

agement of the Wienerwald with the aim of applying to the UNESCO for international recognition as biosphere reserve.

In spite of the fact that the region is noted for its stable and high landscape diversity, a slow progress in grassing of arable land constitutes an ecological problem, i.e. its slow changing into enduring grass green in every place where soils are endangered by erosion. The persisting problem is also a pressure to emplace contextures in the open (for instance masts for cellular radio system networks, trade centres, housing projects and building up of recreation sites).

The legal basis for nature conservation within the European Union is the Bird Directive and the Habitat Directive. The main objective of the Habitat Directive is to contribute towards ensuring biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. A coherent European ecological network of special areas of conservation is set up under the title Natura 2000. The protected areas designated according to the Bird Directive are integrated into the Natura 2000 network. (Details see Environmental report)

Urban environment

Most cities in the border region are confronted with a common core set of environmental problems such as

- Pollution (air quality, high levels of noise, emissions) caused by high levels of traffic and congestion, heating, industrial pollution
- Poor-quality built environment
- Derelict land
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Urban sprawl and
- Generation of waste and wastewater

The causes of the problems include changes in lifestyle (growing dependence on the private car, increase in one-person households, increasing resource use per capita) and demographic changes. Problems related to a poor quality built environment are often linked to underlying socio-economic problems. Urban transport has a direct impact on air pollution, noise, congestion and CO₂ emissions and it is fundamental to citizens and business.

Pollution

Although the environmental pollution has been steadily decreasing in the region there are still places where considerable pollution occurs. In particular on sites with a higher concentration of inhabitants and services the increase of mobile pollution sources both in individual and goods transport and the synergetic effect of these activities is even amplified in the case of:

- Energy-consuming operations, especially in industrial plants (cement works, metal foundries, machine-works etc.)
- Road lines running through towns and in the crossing points to Austria, Slovakia and Germany

- Inversion situations, in particular in winter when the polluted air does not disperse ground ozone and NOx concentrations in towns

Water

Access to clean water and the preservation of fresh water supplies is one factor of quality of life and regional competitiveness. In this context the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) is one of the most important regulatory framework. Water pollution constitutes the most serious problem in the environmental protection of the Czech border region. There is a large amount of small municipalities and leisure facilities without or with insufficient sewage disposals. In Austria the problems with surface water have largely be solved, both in the case of standing and running water.

Natural hazards – flood risk

For the border region, the rivers e.g. the Danube, the Thaya and the March/Morava are also very important landscape features. In the last 6 years the region was confronted with two large and some smaller catastrophic floods. Expansive settlement activities and stream and river regulations lead to insufficient retention and run-off areas. As a reaction to these floods they started to elaborate specific flood risk management and protection programmes based on the existing legal framework on both sides of the border.

Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is defined as the totality of material and immaterial cultural assets like libraries, archives and museums, buildings (churches, castles, monasteries), as well as the manifestation and expression of folk culture, the scientific perception etc. The immaterial cultural assets are passed down from one generation to the other. They are formulated by communities and groups in dependence of the particular milieus, their interactions with the nature and their history and are part of their identity and continuity.

Cultural heritage contributes to cultural diversity and creativity and is part of a regional identity. The variety of cultural heritage and activities in the Austrian-Czech border region offers specific links for activities and measures to protect cultural traditions covering legislative framework (e.g. UNESCO convention, national regulation for the protection of historical monuments and buildings, culture policy etc.) up to customs and traditional handicraft techniques. The preservation, conservation and development of cultural heritage is also very important for tourism. In the program area comprehensive activities to protect the cultural heritage exist (historical urban areas, monuments and historical ensembles, cultural landscapes etc.).²

² As examples for this wide variety of cultural heritage the properties included in the World Heritage list of the UNESCO are mentioned here. (AT-border region Historic Centre of Vienna, Palace and Gardens of Schönbrunn, Wachau Cultural Landscape; CR-border region: Historic Centre of Český Krumlov, Historic Centre of Telč, Holašovice Historical Village Reservation, Jewish Quarter and St Procopius' Basilica in Třebíč, Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape, Tugendhat Villa in Brno)

Social aspects

The availability, accessibility and the quality in reference to housing, health and social care (children, elderly people), social security, social and cultural integration, participation are very important factors for the attractiveness of a region. Trends and prognoses for the Austrian-Czech border region expect fundamental changes regarding the demographic structure. The whole region will be confronted with ageing population and especially the cities will be confronted with increasing migration flows. Gaps between the generations, segregation and social tensions could be the implication. In addition the unfavourable financial situation of the public budgets complicates the reaction to this process in some fields, therefore new innovative ideas are necessary to fit the (new) needs of all parts of the population. For the future also a Cross Border Perspective can help to solve some problems.

The development of social services (health, care of elderly people) can be seen as one example. Different dimensions of cross border social services and social work will gain importance in the future: to secure the quality of supply, the financing of the health and care system, social rights and social policy frameworks on the EU level and in the member states.

In general the Austrian-Czech border region is well equipped with social and health services. The number of physicians per 1.000 inhabitants accounts for about 3,5 on the Czech side and from about 4 in the more rural Austrian regions up to 6,9 in *Wien*. In the Czech Republic the change of the health system lead to a permanent increase of the number of physicians. The transfer from the founder's function, which concerned many health establishments from the state to the regions, has raised the proportion of physicians in non-state health establishments. While the number of physicians increases, the number of hospital beds decreases, because the government is exerting pressure on hospitals to save finance resources. Similar development processes can be observed in Austria.

Against this background in the context of cross border development, problems like the joint supply of high level quality of medical care, the joint use of available capacities, the co-operation structures and possible joint cross border activities of public and private institutions, the mobility of patients and health professionals and education and skills development for health professionals are worth to discuss in the future.

Cross border co-operation structures – Regional Governance

The existing co-operation structures, contacts and cross border exchange at the personal, economical and political level projects offer an excellent position for intensifying the relationships in the Austrian-Czech border region.

In the ongoing period the cross border co-operation can be described along the following structure:

- Co-operation on the institutional level (EuRegio in co-operation with the communities, the regions and the regional management structures)
- Co-operation on a political and administrative level and
- Project based co-operation initiatives

The EUREGIO is one example for co-operation on institutional level. In the border region three EUREGIOS are operating, the EUREGIO Region *Weinviertel- Jihomoravský kraj -West Slovakia* in the West and the EUREGIO – *Bayrischer Wald – Böhmerwald/Šumava* in the East and the Euregio *Silva Nortica* in the Middle. Most of them were founded in the second half of the 1990s. The thematic main fields of activities are location policy and economic and business development, labour market, education and qualification, environment, agriculture and forestry, tourism, regional and local partnership, social affairs and health, energy and waste management, innovation and technology, communication, rescue system and emergency management.

The EUREGIOS are very important partners regarding the implementation of the program, the development and management of projects and dissemination of program and project content. Furthermore the EUREGIOS are communication and information platforms. The EUREGIO acts as a platform for information and know-how transfer, as supporter for economic development and socio-cultural activities and as lobbyist for the specific regional concern. Other key functions are the co-ordination of the cross border activities on the local level, the transformation of the idea of cross border growth and the attendance of the program. Because of their very essential function for cross border development and the restrictive budgets of the municipalities an institutional (financial) support is indispensable for the following years.

Besides the political and institutional platforms a large number of projects aimed at the establishment of sustainable co-operation structures in the fields of regional and urban planning, transport, labour market, renewable energy, education etc. Depending on the particular tasks and the involved actors the intensity of cross border co-operation varies and covers a wide range of very different project types e.g. incubators, thematic information centres, web- and information platforms, clusters, thematic networks and co-operation agreements.