

**Summary of BEN project's roundtable „Cooperation with government institutions in border regions”
08.05. 2006, Tallinn**

Kalli Klement

Opening and welcome address. Purpose of the roundtable is to give an overview of activities within BEN project and make plans on how to move on with work.

Katri-Liis Lepik

She spoke about concrete goals and subjects of the roundtable that need to be discussed.

She pointed out that a concrete goal of a roundtable is to discuss how to improve exchange of information between different interest groups and cooperation between cross-border organisations with government institutions. Goal is to find effective solutions for joint information exchange concerning cross-border activities and inclusion of CBC organisations in planning of regional development in border regions. BEN project itself is a good example about promoting cooperation and information exchange. At the same time every BEN partner is a member in different networks. How to disseminate more widely this information coming from different sources?

Persons who are responsible for implementation of Interreg programme have been among others also invited to the roundtable meeting because cross-border activities are organized mainly through that programme and they should be aware of what are the wishes and problems of euroregions. Euroregions would also like to participate in the planning process, although organizing this is difficult – memberships and structures and also strategies and goals of euroregions are different. Due to Estonia's specific administrative structure in most cross-border cooperation organizations municipalities and county governments together are representatives of regions. Despite the fact that representatives of the state are usually represented in Estonian euroregions, it is necessary to discuss about mutual exchange of information and its forms with government institutions. Cross-border organizations with Estonian partners are often filling the gaps on subjects that other regional development stakeholders are not dealing with. For example B7 is an advocate for getting in the legislation on regional policy special attention to islands that are economically permanently disadvantaged. The main activity of Helsinki-Tallinn Euregio is mediating cooperation between local governments, universities and entrepreneurs and promoting networks because these are activities that other institutions in county and cross-border level are not dealing with. During all BEN project seminars, roundtables and conferences recommendations concerning this subject will be created. What to do with these recommendations and how to disseminate them to the target groups?

Target groups have been so far divided into three groups: euroregions themselves, BEN network as a whole and government institutions on domestic and EU level. BEN project's action plan stipulates creating of euroregions strategy for Baltic Sea Region which would be a guideline for euroregions activities until the year 2015. The strategy should take into consideration all recommendations made. In the last

steering committee meeting in Hiiumaa also a strategy working group was formed. As a leader of the working group, Katri-Liis wishes to get all observations and wishes concerning what that strategy should contain.

Gulnara Roll

The project's importance for Peipsi Center for Transboundary Cooperation is mainly creating of a domestic network and after that participation in the international network.

Recommendations from first roundtable (Tartu, 19.10.2005):

- Support cooperation and meetings between entrepreneurs. Companies in border regions (Estonia-Russia) are usually small and they do not have resources to improve cooperation.
- Science and innovation cooperation. Border regions are not well developed and weak, they do not have possibilities to hire good specialists. Cooperation with universities – students would work in border regions. At the moment there is cooperation only in one sector. It is essential to have cooperation between different sectors, for example local government + university + students + entrepreneurs.
- To create fund of small endowment fund. Euro projects are beyond the reach for small organisations.
- Centralized information exchange. There is a BEN newsletter that is compiled by Peipsi CTC. How disseminate it more widely?
- Estonian domestic website where would be a discussion forum and would be information about cross-border cooperation.
- Communication with government institutions. Development cooperation roundtables are good example – it collocates NGOs and private persons who are interested in development cooperation and communicates often with development cooperation department of Ministry of Foreign affairs. Communication of such kind is more effective than when every organization separately would turn to them with their questions and suggestions.
- More cooperation with local governments. They usually carry out previously mentioned programmes and suggestions. For example there could Peipsi development programme like there is one in Setumaa. There are lots of projects in that region but it is not clear are we moving to same direction.
- Question about NGO's participation in Interreg project – to make expenditures before receiving payments are members of NGO boards often forced to loan funds at their own responsibility. Finding co-financing funds is difficult.

Peipsi CTC activities in BEN project

- Creating CBC database. Database will be available in Peipsi CTC and BEN project website. It will contain information about cross-border cooperation organizations, projects, programmes etc. Everybody can add and update information.
- Organizing cross-border cooperation summer school
- Compilation and dissemination of information letter

Suggestions for further discussion

- Creating of non-formal roundtable using experiences from Development cooperation roundtable
- How to include to the decision making process smaller local governments and organisations.
- Spatial planning – how to be involved?

Discussion

Heli Kirikal:

Planning – in case of planning is the final instance Ministry of the Interior, it is carried out by local government. A year ago Ministry of the Interior initiated new planning period that will last for several years. This process is led by county governments. If third sector wishes to participate in this process it must develop more active cooperation with county governments.

Process is complicated thus would be training about the subject very actual.

Andrei Katsuba: How to raise administrative capability of smaller NGOs, so that also them could carry out larger projects?

Gulnara Roll: There is a support for NGOs through County Development Centers – trainings are arranged, also are available consultations for concrete project ideas.

Reet Kokovkin: In last BEN steering committee meeting the same subject was discussed. Addition to NGOs also smaller local governments cannot participate in projects because there are no funds that could be freeze for years. BEN project could make suggestion to change financing system. For example to make advance payments to organisations

There is a Local initiative programme for small local governments but it is only ment for domestic use. A programme for cross-border cooperation is needed.

Katri-Liis Lepik: Planning of Interreg programme should be coordinated according to development plans of counties not in the way that Varsinais-Soome Liitto declares arbitrarily competition of ideas and based on that a new additional project application period is opened.

Helsinki-Tallinn Euregio plans spatial planning seminar in autumn– through networks gather together physical and strategic planning officials in Uusimaa, Harjumaa and Stockholm region to share experiences and to find common subjects. Seminar could be widened involving other BEN partners.

Ago Kokser: How to take into consideration private sector? Private sector is unpredictable, it is hard to predict which direction this sector wants to move.

Laine Valkama: Planning is long and complicated process where all parties must be heard and this helps to predict future trends.

Katri-Liis Lepik

Innovation seminar (Tallinn, 8-9.12.2005).

Recommendations made for euro regions, to BEN network and government institutions.

- Additionally to citizens to direct activities also to attract politicians, entrepreneurs. Local government + other public sector + universities + private sector.
- Task of border regions should be participating in development of support means of innovation and national innovation politics.
- Happenings of future visions. Promoting possibilities of education. Cross-border information exchange.
- Moving forward from Baltic Sea region and thinking of finding Asian partners (helping entrepreneurs entering Asian market)
- Checking legal obstacles and possibilities to remove them.
- To collect and disseminate studies made about border regions in universities.
- Special attention is needed in twin-cities (Valga-Valka, Helsinki-Tallinn?)

Creating a brand – it was discussed how to sell Baltic Sea euro region as a unified brand.

New project ideas: databases, comparing innovation policies in different countries, cooperation conference for third sector to share experiences about cooperation, twin cities (special financing possibilities)

Reet Kokovkin

B7 introduction (website).

Overview about programme of conference held in Hiiumaa (26-28.04.2006). Spokespersons from Estonia were Paul-Eerik Rummo, Katrin Saks, Kertu Kaera, Raul Rebane. Subject was communication using examples from Pomerania, Southern-Karelia, Öresundi and B7.

Krista Kampus

Considers proposals from BEN project practical and worth of consideration.

Sectoral involvement should be every ministries administrative field but general cross-border cooperation involvement is subject of Ministry of Interior. At the moment is at the preparation stage a website with the information about the following budget period planning and programmes.

Euro regions – to disseminate this subject exists on this website, but because at the moment everybody are engaged with next budget period this subject is will be delayed.

Euro regions in legislation – Are NGO and Foundation laws sufficient or do we need changes in legislation that would regulate better work of euro regions?

Forming euro region groups (Draft of bill from European Parliament and Council “Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a European grouping of cross-border cooperation (EGCC)”) – if there is a demand of forming a group must all participating countries accept this, then is possibility for intervention by the state. Problems may appear in case of Pskov-Livonia euro region where Russia is involved.

State funding in near future has not been foreseen. Ministry of Interior has once given support for euro regions, but so far one euro region has not used it.

Katri-Liis Lepik: Auditing has become over bureaucratic and takes most of the time – there is little time for actual work. Constantly there are new orders and regulations that are implemented retroactively. For example rooms used in project must be evaluated by real-estate company and also concerning previous year which bring additional costs. Auditing first period of BEN project a lot of costs were considered not applicable.

Krista Kampus: There are problems with auditing due to lack of staff. In near future there will be an additional employee.

Difficult is to link account of charges with concrete activities. Role of the auditor is to check and traces. Final decision about applicable expenditures is made according to auditors subjective opinion.

Because there are doubts with many projects about presenting account of charges that are connected to the project, auditing requirements are more difficult. Because in project plans are described work packages then it is difficult to link them to concrete activities and application forms must be filled more accurately.

EU regulation about control is very general.

Estonia has decided to carry out 100% control. Structure of the Ministry of Interior will be changed -> 3 bureaus, one of them will be for Interreg auditing.

Reet Kokovkin: If activities are too specifically described it is impossible to carry out activities in a flexible manner. Preparation time for projects is so long that it is impossible to predict how situations change for the time project starts. There should be more space for interpretations of activities and changes.

Ago Kokser: Problems will arise with co-financing resources of the project in budget of local government. If project funds will not be there by the end of fiscal year, finances must be transferred to next year. Changing financial schemes are needed.

Krista Kampus

“Future opportunities in border-region cooperation with government institutions”

Involvement and cooperation is necessary because these programmes are meant for those local border regions and governments.

Border regions should examine more accurately all regulations and laws that are concerning their regions. States position is not always the same as region's, they should be unified time-to-time.

More should be influenced work of European Commission, sometimes more influence can have specific region than country.

Overview of Interreg project period planning (see slides).

Total 5 programmes:

- 3 Cross-border cooperation programmes

Estonia - Latvia

Estonia - Finland -Sweden – Latvia (“Central Baltic”)

Estonia - Russia

- Baltic Sea region cooperation programme (between states)

- Cooperation programme between regions covering whole Europe (development and science cooperation networks etc)

In case of Estonia-Latvia-Russia cooperation lobby by Ministry of Interior has been directed to that Central-Estonia would be applicable to enable Harjumaa to be near region and cooperation with St. Petersburg would be possible.

Estonia has been against only bilateral projects because in that situation mainly member states will receive money. Co-financing part in Central Baltic programme is open, whether 85% or 75% comes from ERDF. There is no co-financing from Ministry of Interior.

3 cross-border cooperation sub programmes

- Estonia and Southern-Finland (secretariat in Tallinna?)

East-Virumaa, West-Virumaa, Harju, Rapla, Järva, Lääne, Saare, Hiiu, Pärnu

- Developing islands (secretariat in Ahvenamaa?)

Harju, Lääne, Pärnu, Hiiu, Saare, West-Virumaa

- Thematic (secretariat in Sweden?)

East-Virumaa, West-Virumaa, Harju, Rapla, Järva, Lääne, Saare, Hiiu, Pärnu

Dividing will be so that first 2 will get 40% money each and thematic 20%. A joint programming committee and 4 working groups will be formed.

Thematic sub programme subjects have been suggested:

Polycentrism (Estonia does not favor)

Sea subjects

Innovation as a horizontal subject

Innovation: science and development centers and knowledge transmission to business (Estonia favors)

Baltic Sea region programme subjects:

Environment (Estonia favors)

Economical development (development corridors, Via Hanseatica, Via Baltica, tourism)

Cooperation programme between regions covering Europe

Frame programme for supporting cooperation networks between cities and developing experience in aspects of urban planning (based on URBACT)

This programme where lobby from Union of Towns and Brussels office is needed if the aim is to involve also towns with under 100 000 inhabitants would be applicable within the programme.

Tiiu Viljasaar

BEN project should have better dissemination to the public.

Unified information about Estonian partners is hard to find. Should it be gathered together to somewhere (and where)?

Katri-Liis Lepik: Ben project website has all information about project, but when BEN ends, who will administer it? Same discussion was in Hiiumaa. It would be useful if there would be fast accessible information, who are BEN partners members and short description. Then must this information also be updated but it is hard to find this information partner-by-partner from their websites and change of information is the basis of BEN network.

Kertu Kaera

Task is to inform people and media about the activities of European Commission and also informing Commission about discussions in Estonia about subjects and opinions.

Subject of innovation is connected to Lisbon strategy what is led by Commission and which is it's main priority. Cooperation in this field is very good with Finland and Sweden because they are leading countries in this field.

Change of information would work most effectively through leading organizations. Euro regions do not possess enough political power. It is possible to cooperate with AEBR.

Elo Tuppi: Recommendation for the future – if such happenings are planned in future should be more clearly define what officials can expect and what is the use and their role. At the moment some participants don't have a clear view about the goal of this event.

Krista Kampus

Personal opinion - cross-border cooperation programme (A) should be moved from central government to regions. Government should not say what kind of projects regions do together. Involvement with states priorities still exist, programme documents from Ministry of Interior will be followed.

Reet Kokovkin: Such experience exists, it has worked - regional programme (islands programme) – at local level a commission was formed that decided about funding of projects.

Katri-Liis Lepik

Summing up – we need more effective exchange of information. Continuing BEN network future activity we could use experiences of Development Cooperation Roundtable and cooperate as virtual roundtable and to create similar info list like exlinea.org. Euregio will search for possibilities to arrange seminar about spatial planning in autumn 2006 within BEN project as additional activity. Important is co-financing subject. It is necessary that NGOs could get loans for co-financing.

It is necessary to arrange seminar/meeting with auditors and project accountants and other personnel in Ministry of Interior to discuss about problems. Auditors role should be also preventive, to explain organizations how to organize reporting so that auditor would have better overview.

More proactive activities are needed -> trainings, information days.

Within the Baltic Sea region programme working group it would suitable place to discuss how BEN cooperation could continue next programme.

Please send all suggestions and observations concerning BEN future strategy to lepik@euregio-heltal.org

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