



Seagull

Methods for strengthening the public participation in ERB

- experiences from practical examples

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Preface

Seagull is a project for the Euroregion Baltic (ERB) with the main purpose of developing and anchoring a long-term strategy and a joint development programme for the region. The programme will form the basis for future investments in the environment and infrastructure. It will thereby contribute to social, economic and environmentally sustainable development throughout the region.

The future of the region is taking form now. And many have been the results and experiences accumulated from just the Seagull project. The future of the region will depend on a number of factors that strategically will bring the development projected.

Then what can the Seagull project point out? What are the lessons to learn from this project? Without any doubt the project points out that the level of influence and cooperation among the local, regional, national and European levels will affect the success on the implementation of not only the so called Joint development program but for future common activities.

Then this report aims to present the ways of strengthening the local level participation and involvement within and between the Euroregion Baltic. It is based on the results showed by the Seagull project experiences.

This is a joint report for the Seagull - Workpackage 2 and Workpackage 4 that aims at assembling conclusions and recommendations that can have an impact in the ERB and in the accomplishment of its goals.

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Introduction

During the last couple of years a rather new situation has evoked within the EU. This situation has been described, mostly by media, as an evolving crisis within the whole EU with lack of legitimacy and a huge gap between the people and the politicians. Even the vice president of the European Commission, Margot Wallström, is concerned of this development. The way of working within the EU has been a so-called top-down perspective, which the politicians now are eager to change and instead work with more of a bottom-up perspective¹.

The idea is to integrate in a more natural way the local level with the regional, national and European. This is an answer to the challenges of working more bottom-up. Many are the examples on how to accomplish such a task, both in form of project attempts and different activities.

Within the framework of Euroregion Baltic (ERB), two pilot projects have been carried out to work as a guideline from which the job to change the procedure on how to deal with local issues, can start. These two projects have taken place within the ERB's Seagull project. The first pilot project deals with water quality and the second project deals with rural development.

These two projects give a hint on how to approach this situation and solve it. The goal is to accumulate the experiences, knowledge and ideas on how local mobilization and public participation can be a tool to use by ERB.

The goal is to present ways to strengthen ERB among and between the regions, the local level and the European level, to increase the ERB presences in the local level, increase the bottom up approach and develop the transnational cooperation.

Method

The method used for this study is a qualitative content analysis made out of quantitative- as well as qualitative data.

This report is a study of several other reports written within the Seagull project and some theoretical literature on organisational structure and local mobilization. To build a frame for the coming analysis and results, following reports have been analyzed. *Democracy in Euroregion Baltic: an overview of the current conditions in the nine member regions*, written by Daniel Folkesson. *Rural Development and Local Democracy*, written by Mariana Gómez. *The Lyckeby River: an attitude investigation about water issues, study I* and *Lyckebyån: En attitydundersökning om vatten inom EU-projektet Seagull, studie II*, written by Marianne Lindström. *The Lyckeby River: Nature, culture and environment – The Water Management Association*, written by Eva Steiner.

¹ Wallström, 050610

The theoretical framework is build upon first and fore most two books; *Den lokala kraften – Människor i utvecklingsarbete* by Alf Ronnby and *Organisationsteori för offentlig sektor* by Tom Christensen, Per Læg Reid, Paul G. Roness and Kjell Arne Røvik.

All methods have their faults and the qualitative content analysis is some times criticized for not being objective enough. Due to the circumstances with this study, qualitative content analysis is although the best method. To make the method more reliable the faults has been taken under consideration, and the margin of error is therefore minimised.

Euroregion Baltic

Euroregion Baltic (ERB) was established in February 1998 as cooperation between nine regions of Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Russia and Sweden. Since its early days ERB has been pursuing the goals of improving life conditions for its inhabitants, promoting bonds and contacts among local communities, and providing measures for a more sustainable development within the region.

These have proved challenging tasks for the organization, which then included EU member states, acceding countries, and the Kaliningrad Region of the Russian Federation. EU's enlargement on 1st May 2004 brought about a change in the make-up of our Euroregion, offering a historic opportunity to advance the prospects for genuine cohesion throughout the southeast Baltic Sea Region.

Seagull is a cooperation project for the Euroregion Baltic (ERB) with the main purpose of developing and anchoring a long-term strategy and a joint development programme for the region. The programme will form the basis for future investments in the environment and infrastructure. It will thereby contribute to social, economic and environmentally sustainable development throughout the region.

Seagull aims to strengthen the competence among officials and politicians concerning the role of planning in regional and transnational development of the whole ERB in line with the EU objectives.

Seagull is divided in different areas, such as water management, rural development and innovative environments. The project has started under 2002 until november 2005 and this report is an effort on the accumulation of experiences taken out from the areas of water management and rural development with very special focus in local mobilization and local participation.

Water Management

The Workpackage 2 (WP2) on water management under the Seagull project aims at trying to establish fresh, high quality water and enhance awareness among the citizens about the importance with water issues. WP2 has implemented its activities among others in different pilot projects.

One of them concerns the Lyckeby River. This is a water system that flows thru parts of southeast Sweden and ends in the Baltic Sea. Specific with this water system is that it concerns several counties and that man local citizens and business are depending on the river. Based on these reasons, along with the fact that the local organization the Lyckeby River Water Management Association was well aquipt for a pilot project, the Lyckeby River was chosen as a pilot area within the Seagull project.² Aside from its purpose of water quality preservation and restoration, this project makes it possible to measure local mobilization.

The Lyckeby Water Management Association was established in 1988 to preserve the water quality in the Lyckeby River on the same time as they saved local business and water power plants, depending on the river. In other words the Association “encourage an appropriate exploitation of the Lyckeby’s waterways, from the common or individual point of view, by keeping it clean, regulating the watercourses or taking other water conservation measures.”³

The members engaged them selves in different activities such as, annual meetings to decide about budget, next year’s activities and elect the board members etc. One way of working is thru school project within the catchment area, which aims at increasing the level of interest and knowledge for water issues in general and specifically the Lyckeby River. *The Lyckeby River day* is another way of making the people in the area close to the river interested in water issues.⁴ Those two ways of working has shown very successful and engaged a lot of people.

Before the project started a great majority of the people living in the area close to the river believe that education is the best way to increase the awareness of water issues. The attitude investigation made before the project started clearly shows that education is the most important way to engage people. It also shows that in order to make awareness among the people into behaviour of active participation, and in the long run frequent contacts with ERB, it is necessary that people feel involved in the ongoing process.⁵ This statement is later confirmed by a more resent investigation conduced after the project ended.⁶

The Lyckeby River pilot project made a pre and post analysis on the level of engagement among the people and the priorities for developing a better life condition. The studies and the WP2 show that high level of close cooperation among citizens is one of the key factors in the improvement of conditions aiming to develop a town or region. These results are possible not just thanks to the people commitment but also thanks to the inspiration given by the Seagull project. And indirectly thanks to the cooperation in ERB.

The mentioned above was confirmed by the WP 4 on rural development. So this two topics being so different gave the same results and show the importance of ERB at the local level as well as ERB in the activities realised by these different groups.

² Steiner, 2004:4

³ Steiner, 2004:33

⁴ Steiner, 2004:34-36

⁵ Lindstöm, 2003:19

⁶ Lindström, 2005

Rural Development

One essential part in the future of Europe is rural development. In ERB this effort has started and is looked serious upon. Workpackage 4 in rural development aimed to the creation of a development programme for the improvement of rural areas. WP4 consisted of different stages; one of them was the creation of a document that presents the essential factors for success when working with rural areas. This pilot project consist of the analysis of six different projects in six of the nine ERB member regions; Blekinge County, Kalmar County, Klaipeda County, Kronoberg County, Kurezeme Region and Pomeranian Region.

In Blekinge County the project focused on strengthening local democracy and infrastructure in Fur, a small community. The main goal was to be able to offer high-speed internet to the inhabitants in Fur, in order to get more businesses to settle down in the area. Another main goal was to create a meeting place where the inhabitants could practice different kinds of activities. To make all inhabitants feel important and involved a number of interviews were carried out among the inhabitants.⁷ The main actor and initiator in this project has been a local organization that contacted the County Unit of Commerce and Industry and the Unit of Culture and Sport and Spare time.⁸

The objective for the project in Kalmar County was to strengthen local democracy by creating new meeting places and different ways for the inhabitants to participate in the development of the area, because of the decreasing interest and low participation in local elections. The project has been carried out in cooperation with the inhabitants of Södermöre and the local authorities.⁹

In Klaipeda County the objective was to strengthen rural tourism with focus on water tourism. Focus was to strengthen social-economic cohesion of the Nemunas Delta, by expanding the development of natural and cultural resources. This would increase the level of international tourism and raise income for the region. Key actors in this project have been the Municipality, the Kintai Saling Club, which is an NGO, and the private sector.¹⁰

The project in Kronoberg County focused on strengthening local democracy. This was done by empower the inhabitants to take part in the democratic process, and to provide them with tools which are able to help with handling and develop the situation in their own surroundings. With this goal at hand, problems like lack of communication and lack of engagement from the inhabitants have been solved, mainly thru seminars, group meetings, questionnaires etc¹¹. Key actors have been residents, associations and employers.¹²

The objective for the Kurezeme region has been to make rural tourism more attractive. The goals with this objective are, in the end, to enlarge employment in rural areas and because of that minimize unemployment and because of that increase the income of the region. Key actors have been, first and for most, the private sector.¹³

⁷ Havby

⁸ Gómez, 2004:8

⁹ Gómez, 2004:8

¹⁰ Gómez, 2004:7

¹¹ Larsen, 2004

¹² Gómez, 2004:7

¹³ Gómez, 2004:9

The project in the Pomeranian region aimed at providing better infrastructure in the countryside. The goal was restructuring and modernization of the economy by creating an extra source of income beside the agricultural activity. In order to do so, a renovation of the local, cultural, sports and leisure centre for villages took place. Focus was on a bottom-up perspective where local development and investments in modernization and furnishing the structures that perform the cultural, leisure and sporting was of the essence. Key actors were regional actors and local residents.¹⁴

These are all example on how a local initiative and implementation has been successful, mostly because of close cooperation and mutual trust between local organizations and local authorities, from which ERB can learn and should try to recreate in their own efforts to strengthen the cooperation between the ERB and local organisations.

The conclusions of this analysis are assemble in a practical tool-box and presented all around the ERB. After this presentations a new number of pilot programmes started, inspired by the analysis and following the method presented in the tool-box. In august 2005 the results were presented showing high levels of success, living behind good results in the region and a closer and clearer picture of the work done by ERB.

Public participation

Public participation, local participation or local mobilization are concepts that illustrate the same phenomenon. Many are the concepts to define people taking actions to reach their own goals. If we need to explain what local participation is then it was well reveled by Commissioner on Democratic Development of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, who points out: “Modern local democracy should be considered from a number of angles: from the point of view of the citizens, business and the international society. From the citizens perspective successful local governance is measured against the perception of the level of corruption and unnecessary bureaucracy. From a business point of view it is measured by the ability to facilitate investments and to create incentives for successful professionals to come to the area. From the international society, it is increasingly being defined as also involving legitimate participation of non-state actors, local democracy is measured by the degree of citizens involvement in governance”⁸

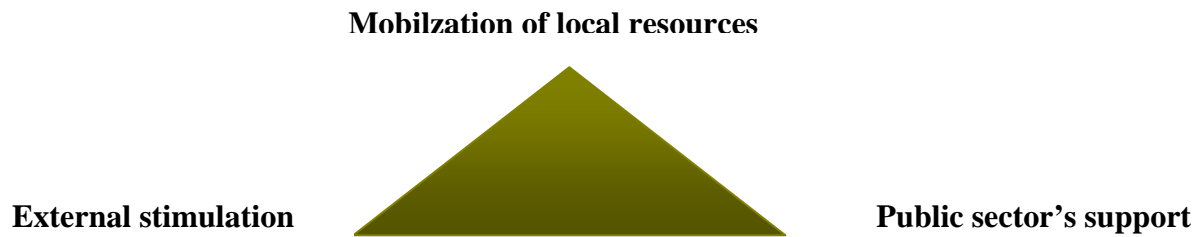
Several social scientists agree upon that three things are essential for successful local development. These three things are:

- Local initiative and that the issue is anchored in the local community;
- Support from the public sector as a possibility maker; and
- Extern impulses, extern stimulation and extern support such as role models or media attention.

¹⁴ Gómez, 2004:9

⁸ *Annual report 1 02-2002-1 03 200*, Council of the Baltic States, presented at the 12th Ministerial Session, Pori, Finland, 11 June 2003.

These three essential factors represent the so called “*the necessary triangle*”:



The figure is found in Ronnby 1995:237. The figure shows what Almås refers to as "the necessary triangle", which houses the three factors necessary for successful local engagement.

The public sector's support consists of:

- The leading of a serial of activities that initiates the process if it does not start by it self.
- The inspiration and stimulation necessary for a constant development.
- Feed-backing
- The assistance necessary under the implementation process

With in the concept of external stimulation Ronnby defines the external actors, as those outside the “local community” in both international, national, regional etc. levels of interaction. Almås also adds to his triangle, the importance of the mass media attention as a factor of stimulation and diffusion.

It is crucial for a successful project that the issue is anchored at the local level. When this happens the local force feel inspired and willing to invest time and energy in a project that hopefully will increase the level of their living conditions.¹⁵

So, which role does ERB plays in an activity where local participation is needed? What can ERB bring to the local level in the aim of working with bottom-up approach?



It is important for a successful local project that the **public sector** like the municipality or the county administrative board is supportive and work together with the local organization.

¹⁵ Ronnby, 1995:238

As for example giving the support in technical issues, less bureaucracy, knowledge and expertises... But it could also imply resources as from EU.

When it comes to **external stimulation** ERB could represent the inspiration, creator, facilitator and mirror needed to take action in different areas. Just like in the above presented workpackages and the different projects that ERB is involved in. ERB

The role to play by ERB is now clarified but some changes and new challenges must be taken in order to reach this necessary triangle. The involvement of the local and regional levels are the guarantee of a better cooperation in ERB.

New challenges

Stronger good governance is required. In many of the nine member-regions within the ERB, people do not believe in the society they live in. They do not believe in democracy and they don not trust the authorities.¹⁶ This must change if those people will use the ERB in their job for a better way of life. People that have bad experiences or have been in negative previous contact with the authorities are not likely to contact authorities again.¹⁷ To change this, people need some good experiences from authorities and maybe people needs to be shown some success stories. Remember, success creates more success. This together with information and close contact between the ERB and the local organizations will probably change this situation, though mutual trust is an essential ingredient in this type of work.¹⁸

In the pilot projects that are mentioned above, this has been shown to work. In *The Lyckeby River project* the local organizations and the local authorities have worked close together and been able to establish a relation based on trust and respect for each other's work. One possible explanation for this might be because of a long history of democratic stability in Sweden, and the fact that the local authorities in the member county concerned are well functioning and confidence inspiring and a long historic tradition on participation in Non Governmental Organisations.

The work concerned took shape in manners of, for example, things as easy as just meet on a regular basis and get a face on your partners and personal relations with the people that you work with.¹⁹ In the other pilot project, *Rural Development and Local Democracy*, the close cooperation between the local authorities and local organizations has turned out successful as well.²⁰ As for example, in Bleking County a local organization in Fur initiated a project to be able to offer high-speed internet to business and thru that effort increase the number of businesses moving to the community. After contacting some local authorities this became

¹⁶ Folkesson, 2003:25, 31 see also Folkesson, 2005:12-22

¹⁷ Even though the ERB not technically is an authority in the way that the word is commonly used the ERB has, in this matter, the same type of assignments and perform the same kind of work.

¹⁸ Ronnby, 1995:208, 210f, 229, 246

¹⁹ Steiner, 2004:33f

²⁰ Gómez, 2004:7ff

reality.²¹ Almost all of the projects within the pilot project have shown successful results because of trust and good relations between local level and the authorities.²²

Another very essential part that has been shown effective for strengthening the public contacts with the authorities in the pilot projects, that also is supported by Ronnby, is education and information. According to the Lyckeby River attitude investigation, education is the best way of making people aware of a specific topic.²³ The way that the Lyckeby River project was carried out also proves that education and information is a good way thru which people can be enlightened and be aware of the project and the possibilities that the authorities can offer. In the Lyckeby River project several ways of reaching out with information was used, many which were meant only for different parts of the public. Some examples of this are seminars about the Lyckeby River and the project; an internet page with information about the project, the project leaders, the Lyckeby River with surroundings, calendar, link, further reading etc; different types of school projects with a connection to the Lyckeby River; and *the Lyckeby River Day*, which was a happening that took place during one week with activities with connection to the river, arranged by for example culture associations and nature prevention associations.²⁴

The Lyckeby River attitude investigation also shows that the best way of communicate with people is thru the local newspaper, though a majority of persons reads the paper.²⁵ This, of course, depends on which specific group of the society you want to reach or in which member region the project is taking place. An internet page might be good, but if the public do not have access to the internet that is not really a good way of communication. Study circles and seminars are very good to some extent, but these activities only work on people that are already involved in one way or another. Therefore it is important to consider if it is the public as a hole that are to be informed or if it is just one specific part and if so which part, before the specific information activity is being started.

It is also important to reach out to all groups in the society, like NGOs and Leader groups, and especially not forget the women, which are in many situations a far too good recourse not to be included in local organizational work. According to the report *Good Governance and Gender Equality in Euroregion Baltic*²⁶ the situation for women in the ERB is not satisfactory²⁷ and the ERB can play an important role to better the situation for women in the region, if it gives this group some extra attention. This is what normally is referred to as a win-win situation. The women will definitely gain from an ERB effort and the ERB will definitely gain from such an effort as well. The women will gain thru better living conditions and a chance to get a better job in the future. The ERB on the other hand will gain from having a population that feels better and gain from integrate a strong and important resource in the local and regional work.

To be able to reach the public and thru education, information and availability strengthen the cooperation between local organizations and the ERB²⁸ is needed a stronger structure within

²¹ Havby

²² Not every project incorporates local authorities as a main actor but incorporates the private sector instead. Therefore not every project showed positive results because of good relations with local authorities.

²³ Lindström, 2003:19; Lindström, 2005

²⁴ Steiner, 2004:35ff

²⁵ Lindström, 2005

²⁶ Folkesson, 2005

²⁷ Folkesson, 2005: 23-31

²⁸ Christensen et al 2005:39

the ERB. The theories that support these statements are well documented, reliable and widely used within both the public- and the private sector and supports here by Tom Christensen et al in their new book *Organisationsteori för offentlig sektor* (Organizational Theory For Public Sector).²⁹

The organisational structure needs to be more of a hierarchy with an organization that branches out as its get further down in the hierarchy, the complex structure. Because of this local organizations and the public as well, will find support and be able to contact and use the central organization, in this case the ERB, more easily.³⁰

In a hierarchical organizational structure there is a major vertical cooperation between the different parts of the organization. In an organization like the ERB this will eventually lead to a better dialog and greater use of the services that the ERB can supply.³¹

As a complement to the vertical cooperation a great horizontal structure is needed because of the geographical situation.³² Local offices that can provide the public and the local organizations with help and information that even stronger than the vertical cooperation will secure the bottom-up perspective, are desirable in transnational cooperation on local level.

This gives at hand a structural situation, which in its core is complex but in practice works both vertical and horizontal. More figuratively speaking this means that ERB might need more local offices, for example one in each county in the member regions, to reach the public and the local organizations. Because if the public and the local organizations don't know that the ERB exist, what the ERB do or how to reach them or if it is to hard to reach them, no contact will be made.

²⁹ Christensen et al 2005:38f

³⁰ Christensen et al 2005:37

³¹ Christensen et al 2005:36

³² Christensen et al 2005:38, 36

Conclusion

This is a list of suggestions on possible methods and tools, which can be useful in the work of the ERB to reach tighter relations with the people on local and regional level.

Change the Organizational Structure

- **Local Offices** It is important that the ERB is easy to get in contact with for the local organizations. If they are to continue to cooperate with the ERB and initiate cooperation the local organizations must feel that the ERB is easy to get in contact with. Otherwise no contact will be made. One solution is to open local offices throughout the ERB. These offices will work as contact institutions and as a link between the “bottom and the top” to which the local actors have access and where the local organizations will be able to turn to for help with information and support. The most effective way might be to support the local authorities, so that they can take a more active role as such an ERB link.
- **An Arena for Networking** To strengthen the ERB's role as a centre part in the local level work the ERB should work, as one of its most important tasks, as an arena for networking between local organisations in the different member regions. To increase the level of transnational cooperation more focus on contacts concerning finding partners for projects, youth exchange and town twinning can be made. Since many organizations are interested in, and find it hard to find partners for different exchange activities this will increase the level of awareness among a huge group of people. But for this to work the organizational structure must change and the ERB must market themselves for this purpose.

Enlighten People through Seminars about Education and Information

- **Education in Favour of Transnational Co-operation** To be able to fulfil the goal of increasing transnational cooperation within the ERB, education is an important part. Education in this matter contributes to enlighten people of the importance of transnational cooperation, which in many parts of Europe is seen as something negative. Thru information and education in this matter people will hopefully become more positive and interested about transnational cooperation and as a result from that, start a constructing dialog with the ERB in a more frequent manner.
- **Make People Aware of the Opportunities** It is of direct importance for the ERBs goal of a closer presence at local level to inform the public about the opportunities that a close cooperation with ERB can result in and make the public aware of the benefits related to the ERB. This is best done thru more concrete PR and information about the ERB and thru showing themselves more to the public.
- **Include All Groups.** To be able to gain as much as possible from the different projects that the ERB is housing it is necessary to work with all parts of the society. Women are such an example that often is left outside and are overlooked in these

contexts, which of course is not good. It is not good because of the democratic values that the society stands for and it is not good for the building of a good society when such a strong and important recourse like the women as a group really is. Let us not forget about the NGOs and Leader groups either, which are such a great recourse in the local level work.

- **Customize the Information** To reach out with information it is necessary to use different types of communication channels, depending on which group in the society you wish to reach. Local newspapers have proven to be the best way of reaching the broad public. Other ways is internet-pages and seminars, which, though, only reaches specific parts or groups in the society. It is therefore important that the group of people that will receive the information is carefully specified in order to choose the right channel for the information.

Work With External Stimulation

- **Give the Actors Recognition** To create a positive atmosphere among the actors in a specific project it is a good idea to make the people feel important. Give the local organizations recognition for their work. This makes people eager to carry out a project, which in the end will show a successful result. This also includes attention from the media. If you have worked with a project for a long time and feel proud about it, what can be better than telling the rest of the society about it. This gives inspiration for a coming project, both for one self and for others. The ERB can work as a coordinator between the local level and the media, as the ERB have more experience from these contacts and might give the story some extra spice.

Another side of extern stimulation is to show some previous projects, which were successful, for the local organisations. This will lead to increasing engagement, increasing optimism and efforts that will create even more success.

Establish Trust

- **ERB As a Tutor** It is important that the local organizations can turn to the ERB for help and support, inspiration, feed-back on their work and to be able to use the ERB as a coordinator. If the local organizations are to use the ERB on a regular basis and that contact is initiated from the local organizations, the ERB must show it self as an open institution to whom it is possible to turn to for help. As an expert in many of the areas and with a lot of contacts it is important that the ERB is prepared and willing to do so. After all, local and regional work is the ERBs area of expertise. If this will be able to work and the ERB can establish a role as a tutor, trust will be established which creates an arena for constructive exchange of thoughts and ideas.
- **Positive Experience From the Authorities** To give the local organizations something to believe in and something that works as a driving force the ERB can and should show the local organisations previous projects that were successful. In the regions where the trust for authorities is lacking, previous projects that show a good level of cooperation between the local organizations and the ERB can be a start for a positive trend and a start of a trustful relationship between the two.

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http://www.eurobalt.org/Seagull_devERB/



This report aims to present ways of strengthening the local level participation and involvement within and between the Euroregion Baltic. It is based on the results showed by the Seagull project experiences.



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