



Learning the languages of neighbouring countries in schools, cross-border programme initiated by the Land of Lower Austria

Language training is a crucial issue for the territory's economic development and the expansion of the potential labour pool.

- That is why **the Land of Lower Austria developed an original project** that was adopted by the neighbouring Länder and then took on a cross-border dimension, with the setting-up of equivalent programmes on the other side of Austria's borders. The project consists in introducing the languages of the neighbouring countries to children in kindergarten. This strategy gives children an awareness of the cross-border character of the region and of the culture of the neighbouring countries from the youngest age. At the end of a young person's school career, knowledge of the neighbouring country's language increases the potential for cooperation in all areas.

## PLAYERS IN CROSS-BORDER ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

The public stakeholders involved in the economic development and planning aspect of cross-border cooperation are the authorities of the regions concerned (regarding the Vienna-Bratislava axis, the two capital city regions and the region of Lower Austria, which surrounds the Vienna region). Given that Austria is a federal State, these two regions are in fact Länder and have broader powers than in the neighbouring countries, which are all centralised and where decentralisation processes are even difficult to put in place. The federal level makes it possible to share the objectives linked to European funds intended for Austria and the good practices of the Länder, which perform an important coordination role. In Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, the regions have very limited autonomy and cross-border issues require decisions taken by central government, which makes cross-border cooperation with Austria more complex.

The consular chambers, particularly the chambers of commerce, also cooperate with one another, mainly via informal contacts and regular meetings (involving the sharing of experiences and assistance and recommendations from Austria in particular). Cross-border projects have been carried out, like the DUO\*\*STARS project mentioned above.

The Centrope Region, which was created by INTERREG III A and straddles the four countries, is now seeking to strengthen institutional cooperation between the different public stakeholders concerned by the territory's cross-border development. While this project's importance is undeniable, with obvious potential synergies, structuring this cooperation is more complicated owing to the different modes of organisation and priorities other than the cross-border dimension.

In terms of European programmes, those devoted to cross-border territories do not include aid to SMEs as it is too complex to implement (involvement of businesses and de minimis aid). Only interregional and transnational programmes address it by including the cross-border dimension (development opportunities for businesses). In a general way, the objective of ETC is formulated less in terms of integration (increase of flows, joint strategies) than in terms of encouragement to businesses and workers to exploit the cross-border potential (R&D resources on the other side of the border, markets for SMEs, linguistic knowledge, etc.).