

Learning Together – Learning from Each Other

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The Euregio Weinviertel - South Moravia - West Slovakia has been working for years on establishing cross-border cooperations. They do not focus on short-term success but want to go further step by step. The Euregio meeting, which takes place every year in Poysdorf, has become an important get-together of these central european border regions and helps to exchange experiences in order to improve the situation in the future.

The general topics which differ from year to year deal with various aspects of "learning together" and are important guidelines for the regions' future.

This year's meeting's slogan has been "learning together - learning from each other". Professor Paul Lendvai reminded the participants to draw the right conclusions from history. In case of the "Iron Curtain" the normal state has been re-established. Now the open borders should help to make everyday life easier for people in these border areas. There are hardly any examples so that it becomes even more important to remove prejudices. It is important to focus on common development and to take advantage of the chances which result from this situation. This is only possible by learning constantly all life long.

The self-portrait of the border regions, which has been very important for this meeting, has been a quite self-confident look on their own strong points. People in these areas have always been forced to develop certain qualities due to their difficult geographical situation, which are a great advantage in comparison with other areas such as:

- routine in dealing with differences in culture and mentality
- frequent usage of information and telecommu-

nication technologies in order to accelerate the access to certain markets and to make interaction between consumers easier

- the ability to use different languages
- self-organization and development of common rules within EUREGIOs
- flexible acting in difficult situations

The meeting's participants have agreed on the fact that especially these "human factor" qualities have to be strengthened in Central Europe. Anyway there is still a certain gap between theory and practice. To overcome this gap and to profit by experiences has been the aim of the workshops held during this meeting.

The participants of the workshop "learning administration - cooperation across borders" have tried to improve cooperation on a regional administrative level. A PC-supported information system for emergency situations in the border area has been presented, which has already been used in German-Polish Euregios with great success. The following measures promise most success according to all experts:

- work experience on administrative levels on both sides of the borders
- common trainings on security, job market and administration
- easier access to information and competent authorities
- language trainings referred to specific activities and development of application-oriented language catalogues

Also town and community cooperations can be model projects for integration and are therefore supported by the union. In communities a real

aid for communication with central european neighbours is granted by this means. Exchange programs between citizens from partner towns and communities as well as from towns/communities which strive for a partnership can be supported. This applies also for conferences concerning specific topics and seminars which facilitate exchanging experiences in town partnerships. Seminars dealing with the following topics are supported preferably:

- theory and practice of town partnership work nowadays
- dealing with European topics of town partnerships put into practice
- comparison of town partnership work in different countries
- cross-border cooperation between communities in Europe
- administrative structures and tasks of regional corporations in Europe

“Professional training and know-how transfer in border areas” has been the topic of another work-shop. Scientific studies have only been able in a limited way to give precise statements about dimension and effects of future migration and commuting movements in Europe. The numbers are between 41.000 and 680.000 immigrants per year to the whole area of the European Union. Along with a quantitative control of cross-border movements towards the job market due to flexible transitional periods certain measures are necessary to balance on the one hand the risks of expansion and to use chances on the other hand in an appropriate way. This applies for all activities, which support cross-border cooperation such as:

- cooperation between job market institutions (e.g. AMS) and social partners
- cooperation between organizations, which are dedicated to professional training, research and advice
- cooperation between undertakings of professional training as well as
- training and flexibilization of Austrian labour in risk branches

The planned agreements concerning commuters and trainees between Austria and the Czech

Republic are a further step towards successful know-how transfer. Commuter permissions can be issued for one year with the possibility of being renewed for another year. For this reason mixed committees are formed every year according to every particular situation and development of the job market - divided into certain border areas, economic sectors or certain professional groups. Maximal numbers for employing foreigners have to be taken into account. Employers have to keep to the local conditions concerning work and salaries.

The trainee agreement helps people from 18 to 35, who have already finished their professional training or have got enough practice in their subject, to improve their language and professional skills. The length of the stay abroad depends on the needs to improve their knowledge. It is at least 6 months and at most one year. Both agreements have to be authorized according to internal instructions and become effective after three months.

The third workshop has been dedicated to the topic “further education - intercultural learning”. The international project “Grenzenlose Grundschule Hartenau” (i.e. school without borders) of the German-Czech border area has got a bilingual education concept, which includes Czech from the first year onwards. In Austria similar projects will be promoted in the “Weinviertel”.

The European magazine ECHO-time for young people of the border area Austria-Czech Republic-Slovakia shows that other domains have been developed a lot more. The multilingual youth magazine is mainly produced by young people. It is handed out free of charge on all secondary schools and youth initiatives of the border area. In autumn 2001 its periodical edition (three times during a school year) started. At the beginning of 2002 opportunities for comments, interesting information links for young people and a jet-room is going to be installed in the internet. Improving language abilities, doing away with prejudices, supporting tolerance and peace, finding and intensifying common interests, better cooperation, exchanging experiences, resolving problems together, developing friendships and creating a common living space are the main aims of this magazine.

Establishing an EUREGIO forum education centre in Zistersdorf should make cross-border cooperation easier. It deals with topics like “learning administration”, “cross-border project management” and “know-how transfer in border areas”. Due to their long experience the EUREGIO forum partners have got a good know-how in cross-border project management at their disposal that will be available to interested participants. The E-BIZ has got the following aims:

- improving cross-border cooperation in difficult domains by practice-oriented training
- increasing efficiency for planning and carrying out cross-border projects
- understanding the differences of people and systems as well as legal restraints better

This program is mainly directed towards people working in public administration (in Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic), elected representatives (mayors), employees of cross-border organizations (EUREGIOs, agencies of regional development, small regions etc.) as well as certain members of the private sector dealing with cross-border cooperation (initiatives, associations, companies, ...).

This education program is offered also in all the border area if required. The events are prepared for different target groups and adapted individually. According to the topic they consist of seminars, excursions or workshops. In order to understand the neighbour better also work experience abroad is offered. For the year 2002 the E-BIZ Zistersdorf has got its focus on the “cross-border project.

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