

Long-term cross-border co-operation resulting from successive and simultaneous, short-term funding, North Livonia – EE/LV

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- 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

A continuous funding base for sufficient time is required to ensure progress in some economically disadvantaged areas.

4. Overview of the case

On the Estonian-Latvian border, a number of medium to large grants running simultaneously and successively have been necessary for progress in cross-border co-operation.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The transboundary area of North Livonia lies in southwest Estonia and northwest Latvia. Following their independence in 1990, the rural areas were abandoned and, although it has now largely stabilized, today the region is sparsely inhabited. This border separates two countries with different cultures and languages but with continuous natural areas, a mosaic of wetlands, forests and agricultural land that limit communication between the populace. It is of outstanding biological uniqueness with globally significant congregations of (water)birds, rare plant communities and large carnivores found nowhere else in Europe, including carnivores like brown bear, grey wolf, lynx, beaver, otter and polecat. The very rare and endangered flying squirrel is found here together with arctic species of birds. It includes the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve (designated in 1997 covering 457,600 ha.) administrated by Latvia and, prior to 2006, the separate Nigula (1957; 2730 ha.) and Sookuninga (2006; 11,170 ha.) Nature Reserves administrated by Estonia. The protected areas (Natura 2000, RAMSAR etc.) amount to 79,307 ha. in Estonia and 24,749 ha. in Latvia. The sandstone banks of the Salace River (LV) have contributed to the popularity of boating and fishing and the coastal part of the area has a long tradition of beach recreation. Most of the inhabitants have jobs in the local municipalities, forestry, schools, agriculture and fishery with increasing numbers working within the tourism business. The population density is highest on the coastline with popular holiday destinations like Häädemeeste in Estonia and Salacgrīva and Aināzi in Latvia.

Cross-border cooperation is, therefore, a pre-requisite for securing and maintaining the natural values and biodiversity of North Livonia whilst ensuring socio-economic development. The responsibility for co-operation within administrative borders

(communities, regions etc.) of one nation is clearly in the hands of the national government. However, their responsibility for co-operation across their national borders is less clear.

b) Objectives

Maintaining and strengthening the ecological integrity of the transboundary area by integrating socio-economic development with biodiversity conservation.

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

a) Management

An Agreement between the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia and the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Estonia on the Management of Nature Conservation in a Transboundary Complex, was signed in January 2000. It established a Joint Commission on nature areas in a cross-border context for the implementation of the provisions of this Agreement.

b) ICZM tools

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were only restored in 1992 after an absence of 74 years. Personal, cross-border contacts in North Livonia had started in 1990 but it was not until 1996 that the first official contacts were made from which a governmental Agreement on joint management was signed. Co-operation in this area has been stimulated by the simultaneous and continuous funding of small term (ca. 1-5 years), inter-related, national and international projects over a decade. The first transboundary co-operation was an all NGO affair when the Estonian and Latvian Funds for Nature received a grant (1996-98) from the Regional Environmental Centre for Central & Eastern Europe concerning awareness raising and communication. A Phare Credo project (1999-2000) focussed on tourism development and local authority, cross-border co-operation. There were also national initiatives. On the Latvian side, the NGO, Estonian Ornithological Society, was granted €675,286 (2001-05) by LIFE to achieve favourable conservation status for coastal meadows and species. The habitats of Luitemaa Nature Reserve were to be restored by long-term management through mowing and grazing. Providing more tourism infrastructure within the reserve in order to control and shape these activities in a more sustainable way was another important aspect as well as winning local acceptance of nature conservation in the region. On the Estonian side, national environmental funds were used (2003-05) to improve the infra-structure for nature tourism and to study local, natural and cultural tourism.

A €770,000 grant from the World bank-UNDP to another NGO, Wetlands International (2002-04) had the objectives to develop local stakeholder commitment for nature conservation through education, the promotion of sustainable tourism, alternative livelihoods for local communities, and agrarian nature management and wildlife damage compensation schemes as well as practical ecological and hydrological measures. Both countries received LIFE grants (no budget details) from 2004-06 with the aim to exchange experience for coastal biotypes. Whilst these projects were underway, Latvia secured UNDP funds (2005-08; \$2,660,500) to protect biological diversity in North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve with attention on rural development, nature management and landscape planning. Estonia (2005-06), with the same focus, secured ERDF funds (no details available) for the restoration of lagg-zone and mire-edge habitats. Latvia also won a grant from the Water Framework Directive Project (2006-07). One of eight activities in the €20m. national programme was to focus on water and nature management and physical planning in the River Salaca basin.

Since then these investments has been cemented by a series of international, cross-border projects. The Dutch government granted €457,325 to develop a management plan for the area (2003-2006). It resulted in a Transboundary Master Plan presenting an analysis of the main issues related to cross-border, biodiversity management and providing directions for co-operative development and management. It has no legally binding status. It was succeeded by two Interreg IIIA projects. The first was funded (2005-06; budget €606,493) to elaborate a coherent policy, joint services, products and infra-structure for environmentally friendly tourism development in the coastal region, involving neighbouring regions and promoting private-public partnerships. A second was funded (2006-07; ERDF funding €474,276) to develop a Transboundary Steering Group formed from the representatives of the partners, governmental and local authorities. The activities involved planning local infra-structure, ecological restoration of aquatic habitats and promotion of eco-tourism and setting up a cross-border monitoring system as an important requirement for the management of transboundary RAMSAR areas.

7. Cost and resources

Complete costing is not available but awarded grants alone have amounted to more than €5.5 m. over a 10 year period.

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

Estonia and Latvia have had much less time to reach effective, cross-border co-operation compared to western European countries. However, in a short space of time they have made notable advances. One tangible output of the co-operation has been the agreement between the two countries to designate (2007) a transboundary RAMSAR site on both sides of the border, only one of seven in Europe. This will make the combined new site a single unit from a water management perspective. The North Livonian Transboundary RAMSAR site (19,218 ha.) incorporates the Sookuninga and Nigula Nature Reserves in Estonia with the Northern Bogs (2002) in Latvia. There is now a management plan for the North Livonian area which is being implemented with good stakeholder and public support. The Natura 2000 areas are being actively managed by the re-introduction of the Estonian Native Cow to small farm households to maintain the semi-natural grasslands. There have also been some other pragmatic outcomes viz. the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve has grown to 12 staff and there is a transboundary GIS database with digital maps, The assessments of all the projects that have been conducted have been favourable with the various objectives having been met.

9. Success and Fail factors

Multi-project funding over a lengthy period clearly has benefits. Too often single, short-term grants are awarded in the expectation, or hope, that the work can become self-sufficient within this limited time-frame. Most often, in such cases, the work stops at the end of the grant. Although it is understandable that grant-giving bodies do not want to endlessly fund one operation, many grants kick-start a process which, as in this case, can take up to a decade to mature enough to become self-sufficient. Here, there was also the benefit that Latvia and Estonia were already building on several years of co-operation. International expertise was also available in the projects.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

The Estonian Native Cow has been saved from extinction.

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13. Sources

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- Restoration And Management Of The Häädemeeste Wetland Complex (2003) M. Kose Estonian Ornithological Society. Life00nat/Ee/7082
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-  Master Plan for North Livonia (8.73 MB) 
 -  Protection and management of coastal habitats in Latvia - Laymans report (2.6 MB)  
 -  Restoration and management of Haademeste (15.06 KB) 
 -  Sustainable Tourism development in the NVBR (901.01 KB) 