

## Event report: “success by cooperation”



*The North West Europe Programme launched the new INTERREG IVB phase of project funding and celebrated its achievements under INTERREG IIIB at a major conference in Lille on 5-6 March 2007.*

The event, titled “success by cooperation”, demonstrated the importance of transnational cooperation and the value to citizens of the tangible benefits that projects can deliver on major European challenges like sustainable prosperity and climate change.

The event was attended by more than 650 politicians, project partners and other stakeholders in transnational cooperation from across the North West Europe region. On Day 1 delegates heard from top-level politicians and experts including EU Commissioner Danuta Hübner and EU Committee of the Regions President Michel Delebarre, as well as stimulating interactive panel

discussions and question and answer sessions.

International journalist Eithne Treanor, formerly of CNBC and Sky News, moderated the first day and kept a lively pace with interaction from the audience.

The action in the main chamber was complemented outside by a large range of 65 project stands in which partners shared and displayed their work and results. The second day was dedicated to developing potential project ideas for funding in 2007-2013. It was equally well attended and gave plenty of opportunities for delegates to meet new partners, share ideas and prepare good proposals for the first call of INTERREG IVB.



*Moderator Eithne Treanor*

### Day 1 : welcome address

The conference was opened with a warm welcome from Martine Filleul, vice president of the Region Nord Pas

de Calais, the NWE programme's Managing Authority.

“Europe won't change only by institutional change, but by concrete projects” she said. “We must work together. Through dynamic projects we will show our ability to adapt to the global economy that is emerging today. Nord Pas de Calais sees Europe as an engine for working with other regions and for learning from them”.



*Martine Filleul, vice president, Region Nord Pas de Calais*

## The Committee of Region's viewpoint

Michel Delebarre has been a member of the Committee of the Regions since 1998, and its President since February 2006. A veteran politician, he has a wealth of experience in French local and national government and planning.

“For the period ahead, the onus is on you and us to develop and sustain these projects. We must share and develop our exchanges and cooperation in our enlarged Europe, beyond frontiers. It is through such practical concrete achievements that Europe can meet citizens' expectations: social cohesion, competitiveness and solidarity,” he said.

M. Delebarre explained that the Committee of the Regions had always supported territorial cooperation, and felt that transnational cooperation in particular can open up “wonderful

prospects” both for local governments and for national cohesion. The new programme is an opportunity to promote better integration between national and regional policies, in the context of the EU's Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies.

“It can play a crucial role in consolidating the regional approach within a framework of European policies like transport, energy, competitiveness and the environment,” he said.

M. Delebarre said it was important to extend the scope of cooperation beyond specialists and open it up to all players, including public and private sectors, non-governmental and non-profit organisations.

“I am convinced that each of us must adopt a visionary point of view and not forget the value of practical cooperation in the field for the benefit of a great number of people. I have a great deal of enthusiasm at the time of the launch of this programme. It will illustrate the success of Europe and the benefits of the EU.”



*Michel Delebarre, President, EU Committee of the Regions*

## The EU territorial agenda

Manfred Sinz, head of spatial planning at the German federal ministry for transport, building and urban affairs, explained how cooperation in North West Europe contributes to the realisation of the EU Territorial

Agenda, which the German Presidency plans to adopt in May.

“We are faced with new challenges. Most of them are well known: daily globalisation leads to concentration and relocation of economic activity, which involves risks of social and demographic imbalance. In some regions of Europe there is also an overload on the environment. All of this is connected to the distribution of people in space,” Herr Sinz said.



*Manfred Sinz, head of spatial planning, German federal ministry for transport, building and urban affairs*

“We should always find a balance between economic and employment objectives; we should promote regional diversity and also develop the specific features of cities. These should be strengthened for the sake of employment and economic growth,” Herr Sinz said.

He pointed out that the social and economic differences were always greater within cities and regions than between them.

“It is necessary to always find a new balance between economic growth and compensation on the one hand and common solidarity on the other hand. This should be developed with strategies for European development.”

The Territorial Agenda aims to make better use of territorial advantages in all regions for economic growth and employment; to promote growth also beyond Europe’s thriving core area; to build cross-border and transnational cooperation and to reinforce regional identity. This will be implemented through five priorities:

1. Strengthening innovative and cooperative development of metropolitan regions, urban areas and regional centres
2. New forms of partnership and territorial governance between rural and urban areas
3. Strengthening and extending trans-European networks
4. Promoting trans-European risk management
5. Strengthening ecological resources and cultural heritage

“These are our five priorities. We all agree that we need to use and implement territorial agenda. We are faced with lots of challenges, so we will have to work hard to make it a success,” Mr Sinz said.

## The new programme

Rainsford Hendy launched the new INTERREG IVB North West Europe programme, speaking of the spirit of cooperation among nations and its importance from his perspective as Chairman of Ireland’s Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly. He said the programme was a productive vehicle for an integrated approach to territorial development.



*Cllr. Rainsford Hendy, Chairman Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly, Ireland*

“The NWE programme 2000-2006 was built on a history of cooperation as well as a spatial vision for the NWE area. These programmes have been hugely

important in Ireland, and particularly in less populated areas,” Cllr. Hendy said. “Despite the differences across regions, we are faced with similar dilemmas, such as connectivity and territorial development. These remain vital for the programme ahead.”

He pointed out that despite the success of transnational cooperation to date, the analysis underpinning the new programme shows that disparities persist in certain areas.

“This poses a major challenge for the new programme and one that we as politicians need to address and develop,” Cllr Hendy said. “It is a great pleasure to formally launch the new programme, to thank all involved and to wish you the best of luck.”

## The strategic priorities

Harry Knottley, UK representative on the international working party on INTERREG IVB, gave insights into the strategic thinking underpinning the programme’s next funding period.



*Harry Knottley,  
UK representative INTERREG IVB  
International Working Party*

He began by outlining the value of transnational working. “Higher level” benefits include the ability to base investment decisions on a deeper analysis of citizens’ needs and to negotiate common purpose with international partners.

Regions and countries can spread best practice and develop transferable models, with transnational support for the development of policies and solutions from large-scale problems to small-scale targeted investments. Organisations gain capacity, understanding, access to networks and a value-added European dimension. “Few of us as individuals have answers. But together as groups we can make progress,” Mr Knottley said.

He then outlined the four strategic priorities of the new programme:

1. Developing the NWE knowledge-based economy by capitalising on our capacity for innovation – so to strengthen innovative capacity and mobilise regional and local potential through transnational cooperation.
2. Sustainable management of natural resources and of natural and technological risks – so to promote an innovative and sustainable approach to natural resource management, risk management and the enhancement of the natural environment through transnational cooperation.
3. Improving connectivity in NWE by promoting intelligent and sustainable transport and ICT solutions – so to improve functional integration and accessibility via sustainable connections for passengers and freight, and to develop innovative communications and technology applications.
4. Promoting strong and prosperous communities at transnational level – so to strengthen the attractiveness and performance of cities, towns, rural areas and regions through joint actions that will encourage sustainable

economic activity and social stability.

The priorities will next be submitted to the Commission for internal checks and analysis, followed by consultation with member states.

## Questions and answers

A question-and-answer session followed, in which several delegates probed speakers on topical issues.

◆ Anke Seidler, a South East England regional representative, asked what in practical terms could be done to ensure that member states take forward and implement what are clearly important proposals for the German presidency and the European Union.

Herr Sinz said the territorial agenda would be implemented voluntarily by member states, regions, towns and cities – in those parts that they wish to, and in ways that fit their regional situation.

“The new document and agenda will be a product of consensus at a strategic level. I can say that there is a common understanding of the problems and the ways to tackle them, but no common instruments and European governance in implementing them,” he said. “They take their own responsibility for their own solutions. That’s subsidiarity.”

Mr. Knottley expanded on that, saying: “There is huge scope for working together and achieving a lot together through consensus.”

◆ Frank Neumann, a delegate from the Institute for Infrastructure, Environment and Innovation in Brussels, pointed out the large contribution to projects from organisations who were able to act fast because of their small size. He asked: “What will be done in the new programme to stimulate the participation of small organisations?”

Cllr. Hendy welcomed the question. “Two thirds of the population of Ireland

live in the greater Dublin area, sometimes at the expense of a lot smaller communities and industries like fishing and farming. It is vitally important to reach out to these smaller organisations,” he said.

Mr Knottley stressed the importance to balance the value of bottom-up working with top-down approaches from governmental players and large organisations, who may for instance have greater capacity to act as lead partners for large projects.

“There is room in these programmes very much for both approaches,” he said.

## Regional policy

Colin Wolfe, Head of Unit for Territorial Cooperation at the European Commission’s Directorate General for Regional Policy, opened the afternoon with a sweeping view of what the new INTERREG programme meant for Europe. He explained that while transnational cooperation might on the face of it seem abstract, in fact its value can be explained in simple terms.

“Transnational territorial cooperation fills in the gaps,” Mr. Wolfe said. He spoke of gaps in transport; missing links and missed priorities in information and communication technology; gaps in environmental cooperation; gaps in social services; gaps in education; gaps between research and business; gaps between enterprises; and gaps in resources like energy.

“The second thing that INTERREG and territorial cooperation can do is address big problems where we can’t act alone – where action in one region or one country or set of enterprises just isn’t going to get the results that are needed,” he said, referring particularly to climate change, energy security and globalisation.

Mr. Wolfe said there was great potential for the future programme to touch everyday issues that matter to

citizens, just as they matter personally to him and everyone else in the room.



*Colin Wolfe  
European Commission DG Regio  
Head of Unit – Territorial cooperation*

Environmental fragility was a key concern. “We have no option but to address this and address it seriously together because that is the only way that we are going to have some sort of impact,” he said.

“Congestion issues are also very important to us, because there is a very large population in NWE squeezed into a small area. I’m sure you all got held up on your travels to Lille. That whole difficulty of too many people in too small an area is something we have the potential to address,” Mr Wolfe said.

He also stressed the importance of social and sustainable development and enterprise, and spoke of the ways in which INTERREG IWB NWE was uniquely well placed to address these problems.

“A modern region needs modern attention. A complex region needs sophisticated attention. Through cooperation we have the opportunity to make sure that we address the problems that make a difference, in a way that makes a real impact on the environment, daily life, wealth, and fundamental well-being,” Mr Wolfe said.

To find these solutions requires us to dig deep, and INTERREG programmes have the ability to do so by forming deep, sophisticated,

distributed partnerships involving many kinds of participants.

“It strikes me that your cooperation operates as a particularly productive interface between the public and private sectors,” Mr Wolfe said.

## **The Commission perspective**

European Commissioner for Regional Development Danuta Hübner recorded a video interview exclusively for the conference. She said INTERREG projects showed that it was essential for Europeans to learn from each other and do things together.

“What I find most important is that it allows you to share experience. There is such an accumulation of knowledge and experience in Europe. By working together and learning from others we can avoid wasting time making the same mistakes,” Commissioner Hübner said.



*European Commissioner for Regional  
Policy: Danuta Hübner*

She acknowledged that Europe’s political and social landscape was changing, and so cooperation programmes had to adapt to citizens’ future needs and challenges.

“Europe has changed enormously, and is also part of a quickly changing world. We live today in a Europe that is bigger: we are 268 regions. We also live in a bigger world that is producing a lot of challenges,” Commissioner Hübner said, referring specifically to climate change, energy, population

ageing, and economic underperformance. “We have to accelerate economic change and become more innovative.”

“Learning to cooperate as regions allows us to work together. The air doesn’t stop at the borders, so if we work together we can respond better to these problems.”

Commissioner Hübner expressed satisfaction with the performance of the North West Europe programme to date.

“It’s one of the best that we have. We have many good projects in this region and they are very diverse, such as floods, competitiveness, coping with the restructuring of regions, and revitalisation of brown-field sites. We are very satisfied from the perspective of Brussels with how it has been managed so far.”

She also sounded an optimistic note for the future. “It is good to have regions with experience, and I hope that Nord Pas de Calais, as managing authority, will do well,” Commissioner Hübner said.

Asked how committed the Commission was to maintaining funding for interregional projects and programmes, she said she would like more of this type of cooperation.

“I believe cooperation within Europe brings huge added value. One of the wealths of Europe is the experience that we have accumulated so far in different areas. Sharing best practices, knowledge and experience has always been an important element,” Commissioner Hübner said.

She ended with a message to the many stakeholders in European cooperation attending the conference.

“We need this cooperation. We believe it is a very important element of European policy. Please work together. Also, it is important in 2007 to stop and look back, to see that there is something that we can be proud of.

“We have achieved a lot, we have a lot to share with others.

“We need to focus on what brings regions and people together, and what brings results to our citizens. That is the task for NWE for 2007-2013.”

## Panel discussion

A stimulating panel discussion brought together contrasting perspectives from Colin Wolfe from the Commission; Jürgen Ludwig from Verband Region Stuttgart; Cllr. Peter Jones and Detlef Golletz of the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA); and A.M.G. Toine Gresel, Mayor of Heerlen.

Dhr. Gresel, whose town lies at the southern tip of the Netherlands, almost surrounded by Belgium and Germany, spoke of the barriers that borders still present when governments see Europe more as a layer of governance than as a facilitating force.

“National governments have less interest in border regions, but INTERREG recognises and supports their potential. It really does fill the gaps,” dhr. Gresel said.

He gave the example of the Minewater project on extracting heat from water pumped through abandoned mine workings. “Minewater has become a link pin between past and future and touches the hearts of local inhabitants. Awareness is everything. Climate change cannot be solved within the system that created it,” he said.



Panel discussion: Toine Gresel, (left) Mayor of Heerlen (NL) and Cllr. Peter Jones (right) Vice-Chairman of SEEDA (UK)

Cllr Jones, who is deputy chairman of SEEDA and also leader of East Sussex County Council, gave a pragmatic perspective on the politics of cooperation. He recalled the maxim that “all politics is local” and said delegates weighing up the prospects for future projects should not hesitate to check off the priorities of the new programme against the local benefits that their ideas have to offer.

Mr Golletz, who directs two large high-speed train projects under INTERREG IIB, said local implementation was also a pragmatic issue for project selection if there are tortuous local regulations and processes to be overcome.

Herr Ludwig, who is Business and Infrastructure Project Manager and Coordinator for European Affairs for the Stuttgart region, said the mission was to foster cooperation within the region and improve its competitive position within the world.

“People live regionally today. They live in one town, work in another, and take their children to school somewhere else. We need to make regions competitive and still work internally. We have to go to the market to do this. The market is Europe. It is a market for better ideas,” he said.

Colin Wolfe made the point that potential partners should never undertake a project just to get funding, echoing a view voiced by several others.

“It must be clear that the need is out there, whatever you are doing,” he said.

He emphasised the importance of making INTERREG projects more visible.

“All this work is very relevant and important in terms of people and enterprise. A huge number of people are involved. But there is also a lack of awareness – of the fact that this cooperation goes on, and also of the results.”

Herr Ludwig seconded that point by reference to a key IIB project in the Stuttgart region – ARTERY, which addresses the neglect of rivers that were once the heart of regions but have lost their glory and role at the heart of urban areas. “Its mission is to bring the people back to the river and the river back to the people,” Herr Ludwig said.



*Jürgen Ludwig (middle) guest speaker representing the Stuttgart region*

“When you bring these new ideas in, that creates visibility. It creates the possibility to move down from channel concepts to children’s hearts. It is about the ability to paint a picture of how I want this area to be,” he added.

Another question raised by the audience related to the sustainability of the “soft” outputs of cooperation projects: the networks of trust and friendship that flourish in projects, but sometimes wither when they end.

“We need to build on partnerships and trust,” said Mr Golletz. “Trust is a very simple but important word: most of the success of these projects is built on trust. That needs to be continued and developed further.”

## **Taking stock**

Jan Olbrycht MEP introduced the closing session with his perspective as Vice-Chairman of the European Parliament Regional Development Committee.



*Jan Olbrycht MEP,  
Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's  
Committee on Regional Development*

He said perceptions of the cooperation were central to its political prospects – and that INTERREG is not well understood on the outside, including among top legislators.

“This sort of action needs a small amount of money and can multiply its effects. In all European action this is the smallest amount of money with the best effect. But it is not seen that way. It is seen as a symbolic added element for European money.”

Mr Olbrycht said communicating the meaning of transnational cooperation would add weight to its cause in budget negotiations for the 2014 funding round. A sum of money that would be nearly meaningless in a mainstream spending programme can make a big difference in INTERREG. “For territorial cooperation, each euro really matters. We should share this knowledge with others.”

He echoed earlier comments about the importance of trust and of concrete results, and pushed home the message that funding is a means, not an end in itself.

“It must not be seen just as a way of getting European money. In my country, Poland, if we think all the time about how we can get European money it is a disaster. We need to think about now not to get European money – how not to need European money. We need to think about how not to be the region lagging behind.”

“If people work together just to get EU money, it is temporary, it is short term. The long term is creating sustainable cooperation.”

Mr Olbrycht said the need and motivation for cooperation must come first.

“That is the challenge: to start it, but then to go on without money. To trust them. To trust them because we made something together.”

The day concluded with an inspiring message from Flo Clucas OBE, a member of Liverpool City Council in the UK and of the EU Committee of the Regions (Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy).



*Flo Clucas OBE, Member of the  
Committee of Region's Commission for  
Territorial Cohesion (COTER)*

“Europe in practice is here – INTERREG. This is what it is all about,” she said. “People from across whole spectrum of Europe working on projects that mean something, go somewhere, make a difference.”

As an example of a project that made a practical difference, Ms Clucas cited maritime safety projects targeting poor standards on ships arriving from elsewhere in the world.

Proposals from these projects on issues such as training for mariners have fed directly into the European Parliament's legislative process, and so will make a practical difference to safety on the seas.

Mr Olbrycht delivered the final word.

“If we first understand each other, next trust each other, next will come the

investors, and it will finish with concrete results and benefits for all.”

## Successful project idea generation on Day 2

During the second day of the conference participants discussed in more detail the four new IVB programme priorities to identify possible project ideas and partnerships. This second day was also largely attended and often exceeded the capacity of certain break-out rooms. Each of the four priorities was the subject of thematic workshop, where a representative of the IWP in charge of drafting the new Operational Programme, explained some of the thinking behind each priority and the key points in terms of fund allocation, timetable and project development. In parallel some 60 project ideas had been registered online before the event on the Programme website and were displayed during that second day together with the project display of ongoing IIIB projects. Furthermore project promoters were invited to present their ideas to other participants during the workshops. This generated some very productive discussions within the workshops but also in the afternoon during the project idea market place. To date out of the 71 project ideas presented so far, 55 focus around Priorities 1 (Innovation) and 4 (Communities). The remaining 15 project ideas focus around Priorities 2 & 3 (Natural Resources and Connectivity).



*Lively exchanges around the 65 project stands*



To allow for more in-depth and focused discussions the project ideas presented were grouped into sub-themes. Appointments were taken during the workshops around specific project ideas and sub-themes to ensure a smooth transition with individual project meetings during the afternoon. There was a buzz of transnational cooperation in the making as participants switched from one discussion group to another and visited the different stands.

Members of the JTS and Contact points were at hand to facilitate these discussions and foster the matchmaking process. Other members of the JTS team were also available at the Programme Helpdesk to provide projects with answers to more specific technical questions

“We enjoyed these two days of the March event very much ! ” commented project partners. “It was a great networking opportunity to help us find new partners and make a good proposal for INTERREG IVB”

Full event contents can be found at [www.nweurope.org/marchevent](http://www.nweurope.org/marchevent)

Review project ideas submitted at :

<http://www.nweurope.org/page/onglet.php?id=1755>

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