



TOWARDS A NEW SPATIAL AGENDA FOR THE NORTH SEA REGION

Updating NorVision

FACT SHEET

The Programme

The 7 countries around the North Sea are working together in the **INTERREG IIIB North Sea Programme** to solve shared problems related to spatial development. Project partnerships get EU money to work with problems such as protecting the environment, improving transport, encouraging innovation, developing more competitive cities and towns, creating new opportunities for rural areas and dealing with the risk of natural disasters. Working together allows partners to share knowledge, money and opportunities for improving the quality of life for everyone in the North Sea Region.

The Programme strategy is founded on four basic principles; namely *transnationality* implying that local, regional and national actors in different countries should work together on solving joint problems, *spatial development* that is concerned with where development happens, *cross-sectorality* that implies the involvement of the relevant sectors at different levels (local, regional and national) and *sustainability* aiming at integrating economic, social and environmental concerns within a project.



Defining the Spatial Agenda

Between 1998 and 2001, a spatial vision for the North Sea Region was developed, based on the principles of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). NorVision, as it was called, is a key advisory document, which has strongly influenced territorial cooperation in the North Sea Region. It describes the existing state of spatial development and suggests directions for future. Projects that have been developed under INTERREG IIIB NSR put many of them into practice

The North Sea Programme:

- ❖ 7 Countries
- ❖ € 274 million (half national, half European funds)
- ❖ 58 approved projects running from 2001 – 2008
- ❖ The North Sea Region is one of 13 INTERREG IIB Areas in Europe

Main themes:

1. New opportunities for rural and peripheral areas
2. Risk management along rivers and coasts
3. Improving transport
4. Using the environment responsibly
5. Making use of innovation and knowledge
6. Developing more competitive cities and towns

The aim for the current update is not to evaluate or rework NorVision, rather the aim is to provide strategic input for continued co-operation in the North Sea Region, focused on a selected number of themes. The themes selected are: coastal water management, transport, facilitating innovation, energy and demographic change (see below).

Studies are currently underway for all themes. They will identify the main future spatial challenges for the North Sea Region, show how they can be addressed in a future transnational programme and identify potential projects and partnerships. All studies follow a highly communicative and interactive approach and involve key players at different stages. Seminars at the Annual Conference mid June 2005 will offer the opportunity to discuss first results and will kick-off the consultation process in the North Sea countries.

Draft final reports of the five studies are expected by the end of August and will be discussed among stakeholders in the member states. In autumn, work on a synthesis report will begin, which will summarise the findings and conclusions of the studies. After adoption by the Programme Monitoring Committee, the synthesis report will be published and distributed widely.

Topics of the Spatial Agenda

Coastal Water Management

Coastal zones and their immediate vicinity contain a high level of economic activity such as trade and tourism. Human activity puts pressure on the coastal zones and this increases the risk of destroying habitats and the resource base of the coast. Until now, the focus was mainly on the landside. The study will look at the coast from a seaside perspective, i.e. coastal waters. There is also a need, but little experience, for more spatial coordination regarding the North Sea itself: wind farms, shipping needs, environmental concerns require a balanced transnational approach to weigh the different interests in the exclusive economic zones.

Transport and Accessibility

The extension of the European Union to the East and raised sensitivity of the risks of maritime shipping have changed the picture of transport in the region during the last years. Other topics to be looked at are the potential role of secondary hubs, the slow response to short sea shipping or the increasing allocation of external and infrastructure costs to the respective transport modes, which will lead to cost and price increases for road transport. .

Facilitating innovation and the transfer of knowledge and technology

Facilitating innovation and transfer of knowledge and technology has often previously been linked to ICT and technological innovation. The extent to which other sectors had been explored in the fields relevant to Interreg and spatial development remains limited. Additionally, during the last five years innovation and transfer has moved into the centre of the European Agenda (Lisbon Agenda). The study will re-cap the current strengths and weaknesses in the North Sea region and identify new opportunities not yet tapped into. Showing what role transnational cooperation can play here is a particularly important outcome of the study.

Energy

The North Sea Region is a European region with unique characteristics as far as energy supply is concerned (oil, gas, wind power, CO2 storage, ...). The study will elaborate on the energy trends facing the region and show how transnational cooperation can improve the energy supply situation, i.e. lower the need for unsustainable sources and decrease the dependency of foreign supply.

Demographic change

Ageing population and migration will continue to affect spatial development in the North Sea Region. Questions to be addressed are i.e. what are the main impacts, how do the different countries and regions react and how can unwanted effects be averted through transnational cooperation?

Future Cooperation

In its communication of 14th July 2004, the European Commission proposes to continue territorial cooperation in programme areas on certain transnational themes. Within these programmes it will be possible to work together in specific projects. The five studies will provide insight in the feasibility of such projects. The current proposals from the European Commission imply a European funding of up to 75% for transnational projects and up to 20% of the funds might be spent outside the programme area. The EU member states and the European Commission are currently negotiating these proposals and although decisions have not been taken yet, most member states seem to be willing to continue supporting cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. First decisions about possible themes and programme areas are expected for June 2005. The results of the Spatial Agenda process will inform the new North Sea Programme when it will be established for the years 2007 – 2013.