



European Union
Regional policy

en info regio panorama

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Interview

Xavier Gizard,
Secretary-General of the
Conference of Peripheral
and Maritime Regions

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**Bringing
the regions
closer together**



The CPMR is a long-standing partner of Community regional policy. What was behind its creation in 1973?

The 23 founding members, from the 'little Europe' of the time, were incredibly far-sighted in two respects. First of all, they were convinced that, as Europe developed and grew, the regional level was bound to be increasingly called upon to play a role in this expansion. Secondly, they believed that our fellow citizens would not consider themselves part of a common European destiny if a territorial cohesion policy did not enable them to feel that all areas had a fair chance to develop.

Why do you combine 'peripheral' and 'maritime'? What does the west of France have in common with, for example, the eastern border of Hungary?

This situation reflects the structure of Europe and the cohesion report shows that it is still a feature to this day. The two words came to be used together in the days when Europe consisted of nine Member States. The accession of six new countries since then has not changed that. In today's Europe, which stretches from Finland to Greece, we see a double phenomenon: the distribution of the population has been stable since the 16th century, divided between a central part (sometimes referred to as the 'blue banana' or the 'Europe of capitals') and the coastal regions. Each of these areas contains about 40 % of the Union's population. However, the heavy concentration of the scientific, financial, economic and political decision-making centres in the central part leaves the 'other part' in a peripheral position, with less chance of developing. With the current phase of enlargement, we are seeing new peripheral areas being created in the east, and they are not all maritime areas. Some countries like Bulgaria,

Poland or Romania are partly continental, partly coastal. And this will be no different in the future for the Balkan States or Turkey.

What are the specific problems frequently faced by these regions?

The analyses of the European Commission, and our own work, clearly identify what these problems are and consider them to be of two kinds. Firstly, the regions have difficulty making their economies competitive. These problems of competitiveness are linked to insufficient accessibility, shortcomings in education and training, a low innovation and research capacity and a need for better urban facilities. Secondly, as indicated in the European spatial development perspective adopted by the 15 Member States in 1999, these regions also have problems arising from the failure to sufficiently promote new areas of prosperity and competitiveness outside the central part of the Union, such as the coastal areas along the Baltic, the North Sea, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Other areas that need to be dealt with separately are those with specific physical constraints such as islands,

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Editor: Thierry Daman, European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional Policy

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Corrigendum: The map of the Baltic Sea regions presented in issue No 6 of *Inforegio panorama* contained some mistakes.

The correct map can be found at http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/interreg3/images/pdf/int3b_baltic_a4p.pdf

the ultra-peripheral areas, mountain areas and sparsely populated areas.

Given these problems and in light of your concerns, do you think European regional policy has evolved favourably?

Yes. To begin with, it was the establishment of the ERDF that led to the creation of this policy, two years after the CPMR was set up. Then, this instrument developed substantially when Spain and Portugal joined the Union. The year 2006 will mark 20 years of sustained effort, and already we can see the beneficial effects this has had, even if much still remains to be done. The real convergence of economies works better when the regional level is brought into play. From this point of view, it is disappointing that the effort to promote the regions in the 15-Member State Union was slowed down with the Berlin compromise in 1999. It is also important to underline that very often the Union's sectoral policies (transport, research, agriculture, competition law and State aid) have done little to further the objective of cohesion.

Through the diversity of the regions that you represent, you are at the heart of the debate on the future of cohesion. How do you manage within the conference to reconcile the expectations of the Union's less-favoured regions and those of the enlargement countries, in terms of allocating aid for example?

As I said, we do this on the basis of our observation of structural inequality between the central part of Europe and the peripheral areas, be they richer or poorer. When we began

discussing the future of cohesion, the Union's current regions in no way objected to the fact that the regions of the future Member States would equally have to benefit from the solidarity developed during the past 15 years of regional policy. They all share a common desire to see an extensive rebalancing of the factors of competitiveness in order to achieve a more polycentric development of Europe. With the new phases of enlargement, our feeling is that the future policy will have to be more ambitious and better funded.

How does the CPMR see the future of regional policy beyond 2006?

It sees it as the Member States' expression of a will to deepen the Union's internal cohesion. In our view, there are five aspects to this:

- the continuation, along the same lines, of a policy in favour of regions lagging behind in development;
- a profoundly reformulated Objective 2 aimed at all the other regions — with varying degrees of European assistance depending on the region's problems — to remedy the various difficulties of competitiveness. Also, there would no longer be an infra-regional coverage of areas;
- increased interregional cooperation to help Europe's major sea basins to assert themselves as centres in a polycentric continent;
- a budget well above the current 0.45 % of the Union's gross product;
- sectoral policies that effectively contribute to achieving the objective of territorial cohesion instead of working against it.

A pioneering network of cooperation

Comprising 145 regions in 25 States — members and non-members of the European Union — the CPMR has been working for nearly 30 years to develop interregional cooperation in Europe and beyond.

Officially set up as an association and maintained with the contributions of its members, the CPMR's activity is both political and operational:

- it makes the European institutions aware of the need to take better account of the specific features of Europe's areas when devising European policies and drafting EU legislation;
- it analyses the important questions of the day concerning the European Union;
- it helps create partnerships, set up projects and establish networks between areas.

The CPMR's member regions are divided into seven geographical commissions (Atlantic arc, Balkans, islands, inter-Mediterranean, Baltic Sea, North Sea, Black Sea), which participate in European transnational, interregional cooperation programmes and carry out actions and projects in various fields: research and technology transfer, transport and communication infrastructure, tourism; the environment, fisheries and aquaculture, enterprise development, culture and identity, etc.

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Netwin: a methodology for local business networking and cluster development

Cooperation

Interreg Atlantic area

Westerly wind on the heart of Europe

The European Commission recently approved an important Interreg IIIB programme to encourage the cohesion and development of the European Union's Atlantic front.

From Scotland to Andalusia, the 'Atlantic area' of cooperation covers 856 420 km² and has a population of 71.1 million inhabitants. Of a peripheral nature, the level of development and economic integration in this vast area is still relatively fragile in comparison with the 'blue banana', Europe's economic centre which stretches from Milan to London.

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the area, different common features (geographical, historical and cultural) give the Atlantic area a certain unity and a significant number of assets that the newly approved programme of cooperation will seek to exploit. These include:

- a spirit of enterprise and innovation in most of the regions concerned;
- the survival of a culture organised around maritime activities (about 190 commercial ports), making it possible to ensure the flow of goods in the peripheral areas and a connection with the major European capitals;
- tremendous environmental diversity (wetlands, mountains and forests);



- an extremely diverse range of tourist and recreational resources;
- an 'oceanic' identity dominated by the Celtic culture, representing a rich heritage resource.

Coherence and cohesion

For the period up to 2006, the Atlantic area Interreg IIIB programme will have a total budget of EUR 204 million, of which EUR 119 million will be financed by the European Union. Its main objectives are to promote the coherence and cohesion of the Atlantic area and improve its economic competitiveness and effectiveness in order to overcome the handicaps created by its off-centre position. The programme also seeks to introduce sustainable development perspectives through an integrated territorial development strategy and to harmonise social, economic and environmental objectives by ensuring the preservation and development of the area's cultural, historical and environmental assets.

Within this context, the Member States and regions participating in the programme have identified four priorities.

- Territorial structuring and the development of centres of expertise. The projects funded may involve the creation of urban networks, rural development actions, territorial studies, and any partnership action aimed at making the Atlantic area more competitive in terms of technological innovation and research.
- Optimisation of transport networks and systems, and improved access to information and communications technologies (ICT). This might include pilot actions promoting intermodal transport (sea-rail-air) and better maritime safety. ICT awareness and promotional actions aimed at the general public and businesses will also be encouraged.
- Protection of the environment and natural resources, the integrated management of coastal areas and estuaries, protection of wetlands, the sustainable management of economic activities. Projects may include transnational partnerships aimed at environmental conservation and a rational use of specific natural resources, the prevention of pollution and pilot actions and exchanges of experiences in sustainable economic development.

- Development of the cultures and heritage of the Atlantic area. Support for the creation and promotion of common tourist products and economic promotion of the area in and outside the European Union.

The region of Poitou-Charentes in France is the authority managing the Atlantic area programme, with the assistance of a common technical secretariat located in Poitiers. A common monitoring committee, management committee and paying authority have also been set up to ensure the management and transnational implementation of the programme.

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The 'Atlantic area' partner regions and States

Portugal — Ireland — Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, Navarre, Basque Country, La Rioja, Castile-León, Canaries, Huelva, Cádiz, Seville (Spain) — Aquitaine, Poitou-Charentes, Loire Region, Brittany, Lower Normandy, Upper Normandy, Limousin, Centre, Midi-Pyrénées (France) — Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Merseyside, Worcestershire & Warwickshire, Avon, Gloucestershire & Wiltshire, Dorset & Somerset, Cornwall & Devon, Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, West Midlands, Wales, Northern Ireland, Highlands & Islands, south-west Scotland (United Kingdom).



The Union's priorities for the regions: defining the Community added value

A first seminar widens the debate on the future of the EU's cohesion policy.

At the second European forum on cohesion in 2001, Commissioner Michel Barnier indicated that the Commission would organise one or more seminars on the thematic priorities of the EU's future cohesion policy.

The first of these seminars took place in Brussels on 27 and 28 May 2002. The programme included a discussion on the geographical priorities of cohesion, particularly as regards the least developed regions, and examined urban problems, the diversification of rural areas, cross-border transnational and interregional cooperation, regions undergoing industrial redevelopment and regions suffering from serious geographical or natural handicaps.

For each priority theme, a Community field of intervention was defined where the future allocations of Structural Funds could be determined with precision. One of the main challenges for the future reform of the cohesion policy concerns the very nature of the interventions of the Funds.

Preference will have to go to actions where there is an optimal 'added value for the Community', but, at the same time, there will have to be a clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities between the Community, national, regional and local levels.

The seminar brought together experts from the Member States, the applicant countries and regions as well as representatives of the social partners and European institutions.

Opened by Michel Barnier, the first day of the seminar consisted of three workshops devoted to the regions lagging behind in development, the restructuring of regions and European regional integration. The second day, which was chaired by Guy Crauser, was dedicated to an open debate enabling all the participants to share their points of view and to examine in depth the different possible choices for the implementation of the cohesion policy after 2006.

Tyneside (England, United Kingdom)

Euro brings metro brings work

On 19 April, Neil Kinnock, Vice-President of the European Commission, inaugurated the extension of the light railway system, known as the 'metro', from Tyneside to Sunderland. A co-funding grant of EUR 24 million from the ERDF made it possible to lay the 18.5 km of track and purchase ancillary equipment.

Commissioner Kinnock underlined the economic, social and environmental impact of the project. Providing an extra 47 000 households with access to a rapid, inexpensive and non-polluting means of transport, the extended line should help reduce traffic, revitalise the city centre and revive business in Sunderland while attracting major new investment. The new line will make it easier for disadvantaged groups to travel to jobs and training opportunities and is also expected to benefit the University of Sunderland, which is served by two new stations. What is more, the metro now provides a direct link to the main railway line between London and Edinburgh and to Newcastle international airport.

Sunderland has been waiting a long time for its own metro system, to extend that in Tyneside, a conurbation of over 830 000 inhabitants. The project took two years to complete and a public-private partnership covered the cost of EUR 160 million.

The fruit of close collaboration between the regional, national and European authorities, the extension of the Tyneside metro is part of a whole series of regional reconversion operations implemented under Objective 2 and other Community interventions. The ERDF contribution of around EUR 24 million is the largest grant ever awarded in England to a single project.

This European contribution is being highly publicised with the launch of a European promotional campaign. For one year, a metro train painted with the colours of the European Union will travel on the new line.



Commissioner Neil Kinnock at the launching of the Sunderland metro train, decorated in the European colours.

Present your projects on the new Info regio web site

With the new Info regio web site (http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/index_en.htm), you can consult by country and by theme a database containing over 500 examples of economic or social development projects supported by the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. An online questionnaire also offers the possibility of submitting information on interesting new projects that can be added to the database. Please do not hesitate to let us know about your projects by going to: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/projects/stories/index_en.cfm



Discovering a country

Denmark: Europe's bridge to the north

By co-funding the Objective 2 programme, the European Union is actively participating in the development of 10 Danish regions.

Since the building of the Øresund bridge, which provides a direct link to Sweden, Denmark, a flat country entirely open to the North Sea and Baltic Sea, is more than ever the gateway to Scandinavia. With 7 000 km of coastline and over 400 islands, of which only 100 or so are inhabited, Denmark is divided into a series of small areas separated by water, but very often connected by bridges, tunnels and regular ferry services. No one place is more than 50 km from the sea.

Denmark's economic power is in no way related to its somewhat outlying geographical position. In a country traditionally deprived of raw materials, successful agricultural and fishing industries were largely behind its rapid industrial expansion. Developed in the early 19th century, the agri-food sector still accounts for about a third of the turnover of industrial production. The metal industry provides an additional third. In fact, Denmark's processing activities are extremely diversified, with most of the branches represented, from machine tools to toys, from electronics to pharmaceuticals. Dominated by small and medium-sized businesses, industry employs 25 % of the working population. Originally concentrated around the capital, Copenhagen, industrial activities have spread across the country, particularly to the eastern coast of Jylland.

As for the tertiary sector, favoured by the role Denmark plays as a bridge to Scandinavia, this has developed considerably and today employs nearly 70 % of the working population.

The country has had a surplus trade balance for some years now, with the extraction of gas and oil from its deposits in the North Sea making Denmark practically self-sufficient in these two resources.

A tradition of local democracy

The Constitutions of 1849, 1866, 1915 and 1953 have little by little forged Denmark's current image, that of a tolerant democracy, providing its citizens with one of the highest standards of living and one of the most comprehensive social security systems in the world.

The State is relatively centralised, but local government performs a number of tasks and can levy taxes for an amount representing about two thirds of Danish public expenditure. The 14 counties (*amter*) manage the main roads and ferry links, hospitals, secondary schools and certain aspects of social services and education. The 275 municipalities (*kommuner*) are responsible for primary schools, social security, local roads, libraries, etc.

The most important financial transfer mechanism is what the Danes call *bloktilskud* or literally 'block transfer'. The amount of this block grant by the State to the local authorities is determined on the basis of redistribution criteria aimed at eliminating the disparities between the country's rich areas and less-favoured areas.

Objective 2: continuing to reduce the gap

By co-funding the Danish Objective 2 programme, the European Union is actively participating in the development of the regions of Bornholm, Lolland, Falster, Møn, Nordjylland, Viborg, Århus, Ringkøbing, Sønderjylland and Sydfyn. The funding amounts to EUR 617 million, of which EUR 189 million comes from the European Union.

The eligible regions have a total population of 537 718 inhabitants, or 10.2 % of the Danish population. The unemployment rate in the Objective 2 regions averaged 8.1 % in 1999, compared with an average of 5.8 % for Denmark as a whole. These Objective 2 regions are faced with



specific environmental problems (for example, vulnerable environments, small towns with limited amounts of fresh water). They are also characterised by a 1.5 % decline in population between 1985 and 1999. This is in contrast to an overall increase in the national population during the same period. While employment in the primary sector is above the national average, employment in the service sector, per capita income, job growth and education levels all fall below the national average. However, despite the structural problems faced by these regions, the gap with the rest of the country has narrowed over the past 10 years.

In addition to technical assistance measures, the Danish regional development programme has three main priorities:

- development of the regions;
- enterprise development;
- development of skills.

The Ministry of the Economy and Industry has overall responsibility for the regional funds in Denmark, with the Danish Agency for Industry and Housing (Erhvervs- og Boligstyrelsen) being the management authority.

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Questions put to Mr Bendt Bendtsen, Minister for the Economy and Industry of Denmark



How would you define Denmark's policy in favour of disadvantaged regions?

Regional policy has evolved considerably in Denmark and currently focuses on promoting growth. The national and European programmes laid the foundations for concrete strategies that create favourable conditions for the development of indigenous regional potential. We have, so to speak, gone from an approach aimed at reducing disparities to one of supporting growth opportunities in each of the regions.

What are the priorities of Danish regional policy?

Denmark has to be at the forefront when implementing new, more effective approaches to regional development. I think that a coordinated use of public funds, targeted at specific objectives, can ensure that the many productive assets

at Denmark's disposal continue to develop to the greatest benefit of regional growth and employment.

The national programme, 'On the road to growth', aims to launch long-term initiatives in numerous sectors. We have included an ambitious regional strategic plan aimed at balanced development for the benefit of all of Denmark. In parallel, we have set up a very large interministerial working group to devise a regional development strategy.

What 'European added value' do you see in Danish regional policy? And vice versa, how does Denmark contribute to European regional policy?

Through the Structural Funds, Denmark receives Community aid for regional measures. While this might appear to be relatively modest, it is nonetheless perceived by the regions concerned as enough to contribute to their development. I would, however, like to stress that there are costs that go with this aid.

The administrative management of programmes mobilises, on the part of the national and regional authorities, a substantial amount of resources in relation to the sums allocated.

Denmark for its part is actively participating in the reform of the Structural Funds.

We contributed to the negotiations that led to the current regulatory provisions, which affect several main issues, including the

concentration of funds in those regions most in need. In addition, we contributed to discussions on the level of aid for firms, which has been reduced in order to limit distortions of competition.

Denmark will be taking over the EU Presidency in July 2002. What place will regional policy have in the Presidency's programme?

The Danish Presidency will focus on the Community's enlargement. Ten new countries are going to have access to structural instruments, which will help them reduce their regional disparities and release their potential by creating conditions for growth that will benefit the entire Community. The applicant countries will also benefit from the experience gained so far in the use of these instruments. In this regard, Denmark will support the Commission in its efforts to analyse and transfer this valuable experience.

Area

43 100 km²

Population (2000)

5 330 000 inhabitants

Density: 124 inhabitants/km² (EU-15: 118 inhabitants/km²)

Economy and employment

Per capita GDP (1999): EUR 30 694 (EU-15: EUR 21 258)

Per capita GDP index at PPP (1999): 119 (EU-15: 100)

Unemployment rate (2000): 4.7 % (EU-15: 8.4 %)

Structural Funds

Objective 2 (areas experiencing structural difficulties)

EU	Other public funds	Total
EUR 189 million	EUR 428 million	EUR 617 million

Discovering a region

Flevoland (Netherlands)

Caring for Europe's youngest region

Conquered from the sea, Europe's youngest region — in every sense of the word — is witnessing an exponential growth in its population. Facilities, services and jobs must now follow, with the transitional support of Objective 1.

Lying east of Amsterdam, Flevoland is an exceptional case in Europe, if not in the world. It is an area that is literally new, since it consists of three polders won from the Zuiderzee in the middle of the 20th century. Following the tidal wave of 1916, which broke down dykes and caused major flooding, the Dutch decided to drain and settle much of the Zuiderzee. The law of 14 June 1918 entrusted the State with the task of building a dyke to close off the Zuiderzee, draining five polders, and settle farmers there.

Flevoland is made up of three of the five polders created in this way: the Noordoostpolder (48 000 inhabitants), drained from 1936 to 1942, is connected to the mainland; East Flevoland (54 000 inhabitants), drained from 1950 to 1957, and South Flevoland (1959–67; 43 000 inhabitants) are essentially artificial islands surrounded by dykes, which can only be reached from the rest of the country by bridges. The three polders combined became the 12th province of the Netherlands in 1986.

Since then, there have been 10 000 new inhabitants every year ...

Flevoland is divided into six municipalities. Services are concentrated in the villages and small new towns. The two largest towns are Lelystad (60 000 inhabitants), the provincial capital, and Almere (95 000 inhabitants), which has the fastest growing population in the Netherlands (over 80 000 inhabitants in 16 years).

The amount and quality of existing facilities are still insufficient, and not enough jobs are being created to keep up with the strong population growth: there was a 220 % rise in the population between 1980 and 1990, and a further 10 000 newcomers have arrived every year since. The influx is mostly made up of young people from Amsterdam and more generally from what the Dutch call the Randstad, meaning the built-up areas of western Holland. With a current population of 340 000 inhabitants, Flevoland is expected to grow to 400 000 inhabitants within the next 10 years.

... with jobs and activities to follow

One of the great challenges of development is to ensure that the rate of employment growth keeps pace with the exponential growth in population. Despite the creation of 15 000 jobs between 1994 and 1999 and a rather low unemployment rate (4 % in 2000), the proportion of long-term unemployed (71 %) is one of the highest in Europe.

While some 9 000 small businesses have chosen to locate in Flevoland, the young province is nonetheless experiencing 'growth crises'. Development is occurring in fits and starts, indicating that a well-balanced society has still not been created.

Flevoland was designated an Objective 1 region (region lagging behind in

development and therefore benefiting from the Structural Funds to help it catch up) between 1994 and 1999. During this period, the injection of EUR 150 million from the Structural Funds attracted nearly EUR 1 billion worth of investment. For the period 2000–06, the European Union will co-fund the province's Objective 1 programme of digressive transitional support. The contribution of the Structural Funds amounts to EUR 126 million, out of an overall budget of EUR 471 million. The Dutch Government is contributing EUR 14 million, while the province is investing EUR 25 million. However, local authorities, institutions and firms are expected to invest a further EUR 306 million in the region. Thanks to this impetus, about 5 500 new businesses should locate in Flevoland and create at least 9 000 new jobs, many of which will be targeted at women.

The programme has four main priorities:

- the development of urban areas;
- the development of rural areas;
- the strengthening of production structures;
- social cohesion and employment.

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Area

1 426 km²

Population (2000)

340 000 inhabitants

Density: 238 inhab./km²

(EU-15: 118 inhab./km²)

Economy and employment

Per capita GDP (1999):

EUR 16 570 (EU-15: EUR 21 258)

Per capita GDP index at PPP

(1999): 81 (EU-15: 100)

Unemployment rate (2000):

4 % (EU-15: 8.4 %)

Structural Funds (2000–06)

Objective 1 digressive transitional support

EU	Other public funds	Private funds	Total
EUR 126 million	EUR 39 million	EUR 306 million	EUR 471 million



A medley of projects

The intervention of the Structural Funds 2000–06 in Flevoland has already led to the implementation of several concrete projects.

Helping women to access the labour market

The Objective 1 programme supports training and assistance actions for long-term unemployed women.

Non-scheduled public transport

The Objective 1 programme has made it possible to launch a new form of public transport that is not based on a timetable but on a call system.

This call-up transport system is helping to make the rural municipality of Dronnten less remote.

International patents

To help companies sell their products on foreign markets, the Objective 1 programme is supporting an institute which helps them file their international patent applications.

Farm-home for the disabled

This Leader+ project in the municipality of Zeewolde is enabling mentally disabled people to live and

work on a farm specifically suited to their needs.

Network of organic farmers

Thanks to this Leader+ project, several organic crop and livestock farmers in Flevoland have joined forces and set up a joint farm management system.

Waste recycling

Using innovative technology, household waste and discarded plastic bottles (PET) are being turned into high-quality material that can be used to make new plastic bottles.

'Geomatics valley' in Flevoland

A European contribution of EUR 304 000 combined with other public grants have enabled the scientific and business park 'Geomaticapark' to build an international documentation centre specialised in geographical observation and earth sciences.

Located in Marknesse on the Noordoostpolder, between the Nationaal Lucht en Ruimtevaart Laboratorium (NLR/National Aerospace Laboratory) and the Waterloopkundig Laboratorium (Hydraulic Laboratory), Geomaticapark has 10 firms active in geomatics aspects of regional planning and environmental management. Their activities range from research to the supply of products and commercial services: remote sensing, data processing, etc.

With all the resources and know-how of the NLR at its disposal, Geomaticapark could be considered a 'Silicon valley' of geographical observation and earth sciences. The presence on the same site of firms specialising in complementary fields, backed up by different support programmes and joint projects, means that synergies can be optimised, leading to new functions and activities.

A EUR 304 000 grant in European aid to the 'Geomatics business park' foundation, which manages the site, is now making it possible to work as a real network. The money for this genuine 'geomatics cluster' has been used to build an international documentation centre where experts can meet, exchange ideas and collect data, all elements favourable to the development of new technological



services and products in the field of geosciences.

By officially opening the centre in September 2002, the Minister for Economic Affairs will highlight the importance of Geomaticapark for the Netherlands and for Europe.

Contact:

Web site: http://www.geomaticapark.nl/engels/index_uk.html

England (United Kingdom)

Regional development agencies

The creation of regional development agencies is a concrete expression of the British Government's will to take better account of England's geographical, economic and social diversity. By entrusting the implementation of regional policies to a level of government closer to the ground, this approach encourages and facilitates the participation of local interest groups and the establishment of partnerships.

Regional development agencies (RDAs) were created in eight English regions on 1 April 1999. A ninth agency was opened in London on 3 July 2000, following the establishment of the Greater London Authority (GLA).

Cohesion and the reduction of disparities in and between English regions are the reason behind the setting-up of RDAs whose mission is to coordinate economic development and regeneration while facilitating increased regional competitiveness.

The following objectives are stipulated in the agencies' statutes:

- assist with economic development and regeneration;
- promote investment in firms and support efficiency and competitiveness;
- encourage employment;
- develop professional skills;
- contribute to sustainable development.

The agencies' specific missions are to:

- prepare a regional development strategy;
- work towards regional regeneration;
- implement national economic policies at regional level;
- attract investors;
- develop a skills action plan to ensure that training programmes match the needs of the labour market;
- manage European aid.

In conjunction with the ministries concerned (Education and Employment, Trade and Industry), the British Government has decided to give the agencies greater autonomy and, starting in the fiscal year 2002/03, will allocate them an overall budget. This will enable the RDAs to better achieve their specific regional priorities, in particular when these are insufficiently taken into account in existing programmes.



Japanese MPs visiting the Tamar science park (north-west England). Regional development agencies are trying to attract foreign investors.

Maximising the impact of European funding: the example of the south-west regional development agency

The regional development agency of south-west England works with a wide range of local and regional organisations to develop and lead strategic partnerships, which coordinate different European programmes. The aim is to ensure that European policy and funding benefit the entire region and that the south-west is seen as a strong region with a distinct identity in the European Union.

One of the key aims of the RDA is to improve business competitiveness in the region and to maximise the impact of the European funding granted for this purpose. This can be achieved through capital investment projects, which increase job opportunities, or through training projects, which increase the provision of high-level skills in the region. The agency also seeks to address important issues facing businesses, such as e-commerce, European labour market legislation and issues relating to the euro.

The south-west RDA also works closely with local and regional partners to ensure that regeneration programmes benefit the areas most in need. For this reason, the agency is very active in providing information and advice on all aspects of the Objective 1, 2 and 3 programmes⁽¹⁾. The south-west RDA is represented on all the bodies (monitoring committee, working groups, etc.) of these different instruments. It also chairs an equal opportunities group, which seeks to facilitate the mainstreaming of equal opportunities in public policies.

The agency's other areas of activity include the implementation of a regional innovation strategy, which aims to ensure the coherent development of information technology across the south-west. The agency also supports a wide range of European initiatives promoting both high-level and basic skills. Funding is provided for vocational training at the south-west regional observatory and for other innovative projects aimed at increasing the scope of the skills development fund.

⁽¹⁾ During the period 2000–06, the south-west region of England benefited from the three objectives of the Structural Funds:

- Objective 1 covers Cornwall and the Scilly Islands at the western tip of England;
- Objective 2 concerns Plymouth, north Devon, South Hams, Torquay, Torridge, west Devon, west Somerset and parts of Bristol;
- Objective 3 concerns the entire region except Cornwall and the Scilly Islands.



The Soundhouse project is being carried out by an artistic centre in Plymouth with the support of the south-west RDA.

With the recent opening of a representation office in Brussels, the south-west intends to strengthen its image at home and abroad and to assert itself as a region that counts on the European scene.

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Netwin: a methodology for local business networking and cluster development

With participants in six European regions, over a three-year period the Netwin project monitored 24 business networks of varying sizes and with a wide range of objectives. With the analysis of these experiences, a range of tools and methods were established for use in a wide variety of geographical and economic contexts.



Netwin partners visiting the Irish company, Waldoan Food Limited, which set up the local Roscommon food network with 10 other food companies.

The creation of partnership networks between firms in the same area makes it possible to share tasks and functions, build a common image, increase the opportunities to meet and exchange information, and to structure a production sector.

A budget of EUR 3.3 million, of which 70.6 % was funded by the European Union under the Recite II pilot interregional programme, has enabled six European business and innovation centres (BICs) to develop a methodology for business networking.

Transforming local experience into methodological tools

The objective of the Netwin project was to make available to local development practitioners and operators (entrepreneurs, local and regional officials, etc.) procedures and

tools that could increase the effectiveness of networking actions.

Focusing on practice, the approach chosen consisted of monitoring 24 local networks and comparing the experiences of the interregional partners which created or developed business networks. Over 30 organisations were involved in the work, mobilising a team of 15 people, including two coordinators, scattered across the six partner regions. Several specialised European experts also participated in the action.

Every three months, a meeting of the main partners was held to review the project's progress and to work on one of the various tools being developed. Every six months, four-day residential seminars were organised for the partners and representatives of the networks being monitored in order to

develop the different tools. In addition to phone calls and e-mails, the different participants were able to use an extranet network on a daily basis for a continuous exchange of information.

Methodological guide

On the basis of their experience on the ground, the project's partners developed a methodological guide (in the form of a ring binder and a CD-ROM) consisting of:

- a methodological reference framework comprising a full set of indicators on the area, the businesses and their many interactions. With these indicators, it is possible to describe and analyse in full how most of the local business networks operate;
- a range of ready-to-use tools for emerging, expanding or well-established networks:
 - network identification tools — advice and examples to perform statistical or documented studies and interview forms to interview regional opinion-makers can be used to locate and identify in a given geographical area concentrations of businesses likely to become a network;
 - auditing tools — several tools can be used to carry out a detailed study of the state of the network and to identify common activities that might be developed taking account of the needs of the businesses and the characteristics of the area. Interview forms are provided to interview business leaders and local economic development actors.

These include summary sheets to facilitate analysis of the information gathered;

- evaluation and re-engineering tools — with these, it is possible to measure the network's impact on its members and on the area while identifying the activities that can be developed to make the network more dynamic and efficient. Here, too, interview forms are provided along with summary sheets;
- cross-sector tools — this is an illustrated list of key factors of success and a series of case studies showing in a variety of contexts the feasibility and importance of networks and examples of how the Netwin tools are used.

The Netwin methodology and its tools allow flexibility and have been designed for direct use: specific indicators can be incorporated depending on the local situation and the economic and historical parameters

of the area concerned. Netwin instruments can be used by local authorities for the design and implementation of local development strategies, by firms wanting to set up networks or by specific providers like development agencies or European business and innovation centres.

A seminar to present the Netwin tool was held in Brussels on 13 and 14 June 2002 and attended by numerous local and regional development practitioners. The methodological guide can be obtained at the address below.

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Web site: <http://www.aditec.org/site/programs/netwin.htm>

The six BICs and partner regions:

Aditec Pas-de-Calais — CEEI — Béthune, Nord/Pas-de-Calais (France)

BIC of Attika — Athens, Attica (Greece)

CPINAL — Centro Promotor de Inovação e Negócios do Algarve — Olhao, Algarve (Portugal)

Innovation Centre Noribic — Londonderry, Northern Ireland (United Kingdom)

Westbic & Roscommon County Council — Roscommon (Ireland)

Technopolis CSTA Novus Ortus — Valenzano (Bari), Apulia (Italy)

Competitiveness and quality of life

Compilation of projects funded by the Structural Funds in the Benelux countries



Available in DE, FR and NL.

First progress report on economic and social cohesion



Available in the 11 official EU languages.

Online

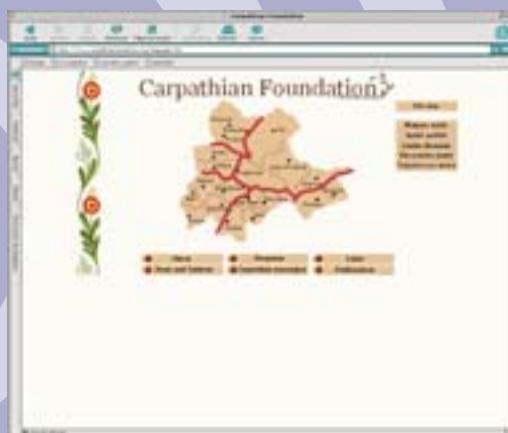


www.polis-online.org

Founded in 1989, Polis is a network of 60 European cities and regions in 16 different countries cooperating to find common urban transport solutions that combine mobility, the environment and sustainable development. A genuine 'city transport portal' that provides links with numerous organisations working in this field, the Polis site contains a wealth of useful information for local and regional practitioners.

www.carpathianfoundation.org

A cross-border association, the Carpathian Foundation provides technical and financial support for local development projects in five countries: Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. This site will be of particular interest to anyone wishing to engage in cooperation in the applicant countries of eastern Europe. The site is accessible in English and in the official languages of each of the countries concerned.



www.eixoatlantico.com

The site of the Euregio Galicia (Spain) and Norte (Portugal) is a good example of the possibilities that the web can offer for interregional cooperation in terms of informing citizens and regional development players. As well as containing relevant institutional documentation, the site also has an attractive and up-to-date list of all social, cultural and sporting activities organised in the 'north-west corner' of the Iberian peninsula. The site is accessible in English, Galician, Portuguese and Spanish.

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