

SRN WORKSHOPS – THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION KLAIPEDA, LITHUANIA 15 JUNE 2006

GOOD PRACTICE IN TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

The aims of the workshop were to examine SRN partners' experiences and good practices in territorial cooperation and briefly to explore their plans for further cooperation from 2007.

Territorial Cooperation in Lithuania

Stasys Bielinis from **Klaipeda Regional Development Agency** introduced this theme, considering cooperation both internal and external to Lithuania, and both before and after accession to the EU.

Within Lithuania the adjacent but very different counties of Klaipeda and Taurage made a successful bid for targeted support from the European Commission in 1999. Joining forces enabled them to overcome competition for the funds from other regions. Timely preparation of the bid was led by the Chamber of Commerce and capitalised on work undertaken previously through the PHARE programme and on positive contacts with the Commission. The new programme supported a Business Development Fund and Human Resources Development Fund. Cooperation continued until 2002 when key staff left. However, Klaipeda now benefits from a consultancy resource dating from this time. Stasys identified the combination of an economic incentive and creative people as crucial for success, it being difficult to sustain cooperation if these two factors disappear.

Before EU accession, Lithuania's external territorial cooperation was mainly with individual countries in the Baltic Sea Region using PHARE and TACIS. From 1995 to 1999, one agency managed cross-border cooperation in the region. Projects were mainly led by partners from existing EU Member States. From 2000 Lithuania managed its own cross-border programme; local participation, especially by sub-regional entities, greatly increased. Lessons from cooperation during the pre-accession period are relevant in current programmes. For example, all partners in a project need to have an equal incentive for participation, with equitable access to funding and the use of local experts rather than excessive reliance on foreign consultants.

Lithuania began to access INTERREG programmes following EU accession in 2004. The IIIA programmes were much delayed and expertise in project development was initially lacking. However, the number of successful submissions increased with each call and the concern now is the short time that remains for implementation. INTERREG IIIB has made a significant contribution to the development of a coordinated strategy for the Baltic as a Euroregion. This cooperation now extends across six countries and ten regions and the joint strategy provides a framework for Structural Funds programmes from 2007, demonstrating the value of a joint strategy in securing financial commitments from the EU, national and regional governments. Lithuania was late in embracing INTERREG IIIC opportunities and participation remains limited. However, Klaipeda Regional Development Agency is a partner in five IIIC projects and able to offer tactical suggestions on how to boost success in this kind of cooperation.

Taking a wider EU perspective, the view from Lithuania is that:

- Territorial Cooperation will not happen on a large-scale without clear economic incentives; and that
- local and national politicians need to be persuaded that Territorial Cooperation is essential to the 'European project' and worth financing.

The experience of Lille

Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine, represented at the meeting by **Francois Goarin**, provides professional and technical support services to 85 municipalities. It has a small team dealing with Objective 2 and INTERREG projects, such as those funded through the IIIC RFO 'Regional triangle of Weimar'. Lille Métropole also participates in cooperation projects funded through other EU budgets such as the Community Framework for Cooperation to support Sustainable Urban Development, FP6 and URBACT.

From Lille's own experience, good practice points for sub-regional organisations involved in the development and implementation of projects include, for example, maintenance of good relationships with the JTS of relevant programmes and with local, regional and national contact officials, and having a clear view of the aims and requirements at the start of a project and a marketing strategy to interest potential partners. Project management structures within a local authority are also important. Lille Métropole has set up a 'triangular' technical and administrative structure to manage projects, with a single contact point for external partners in the European Affairs Department, a Technical Officer and a Financial Reference Point. In the next funding period there will be an internal intranet platform to help link all EU projects and ensure that they are complementary.

As to good practice in programme management and delivery, there should be clarity on the auditing, reporting and dissemination requirements for projects, and Programme Managing Authorities and the JTS should undertake more rigorous monitoring and assessment of outcomes. The effectiveness of the Managing Authority is a key factor in determining success in projects. Consistency is needed in the performance of Managing Authorities and in national requirements for monitoring, auditing and reporting. Discussion indicated general concerns about the quality of management in some programmes, especially INTERREG IIIA.

Shorter interventions illustrating further points

- **Ursula Perez**, from Sociedad Desarrollo (Local Development Agency) de **Santa Cruz de Tenerife** described the agency's involvement in a range of cooperation projects, all of which complement the main functions of the organisation - boosting local economic development, improving social cohesion and stimulating urban development. The projects include the IIIC Knowledge Network (KN), seeking to promote citizen involvement in local policy development and decision-making; two projects to promote tourism training – SMITA in INTERREG IIIB and TYC-PYME, both with an information/communications technology focus; and the IIIC Regional Framework Operation (RFO) MO.DE.LE, concerned with the development of new financial and other tools to support SMEs. MO.DE.LE is significant in that the Canary Island Regional Government has delegated responsibility for implementation to the Local Development Agency, a sub regional entity.
- **Laura Carletti** from **SVIM** gave a perspective on territorial cooperation from Marche Region. Priorities since the 1990s have been cooperation with the Balkans and creation of a broader Adriatic EuroRegion. The Adriatic currently has a lower level of cohesion than the Baltic Sea region, partly because the eastern partners are not within the EU, so that it is difficult to integrate the different funds available, and partly because cooperation was until recently not well coordinated and undertaken in the absence of a strategic plan. Marche Region launched an initiative (SE.A) to establish a Technical Secretariat for the Adriatic area in 2003, and an Action Plan was prepared in 2004. Marche Region is committed to the involvement of different actors in the SE.A initiative, aiming to build a permanent coordination structure by the end of 2006. Sub-regional bodies are represented on the management committees of SE.A through networks like the Adriatic and Ionian Cities Forum and Uniadrión, which brings together universities and research centres in the Adriatic region. Since 2005, the SE.A initiative has been financed mainly through the INTERREG IIIA Adriatic Cross Border programme and a specific Italian national law for cooperation with the Balkans, 84/2001 - the Inter-Adriatic Network Project. The two measures together

result in a substantial financial resource for cooperation. However, administrative difficulties have resulted in late implementation of the IIIA Adriatic programme, leading to a large backlog of proposals yet to be assessed and probable abandonment of a planned third phase. A general lesson from the Adriatic is that substantial financial resources made available through EU and domestic instruments are essential to promote collaboration across borders, but these resources cannot be deployed effectively in the absence of a strategy and well-organised delivery mechanisms. The 2007-2013 programming period should provide opportunities for further integration.

Conclusions/transferable lessons

This workshop demonstrated the extensive involvement of SRN partners in territorial cooperation projects on a range of themes. Three of these sub-regional organisations (Cumbria County Council, Hranice and Sociedad Desarrollo de Santa Cruz de Tenerife) have devolved responsibility from their regional governments for the management of Regional Framework Operations in which they are jointly managing 'mini' Structural Funds programmes, letting and monitoring international sub-projects.

The presentations included several practical lessons on how to ensure success in territorial cooperation projects, with discussion on, for example, how many partners to work with and how to identify partners. Transferable lessons focused on these practical tips, but there were also points of relevance for programme management and for the design of programmes within the new EU Territorial Cooperation objective.

On the new opportunity to 'mainstream' interregional cooperation in the forthcoming programmes for Convergence and Competitiveness and Employment, SRN partners agreed to send observations to the Commission and other stakeholders. Sub-regional organisations have considerable experience in cooperation and ways need to be found to inject this expertise into the formulation of the new Operational Programmes.

If partners want to keep working together, they should begin to develop new ideas for projects before the current project ends, and that they should aim to submit proposals to early funding calls, when the opportunities are greatest and the competition least. SRN partners agreed that there is an urgent need to prepare new proposals for territorial cooperation for the next EU funding period.