

Cross border co-operation in the south-east Baltic, the Euro-region Baltic - Baltic

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: Developing Europe's regional seas sustainably
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Improving competitiveness

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based approach

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The different stages and processes of Euro-region Baltic's development process over the last ten years. It will be useful for other Euro-regions and cross-border co-operation areas.

4. Overview of the case

Euro-region Baltic (ERB) constitutes an operational network of substantial and effective links across the borders, facilitating the promotion of political dialogue and reform as well as sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

Euro-region Baltic (ERB) was established in February 1998 and is a politically solid and well-anchored co-operation in the south-east Baltic Sea, consisting of eight coastal regions of Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. It embraces a territory with 5.5 million people. It was the first Euro-region to have formally included a partner from the Russian Federation. In 2005, ERB partners elaborated a long-term development strategy.

Unlike other forms of cross-border co-operation, Euro-regions have joint political and administrative structures usually in the form of a Board and Council with a secretariat. They have no legal status and they have no powers above and beyond those of their constituent partners. However, the co-operation between regional and local authorities is permanently formalised and based on Agreements and Statutes. There are normally a wide range of collaborative, cross-border oriented actions.

b) Objectives

Since its early days, ERB has been pursuing the goals of improving life conditions for its inhabitants, promoting bonds and

contacts among local communities, and providing measures for a more sustainable development within the region. Its vision is that by the year 2015 the region will be characterised by prosperity and good living conditions of its citizens.

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

a) Management

The Council is the highest legislative body within Euro-region Baltic. There are currently 38 Members of the Council, political representatives of the participating Authorities. It sets the direction by approving actions and programmes, financial plans, electing the President etc. The Council elects an Executive Board from the members of the Council and consists of one representative from each member region and the Chairperson of the Youth Board. The main task is to implement the resolutions of the Council. The President rotates annually between the countries. There is also a Youth Board, one representative from each member who is between 16 and 25 years old. The work of ERB is assisted by Working Groups appointed by the Board. There are currently nine including ones on tourism development, a water forum and an energy forum. Each regional member has its own secretariat with one international, permanent secretariat for overall communication and co-ordination.

b) ICZM tools

Euro-region Baltic is a hub for cross-border relations, involving citizens, politicians, institutions, economic and social partners, educational and cultural institutions. Activities include cross-border projects for social and economic development including tourism. The ERB process started with negotiations between Polish, Latvian, Swedish and Russian (Kaliningrad) coastal regional authorities from which an organising committee was formed. During this period, other coastal regions joined from Sweden, Lithuania and Denmark (the island of Bornholm). ERB was formally established by Agreement in 1998. In 1999, already, 20 Phare Small Projects were funded and implemented. Throughout the implementation period of 1999 – 2006 256 projects in total were co-funded at the total amount of 6 million Euros. This function of assisting small beneficiaries in cross-border cooperation projects with their neighbouring partners is now maintained with the umbrella project co-financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism which has offered around 2 million EUR. This was a period of consolidation for the new organisation. Between the years 2001-05, a Joint Development Programme was drawn up. It was completed in 2005 and resulted from broad consultations in the member regions. Funding was granted from Interreg IIIB (Baltic Sea) in a project called Seagull. It enabled the elaboration of a long-term development strategy based on four strategic priorities, including economic and social development, implementation of the EU policies regarding environmental protection and promotion of renewable energy sources. It also improved infrastructures in order to provide better access to the Trans European transport networks. All of the activities corresponded with the revised Lisbon Strategy and the development of Four Common Spaces between the European Union and Russia. The Programme, whose strategic focus constitutes a Strategy, an Action Plan and an analytical background document, is advancing sustainable economic growth. The action plan describes activities within the four focus areas of the strategy: A competitive business environment; Transport infrastructure; Social dimension; and Environment and energy policies. In 2003, an Information and Communication Strategy was adopted, with concrete objectives, to improve communication both within, and outside, the ERB.

In 2004, membership fees from the Authorities was introduced to fund the permanent secretariat which was instigated in the same year. Between 2005 and 2007 work within ERB focused on the improvement of its institutional capacities. In this period, two further Interreg IIIB projects (Seagull II and Baltic Master) saw the establishment of a tourist network as one of eight reference networks related to the eight main priorities of the Joint Development Programme. Working groups were formed around the specific tasks of the Joint Development Programme, including representatives of the local and regional authorities, expert institutions, academic organisations, professionals and NGOs. In 2006, the Latvian partners withdrew from the partnership following an extended period of low involvement. Between 2005 and 2007, the ERB and its member regions vehemently lobbied to the national governments of Denmark, Poland and Sweden for a CBC programme which would enable them to implement the Joint Development Programme. As a result, the national governments of Denmark, Poland and Sweden, later also joined by Lithuania and Germany allocated around 61 million EUR to a new cross-border co-operation programme in the southern Baltic which includes energy and the environment. In 2009 five projects submitted by the ERB Working Groups (including ones dealing with energy and environment of the Baltic Sea) were awarded grants from the Programme amounting to 5.5 million EUR of the ERDF funding. Two more projects are now in the pipeline.

7. Cost and resources

The annual budget of the ERB is €42,500/yr (2009). The Interreg IIIB budget for the Joint Development Programme was €2.3m with three complimentary projects implemented by the Latvian, Polish and Russian partners from the Phare and Tacis funding with the combined budgets of €400,000. The Seagull II project, a follow-up to the one resulting with the Joint Development Programme, was implemented between 2005 and 2007 with the budget of €600,000.

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

ERB has proved to be an efficient managing body both of European projects as well as other large and complex projects. Four of the working groups have recently been approved funding from the second call of the South Baltic Cross Border Co-operation Programme. The budgets amount to more than €6 m.

9. Success and Fail factors

Euro-region Baltic has undergone significant changes reflecting the continuous need to make it a modern and efficiently acting organisation. These changes have been possible to conduct owing to the financial assistance of the EU programmes and the involvement of all the personnel involved in the ERB cooperation at the regional level. They have included such operations as the establishment of joint structures and building joint financial resources. It is very easily recognisable in the EU and other institutions around Europe and at regional administration level. However, its visibility among the wider representation at local level is regarded as unsatisfactory.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

None so far.

11. Prepared by

A. H. Pickaver, Coastal & Marine Union (EUCC), The Netherlands

12. Verified by

S. Demkowicz-Dobrzanski, ips@eurobalt.org.pl

13. Sources

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eurobaltic region development programme (1.25 MB) 



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