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What are the challenges of cross-border cooperation in the Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice conurbation?

After Poland joined the Schengen space in December 2007, an event welcomed with great enthusiasm in the territory, rapid harmonisation of both the living conditions and the economic level on both sides of the border at a high standard has become a priority. Other than securing and creating attractive jobs, it is necessary to encourage young people to stay in the region. This fluctuation, still substantial, must be reversed, and to achieve this we must apply our determination to build an attractive cross-border territory.

The challenge thus lies in a common development strategy for the two towns, which must be prepared and backed jointly by the protagonists of the cross-border area.

The prospects for accomplishing this are encouraging: the launch of the Interreg IVA programme has released a considerable amount of European funding for cross-border projects. The Pro Europa Viadrina Euroregion brings together the competencies of the territory and is setting up a cross-border regional organisation. For example, it has been decided to pool the management of the German and Polish offices of this structure. In addition, following the Interreg IIIC project "City Twins Cooperation Network", Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice have become major components of the "City Twins" twin cities association. The latter was founded in 2006 and is now an active member of the EUROMOT European network.

Cultural and educational exchanges, and purchases and the use of services on either side of the border, motivated by price or quality differences, have become such a normal part of everyday life for the inhabitants that the border is scarcely perceived as such. Nevertheless the concept of a "European twin city" still generates a number of misgivings. We are trying to encourage acceptance through "flagship initiatives". To achieve this, bringing the inhabitants, the businesses and the institutions of the territory with us on the path of this "European city" remains a great challenge.

The Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice conurbation

Before the Second World War, Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice formed a single German town, divided by the river Oder. In 1945, the "Dammvorstadt" district, the Eastern part of the river, became an autonomous Polish town, Słubice, and the Oder, as major commercial waterway, a State frontier.

Located 80 km east of Berlin, this cross-border conurbation has a population of 80,000 (75% on the German side and 25% on the Polish side). Cross-border cooperation is a challenge and a very important symbol for these two towns, separated for so long by history. In 1991 a first declaration of partnership was signed, marking the determination of the two towns to cooperate. The same year the university Europa Viadrina was established in Frankfurt (Oder), and two years later the Collegium Polonicum in Słubice and the Pro Europa Viadrina Euroregion. Since 1993 a common municipal council meets once a year and joint committees are active. The "structural concept 1994", the "strategy 2003" and more recently* a new agreement between the two towns bore witness to the strengthening of the cooperation and the willingness of the elected representatives to put the seal on a genuine "joint vision of the future".

The experience provided by other cross-border regions was a great help in the organisation of the cooperation between the German and Polish authorities and town councillors. This has proved its worth over the years in a targeted manner and a citizen-centred approach. It has thus been possible to develop strategic partnerships. Several Interreg IVA projects were submitted at the first meeting of the monitoring committee, and in parallel several working groups are developing the joint "vision of the future" while also preparing new cross-border projects. The establishment of a German-Polish skills centre on the border will for example provide



accommodation for the offices of the Euroregion and of other partners.

Examples of projects

In a planned joint marketing office, working in partnership with the Frankfurt tourism association, German and Polish staff will develop communication and ensure maximum visibility of the "Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice European twin city" 'brand', both in-house and aimed at the general public. For this purpose they will take into consideration the five pillars of "Citizen and City" marketing: tourism, culture, science, administration, regional development and the economy. Practical measures aiming to establish this joint identity will be developed and assessed.

Other examples that can be mentioned include joint promotion of the economy and joint searching for investors, cooperation between ports along the Oder, and the setting-up of a German-Polish consumer information centre.

* On 19 November 2008, at the launch conference of the URBACT "EGTC" project on the governance of cross-border conurbations, in which Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice is a partner. Further information at <http://urbact.eu/egtc>.

The Consorcio Bidasoa-Txingudi is renewed

On 23 December 2008, ten years after the signature of the cross-border cooperation convention which governed the establishment of the Consorcio Bidasoa-Txingudi in the Basque country, the mayors of Irun, Hondarribia and Hendaye signed a new convention which renews the French-Spanish structure for a ten-year period.

In this cross-border area with 85,000 inhabitants, the introduction of the Consorcio has set up a concrete legal framework linking the three municipalities of Irun, Hondarribia and Hendaye.

This framework has enabled them to cooperate actively and implement a number of projects in areas including culture, tourism, transport, sport and the environment.

The primary objective of the Consorcio for the next ten years is to improve the management of traffic flows and journeys. A tramway between Hondarribia and Irun is in preparation. The other priorities concern the cleanup of Txingudi bay (it is silting up, leading to pollution risks), rail-road freight transport between France and Spain and the Paris-Madrid high-speed rail line.



The Saar, in front of the Sarreguemines casino

The SaarMoselle Eurodistrict

The SaarMoselle territory on the French-German border encompasses a population of more than 1.1 million. Cooperation arrangements were initiated more than 10 years ago by the association "Zukunft SaarMoselle Avenir", a member of the MOT network. It has resulted in the completion of a number of cross-border projects. Today the local elected representatives want to go further in the structuring of the cross-border territory and have undertaken the establishment of a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC).

The urban community of Saarbrücken and the municipalities of north-eastern Moselle (Forbach, Saint-Avold, Freyming-Merlebach, Sarreguemines, etc.) form a cross-border conurbation of more than 600,000 inhabitants. Between the German and French sides the economic challenges are similar (conversion of former mining and industrial areas), the common culture is based on bilingualism and the border is crossed by substantial flows of border workers. The French side comprises several medium-sized towns which are experiencing restructuring and have implemented an active policy of attracting new industry. But Saarbrücken, which has the majority of the work and the people, is changing rapidly and has a high potential for provision of high-quality services to businesses. The principal challenge at cross-border level is thus to find a better balance either side of the border.

Today the border obstacles are being reduced thanks to strong political determination of the local elected representatives and a common identity that is developing through economic interdependence between SMEs, growing cultural relations and the bilingualism of part of the French population. Over ten years a number of cross-border projects have been completed and reinforce this feeling of belonging to a common territory. They cover areas such as economic development, water, training, transport (tram-train between Sarreguemines and Saarbrücken) and culture.

Towards the establishment of an EGTC

On 5 May 2004 the municipalities and intermunicipal structures of the territory signed a resolution defining the objectives for the formation of a Eurodistrict. In September 2007 the partners commissioned the MOT to conduct a legal operational assistance assignment for the Eurodistrict, following which, in September 2008, the elected representatives adopted the principle of the establishment of an EGTC. This project is positioned in the broader context of the development of a "vision of the future" for the whole of the territory, a cross-border development concept implemented between 2006 and 2008 organised around "master projects" intended for the citizens.

Bearing the name "Eurodistrict SaarMoselle", the objective of the EGTC will be to organise the governance, move towards a more ambitious territory project and federate the previous cooperation arrangements (association, Eurodistrict, metropolitan area cooperation). Another objective is to affirm the binational dimension of the Saar metropolitan area and change its image (upgrading of the river Saar and the forested spaces, research and projects on new energies, setting-up of a cross-border public transport system, etc.). The EGTC will continue to guide and coordinate a number of projects, for example in the area of health (establishment of a platform for discussion and management of cross-border emergencies) or in the area of tourism and culture (setting-up of the industrial heritage route). Projects such as the establishment of an Infobest centre or increasing exchanges of child-care centre and nursery school personnel are also under discussion. These initiatives could be backed directly by the new structure, which will have a high European profile and substantial flexibility in the definition of its organisation and its operating procedures. The establishment of the EGTC, currently in progress, is due to be completed in Autumn 2009 after the municipal and regional elections to be held in Saar between June and August.

Note: The study conducted by the MOT is available to MOT members on request.

EUROMOT meets DG REGIO

Michel Delebarre, in his position as President of the MOT and on behalf of EUROMOT, met **Danuta Hübner**, European Commissioner for regional policy, during the forum on territorial cohesion on 31 October 2008 in Paris. The objective of this meeting was to discuss future cooperation between EUROMOT and the European Commission on all questions relating to local cross-border cooperation and on the ways to encourage local governance and consideration of the cross-border situation at local level in the processes of European territorial cooperation. Subsequently a technical meeting on the ways and means of this cooperation was organised on 28 January in Brussels. It was also an opportunity to discuss the question of the EUROMOT contribution to the green paper on territorial cohesion.

EGTC URBACT project

The next seminar of the EGTC project will take place on 12 March in Chaves, Portugal, on the internal governance of cross-border conurbations. Further information: <http://urbact.eu/egtc>
The minutes of the project launch conference (19/11/08 in Strasbourg) is also online at the same website.

At the MOT



Hans-Günther Clev joined the MOT team in January 2009 as Deputy Director-general. He was previously

Director-general of the Rhineland-Palatinate development Agency (DE).

Press review

- **"Waste in action": a France (Manche) - England (East Sussex) cross-border project**, NewsPress, 9 January
"The objective of this French-British training programme offered by the CNFPT [...] and the University of Brighton is to enable French and English local government personnel working in waste management or the environment to acquire greater in-depth [...] experience..."
- **Establishment of a cross-border cluster for textiles used in healthcare**, L'Usine Nouvelle, 6 January
"The worlds of textiles and French-Walloon health are coming together in a proposal to establish a European cross-functional biotextile cluster. It will guide textile SMEs in research on innovative products for the healthcare field..."
- **Luxembourg and Lorraine are going to develop public transport for border workers**, AFP, 8 January
"On Thursday in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg and Lorraine presented a 'cross-border mobility scheme' (Smot) aiming to increase from 10% at present to 25% by 2030 the proportion of Lorraine residents working in the Grand Duchy who travel by train and bus..."
- **Launching of an RER regional express network between France and Switzerland in Geneva**, Les Echos, 16 January
"Pending the scheduled 2014 completion of work on the new rail link between Geneva and Annemasse, the Ceva, the authorities presented an RER service that will connect the whole of the Lemman basin..."
- **Health Council: doubts about cross-border healthcare**, Europe Information Service, 8 January
"The public debate on the draft directive concerning cross-border healthcare, at the Health Council on 16 December, revealed the divergences [...]. The fear of losing national competences in the healthcare area is one of the major problems for many States..."