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Cooperation on the Upper Rhine

A region grows together

Cross-border cooperation on the Upper Rhine is no longer in the realm of Utopia. At the European crossroads between Baden-Württemberg, Alsace and northwestern Switzerland, there is a whole series of projects and arrangements which represent joint international action in the interests of the region. One of these is the "Dreiland-Zeitung"



(Three-Country Newspaper) – a weekly supplement to Basle's main daily. With offices in Freiburg and Mulhouse, this is a genuine cross-border medium covering economic, cultural and environmental events all over the region.

A classical three-country theme lies behind the word INTERREG. This is an initiative launched by the European Community in 1990 to promote European frontier regions. "Upper Rhine Centre and South" is one of them. By the end of 1993, 40 cross-border projects had been started as part of this programme, in 22 of which Switzerland participates. This is amazing, since it means that EU finance flows into Switzerland, which is a member neither of the EU nor of the EEA. Tri-national projects are financed to the extent of 40% by the EU, with

In the three-country region of France, Germany and Switzerland, cross-border cooperation has made great strides. There is even a weekly cross-border paper! (Photo: Regio Basiliensis)

20% coming from each partner. Bi-national projects receive an EU contribution of 50%.

An excellent example of tri-national INTERREG projects is the Information and Advice Bureau (Infobest) in the old customs house on Palmrain Bridge. This is a springboard office for all cross-border questions, and anyone can telephone or visit. It has been described as the EU's secret weapon to woo local peo-

ple. Equally tri-national is the agreement on a European confederation of Upper Rhine universities, known as EUCOR. This includes the universities of Freiburg, Karlsruhe, Mulhouse, Strasbourg and Basle. EUCOR offers highly specialised higher education of a type which is possible only when several universities pool resources. One example: a course in pharmaceutical medicine, from which the first 50 students graduated in 1993.

In environmental protection, the tri-national regional climate project, REKLIP, must be mentioned. This research programme has a budget of about Sfr. 30 million and is intended to provide aids to decision-making in environmental protection and regional planning. Next summer a regional climate atlas will be published.

The tri-national business and talent shaper, CENTRE, in Colmar is also an INTERREG project. Its aim is to pass on experience and to provide training for professional businessmen, and it has already seen considerable success. Tri-national cooperation in the INTERREG context also appears in a joint tourist guide to the Upper Rhine region and in a joint leisure area concept, as well as in a series of regional economic studies, airport potential estimates and a plan for a European Institute for Cardiological Rehabilitation Research.

Cooperation is in any case indispensable wherever problems do not by their nature stop at frontiers. This applies to the tri-national disaster exercise which was carried out last year in the region. It is also valid for crime prevention. On both the Swiss and Baden-Württemberg sides, it has been repeatedly confirmed by the number of arrests that police co-operation actually functions. In cultural activities, the cooperation in the field of musical education for young people which has existed for many years should also be mentioned. Joint concerts, ensembles and leisure events across borders are a matter of course. Not quite so well developed, but on the way there, is theatrical cooperation in the region. No productions have yet been actually exchanged, but joint publicity takes place and a regional theatre subscription scheme is planned.

Elisabeth Rosenkranz ■