

# mainstream



*mainstream is a newsletter for partners of the INTERREG III-C Network  
'Flood Awareness and Prevention Policy in border areas'.*



## Fourth FLAPP conference, Debrecen, Hungary: Towards the final results

*About 80 water experts from 13 countries gathered in Debrecen in Hungary on 25 and 26 October 2006 to exchange experiences on flood management. It was an unforgettable event with an inspiring professional programme framed by 'Hungarian style' social activities. This was the fourth time that partners of the FLAPP network met each other at a half-yearly conference, and it was clearly visible that mutual contacts were strengthening and that the group spirit is growing. A great basis to work towards our final results!*

Since the FLAPP network was started one-and-a-half years ago, many exchange and research activities have taken place and a lot of good practice examples have been identified. The conference in Debrecen was therefore an important milestone in analysing all the collected material and results so far. The main goal of the conference was to define an integrated approach to flood management with success factors to improve cooperation in transboundary catchment areas. Special attention was given to the cooperation between international river committees and regional and local water managers: how can this be improved to enable better cross-border cooperation?

After a word of welcome by the Mayor of Debrecen, Mr. Lajos Kósa, the conference was opened by the conference hosts, the deputy of the rector of the University of Debrecen, Mr. Ferenc Joó, and László Kóthay, director of the Trans-Tisza Region Water Authority. Ed Eggink, president of the network, introduced the programme with the words: "Now it is time to bring together

the results of this project to present next year at the final conference; to implement the lessons learned and to further extend your knowledge. Make use of your contacts with partners within the FLAPP network as much as possible. During this conference, but also afterwards." The project has created a strong basis for potential further cooperation between European regions.

### Challenges for cross-border cooperation

Prof. dr. Süli-Zakar of the University of Debrecen presented the 'Living Tisza' programme, initiated by the Carpathian Euroregion. "The highest ideal for cross-border cooperation in this region is that the Tisza catchment area will again be seen as one ecological unit, rather than as five different politically sovereign territories. This will require an increase in awareness, so that all the people living and working in the catchment area consider the entire Tisza river as belonging to them." Mr. Sándor Tóth, chairperson of the Flood Protection Expert Group of the International Commission for the protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), elaborated on cross-border cooperation in the Danube, the most international river in the world. With a great diversity of cooperating parties in the Danube river basin, he sees the preparation of sub-basin Flood Action Plans as an important challenge. He stated that these plans need to be adopted and published by countries and/or international sub-basin arrangements. A regional water manager operating in the Meuse river basin, dr. ir. Harry Tolkamp, spoke about obstacles and success factors for cross-border cooperation from a more regional perspective.

Mr. Tolkamp said “regional authorities need to implement flood protection measures and therefore should be able to participate in the preparation of the Flood Action Plans of international river commissions. The realisation of these plans is only possible with sufficient financial support from national and international authorities.”

#### Cooperation between international river commissions and local water managers is essential

“The strategies and action plans of international river basin committees should include regional responsibilities.” This was one of the statements discussed in the panel discussion between representatives of three international river basins (Danube, Rhine and Meuse) and regional water managers. According to Armin Petracheck, former member of the Rhine Commission, people first need to understand each other before they are willing to cooperate. In the opinion of Miklos Pannonhalmi, a regional water manager operating on the border of Hungary with Austria and Slovakia, trust and time are the most important factors to improve cross-border cooperation. The panel members agreed that cooperation between international river committees and local water managers is required to reduce flood risks.

#### Practical do's and don'ts

In the afternoon of the first day participants were able to attend the workshops in which they were most interested. The workshop themes ranged from flood mapping, nature development and flood information systems to intercultural communication and guidelines to inform citizens about floods. The overall aim of the workshops was to identify practical do's and don'ts for local and regional water managers. Following these workshops, component and policy working group sessions took place to collect opinions of FLAPP members about the joint approach to flood management in transboundary catchment areas. At the end of a busy conference day, participants went down to the Mediterranean Water Resort



for dinner and a relaxed evening. Here, they were able not only to talk about water but also to feel it on their skins in the tropical swimming pool.

#### Joint approach to flood management in border areas

The next day, Luitzen Bijlsma, chairperson of the policy working group, introduced an open participatory process to prepare the final FLAPP products. He presented a draft version of the joint approach to flood management in transboundary catchment areas, and reported back on comments made by partners the previous day. This was followed by an interactive discussion in which the audience could react to statements using blue or yellow cards. This discussion gave all the partners the opportunity to exchange their views on the joint approach. One of the conclusions was the idea that floods not only have negative consequences, but can also have a positive effect for nature. This is an important benefit which should be included in the analysis. Another conclusion was that FLAPP partners consider administrative borders and the unavailability of data from other countries to be the most important obstacles to cross-border cooperation.

#### Continuity of expert exchanges in Europe

In the afternoon, Ms. Viktoria Varga Lensces of the EU Commission (DG Region) explained the funding opportunities under the new EU Territorial Cooperation Objective for 2007-2013. “Interregional cooperation projects should have a clear thematic focus on the Lisbon and Gothenburg priorities in the new programming period”. This means a stronger focus on economy, employment and innovation. The themes of environment and risk management will also still be eligible for funding. More strategic and good quality project proposals are required. Following her plenary introduction, FLAPP partners brainstormed about ideas for new projects to start up initiatives for “a life after FLAPP”. Further initiatives are described in the article entitled ‘Next steps’ on the back page of this edition of Mainstream.

## “Commitment of partners to actively cooperate in the FLAPP network is very noticeable”



Mr. Sándor Tóth is chairperson of the Flood Protection Expert Group of the International Commission for the protection of the Danube River (ICPDR). The main goal of the ICPDR is to safeguard the Danube's water resources for future generations by creating a healthy and sustainable river system free from excess nutrients and unnecessary flood damage. When we asked what he thought of the

FLAPP network, Mr. Tóth responded: “At this conference the commitment of the partners on cooperation can be seen in the workshops and the different sessions”. Although this conference in Debrecen was the first time that he had attended an activity of the FLAPP network, he said that: “If the partners always contribute like they did in this conference, FLAPP can be described as a vital group with a permanently high level of enthusiasm.” He is also very positive about the joint approach to improve flood management in transboundary rivers. “The document drawn up by the policy working group will certainly meet the objectives of the project, and has an additional value on top of what has already been said about flood management at different levels in Europe.”

# interview

# partner in the picture



**Kleio Monokrousou, Konstantinos Kouzoukos  
and Thalia Vrachiologlou**

*“Cross border cooperation is a challenge for us”*

The Evros River is the longest river in the Balkan Peninsula, running through Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece. Because of its international character, a project called Evros-Marista-Meric has been initiated to improve cross-border cooperation in the Evros Basin. The project name derives from the different names of the Evros in each language. The initiative of the co-operation is taken by 13 Municipalities and the Dimossineteristiki Evros company. The ‘Dimossin’ company represents Ferres Municipality (partner 24) in the FLAPP network.

According to Konstantinos Kouzoukos “One of the main difficulties is the fact that the other two countries do not belong to the European Union yet. This makes the situation more difficult in terms of bureaucracy and transfer of documents. Another difficulty is the political situation in the other countries. Co-operation in the last 50 years, especially between Greece and Turkey, has

not been very easy. Also the economic situation of the other countries is not as developed in comparison to the economy in Greece, The municipalities in the Evros region feel a bit neglected from the central government because their river basins are isolated from the capitals of their countries”.

The main objective of the project is to identify the success factors and future challenges in an area in which several cooperation difficulties between the three countries still remain unresolved. The Greek partners of the FLAPP network are trying to find solutions for the flood management problems in their border region. This is an area in which many cultivations have been destroyed by severe floods, and significant damage has also been recorded to road networks and water supply networks. These floods were caused by intensive rainfall, melting of snow, deforestation and urbanisation. The lack of cooperation between the riparian countries in this area is proving to be a big problem.

According to Thalia Vrachiologlou “by watching and learning how the FLAPP network is working, with the transfer of how-know techniques, exchange ideas, opinions, this knowledge can lead us to a better co-operation in our own region. We see other case studies and we can adopt them and adjust them to our data, conditions and circumstances. Our participation in such a large network will give us the experience to improve the organisation and co-ordination of our neighborhood network”.

The project is working on a theoretical basis now during a start-up phase. First results are expected in about one year. ■

## Upper Tisza field trip

The conference programme included a study visit to Nyíregyháza, located in the border region of Hungary with Slovakia, Ukraine and Romania, on Saturday 28 October. This is where the Upper Tisza Water Directorate, one of the Hungarian FLAPP partners, is based. The tasks of the Directorate were presented in a very informative film. A particularly important factor in achieving sufficient flood protection for citizens in the Upper Tisza area is international cooperation between Romania (61% of the Tisza catchment area), Ukraine (22%), Slovakia (9%) and Hungary (8%). This region deals with flash floods originating in other countries, which means the lead time to prepare for high water levels in the Tisza is extremely short. The “Common Hungarian-Ukrainian automatic monitoring system” is therefore an essential tool for efficient flood forecasting and early warning of the population. This monitoring system is a unique example in Europe of how cooperation across borders



can be successful when one country is willing and able to make financial investments in measuring stations on the other side of the border.

The study visit was followed by an excursion to the Hortobágy National Park where participants saw the endless plains and the beautiful nature of the Hungarian Puszta. A lively dinner including Tokaji wine tasting in a traditional Csárda closed this wonderful Hungarian-style event. ■



# Next steps

## Proud so far

FLAPP is now moving into the final phase of the project. Annelieke Laninga-Busch, FLAPP project manager, is proud of the intermediate results that have been achieved so far by partners in the FLAPP network. "We have started to get to know each other and collected good practice examples, then we have analysed those experiences and tried to formulate a joint approach. The next step will be to develop recommendations. From now on it is time to draw the 'lessons learned' from the past two years and implement these actions in daily practice." Annelieke made the partners aware of the unique opportunity to make use of the contacts in the network.

## Actions in 2007

There are still a lot of things to work on until the project is finished in August 2007. Three lines of actions will be carried out within the FLAPP network in the next 10 months:

1. Continue to exchange experiences and implement the lessons learned in daily practice: establish bilateral contacts with other partners and attend thematic expert meetings (see calendar of events);
2. Help to produce good-quality FLAPP results: participate in the policy working group or follow the FLAPP PR training to communicate our results externally;
3. Initiate project proposals for the new EU funding period (2007-2013)

## Life after FLAPP?

Some interesting ideas for future projects were developed in the interactive working session on Friday afternoon, which was moderated by Evert Kloosterboer and Annelieke Laninga-Busch. One suggestion was to initiate pilot projects with an integrated catchment-based approach to test the tools of the upcoming EU flood



directive in practice in different river basins 'from source to mouth'. The successful 'Vital Signs' project as presented by local schoolchildren during the previous FLAPP conference in Northern Ireland (see the last edition of Mainstream) was also suggested for possible transfer to other countries in Europe. Another idea was to implement sustainable measures to create more space for water by connecting the Dutch 'Room for the River' programme to the retention areas of the Vásárhélyi Plan in Hungary and possibly similar policies in other countries. In the coming months, the 'lead partners' of these initiatives will work out project proposals together with other interested partners. The new project proposals will be presented at the final FLAPP conference to be held in Spain in June 2007

# Agenda

WHEN	WHAT	WHERE	CONTACT INFO
2007	22-23 Jan.	<b>Expert meeting on guidelines for citizens</b>	Leuven, Belgium luc.bauwens@oost-vlaanderen.be aovsd@zeelandnet.nl
	7-8 Feb.	<b>Policy working group meeting</b>	Alexandroupolis, Greece bart@play-time.nl
	12-13 March	<b>Presidium meeting</b>	Brussels, Belgium project.manager@flapp.org
	17-18 April	<b>PR training for dissemination of results</b>	Brussels, Belgium mmec.merkelbach@prvlmburg.nl
	25-26 April	<b>Expert meeting on nature and floods</b>	Vara, Estonia andres@varavald.ee, blackwatervitalsigns@yahoo.ie
	22-24 May	<b>Expert meeting flood mapping</b>	Cyör, Hungary Andre.Freiwald@lfug.smul.sachsen.de Pannonhalmi.miklos@edukovizig.hu
	12 June	<b>Study visit Ebro basin part I</b>	Pamplona, Spain josu.elseo@gavrn.com
	13-14 June	<b>Final FLAPP conference</b>	Zaragoza, Spain pperez@chebro.org, project.manager@flapp.org
	15 June	<b>Study visit Ebro basin part II</b>	Zaragoza, Spain pperez@chebro.org

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