



**Ex-Post Evaluation – INTERREG III 2000-2006**

**PROGRAMME: INTERREG III A Latvia-Lithuania-  
Belarus**

**Art Without Borders**

**Project Good Practice Study**

## **Project study: Art Without Borders**

### **1. General Information**

**Keywords:** Art, Daugavpils, Vitebsk, culture, heritage

**Region:** Twin cities of Daugavpils and Vitebsk situated in the Latvian-Belarusian border region

**Programme strand:** INTERREG III A Priority South

**Duration:** 2006-2007

**Funding:** The project had a total budget of €182,521, of which €74,228 was funded through ERDF and €83,550 through Tacis. The remaining funds represented the national share in the project (co-financing).

**Lead partner:**

Daugavpils City Council, Vitebsk Municipality

### **2. Project Aims**

The 'Art Without Borders (AWB)' project sought to promote the better exploitation of the cultural heritage potential of the cross-border region by promoting activities and events linked to the renowned artists Mark Rothko and Marc Chagall. The twin towns of Daugavpils and Vitebsk situated in the Latvian-Belarusian border region are the birthplaces of these two painters. Among the specific objectives were: strengthening cooperation between municipalities; encouraging people to people interaction between local inhabitants living in Belarus and Latvia; better exploiting the tourism and cultural potential of the cross-border region; promoting greater understanding so as to overcome stereotypes about the different regions; and using art as a way of overcoming societal barriers between different countries.

### **3. Project Description**

The project promoted cross-border cultural heritage through various initiatives: developing publicity and a marketing campaign of art events in Latvia and Belarus; organising activities aimed at improving the cultural facilities of the cross-border region; and establishing a sustainable cooperation model based on durable cultural facilities for the development of cross-border art. The partners planned to hold joint workshops inviting experts and cultural and municipal specialists from 6 towns located in the cross-border region including, Daugavpils, Vitebsk, Zerasai, Utena, Visginas and Rokiski. The establishment of durable cultural facilities combined with public participation was the underlying driver behind the project's overall strategy. Through cultural networking activities, the project aimed to encourage social and cultural interaction and bring cross-border communities together.

A publicity and marketing campaign of art events in Latvia and Belarus was to be put together, to attract regional and international tourists. In order to reach a wider audience, the campaign would highlight the shared cultural heritage of Daugavpils and Vitebsk through the production of information and publicity materials about the project and through the use of local media, such as radio and newspapers. Furthermore, the project would refurbish key cultural/arts facilities such as museums and regional art

centres and would improve physical space to display a wider range of artists' work and to increase accessibility for visitors. In many cases, the redevelopment of buildings would be combined with new approaches to using limited art spaces. Together this would contribute to the regeneration of neglected areas in the cross-border towns.

#### **4. Political and Strategic Context**

One of the most urgent issues faced by the border areas of Latvia and Belarus is the relatively underdeveloped regional economy. Although AWB was implemented in an urban environment, Daugavpils and Vitebsk both suffer from similar socio-economic disadvantages associated with rural areas. These include relative geographic isolation, high levels of unemployment and problems concerning the ageing population.

In Belarus economic activity in general and the concentration of SMEs, in particular, is disproportionately oriented towards Minsk, the capital city and there is a high dependency on public sector employment in Vitebsk. There is however strong potential for the development of the tourism sector in the cross-border area due to its cultural heritage and in particular, the fact that the two towns were the birthplaces of highly regarded world-renowned artists. Despite this potential, tourism services and infrastructure are relatively underdeveloped and require further modernisation and investment.

The AWB project was carried out under the global objective of the INTERREG IIIA Priority South Programme to "Utilise cross-border cooperation so as to facilitate socio-economic development in the cross-border cooperation territory". The objective was especially important for cross-border regions in Latvia and Belarus, where durable cooperation models can have a strong impact on local tourism and regional branding. There was also a greater need to consider the wider impacts of physical infrastructure developments on the existing cultural industries of both cities. In the case of AWB, the development of local culture was assisted by encouraging the managing authorities and town municipalities to coordinate their activities both during the preliminary and implementation stages of the project.

#### **5. Project Implementation**

The project was implemented by two main partners, Daugavpils City Council (LV) and Vitebsk Municipality (BR). More actors were also involved in the implementation of project activities, such as cultural organisations and artists themselves. This was the first time that the Daugavpils and Vitebsk municipal authorities had designed and implemented a joint cultural project of a cross-border nature. Moreover, prior to the project's implementation, no significant cooperation existed between the two cities' administrations. The partners developed a close working relationship to implement the joint project activities, which has, in turn, greatly enhanced day-to-day communication between public officials from the two cross-border towns.

#### **6. Project Results**

The project created stronger networks of cultural actors and strengthened cooperation between local municipalities and city authorities in Latvia and Belarus. The project also improved the attractiveness of the region from a tourism perspective. A small number of jobs were generated as a direct result of the project. An increase in the number of tourists was also measured, i.e. number of overnight visits while project activities were

taking place. this was partly attributable to the project's contribution to the re-branding of the region, which encouraged socio-economic development.

The project made a strong contribution towards strengthening cross-border cooperation between relevant cultural actors both at a personal and inter-institutional level and promoting the development of cross-border cultural heritage and tourism, which had previously been under-exploited. For example, a number of exhibitions were held by the twin towns in the newly refurbished art galleries. The exhibitions provided opportunities for the local and regional media to highlight the project as a positive example of cross-border cooperation. There is evidence of the sustainability in terms of the types of activities supported through the project. Cultural events proved particularly popular. The connections made between artists, art schools and municipalities have been a long-lasting success in that, many of the project's events have continued without the provision of additional funding.

Furthermore, the successful networking and cooperation activities started through the AWB project will be used in the future to streamline the use of financial resources, including those of other EU programmes. Partners and stakeholders have also utilised the experiences gathered through the project to plan and implement further projects and to alleviate cross-community misconceptions in the region. The development of a Common Plan for the Implementation of Cross-Border Cultural Events 2008-2010 through the project is sought to provide a strategic framework for organising several art events in the region each year.

## **7. Conclusions**

Important lessons were learnt by the partners concerning specific administrative and bureaucratic issues surrounding planning and implementation, particularly with regards to Belarus. The project succeeded in raising cultural awareness and garnering political support for infrastructure projects in which the acquisition of technical knowledge and the sharing of good practices were among the main benefits. In addition, the project added value by establishing new communication and networking structures between project partners and participants, who joined in the collaborative art activities.

The discussions between project partners early on in the project implementation phase so as the development of a better understanding of one another's working methods and approaches guaranteed the success of the project. At the same time, the need to involve a wide range of actors — not only from public administrations but also small cultural sector organisations and artists themselves — was seen as important in ensuring that the activities themselves were successful and raised the attractiveness and visibility of the cross-border area.