Structural policies and European territory
Cooperation without frontiers

European Commission
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Preface

The border regions in Europe have long borne the stamp of the continent’s history: traditionally isolated from the capital cities, these regions often symbolised the divisions of the old continent and were at the centre of territorial disputes that tore Europe apart.

European construction has helped change the status of these areas. The elimination of economic frontiers within the European Union and freedom of movement have given the border regions new opportunities for cooperation that go beyond national limits. European regional policy is particularly focused on limiting the ‘frontier effects’, and a specific Community initiative, Interreg, is devoted to cooperation between regions on either side of national borders.

As an elected official for the last 26 years in Savoy, a region sharing borders with Piedmont and the Val d’Aosta in Italy, I am particularly aware of the importance of cooperative actions between neighbours of different countries. Despite differences of culture, language or administrative and legal systems, we have succeeded together, with Europe’s support, in setting up joint projects for the benefit of those living on either side of the border between France and Italy.

With Europe’s enlargement, a new challenge is facing the border regions in certain Member States of the current Union and the neighbouring regions of the applicant countries. This fundamental geopolitical change in Europe requires sound preparation and explains why, even before their accession, cooperation actions have begun across the borders with the applicant countries. Specific financial support intended for the applicant countries was introduced with the creation of the ‘cross-border cooperation’ strand of the Phare programme. More recently, these actions received a boost with a special programme of cross-border action adopted by the Commission in 2001, at the initiative of Gunter Verheugen and myself. Additional means and special attention will further help to promote integration and to maximise the advantages of enlargement.

The inclusion of these new borders and the continuation of cooperation between regions in Europe, which is bearing its fruit, are at the heart of the great debate that I launched in 2001 on the future of cohesion policy in Europe.

In the context of this debate, it is essential to show that after more than 10 years of Interreg’s existence this cooperation is useful. The projects presented in this brochure are proof of this usefulness and of the willingness of the regions in the whole of Europe to exchange their best practices, to become better acquainted with one another, to work together and to manage projects jointly. In doing so, these regions have added great value to the European Union. Of all these experiences, the projects selected are those that have achieved the most, are the most innovative and perhaps the most exciting.

Michel Barnier
European Commissioner responsible for regional policy and reform of the institutions
Cross-border and transnational cooperation

The border regions represent 40% of the territory of the European Union and account for 25% of its population (1). Their development is a key factor of European integration and economic and social cohesion. Considerable progress has been made there these past few years since the introduction of the single market, the economic and monetary union and thanks to cross-border cooperation and regional development programmes.

The regions lying along the internal borders of the Union, meaning the borders between the 15 Member States, make up a heterogeneous group that accounts for 27% of EU territory and 18% of the population. Here we find what in European regional policy are defined as priority areas (the so-called ‘Objective 1 areas’ of the Structural Funds (2)), for example, the thinly populated areas of northern Sweden and Finland or the rural areas of the southern part of the border between Portugal and Spain. There are also urbanised cores of traditional industry on the borders between the Benelux countries and with Germany.

The regions lying along the Union’s external borders are, for the most part, among the least-favoured regions and a large number of them benefit from Objective 1 assistance under the Structural Funds. For example, in certain regions of Germany, near Poland, the unemployment rate is twice as high as the European average. There are, however, some exceptions: in the Italian regions adjacent to the Slovenian border, this rate is half the European average.

The border regions are also experiencing specific difficulties linked to their peripheral nature, to a low-density population (75 inhabitants per square kilometre on average in the border regions compared with 145 in the rest of the Union), to natural handicaps (mountain or coastal areas) and to more limited transport infrastructure. In addition to these disadvantages, there is a lack of coherence in the management of cross-border ecosystems — water and air know no boundaries.

In today’s Europe of the euro and the single market, no region can consider its development from a strictly national perspective. To ensure its future, a region has to take into account not only neighbouring regions but also those further afield and must cooperate at the cross-border, transnational and interregional level. Transport policies, management of the environment and natural resources or the availability of services of public interest and technologies have consequences that go well beyond borders and that have major repercussions on regional development.

In the future, regions currently located outside the EU’s borders will be part of the single market and will experience considerable differences in development in relation to the regions of today’s 15 Member States. At the same time, new regions outside the enlarged Europe, even less favoured than those of today, will share borders with the Union (the planned enlargement will create 15 new external borders and nine internal borders).

(1) The border regions are defined as NUTS 3 areas (see glossary).
(2) Structural Funds and priority objectives (see glossary).
Cross-border and transnational cooperation
Cooperation without frontiers

Cross-border projects: the challenge of joint management

Cooperation without frontiers is a difficult and rarely spontaneous process. For a long time, the authorities and structures concerned, at different levels of government and power, were not used to working together. Even when the mutual prejudices inherited from the past are done away with, there still remain major obstacles that need to be overcome. These have to do with differences in political institutions, administrative systems and procedures, legal structures and provisions, technical and environmental standards. In addition to these, of course, are differences in language and culture as well as physical obstacles like mountains, rivers and the sea.

European financial aid for cooperation between border areas began in the 1970s in regions located along the Rhine, between the Benelux countries, France and Germany. It gradually developed as links grew closer between European countries and more and more States joined the Union.

The Interreg Community initiative was launched in 1990. What made it special was that European grants did not necessarily have to be awarded separately to States or regions but could be allocated to specific cross-border structures like, for example, the ‘Euroregions’ or ‘Euregios’ (between Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Luxembourg and France).

One of the most important aspects of cooperation without frontiers is the ‘multiplier effect’ that it produced, the energies that it mobilised and the experience gained from it. Some 10 years after Interreg’s implementation, the overall success of cooperation is obvious.

However, difficulties remain in defining common strategies and achieving practical coordination, particularly with regard to legal or financial aspects. Thus the main challenge today is that of setting up genuinely common and integrated structures of cooperation to manage programmes that have been developed and implemented together.

A series of European tools at the service of cooperation without frontiers

To ensure that border regions are competitive and to help them benefit from the opportunities of cross-border cooperation, the Union offers a whole series of tools. In the least-favoured areas, the major objectives of regional policy, pursued with the financial support of the Structural Funds, take account of the specific geographical situation of the border areas. In particular, the Interreg Community initiative aims to lessen the ‘border effect’, to encourage an integrated development of cross-border areas and to...
Cross-border and transnational cooperation

Cooperation without frontiers

European regional planning: coordinating policies

In May 1999, the Member States adopted a European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) with a view to providing the different national and regional officials with a European tool for regional planning and with guidelines for territorial development. Indeed, while regional planning is not a direct responsibility of the Union, it is a growing challenge of European integration. The ESDP does not impose binding policy guidelines on Member States, but it can help them to better harmonise the sectoral policies applied in the same area, to take better account of geographical continuity and the economic, environmental, social and cultural similarities of certain common areas that are beyond the regional and national level.

(1) See glossary

promote more harmonious European regional planning. Interreg is one of the main instruments of cooperation between regions.

The Interreg initiative has seen its scope of action and its budget gradually expand. Interreg III (for the period 2000–06) has a budget of EUR 5.180 billion (2002 prices). In addition to financial aid, the interventions also offer methodological support to develop and carry out projects that correspond to European priorities, such as equal opportunities, sustainable development or innovation. They also encourage an optimal use of resources (financial, institutional, technical, human) and the effective participation of a wide variety of partners.

Aid for cross-border cooperation: Interreg IIIA

Cooperation between border regions — Interreg III strand A — remains the most important part of the initiative because of its essential integrating role for the Union and the future Member States. It implements joint strategies for the development of cross-border regions or economic and social catchments.

The areas concerned are areas lying along the Union’s internal and external land borders and certain coastal areas. Measures can also be funded in certain non-border areas adjacent to those already mentioned. As a rule, only one programme is established per border between two States.

Interreg IIIA is supporting 53 programmes for 2000–06, including 14 along the borders of the applicant countries.

Other levels of cooperation: Interreg IIIB and C

Although the Union considers cross-border cooperation one of its biggest challenges and devotes the largest portion of the Interreg budget to it (about 67 % of available appropriations), the other two strands of the Community initiative also concern all border areas, as well as other areas. They can be complementary to cross-border projects in two specific fields: transnational cooperation (strand B, about 27 % of available appropriations) and interregional cooperation (strand C, 6 % of available appropriations).

Interreg IIIB now covers all transnational cooperation actions involving the national, regional and local authorities and the other socioeconomic players. The objective is to promote territorial integration within large groups of European regions, including those outside the 15 EU Member States, and between the Member States and the applicant countries or other neighbouring countries. The purpose behind this is to promote a sustainable, balanced and harmonious development of the Union. Special attention is being given to the outermost and island regions.

Boulogne-sur-Mer is participating in the network of fortified towns.

The aid granted under Interreg IIIB applies to the whole of the Union, and the regions of neighbouring countries may also participate. A single programme is set up for each of the 13 defined groups of regions:

- western Mediterranean;
- south-west Europe;
- Alpine area;
- north-west Europe;
- Atlantic area;
- North Sea;
- Baltic Sea;
- northern fringe;
- Cades (central Europe, Adriatic, Danube and south-east Europe);
- Archimed (Greece, Sicily, Calabria, Apulia and Basilicata);
- Azores-Canaries-Madeira area;
- Caribbean area (Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique);
- Indian Ocean area (Reunion).

All European regions, including the border areas, are therefore included in this strand.
The 13 Interreg IIIB programmes (2000-2006)
Interreg IIIC supports cooperation between players all over Europe and not necessarily just those in neighbouring regions. This strand helps to make regional development policies and tools more efficient by enabling a vast exchange of information, the sharing of experiences and the creation of structures of cooperation between regions.

Players from all the regions of the Union can benefit from this aid. The actions are implemented through four programmes: North, East, West and South. The regions of the applicant countries and other non-EU countries may also participate in the programmes.

The other Community initiatives and the regional programmes of the innovative actions

In addition to Interreg III, other Community initiatives play a special role in the border regions: URBAN, Leader+ and EQUAL. The regional programmes of the innovative actions also make it possible to try out new ideas (see glossary).

The specific challenges of the external borders

All the regions of the central and east European countries (CEECs) which are applying for membership of the Union have a much lower level of per capita income, gross domestic product (GDP) and productivity, with a few exceptions, than in most of the regions of the 15 Member States.

In the regions lying along the borders of the 15 Member States, the mean level of development is less than half that of their EU neighbours. What is more, their basic infrastructure (transport, energy, management of waste water and solid waste) are largely insufficient.

The ‘Green Train’ contributes to tourist development in Sardinia.
Aid for the central and east European countries

The CEECs already benefit from three important instruments to help them develop in preparation for accession (pre-accession aid). The most important of these is Phare, created in 1990 to support these countries in their economic and political transition and today centred on the development of institutions, investment aid and economic and social cohesion. Since 2000, the Instrument for Structural Policies for pre-Accession (ISPA) has been co-funding large-scale environmental and transport infrastructure projects whereas the special accession programme for agriculture and rural development (Sapard) has been operating more specifically in the countryside.

The Phare-CBC (cross-border cooperation) programme is the part of Interreg that provides funding for cross-border cooperation projects in the applicant countries.

The implementation of cross-border programmes between the regions of the Union and their neighbours in the applicant countries (but also between regions within the applicant countries) is a new experience, which is gradually producing results. This aid to the CEECs and their regions bordering the Union is providing them with a real opportunity to become acquainted with the methods and rules of Community programming and therefore to be prepared to manage, after accession, the future programmes of cross-border cooperation and regional development.

The regions of the Union bordering the applicant countries

It is in the regions of the Union bordering the applicant countries — in Germany, Austria, Finland, Greece and Italy — that more and more exchanges will occur with the new regions of the enlarged Union. Also, the European Commission presented an action plan in July 2001 (see boxed piece of text) that is complementary to existing cross-border programmes.

Community action plan in favour of the regions of the Union bordering the applicant countries

In its communication on the impact of enlargement in the regions bordering the applicant countries, the European Commission announced plans to coordinate specific actions for the regions concerned and to disseminate more information on the objectives and advantages of enlargement in these regions. The action plan in favour of the harmonious development of the border regions has a total budget of EUR 245 million, of which EUR 50 million is specifically earmarked for the border regions within the applicant countries.

The proposed measures fall into four categories.

— EUR 150 million will be allocated to the creation of new lines of communication in the framework of the trans-European networks.

— Additional financial aid of EUR 15 million will go for exchanges of experiences and counselling projects conducted by SMEs in the regions located on both sides of the border. An increase of EUR 10 million in the budget of the European youth aid programme will be devoted to the projects planned in these regions.

— Available funding will be reallocated. Here, Member States are to be offered, in particular during the period 2003–06, the possibility of providing increased aid to the border regions to prepare them for enlargement. What is more, EUR 20 million of the Interreg resources earmarked for networking will be reserved for cooperation projects in these regions.

— The different European policies implemented to meet the specific needs of the border regions will be better coordinated; better coordination between Phare-CBC and Interreg, possibility for the Member States to grant State aid targeted at these regions, in agreement with the Commission and in accordance with the rules in this area.

In addition to these grants, the European Investment Bank (EIB) will award additional loans to encourage investment in the environment and in transport infrastructure in the border regions of the applicant countries. For this, EUR 50 million will be allocated under the Phare programme.
Cooperation with other non-EU countries

For the regions of the Union sharing borders with other third countries (Croatia, Yugoslavia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Morocco and Russia), cross-border cooperation is of another dimension and the stakes are very different: first of all, these are not applicant countries; secondly, there are much wider gaps in development in the regions concerned than in the CEECs; and thirdly, the deepening of relations between the Union and other neighbouring countries, including those of the Mediterranean basin, are of growing political importance.

The financial instruments of this cooperation are in particular the technical assistance programme for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), the Mediterranean Development Agreement (MEDA) to support economic and social reform in the non-EU countries of the Mediterranean basin and the programme of Community assistance for the reconstruction, development and stabilisation (CARDS) of the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

The 32 examples of cooperation without frontiers in this brochure (24 for cross-border cooperation, eight for transnational cooperation) give a good idea of the great diversity of the programmes and all the energy and human resources that they are putting to work.

The construction of dams on the Nestos River for energy and irrigation has benefited from Interreg cooperation between Greece and Bulgaria.
Cooperation without frontiers

Created in 1995, the year that Austria joined the European Union, the Euroregion of Salzburg–Land of Berchtesgaden–Traunstein had all the qualities of an attractive and dynamic cross-border area. The idea immediately arose of integrating the transport networks on both sides of the border. It was a major undertaking, involving two completely different systems of transport, managed on the Austrian side by the Salzburger Verkehrsverbund and on the German side by the Regionalverkehr Oberbayern — Betrieb Berchtesgaden. An agreement between the two regions led to the creation of a cross-border transport association in 1997, without an agreement having to be signed at the national level.

Today, only one ticket issued anywhere in the area is all that is needed to travel throughout the Euroregion, allowing an unlimited number of bus transfers back and forth across the border. The initiative has led to a rise in the number of users of public transport, encouraged the development of tourism and the geographical resources in the Euroregion and fostered closer cooperation.

To achieve this result, ticket machines had to be installed in all the buses and ticket offices of the Euroregion, itineraries and connections had to be coordinated across a network comprising thousands of routes, a standardised system of tariff zones had to be set up and various legal, financial and tax provisions had to be harmonised. Aside from certain problems relating to the infrastructures, the project was implemented without too much difficulty; the two partner transport companies in particular had no problem agreeing on the fares that were to be charged. The system first included the buses and trains of the Austrian Land of Salzburg (with part of the Land of Upper Austria) and the buses of the German Land of Berchtesgaden but was then expanded to include the Landkreis (district) of Traunstein, integrating the German railways as well. A cross-border bus line was put into service for visitors to the national park of the Land of Salzburg while night buses were introduced to provide young people with inexpensive transport for discotheques and cultural events.

**Contact**

EuRegio Salzburg–Berchtesgadener Land–Traunstein
Sägewerkstr. 3
D-83395 Freilassing
Tel. (49-86) 54 49 71 81
Fax (49-86) 54 49 71 89
E-mail: rubach.euregio@tzf.de
Web: www.euregio.sbg.at

**Programme:** Interreg IIA Germany/Austria

**Project:** Public transport Salzburg/Land der Berchtesgaden

**Total cost:** EUR 630 000

**Contribution of the European Union:** EUR 315 000
Cross-border train: cooperation is on the move!

A few years ago, the prospect of travelling by train between Belfast and Dublin would cause a sigh of resignation, so uncomfortable was the line and so inadequate the service. Today, the line is faster and the journey is safe and pleasant, with modern and clean trains. The result has been a growing number of users.

Concerned with the improvement and integration of the line between the two capitals, the two railway companies (Iarnród Eireann in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland Railways) embarked on a joint study in 1988 to come up with an investment plan. It was thanks to the allocation of European financial aid, aimed at the development of transport infrastructure for the trans-European network, that the project was subsequently launched in the early 1990s.

Under the project, repairs had to be made to the line over a length of 182 km and the tracks in particular had to be upgraded (continuous welding needed to be done), an efficient computerised signalling system had to be installed, 50 bridges, level crossings and junctions in the train stations had to be replaced, and the stations of Drogheda and Dundalk had to be renovated. The line now has new fully automated and air-conditioned trains. The trains can travel up to 150 km/h on certain sections and the trip is about a quarter of an hour less, taking one hour and 50 minutes with one stop and some two hours with stops at all the stations. Despite two new, more powerful motor coaches, the trains cannot travel at maximum speed along the entire length of the line because of geographical obstacles like through-cuts, viaducts and tight curves, and because of the speed limits imposed in Drogheda and along the stretch between Lisburn and the border. The number of trains running daily has nonetheless increased, and the 400 000 people who took the train in 1993 grew to about 700 000 in 1997 and currently stands at 950 000. The two companies have also registered on both sides of the border an equivalent increase in domestic traffic, meaning passengers travelling locally and not going to the other country.

A significant aspect of the project is the standardisation of the service: a common operating system, joint marketing and the same uniform for all the personnel. Created in 1997, the new ‘Enterprise’ service represents a model of cross-border cooperation and is the backbone of the island’s railway development. Both from a human and economic point of view, this major technical operation clearly illustrates the possible results of cross-border cooperation, not only improving business opportunities on both sides of the border but also fostering closer social links between the two capitals and the towns serviced by the line.
Bringing Helsinki closer to Saint Petersburg

Helsinki–Saint Petersburg, the most important railway line running across the Finno–Russian border, is experiencing a steady growth in the flow of passengers and goods. In 2010, the annual number of passengers travelling between the two cities, which in 1992 barely exceeded 93,000, could according to some estimates reach 1,700,000, whereas between Helsinki and Lahti, in Finland itself, 4.3 million people are expected to travel. As for goods traffic with Saint Petersburg, it has tripled in 25 years and is currently running at 10 million tonnes per annum.

The direct line connecting Helsinki, Kerava and Lahti, an integral part of the trans-European transport network, is now being built and will be completed in 2006. It will have level crossings and be bordered by barriers in populated areas. Most of the line will run parallel to the Lahti motorway, thereby reducing environmental pollution. Improved connections along this line will also encourage the development of economic centres in the eastern part of Finland. The section running in the direction of Russia, from Lahti to Vainikkala, is to be upgraded and should therefore speed up the journey. The plans here include building a two-way electrified line along the Luumäki–Vainikkala section. Further down the line, between the train stations of Vainikkala in Finland and Buslovskaja in Russia (where large-scale infrastructure work will need to be done to relieve the traffic congestion at these border crossing points), the project is still being examined.

All work on upgrading the lines, which is already underway or planned, concerns the rail gauge (slightly different between the two countries), the building of two-way tracks, the physical protection of the rails, rail connections, electrification, the signalling and safety of the lines, their management and the railway stock. At a later stage, there are plans to build a separate set of tracks for high-speed trains. Other work is also being envisaged to better serve the area surrounding Saint Petersburg.

When this vast project is completed, travelling time between Helsinki and Saint Petersburg, which had already been reduced from six hours and 30 minutes to four hours and 20 minutes at the end of 2000, should be down to three hours in 2006. As for the project’s impact on the environment, various studies have been carried out, including on the two Finnish sites in the Natura 2000 programme: the Ohkola valley and the primeval forest of Vähäjärvi.

Contact
Regional Council of South Karelia
Raatinmiekentie 14
FIN-53 100 Tappeenranta
Tel. (358-5) 913 0210
Fax (358-5) 613 0250
E-mail: timo.tuomisaari@ekarjala.reg.fi
Web: http://www.kaakkoissuomen-interreg.fi

Finnish Rail Administration
Pl 185 (Kaiotaku 6)
FIN-00101 Helsinki
Tel. (358-9) 5840 5111
Fax (358-9) 5840 5100
E-mail: info@rhk.fi/defeng.htm
Web: http://www.rhk.fi/defeng.htm

Ministry of the Interior
PO Box 257
00171 Helsinki
Tel. (358-9) 160 45 09
Fax (358-9) 160 46 50 (29 12)
E-mail: harry.ekesam@sm.intermin.fi

Programme: Interreg IIA south-east Finland
Projects: (1) Development of the Vainikkala cross-border point; (2) Study on the development of the Vainikkala–Buslovskaja–Luzhaki border crossing (Source: Finnish Rail Administration)

Total cost: EUR 1,805,262
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 334,308

A railway line integrated into the European transport network.
Cross-border teletraining

Combining the entire range of telecommunication, telelearning and teleworking technologies so that the students of universities in two regions can access each others’ academic programmes is the idea that has been developed in the Euvikon (network of virtual Euroregional skills) project in the Rhein–Maas–Nord Euroregion. Launched in 1998 and completed at the end of 2000, the project was a joint venture of the Open Universiteit (OU) of Venlo in the Netherlands, the Fern Universität (FU) or ‘Tele-University’ of Hagen in Germany, the Dutch municipality of Venlo and the German municipality of Krefeld. The objectives for the cross-border area were to encourage more people to access university and continuing training programmes, to raise the overall level of skills and in so doing promote skilled employment in the Euroregion.

Together the two universities offer individuals and businesses of the Euroregion a large range of higher-education studies in German, Dutch or English. Combined German–Dutch programmes are planned in certain fields. The OU has also introduced a section for training in cross-border environmental management and the FU has created an institute for European law studies.

Students and businesses can also sign up for continuing training courses tailored to meet their needs and in particular that match the quality requirements of the businesses. A personalised guidance and counselling service for the students is available at all times, and they are also given the opportunity to participate in traineeships. Students have a complete Internet environment at their disposal, and they are provided with demonstration interactive CD-ROMs. In receiving distance training, they can also benefit from the help of tutors, participate in electronic forums and even engage in teleworking as ‘virtual employees’ for companies.

Each school decides on the conditions for registration on the basis of criteria more flexible than elsewhere. The higher education as well as the training programmes and traineeships lead to the awarding of diplomas or certificates recognised by both sides. This resolutely innovative system of education is bearing fruit, and Euvikon’s reputation is steadily growing; numerous contacts are now being established with firms and chambers of commerce or industry.

Contact
Studienzentrum Krefeld
Tannenstr. 79
D-47798 Krefeld
Fax (49-2151) 78 72 07
E-mail: studienzentrum.krefeld@fernuni-hagen.de
Euvikon@euregio.krefeld.schulen.net
Web: http://euregio.krefeld.schulen.net

Studiecentrum Venlo
Beginnengang 4
5911 JL Venlo
Netherlands
Tel. (31-77) 351 61 66
Fax (31-77) 351 36 91
E-mail: donald.hellegers@ou.nl

Programme: Interreg IIA Germany/Netherlands (Euregio Maas-Rhein)

Project: Euvikon

Total cost: EUR 278 500

Contribution of the European Union: EUR 139 250
Environment without frontiers

Europe’s typical landscapes

Our old Europe would lose much of its charm if its rural landscapes were to continue deteriorating. This is clearly understood by livestock farmers in Germany who are members of the ‘Sächsische Schweiz e.G’ (Saxon Switzerland Coop) agricultural cooperative, named after the conservation area where they decided to raise a flock of sheep and which includes a regional nature reserve. This natural area, a genuine mix of ecological niches of general interest, diversified wooded areas, plateaus and low-mountain chains, stretches across the border. Interested in establishing closer contacts with their Czech neighbours to share experiences of agricultural conversion and the conservation of landscapes, the farmers have benefited from Interreg aid. In 1998, this money was used to launch a project for the environment-friendly productive management of meadows, which is part of a series of projects related to environmental protection in the Elbe–Labe Euroregion.

Designed to last for at least 10 years, the project has also included the restructuring of the cooperative and the creation of permanent jobs in the region. The facilities needed to maintain the animals in Saupsdorf have been completed, a silo has been converted to house sheep, a new fold has been built and personnel have been hired to shear the animals. Over 350 merinos have been able to graze on a vast expanse of pastures including 80 hectares in the extreme corner of the national park of Saxon Switzerland and another 240 hectares in the adjacent conservation area. Another part of the project has involved the marketing of lamb’s meat so that the initiative can continue to be funded once the seed capital has been used up.

On the Czech side, where four flocks of 50 sheep now graze on the borderlands, cooperation actions include a vocational training initiative to enable the pupils of Decin Secondary School to take advantage of the Saupsdorf experience of marketing sheep.

Contact
Euroregion Elbe-Labe
Kommunalgemeinschaft Euroregion
Obere Eltal/Osterzgebirge e.V.
Dr-Wilhelm-Külz-Str. 6
D-01796 Pirna
Tel. (49-3501) 52 00 13
Fax (49-3501) 52 74 57
E-mail: info@euroregion-elbe-labe.de
Web: www.euroregion-elbe-labe.de

Programme: Interreg IIA Germany/Czech Republic
Project: Sheep farming
Total cost: EUR 581,319
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 335,275
From valley to valley

Making the border more open through the French–Italian Alps and developing the rich natural and cultural heritage without harming the environment present real challenges and are the focus of the Interreg-supported actions being carried out in the areas surrounding Mont Blanc.

The mountains are a part of nature and encouraging eco-friendly tourism in the Alps is one of the missions of the ‘Conférence transfrontalière Espace Mont Blanc’ (Cross-border conference of the Mont Blanc area). This organisation was founded by the Italian autonomous region of Val d’Aosta and the intermunicipal association ‘Espace nature Mont Blanc’ (Mont Blanc nature area) on the French side and in the Swiss canton of Valais. Some 50 cross-border hiking trails around Mont Blanc were selected according to thematic itineraries with a view to developing the different attractions of the mountains: glaciers, forests, marshes, mines, alpine pastures and traditional architecture. These trails were included in a promotional guide published in the summer of 2001 in French and in Italian. The aim is to make walkers aware of what the mountains have to offer and to encourage them to discover lesser-known trails. This will take some of the pressure off the more heavily trodden paths and help to protect the ecosystem.

The mountains are also synonymous with danger and those who seek it out. Since 30 June 2001, in Val d’Aosta, Valais and Haute-Savoie, borders no longer exist for mountain rescue operations. Pursuant to a general convention for civil protection and mountain rescue operations signed in 1997, emergency calls now pass through a single radio channel, with the same procedures and same frequency in the three areas. A very simple brochure, containing instructions on how to use this new alarm system, is distributed to those who go hiking in the high mountains. What is more, the emergency call centres and rescue call centres have been connected to one another and over 90 % of the area now has radio coverage.

The mountains are also a place where people live. Sharing the border identity around Mont Blanc is at the heart of the project on ‘Daily cooperation in the Mont Blanc area’. The long collaboration between two regional newspapers, La Vallée Notizie (Val d’Aosta) and Le Messager (Haute-Savoie), to inform those living near the border about what is happening on the other side of the Alps has led to the joint publication of a four-page brochure, InfoMontBlanc, inserted each week in the two newspapers. An Internet site has also been set up.

Contact
Région autonome du Val d’Aoste
2, Place Académie de Saint-Anselme
I-11100 Aoste
Tel. (39-0165) 27 57 11
Fax (39-0165) 27 57 44
E-mail (Interreg secretariat for Val d’Aosta):
interreg@regione.vda.it
Web: www.regione.vda.it

Programme: Interreg IIA France/Italy (Alps)
Projects: (1) Cross-border hiking trails, (2) Mountain rescue operations, (3) Daily cooperation

Total cost: EUR 3 635 566

Contribution of the European Union: EUR 1 355 886
‘Green benefits’ for industries

In regions with an industrial tradition like Vienna in Austria and Győr in Hungary, economic activity has long been synonymous with deterioration of the natural environment. The growing demand for environmental protection is, however, now being met in a certain number of firms where more environment-friendly practices are adding value to their image and ensuring more sustainable conditions for development. But to achieve the full benefits, this approach must be followed in an integrated manner, which includes having a cross-border context, through cooperation between government agencies, businesses and consultancy firms. This was the aim of the ‘Ecoprofit’ Vienna-Győr cross-border project.

Ecoprofit is one of the consulting modules created by the Viennese initiative for entrepreneurial protection of the environment. Specially designed for small and medium-sized businesses in the production sector, it consists in making entrepreneurs aware of the basic principles of management of materials and energy by encouraging them to participate in working groups and individual consulting sessions. The purpose is to convince them that it is possible not only to maintain the status quo, but also to become more competitive by respecting the environment if they are able to meet the challenge of innovation and manage costs effectively.

Implemented in 2001 under Interreg II, Ecoprofit Vienna-Győr has primarily developed in Vienna where the number of firms participating increased from 15 in the first year to 40 in the following year. In parallel to this, the Viennese specialists have established contacts with city government officials in Győr with a view to setting up a similar initiative on the Hungarian side, and information material in Hungarian has been drafted. In the longer term the project has contributed to the introduction of a system of environmental management, in accordance with European regulations, in the economic area situated between the two cities (which in particular requires the adaptation of Hungarian standards in this area).

With Interreg III, cooperation has been continuing on an enlarged basis since 2000 through the EcoBusinessPlan (EBP). This includes all the existing modules (ecoprofit, protection of the climate, tourist ventures, EMAS and ISO 14.001(*) and provides for the development of an additional module aimed at reducing the amount of waste produced by small businesses.

(*) See glossary.
Water quality, a challenge without frontiers

Pollution knows no borders on Lake Constance where the quality of the water has suffered from intensive farming methods. For the regional authorities there, cross-border cooperation is essential, especially since the common economic interests of the regions surrounding the lake are directly connected to the environmental situation. The German–Swiss project launched in 1994 by the University of Hohenheim in Ravensburg, Germany in collaboration with the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule of Zurich in Switzerland has, with the support of Interreg, made it possible to take action with a long-term perspective. The purpose of the project was to study and promote environment-friendly methods to grow fruit and vegetables while developing new marketing methods in order to make the Lake Constance area more competitive at European level.

To ensure the economic viability of these crops, without harming the environment, the project’s promoters resolutely chose the only solution possible: to make production less intensive by using more land and spraying it with less pesticides and herbicides. The action therefore included the creation of a cross-border extensive farming area. Methods of harmonising the farming methods used on the Swiss and German sides had to be studied, and research had to be carried out on specific problems, such as the organic treatment of greenhouse cucumbers. The farming and marketing structures on both sides of the border were also analysed with a view to anticipating general trends in European agriculture (reforms of the common agricultural policy, globalisation of trade and agreements within the World Trade Organisation) and in the context of closer relations between Switzerland and the European Union.

The different studies have led to a series of recommendations for the continuation of cross-border cooperation. This includes the setting-up of a new cooperation network that includes Bavaria and the Austrian region of Vorarlberg, more sharing of agricultural and scientific information and knowledge, the creation of a system to detect harmful diseases and insects and the elimination of administrative and legal obstacles to cooperation.
The very concrete effects of ‘fuzzy’ technology

‘Fuzzy’ technology refers to a field of expertise where precise calculations are not needed. The German masters of imprecision are to be found working in Steinfurt in North Rhine-Westphalia. It is there, in the German–Dutch Euroregion that a particularly innovative project has been set up: the Neuro-Fuzzy-Centrum (NFC), the result of cooperation between the Fachhochschule of Münster and the University of Twente, with the support of Interreg.

Neuro-fuzzy systems are the most recent development of intelligent automatic control systems where engineers are trying to reproduce the way in which the human brain functions. Data transmission, voice or image recognition and washing machines are just some of the many different practical areas where fuzzy technology can be applied.

In addition to its research activities, the NFC also acts as a development centre, helping small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Euroregion that do not have their own research and development department to apply these innovative technologies. There are about 100 firms in the region with a real need for this. A good example is the Teupen Maschinenbau GmbH company in Gronau, which wanted to develop a freight elevator with a softer starting and stopping system so as not to damage the goods being transported (furniture and other heavy objects) and to ensure greater safety. Accurate positioning also had to be ensured, and the control mechanism had to be simplified. All of this had to be achieved without increasing the manufacturing cost. Thanks to simple sensors, the new elevator, designed with the help of the NFC, is capable of doing all the work with what would be considered not very precise information for a computer, such as ‘the load is fairly heavy, the elevator is slightly inclined’. This is a world innovation.

Fuzzy technology has also had concrete results in an entirely different field, that of employment. Shortly after the project’s implementation, over 200 jobs were saved or created in Germany thanks to the NFC’s support. The centre was also selected among numerous competitors to present its innovative projects at the World Expo in Hanover in 2000.

Robot developed by the Fuzzy Centre.

Contact
Fachhochschule Münster
Huferstr. 27
D-48149 Münster
Tel. (49-2) 518 30
Fax (49-2) 518 36 40 15
E-mail: verwaltung@fh-muenster.de
Web: www.fh-muenster.de

Programme: Interreg IIA Germany/Netherlands (Euroregion of Ems Dollart)
Project: Neuro-Fuzzy Technology Centre for SMEs
Total cost: EUR 1 929 786
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 914 109
Economic cooperation
Cooperation without frontiers

Two regions united by plastics technology

The plastics industry represents over 2,000 jobs in the cross-border area of Saarland and Lorraine, particularly in firms of the automobile sector. The ‘Pôle de la Plasturgie de l’Est’ (PPE) (East plastics technology pole), a specialised technological centre located in Saint-Avold in Lorraine, and the ‘Zentrum für Innovative Produktion’ (ZIP) (Centre for innovative production) in Saarbrücken, in Saarland have pooled their skills thanks to Interreg support in order to consolidate this industry and to offer a wider range of services and advice.

The PPE is a technological resource centre specialised in the processing of plastics and composites. It helps companies satisfy their needs for information (technical documentation, suppliers, etc.), advice (on the composition of basic materials, manufacturing procedures, etc.) and analysis (testing and experimenting). The ZIP is an engineering centre of the University of Saarbrücken whose mission is to support firms in fields like research and development, automation systems, production management, quality and information and communication systems.

Despite a strong demand for plastics technology, there was no institute in Saarland like the PPE that would have offered the ZIP more opportunities in the plastics technology sector, particularly in the case of calculation and simulation projects. As for the firms in Lorraine, they needed the ZIP’s expertise in digital calculations, robotisation, the computer-assisted design of moulds, the simulation of processing procedures using finished elements and the manufacturing of tools.

By pooling their know-how, the two centres are able to offer more services and better advice. In particular, they provide support (engineering, expertise, advice and technical assistance) for industrial projects involving the use of polymer materials and composites. Before launching the pilot projects, the ZIP and the PPE presented the results of joint projects, such as the manufacture of a door for a firm specialised in the fitting-out of small vans: by analysing the materials and processes in depth it was possible to reduce the weight of the components by over 50% and shorten the assembly time.

Contact
Pôle de Plasturgie de l’Est (PPE)
BP 207
18, Avenue du Général Patton
F-57500 Saint-Avold
Tel. (33) 387 92 93 94
Fax (33) 387 92 92 92
E-mail: ppe@ppe.asso.fr
Web: www.ppe.asso.fr

Zentrum für Innovative Produktion (ZIP)
Gebäude B 2.
Postfach 151150
D-66041 Saarbrücken
Tel. (49-681) 30 20 00 75

Programme: Interreg IIA Germany/France
(Saarland/Moselle/Westpfalz)

Project: Pooling of technical skills in the transformation of plastics

Total cost: EUR 296,350

Contribution of the European Union: EUR 104,550

The St Avold centre in Lorraine (France).
Small businesses in the north search for European markets down south

In the northern regions, where the climatic conditions are harsh, the population is very scattered, distances are long and firms are far away from European markets. Cooperation is more than elsewhere still a condition of development. Launched in 1997 in the provinces of Lapland in Finland, Nordbotten in Sweden, and Nordland, Troms and Finnmark in Norway, the ‘North Calotte’ project has led to over 100 concrete projects and helped start up new businesses at national and international level.

Improving people’s living conditions, creating jobs, increasing the international competitiveness of firms, and reducing the effects of natural handicaps, while protecting the environment and improving the flow of trade between east and west, were the objectives of this programme. The programme was managed, with the financial support of Interreg II, by the North Calotte Council (NCC), the body responsible for cooperation between the three countries. The NCC was created back in 1967 in the wake of a crisis that affected agriculture and the production of timber and triggered the departure of large numbers of people from the countryside to the cities or to other countries and resulted in a level of unemployment twice as high as the national averages.

In the case of SMEs, a series of actions has led to closer cooperation to help them reach European markets. For example, firms in Lapland and Finnmark have joined efforts to produce Nordic gifts and souvenirs. Three organisations in the cities of Boden (SKAPA Företagsby), Alta (IT-House) and Rovaniemi (Regional Business Incubator) have had as their mission to stimulate relations between the firms using information technologies. In another example, three companies have set up a network of public relations and communication services, offering to promote tourist or export projects: Partners Reklambyrå AB (Luleå, Sweden), Jabba Corporation Oy (Rovaniemi, Finland) and Media Økonomi AS (Bodo, Norway). The North Calotte programme is still operating and expanding under Interreg III.

Contact
North Calotte Council
Stationsgatan 5
SE-97186 Luleå
Tel. (+46-920) 960 00
Fax (+46-920) 22 84 11
E-mail: relsen@bd.lst.se
Web: www.nordkalottradet.nu

Programme: Interreg IIA Sweden/Finland/Norway/northern Russia
Project: North Calotte
Total cost: EUR 6 686 157
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 5 014 618

Objective: transcending remoteness.
Interreg strengthens a centuries-old tradition

In the 13th century, the livestock fairs of Zafra in Estremadura, Spain and of Beja in Alentejo, Portugal were gathering points for the regions’ main economic players. The tradition has continued to this day: Zafra still has the largest livestock market of southern Europe. As for Beja, it organises the Ovibeja fair, one of the most important agricultural events in southern Portugal. So, why not organise an event on the other side of the border?

The first fair supported by Interreg took place in 1994. The aim was to intensify agricultural relations between the two regions and to promote the marketing of extensively farmed products. Since then, the fairs have become regular cross-border events, organised every six months in Zafra or in Beja.

The central and traditional part of each fair is the display of animals and products from Alentejo and Estremadura. All the different livestock (sheep, cattle, pigs, horses, etc.) are represented. Another part that has become increasingly important in the eyes of the professionals is the technical workshops. Common solutions and positions are defined in areas like the promotion of livestock and products of extensive farming, marketing channels, the extensive product supply potential of each region, quality labels, development of the countryside, etc.

The third part concerns the promotion of quality gourmet products of the two regions. This is where hotel and restaurant owners and gourmets without frontiers come together along with the specialised press.

The cultural and recreational activities organised around these events and the sale of local products have increased the economic activity of the cross-border area and made it possible to develop cultural activities for the benefit of all the local communities.

Contact
Institución Ferial de Zafra
Mercado Nacional de Ganado
E-06300 Madrid
Tel. (34) 924 55 07 81
Fax (34) 924 55 36 13

Programme: Interreg IIA Spain/Portugal
Projects: Livestock fairs of Zafra and Beja
Total cost: EUR 21 000
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 15 750

The biggest cattle market in southern Europe.
Training and employment

Training on board

To meet the needs expressed by its sailing personnel, the Irish Ferries company, with several partners, decided in 1996 to set up a training programme tailored to the working conditions at sea. Supported by Interreg, the programme also had to be applicable on other ferries in the European Union.

The company, which provides passenger service between Ireland (Dublin and Rosslare) and Wales (Holyhead and Pembroke), ran its project in partnership with the Dublin Institute of Technology (Ireland) and the Coleg Menai (Wales). The training programme was developed according to the British system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs), a standardised method considered the most appropriate because it is based on real working situations at sea. The programme also includes an evaluation of the candidates according to their actual performance, where it has to be proven that they have the qualifications required after a series of tests at different levels.

Two surveys were conducted before the project began, one of the customers and the other of the participants. In 1996, three programmes were developed in three complementary areas: food preparation and hygiene, customer service and management and inspection. Over the following two years, 167 NVQ diplomas were awarded.

The improvement in the basic qualifications and level of skills of the personnel of the ferries immediately had a positive impact on the company’s image. In the light of this success, the training programme has been extended to new participants, and the partners have turned their attention to the transferable nature of the project. The possibility of introducing an Irish system equivalent to the British NVQs is being examined, and quality surveys of customers and participants are being carried out.

Contact
Celtic knots
Tourism Research Centre
Dublin Institute of Technology
Cathal Brugha Street
Dublin 1
Ireland
Tel. (353-1) 874 60 58
Fax (353-1) 874 85 72
E-mail: elizabeth.kennedy@dit.ie
Web: www.dit.ie

Coleg Menai
Gwydyr LLS7 2TP
Bangor
United Kingdom
Tel. (44-1248) 37 01 25
Fax (44-1248) 37 00 52
E-mail: ar@menai.ac.uk

Programme: Interreg IIA United Kingdom/Ireland
Project: Celtic knots
Total cost: EUR 1 682 352
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 887 374
Neighbours around a (gourmet) table

If there is one area where European diversity is at its best, it is gourmet cooking. For the professionals and the aspiring cordon-bleu cooks in border regions, why not share this art with their neighbours? That was the idea that led to the carrying out from 1996 to 1999 of this cross-border cooperation project for vocational training, set up with the financial aid of the European Union. A specialised German school in Pirna, the Hotelfachschule Pirna-Sonnenstein, organised for some 100 German and Czech students from the Euroregion of Elbe-Labe a joint technical training programme on hotel catering and management. The programme also included courses for hotel assistants, tourism training and continuing training on the economic aspects of the sectors concerned. To cope with the difference in language, the Czech students had interpreters in the first year so that they could continue with the rest of the programme entirely in German.

During this three-year training programme, all the students had the opportunity to take one year of courses at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Dresden and to earn a diploma at the end. For the Czech students, the training programme at the school of Pirna included one week of courses a month in the Czech Republic, which, after a further year of courses in Usti nad Labem et Templice, made it easier for them to obtain a diploma recognised by their country.

Living together in boarding accommodation and participating in the same workshops, the students had the opportunity over time to build up working and personal relationships, in which the cultural dimension was also an important element. In addition to the culinary and hotel skills they acquired for their future profession, they also broadened their socio-cultural horizon and learned a foreign language, preparing them for cross-border mobility and therefore facilitating their search for a job. Teacher exchanges between the two sides of the border also encouraged the adoption in the training systems of the two countries of a common approach to the content and organisation of the courses.

Contact
Sächsisches Staatsministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit
Wilhelm-Buck-Str. 2 (Ecke Carolaplatz)
D-01073 Dresden
Tel. (49-351) 56 40
Fax (49-351) 564 81 89
E-mail: poststelle@smwa.sachsen.de
Hotelfachschule Pirna: www.hotelfachschule-pirna.de

Komunální společenství,
Euroregion Labe, Udícke nám., stř. B
CZ-40001 Usti nad Labem
Tel. (420-47) 524 14 37-8
Fax (420-47) 521 16 03
E-mail: erbanova@mag-ul.cz

Programme: Interreg IIA Germany/Czech Republic
Project: Cross-border training in hotel management and catering
Total cost: EUR 2 153 052
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 1 399 484
On both sides of the Rhine, the same fight against social exclusion

In the cross-border area comprising central Alsace in France, the city of Fribourg and the district of Brissgau–Upper Black Forest in Germany, three social welfare institutions posed similar questions: what is happening on the other side of the Rhine and how can everyone’s different experiences be used to act together? After establishing their first contacts in 1996–97, the three partners — the ‘Espoir’ association in France, the ‘Netzwerk Diakonie e. V. im Landkreis Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald’ and the ‘Diakonieverein beim Diakonischen Werk Freiburg’ in Germany — launched a project aimed at creating a Franco–German network to fight social exclusion and chronic unemployment. In concrete terms, the purpose was to offer unemployed people a qualification and jobs through a cross-border network concerned with the sale of second-hand items and the provision of services to people with low incomes. At the same time, the cooperation structure was to encourage a regular exchange of information between those involved in the different existing projects to fight unemployment in the regions concerned.

Thanks to flexible working groups, training courses on specialised topics, the exchange of staff and participation in festive activities, the partners communicated with one another on a regular basis and succeeded in overcoming the difficulty of speaking different languages, having separate ways of thinking and not sharing the same institutional context. They forged a common identity for themselves while acknowledging mutual differences. Their sense of cooperation, uncertain in the beginning, was no longer in doubt. The basic ideas of the project came from those working in the three organisations, people highly motivated by new professional challenges and the possibility of more effectively helping their target groups.

This networking went hand in hand with the development of existing activities in Fribourg, Volgelsheim, Mülheim, Colmar and Brisach. The results included the expansion or creation of second-hand clothes shops and centres selling furniture, electrotechnical items and other used goods, the purchase of tools and machines for the recycling of electrical appliances, the provision of a bicycle repair service and the development, thanks to the network’s resources, of a wide range of inexpensive services. In Brisach, for example, the demand for moving assistance or renovation work needed to be met: these are small jobs that do not compete with the work done by local firms; the authorities consented to the ‘assignment of salaried personnel for non-profit-making purposes’, enabling these people to work for firms and in so doing making them more motivated and better qualified.

In terms of employment, and given the separate laws on working contracts in the two countries, over a period of two years the activities led to the creation of seven permanent jobs in France and 36 jobs financed through social support measures and the creation of 124 temporary jobs in Germany. Implemented from January 1998 to March 2000 with the help of Interreg, the project enabled institutions on either side of the border to engage in cooperation, which is continuing beyond the subsidised period.

Contact
Verein Netzwerk Diakonie e. V.
Am Fischerrein 1
D-79199 Kirchzarten
Tel. (49-7661) 938 40
Fax (49-7661) 93 84-40

Association Espoir
78 a, Avenue de la République
F-68000 Colmar Cedex
Tel. (33) 389 41 50 93
Fax (33) 389 23 12 46
E-mail: contact@association-espoir.org

Diakonieverein beim Diakonischen Werk Freiburg I. Br.
Dreisamstr. 3-5
D-79098 Freiburg
Tel. (49-761) 368 91-0
Fax (49-761) 368 91-134

Programme: Interreg IIA France/Germany (Upper Rhine centre and south)

Project: Franco–German network for the fight against poverty and social exclusion

Total cost: EUR 1 335 638

Contribution of the European Union: EUR 500 000
Since July 2000, Denmark and Sweden have been connected by the bridge over the Öresund (the Öre Strait), which is now used on a daily basis by thousands of people. Many of these are workers who commute between the two countries. The area of Öresund (3.5 million inhabitants) forms a vast cross-border labour pool with considerable potential for development but confronted with a problem of underemployment. It is in this context that in 1996 an Interreg project was set up to stimulate the job market in the area of Öresund and encourage cross-border cooperation between the Danish island of Sjaetland and the Swedish region of Scania. The challenge was to integrate the labour markets so that the two border areas, which until then had evolved separately, could develop together and take advantage of their respective assets. This would benefit local businesses, increase the trade of goods and services and give the inhabitants more training and job opportunities.

The Öresund Committee, which represents all those engaged in cross-border cooperation, entrusted the project's management with AF-Storkøbenhavn (public employment services of Greater Copenhagen), and a joint administrative structure was created in 1996. Other cooperation bodies which play a key role in the project are the Öresund Labour Market Council (ÖAR), consisting of the public employment services of the different parts of the cross-border area, and the four Öresund employment centres set up in Copenhagen, Malmö, Helsingborg and Helsingør to coordinate the services for job-seekers and employers throughout the area.

The area of Öresund is also one of the EURES cross-border partnerships, which exist in various regions of Europe and whose specific role is to facilitate cross-border labour mobility. Öresund benefited from the experience of the territorial employment pacts (TEPs), large regional and local partnerships established across the Union to energise employment policies in areas where there is a concentration of manpower. Half of the 20 projects implemented by the TEPs of Öresund have benefited from Interreg II support.

It is clear that there is no lack of institutional support in the area of Öresund where an all-out effort has been made to encourage employment. The implementation of the Interreg II project has been overwhelmingly successful, and the partners now have an effective system and model for the coordination of labour markets on the basis of agreements between two countries, seven regions and over 20 organisations. This vast mechanism has made it possible to develop a whole range of skills, tools and methods to tackle head-on the problem of employment and vocational training.

There are nonetheless some difficulties, the main one being time: the expectations arising from the Öresund bridge and cross-border cooperation have been so great that the process set into motion has so far not been able to meet them all. However, already under the auspices of the Öresund Labour Market Council, strategies have been devised for Interreg III for the coming years, with priority going to the creation of employment in three areas: the computer industry, the medico-biotechnological sector and tourism.
In the London–Lille–Bruges triangle, numerous towns testify to a tormented history that goes back to the Middle Ages. They are now meeting places of a totally different kind, connected by a network of 17 historical sites set up with Interreg support by the regions of Kent (United Kingdom), Nord–Pas-de-Calais (France) and West Flanders (Belgium) to take advantage of this common heritage. By creating this new tourist product, the partners have sought to increase the number of visitors and overnight stays in the three regions and to encourage development and employment around the sites concerned while stimulating cultural exchanges. The overall coordination is ensured by the joint association of the Côte d’Opale, the province of West Flanders and Kent County Council.

With its innovative concept, the network of strongholds is meeting the current trends in demand for weekend tourism and organised tours. It is making the three regions more attractive and enabling them to achieve a more even flow of tourists between the most popular sites, which are generally overcrowded, and the lesser-known places. The widespread introduction of multilingual explanations is encouraging sightseers to visit all the sites and, for this purpose, the partners also plan to step up the activities of the cross-border transport companies. At the cultural level, historians and archaeologists are working with tourist professionals to make the visitors and inhabitants aware of the rich common heritage of the three regions and to encourage exchanges.

In concrete terms, the network is organising actions like the creation of discovery tours (walks in and around each town), a travelling exhibition for tourist fairs, publishing a trilingual promotional brochure to present the network, a cultural and tourist brochure in three versions (English, French and Dutch) and running advertising campaigns in the media. Actions specific to each town — restoration of architectural sites, exhibitions, audiovisual products, publications, etc. — are also being implemented.

**Contact**

Syndicat mixte de la Côte d’Opale
Hôtel communautaire
Petitu de la Marine — BP 5/530
F-59386 Dunkerque
Tel. (33) 328 58 06 30
Fax (33) 328 59 04 27

Province of West Flanders
Koning Leopold III-Haan 41
B-8120 Sint Andries, Brugge
Tel. (32-50) 40 34 38
Fax (32-50) 40 31 00
E-mail: marc.ryckaert@west-vlaanderen.be

Kent County Council
Springfields — Maidstone
Kent ME14 2LX
United Kingdom
Tel. (44-1622) 22 19 07
Fax (44-1622) 69 14 18
E-mail: simon.curtis@kent.gov.uk

Programme: Interreg IIA France/United Kingdom and France/Belgium

Project: Network of strongholds

Total cost: EUR 874 504

Contribution of the European Union: EUR 407 572
Each morning, with a student card in their hand, they cross the border between Germany and Poland on the Oder River and divide their lives and studies between the two countries. This is the reality that students of the Viadrina European University in Frankfurt-am-Oder have been living since the university’s creation in 1991. The union with Poland grew even closer with the opening in 1993 of the Collegium Polonicum in Slubice where German students could sign up for a post-graduate programme devoted to Polish law. The idea arose as early as 1991 of creating, in collaboration with the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, an institute for studies and research on the cultures, languages, economy and society of eastern Europe.

The Collegium Polonicum has, in addition to classrooms and the Amicus student hall, rooms for tutorial classes and a library boasting 6,000 books and 260 periodicals devoted to eastern Europe: a genuine gold mine for the students and academic researchers. The courses taught there are intended to complement the programmes organised by the two founding universities. The students analyse the problems of the border regions or the impact of economic upheavals on the central and east European countries, study the different constitutional laws of these countries as well as international law and may also take language courses.

This cross-border training programme opens up excellent prospects for employment in international organisations, in corporations, in the media or in the field of city and regional planning. The labour market problems on either side of the Oder are also being dealt with by the science and labour world cooperation centre of the Viadrina European University, nearby. The centre monitors the trends in cross-border relations and ensures collaboration between the German and Polish trade unions on the Interregional Trade Union Board.

The new school attracts students and teachers, not only from Germany and Poland but also from the Czech Republic, France, Italy and even Russia and many other countries. It is therefore an important academic and cultural meeting point and a centre of intellectual and human influence for Europe.

Contact
Universytet A. Mickiewicza skr.
Poczta 35
PL-69100 Slubice
Tel. (48-95) 758 72 33
Fax (48-95) 759 24 55

Europa Universität Viadrina
Postfach 776
D-15207 Frankfurt/Oder
Tel. (49-335) 553 42 03
E-mail: study@euv-frankfurt-o.de
Web: www.cp.euv-frankfurt-o.de/

Programme: Interreg IIA Germany/Poland
Project: Collegium Polonicum
Total cost: EUR 48 000 000
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 8 850 000
Two sister islands beckon you to their shores

In the middle of the western Mediterranean, Corsica and Sardinia are endowed with a southern climate, beautiful scenery and a world-renowned cultural and historical heritage. Nonetheless, for these two islands, whose relative geographical isolation is a cause of economic difficulty, the promotion of tourism, one of their main resources, remains at the top of the agenda. Cooperation between the two islands in this area is encouraging the coordinated organisation of the network of sea basins and ports in connection with water tourism, the development of diversified and eco-friendly tourist practices and the joint marketing of tourist products to take advantage of a shared customer base.

Among the many tourist exchanges between the two islands financed with the help of the Interreg programme for the period 1994–99 are sporting events such as the second and third Island Games, the 11th ‘Terre de Corse’ rally, the ‘Bonifacio Classic’ and the ‘Vela Latina’ (Latin sail) boat races between Ajaccio and Stintino. The cultural exchanges consisted of some 30 activities in the areas of music (interregional music festival), polyphonic songs, theatre and dance, whereas arts and crafts on the islands were honoured, for example, at the 9th Porto Vecchio fair or during the ‘Medieval days’ in Bonifacio (historical parade and costumed medieval market). Other initiatives concerned the archaeological and historical itineraries, the promotion of the historical and cultural heritage of the Sardinian province of Sassari and the department of Southern Corsica and the discovery nature trails.

Nearby Tuscany took part in several of these exchanges, and a whole range of tourist and cultural activities common to the three regions is planned in the Interreg III programme for the period 2000–2006.

Contact

Collectivité Territoriale de Corse
Mission coopération décentralisée
22, Cours Grandval, BP 215
F-20187 Ajaccio Cedex 1
Tel. (33) 495 51 64 25
Fax (33) 495 51 44 62
E-mail: npancrazi@sitec.fr

Regione Autonoma di Sardegna
Ufficio CEE
Viale Trento, 69
I-09123 Cagliari
Tel. (39-070) 606 45 14
Fax (39-070) 606 45 01
E-mail: ufficio.eu@regione.sardegna.it
Web: www.regione.sardegna.it

Programme: Interreg IIA France/Italy (Corsica/Sardinia)

Project: Culture and tourism

Total cost: EUR 13 401 000

Contribution of the European Union: EUR 6 584 000
It’s in the newspapers, and even on television

Ask people you know what they think about cross-border cooperation and you will probably find that many of them do not know what you are talking about. Yet, behind this concept lie numerous achievements, which often have a tangible effect on the lives of people in border areas and may prove quite interesting if only people were informed about them. Informing people is precisely the aim of a project started in 1998 in the Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia where once a fortnight a page is published on the subject in five regional newspapers, including the Primorski Dnevnik, the newspaper of the Slovenian minority of Italy.

Every two weeks, the readers of these five newspapers, which have a combined print-run of 120,000 copies, are able to find out what is happening in the area of cross-border cooperation and what is being planned. The articles are also translated into German and published in the Austrian press, and they have already been compiled into three compendiums. In the summer of 1999, each of the five newspapers devoted this information page to an opinion poll whose results were very useful in improving the design and content of the section.

The action has not been limited to the written press. An agreement concluded at the beginning of 2000 with the regional offices of the Italian broadcasting company resulted in the production of a televised version (12 programmes broadcast every two weeks) and a radio version (24 programmes broadcast once a week) of this information column.

The continuation of the initiative under the Interreg III programmes of Italy/Slovenia and Italy/Austria is currently being examined, and the plans are to have it managed by the new autonomous department for international relations (SARI).
Cities without frontiers

People living near the border did not wait for the single market before trading with the other side when the situation was favourable. That is the case in the Basque Country on the Spanish and French sides where a common culture has encouraged cross-border flows in both directions across the Bidassoa River in the Bay of Txingudi. The Interreg II programme was there to support initiatives that met profound needs.

Today, the Bidassoa River is no longer a border. It is now really what nature intended it to be: a means of communication for the area of Hendaye, Irún and Hondarribia. Already in 1993, joint activities brought together those living on the opposite banks, first outside of any formal framework. A shuttle on water and land was organised to make it easier for people and goods to travel. An annual trilingual publication was put out listing the cultural and sporting activities in the area. The fields of cooperation were many, and in 1995 the three towns decided to create a common legal structure to work in a genuine intermunicipal framework. The signing of the Treaty of Bayonne in 1995 made it possible to create the Eurodistrict of Bidassoa-Txingudi, in the form of a ‘consorcio’, a legal structure governed by Spanish law.

Since then, the number of initiatives has grown. Events and activities are organised each year during the second weekend of October with growing success. Between the sports competitions, art exhibitions and the ‘corso fleuri’, opportunities to go and see what is happening ‘on the other side’ are in no short supply. In Hendaye, a language laboratory enables the Spanish residents to brush up on their French. Spanish and Basque courses are also organised. Two major projects have been implemented, the local housing plan (PLH) and the economic and social regeneration action on both banks of the Bidassoa: renovation of dwellings in Irún and revitalisation of the historic centres of Hendaye and Hondarribia. As for the airport, no longer in use since the opening of the border, it is gradually becoming an industrial area with the arrival of French and Spanish firms. It is, for example, currently home to a print shop, an office furniture cooperative and a bottle cap production plant.

The Diputación foral de Guipúzcoa and the District of Bayonne-Anglet-Biarritz have also begun developing the huge urban expanse that stretches 50 km between Bayonne and San Sebastian. This conurbation of some 600,000 inhabitants has particular needs when it comes to structuring the area. The project includes the establishment of a cross-border observatory to come up with proposals in this field.

Contact
Secrétariat général aux affaires régionales
Préfecture de la Région Midi-Pyrénées
Coordination du programme Interreg France-Espagne
F-31500 Toulouse
Tel. (33) 5 34 45 34 45
Fax (33) 5 34 45 33 05
E-mail: claude.saint-michel@midi-pyrenees.pref.gouv.fr
Web: www.bidasoa.net

Programme: Interreg IIA France/Spain
Projects: Different projects in the Txingudi area
Total cost: EUR 2,484,919
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 1,079,339
A gateway to cooperation

At the borders of Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, closer relations with the applicant countries seeking membership in the Union has turned a vast zone, once divided by the Iron Curtain, into an area of convergence at the centre of Europe with an enormous potential for development. In this context, information and communication have a key role to play. From this arose the idea of the ‘Planning the gateway’ project, a complete IT system for cross-border information on all the initiatives that concern regional development and city and town planning in the Vienna-Brno-Bratislava-Győr area.

Established in 1997, and carried out by an Austrian research institute under the auspices of the City of Vienna, the collection of information has given shape to a database that currently lists nearly 200 different projects (the projects co-funded by Interreg and Phare-CBC in particular), which are regularly updated with brief descriptions and progress reports. There are also address lists, map information and studies on regional topics. Accessible to all, the database is available in five languages (German, Czech, Hungarian, Slovak and English) and designed to be user-friendly: the search menu offers various selection criteria (region, theme, period, new projects) and Internet users are asked to report any changes occurring in the projects, announce the implementation of new actions and share their criticism and suggestions.

Its systematic nature and diverse content make ‘Planning the gateway’ a valuable tool for managers, experts, investors and local players and for anyone interested in cross-border cooperation. A genuine communication platform, it is not only an abundant source of information but also an instrument for sharing experiences, developing networks and providing impetus for new cooperation projects.

Contact

ÖIR — Österreichisches Institut für Raumplanung
Austrian Institute for Regional Studies and Spatial Planning (ÖIR)
Franz-Josefs-Kai 27,
A-1010 Wien
Tel. (43-1) 53 38 74 70
Fax (43-1) 533 87 47 66
E-mail: oir@oir.at
Web: http://www.viennaregion.net
http://www.oir.at

Magistratsabteilung 18 — Stadtentwicklung und Stadtplanung
der Stadt Wien
Rathausstrasse 14-16
A-1082 Wien
Tel. (32-1) 40 00 80 18
Fax (32-1) 40 00 99 80 18
E-mail: post@m18.magwien.gv.at
Web: http://www.magwien.gv.at/VTS/

Programme: Interreg IIA Austria/Hungary, Austria/Czech Republic and Austria/Slovakia

Projects: ‘Planning the gateway’ I and II

Total cost: EUR 123 326

Contribution of the European Union I and II: EUR 61 663
On the trail of ‘narcotourism’: cross-border street work

In a cross-border area like the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, between Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, drug problems are compounded by ‘narcotourism’, meaning the arrival of foreign tourists, recreational consumers of drugs, who come to find an artificial corner of paradise. Often they are unaware of the risks they run in such a neighbourhood where it is easy to go from soft to hard drugs and where the syringes may not be safe. They do not know there are services that provide help or wrongly believe that in the Netherlands everything is allowed. What is more, only a few years ago, the welfare services of the different regions used different methods, and the other players engaged in the fight against drugs (municipalities, police, general public health services) acted without any coordination and according to their own interests, to such an extent that one action could sometimes contradict another.

In 1996 when the ‘Delta plan’ approach to drug addiction was launched in the Euroregion, 54 % of drug users had no contact with the services providing assistance. The situation is significantly different today. Most local consumers now know the street workers from the Euroregional services, visitors are better informed and the collection of syringes is better organised, often with the help of the users themselves. The different people involved know one another better and are more effectively coordinating their actions. Completed in July 2000, the ‘Delta plan’ has left behind consultation structures that continue to operate, ongoing working relations and people who work in the sector who are more aware of the social aspects of the drug problem.

The first part of the ‘Delta plan’ was the cross-border street work. The method developed was not found in any manual. By creating more opportunities for contact and friendly situations with consumers, by becoming known to the surrounding environment (shopkeepers, policemen, street cleaners, etc.), by establishing links with drug assistance services, by diversifying the forms of prevention (discussions in trains, newspapers, etc.), the street workers gradually set up a network of action at different levels, including at the political level. This neighbourhood work contributed to the second part of the ‘Delta plan’, which was the coordination of assistance, from emergency centres to psychosocial help. The work even encouraged intersectoral activities and the global policy approach, which was the third part. In this regard, the ‘Delta plan’ was also based on active cooperation with the European Urban Safety Forum, present especially in border areas.

One of the conclusions of the experience is that the effects of the cross-border project must appear in the relations between the two sides of the border but also in local policy and practice: the local partners were able to find one another thanks to the ‘Delta plan’.

Contact
Stichting Euregio Maas-Rijn
Postbus 5700
6202 MA Maastricht
Netherlands
Tel. (31-43) 389 73 41
Fax (31-43) 389 72 87
E-mail: alainlorquin@euregio-mr.nl

Programme: Interreg IIA Germany/Belgium/Netherlands (Maas-Rhein Euroregion)
Project: Plan to fight against drug addiction (Delta plan)
Total cost: EUR 1,366,194.05
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 673,126.37
Medical cooperation between Greece and the Balkans

The political upheavals in the Balkans have resulted in a deterioration of the public health services of the countries bordering Greece, which also has consequences for Greece because of migratory flows. In the face of this situation, the Greek Ministry of Health took the initiative of setting up, with the help of Interreg, cross-border public health centres (CBPHCs) to cope with immediate needs while promoting cooperation and exchanges of experiences with the countries concerned in the fields of medical research and health education. In a first phase, CBPHCs were opened along the borders of Albania and Bulgaria where uncontrolled migrations and a lack of awareness of health risks have posed acute problems.

A series of 76 studies on major health risks, performed as part of the project, laid the groundwork for cooperation and made it possible to draw up a public health charter for the Greek border areas. Particular emphasis is being placed on controlling transmissible diseases and water pollution, monitoring the effects on humans and animals and improving health-care facilities. Various international activities have also been organised to encourage a common approach to current and future health problems and to help implement appropriate mechanisms to cope with emergency situations. Public health experts from all the countries concerned participated in 35 events, which led to the creation of a Greek–Balkan cooperation and communication network. Today, numerous experts remain in touch with one another through an electronic forum and exchange medical or technical information thanks to an Intranet network.

In Greece, over 200 people have completed a training course on the main health problems, such as disease protection and prevention, so that medical services have sufficient human resources to implement all the necessary reforms in the public health sector.

For the period 2000–2006, the programme being funded under Interreg III includes the expansion of the existing CBPHCs and the setting-up of five new centres along the parts of the border with Macedonia that have become eligible for European aid, the publication of health information for medical professionals and the general public, the development of educational programmes and the transfer of know-how.

Contact
Ministry of the National Economy
Department of Community Initiatives
Place Syntagma
GR-10180 Athens
Tel. (30-1) 03 33 24 46
Fax (30-1) 03 33 23 67

Programme: Interreg IIA Greece/Albania, Greece/Bulgaria and Greece/Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Project: Cross-border public health centres (CBPHCs)
Total cost: EUR 5 300 000
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 3 700 000
Transnational cooperation

Using fast trains to speed up development

The high-speed train or TGV (train à grande vitesse), as the French call it, is an alternative to the car and aeroplane for medium- and long-distance travel and certainly a necessary one, given the steady increase in automobile and air traffic and its growing effect on the quality of life. This is particularly true in heavily urbanised areas like the north-west metropolitan area, which includes parts of Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France and all of Belgium and is inhabited by 75 million people. That is why from 1998 to 1999 Interreg funded the high-speed train network in an effort to improve the railway network in this area. A series of pilot projects were launched so that the network would have maximum economic impact, particularly by diversifying the connections with other means of communication. The initiative encompassed the regions covered by the Thalys, Eurostar, TGV and ICE high-speed train lines. It began with a survey at every stop in the regions crossed. The findings were used to draw a picture of the situation of the different sites and to lay the groundwork for cooperation. A series of pilot projects were then decided and gradually implemented.

These included a study of the road terminals and their connection to the high-speed train network in order to improve the complementarity between the high-speed train stations and the other land-based means of communications. Another study concerned the introduction of an international system that would improve the sources of travel information: call centres, electronic or printed information.

The airports of Heathrow in London, Brussels National and those of Cologne and Charleroi developed the high-speed train airport pilot project to improve the transfer from planes to trains, customs procedures, baggage handling and logistics. As for the high-speed train service project, it was aimed at existing facilities and their integration in the local context, taking account of new markets and new types of train station facilities.

In the cities of Utrecht, Arnhem and Düsseldorf, an analysis of the factors of success and failure and a detailed research study on the network’s relationship with high-tech trade, recreational facilities and tourist and cultural facilities were aimed at determining areas where development was needed. Finally, high-speed freight transport in the regions of the airports of Schiphol, Brussels, Liege and Cologne was the subject of a feasibility study for the high-speed freight train project.

Together, the findings of these projects are providing a better overall picture of the situation and can be used as building blocks for the future.

Contact
Provincie Gelderland
Tel. (31-30) 272 80 19
Fax (31-30) 272 80 50
E-mail: lboelens@hr.nl
Web: www.hst-network.net

Programme: Interreg IIC north-west Europe metropolitan area (NWMO)
Project: High-speed train network
Total cost: EUR 650 000
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 325 000
Science and technology: an ocean of information for the Atlantic regions

The regions lying along the Atlantic seaboard are off-centre in relation to Europe’s main economic areas. This creates disadvantages, particularly for industry and especially for small businesses, which have difficulty gaining access to scientific and technological resources. The Atlantec network, set up between 1997 and 1999, is primarily aimed at promoting transnational cooperation between those working in the scientific and industrial sectors in six regions of the southern part of the Atlantic area: Aquitaine, Navarre, the Basque Country, Galicia, all of Portugal and Andalucia. The network offers them tools to facilitate information dissemination, meetings, exchanges and initiatives within the scientific and technical communities in fields of common interest and to help them learn about areas of excellence and the application of key technologies which have an impact on the economy and society. In this way, the network encourages the development of regional potential.

Among the joint actions carried out is the development of an Internet communication tool, especially intended for environment technologies (processing of industrial residues). Different sources of information, complementary but often scattered, are brought together. New information (legislation, supply and demand of technologies, patents, publications, events, etc.) is e-mailed to the different communities of experts who are registered as users. A server of channels, together with a server of distribution lists, acts as a go-between for the users in the four available languages. It does systematic searches on a series of websites to find new information. With e-mail, it is possible to automatically inform the users about topics of interest to them and to send comments to all the others on the distribution list. Electronic forums are also organised. The Atlantec Internet site also contains a regularly updated database for companies on the technological centres and facilities of the partner regions.

To facilitate the launch of cooperation projects (technology transfers, research and development projects), their promoters within the Atlantec network can benefit from a system of direct financial aid and logistical and technical assistance to help researchers and industrialists when they have to travel. Atlantec also organises technological exchanges between SMEs (products, hardware, software, etc.), exchanges of experiences and good practices in its members’ fields of expertise and training seminars when outside expertise is needed. It participates in events, such as the International Environmental Fair, PROMA 2001, in Bilbao, operates ‘technological watches’ and is engaged in a number of other activities.

Contact
Cámara Navarra de Comercio e Industria
Departamento Comercio Exterior y Cooperación
C/ General Chinchilla 4
E-31002 Pamplona
Tel. (34) 948 07 70 70/(34) 948 07 70 69
Fax (34) 948 07 70 82
E-mail: cexteriorycoop@camaranavarra.com
Web: www.atlantec.org

Programme: Interreg IIC Atlantic Area
Project: Atlantec
Total cost: EUR 278 720
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 158 510
Around the Baltic, a palette of regions to paint the future

Like the many colours on a painter’s palette, the central Baltic Sea is surrounded by 10 regions belonging to five countries: the regions of Stockholm-Malär in Sweden, Häme and the Åland islands, south-west Finland and Helsinki, the city of Saint Petersburg and the region of Leningrad in Russia, the city of Tallinn and the region of Harju in Estonia, and finally the region of Riga in Latvia. These are 10 regions with a tremendous potential for development, given their economic fabric, human resources, dynamic metropolitan areas, tourist and cultural attractions and geographical position as a hub at the heart of the Baltic transnational area. This favourable context corresponds to a period of rapid changes marked by more and more international trade, the opening of the European Union to eastern Europe and the swift development of the ‘information society’.

The ‘Baltic palette’ transnational project, launched in January 1999 with the help of Interreg in the two Member States, of Phare in the two applicant countries applying for EU membership and of TACIS in Russia, has aimed to take advantage of these assets with a perspective, vision, strategy and action plan common to all the participants. Set up with a secretariat spread across the five capitals and a task force of experts, the project was implemented through eight action groups in the following fields: metropolitan areas (cooperation and competition, polycentric development, sustainable development), development ‘corridors’, maritime and port relations, information technology networks, sustainable development in the archipelagos and islands, sustainable development. Sustainable development, meaning environment-friendly and balanced, is a challenge for the partners, because they are responsible for the real risks that the current economic development poses for the rich natural heritage of the Baltic regions.

When the project came to a close in mid-2001, a network was in place and common documents had been published, tools with which to continue the discussion and action. Baltic palette I has since then been followed up by Baltic palette II, which places the emphasis on four needs: a marketing effort to promote the image of the Baltic palette region and make it a symbol of cooperation without frontiers, the orientation of infrastructure investments towards projects able to benefit from the support of international financial institutions, the creation of new cooperation networks in the areas of tourism, the environment and culture, and finally, the establishment of joint education and training initiatives and programmes for the exchange of experiences.

Hovercraft cruise in the Åland Islands (Finland).
Building policies for the outskirts of cities

Who has not been struck by the proliferation at the entrance to many cities of large shopping centres, and especially factory outlets, which move to the edge of their towns? In a lot of cases, this process has negative effects on the urban and regional balance and on the environment: decline of city centres, increased traffic, successive encroachment of green areas, deterioration of the landscape. These consequences are no longer limited to national areas but can have repercussions on border regions in neighbouring countries. To limit these developments and ensure coherence, regional planning policies must be coordinated in cross-border areas and be part of a long-term transnational approach. It was precisely for that reason that the relevant regional authorities of North-Rhine Westphalia (Germany), the Province of Limburg (Netherlands), the Walloon Region and the Flemish Region (Belgium) and a German non-governmental organisation carried out the TRADE project from August 1998 to March 2001.

Coordinating policies in this way is not an easy task, and the objective of TRADE was to establish the necessary criteria and institutional framework to make it possible. A cross-border working group brought together the knowledge needed to evaluate the applications of the promoters of retail shopping centres, introduced a system of consultation and developed common working methods. It compared the experiences of the respective authorities and studied the consequences of building the centres, particularly in border areas. Finally, it defined the guidelines applicable, which all the partner authorities adopted. In parallel to this, workshops were organised with all those concerned (shop owners, local authorities and other institutions) to inform them about the situation concerning the development of retail shopping centres and to give them an opportunity to say what they thought about TRADE.

The final result is that the authorities of the four regions currently have common principles and criteria to ensure that the building of retail shopping centres does not negatively affect local and neighbouring town centres or harm the environment. The granting of building permits is therefore based on these references. Very concretely, the plan to build seven factory outlet centres, representing a total area of 100 000 m², was subjected to these principles, and the number of centres was reduced to two, with smaller retail surface areas. Considered a pilot transnational project, TRADE will lead to the creation of a transnational network for the coordination of regional policies in this matter.

Contact
Coordination of the TRADE project
Tel. (32-2) 358 24 75
Fax (32-2) 358 24 75
E-mail: lothar.blatt@skynet.be
Web: www.deutscher-verband.org/seiten/dv-ev-projekte/trade.asp

Programme: Interreg IIC north-west metropolitan area (AMNO)

Project: TRADE

Total: EUR 176 500

Contribution of the European Union: EUR 85 000

TRADE aims to preserve the quality of life in the suburbs.
Stemming the rural exodus in France, Spain and Portugal

The geographical area comprising the regions of Auvergne in France, Castile-Leon in Spain and the central region in Portugal includes a number of rural areas confronted with a decline in their population and their economy. It was to remedy this situation that a transnational cooperation project, ‘Organisation and revitalisation of rural areas’, was launched in July 1999 under the leadership of the chambers of commerce and industry and the universities of the region of Auvergne in France, Salamanca and Zamora in Spain and Coimbra in Portugal. Beginning with an analysis of the conditions and development problems common to these areas, the project aimed to stimulate their regeneration and therefore the maintenance and creation of sustainable activities in rural areas, the only activities capable of reversing the trend of decline and encouraging the inhabitants to stay in their native countryside. To achieve this objective, the project’s leaders had to take advantage of the potential for local development and tap into the most advanced experiences in the field. The coordinated effort of the three regions to arrive at this goal involved the creation of a pool of skills and a common methodology.

The project included a series of studies and a series of exchanges and transfers of experience. The studies carried out by a team from Blaise Pascal University in Clermont-Ferrand focused on rural areas, particularly mid-mountain areas, and on the processes of development there based on service activities (which tend to be concentrated in large urban areas to the detriment of other zones). In Salamanca and in Coimbra, the research work more specifically concerned the possibilities of setting up multiservice points (MSPs) in shops or other local public places, similar to what already existed in Auvergne. This work between universities was carried out in cooperation with the chambers of commerce and business associations.

The exchanges of experiences confirmed the keen interest the Spanish and Portuguese partners had in the MSPs in Auvergne, which proved to meet their immediate concerns. In Portugal, the findings of the studies were used to draw up a map of poorly served areas and well served areas, a map quite similar to the one showing population density. On the basis of these results, five cantons situated in two districts (Guarda and Castelo Branco) were chosen for surveys of shop owners, the purpose being to determine where to locate the future MSPs. The same approach led in Spain to the identification of 10 possible sites of which five were priority areas. Although the project’s aim was not the immediate opening of these sites, the first MSP was already operating in November 2000 in Pinzio (Portugal), a village of 1200 people and where the owner of a bar-restaurant wanted to personally implement this concept. This innovation was covered by the local press.

Between now and 2006, the initiative is continuing under Interreg III and is expanding to include other actions according to the procedure adopted for the creation of MSPs: analysis, adaptation, transfer, then establishment of a transnational network.

Contact
Chambre régionale de Commerce et d’Industrie
Aéroport d’Aulnat — BP 25
F-03510 Aulnat
Tel. (33) 473 60 46 35
Fax (33) 490 89 22
E-mail: mhleymarie@auvergne.cci.fr

Programme: Interreg IIC south-west Europe
Project: Organisation and revitalisation of rural areas
Total cost: EUR 372 000
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 237 198
Putting small towns online to prevent marginalisation

In small remote urban centres, away from the major areas of economic activity and trade, new communication technologies have a vital role to play to ensure that people have access to a whole range of information, knowledge and services. But for this to be possible, the towns must have IT infrastructures and Internet sites that match their needs and are accessible to people who often do not have a computer or do not know how to use one effectively. It was with this idea in mind that the ‘Network of fragile areas’ project was launched in 1999, with the support of Interreg and the coordination of the region of Umbria, in a series of regions in the transnational cooperation area of the western Mediterranean and the Italian Alps. There were seven Italian regions (Sardinia, Sicily, Basilicata, Liguria, Lacio, Umbria and Val d’Aosta) and the region of Murcia in Spain.

The primary objective was to set up IT access gates (ITAGs). That has now been accomplished for the sites of Arbus (Sardinia), Accettura (Basilicata), Esperia and Lenola (Latium), Petralia Sottana (Sicily), Rhémes-Notre-Dame, Saint-Pierre Castello and Saint-Pierre Pain de Coucou (Val d’Aosta) and Tuoro Sul Trasimeno (Umbria). Another Umbrian site, that of Colfiorito in the earthquake-affected municipality of Foligno, has been set up in a temporary building and will later be transferred to a building currently undergoing renovation (the work is being co-funded by the Italian State and the European Union, and the people affected by the earthquake have received a computer in addition to the compensation traditionally granted). As for the region of Murcia, it has carried out IT actions to develop local and human resources in the field of arts and crafts.

The ITAGs provide two kinds of service: consultation and online assistance. Consultation covers fields like tourism, trade, education and vocational training, the police and civil protection, jobs and businesses, etc. Online assistance is for e-mail, videoconferencing or multimedia programmes, services for different groups of people (young people, women, the elderly or disabled), legal, tax or trade union assistance, teleworking and even participation in European programmes. The sites are designed for a wide public and meant to be user-friendly.

The next step is to use IT to encourage the interactive approach to the problems of the different regions, the sharing of experiences and skills and the stimulation of initiatives. That is the challenge being taken on by the network for economic development, a new project, being financed since 2000 by Interreg III, to promote a more intensive use of IT services, including the ITAGs whose experiences will help to inform this new project.
Cycling, an inexpensive way to travel that requires little infrastructure and has little impact on the environment, is also growing in popularity on the recreational market. Six countries bordering the North Sea have joined forces to create an uninterrupted cycling path along the coastline, with ferry links, and in so doing to encourage cycling holidays. The project is being supported by a very large partnership, including local and regional authorities, tourist boards, transport carriers and numerous organisations in Germany, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden.

The projections made in the tourist sector showed a strong increase in holidays devoted to bicycle touring, which might eventually have major economic consequences. Launched in 1998, the transnational cycling path project included the transfer by ferry to ensure a continuous route around the North Sea. Among the advantages expected were the creation and maintenance of jobs in small-scale sustainable tourist activities, the promotion of other activities related to cultural tourism and awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of the regions visited.

The initiative began with a feasibility study of ferry links and existing paths in order to define the need for additional connections. Once they had this information, the partners approved at the end of May 1999 an overall strategy based on the idea that international promotion of the route should enable a stronger penetration of the market than would have been the case for each country or region acting separately.

Based for the most part on existing itineraries, the North Sea cycling path has been open since 2000. An inaugural race along the whole path, from Hamburg in Germany to Aberdeen in Scotland, was organised to mark the official opening of the complete route in mid-2001. A promotional brochure, published in six languages (Danish, Dutch, English, German, Norwegian and Swedish), includes a map that can be used to plan a cycling holiday and a manual with information on the main destinations. The route is also promoted on the Internet where a calendar of activities is posted.

Contact
Rogaland Fylkeskommune
Regionalplanavdelingen
Postboks 798
NO-4001 Stavanger
Tel. (47-51) 51 66 81
Fax (47-51) 51 66 74
E-mail: pfp@rfk.rogalandf.kommune.no
Web: www.northsea-cycle.com

Programme: Interreg IIC North Sea region
Project: North Sea cycle route
Total cost: EUR 770 960
Contribution of the European Union: EUR 385 480
Eleven countries across Europe: a common territorial vision

The transnational area known as Cadses (central Europe, Adriatic, Danube and south-east Europe) cuts across the centre of Europe and encompasses Germany, Austria, Italy and eight applicant countries seeking membership in the EU (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia). By launching the ‘Vision planet’ project, financially supported by Interreg and Phare, the 11 partner countries wanted to provide themselves with a framework for analysis and projection in order to achieve greater spatial integration and a more coherent development of the regions forming this geographical entity. The method they applied to do this consisted of gradually setting up a framework of dialogue and cooperation between the area’s regional planning authorities.

By setting up these structures, they wanted to achieve more transparency and a common basic vision to define a more long-term regional planning strategy. Unlike the experience acquired in other transnational projects, this was an entirely new approach in the political context of Cadses.

Despite that, Vision planet was able to achieve some interesting results, which showed that the project has real influence on the development of territorial policies. The participants drew up a map of the regions which were more advanced in regional planning, took stock of the diversity characteristic of the area covered by the project, shed light on critical situations and established contacts between various regional government agencies according to their respective areas of responsibility.

Completed at the end of 2000, the project has provided a comparative view of the different regional planning policies, enabling government agencies to see in what fields they are making progress and where more effort needs to be made. The countries where these policies have been implemented recently can benefit from the results of Vision planet to better define their regional development policy and to explore new methods. The project has also influenced decisions on the use of European funding in the applicant countries. For example, participation in the project has helped the Romanian and Hungarian authorities to implement Phare transnational programming.

The pursuit of this joint approach should lead to the publication of the first policy paper on regional planning priorities in the partner countries.

Vision Planet working group at a meeting in Stirin Castle (Czech Republic).
The Interreg III Community initiative (2000-2006)

Interreg III is the Community initiative for transeuropean cooperation in the framework of the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) for the period 2000–06. The guidelines were approved by the Commission on 28 April 2000 (OJ C 143 of 23 May 2000). The total budget is EUR 4 875 million for the period 2000–06 (1999 prices).

What are the general objectives of this initiative?

The objective of the new phase of Interreg is to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by promoting cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation and balanced development of the European Union territory. Actions in relation to the borders and border areas between Member States and between the European Union and non-member countries are, therefore, at the heart of the initiative. Due attention will be given to the external borders of the European Union, in particular in the perspective of enlargement and to cooperation concerning the outermost regions of the Union.

What does it consist of?

This initiative builds on the experience of the previous Interreg initiatives (cross-border, Interreg IIC). It will be implemented under three strands:

— **strand A**: cross-border cooperation promoting integrated regional development between neighbouring border regions, including external borders and certain maritime borders; the objective is developing cross-border economic and social cooperation through joint strategies and development programmes;

— **strand B**: transnational cooperation aiming to promote a higher degree of integration across large groupings of European regions, with a view to achieving sustainable, harmonious and balanced development in the EU and higher territorial integration, including with candidate and other neighbouring countries;

— **strand C**: interregional cooperation throughout the territory of the Union (and neighbouring countries) to improve regional development and cohesion.

What are the principles governing the implementation of Interreg III?

Implementation of joint cross-border/transnational strategies and development programmes, involving:

— a wide partnership between different administrative levels with socioeconomic actors and relevant actors, following a ‘bottom up’ approach;

— complementarity with the ‘mainstream programmes’ of the Structural Funds (Objectives 1, 2 and 3);

— following a more integrated approach to the implementation of the Community initiatives (in accordance with the new Structural Funds regulation — Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 — this initiative can finance measures for rural development eligible under the EAGGF, for the development of human resources eligible under the ESF and for the adjustment of fisheries structures eligible under the FIFG);

— effective coordination between Interreg III and external European Union policy instruments, especially with a view to enlargement: Phare, TACIS, MEDA, EDF, ISPA, Sapard, and CARDS (see: Guidelines).

Which European areas are eligible under Interreg?

Cross-border cooperation (strand A): areas along the internal and external land borders and some maritime areas (see: Guidelines).

Transnational cooperation (strand B): all EU regions are eligible under strand B, some are eligible for two, or in some cases even three cooperation areas.

Interregional cooperation (strand C): the whole of the EU territory is eligible.

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Interreg III: Contribution of the European Union

Indicative distribution of funding by Member State (millions of euro, 1999 prices)

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For further information, consult the Commission’s website at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/interreg3/index_en.htm
Glossary on cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation

**CAP (common agricultural policy):** European agricultural and rural development policy. The CAP falls within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Union. Its ‘first pillar’ is the organisation of agricultural markets and pricing policy. The CAP offsets the reduction in ‘intervention prices’ by increasing direct aid to farmers, encourages quality and environment-friendly agriculture and promotes the introduction of a genuine integrated rural development policy, which has become its ‘second pillar’ (see: Rural development).

**CARDS:** Community aid for the reconstruction, development and stabilisation of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which are currently not candidates for accession to the European Union.

**Cohesion Fund:** Fund created in 1993 to complement the structural aid of the European Union in the four least prosperous Member States (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland) by financing projects concerned with environmental protection and European transport networks.

Community initiative: programme proposed to the Member States by the European Commission to complement the interventions of the Structural Funds in certain areas and implemented by the Member States. Four Community initiatives are being implemented during the period 2000–06 (see: Interreg, URBAN, Leader+, EQUAL).

**EMAS (Environmental management and audit scheme):** a European regulation, also called 'Eco-audit', which defines a line of conduct for any firm or organisation wanting to voluntarily engage in environmentally responsible management. Since 2000, EMAS has included the ISO 14001 international standard as an environmental management tool, adding specific requirements to it.

**EQUAL:** Community initiative aimed at combating the factors behind inequalities and discriminations in the access to the labour market and training.

**ESDP (European spatial development perspective):** informal document adopted by the Member States in 1999, which proposes analyses and guidelines to strengthen the coordination of national regional planning policies. It aims to promote the balanced and polycentric development of Europe, appropriate city planning, a new relationship between cities and the countryside, equal access to infrastructures, communications (in particular through new technologies) and knowledge and a careful management of the environment, natural resources and heritage in order to ensure sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

**EURES:** European network made up of partners such as public employment services, trade unions and employers organisations, and coordinated by the European Commission with a view to facilitating the free movement of workers in the 17 countries of the European Economic Area (EEA) and particularly in cross-border areas. Over 500 EURES advisors provide information and advice to workers, job-seekers and employers.
Interreg: Community initiative of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in favour of cooperation between regions of the European Union. The objective of Interreg III (2000–2006) is greater economic and social cohesion in the European Union and the balanced and harmonious development of EU territory by promoting cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation and the balanced development of the Union. Special attention is being given to the involvement of the outermost regions and the regions along the Union’s external borders with the applicant countries, which are candidates for accession.

ISO 14001: see: EMAS.

ISPA (Instrument for Structural Policies for pre-Accession): European Fund created to help the 10 applicant central and east European countries (CEECs) prepare their accession (pre-accession aid) by funding projects concerned with environmental protection and transport networks. It intervenes according to the model of the Cohesion Fund.

Leader+ (links between actions for the development of the rural economy): Community initiative whose aim is to support innovative rural development actions in all the disadvantaged regions of the Union, through ‘local action groups’ (LAGs) made up of public and private social and economic partners. After Leader I (1991–94) and Leader II (1994–99), Leader+ (2000–06) is centred on the elaboration of integrated strategies for the development of rural areas and the sharing of experiences and know-how between these same areas at the European level.

MEDA: Mediterranean Development Agreement intended to provide assistance with the reform of economic and social structures in the non-EU countries of the Mediterranean basin, which are currently not candidates for accession to the European Union.

Natura 2000: European ecological network aimed at promoting the conservation of natural sites and wildlife habitats while taking into account the economic, social and cultural needs and the particular regional and local features of each Member State. The network is the result of several directives on the conservation of habitats and species, adopted by the European Commission in the wake of the 1992 Rio Conference to deal with the worrying decline in biodiversity.

NUTS (nomenclature of territorial units for statistics): nomenclature established by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) in order to have a single and coherent territorial distribution plan. The current nomenclature subdivides the countries of the European Union into 78 NUTS 1 territories (the German Länder, the regions in Belgium, etc.), 210 NUTS 2 territories (the autonomous communities in Spain, the French regions, the Italian regions, the Austrian Länder, etc.) and 1093 NUTS 3 territories, which are smaller areas. In the regional development programmes, Objective 1 of the Structural Funds primarily covers NUTS 2 territories and Objective 2 covers NUTS 3 territories.

Partnership: principle of action of the Structural Funds that implies the closest consultation possible for the preparation of programmes, between the European Commission and the relevant authorities of the Member States at the national, regional and local level. The partnership principle also implies the cooperation of a wide range of public and private actors, including the social partners (trade unions and employers organisations) and bodies responsible for environmental matters, in the implementation of programmes.

Phare: European Fund created in 1990, initially to support the reform process in Poland and Hungary. It is currently helping the 10 applicant central and east European countries (CEECs) prepare for accession. Centred on institution building, investment support and economic and social cohesion, the Fund covers the same range of measures as the Structural Funds finance in the Member States and is the main instrument for aid to the CEECs. Phare-CBC supports those cross-border or transnational actions that concern the areas situated in these countries.

Pre-accession aid: support provided by three financial instruments (see: Phare, ISPA and Sapard) to each applicant central and east European country (CEEC) until its accession to the European Union. After accession, the new Member State will benefit from all forms of EU structural aid (see: Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund). Virtually all the territory of the new Member States will fall under Objective 1 of the Structural Funds.

Priority objectives of the Structural Funds: objectives to which the Structural Funds devote most (94 %) of their resources. Objective 1 (territorial): aid to help regions whose development is lagging behind to catch up by providing them with the basic infrastructures they are lacking and by supporting investments in firms to boost economic activities. Objective 2 (territorial): aid for areas having difficulties with economic and social conversion (urban, industrial, rural or fisheries-depndant areas). Objective 3 (thematic): measures to modernise training systems and to promote employment. Objective 3 covers the entire Union except for the Objective 1 regions where these measures are included in the catch-up programmes.
**Programming**: principle of action of the Structural Funds aimed at the elaboration of multiannual development programmes. The programming follows a multiphase decision-making process based on partnership and ending with the takeover of the programmes by the holders of public or private projects. The current programming period covers the years 2000-06.

**Regional development programme**: programme adopted by the European Commission on the basis of the plans presented by the Member States and the guidelines of European regional policy. The details of the programme (measures, projects) are then autonomously prepared by the national or regional authorities and implemented, under their responsibility, by the bodies that they selected following calls for tender (see: Programming).

**Regional programmes of innovative actions**: programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) alongside the large-scale regional development programmes and Community initiatives in order to test new methods. The innovative actions have a more limited budget but are a way of putting into practice the most recent ideas, which are often insufficiently used. For the period 2000–06, these programmes primarily concern: the regional economy based on knowledge and technological innovation, the information society in regional development and regional identity and sustainable development.

**Rural development**: balanced and diversified development of rural activities. The focus is on strengthening the economic and social fabric of rural areas and stopping out-migration from the countryside by maintaining a viable and varied agricultural sector while developing complementary or alternative activities (green tourism, recreational activities, services, etc.) and preserving the environment, natural resources, the landscapes and cultural heritage of rural areas. A wide range of rural development measures are being implemented in part in the framework of the CAP across the Union (rural development programmes), in the framework of the Leader+ Community initiative and in part in the framework of regional policy (see: common agricultural policy, European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund, Leader+).

**Sapard (special action programme for agriculture and rural development)**: European fund created to help the central and east European countries (CEECs) applying for EU membership to prepare their accession (pre-accession aid) by lending assistance for the adjustment of agricultural structures and rural development. The fund is entirely decentralised, and each applicant country is responsible for its management. This is an historical first for European funding to non-EU countries.

**Services of general interest**: activities considered of general interest by the public authorities and subject for this reason to specific public service obligations. They include uneconomic services (schooling, social protection, etc.) and ‘services of general economic interest’ (transport, energy, communications, etc.). The Treaty establishing the European Community recognises (Article 16) the role that these services play in favour of the Union’s social and territorial cohesion. The Community and the Member States, each within the limits of its powers, ensure that these services operate according to principles and in conditions that enable them to accomplish their missions. Article 86 of the Treaty defines the framework in which the Member States link services of general economic interest to public service obligations.

**Structural Funds**: the main four financial instruments providing aid for the Union’s ‘structural’ actions, meaning those aimed at narrowing the economic and social gaps. The Structural Funds are complementary to national or private funding and are used to implement large-scale programmes, which cover a very broad range of local, regional or national actions. They combine their interventions depending on the needs. The Funds are the following:

- **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**. It supports the building of infrastructures, productive and job-creating investments, local development projects and aid for SMEs in disadvantaged regions.

- **European Social Fund (ESF)**. It supports training actions and employment schemes and promotes the social and occupational inclusion of unemployed people and less-favoured groups.

- **European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)**. The ‘Guidance’ section supports rural development and assistance measures for farmers in regions lagging behind in development (Objective 1) and supports the Leader+ initiative throughout the Union. The ‘Guarantee’ section supports the same measures outside of Objective 1 and certain specific measures across the Union.

- **Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG)**. It supports the adaptation and modernisation of the sector’s facilities.
Sustainable development: concept based on the choice of balanced economic growth which takes account of the requirements of employment and social inclusion, the needs of firms, the health and welfare of all and environmental protection. The aim is to satisfy present needs without jeopardising the capacity of future generations to satisfy theirs.

Tacis: technical assistance programme for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union and Mongolia. Tacis-CBC (cross-border cooperation) supports those cross-border or transnational actions concerning Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova.

Territorial employment pacts: agreements between public and private local partners to implement at an appropriate territorial level new methods to use all resources (financial, administrative, human, technical) that can help create jobs and contribute to economic and social development. The experience of the 89 pacts implemented in the Union between 1994 and 1999 has served as a basis to encourage a better use of the Structural Funds.

Trans-European networks (TENs): all the cross-border infrastructures for transport, energy, telecommunications and the environment, which are coordinated with national networks in order to maximise the advantages of the single market while ensuring the accessibility and balanced distribution of the infrastructures across Europe.

URBAN: Community initiative aimed at regenerating city neighbourhoods in crisis, improving deteriorated urban fabrics and promoting sustainable urban development.