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INTERREG IVB North West Europe Programme Joint¹ Response to Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

¹ This reaction is without any prejudice to other reactions of the organizations represented in our program. The NWE program bodies wanted to share their joint views with the designers of the Territorial aspect of Cohesion Policy, but only from the perspective of implementing one of the financial instruments of Cohesion Policy



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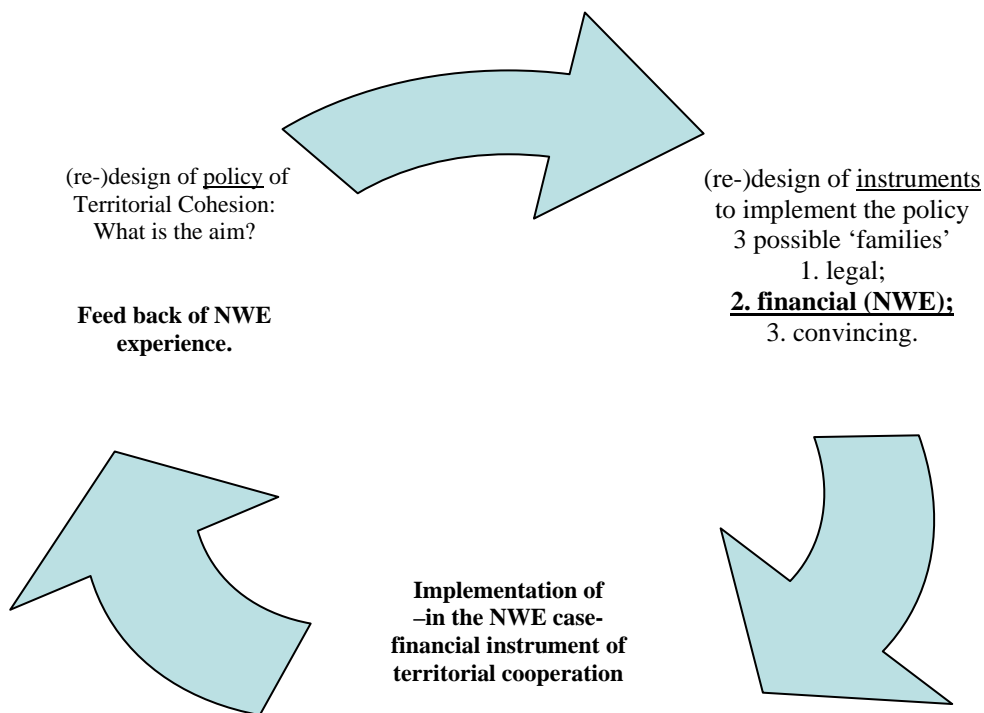


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Introduction.

The launch of the Green Paper under the French EU Presidency signalled another milestone in the discussions on the future of territorial cohesion. Its message complements the findings of the Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion which stated that "Cohesion policy has demonstrated its capacity to adjust to changing circumstances. It has supported much-needed investment in infrastructure, human resources, and the modernisation and diversification of regional economies".

The NWE Programme can feed into the 'policy-cycle' process because Operational Programmes like NWE serve to implement the instruments designed to achieve the aims of the policy. The NWE Programme in particular aims to strengthen European Cohesion through Territorial Cooperation; it is therefore necessary to share the accumulated experience of the past and current periods with the designers of Territorial Cohesion concept. This experience might help to enrich the understanding of the potential and the limitations of the financial instruments employed to achieve the current policy aims. The next figure shows where the Programme is located within the policy cycle debate:



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Answers to Questionnaire of the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

2. The scale and scope of territorial action

Territorial cohesion highlights the need for an integrated approach to addressing problems on an appropriate geographical scale which may require local, regional and even national authorities to cooperate.

- Is there a role for the EU in promoting territorial cohesion? How could such a role be defined against the background of the principle of subsidiarity?
- How far should the territorial scale of policy intervention vary according to the nature of the problems addressed?
- Do areas with specific geographical features require special policy measures? If so, which measures?

Globalisation, climate change and demographic change are ongoing processes that require de-facto mechanisms of joint action across countries. There is a clear role for the EU to promote and support integrated territorial cohesion across its members to tackle these challenges efficiently.

Acting efficiently requires understanding the small print of regional needs when defining the bigger picture and actions at EU level. The principle of INTERREG programming offers a good example of an intermediate level of action where different scales of actors can cooperate (local, regional, national and EU). Its good function relies, among others, on the role of EU in setting by providing Strategic Guidelines and Regulations, by monitoring the implementation and by evaluation the process at different stages. Operational Programmes are approved at EU level but are set on the basis of National Strategic Reference Frameworks and are subject to legal and administrative regulations at national level. This joint procedure sets the context for addressing territorial cohesion with rules respecting above all the principle of subsidiarity.

The Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion 2007-2013 have set climate change and immigration as priority topics. They are dealt with under Priority 2 and 4 respectively of the NWE Operational Programme where almost 45% of the Programme budget is allocated (€154 million).

The NWE zone has been a reference transnational zone for over 10 years. Projects developed within the zone have promoted the significance of European cooperation. Its thematic approach means that projects on the ground deliver cohesion through actions that touch on citizens' daily lives. This has worked with very positive results. Investing in opportunities together has proven to the local and



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regional actors the benefits of cooperation. This has created a certain political visibility to the zone without the need for an additional NWE political entity. Moreover, in some occasions the impact of some actions were visible on EU level, helping to shape policies with the experiences made in the implementation of NWE projects². The overall process proves that it can strengthen the principle of subsidiary and remain politically balanced.

In terms of key characteristics, North West Europe incorporates the richest and most densely populated regions in Europe. Geopolitically it is characterised by rich diversity. So far, more than 150 projects have brought together more than 1,000 key organisations to find joint solutions in making the zone even more competitive. The NWE can be characterised as a type of “big region” in the sense of intermediary transnational zone, which is seen as a relevant level of intervention for cohesion policy due to a number of key socio-economic characteristics.

In regulatory terms, it is important to maintain the general nature of the Strategic Guidelines. A flexible Operational Programme makes it possible to intervene at the appropriate level depending on the nature of the problem but also on the nature of the territory concerned. It will also avoid the necessity to devise special policy measures for different geographical features or different types of problems.

Territorial Cohesion as a process has not been simply added to the existing objectives for Economic and Social Cohesion – rather, the territorial dimension provides the context (of local assets and weaknesses) through which economic and social needs can make sense. This process is about cross-referencing and inter-connectedness with particular attention to the key sectoral policies that have been affecting development on the ground. Economic and social needs vary from place to place. Each locality embodies their unique features making it necessary to examine them in order to understand their relative position.

Transnational Cooperation has more than 10 years of putting such an integrated approach into practice on regionally relevant scales. Rather than adding new instruments in the process, it could be suggested to take stock of the existing mechanisms that form part of it.

² See report “Opportunities for Territorial Change” p48, the ECCE project (see [key documents](http://www.nweurope.eu) on www.nweurope.eu)



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3. Better cooperation

Increased cooperation across regional and national borders raises questions of governance.

- What role should the Commission play in encouraging and supporting territorial cooperation?
- Is there a need for new forms of territorial cooperation?
- Is there a need to develop new legislative and management tools to facilitate cooperation, including along the external borders?

The European Commission already plays an important role in promoting and supporting territorial cooperation by supporting cooperation between regions and Member States within the European Territorial Cooperation programmes (INTERREG). Territorial cohesion has reached this level of development because public and private partners are able to work together. As indicated above under question 2, INTERREG programmes have facilitated this in an important way. With more than 10 years of practical experience, INTERREG is a mature instrument for territorial cooperation bringing together different partners on the required scale, irrespective of administrative boundaries. This policy should be further strengthened.

Building on this experience we see as the challenge for the new period to strike a balance between visibility and simplification: Objective 3 of Cohesion Policy alone contains almost a hundred programmes under its three strands. All programmes are asked to have their own communication strategies and own visibility. As a result, there is a fragmentation of the visibility of the EU a blurring of the visibility of local/regional/national politicians. EU citizens are subject to different messages for different programmes which all represent 'the EU' but the risk is that EU-citizens go away from understanding the *big picture*, i.e. the EU support for specific actions in order to reinforce the Cohesion of the Union.

For citizens communication would be easier, when visibility could perhaps be limited to existing political levels. For INTERREG this would mean local, regional and national political levels. Visibility at single Programme level should be kept to a minimum and more emphasis should be given to the visibility of the activities themselves. By creating one single brand and communicating better the concrete activities and results it will be easier for both the local/regional/national politicians and the EU to catch more the attention of EU citizens.

Due to the nature of the European territory the feasibility and usefulness of macro regions is not everywhere the same. In order to ensure territorial cohesion across Europe the policies and instruments for European territorial cooperation have to be designed with the necessary flexibility in order to allow mainly thematically, as well as mainly geographically motivated cooperation, as well as a combination of both.



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This could also open a window for simplification in the number of programmes. For transnational cooperation programmes it is sometimes mentioned that the absence of a clear geopolitical level is diminishing their visibility. On the other hand, in daily practice one can also see that the process of decisions on requests for funding is consequently mainly driven by the quality of the projects.

Putting the emphasis on quality creates more political added value in the longer term, both for the local/regional/national level and for the EU-level. Transnational cooperation programmes illustrate that such intermediate level of intervention can indicate a good balance between quality selection and political added value.

At the same time it does not help that certain types of project activities are restricted to certain territories. Cooperation activities and implementation on the territory are following a certain logic. Instruments have to be designed accordingly.

In order to develop high quality projects with relevant results it is necessary to cooperate in an informed way and to find the right partners. For this purpose territorial information should be provided and used to more extent. This would also serve a better estimation of the territorial impacts of the operations. The NWE programme is already cooperating with the ESPON programme along these lines.

Finally the capitalization of project results and the transfer of good practice depend to a large extent on the quality and availability/accessibility of project results and partner contacts. To this end a professional knowledge management is urgently needed. Considering the extensive reporting activities requested from beneficiaries and programmes, an efficient use of these data and transformation into accessible information is highly desirable.

4. Better coordination

Improving territorial cohesion implies better coordination between sectoral and territorial policies and improved coherence between territorial interventions.

- How can coordination between territorial and sectoral policies be improved?
- Which sectoral policies should give more consideration to their territorial impact when being designed? What tools could be developed in this regard?
- How can the coherence of territorial policies be strengthened?
- How can Community and national policies be better combined to contribute to territorial cohesion?



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INTERREG projects are requested to take into account various sectoral policies as well as citizens needs in their action plans with a view to addressing several overlapping issues at the same time. This approach is seen as longer to plan but more rewarding and more successful in the implementation phase. There are less unexpected oppositions encountered during the lifetime of the project and implementation has higher chances of taking place. The proposed solutions are adapted to the project needs and need to form part of the wider development strategies. Territory really matters, the fact that everything happens somewhere, makes it certain that in the dense NWE area this balancing of policies is more important than in less dense areas. At policy level, a proposal could be to integrate a Territorial Impact Assessment dimension in the design and monitoring of the policy itself to ensure better coordination from the start. This is based on experience so far though it is certainly difficult to judge at this stage whether this will help to overcome the unexpected effects of any policy on any territory.

Another beneficial exercise was the cross-referencing of regional, national and EU level policies when preparing the NWE Operational Programme. The cross-checking of National Strategic Reference Frameworks and EU Guidelines was essential to identify the key priorities for the zone. We are convinced that the experience of the implementation of NWE projects will help the people involved to think more 'holistic' and 'inclusive' than before. When these people are involved in the development of any policy later in their career, they will bring this experience in.

Based on the NWE Operational Programme, the following sectoral policies can be identified as relevant:

- Transport policy
- Environmental policy
- Energy policy
- Common Agricultural Policy
- Cohesion policy
- Competition policy

Further synergies should be sought with the other big financial instrument, like the CAP, which traditionally were regarded separately. The Paris conference on Territorial Cohesion under the French EU Presidency was an effort to this direction.

Further synergies should also be explored in terms of Financial Engineering (bringing greater value to public funds). The IVB NWE Programme is currently exploring this innovative instrument in relation to its objectives to boost the performance of SMEs and the overall economic performance of regions.



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5. New territorial partnerships

The pursuit of territorial cohesion may also imply wider participation in the design and implementation of policies.

- Does the pursuit of territorial cohesion require the participation of new actors in policymaking, such as representatives of the social economy, local stakeholders, voluntary organisations and NGOs?
- How can the desired level of participation be achieved?

New actors, especially social actors, might be more interested in participating at sectoral policies which for the moment have a different level of social participation. This further varies from region to region. The INTERREG Programme has proactively encouraged the participation of social actors in the design and implementation of projects, mainly of NGOs, voluntary organisations and citizen associations. Their proportionate participation has sharply increased in the last 3 programming periods. As a result, projects are seen as expressing local needs and taking into account citizen's views.

Good practice from EU regions needs to be transferred primarily at sectoral level to make them more inclusive. This will enforce the territorial cohesion level as a consequence. For this past experience indicates the need for an early involvement of such participants and an investment in providing clear communication.

In the context the current financial turbulence the relevance of the funding through Cohesion Policy is given prominence. Cohesion policy provides an approach which addresses sustainable development, inherently reducing future risks. It could even be seen as an example of a Keynesian³ instrument of mitigating recessions and depressions by increased investments of the public sector. So the further inclusion of private bodies and SMEs can be seen as an important element to strengthen the notion of public-private-partnerships.

In order to increase the interest for participation, it is helpful to consider the boosting of visibility of the benefits of territorial partnerships. The IVB NWE Programme is conducting concerted attempts to increase its visibility by further analysing the outcomes of the past IIIB Programme as well as increasing the number of events and publications.

³ Maynard Keynes, 'The general theory of employment, interest and money' (1936)



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6. Improving understanding of territorial cohesion

– What quantitative/qualitative indicators should be developed at EU level to monitor characteristics and trends in territorial cohesion?

Territorial cohesion is an ongoing and dynamic process. This makes it difficult to formulate appropriate indicators that capture fully all the necessary characteristics. The INTERREG IVB NWE Programme recognises the challenge of finding concrete mechanisms with regard to indicators. For this reason, it is proposed to take advantage of the rich experience of the INTERREG Programme and its extensive quantitative and qualitative information on territorial development within the territories. INTERREG programmes consolidate an important repository of, not only indicators, but also of best practices that can be used by EU institutions to illustrate processes and examples.

As mentioned already under the point “better cooperation” this should lead to developing monitoring systems that are contributing to a knowledge base of cooperation activities across Europe, creating added value and increasing motivation for reporting and monitoring.

At the same time it is important to also take stock of long standing indicators and typologies, like the validity of NUTS II typologies. Additionally, it is essential to go beyond GDPs and identify more dynamic indicators capturing the potential for growth; the level or speed of improvement of administrative capacities; attractiveness. In other words, focus on measures that provide the key territorial characteristics.

On behalf of the Programme bodies,

Lille, 27 February 2009.

Mr Ruut LOUWERS, Programme Director.



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