

SOPHIA ANTIPOLIS FOUNDATION; DEVELOPING TELEWORKING AND TELE-CENTRES - Provence-Alpes Cote d'Azur (PACA), France

<p>Background</p>	<p>Sophia Antipolis was created in 1969 – the vision of Pierre Laffitte who wanted to create a ‘city of science and wisdom’. Laffitte came from the Antibes/Nice part of France, and this is where he wanted to realize his vision. The idea ran contrary to other thoughts at the time – because the economy around Nice/Antibes was almost wholly based on tourism. Laffitte’s personality was very important in the early stages of the project – his connections and influence with people/organisations were an important force driving the development of the initiative.</p> <p>The Foundation Sophia Antipolis was created in 1984 and has been state-approved. It leads the scientific and cultural activities and the aim is to facilitate exchanges and prospective reflection, at the French, European and international levels, in the fields of science, industry and culture. The Foundation supports creation of an environment which can facilitate partnerships and support technology transfer.</p>
<p>Purpose of the project</p>	<p>The overall aim of the Foundation Sophia Antipolis is to act as a facilitator for all the scientific and cultural activities of the Technopole. It facilitates exchanges of information and expertise and the joint exploration of scenarios for the future at national, European and international levels.</p> <p>Currently, by providing an appropriate allocation of personnel, skills and tools, the Sophia Antipolis Foundation is developing tele-working across the whole PACA region. Therefore, the project is not about the artificial creation of telecentres, which would merely provide connected offices destined to remain empty, but to meet the expectations of businesses and the potentialities of the area in order to develop a convincing opportunity founded on the local economic and social fabric. The Foundation offers its expertise in terms of project support to local authorities hoping to lead innovative actions which respect sustainable social and economic development. The Foundation holds a centre of excellence in the field of tele-activities and tele-working, which means it is able to assist with all phases of the development of this project.</p> <p>The Sophia Antipolis venture only allows implantation of companies whose activities are focused on research and development. But while the research is undertaken by many different sectors, the Sophia Antipolis Foundation encourages ‘cross-fertilisation’, i.e. networking among these companies to encourage the sharing of ideas. There is recognition that ideas can be shared across sectors or even combined to foster further innovation, and encourage networking via a number of means, such as the holding of informal ‘get-togethers’ over breakfast, seminars and forums, etc. Not only does this cross-fertilisation help in getting different sectors of research to interact, but it also helps to add to a sense of ‘community’ for the people who work in Sophia Antipolis.</p>

Geographical focus	<p>The lower-mountain area of Alpes Maritimes.</p>
Partnership arrangement	<p>The communes of Chateauneuf, Luceram, L'Escarène, Puget Théniers, Baudinard sur Verdon (representing the Regional Natural Park of the Verdon – Var department) followed by la Colle-sur-Loup, St Cézaire and Sospel, are all partners on the steering group of the overall project.</p>
Have you involved other tiers of government in the project?	<p>In the government sector, significant investment in the project has come from local and regional government (around 1/3 of the overall investment). In 2002, 16 communes from the area around the site of Sophia Antipolis united to create the 'Communauté d'Agglomération Sophia Antipolis'. The local Chamber of Commerce is also heavily involved in the Sophia Antipolis partnership, further enhancing Sophia Antipolis' credibility in the private sector, given the considerable influence of Chambers in France.</p> <p>In order to best respond to the general issues of the project, important partners such as EDF (Electricité de France), France Telecom and AFPA (national adult training agency), as well as the Communauté d'Agglomération Sophia Antipolis (CASA), the Communauté d'Agglomération de la Riviera Française (CARF), are working alongside Sophia Antipolis by providing input into the thinking behind the project.</p> <p>A project methodology has been developed in consultation with the local authorities and businesses, which meets the main objectives and challenges (employment creation, training, development of tele-services...) for the opening of at least 7 telecentres networked together between now and 2006 in the PACA Region.</p>
Particular successes	<p>Sophia Antipolis has become a recognised, international brand name and has, over the years, developed a veritable internal dynamic focussed not only on innovation and creation, but also on social interaction.</p> <p>Recently the Foundation helped to create the Sophia Start up Club, the notion of Smart Communities, the use of satellite for the daily exchanges of information and services, the development of venture capital, etc.</p> <p>And the project to develop teleworking in the region allows the area to progress towards a better economic equilibrium.</p> <p>A key factor for the success of Sophia Antipolis and its longevity has been the successful engagement of a network of local actors. These actors add to the sustainability of the project, and represent regional and local governments, the academic sector and the Chamber of Commerce. Sophia Antipolis recognised the need to engage the academic sector from the outset. The University of Nice is closely involved with the venture, so much so, that it modified its name to 'Université Nice Sophia Antipolis'. Part of the university campus is now on the site of Sophia Antipolis. It hosts 5000 students and helps to foster an atmosphere of networking and 'cross-fertilisation' between the academic world and the private sector.</p> <p>Research conducted among the local population and businesses has allowed us to identify the</p>

	<p>precise level of global demand, in order to develop and propose a coherent offer, which best responds to needs, while maintaining a perspective of helping the citizen.</p>
<p>Lessons learnt</p>	<p>The telecentres respond to a real social demand in the areas concerned (distance learning, upskilling in the area, relationship between the citizen and the local authority).</p> <p>Sophia Antipolis demonstrates the importance of the key leadership role. Also essential was a “political” plan of action that involved getting local interests around the venture and taking carefully considered steps to engage with the regional and national authorities at the appropriate levels. This ensured the sponsorship from the Département. The key point is that, while the individual leader has a crucial role, his/her actions need to be embedded with a coherent framework that engages local actors and institutions.</p> <p>There is an acknowledgement that, over the long-term, change will see some employers move to more mature and cost-sensitive processes and needing to find alternative locations. This acceptance of the reality of change and its transmission to the wider community through close links with the media adds emphasis to the need always to be open and forward looking. The sustainable solution is to be found in aggressively seeking out new product markets and new businesses.</p> <p>Ensuring the best local “skills ecology; Sophia Antipolis takes pride on promoting itself under a slogan that highlights its “300 hours of sunshine” in a setting on the Cote d’Azur. There is also a clear management imperative to maintain the quality and balance of the living community and supporting physical environment. This can sometimes produce hard political choices about which firms to encourage into the area and which to deflect. The key is the recognition that for the highest quality of professional and technical workers to move to the area and be prepared to commit their family lives to it, there is a whole local community dimension to the planning and development process. Quality of life is also addressed in other ways in the Sophia Antipolis project. Indeed, the Foundation aims to create a ‘Florence for the 21st Century’. It aims not only to foster industrial and technological research and development but also to nurture culture and philosophy.</p> <p>Part of the ethos of Sophia Antipolis is to manage change actively. This operates at several levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • within the labour pool through links with training and educational institutions; • within civil society through links with 60 local community partners; • with key national institutions, for example, by acting as a centre for national telecommunication regulation; and • with green interests by taking a key role in environmental issues and so on.