



Ex-Post Evaluation - INTERREG III 2000-2006

PROGRAMME: INTERREG III A Czech Republic-Poland

Czech and Polish media cooperation: "Let's get to know each other"

Project Good Practice Study

Project study: Czech and Polish media cooperation: "Let's get to know each other"

1. General Information

Keywords: Mass media, Culture.

Regions: Olomoucki and Moravsko-Sliezsky Regions, Czech Republic; Śląski Region, Poland (twin project).

Strand: INTERREG III Strand A

Programme: INTERREG III A Czech Republic-Poland

Duration: 7/2005-11/2007

Funding: The project had a total budget of €298,000 of which €222,801 (75%) was funded by ERDF and the remainder by the own resources of the project partners.

Partners: The project ("Let's Get To Know Each Other") was implemented by the Ostrava branch of Czech Television, in cooperation with the Katowice branch of Polish Television. The twin project ("The Border That Bonds") was implemented by the Katowice branch of Polish Television in cooperation with Ostrava branch of Czech Television.

2. Project Aim

The ultimate goal of the project was to overcome prejudice and break down barriers between the Czechs and Poles, by informing them about the various social, cultural, economic and political attributes of the two neighbouring countries, and in so going, educating them about the region. It sought to achieve this by encouraging cooperation between regional public TV stations on each side of the border, in this case, the Ostrava branch of Czech Television and the Katowice branch of Polish Television.

3. Project Description

The partners set out to create and then broadcast joint programmes, targeting audiences of local residents in the border regions of Poland and the Czech Republic. Through these programmes the project partners planned to disseminate information about the neighbouring region in an effort to foster greater mutual understanding from the local population. The idea was thus to use television as a means to improve relations in the long-term. Each of the TV stations planned to produce a year-long series of short programmes, as well as to put together their own web page about the project.

The project (and the twin project) consisted of filming and broadcasting regular weekly television programmes: 52 episodes of about 20 minutes each produced by each of the TV stations. The programmes provided insight into the neighbouring country and, specifically, the border region in a serious, informative and educational way, but while using an engaging and entertaining format. All programmes were developed in close cooperation with journalists from both countries.

The programmes were recorded by the TV stations both in their own regions and across the border. Wide-ranging topics were addressed by the programmes. Firstly, there were economic issues, such as the effects of introducing the euro, cross-border trade and the

possibilities of setting up and operating businesses in the neighbouring country, or indeed throughout the cross-border region. Secondly, some episodes addressed labour market issues such as rules and regulations, and the possibility of employing workers from the neighbouring country. Thirdly, legal issues were examined, including the effects of Schengen Agreement and how to go about purchasing property (real estate) across the border. Fourth, there was good provision of cultural information about what was going on in the border region, particularly joint Polish–Czech concerts, exhibitions and organised events. Fifth, some episodes provided insight into tourist attractions, monuments, days out, and regional cuisine in Poland and the Czech Republic. Finally, there was good sports coverage, including features on the favourite national sports of each country, regional sports teams, sports history and national heroes.

4. Political and Strategic Context

Despite the small distance between both cities, (Ostrava and Katowice are just of 100 kilometres apart) cooperation between the two TV stations was very limited. On the one side of the border, Polish Television in Katowice traditionally prepared very few programmes about relations with the Czechs and the Polish–Czech region. However, these programmes were infrequent and had low budgets. Moreover, they were shown at times when audiences were relatively small (not 'prime time' viewing) and did not cover themes that necessarily most appealed to viewers. On the other side of the border, the television station in Ostrava did have a small Polish team supporting its news unit to prepare material in Polish, but this was mainly targeted at the Polish minority living on the Czech side of the border (approx. 50,000 people).

Historically, relations between both countries have been difficult, especially in the border regions concerned. The Zaolzie region, today part of the Czech Republic, has a considerable Polish minority. In fact, the current president of the European Parliament, Mr. Jerzy Buzek, was born here. Both countries have made claims to the region in the past. After World War I the region became Czech, before becoming part of Poland under rather controversial circumstances as the result of Hitler's partition of Czechoslovakia in October 1938. After World War II it rejoined Czechoslovakia once again.

Relations between the two nations deteriorated after Polish troops invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Maintaining contacts between both countries became even more difficult after 1980 with the beginning of the Polish Solidarity movement. The Czech Communist government feared the movement's potential influence on the country. There was close cooperation, however, between the opposition groups in both countries, particularly between Polish and Czechoslovakian Solidarity supporters. After 1989 relations improved considerably, though contact between ordinary citizens was limited.

5. Project Implementation

Ostrava Television had previously expressed an interest in establishing cooperation with the Polish media but it was only with the INTERREG IIIA programme that it seemed possible. The project was essentially a Czech initiative, though the original stimulus was actually provided by the Polish Consul in Ostrava, which informed Czech journalists about the INTERREG programme and encouraged them to prepare a project. Ostrava Television then appointed a team responsible for projects' preparation. The team contacted Polish journalists and, at a meeting in Katowice, convinced them that such collaboration would be beneficial. Katowice Television went on to appoint a 'twin team' and both teams started cooperating.

Technically, in terms of legal issues and finance, two separate projects were approved. Practically, however, in the process of preparing and implementing the projects, there was intensive communication and cooperation between both partners. The very nature of the project, which involved researching issues across the border and then going out to film episodes, demanded close collaboration between staff of the TV stations and administrators from both regions.

Both the Ostrava and Katowice TV channels produced 52 episodes each. The Polish channel only produced a Polish-language version of the programme, whereas Czech channel produced all parts in a bilingual version (Czech language with Polish subtitles) since it was eager to attract Polish-language viewers living in the Czech border region. All episodes prepared as part of the project were made available on the Internet on the project's webpage.

At the outset the partners agreed which topics they wished to cover in the episodes and the order by which they would be made and broadcasted. Due attention was paid to creating a logical sequence with a clear thread. Polish and Czech coordinators were appointed on both sides who, in order to ensure smooth implementation, held regular monthly meetings, often attended by the TV channel directors themselves. The project started and finished with press conferences jointly prepared and attended by representatives from both national teams.

The Czech programmes were aired as part of the regional edition of the morning news in its cultural section, as well as in the channel's digital TV programming. The project's programmes were thus viewed not only regionally but also nationwide. In addition, they were made available on-line via the Ostrava Television website. By contrast, the Polish programmes prepared by the Katowice television were aired during prime time scheduling at 6.50 p.m. every Wednesday, capturing audiences in the wider Katowice region.

6. Project results

The programmes were undoubtedly very popular, reaching a wide audience both geographically and demographically, as evidenced from the phone calls made and emails sent by viewers to the TV channel. Programmes dedicated to tourism were most popular among the TV audience. Czech viewers were informed about the most important characteristics of the border regions and other regions in Poland. For instance, the programme on Polish vineyards and wine production was of huge interest to Czech viewers. As a result, this may encourage Czech tourism in Poland. The programmes prepared by Katowice Television were similarly popular with Polish audiences and are expected to have positive effects.

Regular audience surveys conducted by Ostrava Television showed that the "Let's Get to Know Each Other" project raised huge interest, as confirmed by the numerous visits logged to the project's website. The same applied for the Polish part of the project, Katowice's audience surveys providing valuable feedback on programme content. The project team used this evaluation information as it went along, to choose further topics to cover in its subsequent programmes. This brought an interactive dimension to the project with the audience clearly influencing programme content based on its preferences.

Human and social capital benefits of the project included stronger professional contacts and networking between TV professionals from Ostrava and Katowice, and closer personal relations between partners. The Czechs expressed a strong will to continue

working together with colleagues from the Polish channel. A new joint project with a partner from Lower Silesia is now underway. Journalists from Ostrava want to extend this cooperation along the entire Polish–Czech borderline. Wrocław Television, with its extensive network coverage, seems the best partner in this ambitious project. The management of Ostrava Television is looking for to establish tri-lateral cooperation with Polish and Slovakian Television in the future.

7. Conclusions

Both the Czech “Let’s Get to Know Each Other” project and its twin Polish project “A Border That Bonds” significantly enhanced knowledge among the local communities along the border about the economic, social and cultural situation in the neighbouring region. The project promoted the assets of cross-border regions and contributed to reducing stereotypes, prejudice and bias.

The success of the Czech “Let’s Get to Know Each Other” project and its twin Polish project “A Border That Bonds” can be attributed to the fact that the partners effectively gauged viewers’ needs during the process of actually implementing these projects. As such, their content was adapted to satisfy audience preferences. In addition, the TV staff from both regions worked very closely to research the content of programming to make it as interesting and entertaining as possible.