

Risk management of the Po river basin - IT

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- ADAPTATION TO RISK: Integrating coherent strategies covering the risk-dimension (prevention to response) into planning and investment
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Sound use of resources and promotion of less resource intensive processes/products
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Ecosystems based approach

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

Management aspects of a river basin which take into account public participation.

4. Overview of the case

The largest river basin in Italy is being effectively managed by a specific authority cooperating with other regulatory and non-regulatory bodies. It is backed by adequate regulations and instruments.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The River Po Basin is the largest water basin in Italy covering an area of more than 71,000 km². It includes about 3,200 council areas and six regions. The Po is the largest Italian river both in terms of its length (652 km) and its flow volume (10,300 m³/s); it is fed by 141 tributaries before flowing into the Adriatic Sea through its delta of 380 km². The basin has a population of about 16 million although the territory is unequally populated. The Basin accounts for 40% of Italy's GDP. It is home to 37% of the country's industry, providing 46% of jobs, about 55% of livestock and 35% of the country's agricultural production. Electricity consumption accounts for 48% of the national total.

b) Objectives

The Po Basin Water Authority (PBWA) was established in 1989 by law to enhance the "protection of lands, water rehabilitation, the use and management of hydro resources for the rational economic and social development, and protection of related environment" within the water basin of the River Po. The major regulatory focus of environmental activities in the basin include: hydro-geological protection and maintenance of the hydrographic network; protection of water-body quality; rationalisation of water use; flood control; and regulation of land-use.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The PBWA has a mixed representation of both the state and the regions. It is formed from representatives of the ministries involved in activities for protection and development of natural resources in the regions or provinces situated in the Po Basin and also from regional representation.

The decision-making body of the Water Board is the Institutional Committee which is composed from several ministries as well as from the presidents of the Regional councils in the basin, the Autonomous Province of Trent, and the PBWA General Secretary with a consultative vote.

b) ICZM tools

The work of the river basin is regulatory: the main planning and programming instrument of the PBWA is the Hydro-graphic Basin Plan. This is used as a territorial plan for various sectors and defines the framework of the regulatory regime for particular activities and plans & programmes for the use of the territory. Once approved, it provides directives which have immediately binding effect on both the public administration and organisations and private entities. The PBWA is able to operate according to various transitional plans.

The first important PBWA initiative undertaken was the creation, in 1994, of a consultative body - the Advisory Committee. Its task is to ensure coordination of interests, consensus and wider communication relating to development of plans. The Advisory Committee has a wide representation from various stakeholders and participates in designing the main PBWA planning acts through consultation and providing assessments of different planning approaches to the management of the river basin. It is also involved in decision-making during natural disasters and other crisis situations in the basin.

A Strategic Plan was drawn up aimed at providing common strategies for enhancing security, maintenance and development of water-courses, the fluvial areas and the territory of the Po Valley. Such an approach is a significant innovation in terms of procedure and substance as the PBWA does not limit its scope to planning and programming activities simply by adoption of directives or other regulations. It has broadened its mandate to include implementation of plans and norms for basin maintenance and restoration. The Strategic Plan is regarded by different levels of territorial authorities as an overall vision of development for the Po basin that can be discussed among stakeholders, amplified, improved and implemented. Furthermore, a "Protocol of understanding for the protection and improvement of the territory and promotion of security for the population of the Po Valley" was adopted in 2005 between the PBWA and 13 provinces of the basin. Its aims include the definition of an action plan for protection and improvement of the territory and promotion of security for the population of the Po Valley and the joint implementation of the goals of the Strategic Plan mentioned earlier.

The PBWA has taken practical steps to involve, in its activities, both public and private individuals with varying interests with the aims of: making optimum use of the knowledge, experience and initiatives of various stakeholders in order to improve the quality of planning in river basin management; obtaining consensus and a mandate to operate with public support in the decision-making process; reducing conflict and misunderstanding and thus guaranteeing effective and rapid action; achieving maximum transparency of decisions; and promoting constructive dialogue via exchange of experience between parties involved in the decision-making process.

7. Cost and resources

No costs are available.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

The Advisory Committee's activities have significantly helped to enforce certain innovations in relation to participatory management in the river basins. In the course of project preparations, the Committee interacts not only with the PBWA internal organs, but also interacts with external technical bodies, members of the national government and regional and local authorities which are responsible for putting the plans into effect, and other associations and other stakeholders. The various Programme Agreements are regarded as useful and flexible instruments, and have been agreed upon and coordinated by various actors involved in the planning processes and constructed in line with the specific needs of the territories involved.

9. Success and Fail factors

The combination of the planning instruments allows a dynamic approach and ensures that the Basin Plan is not a static instrument but is flexible for updating by subsequent planning acts, each of which can be viewed as a fundamental element in the overall planning activity. In turn, coordination of these structural elements of programmatic activities ensures the development of an efficient inter-governmental network with all the interested parties being involved in formulating the plan and putting it into effect.

PBWP has made optimal use of successive funding projects. The SAFE project conceived a variety of operational actions to be carried out jointly by PBWA and local bodies including support for local authorities in carrying out actions aimed at reducing vulnerabilities and river ecosystems rehabilitation. The MIRAPO project (Monitoring-Investigation-Research-Analysis-Proposals-Orientation) aimed at increasing the awareness and security of inhabitants of the middle Po valley against the risk of floods and sustainable conservation of the fluvial areas. The RIVAdiPO Project which, more than any other, has moved the Authority further from the planning level to approaching local contexts. Its aim is to develop, through the agreement with the Councils of the Middle Po Valley, a common strategy for economic, social and environmental amelioration and development of the Middle Po Valley with a major focus on sustainable local development and security of the fluvial lands. It intends to coordinate economic use of resources with enhancing ecological characteristics in the area.

PBWA has managed to actively involve public and private entities of diverse interests. It has ensured their participation in both environmental planning and decision-making, as well as in programme implementation.

However, although policy tools for managing and safeguarding water resources are in place at national level, there are still problems with the implementation and enforcement of rules and regulations at regional level e.g. although technological improvements have been introduced, low efficiency irrigation methods are still widely used, particularly in rice farming. There are no national or regional plans for reducing this type of high water consumption in agriculture.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Over the years the Advisory Committee has taken on an important role, not only in formulation and registry of local interests, but also as a proposal-making organ of the Water Board itself. It has drawn attention to problems and possible sources of conflict in the planning processes. However, its informal nature with a lack of concrete regulations regarding its roles and tasks, has limited its potential.

11. Prepared by

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12. Verified by

It was not possible to have this case verified.

13. Sources

- Environmental Risk Management in Large River Basins: Overview of current practices in the EU and Russia (undated, but 2004 or later) The Po River Water Authority
- Facing water challenges in the Po river basin, Italy (undated but 2007 or later) available by download from www.waterwiki.net
- www.adbpo.it (Italian only)



Environmental risk management in large river basins (60.43 KB)

