

THEME GOVERNANCE

SESSION 9.b.1: Managing water across sectors and borders: Institutional frameworks and approaches for efficient Transboundary basin organizations

Tuesday 20th March 2018, 14h30-16h00

Room ST7 (M13)

1. How to create and strengthen transboundary rivers, lakes and aquifers basin organizations? What are the success stories?

The work of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine can be considered as success story. You may call it: "The Phoenix rises". Why? A horrendous disaster/blaze at the Sandoz agrochemical storehouse in Basel caused tonnes of pollutants to be spilled into the River Rhine. The Rhine would die as result of this incident and subsequently rise again. The Rhine was turned blood red and all biological life was wiped out for almost 400 km downstream. This was one of the most important moments in our history and accelerated actions already undertaken by the ICPR. 1986 might be the most famous year of the ICPR's history, but our Commission had already been working on the task of transboundary river protection and restoration for many decades. Through a history of industrialisation and with growing populations the Rhine had already suffered greatly prior to the Sandoz disaster.

As early as the 1960s, the Rhine was known as the "sewer of Europe". Today, the water quality of third largest river in Europe has been much improved, life has returned with many river species once again living in its waters. 9 governments and 60 million people can now be proud of their river again.

At the end of the 1970s, fixing emission standards for a number of pollutants and building wastewater treatment plants slowly but steadily improved water quality.

However, as a result of the fire near Basel in 1986, a principal rethinking process was developed. Within 11 months, the "Rhine Action Programme" was adopted. In the aftermath of enormous floods in 1993 and 1995, it was demonstrated that the Berne Convention of 1963 did not cover such aspects. An extended and modernised Convention on the Protection of the Rhine was signed in April 1999, comprising all aspects of integrated water management. Following this, in 2001, the Rhine-ministers adopted the Programme on Sustainable Development of the Rhine – Rhine 2020. Today the next Programme "Rhine 2040" is under preparation.

This means: Strengthening the ICPR as a transboundary basin organization has been possible by the "help" of disasters during the late 1980s and the 1990s.

Another important step for further strengthening transboundary basin commissions in Europe has been the adoption of the European Water Framework Directive in December 2000. Since the year 2000, the coordination in transboundary river basins, lakes, aquifers is an obligation for EU-member states!!!

I would like to underline:

The successful results of the implementation of the ICPR action programmes/plans, adopted in 1987, soon after the Sandoz disaster and in 1998 after the floods (in 1993 and 1995) have been examples for drafting Directives (WFD) at EU level, which were adopted in December 2000 and FD, adopted in November 2007.

Nowadays, joint bodies with permanent secretariats do exist for all larger European rivers. These joint bodies are also responsible for facilitating the coordinated implementation of the European Directives and drafting common river management plans.

Key elements are:

Building up a network of trust and seeking common solutions to problems that transcend the artificial boundaries drawn on a map.

Bringing the Rhine back to life required strong leadership and keeping an eye on the vision of a healthy river. The Rhine supports many socio-economic activities. It is the key natural resource for the communities, species and ecosystems that it supports. Our commission has worked on an integrated approach to the river, ensuring that all these aspects are incorporated into planning, governance, problem solving and achieving meaningful outcomes on the ground.

Bringing the Rhine back to life was not achieved overnight. The transboundary river management and cooperation within the ICPR started already in 1950. This vision was concurrently tested and strengthened by the incident/disaster in 1986. One notable achievement from decades of focussed effort has been the return of salmon to the river. Under the "Salmon 2000" programme, it was hoped that this fish species would return to the river by the year 2000, and subsequently indicate that the river's health had also improved.

First success has been recorded, but more has to be done before a sustainable salmon population can be achieved. Nevertheless... this programme is just one of the great success stories of the commission's lifelong efforts in favour of the Rhine. Like a Phoenix that has risen from the ashes...

We need to continue working towards our vision even when facing pressures such as climate change, economic stress and continued physical threats to the river. With a shared history and the strength of trust and partnership, the ICPR will continue to take on this challenge.

2. What are the main challenges to ensure good management of transboundary basin organizations and the coordination between riparian countries: financing, data sharing, staff capacities, stakeholder participation, planning, etc.

Requisites for transboundary cooperation:

- analysing the common interest (problems or challenges) in river or lake basin management, initiating solidarity of interest
- starting point: comparison of national monitoring programmes and data sharing,
 - next step: joint monitoring programmes
 - and perhaps the next one: joint monitoring stations with staff from two countries – this is already a reality for permanent monitoring stations at the German-Suisse border and the German-Dutch border
- common development of international targets (interactive processes based on different national experiences), drafting programmes and programmes of measures on summarizing different national approaches and developing a new ambitious vision (f. ex. with a flagship species like “Salmon 2000/2020” or Sturgeon (avoid top-down approaches)
- common political will
- building common trust
- pressure/acceptance from the public
- development of upstream-downstream solidarity and vice versa
- open and transparent communication –mutual respect and understanding
- all activities organized and facilitated by a joint body/permanent secretariat with high level staff capacities (scientific background in water/environmental management, flexible, diplomatic) – a permanent secretariat for organizing transboundary activities needs financing, but much less than a national administration for water management
- large stakeholder involvement (integrates all water users and so-called green associations, facilitates acceptance from the public)
- patience, patience, patience...