MOT general assembly in Collioure

The twelfth Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) general assembly was attended by almost 100 participants on 11 June 2009 in Collioure, within the Catalan cross-border area.

Invited by the Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales and the Generalitat de Catalunya, MOT members, network members and partners, and representatives of many cross-border territories in Europe were able to share and discuss the projects and objectives of the MOT and EUROMOT. For the first time the general assembly was chaired by the new MOT president, Michel Delabarre, elected at the previous general assembly in 2008. Local political representatives present included Christian Bourquin, president of the Conseil Général des Pyrénées-Orientales, and Margarida Aritzeta-Abad, deputy director of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

Jacques Houbart, MOT director since its establishment in 1997, announced to all the members his retirement with effect from 30 June 2009. A new director-general has been appointed by the Bureau: Dr. Hans-Günter Clev (see interview in the column to the left). The general assembly also elected a new treasurer, Marthe Steffann (Caisse des Dépôts), who succeeds Jean-Marc Garnier.

This 2009 general assembly was also the opportunity to welcome eight new members to the network: the Communauté de Communes Pyrénées-Cerdagne, the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the Agence d’Urbanisme Nord Lorraine (AGAPE), the Association du Sillon Lorrain, the municipal councils of Thionville and of Villefranche-sur-Mer, Yvelia Transport, and lastly the Association for the territorial and urbanzone development of Medgidia (Rumania/Bulgaria border). The MOT network now has 56 members, including two on borders not involving France.

To guide this opening-up to Europe, the MOT Bureau has decided to set up a working group tasked with examining this development, particularly in terms of services rendered to members. An initial proposal is expected by the end of 2009. This group is open to any member of the network which wishes to participate*

Within the framework of the services reserved for members, the launching of an extranet, intended to encourage exchanges within the network, was also presented. New resources available on line on the extranet and accessible only to members include documents relating to MOT bodies and the network, a legal collection consisting of practical information sheets and border information sheets, full text of MOT studies, and electronic press reviews on developments in cross-border cooperation.

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Conference in Figueres

In the context of its general assembly, MOT organized a conference on 10 June in Figueres on the topic “Local cross-border cooperation in the future European territorial cohesion policy”.

In the first session, three accounts of cross-border sites (the Frankfurt on Oder/Subice conurbation, the Catalan cross-Border area and the Ister-Granum Euroregion) highlighted the importance of relations with the local population in the setting-up of cross-border governance. Innovative experiments, for example in cooperation project funding, were also presented.

A round-table discussion then brought together representatives of the various levels involved in cross-border cooperation. On one hand, local partners (regional and local levels) emphasized the need to introduce more practical tools, more appropriate for local situations, at national and European levels in order to facilitate project development. For its part, the European Commission underlined the wish for a strong European commitment to local cooperation. And at national level (represented by France and the Netherlands) the emphasis was placed on the usefulness of setting up instruments for observation of cross-border territories to improve communication of needs in the field to the legislators. The example of a “task force” developed in the Netherlands and tasked with systematic communication of cross-border problems to the national level (upstream of decision-making) was cited as an innovative experiment.
Conference on the future of Frankfurt-Słubice 2020

Last 4 to 6 June, as part of the URBACT "EGTC" ("Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations") project, a conference on the future of Frankfurt-Słubice 2020, involving the local population, was held in Słubice, on the German-Polish border.

The URBACT "EGTC" project, with MOT as lead partner, was launched in October 2008. It concerns the governance of cross-border conurbations and the sharing of good practices between them. One of the objectives of this project is to produce a local action plan for each of the partner conurbations. This local action plan consists in analyzing the needs and the ambitions of each cross-border conurbation in order to draft practical proposals for improving its system of governance.

This was the context of the conference on the future of Frankfurt-Słubice 2020 - the purpose of which was in fact to contribute to the drawing-up of this local action plan. During a little over two days, 150 participants divided into various working groups (administration, politics, economy, society, culture and education, research and training) imagined the cross-border conurbation as it might be in 2020. Dr. Hans-Günther Clev, the new MOT director-general, and Jean Rubio, MOT mission officer, took part, in particular in the "politics" and "society" working groups.

At the conclusion of this forward-looking exercise, the most highly-appreciated project was the "Viadrina cross-border urban republic", the main feature of which is to present a highly voluntaristic and integrating vision of the cross-border conurbation, in which the two towns of Frankfurt/Oder and Słubice appear as a single city, with several bilingual schools, integrated public transport (trams), public facilities (cycle tracks), joint social centres and a joint employment agency.

Two major lessons can be drawn from this forward-looking exercise:

- First of all, the very marked determination of the local leaders to involve the civil society in the process of forming the cross-border conurbation. This determination, which was the main driving force behind the organization of the conference, will be incorporated into the local action plan. Moreover, the political leaders of the cross-border conurbation also wish to emphasize the importance of this participative approach at the next URBACT seminar, planned for the end of the year in Lille, which will be devoted to this topic.
- The other important lesson concerns the determination of the inhabitants and the politicians to construct a genuine cross-border identity for the territory: common name, website, joint information centre, joint marketing organization (in the form of an EGTC), and more. In addition, the question of bilingualism stood out as one of the major concerns of the participants.

1 http://urbact.eu/egtc
2 For further information about the Frankfurt/Oder-Słubice cross-border conurbation: http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu/
3 The six partner conurbations of "EGTC" project are: Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, Frankfurt/Oder-Słubice cross-border conurbation, Europiddade Chaves-Verin, Ister-Gronum EGTC, Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau, Basle Trinational Eurodistrict.