governed by the community regulation, its constitutive convention and its statutes and, by default, by the laws of the member state where its head offices are registered (State to which at least one member belongs).

The debates during the Metz seminar highlighted the "qualitative" leap which this new tool has allowed for. Through it, each European state can position itself as a true agent of cooperation and no longer as a simple adjudicator. The EGTC also helps unify and simplify at the European level the cooperation modalities, always allowing for great flexibility.

During the seminar a great number of territories showed their interest and desire to create new EGTC's. A dozen management authorities were present, including the Grande Région, for example. The other EGTC projects presented at Metz were the Dunkirk/western Flanders platform, the territory of the French-Italian Riviera, the Franco-Luxembourg Alzette/Belval project, The "Oderland-Nadodrze" German-Polish Eurodistrict, the Franco-Spanish cross-border hospital at Cerdagne and the Franco-Italian cross-border natural park Alpi marittime - Mercantour. Since then many other sites have submitted their applications to set up EGTCs in order to carry out their cross-border territory projects.

■ European Conference - Call for projects

During the conference "Cross-border Territories: day-to-day Europe" organised by MOT to take place at Lille on November 8 and 9, 2007, a space for the exchange of cross-border projects will be organised in the exhibition area. Project promoters who wish to participate and present their projects* are invited to send us a brief description of them by e-mail : colloque-mot@la4emedimension.com

* Only projects of a truly cross-border nature will be selected.

■ Cross-border sector of the Pyrénées-Ariégeoises Regional Natural Park (RNP)

Between the months of October 2006 and May 2007 the MOT undertook a monitoring mission of the Pyrénées-Ariégeoises RNP project with a view to organising its cross-border cooperation. This study, commissioned by the Joint Park Planning Association, will be made available to members of the MOT on request. A summary can be found on the webpage www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu.

■ Take note of the following events

The **4th European Forum on Cohesion** organised by the European commission will take place in Brussels on 27 and 28 September. This will be an opportunity for the launching of public consultation on the best way to pursue the strengthening of regional development and convergence through the cohesion policy.

Furthermore, **OPEN DAYS 2007** that will take place in Brussels from 8 to 11 October is now available on the DG Regio webpage : http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy

Press Revue

■ A second bridge between Bulgaria and Romania, Le Moniteur, 15 May

"The Bulgarian Prime Minister, Serguei Stanehev began [...] talks on the construction of a second bridge over the Danube linking Bulgaria and Romania, 'a good example of what accession to the European Union can bring'."

■ Jean-Louis Borloo is pushing the tram all the way to ... Belgium, La Voix du Nord, 1 June

"News announced yesterday by the minister himself in Valenciennes was nothing less than amazing. In September the tram will go as far as Denain. In 2010 it is expected to go as far as Vieux-Condé. In 2011, Jean-Louis Borloo promised, it will cross the border as far as Quiévrain."

■ A cross-border national park ?, Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 13 May

"A cross-border national park from the upper Rhine, covering the Rhine valley from one side to the other of the river, why not?"

■ Groundwater - Cross-border vigilance on pollutants, L'Alsace, 2 June

"After five years of work yesterday at Kehl, Alsace, Baden- Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate presented 28 common indicators to measure the quality of groundwater."

■ Switzerland. The number of workers from Franche-Comté has increased by 15%, L'Alsace, 20 May

"Whereas the number of people living on the borders has increased between 1998 and 2005 in the whole Swiss Jura Arc, according to a study conducted by the Trans-jurassic Statistics Centre, the Francs-Comtois have also taken advantage of this remarkable call for air. There are 15% more of them crossing the border every day."

■ River Agreement: the connection to the Swiss network is moving forward, Le Progrès, 27 May

"The wastewater treatment plants at l'Allondon and Journans are currently being connected to the Geneva network. The aim: to preserve l'Allondon from pollution."

