



MONT-BLANC TRANSBORDER PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS



On the 3rd July, after more than 3 years of intensive work, **the first Mont-Blanc Transborder Programme (PIT EMB)** was drawn to a conclusion at the Chalet du col des Grands Montets, an emblematic landmark on the border between France and Italy. All parties concerned from the public and private sector, service providers and town councilors met to assess this stage of the programme and discuss ways to build a common future.

THE OBJECTIVES

Created in 2010, the Mont-Blanc Transborder Programme (PIT) mobilised 3 cross-border countries: France (part of the Savoie and Haute-Savoie), Italy (part of the Aosta Valley) and Switzerland (the Valais region). A total of 35 towns and villages with an overall budget of 12 million euro, including 9 million euro of European funding.

All parties have worked incredibly hard to concretise this ambitious sustainable development project, taking into account the economic, social and environmental aspects. A successful, complex and engaging approach resulting in significant progress. This ambitious project covered a 2 800 km² area and a population of more than 100 000. It brought together thirty organizations in both the public and private sector, throughout the Mont-Blanc area.

The PIT was launched and run by its 3 main partners: the Territory and Environment Council in Aoste, the Syndicat Mixte Pays du Mont-Blanc (which later became the Communauté de Communes Pays du Mont-Blanc et Communauté de Communes Vallée de Chamonix Mont-Blanc) and the Valais district's Department of Economy, Energy and Territory.

On assessment, the general conclusion was unanimous: the objectives have been achieved and there has been great satisfaction in working hand in hand.

Eric BIANCO, Swiss vice-president of the Mont-Blanc Transborder Conference and head of economic development in the Valais district:

"This project has revealed surprises as well as innovative cooperation initiatives. One can confirm that this rich cross-border partnership has attained the goals set in 2006 for a sustainable development scheme in the Mont-Blanc area undertaking a number of actions directly involving local communities, residents and tourists."

Nicolas EVRARD, town councilor in Servoz and vice-president of the "Communauté de Commune" in the Chamonix Valley, in charge of natural zones and transborder politics:

"We have demonstrated that the PIT is operational, consistent and close to the population. We have now reached an important stage as we move towards European programming for the 2014-2020 period. The 'Espace Mont-Blanc' focuses on high mountain areas but also on its lower valleys; a population of nearly 120 000 and a number of industrial economic and service issues. Identified characteristics for which we recognize the benefits of working together."

REMARKABLE RESULTS FOR ALL 6 PROJECTS

6 projects and a coordination plan that guarantees the follow-up and integration of each project. The results and benefits are remarkable: 50 activities carried out across the Espace Mont-Blanc, 128 different actions, 60 tenders for works services and supplies, 21 new services to the population, 95 full-time or seasonal jobs created or maintained.



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1. Mont-Blanc Base Camp

Vocation: The Mont-Blanc Base Camp is the technical and scientific centre of the PIT for the sustainable management of its territory.

Results: 5 different activities result in improved management and a clearer vision of the territory:

- Project coordination and management.
- Communication, awareness of sustainable development and a partner network.
- An observatory of Mont-Blanc and the establishment of a statistical database for the 3 countries via a geo-portal.
- A scientific atlas of the Mont Blanc range: an inventory of the scientific works carried out on all 3 sides of the mountain via a single database accessible on the internet. A simplified analysis will be provided for the general public.
- A common strategy for the future of the Mont Blanc mountain range.

Evolution: to continue to develop collaboration. An organization is to be created to continue the development of the geo-portal and the updating of data. The strategy for the future of the Mont-Blanc range will act as a guideline schema for future programming.

2. Mont-Blanc Sustainable Villages

Vocation: to protect and sustainably manage the alpine villages using innovative technology and renewable energy in an aim to reduce pollution.

Results:

- The use of certain tools considered necessary as a result of energy audits on buildings and public infrastructure. Objectives: to improve energy efficiency, optimize the use of renewable energy and reduce pollution.
- The realization of the first 'A' class, low-energy building in the Val digne region.
- The creation of a Home Energy Office for the general public, residents of La Val digne and Morgex.

Evolution: To continue the energy planification project "Planeter" and engage works programmed in the different audits.

3. Around the Mont-Blanc

Vocation : a project focused on summer walking trails around Mont-Blanc with for purpose the promotion of non-polluting transport in respect for the principles of sustainable tourism.

Results: This project federated all parties. A number of specific measurable actions destined for the general public were put in place:

- A web portal autourdumontblanc.com
- A website dedicated to the reservation of accommodation in mountain refuges montourdumontblanc.com
- Smartphone and iPhone applications
- An interactive map carterandomontblanc.com and autourdumontblanc.com
- The creation of 4 thematic itineraries
- The harmonization of the signpost system along the Tour du Mont-Blanc
- The development of a project "the mountains for all" for the physically disabled: a prototype electric joelette and chair adapted to mountain trails.

Evolution: to continue to develop technology.





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4. Environmental Education

Vocation: to identify, value and preserve the “Espace Mont-Blanc” through environmental education.

Results:

- Scientific exchanges between the 3 countries concerned.
- Information difused to a wide audience .
- The creation of 4 itinerant exhibitions and the realization of informative entertainment and educational material for schools (models, booklets, posters etc.).
- The organization of 19 school trips and cross-border educational trips for 100 young students over a 2 year period

Evolution: the continuation of the transborder educational programme (3 trips programmed in 2013), the scientific network and the exhibitions across the 3 different territories.

5. Sustainable mobility in the “Espace Mont-Blanc”

Vocation: to improve general mobility, accessibility to peripheral areas and public transport.

Results: This initiative to promote transborder public transport within the proximity helped to valorize the existing public transport system and create new shuttle bus services:

- The creation of three new transborder shuttle-bus services (Alpis Graia / Trient Vallorcine / D-Finhaut Emosson).
- Improvements to the Chamonix Courmayeur bus route.
- The creation of a scheduled transport service on demand (day and night) in La Val digne area and a project concerning the feasibility of the creation of a similar on-demand transport service in the Mont-Blanc region.
- The creation of eco-driving courses.

Tout en favorisant la mobilité, ce projet contribue à la réduction des émissions de gaz à effet de serre et renforce le développement économique.

Evolution: to maintain collaboration between the different transport companies, improve transborder relations and develop the platform ViaMontBlanc.

6. Alpine flavours (Saveurs d’Hauteur)

Vocation: To support and develop alpine agriculture, local produce and farming in the three regions.

Results: This project resulted in the creation and structuring of close circuit distribution methods for meat and cereals, the creation of a partnership network, a weekly farmer’s market in Morgex, festivals such as the “Goût du Mont-Blanc” in Pré St Didier or an annual participation at the “Foire du Valais” agricultural fair in Martigny. It also contributed to the development of a practical guide: an explanatory document of the customs arrangements for agricultural goods to help farmers sell their produce over the border. 3 documentary films have also been made.

Evolution: to maintain the farming production network and secure the continuation of the event “Les Goûts du Mont-Blanc” via the project “Produits d’Hauteur”.





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THE ASSESSMENT OF EACH TERRITORIAL REPRESENTATIVE

Manuela ZUBLENA for the Aosta Valley:

"We have worked on a number of environmental issues: natural resources, energy, and the experimentation of sustainable transport services. Concerning sustainable tourism, we have valorised hiking in the aim to encourage a more gentle form of tourism. We have done what's necessary to educate young people. The results are extremely positive. Exchanges between businesses, associations and professionals have strengthened the 'natural' bond between those who live in the mountains."

Jean-Marc PEILLEX Mayor of Saint-Gervais and President of the "Communauté de Commune Pays du Mont-Blanc":

"All our achievements are positive. This programme has created networks and diverse partnerships that didn't previously exist between guides, scientists and transport companies. Different communities, service providers, associations and countries have learnt to work together and this is particularly promising for future projects.

My wish, as an elected member of council, is that we be more pragmatic and more present on site, at a time when we truly need economic drive. Public money, whatever its source, must serve to create and achieve rather than to conduct imposed research. "

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Like Jean-Marc PEILLEX, the parties involved are fully aware of the weak points that require further investment; particularly the lack of visibility and outreach to the population.

Solange SPINELLI, former President of the 'Syndicat Mixte Pays Mont-Blanc' and leader of the project "Saveurs d'hauteur" remarks:

"The PIT remains a fairly vague concept for the majority of the population since it is not easy to communicate on such a project."

One of the solutions evoked: to communicate via social networks and rely on more regular communication between leaders and partners, both internal and external.

THE DESIRE FOR LEGAL STATUS

Leitmotiv of the day: the sustainability of actions in the next programme.

A common desire: simplification of the management body, simplification of procedures at the ALCOTRA level and more flexibility.

All parties actively called for the creation of a strong, clearly defined legal structure, specific to the Espace Mont-Blanc, to ensure a peaceful and enduring future.

Eric BIANCO, Swiss Vice-president of the Mont-Blanc Transborder Conference and head of the Economic Development Service for the Valais district:

"The EGTC, European Group for Territorial Cooperation, would be the most appropriate organization at European level to allow the Swiss part of the Mont-Blanc territory to join the project."





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PROSPECTIVE VISION WITH THE NEW STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

In addition to the identification of the strengths of the Mont-Blanc Transborder Programme (PIT) to be maintained, the parties involved also reflected on the future of common territory and together proposed a number of new perspectives in order to continue the adventure.

Eric BIANCO, Swiss Vice-President of the Mont-Blanc Transborder Conference and head of the Economic Development Service in the Valais district:

"The Espace Mont-Blanc partnership attaches particular importance to the implementation of the new strategy for the future of the Mont Blanc mountain range. It has allowed us to redefine common objectives and to identify new priorities in the social and economic development of communities while valuing the natural landscape and cultural heritage of the 'Espace Mont-Blanc'. This strategy aims to propose a plan of action that provides local authorities with the key to collaboration relevant to the sectors of activity in need of development, such as transport, tourism and energy supplies."

On the French side, the strategy for the future of the Mont-Blanc mountain range, approved by the 'Communauté de Communes Pays du Mont-Blanc' and the 'Communauté de Communes de la Vallée de Chamonix Mont-Blanc' provides an operational framework for the years to come, with a total of more than 100 new actions on the following themes: global warming, natural zones, attendance management, land policies, the airspace and social economic perspectives.

TAKING THINGS A LITTLE FURTHER

Claude COMET, elected representative of the Rhône-Alpes Region:

"This is an interim assessment but we already have a lot of results. We envisage a new programme of European funding for 2014-2020. The stakes are high for the Mont Blanc mountain range for which the Region demanded Unesco World Heritage classification in 2007. As concerns energy transition, alpine areas should be emblematic in their development and not simply propose punctual solutions to one-off energy diagnosis'."

In conclusion, all parties concerned desire to capitalize on a unique experience of international cooperation between 3 countries and to continue their mobilization and participation

For more informations: <http://pit.espace-mont-blanc.com/>



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