

## ERRConference 2013

### Session 11: Contemporary river corridor management

#### Final Session Report

#### Introduction

*(by the chair Bruno Mazzorana, Autonomous Province of Bolzano, Department of Hydraulic Engineering, Italy)*

Improving the governance of international river corridors is vital to preserve and manage these unique socio-ecological systems in a sustainable way. The SEE River Session at the ERRConference 2013 provided room for valuable contributions in this direction. One comprehensive **key note speech** was devoted to illustrate both the theoretical and practical facets of contemporary river corridor management. This provided the setting for a structured workshop, where all attending participants were allocated to six smaller **working groups** to address three prepared driving questions on the needs for improved river corridor management and on the pathways for a sustainable management approach.

The results of the workshop were summarized and presented in the plenary by the rapporteur. Within the SEE River Project the gained insights will be thoroughly considered while preparing the SEE River Toolkit, one essential project outcome.

## Contemporary River Corridor Management: From local to transboundary level, from top down to bottom up

(Abstract of the introductory presentation)

*Compiled by: Aleš Bizjak, Institute for Water of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

The SEE River project (*Sustainable Integrated Management of International River Corridors in SEE Countries*) originates from decisions taken by participants of the International Drava River Vision Symposium, held in Maribor in 2008 and is based on *Drava River Vision Declaration*, adopted at the event.

The project is engaged with challenges of contemporary river corridor management, e.g. by methods combining local, regional, national and transboundary levels of river management, involving relevant sector stakeholders in the process of articulating cross-sectoral solutions, and combining the top-down and bottom-up approaches and their combinations.

The main project goal is to improve current capacities of existing local, regional, national and international structures in South-Eastern Europe for effective transboundary and cross-sectoral linking and networking in executing river corridor management, notably by applying and promoting the new SEE River TOOLKIT, the main project product that is intended to explain how to achieve an integrative dialogue and harmonised management.

Approaches and methods are being tested on 6 SEE rivers (Drava, Bodrog, Soča, Neretva, Prut, Vjosa), where on the Drava River methods will be applied in detail on 5 pilot sections in each of the riparian countries (Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary). Other key tasks include an analysis of the state of these rivers and of applied administrative procedures, the determination of the river corridor and its key management issues, the execution of a stakeholder involvement process concluding in cross-sector agreements on a joint vision and action plan for all 6 rivers and pilot areas.

The SEE River project consists of 26 partners from 12 countries in SEE region and outside. It runs from 1 October 2012 until 30 September 2014.

## **Conclusions from the discussion results of the small working group**

*(compiled by the rapporteur Alexander Zinke, Zinke Environment Consulting, Vienna on behalf of the Austrian Ministry of Life)*

Six groups with each 7-8 members spent half an hour of joint reflections addressing the three guiding questions on their experiences on how to better manage complex river corridors. Individual results are listed below. Some points that could be highlighted were:

- Experience from various rivers in Europe shows a wide diversity of experiences with **stakeholder involvement**, both from the side of responsible authorities (sometimes reluctant) and the stakeholders (sometimes difficult to represent and work with). Foster the experience exchange!
- Key of success is the engagement of stakeholders: communication, transparency and mutual trust are important. Competent facilitation is essential and has to set up the **cooperation framework** and a suitable communication platform. Result should be a negotiated **agreement**.
- Contemporary river corridor management requires creativity and experiment; related actions are not easy to finance and execute. **Process focus** should still be less on discussions and planning but more on **achieving actions** and visible results, starting with the simple ones.
- It is necessary to transparently identify who has the major **benefits** from a certain management.
- **Sustainability** of agreed action and management must be assured.
- The definition of the river corridor (= local scale) must keep the wider region in mind, as it may also affect the corridor.
- Time really needed for change/improvement requires patience, lasting interest and **commitment** of many parties. Adaptive and step-wise implementation that allows **flexibility** is important. Incentives for change and integration may ease overall progress.
- The future Toolkit must be written in a **generally applicable** form and should show diverse experiences and examples.

## **Session 11 message to the ERRConference 2013**

Cross-sectoral river corridor management can be achieved at local, national and international level, if stakeholders become engaged from the beginning, using in a flexible way the vast experience and new tools available in Europe.

## Results from the Session's Working Groups

*Compiled by the Session Rapporteur: Alexander Zinke, Austria*

The following question was addressed in two groups with each ca. 8 persons:

Note: Results based on the **flipchart notes** of each working group were formulated with the help of the group facilitators.

**Question A:** *What are from your experience the **needs for improved river corridor management** on local and transboundary scale?*

### **Working Group 1 (facilitator: Arno Mohl)**

➤ **Local scale:**

- Need of a balance between conservation and use, taking into account the stakeholder interests
- Need of a corridor definition, of awareness raising and the execution of *pilot projects*
- Opportunity to convene a »river parliament« to support support of activities
- The resulting know-how should be transferred onto the

➤ **Transboundary scale:**

- This offers the opportunity to develop a joint declaration/vision, do joint projects, exchange experiences.
- It is essential to ensure simultaneous translation and provision of standardised information

### **Working Group 4 (facilitator: Tanja Nikowitz)**

➤ Approach

Be aware »of the **spatial scale**: Even if we work at corridor level, « there are connections and impacts from the catchment. E.g.: even if we fully apply modern river management at the corridor, the implementation of a highway could impose a severe threat from the surroundings.

Improve the **definition of »corridor«**  
Define **common management goals**

»River Corridor Management«: A union of NGOs or **independent experts should facilitate the work** at local level and bring together/ mediate between the different stakeholders (similar to the concept of »river basin managers«): information, participation, integrated management. This would catalyze and enable integrated river basin management on the ground.

**Assess the appropriate time scales:** Short-term / long-term  
Link with adaptive management

Achieve a more integrated approach by **modeling costs / benefits and scenarios**

Emphasis on local »buy-in« and incentives

Provide better **incentive schemes for agricultural conversions:** better agricultural legislation  
land conservation / consolidation

**Cross-sectoral partnerships allow to find »synergies«** between business and other groups

Improve the creation of **frameworks for transboundary work**

➤ Communication

**Convince politicians about the benefits of integrated river basin management and ecological flood protection** (have case studies available): Assess the costs (ecosystem services)

**Communication tools are needed to support decision-making-** most people are still not aware of the ecological needs of a river. With better information and integration they will be easier convinced about restoration projects and even support this idea.

Better communicate (and assess) the **ecosystem services (benefits) of restoration.**

Improve **branding and marketing**

Ensure better environmental education programs

Question B: *What are the needs to ensure sustainable transboundary river corridors in WE and SEE countries*

### **Working Group 3 (facilitator: Andrej Grmovsek)**

- Above all it is deemed as strategic to enhance the planning approach but at the same time to be very effective in taking actions and hence to demonstrate that transitions in the RC can be made.
- **Sustainability** is a definition that can be stretched on demand, hence, it is necessary to converge to a common view of sustainability at a transboundary level in order to be able to articulate long term visions.
- It is moreover necessary to **transparently** identify who has the major **benefits** from the project.
- Concerning the **decision-making process**, mechanisms should be foreseen to avoid impasses within the stakeholder group.
- The importance of **good communication** is stressed to facilitate consensus-building and negotiations (agreements).

- To master complexity a step by step approach seems to be suitable and **different strategies** might work **for different scales**. In a broader sense it is crucial to build a strong lobby around the key objectives of the planning process.
- Funding is always seen as crucial to ensure **continuity of action**. In this context bilateral commissions might be helpful.
- From a cultural perspective a certain change in our mindset is needed (more flexibility) to tackle the complexities of transboundary RC management. Dissemination and education are essential in this context. Science and practice have to cooperate more tightly. Inertial forces inhibiting the RC transition process are difficult to be removed.

### **Working Group 6** *(facilitator: Norbert Sereinig)*

- Define a **common vision** within the given socio-economy and consider the peculiarities of the political background. To put it in another way: To go in one direction at every level.
- Employ a shared methodology and include relevant stakeholders in the participatory process.
- There is a need to **apply different scales**: Zoom from a large scale representation of the RC to the more detailed particular views at local scale. Goals defined for the large scale should be **consistent** with chosen regional and local objectives which take the cultural and socio-economic aspects into account and ensure jointly accepted implementation.
- Think TOP – DOWN, act BOTTOM UP
- Find a common way on a political level respecting the different backgrounds
- Set up a suitable **communication platform** both at local and transboundary levels
- Dealing with sustainability requires sufficient knowledge about long term actions and processes (**scenario thinking**)
- There is no way from escaping the »basin approach«, and large scale processes should be considered.

Question C: *What are **your experiences** in managing rivers through the bottom-up approach and in linking the top-down and bottom up approaches?*

### **Working Group 2** *(facilitator: Mateja Softic)*

➤ **Land owners:**

- Communication on land use changes to achieve more sustainable approaches.
- Compensation!
- Participative process is not the best approach to get started.
- Better is a step by step approach.
- Authorities need to take over responsibilities, »make the job their personal duty«, do not rely on external services.

➤ **Public authorities:**

- It depends on site-specific conditions which approach is most effective to foster administrative commitment.

- Often an initial trigger from outside may help.
  - Motivation is a problem! How to get people interested in an integrated approach (one solution: study and experience exchange visits; bring foreign specialists to critical areas).
- **Civil society:**
- Awareness raising among the broader public may influence decision makers on a higher level.
  - Problem: diverse interests amongst the public.
    - Build scenarios and present the benefits of integrated management to specific stakeholders groups.
    - Create events which are 'get-togethers' in the first interest and spend time listening to people, not telling them what to do and how to think.
- **Key tools**
- Mutual trust and understanding: authorities – civil society.
  - Use municipalities as a first level of facilitation, capacity building.
  - Give practical examples:
    - positive ones,
    - negative ones.
  - Foster experience exchange:
    - expert exchange,
    - field trips.
  - Continuity in stakeholders involvement »and don't forget the coffee«.
  - Positive short term outcomes need to be delivered to keep people interested and to get them even more involved.
  - The facilitation of communication on different levels should be neutral.

### **Working Group 5 (facilitator: Simona Kaligarić)**

- Refer to Session 9 conclusions: Ensure local sustainability
- G. Gusmaroli presented in Session 1 the Italian concept of “**River Contracts**” (negotiated agreements at sub-catchment/corridor scale as a tool for integrated implementation of WFD and FD with a bottom up approach): This is very similar to our negotiated agreements for river corridors.
- Have a **flexible and open minded approach** to share common goals.
- **Always involve your stakeholders!** It is very important to recognize and to involve all of them into the process. In many cases, stakeholders with great proposals are not willing to participate.
- **Bottom-up approach must be guided by some top-down guidelines.** Issues important at the national level are not necessarily recognized as important at a smaller scale or for individuals. In that case authorities have to prepare guidelines (e.g. for drinking water protection). Bottom up approaches do not always guarantee the best solution, especially if the goals are on a higher level and stakeholders cannot identify themselves with them.
- **Bottom-up approach may lead to different conclusions / interests.**