



The Catalan cross-border space: an ambitious but practical project



The political steering committee for the constitution of a Eurodistrict of the Catalan Space met in Gerona on 21 November. At the meeting the representatives of the twenty-five institutions making up the territory confirmed their determination to organise themselves in a joint cross-border body.

The Catalan cross-border space is a territory with more than a million inhabitants covering 10,000 sq. km, from the Pyrénées-Orientales department on the French side (Northern Catalonia) to the Gerona Region in Spain. There are many similarities between these two spaces separated by the French-Spanish border: similar morphology, with the Mediterranean coast to the East, urbanised plains around the two main conurbations of Perpignan and Gerona, and in the West a much more sparsely populated mountainous area. The territory is also characterised by a high attractiveness for tourists, many jobs and a common culture in the Catalan identity. However, there are also many differences between the two sides. The economy of the southern part is more industrial than that of the north, which is more reliant on farming and services. Cultural differences are also marked with regard to housing: on the northern side house rental is predominant, whereas on the southern side the majority of apartments is owner-occupied.

Despite the weight of history which has contributed to a distancing between these two territories, their cross-border links remain very strong. Today the inhabitants do not hesitate to cross the border for reasons mainly relating to trading practices and leisure. Some have even moved permanently to the other side of the border, such as the many Catalans from the south who live in French Cerdagne. It is these characteristics, these points in common, these divergences and these cultural and historical links which make this space a genuine cross-border living area. And it is this territory, under the name "Catalan cross-border space", that the local authorities on both sides of the border want to cover with a genuine joint cross-border project, based on practical actions.

For just over a year now the twenty-five institutions that signed the Céret declaration of 27 July 2007 have been working in a steering committee to attain the objectives they set when signing the declaration: to structure and harmonise this space through a joint spatial planning and sustainable development policy with the aim of solving the day-to-day problems of the populations in areas as varied as employment, the economy, services, means of communication, tourism, education, etc. The intention is to set up a cooperation entity for the Catalan cross-border space with legal personality and financial autonomy.

This is the context in which the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) was given the task of providing guidance for the organisation of this Eurodistrict. The MOT has worked for nine months in collaboration with the University of Gerona on this project: it has gone over the cross-border territory with a fine-tooth comb, meeting more than sixty protagonists on the two sides of the border, analysed the functioning and the issues of the territory and identified the topics and projects contributing most to structuring, with the aim of producing a proposal for joint cross-border governance. The conclusions of this study were presented on 21 November 2008 in Gerona at the meeting of the Eurodistrict's political steering committee. At the end of this meeting Christian Bourquin, president of the Pyrénées-Orientales department council, and Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, vice-president of the Generalitat of Catalonia, on behalf of all the attending elected representatives, confirmed their determination to set up a joint legal structure for the Eurodistrict by the end of 2009 in the form of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Le dernier comité de pilotage politique pour la constitution d'un Eurodistrict de l'Espace catalan s'est tenu à Gérone le 21 novembre dernier. Les représentants des vingt-cinq institutions composant ce territoire y ont confirmé leur volonté de se structurer en un organisme commun transfrontalier.

Photo: Gerona in Spain

Further information on MOT: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu>

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