

Report on Workshop

Sustainable Development in Lake Areas: Empowering Local Initiatives and Civil Society



15 – 18 June 2009

Lake Võrtsjärv, Estonia

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Introduction

Four workshops are organised by Forum Synergies and Global Nature Fund in the framework of the project “Sustainable Development in Lake Areas” supported by Fondation de France.

The general objective of the project is to support initiatives in sustainable development by exchange of good practice of participatory implementation and local sustainable development. The exchange shall lead to capacity building of private actors, NGOs and local governments in environmentally sensitive areas. The thematic workshops will contribute to the development of local democracy and to a more participative management of environmental resources, in order to fill the gap between European citizens and their institutions, and also via feed-back to decision makers to contribute to environmental and rural policies that better meet peoples' need for participation.

The project's objectives are:

- to exchange experiences about different participatory implementation strategies of Nature 2000 and WFD in concerned rural areas
- to give local actors and authorities better access to practical knowledge about sustainable Nature 2000 and WFD implementation strategies via exchange with successful projects
- to develop political proposals to regional, state and EU governments to use the existing participatory options that are provided from EU-side in order to support sustainable development in rural areas.

The international Living Lakes Network forms a good platform for a wider dissemination of project results. The scientific partnership with University of Marburg / Germany assures that the project integrates political knowledge of integrated water body management.

The workshops are meant to empower civil society actors to contribute to participatory sustainable development, and shall yield recommendations to local and EU governments about more participatory ways to implement environmental policies. Lakes, river basins and coastal areas are good topics for exchange workshops about participatory implementation strategies because they fall usually under both Natura 2000 and water framework regulation, they give a common thematic focus, are of high public relevance and give room for integrated development approaches. Furthermore there tend to be serious conflicts of interest between different stakeholders, giving need for mediation and participatory conflict solution.

Workshop Sustainable Development in Lake Areas: Empowering Local Initiatives and Civil Society

The first workshop within the frame of the project took place at the Lake Võrtsjärv in Estonia on 15 – 18 June 2009 giving start to an active exchange between project partners and participants.

Location

Lake Võrtsjärv near Tartu in Estonia, the biggest inner-Estonian lake, is mainly used by fishermen from the five surrounding villages with some recently evolving soft tourism and recreational activities. Nutrient intakes from the last decades caused heavy mud deposits in the shallow lake, deteriorating the water quality especially in summers with a thread of oxygen crises, and causing a reed belt of more than 100 meters to grow on its shore, preventing inhabitants to access the lake as they used to. There is need for an ecologically adapted solution under participation of the different interest groups.



The workshop took place at the shore of the lake in Vehendi Guest House, Vehendi Village.

Participants

19 participants from different countries and even continents took part at the workshop: Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, France, Germany, China and Botswana. Worthwhile and intensive team-working with NGO-representatives from the Ukraine and Moldova contributed to the accomplishment of workshop objectives during the second day of the Workshop.

Workshop realisation

The workshops proceeded in three main steps. Firstly, the presentation of the local situation was held by the host organisation Lake Võrtsjärv Foundation and its partners; visits of project sites took place to enable a better understanding of the situation. Secondly, the foreign guests had the opportunity both to get in touch with local initiatives and civil society groups and to share their ideas, views and experiences with respect to the local situation. Finally, the moderators tried to

crystallise political conclusions in order to formulate a valuable feedback to EU decision makers on the basis of lessons learned.



On the first day the host organisation presented in detail the local situation at the unique Limnological Centre at the Lake Võrtsjärv. The foreign guests posed questions to better understand the situation and relate it to their own experiences. A group of Ukrainian and Moldavian NGO-representatives engaged in the protection of the river Dniester basin introduced their common activities and the planned cooperation with two Estonian partners namely the Peipsi centre for Transboundary Cooperation and the Lake Võrtsjärv Foundation.

All participants were taken to the first field trip: a tour with a traditional Estonian fishing boat reconstructed according to the original medieval drafts. The boat forms a part of a project concerning development of sustainable tourism at the lake. During the trip the guests could communicate directly to the local fishermen getting their first practical feeling about the local situation and sketching first conflicts particularly regarding the perception of Natura 2000 by fishermen and the enormous “distance” between local people and the decision makers.



During the afternoon session further explanation to the local situation were given by the representatives of the Estonian NGOs Peipsi centre for Transboundary



Cooperation and Lake Võrtsjärv Foundation and questions arisen were answered. To get the general image and vision of stakeholder participation five working groups were formed to reveal the main concepts and ideas of a successful involvement of different

stakeholders and to connect them with the overall topic.



The Ukrainian and Moldavian colleagues participated actively in the exercise.



Afterwards the opportunity to visit the biggest traditional Estonian song festival was offered to the foreign guests to get to know Estonian customs and rites and to try delicious Estonian cuisine.

The second morning session allowed the international guests to summarise the conclusions of the previous working day and to contribute their views, ideas and experiences with respect to the local situation. During the discussion following (sometimes unexpected) questions were raised: Which is the best way to get in touch with the local government? How to provide an interexchange of facts and figures between local people and decision makers and which could be the role of different NGOs in the process? How to get new actors e. g. enterprises involved? What is the role of media in revealing and solving the conflicts? Which is the best way to maintain the feeling of a deep involvement into processes by all stakeholders?



Three working groups analysed and presented experiences in conducting projects in three different regions namely Estonia (on the base of new information and with the contribution of the Estonian partners), Hungary and Botswana. Apart from common problems and difficulties faced some unexpected approaches for conflict solutions appeared as appropriate for regions seemed to be incomparable, e.g. Botswana and Poland or Hungary and China. The participants tried to apply the conclusions made to the situation in Estonia and to give some ideas and advices to the host organisation.

A second field trip in the afternoon of this day brought the participants to local initiatives and civil society groups to talk with them about their vision, their practical experience and the specific local obstacles to their engagement. The trip was supposed to include four excursions to sites implementing innovative management methods: visits of an eel breeding farm, a berry farm, an animal husbandry at Natura 2000 area and a water waste treatment system in the Rannu village. Due to lack of time the fourth visit was canceled and therefore it was replaced



with a conversation with local authorities in charge of the water waste treatment facilities.

Among the workshop participants four groups were formed to conduct interviews on project sites with the intention to write articles considering project issues and particularities. As the result of the exercise four working papers were produced comprising information about initiators and organizational form of the project, main objectives, focus activities and sustainability of the actions, main results and lessons learned, perspectives, relation with regional-, national- and EU-politics in means of support and restrictions. The entire articles can be found under www.forum-synergies.eu.



In the evening of the second workshop day an official event took place at the Rannu Centre. In order to enable the local public to participate in the meeting the event was announced in the local press. Even though the participation rate was not high, the province governor illustrated the main activities and objectives for and in the region. Following up his presentation and the introduction of the workshop, its structure and goals, an open discussion started giving the foreign guests the opportunity to clarify and deepen their experiences with the project implementation and stakeholder participation at the lake Vörtsjärv.

To summarise and to analyse the information gathered within previous workshop days the main statements were collected and controversial questions posed during the third morning session. In the form of an exercise the participants were asked to show their agreement/disagreement with statements related to the local situation on Natura 2000 implementation, stakeholder participation, elaboration of action plans, management of natural resources and sustainable development in the region. Towards the end of the session the attempt was made to collect the suggestions to be part of a list of political references for EU decision makers. The final evaluation of the workshop helped to make suggestions for improvement the structure and the frame of further workshops in Poland, Slovenia and France.



Conclusion

The workshop revealed the main difficulties and conflicts regarding participatory implementation and local sustainable development in Estonia. The encounters with civil society actors helped to contribute to understanding of the particularities of Natura 2000 implementation at the lake Võrtsjärv. The field trips, small working groups and varied exercises had a positive effect on the general efficiency of the workshop.

Some conclusions made about the overall frame of the workshop will help to implement the lessons learned during the prearrangements for the next workshop in Poland. Important improvements like involvement of a greater number of local participants, strengthening the element of supervision of case studies and providing more information about background of local stakeholders/actors inclusive groups in distance or in conflict with environmental issues have been suggested by the workshop participants and will be taken into account during the preparation phase of the second workshop.

The role of lakes as places of serious conflicts of interest between different stakeholders, giving need for mediation and participatory conflict solution, has been affirmed. The workshop shall now provide basis for further project activities and for drafting recommendations to local and EU governments about more participatory ways to implement environmental policies.

Outline October 2009 – the 2nd Workshop in Poland

The next international workshop is expected to take place on the 20 – 24 of October at the Milicz ponds near Wrocław in Poland. The Milicz ponds are a great lake area that has been created by medieval monks for aquaculture. Nowadays they create an almost natural environment with very large numbers of birds and also plant species on the surrounding wetlands. ProNatura, an ecological NGO, takes care for the ponds and has organized a number of successful projects. Some of them will be presented during the workshop.

The experiences gathered and questions raised in Estonia form a perfect foil to continuation of the common work. We hope to learn a lot about successful integration of social inclusion, renewable energy initiatives and ecological initiatives into an overall activity that preserves the lake environment, creates jobs and develops cultural, economical and social potential in Poland.

Speaking the “object language”: Feed back of the participants



Réka Belenta The workshop was a sort of new “oxygen” consisting of new experiences for the “lamp” which you can take everywhere to spread the “light” of new ideas.



Erzsébet Székely We need the “light” of the workshop to focus on important things; we must keep it alive to provide a successful collaboration.



Mara Kaminska There was a lot of information to notice, a lot of new ideas, a lot of new people.



Ewa Zuber The workshop like a mirror reflected new situations, ideas, information showing different ways of solving similar problems.



Piotr Kryszczak This workshop is particular not only because of different foreign languages used, but because of thousands of words: every word has a deep meaning, looking at words opens new horizons. Everyone is different; everyone is a sort of imaginary “dictionary” explaining new meanings to the others.



Roman Guziak we were an international group both in means of languages and general diversity.





Milan Vogrin The workshop could be compared with the “forbidden fruit”: the symbol of spreading knowledge, information; at the same time giving “food” for further activities.





Mechthild A. Adameit Like Estonian bread, the workshop combined the sense of something exotic and familiar; it gave everybody the possibility to share his knowledge like sharing the bread; it had several ingredients making possible to taste new things.




Jaanika Kaljuvee  Openness: open-minded people opened a lot of new possibilities opening the door of cooperation.

Katja Tolkachyova  The workshop provided us with consistent and nutritional “food” to be able to live and to improve the life.

Dr. Tillmann Stottele  We learned a lot and gathered different “tools” which will support our further work.

Dr. Titus Banner  Before the workshop started, it was like a closed box – you are expecting something new and interesting. Step by step it is opening up and revealing its content: there is a lot to be discovered.

Philippe Barret  The workshop served as tasty and pleasant “food” in different aspects: warm relations between participants; numerous opportunities to introduce new exercises; and the impression of growing energy encouraging to continue with building Europe.