Open Society for Environment management “Bartava”

Layman’s report

Project Barta Club LIFE 00 ENV/LV/000961

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Main objective of the project was to create an innovative river basin management system for Latvian conditions, co-coordinating different (from local to Baltic Sea basin) interests and allowing to decrease pollution level in Barta river catchment's area. Another aim is to show with the help of pilot projects alternative possibilities to reconstruct wastewater and drinking water de-ironisation systems for small size (up to 2000 inhabitants) local governments.

Overall objective: Clean Barta for local inhabitants, Latvia and the world.

Water management system in Latvia is far from perfection. Not only ministries and other state institutions but also the local society should be involved in solving this problem. Solutions will differ from place to place, but in general we see 2 solutions – for communities with up to 2000 inhabitants and larger communities. Second ones were mostly included in state investment program 800+. The main obstacle to attract finances for small municipalities was the small number of inhabitants - a complex reconstruction is too complicated to manage, and there is lack of financial resources. Different technologies should be used, offering not only cheaper construction, but cheaper operation as well.

Barta River belongs to Salmonidae rivers. So it is extremely important to protect its habitats and Salmonidae spawning places for next generations. While the project was evaluated by DG Environment LIFE Unit, the Commission approved the Water Framework Directive and Latvia adopted several laws related to this directive. The project proposed establishment of public institution for decision making, establishment of non-profit enterprise for waste water and drinking water management and implementation of several pilot projects for integration of Eco-technologies into waste water and drinking water management, which has not been done on the level of small rural municipalities up to now. The benefits would be: low cost of construction, low running costs and environmentally friendly technologies. Elaborated results are of great interest for small local governments not only in Latvia but also in other new EU and accession countries. Water related institutional arrangements in all CEE countries and Latvia are too complicated, non transparent and financially not self-supporting. Trans boundary river basin management has not been a research topic in any Baltic state and this project is a large step towards the model for improving the existing situation.

As it was planned in the project Water Basin Club "Barta Club" has been established and was participating in development of local restrictions on water management, elaboration of SD indicators list, elaboration of Barta River management plan, elaboration and realization of local environment quality monitoring system. There were organized regular 8 events of Barta Club along the project. The establishment of Barta Club was approved on Board meeting of beneficiary – thus by all partners of the project. Every partner agreed on representatives from each municipality at their Municipality board meetings. The lists of representatives were submitted to the leading partner. By approving of minutes of Board meeting, the establishment of Barta Club was not signed but accepted by voting of Board members.

Proposals for local restrictions on water quality and its management have been elaborated in accordance with Water Framework Directive, thus there is a base for further implementation of this directive objectives not only in these 8 municipalities, but also in other municipalities of Latvia and CEE countries.

Significant output is river management plan with Environmental Quality Objectives for a small river, elaborated with extensive involvement of local community, which is an introduction of Water Framework Directive objectives and tasks on a local level.

The management plan includes Environmental Quality Objectives for Barta River which serve as a basis for planning and implementation of activities aimed at improvement of environmental quality, which is an important output of the project. Such Environmental Quality Objectives for a small river elaborated with extensive involvement of local society are the first in Latvia, because up to now similar objectives were elaborated only by experts for larger rivers (e.g. Daugava).

Eight small (up to 2000 inhabitants) municipalities - Barta, Dunika, Gramzda, Kaleti, Nica, Otanki, Rucava and Virga participated in the project. Such co-operation was not completely new to these municipalities, but for the first time all the municipalities living on the coast of Barta River were involved in a project aimed at management of Barta River basin. Many topical problems were addressed during the project activities, drafting the next co-operation steps necessary.

A very successful co-operation was established with local schools, especially in development and continuous implementation of monitoring program.

Project partners have assumed responsibility for the sustainability, maintenance and further development of the created project – both soft activities and investments.

The public understanding of the necessity of local level implementation of the laws and regulations of EU and Republic of Latvia has grown substantially.

The project has shown that it is economically feasible for small municipalities to join their efforts for carrying out pre-feasibility studies, working with technical water treatment projects, buying and installing water supply and treatment equipment, etc.

A limiting factor can be the necessity to ensure political commitment of many parties. The choice whether to have one applicant for funding or many individual applying municipalities is very important and should be considered carefully in each specific situation.

The greatest benefit for partner municipalities is the evaluation of the current situation, which includes a specific breakdown of possibilities for each of the municipalities. Short, middle and long term plans have been created stating the vital measures, advisable measures and optional measures, allowing to make well-grounded decisions on financial investments. The same kind of breakdown has been created for the whole river basin.

The students (12 – 16 years old) participating in monitoring activities have received public acclaim for the good work and this program will be continued with the funding of National Support Program of the Netherlands. 50 % of project partner municipalities are going to continue public monitoring

One of the most important results is the considerable improvement of environmental indicators in Barta River, which prove the effectiveness of methods chosen. The quality of the drinking water has increased and according to the data of Environmental Health Centre the results are much better than planned initially. When the treatment stations will be completed, the inflow of untreated waste waters into Barta River basin will be stopped and the possibility of such waters reaching Baltic Sea basin will be decreased.

The water quality will increase in general and already now inhabitants are showing interest about connecting to better drinking water supply system and waste water collection and treatment system in 5 municipalities, where pilot activities – drinking water de-ironisation and construction of waste water treatment plants have been implemented or will be completed shortly. Many municipalities in Latvia - Talsi, Kuldīga, Jelgava and Salacgriva and Lithuania – Skuida and Kretinga have shown great interest about the innovative basin management approach.

The co-ordination of various levels of interests in development of river basing management documentation and their practical implementation was achieved with the help of Barta Club and Microeuroregion Bartuva.

The single water operator is a model how various infrastructure objects can be managed in the territory of several municipalities in the circumstances of territorial reform

The pollution of open waters within the basin will be substantially decreased after completion of waste water treatment plant construction. . The public in Latvia (through Latvian Union of Municipalities) and Lithuania (through MER Bartuva) was introduced with alternative possibilities for drinking water de-ironisation and waste water treatment, specially stressing the high economic efficiency of these constructions.

The project objectives are mostly met and project partner municipalities are planning to continue the development of their water management system with the support from EU Structural Funds.

Barta Club can operate as a structural unit and in some respects as model in Venta River Basin Management Council.

The technologies used in environmental sphere – de-ironisation and planned technology for waste water treatment is successful. It is confirmed by positive results achieved in Ziemelsuseja project as well. The drinking water treatment results are: Virga Community from 0.899 mg /l FeO3 to 0.035; Nica Community from 0.856 mg/l to 0.139 mg/l and in Otanki Community from 0.853 mg/l to 0.113 mg/l. The results are better than expected and significantly improve the quality of drinking water supplied for customers in the mentioned community. The testing results were assured by Society Health State Agency

According to the project goals the implementation of the project allowed to improve the quality of drinking water and reduce the pollution load in the Barta River basin territory. The iron content in drinking water has decreased considerably and after completion of treatment plants the inflow of 112 m3 of untreated waste water will be stopped in Barta per day and Dunika municipalities. The requirements of Common Water Framework Directive have been fulfilled, and after completion of waste water treatment plants they will be fulfilled for waste water as well.

A single water operator will allow the municipalities to achieve the requirements of Common Water Framework Directive about financial sustainability of this operator and will stop subsidisation of water management system from municipal budgets.

The results of public monitoring show that the treatment stations constructed in Lithuania (credit financing from Investment Bank of Nordic Countries), which partly resulted from the joint activities with Lithuanian partners, has already stopped the inflow of largest stationary pollution into Barta River.

The main aspect of institutional innovations is connected with preparing a new methodology, creating new partnership and establishing new institutions. Its aim is to demonstrate the application of the EU Water Framework Directives in small river basins, motivate the participation of the local community and stakeholders in its implementation and coordinate the management of the national level river basins with the management of regional and local river basins. Barta Club was established as this kind of institution.

The prepared list of indicators of sustainable development and methodology for testing using simple biological methods for monitoring of river quality and development process in the river basin is an important innovation. The list of indicators is prepared as a complex integrated instrument consisting of 3 parts:

a) Monitoring indicators of economic activities

b) Monitoring indicators of social activities

c) Monitoring indicators of environmental quality and activities within the Barta River basin.

According to the project calendar plan the list of indicators was prepared and discussed in several workshops and further approbation and development of it will be continued according to the prepared methodology.

The single water operator is an innovation for cooperation of small size municipalities and newly established administrative provinces. The acquired experience shows that such water management allows using the limited municipal financial resources more effectively

Project has illustrated the benefits of solving large-scale problems in a common structure, and showed the possible threats and weaknesses such a structure could have. The partner municipalities have had the possibility to evaluate the qualitative and quantitative benefits to their water system and will continue to sustain the created structures and develop more by applying for funding from the Environment Investment Fund and EU Structural Funds.