FINAL REPORT

PROJECT TITLE:
Name: Finding common grounds – Facilitating fisheries governance in the Baltic by creating a national stakeholder platform in Poland
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PROJECT BACKGROUND:
Ecological stress and declining fish stocks in some species in the Baltic Sea have made a sustainable management of fisheries in the Baltic Sea countries a serious and complex concern. At the start of the project in 2009 the Baltic herring and sprat stocks had generally been in good condition, while the two cod stocks (“Eastern” and “Western”) had decreased considerably and the situation had been especially dramatic for the Eastern cod stock.

The Polish fishing fleet consists of mainly small-scale fisheries distributed over 65 ports and small harbors. 70% of the fishing boats are below 12m in length. The most important fish species is cod. However, fisheries in Poland is a decreasing sector – while 1500 boats were registered in 1990, only 500 remained in 2010.

Poland as EU member stated is embedded into the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) since 2004. As a former member of the Eastern block, Poland had to undergo the transition from a socialist to a market oriented society. This shift led to major breakdowns in the state-owned and cooperative-based fishing boats, while the private sector increased significantly. Nevertheless this had led to a highly fragmented organization of the fishing communities with only small unions and many fishermen that are not organized in some group at all.

Interviews with fishermen from Poland indicate, that due to or despite this shift, opportunistic norms and behavior dominate amongst the fishermen. In addition, Poland is characterized by an authoritarian culture with many layers of decision-makers, as well as stakeholders who have very little experience with deliberative decision making. Previous research (e.g. Stöhr and Chabay 2010) shows that skepticism and distrust towards EU regulations is especially high among Polish fishermen compared to other countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. Accordingly, illegal fishing and non-compliance with the CFP rules are especially high in Poland. For example Rossing et al. (2010) estimate that more than a third of all illegal fishing in the Baltic is conducted by Polish boats and for some years the actual landed amount of cod was 3 times as the reported landings.

Against this background the project focused on the development of a national network for the Polish Baltic Sea fisheries, bringing together different stakeholders: fishermen with local knowledge, fishing industry representatives, scientists with formal knowledge and data analysis, members of environmental organisations, and policy-makers. It also focused on the role of such a network in
participatory governance and efficient fisheries management on both a national and an international level - for example, internationally as part of the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BS RAC).

**PROJECT OBJECTIVE**

The project’s objective was to institute processes leading to more effective sustainable governance of the Baltic Sea fisheries in Poland and on the international level. This included:

- To establish a cross-link between the local and national level in Poland
- To build informed consensus (or disagreement) among stakeholders
- To develop a more coherent and effective Polish voice to the European Commission, to the Polish government, and in the international, stakeholder-based Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council (BS RAC)
- To increase trust, stimulate learning, and build social capital among fisheries stakeholders, environmental NGOs, scientists, and decision makers

The project addressed these objectives by developing, institutionalizing, and facilitating a Polish multi-stakeholder network – called the Polish Baltic Sea Fisheries Roundtable (PFRT), which brought together stakeholders with national interests as a group. The stakeholders include fishermen, commercial fish processors, environmentalists, scientists, and policy-makers. The project tried to build a common base of understanding of core issues and develop competence among stakeholders in using designed dialogue techniques that in turn will support more effective fisheries governance, both within Poland and the Baltic RAC. This would help to close the existing gap between the international level and the grass-root stakeholders and help make fisheries governance more participatory and effective on all levels.

**PROJECT ACTIVITIES, PROGRESS AND OUTCOME**

1. **INITIAL STEPS**

The project started by identifying relevant stakeholders and networks in Poland. For this purpose we collaborated closely with Ryszard Malik as a fisheries representative in the Baltic Sea Regional Advisory Council, who helped in finding and addressing fisheries stakeholders in Poland, and Ewa Milevska, who is representing the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) of Poland in the BS RAC and helped contacting different environmental NGOs in Poland. We visited local fishing communities and other key stakeholders to study the attitudes of the different groups in regard to participatory governance, multi-stakeholder dialogue, and the BS RAC, as well as to better understand the incentives and barriers to effective participation.

We introduced the core ideas of a long-term multi-stakeholder network in Poland to help develop a more efficient national network in fisheries management and the benefits and methods of mediated dialogue to address conflicts, achieve consensus, and build “improbable alliances”. As external initiators who were perceived as impartial and competent, we were successful in creating interest in this idea and formed a steering committee with trusted Polish people from fisheries (Ryszard Malik), NGOs (Ewa Milevska) and Science (Zbigniew “Steve” Karnicki) in order to prepare the first meeting of the roundtable.

In May 2009, we organized a first meeting to discuss and sign a joined Memorandum of Understanding that defined rules and procedures for dialogue by all participants. The agreement that was achieved served as the basis for the later meetings and provides a first “consensus” between highly conflicted groups. We were also able to involve government representatives. This was important so that the roundtable is relevant in that the decision makers participated, but were not permitted to dominate the discussion as per the prior authoritarian culture, since they also had to follow the agreed rules of the Memorandum.

The initial steps served two main purposes. First we had to overcome the resistance of many local fishermen towards “meetings” as such (e.g., characterized by comments including “Waste of time” and “Why should I care”) and create willingness for initial investments in the process. Secondly, we had to introduce and legitimize dialogue and mediation techniques to avoid “shouting matches” that were apparently the prevalent mode of discussion among the different groups up to that point in time.
2. TAKE OFF PHASE

For the first meetings of the roundtable, we used the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) reform in 2012 as the focus of discussions and the motivational driver. A consensus advice statement on the CFP was solicited from all parties to influence decision makers in Poland and at the EU level. This provided a time limited and highly significant opportunity for the PFRT to contribute in Poland to the comments on the CFP. Within the issues of the CFP, we chose a moderately conflicted issue (Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQ)), that is relevant, but for which consensus had a reasonable likelihood for being achieved. Steve Karnicki served as a chairman, since he was perceived as neutral and also is a skilled mediator. We invited experts that covered a range of scientific positions in order to be transparent about the range of positions and the uncertainties within the scientific community. Summaries of each meeting were published in Polish and distributed to all PFRT members and the Polish government, as well as via a journal of the Sea Fisheries Institute (MIR) in Gdynia that is distributed among the local fishermen. In order to get a better understanding of perception and progress of the Roundtable we did a series of interviews with different stakeholders that were transcribed and analyzed.

As an outcome of the first Roundtable meetings, the members were able to agree on a consensus statement on ITQ in Poland, which was communicated to the Polish government and the European Commission. As a consequence, the Polish government - for the first time – invited participants of the roundtable to actively participate in the administrative meeting about ITQs in Poland (Feb 24th 2010). The PFRT was also introduced to the BSRAC, resulting in a joint meeting in December 2009 and a presentation of the Roundtable in the BSRAC report.

3. THE SITUATION TODAY

So far, 8 official roundtable meetings were held so far covering the following topics:

1. 6th May, 2009: Presentation idea of the Roundtable; discussion of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding rules for participation in PFRT meetings.
3. 10th Dec, 2009: Discussion continued: ITQ in Poland including invited experts
4. 23rd Feb, 2010: Discussion, which included invited experts: Long Term Management Plan on Pelagic Stocks
5. 28th Apr, 2010: Discussion, which included invited experts: Polish Fleet size after 2011
6. 2nd Sep, 2010: Discussion: Small Scale Fisheries and MSC
7. 1st Dec, 2010: Discussion, which included invited experts: the EUs Marine Strategy, Eco-system based management
8. 22nd March, 2011: Monitoring and Control Issues with Harm Koster (Director, Community Fisheries Control Agency, CFCA) as invited expert.

With 8 PFRT meetings the process is reasonably stable, even when “green” topics were addressed (like eco-system based management), which usually elicit little interest from fisheries stakeholders. The number of participants has increased significantly, indicating momentum and a willingness to invest in the process. Permanent participation and support of Polish government representatives seems ensured. The reports of the meetings are distributed through various channels and the roundtable gained significant media attention. Due to its successes, the Roundtable was also able to gain external, follow-up funding following on some modest support from the Baltic Sea 2020 foundation through this project.

Nevertheless, in the course of the initiation and institutionalization process of the PFRT, there were also a number of challenges and questions that are not fully resolved (see section on reflections, below).
4. PROJECT OUTCOMES

Social Outcomes
The objective of instituting a process by building a bottom up participatory process and connecting it to the existing fisheries governance process to achieve more effective and sustainable governance of the Baltic Sea fisheries in Poland has largely been achieved.

Communication:
An atmosphere of free and open discussion has successfully been implemented as “something different” in the Polish fisheries context. The capacity for and experience of productive dialogues among highly diverse stakeholders about contested issues is also expected to be helpful in the long run.

Learning:
The quality of discussions is perceived as high and useful by all groups. Government and ENGO representatives and even very experienced fishermen indicated that they learn from the meetings. Thus, the discussions among the stakeholders and the invited experts have led to increased knowledge.

Trust:
The continuity in meetings, careful process design, and good leadership have led to decreased conflict and a degree of increased trust among actors in Polish Baltic fisheries, especially between fisheries, scientists, and ENGOs. This trust was built up dealing with various conflicted issues, including “green” topics (like eco-system based management) that usually elicit little interest by fisheries stakeholders. Thus, although uncertain, it seems likely that the trust that has developed will help when new conflicts occur. However, it is not certain how representative that is for those stakeholders that the PFRT participants represent, but who have not been present. In addition, our interviews also indicated that distrust towards the EU and the Polish government continues to be very high. Potentially, this might change in the long-term, if the PFRT continues to collaborate with the Polish government and demonstrates some actual influence on decision-making. At this point it is difficult to give a prognosis in this regard.

Economic outcomes
Right now, the effects of the PFRT in terms of economic benefits are not clear. However, in several of the meetings, the content provided fishermen with access to knowledge about how to manage certain economic issues, especially around small-scale fisheries.

Institutional outcomes
The PFRT currently has a functioning organizational form with ensured long-term funding. After 8 PFRT meetings, the process has become accepted and institutionalized. The number of participants has increased significantly, indicating momentum and a willingness to invest in the process. Permanent participation and support of Polish government representatives is also assured. However, its formal relation to the government is not explicitly defined at this point. It is unclear what the role of the PFRT long term will be. Will it or should it play an official advisory role for the Polish government, as some participants have urged?

Ecological outcomes
After not quite two years, it is impossible to make any judgements regarding ecological effects of the PFRT initiative. The Eastern cod stock – formally the most critical endangered stock - has undergone a tremendous recovery during the last two years, so much so that ICES even suggested an increase in catching quotas for 2012. It would be valuable to conduct follow on studies in the near future to determine to what degree PFRT dialogues impact the majority of fishermen in Poland and if that impact includes changes in compliance with quotas and other regulations.
5. COMMUNICATIONS

Apart from the process of initiating and institutionalizing the PFRT in Poland, the forum and the lessons learned during this process were also communicated through various channels to practitioners in the fishing sector, the public and policy makers, and the academic community. These communication activities included:

1. Presentation of PFRT project at the international workshop “Social Learning and Sustainability: Exploring Critical Issues in Relation to Environmental Change and Governance” June 1-3, 2010, Stockholm Resilience Centre.

2. Lecture by Ilan Chabay at the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Germany August 2010 “Empirical methods for better modeling of social-ecological-economic systems.” The PFRT project was part of presentation.

3. Lecture by Ilan Chabay at a Virginia Tech University and IBM conference in Zürich, Switzerland on Community Resiliency, “Moving from information and knowledge to agency, responsibility, and resiliency.” PFRT and the study of the BS RAC were included in the presentation.

4. Christian Stöhr was interviewed by Ernst & Young (on behalf on DG MARE) about how to improve (cross-level) communication of the EU with – among others – the local level in Poland in September 2010.

5. Ilan Chabay and Christian Stöhr were interviewed by a journalist from Fiskeriverket for an article on PFRT for online publication in October 2010.

6. Presentation of the PFRT project at the workshop “Rebuilding a more harmonious co-existence with nature: new perspectives in small-scale fisheries management” in Uppsala, November 15th-16th 2010.

7. Lecture by Christian Stöhr on Participatory Governance as part of the Master program in Sustainability Science in Lund, November 26th 2010. PFRT and the study of the BS RAC were included in the presentation.

8. Keynote lecture which included outline of the Baltic RAC and Polish Fisheries Roundtable projects by Ilan Chabay at eKnowNet EU 7th Framework conference on science communication and education in Berlin, December 1, 2010.


10. Presentation of the Polish Fisheries Roundtable project at the Alliance for Global Sustainability (AGS) Annual Meeting in Gothenburg, January 24th-25th 2011.

11. The rationale, purpose, and issues in operating the PRFT (with acknowledgement of the Baltic Sea 2020 Foundation’s support) was included in lectures for the US National Science Foundation (February 2011) and a panel session organized by Ilan Chabay at the Resilience 2011 Conference in Tempe, AZ, in March 2011.


13. Polish fisheries and the PFRT is part of a paper published in the International Journal of the Commons in August 2011.

14. Polish fisheries and the PFRT is part of a paper published in the Human System Management in January 2012.

15. A paper with an in-depth analysis of the PFRT including a comparison with the Swedish co-management initiative has been submitted to the journal Environments to the special theme issue: learning, governance and sustainability.
PROJECT REFLECTION

Creating a forum like the PFRT is a dynamic process. The following illustrate this and indicate the critical factors and events that either furthered or hindered the project.

(A) Enhancement of the process:
1. Key role of the chairman:
The transition from the former contentious culture of argument put tremendous demands on the capabilities of the chairperson in keeping the discussion focussed and enforcing the agreed-upon rules and at the same time keeping an atmosphere of an open and transparent dialogue. After the initial foundational meetings (chaired by Ilan Chabay and Peter Adler) these challenges were successfully managed by Steve Karnicki, which has to be seen as a major factor in making progress.

2. Early successes:
As an outcome of the first Roundtable meetings, the members were able to agree on a consensus statement on ITQ in Poland, which was communicated to the Polish government and the European Commission. As a consequence, the Polish government - for the first time – invited participants of the roundtable to actively participate in the administrative meeting about ITQs in Poland (Feb 24th 2010). The PFRT was also introduced to the BSRAC resulting in a joint meeting in December 2009. These direct successes of the first attempts of the PFRT demonstrated both the relevance and potential of the PFRT and provided a positive feedback on participation in PFRT, which is often absent in other advisory processes (e.g., RACs). Thus, the members were encouraged to further invest in the process.

3. Long term funding ensured early in the process:
The financial part of organising such an initiative is known to be a barrier to many long-term efforts. The financial support from the Baltic 2020 foundation to the project was critical to initiate the PFRT. At the same time, the long-term commitment of other agencies to invest in the process is a major factor in making the PFRT an institutionalized, well-established participatory platform.

(B) Barriers to the process:
1. Unclear political role and mandate of the PFRT:
The most critical challenge for the PFRT regards the question of whether the roundtable should formally adopt positions on issues. After the early successes in engaging in productive discussions, some members – especially fisheries representatives - are arguing for consensus-based position statements that then could be sent to decision-makers at national and EU level. Others, especially the chairman, take clear position against this, arguing that the open discussion is then compromised and becomes political misuse of the PFRT. This issue has become critical and is still unresolved. As a result, some PFRT members start questioning the chairman, the steering committee, and the PFRT as such. Several attempts to discuss this issue during a PFRT meeting were supressed by the chairman. The fishermen organized a separate meeting with the research team, asking for help in this matter. In response, we pointed out that there were two separate functions that were involved – knowledge production, sharing, and learning on one hand; negotiation to define a group consensus for a formal resolution on the other hand. We argued that the participants in PFRT have to choose whether to continue the open knowledge sharing function OR use the Roundtable for negotiation, which is likely to restrain the more open exchange of knowledge and ideas.

2. Important steps, but a question of timing
Building trust and an atmosphere of cooperation takes time. While it was very positive that a consensus-based statement could be achieved already at the discussion of the first topic of the PFRT, it also demonstrated the limits of the PFRT at this stage. This is indicated by two events: Firstly, the consensus statement on ITQ, which even reached up to the EU level, created a serious conflict within the roundtable. Some of the participants saw this as taking a direct political position by the PFRT, which was not the intent of group in its founding Secondly, as a follow up to the good discussions about ITQ in the PFRT, the Polish ministry of agriculture organized a meeting on the administration of ITQ, to which selected PFRT members were invited. However, the meeting became a disaster from
the view of the PFRT members, because no results were achieved and the meeting ended up being highly conflicted.

3. Too many participants in a single forum
The PFRT was created as an open platform where everybody who is interested and willing to follow the rules can participate. However, the PFRT attracted significantly wider interest after the first successes and participant numbers increased rapidly to 60 and more people. That many participants make a productive dialogue very difficult. It may prove more effective to replicate the PRFT structure in several smaller, local forms with an experienced facilitator present at each event.

CONCLUSIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The objective of building an effective participatory process connected and contributing positively to reasoned and sustainable fisheries governance of the Polish Baltic Sea fisheries has largely been achieved. Both from our observations of the Roundtable meetings and a series of interviews with participants we can draw the following conclusions:

- An atmosphere of free, open, and reflective discussion has successfully implemented to replace less effective and more authoritarian processes of the past.
- The quality of discussions is perceived as high and useful by all groups. Even very experienced fishermen indicated that they have learned from the meetings.
- Trust is starting to develop between ENGO, scientists and fishermen.

The generous support of the Baltic Sea 2020 Foundation for this project and its predecessor on the Baltic Sea RAC has provided both opportunities for the authors to contribute to the sustainable governance of the Baltic fisheries and to increase their understanding of and commitment to improving processes of participatory governance of common goods and spaces. For the support and opportunities, we are most grateful.

Further, we would like to express our gratefulness to all the persons that supported the project and its progress, without them, the achieved outcomes had been impossible. In particular, we would like to thank Peter Adler, Sally Clink, Steve Karnicki, Ryszard Malik, Ewa Milewska, Piotr Predki, Krzysztof Stanuch and Katarina Veem.