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Workshop on „Tourism and water resources in Gauja River Basin District”
In the frame of the project “European Network of Municipalities and Rivers -
ENMaR”

January 31, 2006, Sigulda

Report

Opening by A. Ruskule, Vides projekti, project expert

A. Ruskule pointed out to the goals of the meeting:

- To give an overview about the links between the tourism and water quality;
- To discuss potential trends in tourism development and possible impacts on water quality in Gauja river basin district (GRBD);
- To define objectives for the tourism sector from perspective of the Water Framework Directive (WFD);
- To discuss the role of municipalities and other stakeholders in balancing sustainable use of water resources and tourism development.

A. Ruskule introduced to the agenda and participants of the workshop (municipalities of GRBD, administrations of the Gauja National park and North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve, organisations dealing with promotion of tourism development and lecturers on tourism management from Vidzeme University College).

Short introduction to the Interreg IIIC project “European network of municipalities and rivers” (ENMaR): Ingrīda Brēmere, Vides projekti, project expert

I. Brēmere informed about the tasks of the ENMaR project and main topics covered by the project, related to the role of municipalities with regard to implementation of the WFD requirements. She introduced to the project partners from five river basins in Europe (Miño – in Spain, Mersey – UK, Weser – Germany, Emån – Sweden and Gauja River Basin District – in Latvia). Further I. Brēmere gave an overview on events carried out by the project so far.

General overview on relations between tourism and water quality *Anda Ruskule, Vides projekti*

A. Ruskule gave a short reflection on tourism sector and explained its relation to the water quality. She mentioned that most popular tourism and recreation activities usually are related to water ecosystems, thereby having direct effect on water quality (e.g. bathing, sailing, boating, angling, etc). Though also activities not directly related to the waters (e.g. city, rural and cultural tourism), might contribute significantly to the use of water services wherewith having impact on the water quality.

A. Ruskule described the main problems from the two perspectives - pressure from tourism activities to the water quality and impacts of low water quality on tourism development. Low environmental awareness among tourists as well as tourism service providers also was mentioned as

a significant problem. A. Ruskule concluded that good water quality is not only the objective of the WFD, but also a precondition for sustainable tourism development.

Reflection of the tourism pressure in the report of Latvian Environmental, Geological and Geomorphological Agency (LEGMA) „Characterization of the river basin districts. Evaluation of the antropogenic pressure on groundwaters and surface waters. Economic analysis”, Sigita Šulca, LEGMA, River basin management unit

S. Šulca introduced to the process of implementation of the WFD in Latvia, results achieved so far and situation at the GRBD. She informed about the protected areas, bathing places and waters important for fish protection defined at the GRBD. She gave an overview on pressure and impact analysis carried out by the LEGMA, indicating the main point sources of pollution as well as pressure from diffuse sources (agriculture and forestry) and morphological modifications. S. Šulca informed about the results of risk assessment for water objects at the GRBD. As the main risk here is defined pollution from point source – for 8 river water objects and 7 lake water objects it is already known that water quality objectives will not be achieved by 2015. With regard to diffuse pollution sources it is expected that most of the water objects will achieve the water quality objectives or there is insufficient information to estimate the risk. Tourism sector is not defined as significant source of pressure in the report, however S. Šulca admitted, that the real pressure from the tourism might be underestimated, since impact on water resources and quality can not be distinguished from the general statistics.

S. Šulca explained the economic analysis of the water consumption, which shall be carried out in parallel to the assessment of the trends in the water consumption. Economic analysis includes assessment of cost recovery (i.e. realisation of the „polluter/user pay” principle and setting the incentive price policy, to promote rational use of water resources) and cost effectiveness analysis of the management measures.

S. Šulca listed the potential benefits and losses related to the tourism development and its impacts on the water quality. There are estimations that number of tourists in Latvia could increase 3 times by 2015. The main benefits from the tourism development are related to increase of added value from the expenditures of tourists as well as recreational value of water objects, whereas losses refers to the deterioration of the water quality and related costs for environmental damage. According to the WFD, if the cost-benefit analysis shows that benefits significantly exceed the costs, then development of the sector can continue by applying less strict quality criteria. However, with regard to tourism it is important to remember, that possible losses, in case when deterioration of the water quality reaches the critical level, will exclude all expected benefits.

Questions and discussion

- The main information sources about pollution of the water objects are reports from enterprises on water consumption and discharges (Form 2-water), data from monitoring programmes, as well as survey of water service enterprises planned for 2006.
- Assessment on pressure from the tourism sector was recognised as a big problem. So far information has been obtained from the water use permits, statistical data and municipality development plans. In order to get an objective assessment of the tourism pressure on the water quality, it would be necessary to interview all the tourism service providers (e.g. hotels, guest houses, etc.) about the following questions:
 - What is the number of tourists visiting the places during one season;
 - Where and how much water is abstracted for providing tourism service;
 - Where the waste water is discharged and is it treated;
 - Are there water motorbikes or motorboats used;
 - Are there fishponds, etc.?
- It is not expected that forecasted development of the tourism sector would result in such pressure on the water quality, which could become comparable, for example, to the pressure

form agriculture. However, problems might be expected in some intensively used tourism destinations.

- Designation of bathing places was recognised by participants as a significant problem. According to the WFD bathing places are classified as protected areas falling under strictly defined environmental quality criteria. In future when municipalities will have to implement the river basin management programmes, these quality criteria might significantly increase the costs.
- As one of the potential sources of pressure was pointed out the increasing use of water motorbikes and motorboats. Up to now LEGMA has not carried out special assessment on impacts of such activities, but potential pressure is evaluated through questioning of spatial planners.
- As the most essential point sources of pollution were mentioned leakages from storage places of manure and discharges from the waste water treatment plants.

Guidelines and activities carried out to minimise the pressure from tourism in Salaca river basin *Valērijs Seilis, Director of the North Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve (NVBR)*

V. Seilis told about the most important water objects and related tourism activities in the NVBR as well as the main problems and actions carried out by the administration of the NVBR to minimise the tourism pressure. As the most essential instruments were mentioned different planning documents – management plans for protected areas, spatial development plans of the local municipalities as well as Salaca river basin management plan, being currently elaborated as a pilot project. Administration of the NVBR takes active role in the development of these documents and checks that the planned development activities are not contradicting to the environmental requirements. Administration of the NVBR also gives its adjudgment on tourism infrastructure plans, carries out inspection, participates in research and national monitoring programme, develops integrated monitoring programme for the NVBR as well as initiates public monitoring programme. V. Seilis also gave an overview on projects promoting sustainable development in which administration of the NVBR takes part.

V. Seilis introduced to the guidelines for the tourism development in the Salaca River valley, developed within the frame of UNDP/GEF financed project, and taken into account when developing management plans for the Salaca River Valley. The guidelines give recommendations for increase of administrative capacity in the Salaca River Valley, marketing development of the tourism offer as well as quality improvement of the tourism services and infrastructure. The guidelines also include the quality criteria or minimum requirements for setting up of the camping sites to minimise pressure on environment as well as to ensure adequate European level service.

Questions and discussion

Integration of different planning documents (spatial plans, nature management plans, expected river basin management plans):

- The system of planning in Latvia in general is well established, by setting clear criteria for each of the planning documents, however, integrity of the different plans is not ensured. One of the major obstacles are different deadlines – spatial development plans of municipalities have to be finalised by 2006, while river basin management plans are expected to be ready by 2009. Consequently there will be needed significant amendments to all spatial planning documents in order to integrate management actions foreseen in the river basin management plans.
- So far connection between river basin management plans and nature management plans also have not been functioning - existing methodology for nature management plans does not foresee integration of the water quality aspects.

Main results of the Gauja National Park (GNP) project „Impacts of tourism on environment and landscape” *Juris Smaļinskis, author of the study, Vidzeme University College*

J. Smaļinskis introduced to the project, financed by the Latvian Environmental Protection Fund, which included study about impacts of tourism near the campsites at the GNP, as well as development of the methodology for identification of tourism impacts. There has been carried out also a survey of tourists and expedition on the River Gauja to inventorize the campsites and their surroundings starting from Valmiera till Murjāņi. In total there has been registered 46 types of impacts caused by tourism and elaborated indicators for detection of these impacts. Erosion of the river banks, tramping, extinction of rear and protected species or destruction of their habitats, damaging of sandstone outcrops and caves, disturbance effect, etc. were pointed out as the most essential impacts. The project has also developed proposals on how to minimise the tourism pressure.

J. Smaļinskis admitted, that even the most appropriate network of the campsites in Latvia so far has been developed on the banks of the River Gauja, but, taking into account expected increase of tourism, increase of the capacity of existing campsites as well as setting up of new ones shall be considered. J. Smaļinskis positively evaluated the initiative of the GNP administration to start such project, however it requires for continuation - regular collection of statistics about water tourism and monitoring of its impacts, as well as undertaking complex approach in limitation of the negative impacts from tourism.

Questions and discussion

- Participants of the seminar admitted that Latvia at the moment is not ready for the expected increase of tourism – there is insufficient social, economic as well as environmental capacity.
- Principles of sustainability are not taken into account neither in the planning process nor implementation of the planning documents.
- Tourism (including nature based tourism) always will have some kind of impact on environment, however the pressure can be reduced by providing sufficient infrastructure, as well as by incorporating balanced development principles in the planning documents.
- The most important criteria for evaluation of the tourism pressure on environment should be defined. Such studies, based on experience and findings of the GNP project, are planned to be continued in the Salaca River Basin.

Discussion:

Objectives for the tourism sector from perspective of WFD

- How to limit the negative impacts on the water quality?
 - Prognosis on the dynamics of tourism development shall be made and ecological capacity of the sites frequently visited by tourists shall be assessed, to avoid overexploitation of the ecosystems. Different studies are available on assessment of ecological capacity, however the existing methodologies shall be adapted to Latvian situation (individual approach might be needed for each site of concern). For assessment of tourism impacts also the non-organised tourism activities shall be taken into account and mechanisms on how to control or limit such activities have to be elaborated.
 - One of approaches on how to regulate the tourism intensity could be popularisation of less known tourism destinations, thereby directing tourists away from the „hot spots”.
 - Vulnerable nature objects of very high nature conservation value are not recommended to be included in the tourism guides and popular nature trails.
- How to introduce the cost recovery principle (“polluter/user pays”)?
 - So far the water consumption fees have been applied as the only method, but in future this principle has to be incorporated in the price of the tourism services. Tourists will have to

pay also for maintenance of the tourism infrastructure and collection of the waste. One of options is to introduce licences for boating in the rivers or tickets for visiting the particular nature objects or nature trails. This mechanism partly has been applied in Salaca few years ago.

- Since the river basin management plans are adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers, implementation of activities foreseen in these plans will be binding. Therefore solutions have to be found on how to finance the implementation of these activities.

Present situation in the GRBD and trends regarding tourism development and its impacts on the water quality:

- Development of the ports is foreseen in the nearest future, which will promote also development of the yachting tourism. It is important to learn from other countries' experiences, where yachting is already very popular, about impacts of such activities on the water quality, and solutions on how to deal with this problem.
- Licensed angling and poaching might be serious pressure to the fish resources and water quality in the Salaca River, even it is not evaluated as such in the Salaca River Basin management plan (evaluation is based only on amount of sold fishing licenses, therefore it is not really reflecting the real situation). The pressure for angling on the fish resources as well as river bank habitats is also pointed out in the nature management plans of the Salaca River Valley.
- Too intensive tourism might disturb usual life style of the local communities, therefore they are not always interested in popularisation of the tourism objects and developing of the tourism services.
- The existing capacity of the tourism infrastructure (number of hotels, road condition, etc.) is not ready for huge numbers of visitors, therefore it is unlikely that prognosis on the tripling of the number of tourists by 2015 might come true. However, the importance of tourism development shall not be underestimated (currently tourism in Latvia makes 2 % of GDP, while agriculture – 4%).

Role of municipalities and other stakeholders in balancing sustainable water management and tourism development.

- River basin management plans: local authorities develop action programmes and define costs for implementation of the actions. Requirements for tourism infrastructure shall be integrated in these programmes.
- Spatial planning carried out by local authorities is one of the most important instruments for balancing tourism development and environmental protection requirements.
- Binding regulations of municipalities can regulate tourism pressure by limiting number of visitors or setting seasonal limitations for visiting particular nature objects, and defining requirements for the use of bathing places and campsites, etc. As a positive example was mentioned initiative of the municipalities along the Salaca to develop harmonised municipality regulations for visiting the nature park “Salaca River valley”.
- Tourism development strategies developed so far mainly have been focusing on how to attract as much as possible tourists to the particular area and neglecting environmental protection aspects. As positive exception was mentioned tourism development strategy for Sigulda – during its elaboration consultations with administration of GNP were carried out.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Ø So far in Latvia insufficient attention has been paid to the potential negative impacts from the tourism sector on environment and water quality, mainly focusing on economic aspects and increase of tourism. Therefore this seminar can be evaluated as a positive initiative for raising the awareness and starting discussions about this topic.
- Ø Good water quality is not only objective of the WFD, but also the precondition for successful tourism development. Therefore, when carrying out cost-benefit analysis of the tourism sector, it is important to remember, that expected loses, in case when the

deterioration of water quality reaches the critical level, might exclude all the expected benefits.

- Ø In River Basin Characterisation Report prepared by LEGMA tourism sector has not been assessed as an important source of pressure. However, at the moment there is not sufficient information available, to provide objective evaluation of the impacts of tourism on water quality.
- Ø Tourism pressure on environment is not so much depending on the number of tourists, but rather on the lack of sufficient infrastructure, as well as concentration of tourists at the most popular places.
- Ø Existing capacity of the tourism infrastructure in Latvia is not sufficient for expected increase in the number of tourists. Although the lack of infrastructure might be also limiting factor for the increase of tourism.
- Ø It is not expected that as a result of the foreseen development of the tourism sector, its overall pressure on water quality, could become comparable, for example, to the pressure from agriculture. However, problems might be expected in some intensively visited tourism destinations.
- Ø The main instruments to regulate the pressure from tourism are different planning documents – spatial development plans, nature management plans, river basin management plans, as well as tourism development strategies. It is important to incorporate sustainability principles in such documents, as well as to ensure their integrity. As one of the obstacles can be different deadlines for submission of these planning documents.
- Ø To follow the requirements of the WFD and implement the “user pays” principle, the prices for tourism services should include costs for use of water resources as well as maintenance of tourism infrastructure.

Report by Anda Ruskule