



The French government has selected four areas for piloting '[reciprocity contracts](#)' between cities and their surrounding countryside. Local government officials and residents from both types of area get together and negotiate win-win partnerships and joint activities in areas of common concern such as employment, the environment and local services.

The City of Brest and the rural area of Centre-Ouest Bretagne have been working together to support innovative projects around health, energy, education and culture. To ensure success, the necessary governance and funding mechanisms have to be put in place.

Introduction

In 2015, France launched an experimental scheme to promote inter-municipal cooperation, called 'city-countryside reciprocity contracts' (in French: contrat de réciprocité ville-campagne).

This policy initiative stemmed from a two-years' national consultation process on rural challenges⁽¹⁾, which acknowledged the diversity of rural areas and sought to foster urban-rural linkages. Such a spatial planning approach requires a macro regional strategy that recognises the importance of a polycentric urban network to the development of areas linked to these metropolises, including small and medium-sized towns located nearby.

The aim is to close the gap between urban and rural areas by promoting win-win partnerships in areas such as:

1. environment and energy transition;
2. economic development;
3. quality of services;
4. administrative organisation.

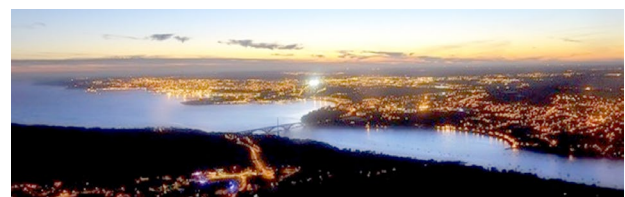
Four territorial partnerships were selected on a voluntary basis for the first round of experimentation. Here we examine the first partnership to officially sign a contract, in 2016, for the Brest metropolitan area and the Pays du Centre Ouest Bretagne.

The Context

Brest Métropole Océane is a harbour city of 207 000 inhabitants⁽²⁾, located on the Atlantic coast in the 'département'⁽³⁾ of Finistère, Brittany, western France. It is a maritime city, renowned for its research and development activities, and with a robust service sector. It has a younger population than in its surrounding rural areas⁽⁴⁾.

The Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne has a population of 97 000 inhabitants and has experienced a significant decline in productive employment since 2009, mainly due to an agro-food crisis, which had a severe impact on the milk sector.

Despite these difficulties in the conventional economy, local stakeholders have always been enthusiast proponents of community-led local development; the area has been involved in LEADER since as far back as 1992. Nowadays, the economic strategy of the Pays puts a strong focus on the circular economy in the wood sector, with several joint actions at local and sub-regional levels.



1 In French: Les Assises des Ruralités, an open forum that lasted two years (2014-2015), collecting the voices from rural stakeholders in order to co-design a strategic action plan for the future.

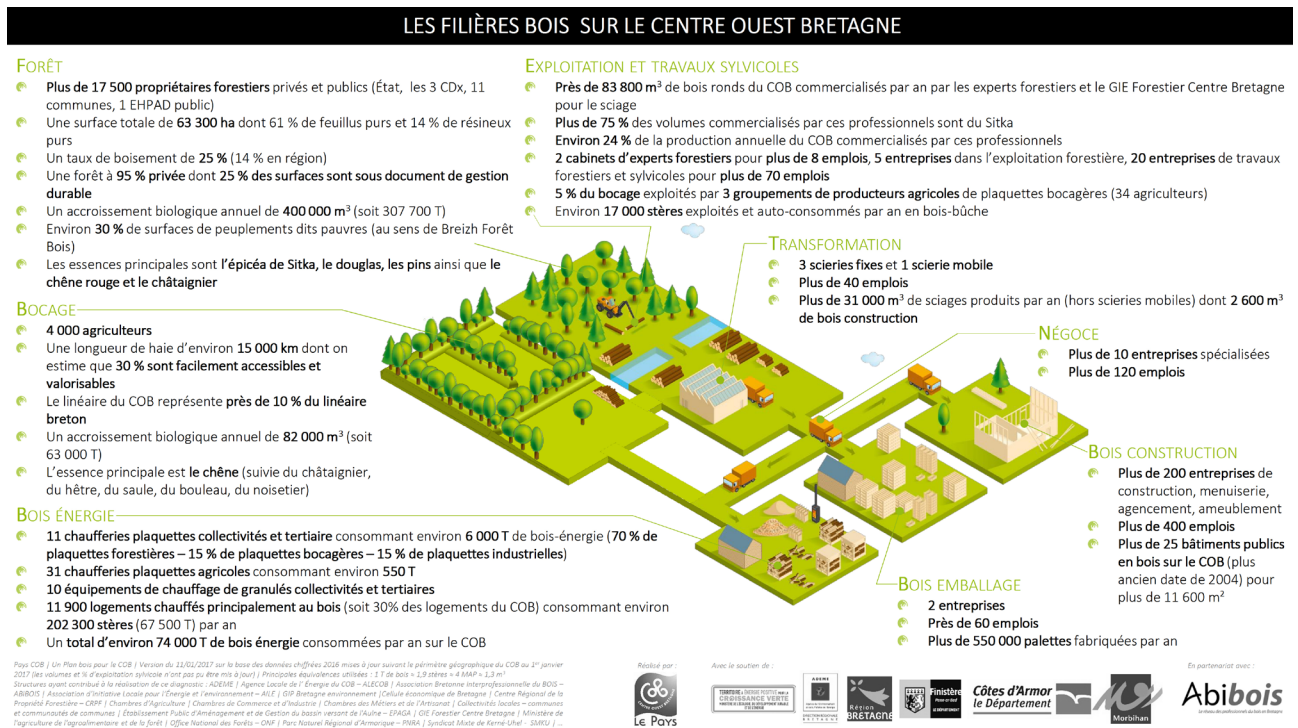
2 INSEE – 2014

3 Sub-regional administrative entity in France, NUTS 3 level.

4 24 % of the population aged between 15 and 29 years old, against 13 % in Pays du Centre Ouest Bretagne. Source: ADEUPA strategic diagnosis report – December 2015.

The graph below illustrates the value chain for the Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne, providing key figures for each component: forestry, chippings, biomass (energy), agro-forestry and the timber industry (processing, trading, building, packaging).

Figure 1. Value chain for the Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne



The rationale

For Brest, the rationale for engaging in a reciprocity contract is linked to the medium and long-term risk of losing competitiveness and attractiveness compared to the regional hub of Rennes.

The challenge is to secure jobs and services, while increasing the economic wellbeing of the city and its surroundings. The metropolitan area has already engaged in a territorial partnership with its western surroundings – known as Pays de Brest – and is now strengthening its northern connections with the Pays centre Ouest Bretagne through the reciprocity contract.

For the Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne, there were two motivating factors. The first was the risk of the area becoming a medical desert, even though the local maternity hospital of Carhaix successfully managed to survive after street demonstrations in 2008⁽⁵⁾. The second was the presence of a fast growing wood sector, seeking new markets and opportunities.

Co-designed priorities

The City of Brest and the rural area of Centre-Ouest Bretagne have been working together to support innovative projects around four main strands:

1. economic development;
2. social inclusion;
3. health, culture and services;
4. environment and energy transition.

Under each strand, local government officials and residents from both areas met 3-4 times in 2015 and negotiated win-win partnerships and joint activities to address areas of common concern. This bottom-up process was facilitated by the Brest-Bretagne urban planning agency⁽⁶⁾ and led to the development of a joint roadmap, which was formally adopted by the local assemblies before being signed with French government representatives in November 2016.

5 This event was widely covered by the press because pregnant women carried the resistance forward. In 2012, the film 'Bowling' uses this real story as a baseline for a social comedy. The small town of Carhaix is now famous for its maternity hospital.

6 ADEUPA – see www.adeupa-brest.fr

Despite the fact that the initial contract did not include any financial commitment, it did make provision for the addition of a new budget line in the multiannual framework contract agreed by the State and the regional authority of Brittany in 2017⁽⁷⁾, leading to a public grant of €2 million for the 2015-2020 period. There is also potential to seek European Structural and Investment Funds, especially since Brittany is one of the few regional authorities to have retained the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) scheme in France.

First operational outcomes

One year after the signing of the contract, three main areas of activity are already showing tangible results: the audiovisual sector, the healthcare sector and the energy wood industry.

Audiovisual cluster

Since 2006, the small village of Mellionec has been hosting a festival of documentary film, organised by a local NGO called 'Ty films', which is Breton for small movies.

The project has grown over the years and Ty films now has 9 full-time-equivalent employees and many other all your round activities, such as a residence for filmmakers, and educational workshops for young people between the ages of 12 and 17.



In 2016, the village was elected the 'Regional hub for documentary film' by the regional authority of Brittany, and since 2017, the Bachelors Degree and Masters of Documentary Films at the University of Bretagne Occidentale includes in its curriculum, four weeks of 'field work' hosted by the NGO Ty Films.

Healthcare

Healthcare has been a priority for the rural area for many years. In 2004, a first territorial assessment was conducted in order to map the area's needs and optimise the services offered by surroundings cities. The hospital of Carhaix⁽⁸⁾, the area's main urban centre, is 70 km from Brest. In 2008, the hospital's maternity unit was threatened with closure.

A campaign launched by local pregnant women succeeded in averting the closure, leading to a merger agreement with the University hospital of Brest. With the reciprocity contract, healthcare services provided by Brest hospital are also made available to the rural area of Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne through, for example, specialists' outpatient consultations and a mobile MRI scanner.

Figure 2. The Carhaix hospital is now a satellite of the Brest university hospital



Free evening talks called 'Health Mondays'⁽⁹⁾ are organised once a month at the Brest hospital and broadcasted to the Carhaix hospital. Specialist physicians make presentations and reply to questions on various topics such as the link between respiratory illness and air quality, the surgical treatment of obesity or how to prevent, recognise and react in case of stroke.

With regard to higher education and vocational training, things are also moving forward. Since April 2016, career training is provided for 20 students every year in Carhaix, as an additional element of the Brest curriculum⁽¹⁰⁾. The Brest faculty of dentistry is also adding a satellite course in Carhaix for its 2018-2019 academic programme. Furthermore, the SPICES research project, cofounded by the European CORDIS programme⁽¹¹⁾, and coordinated by the Brest University Hospital, is including the Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne as a test-bed for a comprehensive cardio-vascular disease (CVD) prevention and control programme. Five settings are to be examined: a rural and semi-urban community in a low-income country (Uganda), a middle income country (South Africa), and vulnerable groups in three high-income countries (Belgium, France and United Kingdom).

7 In French : Contrat de Plan Etat-Région 2015-2020.

8 The urban area of Carhaix represents 14 136 inhabitants (INSEE 2014).

9 In French: Les lundis de la santé – see programme for February to June 2017 here.

10 In French : Institut de Formation des Aides-Soignantes (IFAS)

11 http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/207230_fr.html - Budget €6 millions, duration 5 years.

Bioenergy

The Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne has a high level of afforestation, with 25 % of the area covered by forests, and 15 000 km of hedgerows. Its annual production potential is estimated at 120 000 tonnes.

The 'Local Wood Hub' project, co-funded by INTERREG⁽¹²⁾, and involving two English partners, examined how the forest resource could be better utilised. This led to the creation of a wood energy cluster, bringing together all the local timber industry businesses. The engineering resources of urban and rural agencies have also been shared, leading to the creation of a common platform for energy performance in public lighting and eco-building. Since early 2017, three local trucks laden with wood chips⁽¹³⁾ leave the rural area every day to feed a biomass power station in Brest, substantially reducing the city's CO₂ emissions. The following graph provides some key figures of this business model.



Learning from reciprocity

Things have progressed in a step-by-step way and the list of projects now underway is impressive (around 30); from soft networking activities to more ambitious initiatives.

To ensure success, the necessary governance structure has to be put in place and facilitated by technical staff, who monitor progress over time, identifying pitfalls and ensuring good information flows between all stakeholders.

The fact that the Brest urban planning agency has taken on this responsibility is a major asset, and by extending and sharing its engineering resources to the rural area of Pays Centre Ouest Bretagne, it will certainly help to support future territorial convergence.

Financial commitments stemming from the region and State, and increased by EU funding, are also an important success factor, as local finance is scarce: the French subnational levels are responsible for only 20.5 % of public expenditures⁽¹⁴⁾. The ITI component has not yet been activated at the time of writing this article (November 2017) but there is room here for innovative proposals to be supported.

The French government reports that dozens of French rural areas are interested in applying for an urban-rural reciprocity contract. The initial pairing is an essential success factor, but it cannot rely only on political alliances. Closing the gap between rural and urban areas, designing a shared vision with an explicit long-term development strategy is not an academic desktop exercise: it is something dynamic to be reinvented as often as required with local communities.

References

Note bene: most of the references are in French, unless otherwise indicated.

- The Reciprocity contract in a nutshell: [overcoming the rural-urban gap](#), CGET News, November 2016.
- OECD regional outlook 2016 (English): [productive regions for inclusive societies](#) (p.212)
- ADEUPA (Brest urban development agency): [Towards a reciprocity contract between Brest Metropole and Pays centre Ouest Bretagne: strategic diagnosis](#), December 2015.
- The signed reciprocity contract: www.adeupa-brest.fr/system/files/publications/2016_contrat-reciprocite-signe.pdf

12 www.keep.eu/keep/project-ext/26663/Local%20Wood%20Hub - EU funding €150 000 – Duration 2013-2015.

13 The current supplier is BECOB, a local firm.

14 www.oecd.org/cfe/regional-policy/regional-outlook-2016-france.pdf