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Europe Through the Borders?  
The Implementation of  
INTERREG III-A France-Spain

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## **Abstract**

Assuming that structural funds are the catalyser of new forms of governing within the member states, this paper focuses on the Europeanisation process through the comparison of three cases of implementation of the INTERREG programme for cross-border co-operation. It questions the legal and cognitive capacities of the European Commission to make converge the regional and sub-regional actors toward the constitution of multi-level networks mobilised for the territorial development. It is argued that the translation of the action of the Commission depends on the capacity of institutionalisation of interests and ideas at the border local level.

## **Keywords**

Interreg, Cross-border co-operation, paradiplomacy, France, Spain, Pyrénées.

## **Table Of Contents**

1. Introduction
2. The Emergence of a Specific European Cross-Border Policy
3. The Progressive Opening of the Franco-Spanish Border
4. The Implementation Process as a Factor of Convergence?
5. INTERREG III-A France-Spain From a Comparative Perspective
6. Conclusion
7. Notes
8. References
9. Map
10. Biographical Note

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly assumed that the rise of the European integration has given way to new forms of governing within the member states. Some authors believe that the administrative activity of member states would converge toward a common model defined by the authorities of the European Union (Hassenteufel, Surel, 2000: 8-24).

This paper tries to shed a new light on the process of convergence encouraged by the European Commission. More specifically, it focuses on the European incentives for cross-border relations between French and Spanish sub-national authorities. Since the Single European Act (SEA) came into force on 1 January 1993, cross-border co-operation has grown appreciably in Europe (Anderson, O'Dowd and Wilson, 2002: 1-12). This phenomenon can be defined as 'all types of negotiated actions between the public institutions of, at least, two neighbouring countries. These negotiated actions must take place within the border territories of these states in order to reinforce the relations of these states and of their territorial institutions by all the means possible' (Pérez González, 1993: 545-564). The European Commission promotes it through a specific policy called INTERREG which provides public funds to local cross-border projects which have a positive impact on employment, environment protection, culture and gender equality. This paper concentrates on the first part (2000-2003) of this programme. The case of the Franco-Spanish border is interesting because it is one of the symbols of the French and Spanish sovereignty, but at the same time, it constitutes a peripheral territory which depends on the structural funds. Then, the Pyrenees can be considered as a political arena of confrontation between two logics of territorial development: a top-down state-centred logic and a multi-level logic through the implication of the European Commission at the local level (Sodupe, 1990: 58-8).

The study of European integration through cross-border relations is divided into four 'schools' (Smith, 1995; Philippart, Van Cutsem, 1999: 789-808). On one hand, the neo functionalists focus on the overtaking of the nation-state model through a spill-over process produced by the economic integration of the continent. In a similar way, the federalists interpret the European integration as the multiplication of intermediary levels of governance and specially as the rising of the regional level. On another hand, the intergovernmentalist authors stress the importance of state bargaining and consider the structural funds as a side-payment of poor states allowing the completion of other policies by rich states. Finally, the scholars who observe Europe through the framework of the international political economy deduce that the European funds serve the setting of a global capitalist market by filling the gap between poor and rich areas.

My contribution is based on three case studies selected for their representativeness<sup>1</sup> in the western, central and eastern parts of the Pyrenees (cf. map). It is intended to be a comparative analysis whose purpose is to demonstrate how and why the legal and cognitive dimensions of the European regional policy tend to favour the convergence of regional and sub-regional actors toward a multi-level network mobilised for the territorial development. Through a 'calculus approach' of historical neo institutionalism (Steinmo, 1992), I question the neo functionalist hypothesis of diffusion of the European standards promoted by the European Commission to the sub-national level. These standards consist in a multi-level governance logic of implementation and a modern conception of local development based on training, local networking and quality production.

This paper is based on the Ph.D on which I am working as a researcher of the department of Social and Political Sciences of the European University Institute of Florence. I collected the empirical data during the first part of the INTERREG programme, from 2000 to 2003, through 40 interviews with the private and public actors involved in the three cases I selected.

This article is made of four parts. The first step sets out the way the INTERREG III-A policy emerged from the European political space. The second section describes the evolution of the Franco-Spanish border policy. In the third part, the three case studies are presented. After that, the comparison is used to investigate the outcomes and the causes of the implementation of the INTERREG programme in these border areas. Finally, I conclude with some related theoretical considerations.

## 2. THE EMERGENCE OF A SPECIFIC EUROPEAN CROSS-BORDER POLICY

INTERREG did not appear in 1988 as if by magic. It emerged progressively and required the mobilisation of many actors. The signing of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986 increased the importance of structural funds at the national borders.

### *2.1. The Genesis of European Cross-Border Policies*

According to R. Sunnen (1970: 297-321), just as monsieur Jourdain in Molière's *The Would-Be Gentleman*, until the 1980s the European Economic Communities (EEC) produced cross-border policies without being conscious of it.

However, this analysis is incomplete. Borders were mentioned during the Conference of Messine (1955) but simply as a limit to the free market and to economic growth. At that time, the European Coal and Steel Community carried out research on border regions such as the Saar and Lorraine. Nevertheless, these investigations were undertaken to help the industrial conversion of these areas and not because of their status as border regions.

From the end of 1960s, border regions began to constitute a subject of political interest, but only at the discursive level. In 1968, the president of the Directorate General XVI (today DG Regio) when addressing the European Parliament stated that '*border regions deserve the whole attention of communities*'. On 9 October 1981 and 19 June 1984 the European Commission enjoined member states to promote cross-border co-operation but this did not, of itself, oblige member states to take any particular action.

The supporters of border regions had to re-direct their claims toward alternative fora. Three institutions recognised the right of border regions to be heard. The first was the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which was committed to fighting against cross-border pollution. The second was the Council of Europe and the Permanent Conference of Local and Regional Authorities who proposed a juridical framework with the European Outline-Convention of Transfrontier Co-operation Between Territorial Communities or Authorities on 21 May 1980 (Council of Europe, 1980). The third was the Association of European Border Regions, a member of the Assembly of European Regions, which still produces a large number of surveys about border areas (Assembly of European Regions, 1992) and monitors the LACE network (Linkage Assistance and Co-operation for the European Border Regions). Despite active lobbying, the expertise of these institutions was not sufficient to include their claims on the EEC agenda

### *2.2. The Reform of Structural Funds and the Institutionalisation of INTERREG*

The signature of the SEA in 1986 allowed the taking into consideration of border regions in the EEC agenda. Although the EEC authorities had cautiously considered the claims of border regions prior to 1988, the fear of an economic crisis in the border areas and the appointment of more receptive commissioners made the European Commission more open to the double-discourse of the advocates of border regions: on one hand, border regions needed economic

compensation to deal with the opening of borders; on the other hand, these areas had great potential for economic development.

The reform of structural funds in 1988 constituted a watershed for cross-border issues. In 1989, INTERREG was implemented as a pilot action, financed through Article 10 of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In 1990, it was integrated in the community initiatives. These were special programmes established by the European Commission to act directly with sub-national actors according to a 'bottom-up' logic (Hooghe and Keating, 1994: 367-393). The financial and political weight of INTERREG progressively increased while the number of initiatives was reduced. During the first programming period (1990-1993) INTERREG I contributed the lion's share of the 14 initiatives and cost 1,000 million Ecu, from a total spending of 5,500 million Ecu. After the re-launch of 1993, the INTERREG II budget grew to 2,900 millions Ecu, from a total of 14,379 million Ecu for 13 initiatives (1994-1999). Following the Berlin European Council (1999), community initiatives were reduced to four. Despite these reductions, € 4,875 million were allocated for INTERREG III (2000-2006), from a total of € 10,442 million (Wallace and Wallace, 2000: 243).

Nowadays, INTERREG III is divided into three strands: strand A is dedicated to co-operation in *transfrontier regions* (regions with a common border); strand B promotes *transnational co-operation* (regions without common border but in the EU); and strand C is related to the *interregional co-operation* (regions all around the world).

### 3. THE PROGRESSIVE OPENING OF THE FRANCO-SPANISH BORDER

Defined for the first time in 1659 by the Treaty of Pyrenees, the Pyrenean border was definitely established in 1862 and strictly ruled by the states. Although local cross-border agreements, called *faceries*, have existed since the Middle-Ages, the implementation of cross-border co-operation policies since the mid-1980s represents a departure from the general trend of Franco-Spanish relations toward a more open cross-border type of governance based on authorities of different tiers.

#### *3.1. The Puzzle of the Franco-Spanish Cross-border Co-operation*

Until the devolution process of the late 1970s, cross-border relations were ruled by sectoral agreements controlled by national governments. In 1875, an International Franco-Spanish Commission (IFSC) was set up to adjudicate in disputes related to fishing in the border river Bidasoa. Progressively swallowing up the other cross-border sectoral agencies, the IFSC remained the largest association until (Fernández de Casadevante, 1990).

In France, the right of local and regional tiers of government to implement their own cross-border policies has been progressively recognised since the *décentralisation* laws of 1982. The competencies of the 'deconcentrated' administrations (local and regional prefectures) were transferred to 'decentralised' authorities (local and regional assemblies), and the latter were authorised to establish cross-border agreements with neighbouring sub-national authorities. Between 1983 and 1990, the Delegation for the Exterior Action of Local Communities and the Bureau for Decentralised Co-operation appeared. In 1992 and 1995, two laws established the right of local and regional administrations to join cross-border institutions. Finally, in 1997 the *Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale* (DATAR, Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action) created the Cross-border Operational Mission to network the decentralised authorities involved in a co-operation programme.



In Spain, this process was more marked by disputes in a way not seen in France despite the transfers of competencies to the new 17 autonomous communities planned by the 1978 Constitution. These regions fell into two categories: those that received extensive competencies ratified by referendum (Euskadi, Catalonia, Galicia and later Andalusia) and those that adopted the ordinary transitional status. The Constitution, however, only gave the regions the right to be informed of the external agreements of the state. As a result, the autonomous communities came up against the rigid position of the central state bureaucracy. After a long and bitter dispute, the Constitutional Court decided in 1994 that the Spanish Foreign Office exerted a monopoly on the hard core of foreign affairs, but that autonomous communities could draw up their own international policies provided that they were compatible with the interests of Spain (Burgorgue-Larsen, 1995: 108).

The adoption of the Outline-Convention of Transfrontier Co-operation of 1980 and its Additional Protocol of 1995 by France and Spain supported this change. As the signing of a bilateral agreement between states was required for the Outline-Convention to be valid, a Franco-Spanish agreement was established in Bayonne in 1995.

There are now two types of cross-border institutions in the Pyrenees: the intercommunal structures such as the *Consortio* Bidasoa-Txingudi (1998, Hendaye, Irún and Hondarribia) and the Basque Eurocity Bayonne-San Sebastian (1995, from Bayonne to San Sebastian); the interregional structures such as the Common Fund Aquitaine-Euskadi (1989, which also brings together Aragón and Navarra), the Common Fund Aragón-Midi-Pyrénées (2001), the Euroregion Catalonia-Midi-Pyrenees-Languedoc-Roussillon (1991) and the Working Community of Pyrenees (WCP, 1983, all the Pyrenean regions and Andorra) (Harguindéguy, 2004: 307-321).

### 3.2. *The INTERREG management: from the Centre to the Periphery*

In 1989, the Catalan presidency of the WCP presented a pilot project to the European Commission. Upon examination, the commissioners chose instead to finance the project proposed by the DATAR and the *Ministerio de Obras Públicas* (MOPU, Ministry of Public Works), even though it was managed by national governments. In 1990, INTERREG was re-launched as a community initiative. It is not surprisingly that the state authorities such as the DATAR and its Pyrenean agency, the Pyrenean Planning Commission, the Prefecture of Midi-Pyrenees, the MOPU and the Spanish Treasury monitored the INTERREG I programme (31.22 million Ecu) (Morata and Muñoz, 1996: 195-219).

After this very shaky start, the Commission doubled the INTERREG II grant (60.6 million Ecu for the period 1994-1999) and urged the governments to get both sides of the border involved in the projects. Led by the Prefecture of Midi-Pyrenees and the Spanish General Directorate of Treasury, cross-border working groups were created but their efforts were limited to putting forward suggestions. As a consequence, 90% of the INTERREG II projects were national projects with a simple certificate signed by a 'partner' located on the other side of the border. In addition, the Spanish state transferred the management of INTERREG II to the autonomous communities in 1996 while in France it remained a state programme.

In order to remedy this situation, the European Commission modified the budget (€ 173.88 million from 2000 to 2006: 30% for the French area, 70% for the Spanish regions) and the design of INTERREG. Moreover, in 1997, the dissolution of the French Parliament by the president J. Chirac provoked the election of a leftist government who delegated the management of INTERREG to the decentralised regional authorities. As member of the WCP, the president of the *Conseil Régional* of Aquitaine proposed himself as the monitoring authority of INTERREG France-Spain. The French Government is still represented by the

Prefecture of Midi-Pyrenees and the Pyrenean Planning Commission. Cross-border cooperation is compulsory because projects must first be sent to the monitoring authority to be financed by the payment authority (General Directorate of Community Funds of the Spanish Treasury). The eligible territories are NUTS III-level territories<sup>2</sup> 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. The examination of proposals is in the hands of three territorial committees of pre-programming (west, centre and east) which bring together French and Spanish sub-national authorities. The final decision on financing falls to a general committee of programming run by these authorities and the head of the INTERREG III-A service from the DG Regio. In order to avoid the implementation gap, new cross-border proposals must respect two rules (European Commission, 2000). First, partnership has to be implemented through three dimensions: a vertical one by involving different tiers of governance, a horizontal one by integrating public and private partners, and a transnational one by connecting French and Spanish actors. Second, the projects have to fit with the modern conception of territorial development promoted by the Commission by stressing the training and networking of local border actors.

#### 4. THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AS A FACTOR OF CONVERGENCE?

Structural funds can be considered as a catalyser, viz a substance which accelerates the normal path of a chemical reaction. Actually, the configurations of the three case studies make them more or less receptive to the new framework designed by the European Commission (cf. map).

##### *4.1. The Western Case: Europeanisation through the local actors*

The first case concerns the three towns located around the bay of Txingudi, in the western Pyrenees, on the Atlantic coast of the Basque Country. Hendaye (France) is a family seaside resort of 12,600 inhabitants whose seaport now concentrates on tourist activities. On the opposite shore, Hondarribia (Spain) is a medieval citadel and a fishing seaport (15,000 inhabitants). The main city of the bay, Irún (Spain), is an industrial town of 55,000 inhabitants.

The Bidasoa river separates Hendaye from its Spanish counterparts. It is also a border between the traditional Basque provinces of Labourd (Hendaye) and Guipúzcoa (Irún, Hondarribia), between the *département* of Pyrénées-Atlantiques (which the three French Basque provinces share with the Béarn) and the province of Guipúzcoa and between the Aquitaine region and the autonomous community of Euskadi.

Hendaye is a traditional fief of the *Parti Socialiste Français* (PSF, French Socialist Party) within a *département* dominated by the liberal rightist *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF, Union for the French Democracy) opposed to the socialist presidency of the region. Irún is also governed by the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE, Spanish Worker Socialist Party) when Hondarribia is ruled by the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party) since the democratisation. The PNV traditionally leads the province of Guipúzcoa and the Basque Autonomous Community.

These municipalities can be considered as 'pro-active' actors in cross-border issues as they founded a common intercommunal institution called *Consortio* Bidasoa-Txingudi in 1998 (Smyrl, 1995). It was the continuation of the Eurodistrict, an informal institution created in 1992 to which the Treaty of Bayonne of 1995 gave official backing. The *Consortio* is

administered by a political committee of municipalities' representatives. The technical aspects are in the hands of the Spanish private consultancy *Bidasoa-Activa* who implemented several initiatives such as a cross-border journal or a trade fair.

The project proposed by these municipalities consists in supplying a suitcase of educational games to the pupils of the bay in order to complete their national training with cross-border information. This proposal shall cost € 213,000. It was presented on January 2002 to the western territorial committee of pre-programming, who approved it in December. The committee of programming confirmed this decision on January 2003. It is the extension of a previous project which aimed to create tourist paths all around the bay. This project is locally managed by the *Consortio* and *Bidasoa-Activa*. The latter appointed two societies specialised in tourist development: *Maîtres du Rêve* from Aix en Provence (France) and *Zoocreative* located in Bera de Bidasoa (Spain). Both developed the strategic and graphic aspects of the suitcases with the help of local professors through the cross-border working group specialised in cultural issues created by the *Consortio* during the INTERREG II programme. 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 *Consortio* (Spanish, French and Basque). The strong link between the suitcase and the pedestrian paths also had to be stressed. Despite the local conflicts between the political representatives of Irún and Hondarribia on the toponymy to adopt (Basque or Spanish), 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 obtained the financial support of the Basque Government, the *Conseil Général* of Pyrénées-Atlantiques and the *Conseil Régional* of Aquitaine.

#### 4.2. *The Central Case: Traditional State-centred Policies vs New Forms of Governance*

The second case study is based on a project implemented by the municipalities of Gèdre (France), Gavarnie (France), Torla (Spain) and Broto (Spain) in the central Pyrenees. Each of these hamlets concentrates approximately 200 inhabitants. Gavarnie and Gèdre have an easy access to the Gavarnie circus (1 million visitors a year) in the National Nature Reserve of Pyrenees and to some ski resorts, while Torla and Broto are the gateway to the Monte-Perdido (1.2 million visitors a year) in the National Nature Reserve of Ordesa. This situation eased the conversion from agricultural activities to the tourism trade during the 1970s.

Unlike the other cases, these hamlets do not share a common culture. 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, while Torla and Broto are part of the Spanish-speaking area of the *comarca* (intercommunal district) of Sobrarbe, in the province of Huesca, in the autonomous community of Aragón.

Following the pattern of Euskadi and Catalonia, aragonese nationalist parties have emerged in Aragón. Nevertheless, 'Aragonism' is still a regionalist movement and not a nationalist one. It did not impede the election of two state parties at the local level: the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP, Popular Party) in Torla and the PSOE in Broto as in the whole Aragonese community. On the French slope, Occitan nationalists are dedicated to cultural activities while centre-left traditional French political forces rule the municipality of Gèdre (*Mouvement Radical de Gauche* -Leftist Radical Movement- and PSF), the

*département* and the region. In turn, Gavarnie is ruled by the French conservative *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP, Union for a Popular Movement).

At the difference of the western case, municipal representatives are only 'reactive' actors as there is no tradition of cross-border projects in this area. Until 2000, few local cross-border projects were implemented, and most of them were managed through the DATAR-MOPU agreement (Smyrl, 1995). The only project led in co-operation between Torla, Borto, Gèdre and Gavarnie was the financing of an atlas about the local natural patrimony protected by the UNESCO.

The project proposed by these municipalities is a feasibility study on the building of a telpher carrier between the four villages. The study costs € 153,000. It was presented in April 2002 to the central territorial committee of pre-programming and approved by the territorial committee of programming in June 2002. These villages are 150 kilometres apart by the closest road and a telpher carrier could simplify the journey between the two slopes. It would prevent visitors of staying in just one resort, to the cost of the others, and could lengthen the season of the Spanish hotel keepers. There is no specific cross-border institution to manage this proposal. The leading authority is the *Communauté de Communes* (intercommunal grouping) Gavarnie-Gèdre, governed by the mayor of Gèdre. A parallel and unofficial local Franco-Spanish committee of management allows integrating the four municipalities. Although, the Spanish municipalities produced a first evaluation of the possibilities of transport across the border in the 1990s, entirely financed by the Aragonese Government, the members of the four town councils only began to organise local cross-border meetings on cross-border transport issues from 1999. After fourteen reunions it appeared that 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 Aragón 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 through the *ODIT-France*. The latter represents the Ministry of Tourism and its regional delegation of the SGAR. This agency is specialised in mountain tourist logistic and supports the agents of the *Communauté de Communes* since the beginning to finance a first appraisal of the future works. Tenders were invited to propose technical solutions to the geographical constraints of the project. The French consultancy *MC2 Consultants*, located in Toulouse, was chosen. The MC2 consultants, helped by other French specialists on mountain infrastructures and environment sustainability tried to elaborate a planning scheme with the least negative environmental impact possible as the cable car should cross a part of the National Nature Reserve of the Pyrenees on the French slope. The results of the investigation concluded that it was possible to establish an infrastructure of communication between the two slopes but the National Nature Reserve's board, which depends on the Ministry of Environment, imposed to finance new studies the economic and ecological repercussions of the project before to take a final decision.

#### *4.3. The Eastern Case: Unfinished Europeanisation*

The last case study consists in analysing 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). The economic activity of Puigcerdà is based on mountain agriculture and tourist services, as in the French villages, but the Spanish town also has some light industry.

These neighbouring municipalities share a common historical territory called Cerdaña. Until the Treaty of the Pyrenees, Cerdaña was one of the provinces of Catalonia, which also

extends to the whole *département* of Pyrénées-Orientales. After 1659 both sides progressively separated (Sahlins, 1989). Nowadays, Spanish Cerdaña constitutes a *comarca* (district) which is part of the province of Gerona and the autonomous community of Catalonia. The French side is integrated to the *département* of Pyrénées-Orientales, within the Languedoc-Roussillon region.

At that time, the French hamlets were ruled by different political formations but were mainly governed by socialist mayors, in a *département* traditionally ruled by the centre-left. However, since 1998, the Languedoc-Roussillon regional Council was dominated by the UMP thanks to the backing of the neo-fascist *Front National* (National Front). This configuration provoked many tensions with the *Conseil Général* of Pyrénées-Orientales until the election of a socialist president at the head of the region in 2003 (Alliès, 1998: 5-40). In Spain, the leftist Catalan nationalist mayor of Puigcerdà (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERC -Republican Left of Catalonia-) is in favour of the unifying of the Catalan-speaking regions but was also very isolated in a province and a region controlled by the Catalan nationalist liberal/demo-Christian coalition *Convergència I Unió* (CiU, Convergence and Union). Nevertheless, a new alliance led by the PSOE, ERC and the ecologists was elected during the autonomous elections in 2003.

As in the Basque case, there is a local tradition of individual local cross-border contacts. However, these ‘pro-active’ actors always met with difficulties to implement public projects involving territorial leaders, especially on the French part (Smyrl, 1995). According to this pattern, the proposal of cross-border hospital in Puigcerdà was put into service thanks to the backing of the Catalan Government since French leaders did not find an agreement.

The proposal of these municipalities consists in networking the Museum of Cerdaña, located in Sainte-Léocadie, and the Cerdan Museum of Puigcerdà. The museums are managed in different ways. The five French municipalities co-operate through a common structure called *Syndicat Intercommunal pour la Valorisation du Patrimoine Cerdan* (SIVPC, Intercommunal Office for the Development of the Cerdan Culture) while the museum of Puigcerdà is administered by a *Patronat* which associates the town council and the *comarca* council. The principal aim of the project is to compete with Andorran ski resorts by diversifying local tourist activities. This project is the continuation of various proposals that have been implemented since the 1980s but which failed. In 1999, the new administration of the French museum proposed another agreement to the authorities of the Cerdan Museum. Both accepted to constitute a complementary collection, a unique ticket office and a common training programme for a total budget of € 1,874,615 with the *Patronat* as the leading authority of the project. Presented in January 2003, the proposal was accepted by the territorial committee of programming on September 2003. However, after a *coup de theatre* on June 2004, the committee reconsidered its decision and postponed *sine die* the adoption of the proposal. The main problems of the implementation process were first that 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. Second, the proposal of the regional Council to integrate the Museum of Cerdaña into the future Regional Nature Reserve of Occidental Pyrenees provoked the financial retraction of the *Conseil Général*. Actually, the latter proposed its financial assistance provided that the local actors excluded the other institution. In March 2005, the project was finally accepted for a total amount of € 745,323 financed by the regional Government of Catalonia on the Spanish side, the *Conseil Général* and the *Conseil Régional* on the French side. Nevertheless, the two museums had already established their budget on the precedent number and discovered that they had spent more in infrastructure 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 in 2003 from a 50/50 division between Spanish and French partners to a 70/30 division. Then, the realisation of the initial cross-border projects seems doomed to failure.

## 5. INTERREG III-A FRANCE-SPAIN FROM A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

By using the method of differences (Przeworski, Teune, 1970: 17) I aim to investigate what are the different outcomes of the implementation process and what causes such results. The comparison reveals that Europeanisation is a 'differential' process (Héritier, 2001) constrained by the contextual variables. In the case of INTERREG, the diffusion of European standards related to policy goals and governance depends on the capability of local actors to establish institutional arrangements.

### *5.1. A Common Policy, Different Outcomes*

The three implementation processes can be compared according to two main features: first, the way in which the implementation is led, second, the policy goals which structure the three projects. For that, I use two theoretical tools. On one hand the policy networks' approach developed by Roderick Rhodes and David Marsh (1992). On the other hand the cognitive analysis of public policies based on the notion of '*référentiels*' elaborated by Pierre Muller and Bruno Jobert (1987).

At the interactional level, the strong ideological and strategic integration of the western 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. This network involves different tiers of government on a vertical dimension, private and public actors interact on a horizontal dimension and French and Spanish actors participate on a transnational dimension. 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 aspects of the interaction. In this case, the vertical dimension of the network is dominated by the state administrations. The horizontal dimension is limited because there are no private actors involved and the transnational dimension is incomplete because the function of Spanish actors is limited to the symbolic support of the project. 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. The vertical involvement of different tiers of administration is a source of conflict, the horizontal integration of private actors does not work and the transnational dimension is restricted by the autonomous strategies of the two partners.

At the ideational level, political representations are also divided. Two referentials 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 little projects which aim to conciliate tourist activities and the protection of environment. This local referential 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 feasibility study project 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.

## 5.2. Drawing on the Sources of the INTERREG Implementation Process

Many intervening variables can be invoked to explain the different outcomes of isolated cases of implementation of INTERREG III-A France-Spain. However, their comparison allows establishing a hierarchy of causality and inference. Three sets of causes can be invoked: those related to ideas, those linked to interests and those connected to institutions.

With regard to the ideational variables, one of the commonplaces frequently encountered during the investigation is 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.

Local actors also invoke the internal capacity of cultures to favour the implementation process. Basques are often presented as well organised *per se*, while Occitan, Aragonese and Catalan people would be too individualistic to co-operate. Nevertheless, from an analytical viewpoint, cultural stereotypes are only an *a posteriori* rationalisation to justify a satisfactory -or unsatisfactory- outcome (Keating, 2003: 41-74).

The geographical conditions would exert a pressure on the co-operation process too. 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. It also should be possible to explain the will of the actors of the feasibility study to finance heavy infrastructures by the presence of a physical barrier. Nevertheless, as 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, it invalidates this hypothesis.

The basic needs of the actors and their socio-economic complementarities are also supposed to have a strong influence on the way in which the implementation is managed. However, the ‘success story’ of the western case economic demonstrates that a strong economic competition between municipalities has no effect on the cross-border co-operation policy which is, above all else, a political process (European Commission, 2002).

In the same way, the proposal of the feasibility study seems to have a larger scope than the others. 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 cost of the feasibility study is lower than that of the networking of the museums. Moreover, it 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. 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 *Consortio* have tried 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 (Morata, 1995: 117-127). According to some actors, the presence of socialists in the first two cases on both sides of the Franco-Spanish border would facilitate the co-operation. In turn, the different political tendencies of the eastern case would explain the difficulties met during the implementation process. However, the transnationalisation of political parties does not intervene in this process because French and Spanish socialist parties have a very different history and are confronted to two different structures of political interests.

The political party of local leaders is also expected to play a role in the cross-border involvement. According to this explanation, Basque and Catalan nationalists, but also the socialist leaders would be more inclined to collaborate on a cross-border basis. But as proves the eastern case, the leadership of a pan-Catalan nationalist is not a sufficient factor to establish a good level of co-operation. In turn, the type of political leadership seems to have a greater influence on the co-operation. The 'transformational leaders' generally coincides better with the European standards than the 'transactional leaders', who merely manage the projects as classical national policies (Bailey, 1969; Burns, 1978). In the case of the *Consortio* 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 thanks to his knowledge of regional clientelist networks.

The skill levels of the local administrative staff also plays 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 *Consortio* whose involvement in cross-border issues reinforced the learning process of their agents.

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. This involvement can be a positive element if local agents are able to channel the peripheral actors. Conversely, this presence can also provoke the loss of local control over the implementation process as in the central case, or even the disintegration of the local agencies as in the eastern case.

The role of institutional variables in the implementation process is linked to the stabilisation capacity of the actors' networks (Powell, DiMaggio, 1991: 1-38). Nevertheless, all the institutional arrangements are not able to point the action of agencies towards the respect of European standards of implementation (Duran, 1992). According to the INTERREG implementations experienced in the three selected areas, the best administrative organisation must hold four necessary criteria:

First, leading authorities have to be local institutions in the sense that they must represent effective interaction from a bottom-up perspective. This is the case of the three leading authorities.

Second, leading authorities are more efficient when they are common institutions which represent both sides of the border. This is the case of the *Consortio*, and this is also the case of the Intercommunal grouping of Gèdre-Gavarnie thanks to the help of the Franco-Spanish Committee created by the four municipal councils. *A contrario*, the *Patronat* can be considered as a smoke-screen since the two local partners of the eastern case do not really co-operate.

Third, the leading authorities with a legal backing are also the most legitimate. In all the cases, the leading authorities are legally recognised by their respective states, nevertheless, the *Consortio* is recognised by the French and Spanish Ministries of Foreign Affairs since the ratification of the Treaty of Bayonne in 1995, imposed by the Outline-Convention of Madrid.

Fourth, the leading authorities which hold a 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 *Consortio*, a specific administration designed to directly put into practice the Community policies is more flexible. The *Consortio*



was created mainly to implement the European directives on cross-border policy. This efficiency is the consequence of the division of labour between the three town councils and these specialised structures in cross-border issues. In turn, the other leading authorities must work at the same time on their national affairs and on a cross-border programme.

## 6. CONCLUSION

As this analysis underlines, the neo functionalist hypothesis which guides the European Commission is partly invalidated. The local level is fundamental, especially with regard to the implementation of large programmes such as INTERREG (Tannam, 1995: 67-93). Although the European Commission elaborated an even more constraining institutional framework, in some cases local actors continue to use the structural funds as a spur to implement traditional state-centred policies based on a productivist vision of development.

This ‘calculus approach’ of historical new institutionalism tallies with this local focus 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. Under certain conditions, institutions exert a stabilising effect on political actors, favour the learning process and reduce the uncertainty (Perkmann, 2002: 103-124; Smyrl, 1995).

This rational choice/neo institutionalist analysis based on the study of cognitive and interactional aspects of the implementation of structural funds also reinforces the constitution of a consistent middle-range theory which goes across the traditional theories of integration. It adequately completes the neo functionalist *corpus* by stressing the importance of context in the diffusion process. Then, the spill-over is possible only if sub-national actors have an interest in doing so. Federalist works are concerned by the sub-national actors too. However, neo institutionalist analysis does not take for granted the growing importance of the regions and only can subscribe to a large and variable definition of multi-level governance. This interest for new modes of governance partly goes against the principal-agent model of intergovernmentalism by demonstrating the weight of intermediate institutions (local, regional, state-national) and the competition between state services. In the same way, this neo institutionalist study demonstrates that the theory of international political economy is too deterministic when it considers that the structural funds implicate automatically the setting of a virtuous dynamic of economic development in the peripheral territories. Many variables intervene in this process, especially in the border areas where two socio-political spaces encounter.

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## 7. NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The French and Spanish projects selected are separated by less than five kilometres, they aim to promote tourism through the development of natural and historical heritage, they are managed by public authorities and they cost less than € 800,000. However, the three cases have their own specificities. In the western case, actors are grouped into a transnational network, they share a common Basque culture, and they use a specific cross-border institution to implement the INTERREG initiative at the local level. In the eastern case, actors form a cross-border network and they share a common Catalan culture. In the central case, the implementation only depends on a transnational network of political men and civil servants. The selection of these cases fulfils the needs of a comparative analysis by constituting a ‘jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive’ panel (Sartori,

1970: 1033-1053). The western case is effectively implemented according to the European standards; the second is also well implemented but the way in which the process is led does not fit with the European directives; the third is not implemented at all and has many difficulties to respect the expectations of the European Commission.

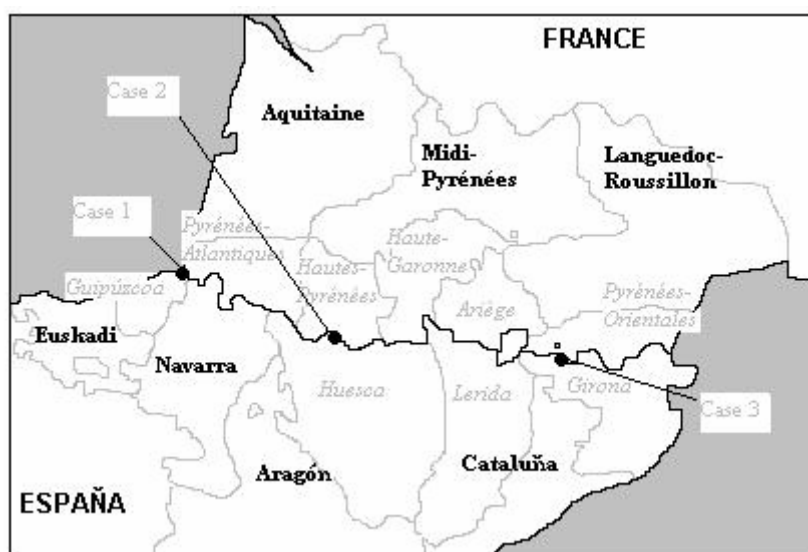
<sup>2</sup> *Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques* (Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units): NUTS I include multi-regional territories; NUTS II are usually regions; NUTS III corresponds to provinces.

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## 9. MAP



The Three Selected INTERREG Cases (by J. B. Harguindéguy)

## 10. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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