

mainstream



mainstream is a newsletter for partners of the INTERREG III-C Network

'Flood Awareness and Prevention Policy in border areas'.



Final FLAPP conference, Zaragoza, Spain: Improving flood management across borders

On 13 and 14 June, 2007, some 150 flood experts met in Zaragoza, Spain, to discuss recommendations made by the EU-funded network on "Flood Awareness and Prevention Policy in border areas" (FLAPP) to improve cooperation between authorities responsible for flood management in Europe. With the FLAPP partners, politicians and other water experts from at least 12 countries took part in the closing conference of this knowledge exchange project. The key moment of the conference was the handing over of the final FLAPP results to the vice-president of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament, Mr. Hans Blokland. Network partners declared themselves very satisfied with the outcome of the project in which they exchanged experiences on flood management, creating a solid basis for further cooperation. It is now up to partners to exploit and expand the knowledge gained in this highly successful project.

The final FLAPP event climaxed a series of five half-yearly conferences. The project was formally launched in March, 2005, at a conference in Maastricht (NL). In October of that year partners gathered again in Grimma (DE) to discuss cross-border cooperation issues and in April, 2006, the third conference took place in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland (UK), where raising flood awareness was the central theme. In October last year partners met again in Debrecen (HU) to prepare the final results. Throughout the two and a half years of the project, partners collected examples of good practice, organised study visits and undertook research studies, helping partners to learn from each other's local and regional flood management experiences. The FLAPP network facilitated the exchange of knowledge and encouraged authorities to implement recommendations in their own region.

The final products of the network, presented in Zaragoza, included policy recommendations aimed at different levels of government, a joint approach to

improve flood management across borders, a collection of examples of good practice and several thematic sub-products. The closing conference also featured lively discussion of follow-up ideas to stimulate continuing cooperation.

The conference was opened by Mr. Antonio Serrano Rodríguez, General Secretary for Territory and Biodiversity at Spain's Ministry of Environment, who highlighted the importance of developing significant new measures to avoid floods. Mr. José Luis Alonso Gajón, president of the Ebro River Basin Organisation, host of the conference, and Mr. Roque Gistau, president of EXPO Zaragoza 2008, welcomed delegates and congratulated FLAPP on its work. The president of the network, Mr. Ed Eggink, then introduced the programme for the first conference day and told delegates: "We have nearly reached the end of the FLAPP network, so make use of the good basis that we have created for further cooperation!"

Presentation final products and sub products

Mr. Luitzen Bijlsma, chair person of the FLAPP policy working group, introduced the recommendations of the FLAPP network and elaborated on their usefulness for various levels of governance. The final FLAPP products were then handed over by Mr. Alfred Evers, representative of the Euregion Meuse-Rhine, lead partner of the network, to Mr. Hans Blokland, vice-president of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament. Making the presentation, Mr Evers said: "An integrated river basin approach is possible only if there is good communication and good understanding between all parties concerned. Connecting people, connecting water managers, connecting institutions and connecting systems - it all sounds easy enough, but in reality it is a hell of a job. Mr. Blokland, may I offer you the results of a fantastic cooperation between 35 European partner organisations." Responding to the policy recommendations, Mr. Blokland told delegates: "Your joint suggestions and recommendations could improve the quality of cross-border flood policy and are valuable for the implementation of the EU flood directive." >>

After a coffee break which included a briefing for Spanish media, leaders of the thematic working groups introduced their sub-products. Mr. Luc Bauwens and Mrs. Mary O'Halloran, who created tools for authorities to advise citizens how to act before, during and after floods, said "you can't always prevent flooding but you can prepare for it. Taking action can make a difference. Going into communities at risk and planning with them rather than for them is most effective in the long term". FLAPP flood awareness tools include flyers in different languages, brochures, a website (www.flood-info.eu) and a traffic sign warning of flooding. These tools are available to all authorities in Europe.

Results of other European projects

As the FLAPP network aims to increase synergy between flood experts in Europe, other EU projects dealing with flood management were invited to present their results at a European project "market", a platform organised in parallel with the conference and during thematic sessions. As an introduction to the project market, Mr. Nicolas Singer, project officer at the INTERREG IIIC West Zone Joint Technical Secretariat in Lille, gave an overview of different water management projects supported under INTERREG. He described FLAPP as one of the most successful INTERREG IIIC projects and emphasised the importance of exchanging experience in Europe and of sharing lessons learned in order to build on results already achieved. The final FLAPP conference was "a good starting point for preparing future interregional cooperation projects on water management", Mr Singer said.



Visit to EXPO '08 site

After a very fruitful first conference day, delegates took a bus tour to the 25-hectare construction site of Zaragoza EXPO 2008 on the River Ebro. EXPO 2008 is an international exposition on water and sustainable development to be staged from June to September next year. It will make Zaragoza a unique meeting place for people interested in cultural change in favour of more sustainable use of water and, over 93 days, people from all over the world will be able to experience the culture and gastronomy of more than 100 countries.

Picking fruits of the FLAPP network

On day two of the conference the focus was on what happens after the FLAPP project. Mrs. Dorothea Palenberg of consultancy firm Blue! and Mrs. Annelieke Laninga-Busch, FLAPP project manager,

discussed ways to use the experiences and spread knowledge gained during the project. Mrs. Palenberg told the conference: "It is crucial that partners derive a funding proposal from their daily work, for example using the lessons learned in the FLAPP network for future INTERREG IV or other EU-funded projects".

Mr. Tako Popma, of finance and business consultants Haute Europe, offered advice on essential steps in formulating a project proposal: start by defining the content of a project idea, pick the best source of funding, identify any specific requirements and find the right partners to develop a project plan. Finally, he said, it was important to agree on roles and responsibilities before filing a new project application. He presented an overview of different EU funding possibilities. Several participants then gave short presentations of project ideas and took part in a partner search "carousel". In the afternoon, the project ideas were worked out in more detail in workshop sessions.

Walking/canoeing on the river Ebro

After the formal closure of the FLAPP network, conference organisers hit on an enjoyable way to bring down the curtain on the project more informally. After months and years of talking about rivers mainly as a threat, it was decided to take advantage of the leisure opportunities and beautiful scenery of the River Ebro. Some



delegates seized the chance to go canoeing while others went for a guided hike through wetlands. Both groups met for a joint picnic on the beach along the river bank. Either way, it was a very agreeable closing activity at the end of a productive and energetic final conference!

"FLAPP supports the implementation of the EU flood directive"

Mr. Hans Blokland is vice-president of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament



"For the implementation of the flood directive it is up to Member States to undertake concrete measures to prevent floods or to minimise the risks. This underlines the importance of the FLAPP network in which regional and local flood experts participated. The joint approach is a result of bottom-up initiatives characterised by a high level of willingness of all parties.

"This process improved relations between the partners in the network and formed a good basis for fruitful and effective cooperation.

The recommendations are very complete and written in a simple way so that people who are not experts will understand them as well.

"The FLAPP network is a perfect initiative to promote the implementation of the EU flood directive. All partners of the network have to keep in mind that it is of high importance to continue exchanging knowledge with other organisations and Member States and to remain in contact with each other.

"You now know each other and you have already built up a network. It is valuable to maintain or even improve this level of cooperation to organise new flood management projects in order to deliver further quality impulses to the implementation of flood-related legislation."

interview

partner in the picture



Josu Elso, biodiversity specialist,
Environmental Management Unit, Navarre

On the day before the final conference, the Environmental Management Unit of Navarre organised a study visit in which Mr. Josu Elso guided participants along the rivers Arga, Aragón and Ebro to see projects to restore riverine habitats and floodplains. Mr. Elso was happy with the way project partners responded to the tour. "A lot of questions were raised because it was difficult for the partners to imagine the differences between the water flow in winter,

when the flow is very wild, and in summer, when the river is much calmer. However, the importance of wetlands in this area was well understood."

During the FLAPP network, Mr Elso's organisation developed a project aiming to return floodplains to their natural state and control river dynamics in order to create space for the river in case of flooding. The aim was to remove all existing dikes and rebuild them outside the river space, to recover the natural floodplains and to reduce the downstream flood risk. According to Mr.Elso, his organisation has learned that ecological restoration of floodplains combined with the right land use would save money and improve the ecology of the river system. "Now we are trying to develop agreements with owners, and aid is being given by public bodies to stimulate and support the changes," he said.

Mr. Elso was a contributor to the FLAPP report which describes obstacles, challenges and solutions for sustainable flood management. The report is the result of an intensive group effort by FLAPP participants working on ecologically sustainable water management. The aim of the report is to provide policy and practice recommendations to improve sustainable flood risk management in rivers. ■

Study Visit Zaragoza

On 15 June, partners visited the host organisation of the conference, the River Ebro Basin Organization in Zaragoza. After a short introduction to the organisation, delegates saw an impressive film about the destructive impact of climate change on glaciers in recent decades.

They also learned about the River Ebro Basin Organisation's automatic hydrologic information system (SAIH). Located in the organisation's head office since 1997, this monitoring system automatically collects data from rainfall gauges, dams, rivers and channels measured by remote stations. The collected data is transmitted by a radio network to the Basin Processing Centre and to concentration points throughout the Ebro basin. The processing centre stores and processes the information. In the heart of the centre is a synoptic panel on which luminous signals linked to

all remote stations can be seen. The SAIH website (www.saihebro.com) provides hourly updated information on the hydraulic state of the basin.

In addition, a decision support system called SAD is managed by the Basin Processing Centre. This system, fully operational since 2002, provides a flood forecasting and management tool for the Ebro river, using data from the SAIH system. SAD allows simulation of dam operations and helps the flood management decision-making process.

The processing centre is staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to control, collect, process and store all received data. In case any recorded variables rise above an established limit, Ebro Basin authorities are warned immediately so that time available for implementing flood defence measures is considerably increased. Both systems help to minimise flood damage and provide an early warning for territories affected by flooding. ■



Future Initiatives

Although the FLAPP project is at its end, it is vital to continue exchanging experience and spreading the knowledge gathered. FLAPP created a good basis for future cooperation and FLAPP partners network can “pick the fruits” of the network by applying lessons learned in their own daily work. Based on contacts between experts across Europe, established through FLAPP activities, several partner organisations are planning to continue to cooperate in future projects related to flood management. Ideas for future EU projects were explored by FLAPP partners in a brainstorm session during the fourth FLAPP conference in October, 2006, in Debrecen (HU). During



the final conference workshops took place to work out further details and prepare new project applications. For example:

- Specific FLAPP recommendations to improve flood management in border areas could be implemented via new INTERREG IV-A or ENP/CBC projects.
- Networking and exchange of knowledge and experience could be continued via new INTERREG IV-C projects or other EU funds (e.g. LIFE+ or 7th Framework Programme).

The new funding period 2007-2013 under the EU programme for Territorial Cooperation might allow these initiatives to be realised. Updates will be made available during the next months on the FLAPP website www.flapp.org.

PROJECT PROPOSALS	AIM	CONTACT INFO
European centre of excellence for flood management / Portal Water Management	Create a network for flood management issues connecting theory and practice. Share and exchange products and knowledge about sustainable and innovative water management. Initiate and maintain communication between present and future river managers in Europe. Involve citizens and other interested parties in the theme of river basin management	reinhard.vogt@steb-koeln.de / M.Bellemakers@science.ru.nl
CRISIS	Establish a coherent European crisis management network in which authorities and emergency services cooperate and execute exercises, exchange knowledge, experience and lessons learned	pj.mersie@zeeland.n
Water Watch	Develop a website with a GIS-linked database of water quality in streams and small river throughout Europe	grettamccarron@eircom.net
EU flood directive pilots	Set up pilot projects in different river basins in Europe to exchange experiences on the implementation of the new EU flood directive in relation to other EU regulations in the field of sustainable water management.	Jab.molleman@prvlimburg.nl
Common strategies for border lakes	To develop a common strategy for water management of border lakes (for example Lake Peipsi in Estonia) using the Joint Approach of the FLAPP network, and creating a network to exchange experiences between border lakes	watering@slovanet.sk

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