

SAUL Launch Conference **24th June 2003**

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERREG FOR THE UK GOVERNMENT:

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I've had the good fortune to be working on Interreg now for about 3 years. The role is very much about co-ordinating Interreg IIIB activity in the UK, and of course that's not something I do by myself with one or two others back in the office. We work closely with colleagues in the Government Offices and the devolved administrations, and outside of the UK we also work with colleagues in the Secretariat and other countries, but looking at it within the UK it is very much a partnership approach that we adopt. It also extends more widely than local government and regional assemblies. I was interested in the comments that Clive made about the need for a strong involvement of communities. That's a very important point, particularly perhaps when you are looking at projects that deal with urban issues. So we work with a wide partnership including the regional development agencies, government agencies, non-governmental offices and many smaller organisations at community level. So that's where I come in, and I'm co-ordinating that activity in the UK.

I'd like to thank Clive for the opportunity to come here and say a few words today. I'm happy to be here because for some time I've been following the SAUL project, albeit somewhat at arms length, and it's very satisfying now to see it come to fruition. So my hearty congratulations to Clive, his team and all the partners for their efforts - which of course will need to be redoubled! But I really do wish you well, and it's very good to see this important project has got to this stage, and to know it will be implemented.

It's nice to be strategically placed between Paul, who was speaking about transnationality, and the presentation to come, which is about the London Plan; because I really want to focus on three points - transnationality; added value; and the delivery of regional planning priorities within the framework of increased spatial planning in the UK. As we all know, the UK has been working and co-operating with European partners for many years, and the concept of co-operation is very much embodied in the Interreg initiative. Interreg IIIB, perhaps like some beers, reaches parts that other European initiatives doesn't reach. I think it covers a very diverse range of subjects from urban issues, factors affecting development of rural communities, the inter-relationship between the two, the states and dependencies of peripheral regions, access to IT, strategic transport issues, and so on.

In short, Interreg deals with issues that are all vital to the creation of sustainable communities - very much a byword, not only for community organisations, but also for central government in the UK. We are putting into practice now, a Community Plan approach to all development within the UK, so this is something that is very important. As far as Interreg IIIB goes, it also represents a big step forward from its predecessor programme IIc, which also sought to foster spatial planning concepts through studies; but with IIIB I think we're now taking a strong leap forward by seeking to promote spatial development. So the accent is very much on delivering concrete outcomes, and Interreg IIIB is therefore an initiative which is ideally placed to help deliver not only social and economic cohesion across wider areas of European space, but in the process also the regional, territorial and community plan agendas in the UK. But I think it's the concept of bilateral and multilateral transnationality which is perhaps the key ingredient of the IIIB programmes. It's the sometimes-elusive added value which transnational partners can derive from working with one another, and in the process help deliver some of national and regional planning priorities, which we are seeking to realise.

It's becoming increasingly apparent that the UK is involved in a more spatial approach to its own planning, recognising the need for a strongly co-ordinated cross-sectoral approach. This is reflected in the many spatial strategies which frame the delivery of regional and territorial priorities in the UK. I'm conscious that for many, the delivery of social and economic cohesion, a big wide concept that in many ways underpins the thinking



behind the Community Plan in England, is perhaps a somewhat ambitious concept to achieve. But for those of us in the UK engaged in Interreg IIIB, we really do see it as a very important opportunity to create transnational partnership such as those embodied in *SAUL*, which will help to deliver lasting tangible benefits across the heart of Europe, including the regions and territories of the UK; so it's important that from the transnational perspective we seek to embed these lasting benefits into our planning processes, I think it is important that we seek to realise that within Interreg IIIB.

So the key message is that the UK is participating very strongly in Interreg IIIB; and through its diverse activities delivered through transnational co-operation with the added value that transnational co-operation can achieve, Interreg IIIB is aiming to deliver concrete outputs which in the UK are designed to deliver regional and national planning priorities. We'll be waiting with interest to see how *SAUL* realises its potential in action. It is a very good strategic project and that's important. I was at an event last week when one of the senior colleagues in the Commission spoke about the whole of the Interreg initiative, and one of the things he stressed was the importance of strategic projects to deliver positive tangible outputs for wide areas of space across Europe. This is what *SAUL* will be able to deliver; so I wish you a successful conference and good launch to get the *SAUL* project going.

The Chairman added the following points:

Harry played an extremely important role for us in helping us to develop and carry through the *SAUL* Application when it came to the process with the International Steering Committee that makes the decisions.

The British Government has provided us as Lead Partner with resources from a special fund to help us with our role, and among other things it has meant we could have a somewhat larger Launch Conference for *SAUL* than we might otherwise have been able to do so thanks to Harry and his colleagues for that.

