

Baltic 21 Action Programme

External assessment of Baltic 21

Summary of the final report

27th April 2009

Forword

This external and independent assessment of the Baltic 21 cooperation from 1997 until 2008 focusing on the period from 2004 to 2008 is prepared of Morten Kvistgaard, Evaluators.EU ApS (Copenhagen, Denmark) on request of the Baltic 21 Senior Officials Group Bureau. The assessment is accomplished in the period from 21st January 2009 till 19th of March 2009 and finally presented at the 30th SOG meeting in Tallinn on the 23rd April 2009.

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On top of the valuable inputs my own experiences and judgments play of course a significant role in the assessment. In spite of the good assistance received, the report might still include mistakes and misinterpretations, and if this is the case, these are of course only my responsibility.

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List of abbreviations

BASREC:	Baltic Sea Region Energy Co-operation
BSR:	Baltic Sea Region
BUP:	Baltic University Programme
CBSS:	Cooperation of Baltic Sea States
CSO:	Committee of Senior Officials
DK:	Denmark
E:	Estonia
EC:	European Commission
EIA:	Environmental Impact Assessment
ESOG:	Environmental Senior Officials Group
EU:	European Union
F:	Finland
G:	Germany
HELCOM:	Helsinki Commission
I:	Iceland
LHP:	Lighthouse project
LT:	Lithuania
LV:	Latvia
MoE:	Ministry of Environment
MoFA:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
N;	Norway
NCM:	Nordic Council of Ministers
NEFCO:	Nordic Environment Finance Corporation
NGO:	Non Governmental Organizations
P:	Poland
R:	Russia
R&D:	Research and development
S:	Sweden
SD:	Sustainable Development
SEA:	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SOG:	Senior Officials Group
SWOT:	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
ToR:	Terms of Reference
UBC:	Union of Baltic Cities
UN:	United Nations
VASAB:	Vision and strategies around the Baltic Sea 2010
WWF:	World Wide Fund

Executive summary

The Baltic 21 Action Programme was initiated in 1996 and adopted by the 7th CBSS session in June 1998 (Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the Baltic Sea Region). The overall mission of Baltic 21 are to contribute advancing the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region by coordinating goals and activities, and by servicing as a forum for cooperation across borders and between stakeholder groups. After 10 years it is decided to carry out an assessment of the Baltic 21 Action Programme focusing on the *future content and organization* of the Baltic 21 intervention. The assessment was carried out both through and internal self-evaluation and an external assessment. This report presents the findings and conclusions as well as recommendations exclusively from the external assessment.

Conclusions

Overall successes and shortcomings of Baltic 21

From the launch, the cooperation has been based on the Baltic 21 Action Programme from 1998 defining the core activities of the cooperation in terms of sector activities and so-called joint actions.

The most referred successes of the cooperation have been the *network building* process and the *multi stakeholder involvement at the project level*, in particularly in the first period of the cooperation from 1998 to 2004. After 2004 and the enlargement of the EU, multi stakeholder involvement is getting more common and the established networks are getting more and more independent and sustainable, not needing any permanent facilitator making them work.

The *sector activities* have demonstrated big variations in performances. Some sectors have been rather successful. They have been active through the whole period (Agriculture, Education, Forests, Tourism and Industry to a lesser extent) and have delivered input to the policy making processes nationally and internationally, while others have had limited success such as Transport and Fisheries in the last few years. Currently, transport issues are only dealt within the BUSTRIP project and Fisheries are within the mandate of the EU Commission and is as such out of the Baltic 21 cooperation. Two sectors have been “transferred” to other organizations, Spatial Planning to VASAB and Energy to BASREC.

The so-called *joint actions* show also big variations in performance. Some of them were only active in the beginning of the period, while other lasted longer and were transferred to different Sectors or to the Baltic 21 Secretariat. From 2004 Baltic 21 has focused more on cross-sectoral issues and project development. In 2007 four ad hoc Working Groups were set up to strengthen this work and some of the active sectors and Joint Actions did also take part in these working groups and did play an important role in the successful project preparation process with 4 projects approved out of five applications to the EU BSR Programme 2007-2013.

The strategic guidelines from 2004 mark a new orientation towards project development, and in this sense the successes of the new EU funded projects as well as Interreg funded projects previously document the success of this approach. The project orientation based on a cross sectoral and integrated approach is generally considered a strength of Baltic 21 generating good results

contributing to the fulfillment of the Baltic 21 overall objectives of stimulating sustainable development in the BSR. On the other hand, the project orientation and the associated down scaling of the Sector activities did also make it difficult for the Baltic 21 cooperation to ensure a ministerial policy and activity coordination across the countries in the region, which consequently did make the fulfillment of the original vision with difficult to fulfill.

Relevance of the Baltic 21 for sustainable development

The relevance of Baltic 21 has diminished over the years and in particularly after the EU enlargement in 2004. During the period from 1998 to 2004, the Baltic 21 cooperation did facilitate networking and stakeholder involvement, as well as transfer of political and administrative practices from old EU member states to the accession countries. The relevance was high and the role appreciated of the countries. From 2004 and to 2008 the main effort of the countries (primary the new EU member states) has been targeted the EU and the requirements for implementation of new regulation and legislation in compliance with the *acquis*, and coordination of national policies and interventions has now primarily an EU origin.

Furthermore sustainable development is no longer an unknown policy area, but is more or less being integrated into EU legislation and policy implementation. Consequently, the relevance is diminishing for Baltic 21 as a regional cooperation stimulating sustainable development parallel to other organizations tied up on binding political mandates (EU, UN, HELCOM, NCM).

Key strategic areas of Baltic 21

One of the strengths of the Baltic 21 cooperation is the *cross sectoral* and *integrated* approach, where environmental, economic and social dimensions are included. Although emphasis has been on the environmental dimension, positive experiences from the other two dimensions are also available in the project portfolio.

The key strategic areas for the Baltic 21 in the next period must combine the sectoral strengths proven so far with the cross cutting and integrated approach. The combination of a few strong sectors with the cross cutting and integrated approach is important for success, also in terms of ensuring ministerial coordination. Other organizations will have sectoral expertise and will also build up competences in order to be able to comply with requirements regarding involvements of environmental, economic and social dimensions in project applications under EU programmes, for example. A focused effort can math this challenge. The obvious sectors to keep operating are agriculture, education, forests, tourism and industry while the most obvious thematic areas are the themes included in the new four EU projects, including bio-energy promotion, sustainable innovation, balanced urban and rural development and eco-regions.

Relevance and performance of the organizational set-up

The current organizational set-up is not feasible in the future. It is not well functioning, and it is not considered relevant anymore of the majority of countries due to the EU orientation of the majority of the countries in the region.

One major problem is lack of a binding political mandate and a corresponding lack of commitment, participation and payments from a few of the member countries. A stronger and binding political mandate must be ensured, if the cooperation shall be continued.

Another major weakness is that the organization does not ensure that the policy-project-policy loop works sufficiently well. Even though that results and impacts from projects with Baltic 21 involvement are recorded from the projects, and that they have been presented at the SOG meetings, there is no appropriate dissemination of results from projects to the SOG and further upwards to the national ministerial levels. Furthermore there is no transfer of political and administrative problems and needs from the national ministries through the SOG down to the operational project level. One reason to this weakness is the lack of binding, non-voluntary political mandate. Another one is lacking or weak linkages between the tasks and the work responsibilities in the line ministries on the one hand and the content of the various projects on the other hand. Many countries do not participate in the projects due to the fact that the project content is not considered relevant in the light of other duties and responsibilities of the ministries in question. A better linkage between practical political and administrative work in the ministries and project content is asked for together with improved mechanisms for transfer of political needs and demands downwards and project results upwards.

The SWOT analysis presented makes it clear, that the Baltic 21 organization must have a stronger binding political mandate in order to survive, either through a merger with CBSS or another organization (HELCOM). Furthermore the organization must improve the facilitation of the communication between the political level and the operational in order to make the policy-project-policy loop work, either through the SOG or through the selected sectors. From the perspective of content and work model, the SWOT analysis shows that the benefits and the value added of the integrated and cross sectoral approach must be documented better than so far demonstrated, and a focused effort on selected sectors and themes, including non-environmental sectors, combined with innovative dissemination mechanisms might be the way ahead.

Recommendations

Organization

It is recommended on *the short term* to work for a merger of Baltic 21 into CBSS, either in a full model or in a light model (see model 3), in order to make CBSS take advantage of the Baltic 21 experiences and competences in the implementation of the reform of the CBSS with environment (sustainability) as a priority area and project work as a new work model.

In order to ensure *long term sustainability* of the cooperation it is instead recommended to transfer the Baltic 21 into HELCOM, where the binding political mandate is clear, where the organizational set-up is in place, and where policy making is in direct compliance with and linked to EU and UN policies, see model 4.

Content of the cooperation

The content of the future work is independent of the organizational structure and shall be thematic in line with the new Lighthouse projects approved of the EU BSR 2007-2013 programme, and shall

be based on a few strong sectors. The approach shall be cross sectoral (thematic) and shall be holistic and integrated with renewed emphasis on all three pillars of the sustainability concept.

Work model

Also the work model is independent of the organizational choice made. The dominant work model shall be project oriented, and the secretariat shall assist in project development and implementation, where ever relevant for the overall objective of the cooperation.

Cooperation shall continue with the active sectors, and the multi stakeholder approach shall be pursued on project level. Mechanisms for an effective transfer of project demands to the operational project level and the transfer of project results to the political and administrative level shall be ensured, both organizational and in the project design.

Next steps

It is recommended to take a decision on choice of future organizational model in order for the relevant other organizations (for example CBSS) to be able to take a fast decision during the summer (June) 2009, making the 2010 a new start for the Baltic 21 cooperation.

Choices of content and of work model can be taken at a later stage, and are not needed now in order to find a solution on the organizational question.