



Ex-Post Evaluation - INTERREG III 2000-2006

PROGRAMME: INTERREG III B Baltic Sea

**TRABANT - Transnational River Basin Districts on the Eastern
Side of the Baltic Sea Network**

Project Good Practice Study

Project study: TRABANT - Transnational River Basin Districts on the Eastern Side of the Baltic Sea Network

1. General Project Information

Keywords: ecological and water management, spatial development, non-EU countries

Region: Baltic Sea Region

Strand: INTERREG Strand B

Programme: INTERREG III B Baltic Sea

Priority topic(s): "Promoting the environment and the good management of cultural heritage and of natural resources, in particular water resources"

Duration: July 2005-January 2008

Cost and co-funding: Euro 1,572,007, of which Euro 739,117.75 of ERDF funding. For the involvement of non EU-partners the INTERREG project was linked up with a TACIS-funded project which started in summer 2006.

Lead partner: Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE).

Partners: Altogether 16 partners from Finland, Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and Sweden participated in the project. These included representatives of regional and national authorities in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) or institutes contributing to it. Furthermore, organisations working with water protection and water planning and civil society were involved.

The partners met during the application stage to discuss project targets and prepare the application, which was approved after resubmission to the Steering Committee. For the non EU-partners an application for TACIS funding was prepared.

2. Project aim

The project's aim was to improve ecological and water management co-operation in the Eastern Baltic Sea region, in the field of river basin management planning, by creating a network of partners from EU and non-EU countries. The partnership set out to support the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) by, first, comparing, evaluating and testing different water management tools and methods, and then producing guidelines to enhance planning processes by linking the WFD with more general spatial plans for the transnational region.

3. Project Description

The project sought to gather information about established procedures and methodologies in different fields of water management in the participating regions (description of the state-of-the-art), and then, in a series of case studies, test these new methodologies and co-operation approaches, with a view to harmonising management procedures. The four work packages addressed basic elements of river basin management, the interface of spatial planning with riverine planning, public participation approaches to river basin management, and the creation of guidelines and recommendations for co-operation in transboundary river basins.

Work package 1: Basic elements of river basin management. Here the strategic focus was on improving and harmonising procedures, tools and methodologies for river basin analysis and management, with a view to status assessment, the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and monitoring. To evaluate and test tools and methods, two pilots would be carried out in the Vuoksi and Narva river basins (supported by TACIS), the aim being to identify contamination and other factors putting pressure on surface waters via an impact assessment.

Work package 2: Interface of spatial planning with riverine planning. The aim was to gather knowledge about the links between spatial planning and the implementation of the WFD, gauging existing approaches and identifying obstacles. The partners would conduct country-specific studies in all Baltic Sea region countries and case studies in the river basins of Daugava, Nemunas, Narva, Vuoksi and Odra.

Work package 3: Public participation approaches in river basin management. The goal was to improve the use of public participation methodologies in planning processes and management, especially in transboundary riverine areas. The partners sought to develop a pilot scheme focused on public participation training programme for environmental specialists of local municipalities and water management officials.

Work package 4: Guidelines and recommendations for co-operation in transboundary river basins, dissemination of project's results. At the end of the project the partnership intended to make policy recommendations and put forward guidelines on transnational river basin management.

4. Political and Strategic Context

There are 14 large international river basins within the Baltic Sea region. The Eastern Baltic Sea region covers the transboundary river basins of Vuoksi (between Finland and Russia), Narva (between Estonia and Russia, extending to Latvia), Daugava-Zapadnaya Dvina (between Latvia and Belarus, but also Lithuania and Russia) and Nemunas (between Lithuania and Belarus, but also Poland, Latvia and Russia).

In 2000, the EU adopted the Water Framework Directive (WFD), which had to be implemented step-by-step nationally by 2009. The implementation of the WFD required systematic procedures and the analysis of river basin management. In the WFD's Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) established in 2001, the Member States committed themselves to defining common goals. In order to jointly and systematically develop effective river basin management, intense cooperation was needed at the regional and local levels to conduct pilot projects that would test different approaches. Implementation had to consider the characteristics of water management in neighbourhood countries, including those outside the EU such as Russia or Belarus, which also influence water protection in the Baltic Sea Region.

5. Project Implementation

The lead partner was responsible for project management and reporting. Different partners acted as work package leaders. A Co-ordination Group (CG) was established, bringing the groups together alongside partner representatives twice a year. Internal meetings included a kick-off meeting, work package meetings, co-ordination group meetings and steering group meetings. External meetings included a final seminar and four workshops, one of which was connected to a larger symposium.

The partners differed in their resources and in the point at which they were starting out from, in terms of knowledge. This created challenges when developing methods and tools for water management, for example, in EU border areas with Russia and Belarus regarding the common understanding of terms and the comparison of

conditions and practice which would underpin the common transnational activities. In Russia, water management legislation changed during the project lifetime. In 2006 new laws came into force and further detailed legislation is being prepared. This made common approaches to river basin management more essential then ever.

The involvement of these specific partners was extremely important for project effectiveness as many river basin districts are located in a boundary region of one EU and one non-EU region. It was essential for the TACIS project to be approved and additional funding secured (it started in 2006 and ended a half a year later than the INTERREG project). Additional management of the TACIS project was conducted by the lead partner. As such, a key challenge for the partnership was to effectively manage two complementary projects financed under two separate programmes.

More insight into the implementation of the project can be found in the final report, "The Water Framework Directive in the Baltic Sea Region Countries - vertical implementation, horizontal integration and transnational cooperation". Since the end of the INTERREG and TACIS projects the partnership has not institutionalised its co-operation further. However, the partners remain in contact and intend to prepare an application for a follow-up project.

6. Project Results

The main achievements of the project were surveys on methodologies for status assessment and monitoring, and studies on factors affecting water quality. The project produced 11 country-specific studies in the Baltic Sea Region and five case studies concerning the affect of implementing the WFD on water management planning, plus two pilot and demonstration studies focused on public participation.

A synthesis of the results was presented during the project's final seminar "Water Management and Assessment of Ecological Status in Transboundary River Basins" in September 2007 and published in two final reports, which include surveys of river basin management planning (including links to spatial planning, methods of public participation, river basin analyses and management, status assessment and monitoring). The reports contain recommendations for implementing the WFD in light of project experience.

In terms of communication, some 80 presentations were given during the project. Overall, about 200-300 people were involved in external events, but as many as 160 people participated in internal project meetings or workshops. Conferences in Kaliningrad, Minsk and St. Petersburg were organised with additional TACIS funding. Regarding public participation, to accompany the pilot scheme the partners produced training material in Estonian, English and Russia. A demonstration study, including a simulation game for school children, gives an introduction into the complex decision-making involved in spatial planning and challenges involved in reaching consensus.

More generally, and with a view to long term cooperation, the project reinforced expert networks and facilitated the exchange of technical information and know-how, which subsequently increased managerial capacities concerning water quality regulation, enhanced cultural and technical awareness of divergent perspectives across borders and improved inter-cultural understanding among partners.

7. Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

The project demonstrated that transnational co-operation can successfully contribute to the *harmonised* implementation of European guidelines or directives. Despite differences in regional socio-economic conditions and political-administrative structures the partners recognised that their regions were facing similar challenges. As such, exchanging information about approaches and different testing, implementing

and evaluating methods, techniques and procedures, was valuable, particularly in light of newly emerging national legislation.

The BSR INTERREG III B neighbourhood programme and TACIS were felt to be appropriate and complementary tools for stimulating co-operation processes and creating management and expert capacity. The project brought to the fore the differences between EU and non-EU partners, like Belarus or Russia, concerning regulatory regimes, but also the basic problem of language barriers and how these need to be overcome. The project shows how financial and political support for language training courses is essential.

No major difficulties were encountered, though small problems were reported concerning the involvement of non-EU partners and, consequently, the implementation of two different funding instruments. This created challenges for project management and complicated life somewhat for the lead partner. In light of this project management experience the lead partner recommends harmonising procedures and regulations across funding programmes in order to facilitate the involvement of non-EU partners.