



Report on Workshop

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



21 – 24 October 2009

Milicz ponds, Poland

Lake Project Workshop Milicz Ponds / PL



Summary report

The second workshop of the Forum Synergies and Global Nature Fund project “Sustainable development in lake areas” was held in south western Poland at the Milicz ponds Natura 2000 area in the Barycz valley N from Wrocław from 21 - 24 October 2009. Our local partner was the Ecological Association ETNA.

Background

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.

The participants were a comparatively small group of up to fourteen activists, half of them from Poland, the other half from Germany, England, Estonia and Romania. The workshop lasted three days and followed a similar pattern as the preceding first workshop in Estonia: After a welcoming evening, the first day focussed on presenting the local situation and experiences by presentations of local experts and field trips. The second day was dedicated to the foreign guests' experiences in comparison to the local situation, and on the last morning the focus was on policy conclusions and a short workshop evaluation.

After we had experienced this methodology to be basically suitable and successful in our first workshop in Estonia in June 2009, we aimed to go one step further now by trying to have a more detailed view to the local situation, and in trying to get a deeper understanding of NGO participation options in the implementation of a sustainable development strategy on the background of EU environmental regulations.

The workshop was moderated by Titus Bahner, coordinator of Forum Synergies, and Roger de Freitas, member of Global Nature Fund's advisory board. The conference venue was a nice 20-bed newly built eco-tourism hotel in a small village close to the ponds area; we were the first seminar group to use it.

The first day



At the welcoming evening local farming families presented the „Barycz Valley Recommends“ label and a large variety of their fruit, juices and homemade marmalades to the participants. The label was developed as a LEADER project to support the marketing of the regional products and designates food, but also ser-



vices. The products are marketed regionally, but also exported to Warsaw, Hamburg or Scandinavia (eg. raspberries). The main distribution ways are direct sales, eco markets, and stands during local events.

On the first full workshop day our Polish partners gave a very detailed presentation of the Barycz valley's ecological, economical and social situation („we learned some new facts about our area by this exercise“). After the presentation we made an attempt in „mapping conflicts of interest“, and therefore constructed a large map of relevant stakeholders in the triangle between politics, economics and ecology in order to make conflicts of interests visible. It became obvious however that, due to long and successful NGO work in the area, there were comparatively few unsolvable conflicts between stakeholders and rather established communication structures to clear possible synergies, like in the 1990s broad stakeholder participation in creating a regional development plan or pilot Natura2000 management plan, and nowadays the LEADER+ Local Action Group (LAG).



The current Barycz Valley (Development) Programme (BV-programme) covers the core ponds area and is based on the LEADER+ programme as well as the programme for sustainable fisheries. The local development strategy has been developed with participation of at least 100 leaders from the area during the first phase of LEADER+. Local leaders described how they would like the region to be; professionals gave advices, and all together decided how they could implement it.

Background information to the ponds & the region

In the region live about 97.000 people, there are about 100 different NGOs (tourism, business, ecology, education, village development etc.), 75 schools, and a few cultural centers.

The 60s and early 70s were prosperous years for fisheries in the region but nature suffered from heavy investments into ponds – especially from removing of shallow zones to create more deeper areas suitable for fish growing. In the late 70s and 80s an economic collapse happened due to a general crisis in Poland. After the end of centralized socialistic economy in the 1990s, people did not know what they had to do to improve the situation. For some 15 years the ponds had to be managed in a very unstable surrounding – the managing institutions were changing, the profit could not be reinvested due to lack of contractual clarity and also general legislation concerning this kind of state institutions was rather unfavourable.



So in the early 2000s a project within the frame of LEADER+ was started. Mostly people from outside came to help. The locals did not believe in the success of the programme. Opened meetings in schools and municipalities were conducted to involve local communities. People did not really understand the meaning of a “sustainable development”, so there was and still is the need for educational activities.

The economy in the region is based on fishery, farming (agriculture), forestry, machinery etc. The main fishery product is carp. The breeding period for it lasts three years. The “resettling” system is being used: There are three ponds of different volumes, where fish grow until they reach a certain size, and then they are resettled to a greater pond.

Tourism is being developed: among other opportunities, bird watching tours are being offered to the visitors.

The difference of water quality between in- and outgoing water in the ponds is balanced. The main pollution sources are excrements of birds, food rests etc.

During the workshop an attempt was made, to name all stakeholder groups and to reveal different conflicts and conflict potential between the mentioned groups.

In the evening of the first workshop day we were invited to a group of young students from three different high schools at the Milicz town council house who had prepared a simulated TV discussion about „Natura 2000 - chance or obstacle?“. They presented a quite detailed understanding and some unorthodox ideas for solution. A big part of students showed interest in working for nature conservation in their future.



After the presentation a discussion found place showing some problems concerning information supply on Natura2000:

- lack of information on the programme in the local press: nobody of students had heard anything about Natura2000 before the workshop started;
- students see the necessity of bringing the topic to the press;
- until now there were no publications about this particular workshop, the only information channel are the high schools themselves.



The feedback of the guests contained a lot of interesting information, notes and ideas. The representative of the local administration pointed out a negative attitude of local popu-



lation to the Natura2000 programme. He was impressed by the number of positive things mentioned by students. A fisherman named a lot of obstacles he is facing with Natura2000: how to use the programme, how to bring the activities in balance with nature (e.g. bird nesting) etc. He mentioned that fishermen try to help the ecologists, but they have to assure their own survival: that is why it is difficult for them to accept something damaging their income. It is difficult, to live only from fishery, so the money of different environmental programmes could be a hope for professional fishermen.

Speaking about things the others could learn from the region, the students named the environmental protection without harming people living there.

Marta, the representative of the LAG Partnership for Barycz Valley, stressed the fact, that the conversion of restrictions into opportunities is a challenge for all stakeholders. Fishing methods could be improved without harming the nature. The costs will be high, but not the fishermen should bear those.

Dr. Tillmann Stottele called overall attention to the fact that the community and its members should be ready to partially carry over the costs: the EU will not be able to bear all the costs, and this beautiful place should be saved by & for the people living there. According to Titus Bahner, the EU, Polish government, and the communities should be able to bring the money together to develop sustainable fishery in the region.

Summarizing it all, the representative of LAG stressed that people should recognize the problem and the necessity of solution finding.

The second day

On the second workshop day we visited the state fish farms which with an overall surface of 7.500 ha take care for the core part of the Natura 2000 reserve of Milicz ponds and by their low input production technology provide a very sustainable environment for the many species of breeding and migratory birds there. Over 180 of Poland's total 250 bird species are found here. The visit was part of the carp days festival, an annual marketing, cultural and educational festival promoting local products and the Barycz Valley region as a place for quiet enjoyment. Again we could talk to students from school classes. As part of an educational project they were serving homemade traditional soup in the cold weather, and we also were able to discuss





with some key people like the leading ornithologist Prof. Witkowski of The University of Wrocław as well as the general and the local director of the large state fish farms (the latter having participated in an earlier GNF workshop at Lake Constance).



In the afternoon the workshop participants had a unique opportunity to become a part of an environmental project: everybody planted an oak contributing to the restoration and preservation of the original beauty of the region.

After returning from the field trip in the afternoon and reinforced by two more Polish experts from the Barycz Valley Foundation we came back to our map to integrate new information about actors and conflicts that we had heard (in fact the map had already been quite complete), and we then tried to formulate „views from outside“ towards the local situation.

Dorota Chmielowiec-Tyszko, the representative of BVF, presented the local initiative for cooperation. The development of such a strategy for the region was an idea of outsiders from Wrocław who from the very beginning involved local people to develop the strategy and got together to a Local Action Group. Later the opportunity to apply for the LEADER+ programme appeared. As the result of the first local strategy, the BVF was created. At the second stage in 2008-2009 an action plan was developed and in 2009 – the local fishery strategy. Nowadays, the local action group is working on an action plan for fishery.

In 2000 the development of management plans for Natura2000 started, but it was never been completed, because the regulation stipulating the necessity of the use of management plans was made later.

The LAG was started by NGOs, not by the government. The municipalities are convinced that the LAG can carry over all the tasks concerning management plans elaboration because it already has experience. But there is a lot of difficulties with financial issues. The government don't want to consider a concept of a “professional” NGO, that is why voluntary organisations are expected to be “poor” and on voluntary basis. People from neighbour regions in Barycz Valley expressed their strong wish to join in but it was not possible due to the dependance on the LEADER+ financial means and regulations (restricting the size of the LAGs).

Commenting the local situation, the guests made some remarks. So, Dr. Stottele stressed, that for regional authorities it is important to have a concrete person they will stay in contact with. Roger de Freitas mentioned the necessity to be “identifiable” as a group. These could be the options to strengthen the role of the LAG.



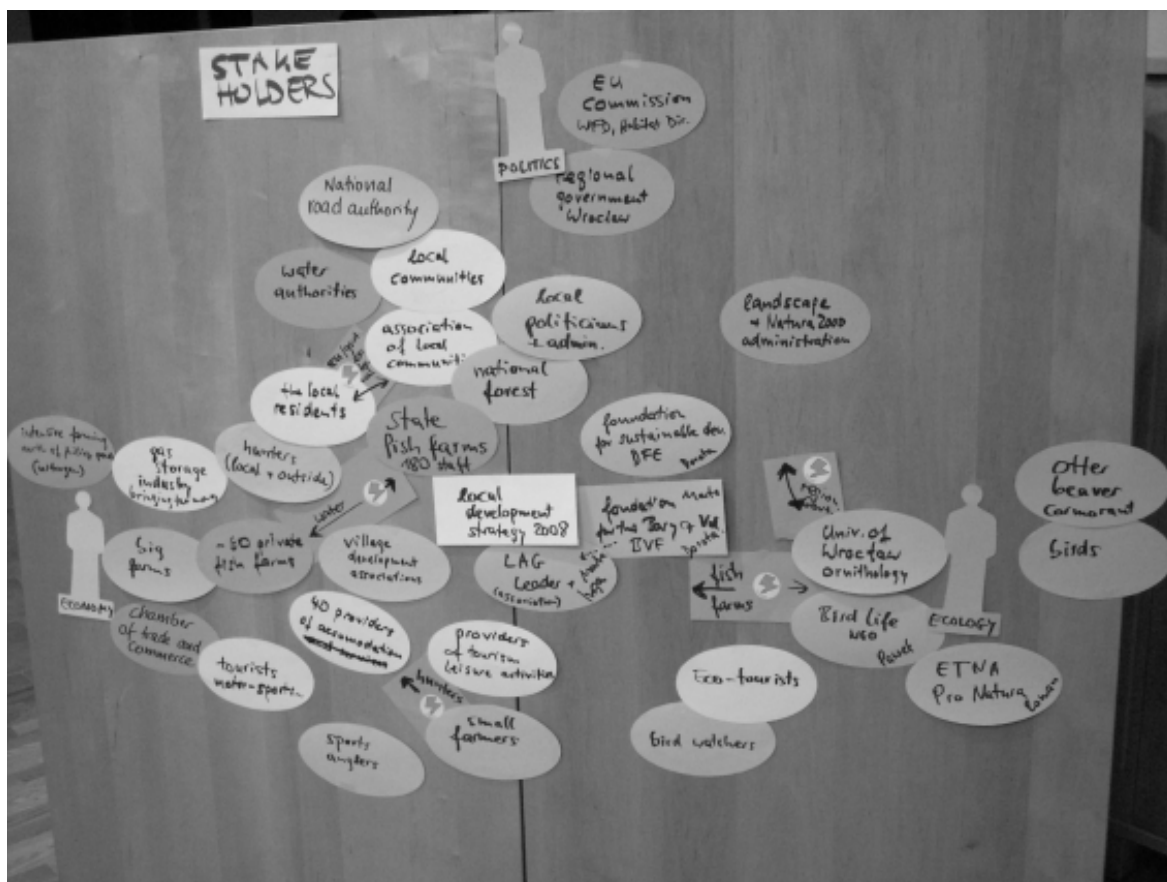
The guests from Romania and Estonia described the situation in respective countries, where NGOs are being operated by a small number of people in cooperation with other groups.

There is no much interest from the side of press. The idea was expressed to establish a special newspaper or another information channel and to finance it from the own funds. Furthermore, it is possible to use “social” media like internet, facebook, etc. In this way it is possible to look for active people. It should be clear that everybody can help: if young or old, normal or handicap.

The view from outside

The main feedback was as follows:

Environmental activists from Wrocław town had initiated and now are involved in the management of Barycz Valley Foundation and later of the LAG for the Barycz valley to help to preserve the tremendous ecological values of the Milicz ponds area that had been managed with very low input and low productivity by the state fish farms since socialist times. To this purpose they proposed a strategy of integrated sustainable development. Their help was welcomed by regional stakeholders because in their concept ecological preservation went well together with economical chances for local producers (including moral support for the state fish farm as important employer) and with a positive identity of the whole region. The informed and dynamic environmentalists from the city helped the locals to cope with the difficult post-socialist and EU accession situation by formulating an acceptable development strategy and by organising EU funding money. The state fish farm management, after some years of mistrust, also welcomed the support of the environmental NGOs because they helped them to defend their position against privatisation approaches of the central government.



The future however seems uncertain because the state fish farms as the main pillar of the region's ecology are economically not able to continue usual business in the long run. Heavy and accumulated needs of investment go along with a carp virus disease that is likely to reduce the fish harvest in the coming years to about half of the usual catch.

The NGO activists have been successful in stopping non-sustainable privatisation approaches, but how can they constructively contribute to solving fish pond management questions? Up to now they have participated and in fact taken the leadership in implementing a visionary development strategy for the region. A new, enlarged task would be to somehow take on responsibility in the management or even ownership structure of the state fish farms. The fish farms have produced high ecological values not by conviction but rather by traditional production techniques that are not „sustainable“ in economical terms and not adapted to future needs.

Actually the central government has decentralised the ownership of the fish ponds to the regional government and the regional government is looking for ways of a „soft“ privatisation that takes into account the ecological values of the ponds. Details of this





development are actually discussed and the local NGOs seem to have to play a responsible role in this discussion.

Political conclusions: a positioning game

We concluded the day with a political discussion that was actually foreseen for the third day (because several participants had to leave earlier). The „debate“ was done in the form of a positioning game: Representatives of the most important stakeholder groups were positioned in the room in a way that represented their relation towards each other. They then were asked about their feelings with regard to their position. In the status quo position it became visible that LAG, Barycz Valley Foundation, local mayors and local people were standing closely together, the state fish farm standing somewhere beside and watching the process from a distance, the regional rural development administration in Wrocław standing opposite in a rather demanding position, and the regional environmental administration sitting in a distance, not being involved in the LAG

Then the position of the representatives was successfully changed in order to simulate possible future developments of the situation. Firstly the environmental administration officer from the back was replaced by a more engaged employee and moved its position in front besides the rural development officer, more actively watching the scene. Being watched more closely by the environmental administration the LAG felt that there was need for more scientific support for its activities and called a scientist into the situation. As soon as the scientist turned up, he was called by the environmental administrator to rather come to his place instead of being closely linked to the LAG.



From time to time a representative from the EU commission came in from outside and disturbed the actors in their internal reflections by claiming a Natura 2000 management plan.

A new situation came up when the state fish farm representative was withdrawn from his position because he „never delivered any idea“ (becoming angry because he had always done his duties!). With the fish farm management position vacant, the LAG and behind it the Barycz Valley Foundation started to feel very uncomfortable because the guarantee for the ecological status quo had vanished, leaving a considerable vacuum in the setting. It was clear that at this moment the local actors had to become more active and were motivated to take on responsibility in thinking about a



suitable form of fish farm organisation. Local people asked for more educational activities to support and rise their interest in participating in the process.

We had to stop the game there but it revealed a quite detailed view on the specific situations and activity options of the different stakeholders at Milicz ponds region.

Broadening the NGO scope

One main conclusion was, as Roger de Freitas put it at the evaluation round on the last morning, that in order to enhance the local NGOs' participatory role in the situation it is crucial for them to broaden their „intellectual working base“ in integrating people from other businesses into their network, like business officials, regulators, bankers or agricultural representatives. These people could be informally invited to strategic meetings in order to contribute their knowledge, ideas and network relations. The existing NGOs could play a role of transmitters of the functional knowledge bringing the experts from outside into the region (e.g. organising workshops). In this way they would strengthen their position towards the local authorities.

The workshop was closed with a brief introduction of ideas for the next workshop in Slovenia on 21.-24.04.2010. Dr. Tillmann Stottele as well as a further person will visit the project sites in Slovenia in order to prepare the necessary framework for a successful workshop, taking into account experiences learned from the two previous workshops.