Sustainable Development as a Constitutive Dimension of Territorial Policies. The Case of the Franco-Spanish Cross-Border Co-operation.

ABSTRACT

According to the Convention of Rio (1992) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), the notion of sustainable development has become one of the driving concepts in European Union policy-making. In this paper, I focus on the case of the INTERREG III-A community initiative for specific to France and Spain, launched in 2000 by the European Commission to develop cross-frontier co-operation of European border regions. By comparing three cases of the implementation of INTERREG, I aim to examine how the idea of sustainable development is interpreted by local actors in the respective States. This research reveals the existence of three patterns of political mobilisation for sustainable development. In the case of Aquitaine and Euskadi, an efficient cross-border network based on small local projects has been created. With regard to Midi-Pyrenees and Aragon, the demands of local and regional leaders for large-scale transport infrastructures within the national nature reserves of the Pyrenees skipped the debate on environmental protection with ecologist associations. Finally, tensions between French politicians of Languedoc-Roussillon has led to the Government of Catalonia to take a leading role and apply a strategy of indiscriminate funding which does not take into account the rules of good practice set by the Commission.

INTRODUCTION

Two months after the Kyoto Protocol came into force, European citizens wonder how and when the first measures will be implemented, and what will be the concrete affects of this international treaty on their daily lives.

This paper concentrates on the same question by focusing on the implementation of the concept of sustainable development through the European territorial policies. As stated by Y. Rydin (1997, 152-174), implementation is the Achilles’ heel of the European Union as its agents do not control this process at the sub-national level. While the majority of authors are more interested in the adoption of international law by the member States, some scholars focus on the local level (Baker, 1996, 19-50; Aguilar Fernández, 2001, 255-275; Eckerberg, 2000, 209-244) which is fundamental to examine the material interpretation of a more general policy (Jordan, 2002, 303-328).

This intention of this article is to analyse an original aspect of the territorial planning of the European Union: the cross-border policy. I focus specifically on the
INTERREG programme which favours the co-operation between the external and the internal borders of the European Union. As a Community initiative, INTERREG was launched by the European Commission in order to directly promote the local cross-border projects with a positive impact on employment, culture, gender equality and environment protection and to avoid the control of the member States over the management of the structural funds. The current institutional design of INTERREG III-A (2000-2006)\(^1\) imposes a threefold principle of partnership which requires the involvement of different tiers of administration, as well as public and private actors, on a cross-border basis.

Through a comparative analysis of three cases of implementation of the INTERREG III-A programme selected for their representativeness\(^2\) all along the Franco-Spanish border –one of the oldest European boundaries (1659)– I aim to shed new light on the hypothetical implementation gap and its causes. In doing so, I assume that from a neo-functionalist point of view, the local “translation” (Smith, 1995) of the notion of sustainable development should fit in perfectly with European standards. The “greening” (Lenschow, 1999, 91-108) of the European territorial policies would be a logical consequence of the progressive economic integration of the continent. In turn, the intergovernmentalist counter-hypothesis takes for granted that the adaptation of such a conception of development is used by State actors as a “green window-dressing” to hide national practices based on a productivist conception of development (Burchell, Lightfoot, 2001, 111).

I collected the empirical data during the first part of the INTERREG programme (2000-2004)\(^3\). According to the “calculus approach” of historical new institutionalism I used to analyse this information, the new design of INTERREG III is considered as a new political opportunity structure which exerts a strong pressure on the actors involved in the implementation process (Scharpf, 1994, 219-242; Steinmo, 1992). However, the latter conserve their autonomy by acting rationally, with respect to the new institutional context. I take into account the interactions from a strategic and a cognitive point of view respectively studied, thanks to two theoretical tools: on one hand the policy networks developed by R.A.W. Rhodes and D. Marsh (1992)\(^4\), on the other hand the notion of “référentiels” elaborated by P. Muller and B. Jobert (1987)\(^5\).

After a short overview of the emergence of a sustainable issue in the European Union policies (I), I present and compare the three case studies and the main causes of their respective implementation (II), after which I conclude with some related theoretical considerations.

THE PROGRESSIVE INTEGRATION OF THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTO THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC POLICIES

The notion of sustainable development is an “essentially contested concept”, and this is what makes the strength and the weakness of its arguments (Lafferty, Langhelle, 1999, 1-29). Its progressive diffusion into the environmental and the non-environmental policies of the European Union is a real teleological revolution as it has substantially modified the objectives of European integration after forty years of productivism (Burchell, Lightfoot, 2001, 111).

*The Introduction of the Concept of Sustainable Development into the European Treaties*
It is commonly assumed that the official launch of the sustainable development concept began in 1987, within the Brundtland Commission. Until 1987 different conceptions of alternative development had competed with each other –such as the “zero growth” or the “limits to growth”–. From the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of 1992 onwards, sustainable development definitely monopolised the public space (McManus, 1996, 48-73). According to W.M. Lafferty (1996, 185-208), the success of this concept is essentially due to its abstraction. The Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* was the end result of two opposite forces: on one hand the realists (militants, scientists), on the other hand the consensualists (political men). The equilibrium between ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility produced a mobilising concept promoting environmental protection without questioning the capitalist system.

The integration of this notion into the European Treaties was executed in three steps. The first was evoked during the European Council of Rhodes in 1988, sustainable development became in 1992 an objective of the *Fifth Environment Action Programme (1993-2000): Towards Sustainability* of the European Union which planned the introduction of this principle in five key sectors (tourism, industry, energy, transport and agriculture). In a second stage, the goal of “sustainable and non-inflationary growth” replaced the aim of “continuous expansion” in the Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union in Maastricht (1993). In the end, the signature of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) granted permission to re-modify the Article 2 by introducing the term “sustainable development” next to the sustainable and non-inflationary growth and by enlarging the scope of sustainable development to all the policies of the European Union (Baker, 2000, 301-336; Haigh, 1998, 64-75).

This last remark is fundamental as it forces all the European policies to integrate a long-term vision, so as to maintain sustainability of the implemented initiatives. This is particularly important for the policies of the pillar I (European Communities), above all the common agricultural policy (43% of the total spending in 2001 - € 95 billion), the structural funds and the cohesion fund (30%), the pre-adhesion fund (11%) and the external co-operation policy (7%) since in the past, some of these initiatives produced negative outcomes for the environment (water polluting, modification of biotopes, etc.) (Morata, 2002, 3-28; Coffey, 1998, 130-150).

**The Emergence of the Concept of Sustainable Development in the European Cross-border Policy**

In the sector of structural funds as elsewhere, the transition to sustainability was a radical cognitive shift. It was a parallel route to the institutionalisation of a cross-border policy led by the European Commission. Actually, despite the active lobbying of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Council of Europe and the Association of European Border Regions to encourage regional cross-border exchanges against the regional under-development and industrial pollution, there was no European cross-border policy until 1988. However, the openness of the internal borders in 1986 and the reform of structural funds in 1988 permitted to inscribe the interregional exchanges within the Community agenda. First implemented as a pilot action through Article 10 of the European Regional Development Fund, the INTERREG programme became a Community initiative in 1990 in order to create a direct link between the sub-national actors and the European Commission (Hooghe and Keating, 1994: 367-393). Nevertheless, the programme was monitored by the representatives of the member States. INTERREG was re-launched in 1993 with the aim of integrating more local
actors through cross-border working groups. Once again, the implementation remained under the responsibility of the State civil servants in the majority of cases. Furthermore, many projects were not monitored as cross-border initiatives but as national projects on one side of the border. Eventually, a few private actors intervened in a programme largely dominated by the public sector. Despite these mixed results, € 4,875 million were allocated for INTERREG III. The objective of sustainable development and the method used to reach it have been stressed by the European Commission on different occasions: “Cross-border co-operation between territorial authorities aims to promote cross-border social and economic poles through common strategies of sustainable territorial development” (European Commission, 2000). In summary, the economic development of the border zones and the respect for the natural environment must be encouraged at once; the idea of a partnership between different tiers of administration, as well as public and private actors must be emphasized from a cross-order perspective.

In the case of the current INTERREG France-Spain programme, these ideas were put into practice in 1999 and € 173.88 million were dedicated to this area. Cross-border projects must first be sent to the monitoring authority –Conseil Régional of Aquitaine (regional authority)– before being financed by the payment authority (General Directorate of Community Funds of the Spanish Treasury). Three territorial committees of pre-programming (west, centre and east) composed of French and Spanish national and sub-national authorities examine the proposals. A general committee of programming run by these representatives and the head of the INTERREG III A service from the General Directorate Regio decide whether or not to finance the projects.

Sustainable development has received a great deal of attention. According to Susan Baker (1996, 19-50): “Thus it is clear that the INTERREG initiative was not primarily designed as an environmental protection initiative. However, it does include such a dimension and when INTERREG I was launched the Commission stated that all specific measures funded under INTERREG ‘must comply with the protection of environment’”. In many occasions, INTERREG is implemented in fragile areas from the environmental point of view. As peripheral regions located between two States, border zones suffer from low density and industrial under-development but also have at their disposal intact natural areas (Pyrenees, Dalmatia, etc.) (Baker, 1994, 233-255). In these conditions, some local authorities could not resist the temptation to use the previous INTERREG programmes to finance heavy infrastructures to promote tourism or local industries. As a consequence, the European Commission introduced a new environmental regulation policy in 1994 under the pressure of ecological associations to improve the environmental aspect of the structural funds in general and INTERREG in particular (Robins, 1994, 94-104).

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL AND ITS VARIABLES. THE CASE OF THE INTERREG III-A FRANCE-SPAIN PROGRAMME

The implementation of a general principle such as sustainable development largely depends on local conditions (Pressman, Wildavsky, 1984). By comparing three cases of implementation of the concept of sustainable development through a cross-border policy—a positive one, a negative one and a relative policy failure—, I aim to identify the principal intervening variables and to propose some measures to improve this process.

The Western Case: an Implementation fit?
The first case study consists of analysing the project established between the three towns located around the bay of Txingudi, in the western Pyrenees, on the Atlantic coast of the Basque Country. The main city of the bay is Irún (Spain) which is an industrial town with 55,000 inhabitants. Hondarribia (Spain) is a fishing seaport which has approximately 15,000 inhabitants. As a family seaside resort of 12,600 inhabitants, Hendaye (France) now concentrates on tourist activities.

The Bidasoa border-river divides Irún and Hondarribia from Hendaye. It also separates the Ancien Régime Basque provinces of Guipúzcoa (Irún, Hondarribia) and Labourd (Hendaye), the administrative province of Guipúzcoa and the département of Pyrénées-Atlantiques (which the three French Basque provinces share with the Béarn), and the autonomous community of Euskadi from the Aquitaine region. In so doing, the Bidasoa also splits two political spaces. On the Spanish shore, Christian-democrat Basque nationalists (PNV - Partido Nacionalista Vasco - Basque Nationalist Party) dominate a regionalised political market while on the French side, State-national parties govern a State-national political market. The conservative and liberal right rules the département council and the socialists maintain their hegemony over the regional council.

The INTERREG proposal of the representatives of Hendaye, Irún and Hondarribia consists of providing an educational suitcase to the pupils of the bay. This suitcase should complete their national training with cross-border information. This proposal is the extension of a previous project which aimed to create tourist paths all around the bay. The project will cost € 213,000 and was presented on January 2002 to the western territorial committee of pre-programming which accepted it in December. The committee of programming validated this decision on January 2003.

The leading authority of the project is the Consorcio Bidasoa-Txingudi, an intercommunal institution created in 1998 after the signing of a cross-border agreement between the three ex-mayors of the bay. As a cross-border institution with Spanish and Community official backing, the Consorcio carries on the efforts of the Eurodistrict, an informal association set up in 1992 to promote the cultural exchanges within the bay. The political aspects of the Consorcio are ruled by a committee of representatives of the three town councils. The Spanish private consultancy Bidasoa-Activa manages the technical features of the day-to-day co-operation.

The implementation of the proposal was conducted in a calm atmosphere, in contrast to the continuing battles of the 1990s. First conceptualised within the thematic cross-border working groups created under the INTERREG II programme, the project received the backing of the political council of the Consorcio. Despite the critics of the communist and conservative groups who predicted the dissolution of Hendaye in a Spanish institution, the town council of Hendaye –traditional fief of the socialist party– pushed on with the project. In Spain, the abertzale parties (leftist radical Basque nationalists) of the town councils of Irún (Spanish Worker Socialist Party) and Hondarribia (PNV) were opposed to the technocratic way in which the project was being led. After the approval of the proposal by the three mayors, the Bidasoa-Activa consultancy examined the material aspects of the project and contracted a French and a Spanish companies of graphic arts to carry it out: ZooCreative, located in Euskadi, and Maîtres du Rêve, situated in Paris. The specifications imposed to design the educational suitcase were to focus on children aged between eight and ten and their families, with a pedagogical aim but in a light-hearted way, in the three official languages of the Consorcio (Spanish, French and Basque). The strong link between the suitcase and the pedestrian paths also had to be stressed. The Franco-Spanish duo of tenders elaborated
different educational tools such as a map, a card index for the teachers, a notebook, a CD Rom and a Trivial Pursuit Game about the natural and human patrimony of the border area. These elements correspond to the new roadsigns set out along the pedestrian paths which emphasise the importance of the different natural landscapes and monuments located around the bay. The project received the agreement of the French Ministry of Education and the Educational Department of the Basque Government. It also received the financial support of the Basque Government, the Conseil Général and the Conseil Regional has made it possible to rapidly implement the project, in spite of the European funds arriving late.

The Central Case: an Implementation deficit?

The second case study concerns the project implemented by the municipalities of Gèdre (France), Gavarnie (France), Torla (Spain) and Broto (Spain) in the central Pyrenees which concentrates approximately 200 inhabitants each one. Thanks to their respective easy access to the Gavarnie circus (1 million visitors a year) in the Nature Reserve of Pyrenees and to the Monte-Perdido (1.2 million visitors a year) in the Nature Reserve of Ordesa, these hamlets discarded their agricultural activities turning to the tourism trade during the 1970s.

The people of these municipalities do not share a common culture. Torla and Broto are part of the Spanish-speaking area of the district of Sobrarbe, in the province of Huesca, in the autonomous community of Aragon, while Gèdre and Gavarnie belong to the Occitan speaking Ancien Régime’s province of Bigorre, now located in the département of Hautes-Pyrénées in the Midi-Pyrénées region. Following the pattern of Euskadi and Catalonia, aragonese nationalist parties have emerged in Aragon. Nevertheless, ‘Aragonism’ is still a regionalist movement and not a nationalist one and did not impede the regional re-election of socialists. On the French slope, Occitan nationalists are dedicated to cultural activities while centre-left traditional French political forces rule the whole region.

The town councils of these municipalities proposed to finance a feasibility study on the building of a telpher carrier between the four villages with the INTERREG III A fund. From a geographical viewpoint, these hamlets are 150 kms apart by the closest road and a telpher carrier could shorten the crossing of the border. The telpher carrier could also promote the local tourist industry by putting an end to visitors staying in just one hamlet, to the detriment of the other resorts. This proposal costs € 153,0008 and was presented in April 2002 to the territorial committee of pre-programming of central Pyrenees. The territorial committee of programming approved it in June 2002.

This is the first large scale cross-border proposal of these municipalities. Until 2000, the only project led in co-operation was the financing of an atlas about the local natural patrimony protected by the UNESCO. However, the Spanish municipalities have produced a first evaluation of the possibilities of transport across the border. As there is no specific cross-border institution to manage the implementation process, the leading authority is the Communauté de Communes (intercommunal grouping) Gavarnie-Gèdre because of the high-flexibility of this structure and the political contacts of its habitual leader, the mayor of Gèdre, with the centre-left politicians of the region.

The implementation of the proposal took place very fast for a feasibility study considering the fact that the preliminary stage of the construction of a telpher carrier costs between 30 and € 40 million within the French National Nature Reserve of the Pyrenees. The members of the four town councils began to organise local meetings on cross-border transport issues from 1999. After fourteen reunions it appeared that the
The easiest method to cross the border was to build a chair lift between the two slopes. Then, the French and Spanish representatives decided to inform their respective national authorities of their intention. In Spain, the Ministry of Public Works and the regional Government of Aragon gave a strong backing to the project. In France, the regional Prefecture of Midi-Pyrénées and the Pyrenean Planning Commission also pushed the initiative forward and exerted a strong pressure on the decentralised authorities to finance a first appraisal of the future works. The agents of the Communauté de Communes Gèdre-Gavarnie invited tenders to propose technical solutions to the geographical constraints of the project. The French consultancy MC2 Consultants, located in Toulouse, were chosen because of their experience in cross-border issues. The MC2 consultants tried to elaborate a planning scheme with the least negative environmental impact possible. The results of the investigation concluded that it was possible to establish an infrastructure of communication between the two slopes, but did not criticise the opportunity of such structure. The management of the project made it necessary for an agreement between the Spanish and French ministries of Territorial Planning and Environment and the subsequent creation of a local cross-border administration to monitor the everyday running of the structure. The weak mobilisation of ecologist associations can be considered astonishing given the conclusions of the study. However, the public nature of the debates was deliberately limited by the actors involved in the co-operation process who only organised posterior meetings with public institutions.

**The Eastern Case: an Implementation Failure?**

The last case study is based on the project established between the five hamlets of Estavar, Nahuja, Osséja, Saillagouse and Sainte-Léocadie (France - 9,000 inhabitants) and the town of Puigcerdà (Spain - 7,800 inhabitants). Although Puigcerdà has some light industry, the economic activity of the border zone is based on mountain agriculture and tourist services.

Located in a historical territory called Cerdaña, these municipalities share a common Catalan culture since Cerdaña was one of the provinces of Catalonia until the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659). After the establishment of the international border, Cerdaña was progressively divided between the département of Pyrénées-Orientales in the Languedoc-Roussillon French region, and the province of Gerona, situated in the Spanish autonomous community of Catalonia (Sahlins, 1989). Although there is great evidence of a common feeling of belonging to the Catalan culture, the French political market is characterised by the supremacy of French-national political forces. The conservative right rules the regional council thanks to the votes of the extreme-right and the socialists dominate the department council of Pyrénées-Orientales. The regional political market of the autonomous community of Catalonia is distinguished by the domination of a coalition between Catalan Christian-democrat and liberal nationalist parties in the whole region.

The aim of the local representatives is to connect the museum of Puigcerdà (Cerdan Museum) to the museum of Sainte-Léocadie (Museum of Cerdaña) in order to make them complementary. By diversifying local tourist activities, the proposal intends to compete with Andorran ski resorts. The constitution of complementary collections should cost € 745,323⁹ instead of € 1,874 million as it was proposed. Although the project was presented in January 2003 and accepted by the territorial committee of programming on September 2003, the committee reconsidered its decision on June 2004.
and postponed *sine die* the adoption of the proposal. In March 2005, the project was finally accepted.

This proposal is in keeping with the general pattern of cross-border policy led by the museums’ representatives since the 1980s. The last cross-border project proposed to the INTERREG II authorities failed to an extent because of the internal conflicts of the administration of the French museum—ruled by the SIVPC (*Syndicat Intercommunal pour la Valorisation du Patrimoine Cerdan* - Intercommunal Office for the Development of the Cerdan Culture) bringing together the five French municipalities—which did not transmit its proposal to the INTERREG representatives but to the French Ministry of Culture. As a consequence, only the Spanish museum—administered by a *Patronat* which links the town council of Puigcerdà with the district council—received the European funds while a financial crisis provoked the resignation of the French administrative staff. In these conditions, when in 1999 the new administration of the Museum of Cerdanya proposed another agreement to the authorities of the Cerdan Museum, the *Patronat* was logically the most legitimate structure to become the leading authority of the proposal (Mancebo, 1999, 75-87).

The implementation of the networking of the museums of Puigcerdà and Sainte-Léocadie partly failed for different reasons. Firstly, although the aim of the museums was to promote the Cerdan culture, there always remained doubts about how to do so. While the French actors were in favour of the creation of a local tourist industry, their Spanish counterparts preferred to encourage the creation of a scientific centre for investigation. Moreover, the substance of the Cerdan culture itself was unclear. While the French regional co-financer envisaged the centring of the museums on the Mediterranean culture, the president of the *Conseil Général* tried to make them focus on the Catalan identity. The poor framing of the initial objectives forced the local operators to revise their proposal on two occasions. Despite lower costs, the second version was equally unsuccessful in involving French and Spanish actors in a common dynamic. An example being that the majority of preliminary meetings were organised with the respective national authorities of each museums: the regional Government of Catalonia on the Spanish side; the *Conseil Général* and the *Conseil Régional* on the French side. This practice reflects the current state of the “complementary” museums: while the Cerdan Museum only has to finish off its architectural ornaments, the Museum of Cerdanya needs to entirely restore its premises and renovate the presentation of its collection. In these conditions, it is not surprising that few private actors joined the co-operation process. Eventually, the integration of different tiers of authority accentuated the local ruptures through the diffusion of the peripheral conflicts into the local implementation process. Despite the active support of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia, the struggle between the two French co-financers affected the implementation. Actually, the latter proposed their financial assistance provided that the local actors excluded the other institution.

*INTERREG III A from a Comparative Point of View*

The outcome of the implementation process differs from one case to the other. The creation of a strong local network greatly determines the result of the co-operation. The model of policy networks described by R.A.W. Rhodes (1997) illustrates well the level of integration of the local actors. Thus, the strong ideological and strategic integration of the first case fits with the model of “community network” which is defined by a strong capability to isolate the internal participants from the external ones, the circulation of political resources between its different members, and a high vertical
interdependency. The central case can be analysed through the “professional network” pattern which shares the same characteristics as the community network but has a lower capacity to cut off the internal and external dimensions. The eastern case runs like an “issue network”, where its members neither reach a minimal level of isolation, nor exchange their resources between themselves because of their low interdependency.

Political representations are also divided. Two référentiels appear through these three types of agencies. On the western side of the Pyrenees—and to a lesser extent on the eastern side—, French and Spanish actors agree on the financing of a sustainable project which aims to conciliate tourist activities and the protection of environment through the integration of private and public actors of different levels. This local référentiel refers to a larger model which can be summarised using the term “modern development”. It means that the sub-national authorities can freely manage their own development projects on a global-territorial basis through a strong investment in the tertiary sector. In turn, the way in which the feasibility study project is led denotes the maintaining of an “old model of development”, based on the dirigisme of local policies by the central State, a sectoral approach to economic issues and a special focus on the financing of heavy infrastructures to industrialise the peripheries (Muller, 2000, 189-207).

These divergent mobilisations depend on their individual territorial contexts. I have identified three sets of intervening variables: the causes related to ideas, those linked to interests and those connected to institutions (Surel, 1998, 161-178).

With regard to the ideational variables, one of the commonplaces that I frequently encountered during the investigation was the constructive influence that a common culture exerts between two groups of actors involved in a cross-border policy. The positive example of the Basque co-operation seems to back this culturalist explanation. Even the actors engaged in the proposal of feasibility study agree thoroughly with this opinion by invoking their common mountain background. However, the difficulties of the Catalan policy prove that culture is not the perfect solution to cross-border issues. From an analytical viewpoint, culture is only an a posteriori rationalisation to justify a satisfactory–or unsatisfactory–outcome (Keating, 2003, 41-74).

The basic needs of the actors and their socio-economic complementarities have a stronger influence on the way in which the implementation is managed. In reality, the appraisal of the “objective” situation of the actors also depends on the political background of the latter. This evaluation is the consequence of a social process of construction of reality (Berger, Luckmann, 1966). Thus, one can directly explain the action of Basque actors in favour of a little project with a high cross-border value-added by the absence of physical borders. But it could be more accurate to consider that this cross-border policy style was shaped by an early mobilisation which began with the openness of European borders in 1992, and whose goal is to catch up structural funds by adopting the standards defined by the European Commission. This cognitive explanation also elucidates why the Catalan actors did not reach the same level of cross-border co-operation than the Basque ones when their geographical condition of open border areas does not radically differ.

In the same way, the proposal of the feasibility study seems to have a larger scope than the other. So, it should logically lead to the implication of the State services while the two other proposals should only involve local and regional actors. In fact, the projects provoke the mobilisation of the State actors only when they symbolically affect the sovereignty of the State. From this point of view, the feasibility study does not really differ from the educational suitcase since the latter also breaks the monopoly of the French and Spanish Ministries of Education by distributing new educational materials to
the schools of the Txingudi bay. At the level of the “little projects”, the main difference lies on the strategy led by the local actors. While in the case of the feasibility study the support of the State has been voluntarily required, the members of the Consorcio have diluted the educational aspects of their project into a more classical tourist policy to avoid the possible implication of State representatives.

At the level of interests, the local leadership proved to be a fundamental aspect of the implementation process. The “transformational leaders” generally coincides better with the European standards than the “transactional leaders” (Bailey, 1971), who merely manage the projects as classical national policies. In the case of the Consorcio and the Patronat, the election of political entrepreneurs increased the symbolic European involvement of the towns. However, as a notable, the leader of the Communauté des Communes Gèdre-Gavarnie gave less pro-European discourses, but was more effective at the level of no-cross-border local politics. However, more than the political alignment, the integration of the leaders within their respective territorial political fields has had a great effect on their actions. This is one of the reasons why the mayor of Gèdre, experienced in the use of the centre-left regional political networks, reached a total agreement with the other territorial authorities of the region thanks to his knowledge of clientelist networks, while the members of the Consorcio and the Patronat faced some initial local and regional critics.

The skill levels of the local administrative staff also played a key role in the mobilisation of the INTERREG III A funds according to the European standards. The capability to evolve in an international context and to resolve the daily problems which arise during the co-operation is rather characteristic of “large” local administrations, such as the Consorcio or the Patronat11 whose involvement in cross-border issues reinforced the learning process of their agents. It is more unusual to find this type of expertise in a national administration like the Communauté de Communes Gèdre-Gavarnie or the SIVPC. However, the recruitment of new highly-qualified civil servants in Gèdre facilitated the transition from local concerns to cross-border issues.

The backing of the external actors for the project is also important. Firstly because the INTERREG III A programme imposes a minimal level of public co-financing, only available due to the assistance of the provincial and regional administrations. Secondly, because the external actors also provide political resources (technical expertise, political support, etc.) which are essential in the implementation practice. However, their presence can also provoke the loss of local control over the implementation process, or even the disintegration of the local agencies. The example of the western co-operation demonstrates that pressure from the regional and the provincial actors can be channelled in a positive way by the agents of the Consorcio in order to coincide with the European criteria. In turn, the case of the proposal of Gèdre, Gavarnie, Broto and Torla shows the progressive harnessing of the implementation by the Spanish and French State representatives –with the blessing of the local actors–. In the end, the diffusion of peripheral conflicts into the eastern interactions provoked the partial disintegration of the project.

The role of institutional variables in the implementation process is linked to the stabilisation capacity of the actors’ networks. Nevertheless, all the institutional arrangements are not able to point the action of agencies towards the respect of European standards of implementation. According to the INTERREG implementations experienced in the three selected areas, the best administrative organisation must hold three necessary criteria: it has to be a common, localised and cross-border structure. The case of the previous project proposed by the SIVPC and the Patronat to the INTERREG authorities revealed that the parallel implementation of a cross-border policy could lead
to a total misfit with reference to the method imposed by the European Commission. The lack of concentration did not impede the French local actors to side with their respective national authorities rather than to favour a collective cross-border mobilisation with their Spanish counterparts.

The common local institutions acting as leading authorities such as the Communauté de Communes Gèdre-Gavarnie or the Patronat represent a step forward with reference to the previous period of programming. The concentration of abilities within a single operator accountable to the General Directorate Regio allows establishing a direct “bottom-up” link between these different tiers of administration. Despite the difficulties to swallow up the local actors wishing to lead a more autonomous cross-border policy such as the SIVPC, these common local institutions act as local policy fora and arenas (Jobert, Muller, 1987), as places of debate and negotiation which at least make it possible to establish a common proposal to the INTERREG representatives.

However, the leading authorities which hold a common, local and cross-border feature concurrently face fewer difficulties in the implementation of the structural funds in the way imposed by the European Commission. As is demonstrated by the example of the Consorcio, a specific administration designed to directly put into practice the Community policies is at the same time more legitimate and more flexible. Firstly, the legitimacy is linked to the institutional form adopted, but also depends on the work produced at the local level. The Consorcio was created mainly to implement the European directives on cross-border policy. The European Commission (2002: 34) has co-operated with the Consorcio since 1998 and made it one of its “star pupils” citing it as an example of good practice in its official publications. Secondly, the flexibility of the Consorcio and Bidasoa-Activa administration has shown itself to be a crucial advantage. In fact, this efficiency is the consequence of the division of labour between the three town councils and these specialised structures in cross-border issues. Despite these successes, the main challenge the Consorcio has to face from now on is the democratisation of its decision-making structure, since its leaders are elected in an indirect way on a municipal basis. However, the institutionalisation of such structure in the name of cross-border sustainable development is a difficult task since it would profoundly question the legitimacy of the State borders (Baker, 1996, 19-50).

CONCLUSION

As this analysis underlines, the implementation stage is fundamental, especially with regard to a concept like sustainable development, whose meaning can be interpreted in several ways. Unfortunately, although the European Commission elaborated an even more constraining institutional framework, the local actors continue to use the structural funds as a spur to implement “old-style” growth policies based on a productivist vision of development (Burchell, Lightfoot, 2004, 168-185).

Many policy instruments are invoked to remedy to this implementation gap: fiscal policy (taxes, fiscal penalties), legal policy (directives, jurisprudence, new rules of voting), evaluation, etc. (Baker, 2000, 301-336; Lafferty, Meadowcroft, 2000, 337-421). In turn, little attention has been paid by official authorities to the local level until the Local Agenda 21, which promotes a “bottom-up” perspective of sustainable development.

This “calculus approach” of historical new institutionalism also tallies with this dimension by assuming that the correct implementation of the European programme
could be improved through the creation of local specialised relays. From a theoretical point of view, actors act according to a rationalist pattern and try to maximise their position. The capability of actors to establish institutional arrangements permit the reduction of the transactional costs which they would have to pay without such structures. Therefore, the regulation of local agencies through institutional rules is the only way to force them to operate in a collective direction (Williamson, 1985).

Institutions exert a stabilising effect on space and time and make progressively converge the local strategies and erases ideological differences.

REFERENCES


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1 This new programme is made up of three strands: strand A promotes co-operation in *transfrontier regions* (regions with a common border); strand B is related to *transnational co-operation* (regions without common border but in the EU); and strand C is dedicated to *interregional co-operation* (regions all around the world).

2 The French and Spanish projects selected are “the most similar possible”. As in the rest of the cases, they are separated by less than five kilometres, they aim to promote tourist activities and they are managed by public authorities.

3 This investigation is based on a large review of the literature on sustainable development, structural funds and cross-border co-operation. Thirty-two interviews with political men, civil servants, members of associations and private consultants were led from 2002 to 2003.

4 Policy networks depend on the degree of integration of agencies: from the most integrated interaction (policy community) to the less integrated (issue network).

5 The *référentiels* are social representations which structure the internal content of a public policy. They fit with a more general theory of the State action.

6 The eligible territories are NUTS III-level territories located in an Objective 2 zone (maximum of 50% of ERDF financing): the French *départements* of Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Hautes-Pyrénées, Haute-Garonne,
Ariège and Pyrénées-Orientales; the Spanish provinces of Guipúzcoa, Navarre, Huesca, Gerona and Lerida.

The project of educational suitcase is financed by the **Consorcio**, the **Conseil Général** of Pyrénées-Atlantiques (provincial council) and the **Conseil Régional** of Aquitaine. The Basque Government only brings a technical support to the elaboration of the project.

The project is financed by the four municipalities, the **Conseil Général** of Hautes-Pyrénées, the **Conseil Régional** of Midi-Pyrénées, the Pyrenean Planning Commission which depends on the DATAR (Délegation à l’Aménagement du Territoire et à l’Action Régionale - Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action) and the Prefecture of Midi-Pyrénées (regional representative of the State at the regional level). The Spanish Ministry of Public Works and the Government of Aragon support the implementation through their technical services.

The project is financed by the **Patronat**, the SIVPC, the **Conseil Général** of Pyrénées-Orientales, the **Conseil Régional** of Languedoc-Roussillon and the **Generalitat** of Catalonia (regional Government of Catalonia).

The failure of a policy process is a highly relative concept. However, the implementation of the eastern case does not answer to the criteria of the INTERREG III A programme defined by the European Commission.

The fact that both are Spanish administrations is not a coincidence. The municipal tier is relatively less fragmented in Spain than in France (8,000 municipalities in Spain; more than 36,000 in France). This differential fragmentation also affects the human and financial municipal resources (Garraud, 1994, 161-183).

MAP: The three selected INTERREG Cases (by J. B. Harguindéguy)