

THE EUROCITY BAIONA – DONOSTIA. EXAMPLE OR UTOPIA IN THE CROSS – BORDER COLLABORATION?

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In the last few years the European Union has made an important effort to overcome the national point of view of states and reach a situation of unity in different areas, such as economy, society, environment...

One of the most important steps toward the integration of nations consists of the suppression of physical and mental borders, giving a special importance to the border areas. The territory between the Southeast of France and the Northeast of Bask Country is one of those places where the effort to overcome the current situation must be increased.

This change can be considered like a utopia because of a very different legal and administrative reality, opposite interests, local territorial managements, even the existence of two different languages.

To build the European project, interior borders must be suppressed. If this was one of the most important problems in 1992, when the idea of the «Eurocity Baiona-Donostia» was born, nowadays borders have disappeared and there is a common currency (that has increased economical exchange) in both sides of Bidasoa river.

In January of 1993, when the borders in the European Union disappeared, the institutional responsables of both territories included in the idea, La Diputación Provincial de Guipuzcoa y El Distrito BAB (Baiona, Anglet, Biarritz) signed an agreement to develop the cooperation between the institutions of both sides of the border.

Because of economical, structural, legal and administrative differences between two territories, political and administrative responsables have been implicated in the project. In local level there are included different towns, provincial level La Diputación Foral de Guipuzcoa and El Conseil General des Pyrénées Atlantiques, in regional level El Gobierno Vasco and El Conseil Regional d'Aquitaine and in state level the two Central Governments.

To develop the project that consists of the integration of both sides of the border and its importance in the European Union, some objectives have been defined. The three main objectives consist of development of an intermodal logistic platform, a necessity for a networked, polycentric metropolis while respecting the principles of sustainable development.

In a second level, there are basic lines of action considered specific objectives. In these objectives some initiatives are mentioned: development of an intermodal eurocorridor, logistic heads, organization of the metropolis, competitive public services, promotion of public transport...

Finally, in the last level, several actions are defined. These actions make reference to different aspects such as: high speed railway connection through the border, a new logistic system to organize the merchandise traffic, creation of a central industrial junction, coordination of two commercial ports (Baiona and Pasaia), reorganization of airports, creation of an information highway to connect the Eurocity with world information traffic, creation of an exhibition centre, a common management of services like provision of water, protection of the zone around the river that connects both territories, common supply of cultural and tourist activities, optimization of different public transport ways, integration of universities and medical services, creation of protected spaces...

At the beginning of 1997 «La Agencia Transfronteriza para el Desarrollo de la Eurociudad» was created to avoid the problems originated by the different legislations in both sides of the border. This private organization can have decisions independently but the members of this association are members of the public Administrations involved in the project and project's financing comes from European Union. As well as this management organization, other technical associations were also created to promote and consolidate the project of The Eurocity.

Making a first analysis of the results obtained during these years, conclusion wouldn't be excessively optimistic. In the economical aspect help has not been enough, money has not been invested in the actions defined in this article, however it has been used to create the bureaucratic organizations and processes, nevertheless necessities in the development of this kind of project.

In the other hand, the existence of two legal, administrative, cultural and economical realities has obstructed the development of the objectives and actions defined in the article.

The territory of the Eurocity is also inside of bigger territorial realities; this situation can cause conflicts. For example, to improve the cooperation between ports of Baiona and Pasaia can cause problems with the port of Bilbao, in direct competition with Baiona. As a consequence of these conflicts, the cooperation does not exist.

In conclusion, The Eurocity can be considered as an example of an unreached cooperation between territories situated in the both sides of a border line. The utopia should not be so far if politicians were really interested and worried about this kind of projects. However, because of the questions mentioned in this article, nowadays the attitude about this project is really sceptical.