

Via Baltica Nordica Development Zone

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Photo: Johanna Inkinen

Pre-accession instruments made Podlaskie ready for full partnership in EU projects

The Podlaskie Voivodship used to be thought of as one of the least developed regions of Poland. Its low transport accessibility, under-developed infrastructure, low investment attractiveness and agricultural economy had contributed to the region's image for years. Yet a few years ago things began to improve. The quickened development would not have been the case had it not been for the help of the EU pre-accession funds. In the years 2000 – 2003 we received over € 59M from the EU in the framework of PHARE ESC. It enabled us to modernize not only the roads (both main trunk roads and smaller local ones), tunnels (a vital investment in the city of Białystok with PHARE contribution around € 7M) and even waterways (the Augustów Canal – a technical masterpiece from the late 19th century) but also low level infrastructure such as sewage systems and water treatment plants. It gave us the opportunity to encourage and promote small and medium enterprises development and thus stimulate economic growth. Still, it has not solved all our problems but undoubtedly has given us a lot of experience, of which we hope to take advantage moving a level up, i.e. applying for the EU structural funds.

The EU enlargement is now fact. It has created a new situation we had all been preparing for and hence should find easy to adjust to. The structural funds, a part of this new reality, are the main challenge for us in the years to come; a challenge we will meet and hope to benefit from.

We are aware that we can achieve more if we work as a team. Therefore we have, and still do support co-operation between regions – the Via Baltica Nordica project being a good example. Via Baltica,

the axis of the Via Baltica Nordica project, which runs through our voivodship, is a road of strategic importance, not only for us, but also on the European scale. It affects transport accessibility – a must where sustainable development is concerned. What is more, we believe it can be the core of a tourist brand and, thus, conducive to tourism development. To make use of this yet undiscovered asset of Via Baltica's many benefits, we have carried out *Via Baltica development analysis in terms of tourist services with linear tourist brand creation* – a project within the Via Baltica Nordica framework and with PHARE CBC funding. Besides our activities along the tourism theme of the project, we find Via Baltica Nordica a helpful tool regarding GIS and railway development and, additionally, expect Via Baltica Nordica assistance in our efforts to aid the construction of airports and development of air traffic, perhaps as an integral component of the follow up activities.

The Via Baltica Nordica has proved to be successful and, as it draws to an end, we look forward to co-operating in the follow up activities from August 2005 onwards, yet this time following common financing and administration rules and same time schedule which will significantly simplify our contacts and facilitate co-operation.

This is a chance given us by the EU enlargement. The chance we must take.

Janusz Kazimierz Krzyżewski
Marshal of the Podlaskie Voivodship



Photo: Marshal Office of Podlaskie Voivodship



Mobilise GIS for your policy!



A Geographic Information System (GIS) can be defined as a computer-based system for the digital entry, storage, transformation, analysis, and display of spatial data. Although we often restrict our concept of spatial data to maps (e.g. land use, vegetation), spatial data also include images (e.g. satellite data), point observations (e.g. rainfall), or tabular data associated with geographic areas (e.g. census records). In addition to maps, a GIS must be capable of handling other types of data within a spatial frame of reference.

Few would disagree with this definition but, at the same time, many would arrive at a definition on their own. Their definitions would be shaped by their own interests and needs and how the GIS is to be applied. Thus, a GIS can mean different things to different people.

- If you understand maps and data as a very important tool to improve internal procedures and to co-ordinate external networking by information management, then GIS is more than software on a computer, emphasizes Torsten Naubert, chairman of the GIS theme group in the Via Baltica Nordica.

- You can use GIS in combination with databases and Internet strategies for content and process-management, for citizen participation and involvement, to cluster partners in win-win-networks (i.e. in planning, tourism, local development, small and medium-sized enterprises, in education, for real estates, in web portals etc.) and also in a quality management and controlling of workflows, lists Naubert and gives a concrete example:

A potential investor is looking for the best location for an industrial area. He has clear structural, technical and financial conditions. A pre-selection in regional Internet location information systems gave a ranking with three best locations and one of them is situated in your municipality. A meeting is fixed ad hoc. The municipality mayor collects all information needed. Maps, site plan, aerial views, posters and so on are pinned on the meeting room wall. All seems perfect!

Suddenly the investor tells him by mobile phone that he and his experts are waiting on the location area. What to do now? Immediately he drives by car to the open-air meeting and his laptop, equipped with GIS and databases with master plan, site plan, aerial views on a map, statistics, infrastructure information as well as landscape and tourist offers, will be his bodyguard! Surely, the demonstration at the site on the car bonnet will be impressive.

In the Via Baltica Nordica partners apply and utilise GIS in many ways. In Germany the Region Havelland-Fläming coordinates an internet-portal for tourism information (www.reintour.de). The tourism offers (castles, palaces, museums, parks etc.) and services (hotels, cafés, shops, railway stations etc.) are put into the portal as business cards with information, pictures and a position on a map. Moreover, you can combine some of them into specific tours (e.g. a trip around the historic city of Beelitz, architecture walk in old Brandenburg) and for thematically useful clusters it is possible to bundle them into higher-level tourism-packages (e.g. summer trips in the old cities of Havelland-Fläming). Additionally the information is used for touristic presentation of the whole city. You can get the cities, packages, routes and visit cards with their own web-addresses, i.e. for specific marketing actions.

- The basis for the maps is a GIS. Online maps were developed for data input which are easy to handle by the input partners on the spot. So this Internet-portal has all characteristics of modern information management and opens a chance for a new quality in inter-municipal cooperation on a local-regional scale, says Naubert.

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Photo: Johanna Inkinen

Via Baltica Nordica participates in investments: Voipaala Culture centre ready to operate

As part of the landscape management plan, Valkeakoski has converted an old cowshed into a culture centre at Voipaala. Development of the plan runs further at this valuable landscape area. Plan proposals were made available to the public in July 2004 and gardening and forestry measures took place in August.

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GIS handbook

For more examples on GIS in planning, tourism, landscape management and economic development, please see the GIS-handbook online at www.viabalticanordica.com

Prammi makes the landscape route attractive

The municipality of Loppi has developed a landscape route in its pilot project. The landscape route *From the Oxroad to the Railway* connects the more than one thousand year old Oxroad of Häme to a more modern way of travelling, the railroad at Riihimäki. Today individual travellers can travel along the 60 km long route by bike and motorcycle or, if they are group travellers, by bus. During the Via Baltica Nordica project, Loppi has made and implemented a development plan for the route and built a new resting and gathering place called Prammi. It will considerably improve the services of the landscape route.

Prammi is built on an ice age ridge near by the so called "Devil's rock". By connecting new canoe, horse and cycling routes to this building, Loppi can offer a new kind of nature travelling experience.



Photo: Johanna Inkinen

The idea is to bring the customers to Prammi by bikes, canoes, on horseback or on foot, but most importantly without cars. Prammi is equipped for 60 customers and has kitchen and meeting equipment. Nearby there are also almost 250 bed places. Prammi is available for all service providers, citizens and organisations.

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Kaunas County promotes the zone in Lithuania

In Lithuania the Via Baltica Nordica zone covers the area surrounding the Via Baltica road, which is the counties of Marijampole, Panevezys and Kaunas. The main project activities in the Phare CBC project of the Kaunas County Governor's Administration are related to the promotion of the Via Baltica zone development: spatial planning and promotion of investment through the use of GIS, creation of the County GIS data bank and development of tourism in the Kaunas County. They will also prepare a strategy for tourism development and a study about the structure of the county's GIS data bank. The budget is € 67,000 and the pilot project will last until November 2004. In order to continue as an active partner in the Via Baltica Nordica the Kaunas County will submit a follow-up Phare application for the rest of the project period.

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Interactive maps in the Internet support participatory planning

An interactive regional plan map is Häme's pilot project in the Via Baltica Nordica. The solution is based on GIS and Internet technologies. Citizens can give feedback to the planners during the planning process via the internet plan maps. During the public inspection in February 2004, 1100 visitors visited the Internet site and 120 of them gave feedback via the map service or e-mail.

- We are very pleased that this project supported widening the public inspection methods to the Internet. Citizen participation is an essential part of the planning process today, says Hannu Raittinen, Head of the Regional Planning Unit.

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Interactive map: www.hameenliitto.fi/en/regionallanduseplan

Reports

The Via Baltica Nordica partners have produced several reports on railway traffic, tourism and GIS. You can find reports at www.viabalticanordica.com

Innovative Information Boards

Attractive information boards along a road are important tools for promoting tourism. The Swedish partnership asked themselves two questions: How can the visitors' impressions obtained along the Blue Highway be enhanced? How can we strengthen the identity of the Blue Highway? Visible, up to date and well-designed information boards in the right environment, in other words, *an attractive information milieu*, is one answer.

Such milieus are created through unique techniques by young design students. The key is the unique technique and the material, which enables you to create information boards, chairs, tables, and rain-shelters amongst other things. It is strong and allows extremely high-resolution pictures; it is very flexible and gives up to 20 years service, and it is much cheaper than comparable solutions.

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Via Baltica Nordica follow-up project under preparation

Via Baltica Nordica has been successful in many ways and most of the project partners have expressed their willingness to continue this cooperation also after July 2005. Transnational cooperation and networking developed during this and the previous project is seen as a fruitful way to develop the Via Baltica Nordica corridor further with new ideas.

Partners have especially raised two themes which will probably be prepared into two separate projects. The transport connections project would deal with such issues as bottlenecks along the corridor, new planning methods and travel information systems. The tourism clustering project would focus on a wide exchange of experiences, common marketing and tourism research. Partners see that in the new project common transnational activities should have an even more important role than before.

The BSR Interreg IIIB programme will continue in the future to be the most relevant financing instrument for the follow-up project. It provides better transnational cooperation possibilities than ever: old and new member states use Interreg financing on equal terms and the New neighbourhood instrument will improve the coordination between Interreg and Tacis. Applications for the follow-up projects are planned to be submitted in February 2005.



Partners planned the follow-up project in the third Via Baltica Nordica Forum in September 2004 at Białowieża, Poland. Photo: Marshal Office of Podlaskie Voivodship

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Are you interested in the follow-up project?
Please visit www.viabalticanordica.com for contact information!



Armands Tetters (Latvia) with the winning fish (91 cm and 5kg).
Photo: Kai Siiponen

Via Baltica Pike Trophy Championship in Sweden

In August 2004 the Swedish partners organised a large, international pike fishing competition at Kattisavan on the Blue Highway. The aim was to raise awareness of pike fishing as an international product of high quality and to develop the product further. Competitors came from Russia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden: travel agents specialising in fishing trips, journalists and sports fishermen. The competition and the educational tours for travel agents and journalists that were held beforehand were arranged in cooperation with two other projects called Lapland Fishing and St Petersburg project.

“Fishing is a distinctive product for the whole Via Baltica Nordica Zone, and we hope that other partners will arrange competitions

next year. Fishing competitions give a good opportunity to involve many local entrepreneurs, to attract media, agents and fishing organisations and to get both publicity for the region and training for the entrepreneurs. We will produce a small report on describing competition arrangements, costs and methods,” says Johanna Palmlöf.

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