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

Jean-Baptiste Harguindéguy

To cite this version:
Jean-Baptiste Harguindéguy. Sustainable Development as a Constitutive Dimension of European Regional Policies The Case of the Franco-Spanish Cross-Border Co-operation. 2001. <halshs-00125763>

HAL Id: halshs-00125763
https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00125763
Submitted on 22 Jan 2007

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.
Sustainable Development as a Constitutive Dimension of European Regional Policies: The Case of the Franco-Spanish Cross-Border Co-operation

J.B. Harguindéguy
Department of Social and Political Sciences, European University Institute, Via dei Rocettini, 9, 50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), Italy, email: jean-baptiste.harguindeguy@iue.it

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 and why 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. It is assumed that the adoption of European standards of implementation depends on the capability of local actors to establish institutional arrangements.

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 effects 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 the capability of the European Commission to impose its own standards of sustainable development to the sub-national actors. For that, I study 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 border zones 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. The goals of local policy-makers must converge toward a very broad definition of cross-border sustainable development.
taking into account the social, environmental and economic aspects of local territories (table 1).

The impact of the INTERREG policy is analysed through a comparative analysis of three cases of implementation selected for their representativeness all along the Franco-Spanish border. Being one of the oldest European boundaries (1659), the Pyrenees are also an area of contact between two logics of development policy: a classical State-centric pattern promoted by the French and Spanish governments and a multi-level pattern defended by the European Commission. I aim to shed new light on the hypothetical implementation gap and its causes. According to my main hypothesis, 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). According to the “calculus approach” of historical 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.

After a short overview of the emergence of a sustainable issue in the European Union policies (I), I will present the three case studies (II). By comparing them, I will try to identify the main causes of their respective implementation (III). Finally, I will 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 1 (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: the regional Prefecture of Midi-Pyrénées representing the State at the regional level in France and the Spanish Treasury in Spain. 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 socio-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 often 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 selecting 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 cover the whole range of possible theoretical outcomes produced by the implementation of INTERREG III-A.

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 Bidassoa 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 Bidassoa also splits two political spaces.

On the Spanish shore, Irún is ruled by the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, Spanish Worker Socialist Party) while Hondarribia is governed by the Christian-democrat Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party) which also dominates the province and the region. In France, the département of Pyrénées-Atlantiques is led by the liberal Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF, Union for the French Democracy). In turn, Hendaye is a fief of the Parti Socialiste Français (PSF, French Socialist Party) which administers the Aquitaine region too.

The cross-border co-operation between the municipalities of the bay of Txingudi is based on a long tradition and is managed by a specific intercommunal institution called Consorcio Bidassoa-Txingudi 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 Bidassoa-Activa supervises the technical features of the day-to-day co-operation.

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 costs € 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 proposal received the financial backing of the Basque Government, the Conseil Général of Pyrénées-Atlantiques and the Conseil Regional of Aquitaine. The leading authority of the project is the Consorcio Bidassoa-Txingudi.

The implementation of the proposal was conducted in a calm atmosphere, in contrast to the continuing battles of the 1980s, provoked by the integration of Spain and Portugal into the European Communities, and the lower prices proposed by the Spanish companies. First conceptualised within an internal thematic cross-border working group with the help of local professors, 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 (leftist radical Basque nationalists) members of the town councils of Irún and Hondarribia were opposed to the technocratic way in which the project was being led but never blocked it as it symbolically breaks the international border between northern and southern Basque Country.

After the approval of the proposal by the three mayors, the Bidassoa-Activa consultancy examined the material aspects of the project and contracted a Spanish and a French companies of tourist development to carry it out: ZooCreative, located in Bera de Bidasoà, and Maîtres du Rêve, situated in Aix-en-Provence. The specifications imposed to design the educational suitcase were to develop pedagogical activities directly related the pedestrian paths around the bay, focused on children aged between
eight and ten and their families, in Spanish, French and Basque. In order to do so, the tenders elaborated a card index for the teachers, a map, a CD Rom, a notebook and a Trivial Pursuit game focused on the environmental and historic patrimony of the bay. New corresponding roadsigns have been set out along the pedestrian paths to stress the different natural landscapes and monuments located around the bay. The project received the agreement of the local delegation of the French Ministry of Education and of the Berrizegune which represents the Educational Department of the Basque Government at the local level.

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 concentrate 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 election of the PSOE as in Broto as in the region and of the conservatives of the Partido Popular (PP, Popular party) in Torla. On the French slope, Occitan nationalists are dedicated to cultural activities while centre-left traditional French political forces rule the whole region and département. This is the case of Gèdre, governed by a centre-left town council (PSF and Parti Radical de Gauche, Leftist Radical Party, PRG). In turn, Gavarnie is a fief of the Gaullist Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP, Union for a Popular Movement).

There is not a strong tradition of cross-border collaboration in this area. The few transfrontier projects implemented in the 1990s were managed by the Pyrenean Planning Commission which depends on the Délegation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale (DATAR, Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action) and the Spanish Ministry of Public Works. The INTERREG programme has been traditionally led by the regional Prefecture of Midi-Pyrénées and the Spanish Treasury (which transferred the management to the Aragonese Government in 1996).

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 kilometres apart by the closest road and a cable car 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 € 153,000 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. It is financed by the regional Prefecture of Midi-Pyrénées, the Conseil Général of Hautes-Pyrénées and the Conseil Régional of Midi-Pyrénées.

The Spanish municipalities have produced a first evaluation of the possibilities of transport across the border during the 1990s thanks to the financing of the Aragonese
Government, but this is the first large scale cross-border proposal of these municipalities. As there is no specific cross-border institution to manage the implementation process, the leading authority is the Communauté de Communes (intercommunal grouping) Gavarnie-Gédre because of the high flexibility of this structure and the political contacts of its habitual leader, the mayor of Gédre, with the centre-left politicians of the region. Nevertheless, an unofficial Franco-Spanish Committee of municipal representatives allows discussing the proposal between the four town councils on a cross-border base.

The members of the municipalities began to organise local meetings on cross-border transport issues from 1999 and presented their proposal to the territorial and State representatives of Midi-Pyrénées and Aragon. In Spain, the Ministry of Public Works and the regional Government of Aragon only gave a symbolic backing to the project. In France, the regional Prefecture of Midi-Pyrénées and the Pyrenean Planning Commission pushed the initiative forward by exerting a strong pressure on the decentralised authorities to finance a first appraisal of the future works. Thus, the local agents are helped by the specialists in mountain tourist infrastructures of ODIT-France, a delegation of the French Ministry of Tourism and the regional Prefecture. As the cable car is supposed to cross a part of the National Nature Reserve of the Pyrenees which depends on the French Ministry of Environment, the main challenge of the feasibility study restates in convincing the Nature Reserve’s board to accept such deterioration.

The French consultancy MC2 Consultants, located in Toulouse, was invited 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 by destroying a part of the Especières valley, which is already disfigured by a high voltage wire. The management of this project whose cost could reach € 40 million makes necessary 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. By the moment, the Nature Reserve’s board imposed to realise complementary studies on the economic and environmental costs of the infrastructure.

The eastern case: an implementation failure?
The last case study is based on the project established between the Syndicat Intercommunal pour la Valorisation du Patrimoine Cerdan (SIVPC, Intercommunal Office for the Development of the Cerdan Culture) and the Patronat of the Cerdan Museum of Puigcerdà. The first gets together the five municipalities of Estavar, Nahuja, Ossèja, Saillagouse and Sainte-Léocadie (France - 9,000 inhabitants) to manage the Museum of Cerdaña in Sainte-Léocadie, (Spain - 7,800 inhabitants). The second is ruled by the mayor of Puigcerdà and the district Council. 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 (Sahlin, 1989).

Although there is great evidence of a common feeling of belonging to the Catalan culture, the SIVPC is led by the socialist mayor of Ossèja. The PSF also administers the département. The conservative right rules the regional Council since 1998 thanks to the
votes of the extreme-right, and this provokes many conflicts with the PSF. The situation changed in 2003 after the election of socialist at the head of the regional Council. In turn, the mayor of Puigcerdà is affiliated to the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC, Republican Left of Catalonia), a pan-Catalanist nationalist party opposed to demo-Christian/liberal Catalan nationalist coalition which governs the province and the region. However, the ERC is not so isolated anymore since a socialist/republican/ecologist alliance won the last autonomous polls in 2003.

Despite a strong tradition of individual cross-border contacts, the realisation of public cross-border projects between these municipalities always faced serious problems. In particular, the strong confrontation between French departmental and regional leaders never was totally compensated by the involvement of the Catalan Government as demonstrates the INTERREG II project of linkage led by the museums of Sainte-Léocadie and Puigcerdà. At that time, only the Spanish museum received a European grant while the French leaders were paralysed by their internal conflicts (Mancebo, 1999, 75-87).

The aim of the local representatives is to repeat this initiative by connecting the Cerdan Museum to the Museum of Cerdaña in order to constitute a unique ticket office, a complementary collection and a common training programme of museums' staffs. By diversifying local tourist activities, the proposal also intends to compete with Andorran ski resorts. The constitution of complementary museums should cost € 1,874 million and would be managed by the Patronat as a leading authority. 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 but the cost was reduced to € 745,323. It is financed by the Catalan Government, the Conseil Général of Pyrénées-Orientales and the Conseil Régional of Languedoc-Roussillon.

The reduction of the INTERREG grant can be explained by the vagueness of the proposal. Though the goal of the museums was the promotion of the Cerdan culture, the way to do so always remained uncertain. French actors preferred the creation of a local tourist industry, while Spanish representatives were in favour of the creation of a scientific centre for investigation. Moreover, the integration of French departmental and regional 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. Thus, the proposal of the regional Council to integrate the Museum of Cerdaña into the future Regional Nature Reserve of Occidental Pyrénées provoked the financial retraction of the Conseil Général. Actually, the latter also proposed its financial assistance provided that the local actors excluded the Conseil Régional. As the Nature Reserve never was realised, French co-financers finally reached an agreement.

Eventually, the two museums faced problems as both had already established their budget on the precedent number accepted by the committee of pre-programming. Then, they discovered that they had spent more in architectural ornaments than what they should get through the new INTERREG grant. This is especially true in the French museum since the allocation of INTERREG III-A grant was modified by the Committee of Programming in 2003 from a 50%-50% division of the allocation between Spanish and French partners to a 70%-30% division. Then, the realisation of the initial cross-border projects seems doomed to failure. In sum, three years after the first proposal, nothing has been done.
INTERREG III A from a comparative point of view
The outcomes of these implementation processes and their related causes can be contrasted through a comparison based on the “method of differences” (Przeworski, Teune, 1970, 17). By elaborating a hierarchy of the principal intervening variables, I aim to propose some measures to improve this process.

INTERREG as the catalyst of territorial dynamics
The outcome of the implementation process differs from one case to the other. In order to compare the three cases studies on a scientific basis, I take into account the interactions from a strategic and a cognitive point of view (table 1).

The actors mobilised for the implementation of the western project form an integrated network. The three dimensions of the partnership principle imposed by the European Commission are respected. The vertical involvement of local, provincial, regional and State representatives is effectuated under the leadership of local political men. Subsidiarity is stressed. From a horizontal viewpoint, cross-border working groups also allow public civil servants and actors from the civil society working on a common base. Then, the set composed by the working groups, the Consorcio’s board, the Bidakoa-Activa agency, the duo of tenders and the evaluating authorities mandated by the French and Basque departments of education offers a large representation of transnational interests all along the implementation process. This is not the case of the central project which is implemented on a vertical base under the complete control of State representatives. At the horizontal level, the latter involucrate private actors only as tenders paid to apply the decisions of public managers. Finally, as the Aragonese Government chose not to participate, the representation of public interests is also monopolised by French institutions. Then the transnational dimension is very limited. The eastern case functions according to an even less integrated pattern. In this case, the participation of peripheral actors tends to disintegrate the local network, particularly on the French side. In addition, horizontal co-operation is also difficult as public actors do not find private ones to collaborate because of the recurrent financial and political problems of the museums. Transnational co-operation is limited too since French and Spanish local representatives proceed according to a State-national pattern. Cross-border collaboration is weak (few meetings) and limited to symbolic issues. INTERREG is essentially mobilised to complete infrastructural works with few cross-border add-value.

Political representations of sustainable development are also divided. Social issues are taken into account by the three implementers. The pedagogical suitcases, the feasibility study and the museums’ networking emphasise the cultural links between border peoples. Obviously, in the Basque and the Catalan cases, local actors stress their common cultural heritage. Nevertheless, interviewees of the central project also insist on their common mountain border tradition. Economic issues are present too. The use of natural and historical heritage in order to promote local tourist activities is relatively clear in the western and central cases. However, the discussions between French and Spanish actors about the ends of the museums of Cerdaña complicate the economic objectives of this project. In turn, environmental considerations are very present in the eastern case, as in the western case. In fact, the pedagogical suitcases and the museums were principally designed to make discover the cross-border milieu to French and Spanish neighbours. This is not the case of the central proposal as the latter was essentially created to impulse a dynamic of economic development, even if this dynamic must be implemented at the expenses of the natural landscapes.
Causality and inference of the different outcomes

These divergent mobilisations depend on their specific 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).

At the level of ideational variables, many local actors invoke the constructive influence exerted by a common cross-border culture on the outcomes of the implementation of the INTERREG programme. The Basque example is often cited as a good practice facilitated by the ancestral transfrontier links between northern and southern Basque Country. Even if they lack such cultural background, the participants of the central project also appeal to their common mountain traditions. However, the problems faced by the Catalan actors demonstrate that culture is not the perfect solution to cross-border issues.

In the same way, some interviewees explain the positive or negative outcomes of the implementation process by invoking the intrinsic nature of local cultures involved in the INTERREG programme. The Basque communitarianism would be opposed to the individualism of Occitans, Aragonese and Catalans. This organisational capability would be the key of co-operation. Nevertheless, M. Keating (2003, 41-74) proved that stereotypes can be used as in a holistic way as in an individualistic manner. Then, stereotypes are only an a posteriori rationalisation to justify a satisfactory—or unsatisfactory—outcome.

The influence of the relief is also presented as an explaining variable. Basques would be disadvantaged by the absence of physical borders. In turn, the actors of the central project should implement large infrastructures to open up their mountain area. But another time, the Catalan failure proves that one can meet no difficulties of communication and not be able to reach a minimal level of co-operation.

The technical aspects of the projects seem to determine the quality of actors involved in the co-operation process too. Then, the feasibility study would logically integrate State actors because of the big consequences of the building of a cable car in a mountain area, while the distribution of pedagogical suitcases around the Txingudi would be a more symbolic policy. Yet, this division is unclear as the most onerous proposal is that of museums of Cerdaña. Furthermore, the central project is only a feasibility study which does not really differ of the western project since both infringe the sovereignty of the French and Spanish Ministries of Public Works, Environment and Education.

The socio-economic complementarity of the actors is supposed to have a decisive influence on the way in which the implementation is led. Complementary areas like Torla, Broto, Gèdre and Gavarnie, viz, border zones with a crucial interest in collaborating, would have less difficulties to implement the INTERREG initiative (even if they do not respect the European standards). But the example of the Consorcio also proves that a conflictive area such as the bay of Txingudi, characterised by socio-economic struggles between French and Spanish workers (the fishers in particular), can reach a good level of cross-border co-operation thanks to the political supports of the local elite.

Interests exert a fundamental pressure on the way the implementation process is led. Many actors consider that the presence of the same political party on both sides of the Franco-Spanish border is a source of Europeanisation. In the western and the central cases, French and Spanish socialists are present and this presence seems to have a positive impact on the outcomes. In change, in the eastern case, the political differences
between French and Spanish leaders can be interpreted as a brake of the co-operation process. Nevertheless, French and Spanish socialist parties share a totally different historical heritage and they are confronted to two different structures of interests (Magnette, 2001, 57-82).

The intrinsic nature of political parties represented at the local level is also suggested as a variable of the co-operation process. The presence of Basque and Catalan nationalists and, to a lesser extent, of socialists, would be a factor of Europeanisation. On the other hand, as shows the eastern case, despite the institutional leadership of the ERC, the implementation of INTERREG is constrained by important limits.

The type of leadership is a more reliable variable. The “transformational leaders” generally respect better the European principles than the “transactional leaders” (Bailey, 1971), who only supervise the proposals as State centred policies. In the western and eastern cases, the appointment of political entrepreneurs improved the symbolic European concern of the municipalities. At the level of the intercommunal grouping of Gêdre-Gavarnie, the maintaining of the mayor of Gêdre, *a notable*, is guided by his efficient involvement in no-cross-border local politics thanks to his good knowledge of regional clientelist networks.

The technical skill of local administrative agents allows them to implement INTERREG in an effective way according to the European standards. The problems caused by the international context, such as the working language or the juridical asymmetry are best resolved by “large” local administrations. The agents of the Consorcio and Bidasoa-Activa are more numerous and better trained to the cross-border policies than those of the central and the eastern cases.

The influence of peripheral actors also plays an important role. The presence of co-financers is compulsory, but external institutions can provide political resources too. This backing can have a positive pressure if local actors are able to channel it, as demonstrates the western case, under the leadership of the Consorcio despite the involvement of the representatives of the French and Basque Ministries of Education. As well, in the central case, this integration exerts a positive influence but local actors are completely swallowed by the State representatives. In the eastern case, the participation of French territorial authorities has a tendency to lead to the disintegration of the local agencies.

The capability of local actors to establish institutional arrangements reinforces the integration of European norms under certain conditions. With respect to the three types of implementation selected, the most efficient organisation holds four complementary and necessary criteria:

Leading authority must be a local institution which represents “real” local interactions. This is the case of the three local management authorities.

Local leading authorities which represent both sides of the border through a common agreement face less difficulties of implementation. At the level of the western case, the Consorcio is a common organisation *per se*. But as proves the case of the intercommunal grouping Gêdre-Gavarnie, local representatives can also introduce organisational innovations to the official leading authority through the Franco-Spanish Committee created by the four municipal councils. In turn, the Patronat is only a smoke-screen which hides parallel no cross-border practices.

The legal backing of the leading authority is fundamental as it provides legitimacy to local actors respect to the other participants of the policy. The three institutions assuming the local management of INTERREG are legally recognised by their
respective State-national representatives. Nevertheless, the *Consorcio* is the unique organisation which is officially recognised by the French and Spanish governments.

Finally, the cross-border feature of leading authority is important in the sense that it determines the time and the money dedicated to the management of the INTERREG initiative. The municipal councils of Irun, Hondarribia and Hendaye get much advantage from the specialisation of the *Consorcio*. This specialisation in cross-border issues increases the efficiency of its agents and the assignation of its budget. This is not the case of the agents of the intercommunal grouping Gèdre-Gavarnie and the *Patronat* which have to divide their activity and their financial resources between the management of cross-border and no cross-border policies.

**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. As the comparison of the three cases studies put to the fore, the pressure of the European Commission does not act according to a neo functionalist logic of diffusion. Some local actors continue to use European funds as a spur to implement policies of modernisation based on a productivist vision of development (European Commission, 2002; Burchell, Lightfoot, 2004, 168-185).

Many policy instruments are invoked to remedy 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.

The “calculus approach” of historical neo institutionalism used in this analysis entirely agrees with this localist dimension. Since local actors act in accordance with a rational pattern according to their socio-historical context, one of the many ways to channel these interactions is to build institutional arrangements coming up with the local, common, legal and cross-border features. The reduction of transactional costs which the local actors would have to pay without such structure makes more beneficiary to them to operate in a collective direction (Williamson, 1985).

**References**


Steinmo Sven (1992), Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis, New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Map 1.** The three selected case studies (source: J.B. Harguindéguy)

![Map showing three regions: Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon, Navarra, Aragón, Cataluña.]

**Table 1.** Comparison of the three case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of interactions</th>
<th>Western case</th>
<th>Central case</th>
<th>Eastern case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions of policy goals</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realisation</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
<td>Not achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

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. Moreover, these projects are implemented in different ways. In the first case, implementation is based on a common culture, a network of civil servants and a specific cross-border institution. In the second case, the proposal is only led by a network of French and Spanish network. In the third case, the civil servants’ network is also present and local actors share a common Catalan culture.

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

4 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, Navarra, Huesca, Gerona and Lerida (map 1).