

Best practice 1: Aire 198. A network of urban areas (Angoulême, Niort, La Rochelle, Poitiers), France

Scale: Regional

Stage of tourism development: Growing

Main objective: Regional development

Categories of effects:

Effects on urban governance

- Network of cities
- Sustainable partnerships
- Destination management
- Regional cooperation

Effects on quality of life

- Social life, local values and traditions
- Urban economies

Poitou-Charentes is a rural region, with an image and tourism wealth often reduced unfairly to the Futuroscope. It was important to put the cities of Poitiers, Niort, La Rochelle and Angoulême in the regional dynamics. These cities could have been competing. Their mayors preferred joining their strengths in 1989 by creating Aire 198 (AIRE means *Aménagement du territoire, Initiatives locales et régionales, Recherche sur l'Espace en Poitou-Charentes* and 198 is the sum of the area codes) so that together these cities have the strength of a town of 400 000 inhabitants. Since its creation, this network of cities has become a network of urban areas. The aim of Aire 198 is to promote a shared view of a territory that is enhanced and appropriated by actors and inhabitants, to include the network in dynamics of sustainable local development (in a social, cultural or tourism...standpoint), to support important projects and to reinforce the urban areas' cooperation by being an area of dialogue and exchange of experiences, expertise and new ideas. Aire 198 acts like a mediator between regional partners. To reach these objectives, Aire 198 organizes regular meetings with elected persons and technicians in order to discuss about some themes or some news. Discussing about some shared issues enables to find solutions. A tourism working party was created in 2000. This working main line is considered as one of the most successfully completed ones. In the tourism domain, the network contributes to the implementation of shared strategies. As an example, the four urban areas develop a joint promotion abroad that enables to put the region on new European markets. This action is realized with the partnership of the *Comité Régional du Tourisme* and the four urban areas' *Offices du Tourisme*. To promote these cities' image and to propose some quality tourism facilities, Aire 198 helped the elaboration of four maps which follow the same graphic convention. Aire 198 was rewarded by the *Marianne d'Or de l'Intercommunalité* and obtained the label "réseau de villes" by the DATAR (*Direction à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale*).

Source: Mr Xavier Hurteau, responsible for tourism in the Poitiers urban area and leader of Aire 198.

Link:

www.aire198.org