Lake Peipsi on the Estonian/Russian border – dividing or uniting line

Margit Säre

Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation, Estonia

Lakes and their cultural, social values

- Lakes provide diverse natural resources to communities – water, energy, fish, wetlands, and beautiful coasts. Lake communities cultural heritage is closely connected with the water
- In the regions in transition, in peripherial areas local communities are especially dependent on using local natural resources
- Therefore, these communities have an inherent interest in promoting sustainable use and management of natural resources as well as protecting the region’s cultural values
Lake Peipsi/Chudskoe

- Situates on the Estonian-Russian border
- Forms a “natural”, therefore an easily visualized mental dividing line, which separates two socially and culturally distant places
- Is EU external border

Lake Peipsi region on Estonian-Russian border

- 2/3 of the border is covered by Lake Peipsi. Largest transboundary lake in Europe
- 44% of it belongs to Estonia, 56% to Russia
- Surface area 3550 km²
- Shallow - 7 m average
Lake Võrtsjärv
Lake Peipsi
Emajõgi River

Landscapes and habitats of high importance

Natura areas, Wetlands, forests
Lake Peipsi environmental issues

Major environmental problems:
- water eutrophication
- reduced fish stocks.

- The main commercial fishes are lake smelt, perch, ruff, roach, bream, pike, vendace etc.
1200 professional fishermen, plus recreational fishing.
Problem has been illegal fishing

Water eutrophication is regarded mainly dependent on the development in the agricultural sector.
Region is sparsely populated and it is struggling with unfavourable demographic situation.

Lake Peipsi area has rich historic and cultural heritage.

Estonians, Russians, Setu and Old-Belivers live next to each other for centuries.
Old-Believers and Setus

• Old-believers were forced to emigrate in remote areas of the Russian Empire on 17th century. They live on the western shore of Lake Peipsi.
  - They are famous onion growers and in August famous onion-fair takes place every year.

• The Setu ethnic group (around 13,000 people) live in the southern part of the Lake, both in Estonian and Russian (less than 1000) side as their land was divided after IIInd World War
  Setus are of Orthodox religion.

- Successful tourism region
**Tourism development challenges**

- Low development of infrastructure; few hotels, restaurants, other service providers.
  Some groups are not interested in introducing their culture (churches) to outsiders
  Mainly: nature tourism, cultural tourism, recreational fishing

- Necessity to learn to develop tourism by way of promoting one’s own ethnic peculiarities, to create necessary infrastructures, interactive museums

- Stronger measures are needed to promote sustainable use of the natural resources, taking into account the fragile lake region environment and resources. The protection of cultural and natural heritage should be done hand in hand.

**Preservation of Cultural heritage**

- It is primarily the settlements and cultural objects of Old Believers and Setu people that has to be protected.

- For the first time in their 300-years-old history, the Old Believers are becoming integrated in society, however, at the same, their traditional livelihood – fishing and farming– is decreasing

- There is a Dilemma – more you get integrated to society and develop tourism, more there is a threat to lose your identity
Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation activities

- CTC works to promote sustainable development and cross border cooperation in Lake Peipsi region already last 14 years. Our programs focus on environmental awareness, community development and cross border cooperation issues

- We work both sides of the lake, have local coordinators in different communities

Close cooperation with different ethnic groups, schools, NGOs, museums, women and other community groups

CTC acts s advocate for region: try to bring government attention to unique Lake Peipsi region and the importance for national strategies and support to the region
Peipsi CTC activities

• New project on Elaboration of a Strategy for Protection & Promotion of Diverse Cultural and Natural Heritage in the Lake Peipsi Region

• We try to promote development of the social capital in peripheral areas, which is a key direction in promoting local development – keeping people living in the border areas, especially young and creative ones; establishing networks, promoting diversification of the local business sand broader contacts between authorities, business, research and art communities;

• Project activities incl. establishing local museum network, training programs, tourism brochures; info exchange with other similar regions

• Together with local stakeholders we work out proposals for protection of Lake Peipsi cultural heritage. Close cooperation with relevant governmental institution