



**Franche-Comté**  
Conseil régional



## **“HOW TO IMPROVE COMPETITIVENESS OF SMALL-MEDIUM CITIES UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALPINE GREAT URBAN CENTRES?”**

### **ANALYSIS OF INNOCITE PILOT SITES WITH REGARD TO INNOCITE GOALS**

This question is very large, surely too much to receive one day a simple answer. How to define “competitiveness”? How to characterise the mutual influence between little towns and great centres? This global question seems to suppose that there is something bad in the influence of a city, that little towns are penalized...

We will just try to explain that it is always possible to initiate an action which combines different interests.

#### **1. WHAT IS PARTICULAR IN THE MEDIUM POSITION OF THE PILOT SITES?**

The relation with one or more upper towns in the regional urban frame is the common character of the different pilot sites: they are in the middle or at the bottom of the chain. So we have to define the global system which include the sites and then to understand the particular position of each one in this system.

##### **1) Character of the alpine main cities**

The alpine metropolises are meeting points where the main roads crossing the Alps join a large exchange corridor and sometimes open on the sea:

- Lyon, the Rhone’s valley, the Mediterranean sea
- Milan, the Leman valley, the Simplon pass, Lombardy,
- Munich, the Brenner pass, Tyrol, Bavaria, the Rheine valley
- Vienna, the danubian corridor...

The alpine metropolises make a large network which depends on very big infrastructures. It is a European challenge to achieve the roads crossing and opening the alpine network.

But the alpine main cities aren’t world-wide cities: they are “only” millionaire cities, grounded on regional urban system which gives them a productive capacity. So they need other towns to relay to and give power to their capital position.

##### **2) Analysis of the relation between middle- town and main-city**

The relation with the major city is ambivalent and conditioned by the geographical situation. The pilot sites give a panel of very different situations:

- Included in the agglomeration suburbs (La Neuville)
- Dormitory-town
- Satellite-town or urban relay in the regional net (Voghera)
- Amount point in a valley or rural context (Lure)
- Logistic hub, sea port, border situation (Koper)

- Touristic pole (Garmisch-Partenkirchen)

These different situations give sometimes superiority, but there is always a threat: excessive specialisation, less of diversity, difficulty of developing new activities, ecological problems...

### 3) As a conclusion

It is impossible to define *a priori* the character of the relation between a middle-town and a main city. We just know that distance reduces benefits of the city entertainment: employment, access to services and commodities, upper education... These shortages are limitations for competitiveness.

It is also important to consider if a regional planning is operating to give a global strategy. In France, the Regional Council sets up a regional development plan, supposed to propose a prospective view and to organise a balance. This plan is able to define and comfort the part to play for each unit of the region. It is linked with a national contract with a financial planning. It is interesting to consider that in Italy, Germany, Austria and Slovenia, regions are engaged to defend the middle-towns' dynamism.

## 2. POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

Strategic approach needs to define the broadest space for potential action... I mean with a high successful probability... As usual the strategic question seems to be a paradox: "How to take an advantage from *within and without* the main city?": "within" for integration in the regional dynamics, "without" for identity and independence.

### 1) Identify, understand and strengthen the local area links

The middle-town has to take look after the local area which is composed of many sorts of outskirts, suburbs, rural communities, villages... It has to give satisfaction as local central point. It has also to provide basic facilities which are commercial offer, education, health, culture and to impulse public live with fair, festivity, performances... Local town is the local reference.

A middle-town will take charge of employment and give business to the region.

The middle-town will also take a leadership in a local project, to boost an organisation and a sharing of benefits. It is possible to act within a local institution which brings together lot of communal authorities. "Intercommunity" and "decentralization" give opportunity to build a common strategy at the right local scale. It is necessary to associate private actors, populations and local stakeholders.

The drama of competitiveness's regression is when activities are destroyed because of external decisions. In France we have a very important reform of public utilities. National administration and public utilities are going to be concentrated in the main cities. Justice, university, defence, health... are leaving little and middle towns. It is the same evolution in industry and important firms. The new economic geography is under influence of speed and mass: this is an opposing trend for the middle-towns.

### 2) Competitive attitude or alliance strategies?

Building a strategy needs to evaluate competitiveness and to estimate all kinds of risks.

- What is possible to reach?
- Who is looking toward the same goals?
- Is it better to fight a challenger or to make a linkage with another territoriality?

This last question is gripping when a town needs to access at an upper level (tourism promotion, creation of a university), to find complementarities (in an economic chain), to

share something (maritime traffic), to strongly express a demand (lobbying)...It is quite impossible to succeed on one's own.

Alliance is necessary to finance great equipments or infrastructures.

It is today easier to rally another town or region in the European space. InnoCité is evidently an additional opportunity.

### 3) Pilot sites are unique

As conclusion, I think that the goals of the InnoCité program are relevant in the condition we accept the very large –and natural- diversity of the pilot sites. The solutions, local projects or strategies, which each one can set up, are only interesting examples. We can also find interest in some innovations... But *examples* aren't *solutions*; they are situations to transpose in other contexts, as processes. At first it is necessary to act by one self and define what is requested. Afterwards, the choice of the process and its transposition are possible.

I think it is an important thing in this collective work, in the way to keep memory of our exchanges and to resituate them.

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