news bridge
NEW BRIDGES project newsletter 1/2010

Strengthening of Quality of Life through Improved Management of Urban Rural Interaction

What is rural
What is urban
Approaches to Quality of Life

www.urbanrural.net
Developing Quality of life and urban rural partnerships in the Baltic Sea Region

In view of making city-regions more attractive the issue of developing quality of life seems to become increasingly an emergent challenge. In terms of policy-making and spatial planning, however, one can state that the individual perceptions and appraisals of (potential) inhabitants as well as any other kinds of consumers or investors with regard to the specific qualities a city-region can offer to them, have been rather neglected so far. This is in particular an urgent quest for city-regions that cover both urban areas as well as more rural ones since the interactions of the two types of territorial qualities become more and more complex. In addition, the set of concerned stakeholders and their various expectations, agendas and interests can be considered as relative diverse in those types of city-regions.

The growing importance of quality of life as an essential element of policy-making has brought forward the requirement of a distinctive and objective comprehension of its influence. Tailor-made approaches for developing quality of life cannot be based on policies initiated by hierarchical co-ordination of public institutions, it should in particular take into account the individual aspects and preferences. In this respect an improvement of quality of life in a city-region at hand becomes not only a question of equity, but also predominantly as an element of strategies in order to attract people and investments.

In recent strategic policy papers, the relation of quality of life with regard to sustainable development as well as to make cities and regions more attractive has more and more been trickled down. An example is the European Strategy for Sustainable Development (ESDS, 2006). The Baltic Sea Region Programme for the period 2007-2013 has incorporated, at least implicitly, the strive for developing quality of life in one of its priorities to make cities and regions in the BSR more attractive. This has been the point of departure to develop the NEW BRIDGES project.

The NEW BRIDGES project focuses on urban rural interaction, its management and impacts on quality of life in seven partner city-regions across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). The project aims to improve the management of urban rural interaction by developing sound strategies to identify and launch Pilot Actions and management tools for strengthening quality of life.

Within the project quality of life is being approached through the following three key elements: residential preferences, mobility & accessibility and provision of services. Particular attention is being paid to the individual preferences of the people who are living in the seven partner city-regions. Inhabitants as well as local stakeholders are involved in the process from the very beginning trough surveys, interviews and Local Stakeholder Meetings.

Identifying priority challenges and proceeding towards Pilot Actions

Over the course of the project, the partners create new partnerships and identify the three most important priority challenges regarding quality of life in their city-regions. At the same time each partner analyses the individual preferences as well as local circumstances and policy environment that is prevailing in the respective city-region. By linking the outcomes to the priority challenges identified the partners perform a critical reflection which builds the decision

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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for NEW BRIDGES project.
framework for selecting a Pilot Action that suits both the city-region and the project. The selected Pilot Action will be implemented during WP 4 (figure 1).

Work Package 3 (April 2009-June 2010) consists of three phases which reflect developing methods and stakeholder involvement processes accordingly: Information, Participation and Involvement Phase.

During the Information Phase, priority challenges in regard to quality of life and its three key elements have been identified based upon strengths and weaknesses seen by the inhabitants and local stakeholders. Almost 300 local stakeholders have successfully been involved in the project during the Information Phase. Most of them were policy makers and representatives from NGOs. Inhabitants have mainly been involved through the surveys on individual preferences.

The partner city-regions face challenges mainly within the key elements mobility & accessibility as well as provision of services, namely:

- A well-functioning public and private transport system connecting urban, suburban and rural areas especially in the long run,
- Long-term provision of both public and private services and jobs in rural areas.

The provision of public services in general plays an important role in the Baltic States. All partners mentioned difficulties in regional planning in order to address the challenges identified as cooperation and communication between the relevant stakeholders as well as an integrated planning approach is performed insufficiently or not existing.

During 2010 the priority challenges are being further analysed and put into perspective in each partner city-regions' local circumstances and policy environment. Based upon the outcomes, each partner together with inhabitants and local stakeholders will commonly agree on a Pilot Action and prepare its implementation.
In every project there is a moment when you have to turn your words and plans into actions. In NEW BRIDGES this moment will be in summer 2010. It will be the breaking point when partner city-regions will introduce and demonstrate their pilot actions as new working models for improved management of urban rural interactions.

During the first year of the project almost 300 local stakeholders have successfully been involved in different partner city-regions’ activities, most of them practitioners (authority members), representatives from interest groups and NGOs but also scientists, decision-makers, entrepreneurs and journalists. Partner city-regions have been looking at the priority challenges in NEW BRIDGES themes through the lenses of their current planning procedures and the individuals’ and stakeholders’ preferences.

The identified priority challenges are analysed and discussed more during the spring 2010, resulting in selection of one or several pilot actions in each partner city-region. A detailed pilot action work plan will be made for the selected action(s). These work plans will be transformed into concrete local level projects, measures or actions focusing on how to bridge the gaps between existing planning and people’s expectations. During the period from summer 2010 to spring 2011 all partner city-regions will implement their participative pilot actions. The actions are expected to comprise certain concrete ‘geographies’ as they are inevitably focused on a specific spatial section within the city-regions. The diversity and differences of partner city-regions impose a variety of pilot actions but they all will aim to improve the urban rural interaction at certain territory.

For ensuring the sustainability of the implemented pilot actions the planned actions will later on be developed into a long term management models. City-regions are expected to create a long-term priority list of new regional actions which would improve the management of urban rural interactions and the quality of the life in the future. During the pilot action period the city-regions will also visit each others’ local planning meetings as peers and get additional insights from the pilot action processes in other partner city-regions.

During the recent years almost the whole world has fallen into one of the deepest economic recession of contemporary economy. Although the downturn has been significant also all over Europe, some of the countries have been affected vastly more than others. Among them are the Baltic States, where the crisis has been worst after the early 1990s. The economic situation brings challenges to regional planning. Planners are working under high pressure and almost miracles are required from them: with reduced labor force and financial resources they are demanded to create new jobs and to reorganize local services more efficiently and sustainably. At the same time the planning should build more attractive city-regions under the eyes of (new) taxpayers, business seekers and tourists.

The notion that quality of life is playing pivotal role in (individuals’) migration decision and in regional economic growth is well established in literature already a few decades ago and recent discussion about attractiveness of the places have even reinforced the argument. Still the practices in regional planning have often been dragging behind or even opposite, especially now under this economic downturn. Reasons for that are varied: budgets have been tightening; neighboring municipalities and regions have been seen more as competitors than as considerable partners; and very often there are different conceptual understanding and viewpoints between the policymakers, stakeholders and individuals.

NEW BRIDGES aims to reinforce co-operation in urban rural management beyond governing boarders in the city-regions. It aims to gather different stakeholders from the city-regions around the same table for planning new co-operative models for more solid interactions and concrete actions to implement the plans. Solid co-operation and better management of interactions in the city-regions do not only improve residents’ quality of life due to easier accessibility and residents’ participation in planning their own living environment, but it will be also beneficial
Acting together – towards sustainable Baltic Sea Region

Text: Talis Linkaits  Photo: VASAB

History of the nations living along the Baltic Sea has been mutually intertwined for centuries. Though we are still seeking the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region, there is no doubt that the Region is united by the wish to create a living space which is attractive, creative and promotes innovative initiatives. Improved quality of the living space will have a positive impact on joint economic achievements of the Region and so enhancing its competitiveness and increasing its role on the global scale.

On 16 October 2009 in Vilnius, the ministers of the 11 countries of the Region responsible for spatial planning and development adopted the VASAB Long-Term Territorial Development Perspective of the Baltic Sea Region till 2030 (LTP).

Threats for the sustainable development

The LTP underlines several spatial threats and challenges in the Region. Demographic changes (a natural population downfall and ageing) in several BSR areas put a pressure on securing enough labour force to sustain the growth and to manage third age services. Shrinking productive age resources may not be sufficient to match employment demands and, subsequently, may in itself lead to economic stagnation of the Region.

The negative tendencies are often coupled with adverse migratory trends. Outward migration to find attractive jobs still prevails in the Nordic peripheries and eastern territories of the Region, generating a significant decline in population balance. This is seen especially in the rural areas, primarily among young and well educated inhabitants. While the migration processes contribute to a comparatively good labour market situation of the largest cities, they challenge the liveability of peripheral, rural and old industrial areas in the BSR, e.g. by increasing the knowledge gap.

Some manufacturing industries in the BSR will still be vulnerable to competition from rising economies of Far East countries. Cheaper labour costs in these countries may become a decisive factor for relocation of production and assembly activities, thus causing severe implications for the labour market in the Region and deterioration of the social environment in some of its parts.

The urban rural divide presents itself as one of the major challenges for the BSR cohesion. This divide becomes more and more detrimental for the rural areas in effect of the population ageing and outward migration.

A call for joint action

The VASAB LTP sets a plan of 22 actions for prioritised issues of transnational importance that can be achieved only by joint forces of the regional stakeholders.

VASAB has identified NEW BRIDGES project as a one of the cornerstones for overcoming urban rural divide. The project is seen as an effective tool for combining the development of metropolitan areas and their rural surroundings (LTP Action Agenda 7). VASAB hopes that NEW BRIDGES will develop and test new forms of urban rural partnership and cooperation. The outcomes might have not only national relevance, but also serve across the borders.

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VASAB is an intergovernmental cooperation providing a ministerial platform and expert network for 11 Baltic Sea Region countries to coordinate spatial planning and development: Germany, Poland, Russia, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. It is guided by the conference of ministers and steered by Committee on Spatial Development where German Länder adjacent to the Baltic Sea and Russian North West Oblasts and city of St Petersburg are also represented. Lithuania is the chairing country of VASAB between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2010.

More information can be found:
www.vasab.org

For local economies through optimized and regionally planned services.

NEW BRIDGES was born, and frightens to say so, but it will also be completed under the difficult economic circumstances in BSR. Sustainable overcoming of current downturn requires many structural changes and institutional innovations to reorganize society’s residential planning, services and transportation. City-regions’ social and organisational functions have to be planned more cost-effectively, but at the same time improving the individuals’ quality of life and environmental sustainability. These objectives should not be conflicting, but with closer interaction and better management these all can be established through improved co-operation in the city-regions. Although the current economic downturn is challenging will it be the most convincing moment to establish soft values, such as quality of life, to regional planners’ toolbox.
What is rural, what is urban?

Text: Christina Hovi & Mikko Laaksonen
Photos: Mikko Laaksonen & Turku Tourism/Mainostoimisto Satuman

As NEW BRIDGES concerns urban rural interaction, one of the key questions in Turku and South-West Finland has been to define the rural areas. In the conducted questionnaires rural areas have been seen as distant areas of municipalities; namely archipelago, fields and forests with diverse agriculture, forestry, fishing and summer cottages. Agricultural land and number of farms is a good indicator for describing rural areas. About ¾ of the land area within Turku urban region was agricultural area in 2000.

Within NEW BRIDGES the City of Turku and the Regional Council of Southwest Finland as project partners have conducted an Internet survey about inhabitants’ opinions of the quality of life, residential preferences, provision of services as well as mobility and accessibility in the Turku urban region. The questionnaire was particularly aimed to the borderlands of rural and urban areas, which were considered as potential pilot areas for NEW BRIDGES. 546 responses were received. The questionnaire provided additional information of the way of life in the urban rural borderlands and also emerged several ways to improve mobility and services in these areas.

Also the municipal officials and political actors of the Turku urban region were interviewed over the Internet with 67 respondents. The objective of these interviews was to find out how the urban rural interaction has been seen in the strategies, decision making and operations of the region’s municipalities. The key findings of this research include the following issues: 1) Regional cooperation and cooperation between municipalities in the region could respond to many challenges. 2) Regional public transport could be improved by launching local trains and developing the service lines of buses within the municipalities. 3) The fringe rural areas in the most wanted locations are the choice for those who can afford long journeys. These areas cannot produce sufficient population basis for any local services or public transport. 4) The mobile services such as school taxis or home care are very expensive for municipalities. Making the service network more rational would help when the need of services increases as the population ages.

Today the connection between the municipal strategies and regional collaboration is weak in the Turku urban region. There is an urgent need for regional strategies and common view particularly including land use planning, housing policies, provision of services and public transportation. The efficient form for cooperation has still been missing in practice. According to the interviews, the City of Turku should lead this collaboration, but has not been able to fulfil this role. There has been a fear that the basis of regional collaboration would be “everyone gets what they want”, while in real fruitful co-operation the needs and wishes should be reconciled, so that the gains for the whole region would be increased.

The Turku urban region consists of 14 municipalities: Aura, Kaarina, Lieto, Länsi-Turunmaa, Masku, Mynämäki, Naantali, Nousiainen, Paimio, Raisio, Rusko, Sauvo, Tarvasjoki and Turku. The region has been defined based on the commuting area for the structural model in preparation for the Turku urban region. By population the Turku urban region is the third biggest urban area in Finland, but it also includes large rural areas and a broad part of the unique Turku archipelago. At the end of 2008, the population of the Turku urban region was 328170 inhabitants, of which 176170 live in the City of Turku. The total area of the region is 8 800 km2, of which 40 % is land.

About Turku urban region

The municipalities in Finland enjoy wide autonomy. Regional land use planning and interests are co-ordinated by the Regional Council of Southwest Finland. The City of Turku co-ordinates municipal co-operation in the PARAS project for municipal reform. The sprawl of the built-up areas in the Turku urban region has been studied by the Regional Council of Southwest Finland. Most of the sprawl is explained by building permissions and deviation permits granted outside the planned areas. In principle, building built-up areas without urban planning is forbidden by Finnish law. However, as the law allows exceptions and deviations to this principle, in practice the municipalities have liberally allowed construction outside planned areas, particularly in areas close to the sea.
Local Stakeholder Meetings

During 2009, two Local Stakeholder Meetings were organized in the Turku urban region, first one in Raisio in May and second one in Kaarina in November. The themes of the meetings were the challenges of urban quality of life and the relationship between urban and rural areas. The first meeting had about 70 participants and the second about 60, mostly municipal officeholders but also political actors, NGO and business stakeholders.

The first meeting discussed the local possibilities and challenges in three workshops according to the project themes; residential preferences, mobility and services. Numbers of challenges were identified in the workshops and finally ten priority challenges were voted for further analyses. In the second meeting in Kaarina the ten priority challenges were discussed further and refined to three priority challenges:

1. Mobility and accessibility
Settlement structure reducing the need for traffic, regional public transport, cycling and walking network and service concept

2. Services
Versatile service centre network joining public and commercial services, city centre, municipal, town and region centres, village centres and suburban local services, mobile services

3. Residential preferences
Socially balanced housing offer, lifecycle thinking, affordable housing prices and taking the cultural environment into account

In addition, further ideas for the project were discussed in workshops under four different themes: 1. sustainable development and environment, 2. cultural environment and natural landscape, 3. service centres in built-up areas and services in villages and 4. social justice and residents’ participation possibilities.

The meetings have given a good opportunity to increase regional co-operation and trust between stakeholders. They also form a basis for deeper interaction in the structural model work. Due to informal mode of meetings the regional stakeholders have learnt to know each other and have had an opportunity to discuss important issues together. Both the number of participants and the level of discussion indicate the high interest of the stakeholders.
In the region of Lower Silesia in Poland NEW BRIDGES is one of the first projects implemented under the transnational Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. Geographically the region of Lower Silesia is large and diverse. Thus the activities of the project are planned to focus on the south-eastern part of the region, area of Jelenia Gora Poviat. This area comprises ten territorial units and is aimed to become region’s model example of urban rural interactions. NEW BRIDGES opens new possibilities and offers fresh approaches for these interactions in the area. It has engaged representatives from different institutions like public authorities, experts from universities and other professional regional planners.

In Jelenia Gora the project process begun with comprehensive residential survey indicating the importance and challenges of urban rural interactions for the residents. The inquiry discovered that although most of the people prefer to live in urban environment they still would like to live in small detached houses. These preferences have led to the novel regional development where the areas of detached houses surrounding the cities are sprawling. The urban sprawl is expanding to semi-urban areas and thus the conventional boarders of urban and rural are vanishing in the region.

The project has already been enhancing communication between different stakeholders and cooperation has found completely new forms. One good example is the inter-commune initiatives where local activity groups and Karkonosze Communes Union have started to work together. The aim of these local activity groups is to integrate the activities of different interests groups, like non governmental organizations, local entrepreneurs, public institutions and individuals, in order to improve the quality of life and to create coherent program for sustainable community development in the region.

The three priority challenges defined in the 1st Local Stakeholder Meeting in Lower Silesia reflect the need of concentrating the project activities on:

1. Integrating the planning of settlement structure and transportation
2. Taking advantage of varied forms of transport and better coordination
3. Retaining landscape and architectural values characteristic of village and city.

After analyzing these challenges the findings will be the starting point for the selection and implementation of NEW BRIDGES pilot action in Jelenia Gora. There is great optimism and full engagement to proceed with these actions. The final aim is to elaborate the best actions and tools which directly result in improvement of urban rural interactions and quality of life in Jelenia Gora Poviat and the whole Lower Silesia region.
The Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg is one of the sixteen states of the Federal Republic of Germany. Hamburg is a city state with 1.77 million inhabitants living in an area of about 750 km². As a city state with a restricted area, Hamburg is tightly intertwined with its immediate surroundings (in terms of urban development, the housing market, commuter flows, infrastructure facilities etc.) and simultaneously forms a vibrant, economic hub of 4.5 million inhabitants (since 1996 called the Metropolitan Region of Hamburg), which lies primarily in other states, districts and municipalities.

Against this background, Hamburg is traditionally dependent on intensive regional collaboration and by participating in various projects strives to build “bridges” in order to make a lasting improvement to the quality of life of its inhabitants and the regional population. These projects may concern a particular urban development, regional parks and the retail trade in the region, but also public transport.

As an economically strong and vibrant city in Northern Europe, Hamburg also assumes responsibility for its own markets and for the whole of Northern Germany by endeavouring to greatly improve residential and industrial conditions with a variety of participants in the form of pan-regional networks, development projects and clusters. Special attention is paid to rural areas, which are characterized by structural weaknesses, insofar as they are more on the periphery to the city, regional growth centres and transport routes.

Since the end of 2007, together with its neighbouring federal states and with grants from the Federal Government, Hamburg has therefore established a Northern German partnership project “MORO Nord” (www.moro-nord.de), which serves to illustrate the opportunities and obstacles of a “cooperative partnership” between the city and rural regions.

Identifying new opportunities

One of the essential questions is to jointly determine which opportunities and collaborative interests exist in the rural regions as compared to the city of Hamburg and which collaborative projects, in particular, can strengthen teamwork to the mutual benefit of both parties.

With the support of the project NEW BRIDGES, Hamburg is attempting to identify opportunities in the form of experts’ reports and a series of workshops with parties from Hamburg and the region and to encourage rural districts to table their concerns better than previously in regional collaboration. The District of Ludwigslust (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) and districts in Schleswig-Holstein have developed this “stakeholder dialogue” particularly intensively. Not only should specific partnership projects be agreed that benefit Hamburg but they should also improve the development prospects of rural areas. With its large population, Hamburg can be seen even better as a “market” for regional products and tourist offers, or can be used as an international “shop window” for self-promotion. Where at all possible, parties should seek economic partnerships, as well as strive to realize opportunities that take an integrated view of mutual challenges to the housing market, demographic change and the use of infrastructure facilities.

Mid-2010 and in 2011 the opportunity will be there, within the scope of large conferences, to understand both the factors for success and the constraints for an urban-rural partnership in metropolitan regions, such as Hamburg, and in national partnerships, which are consciously structured on a larger scale and therefore include urban and surrounding rural regions, and to get to know them as a European prototype for regional cohesion.
Taking steps in urban rural interaction

Text: Grazina Cepuliene  Photo: city of Kaunas

The Kaunas city-region, meaning the City of Kaunas and the surrounding Kaunas District Municipality consist of urban and suburban areas surrounded by large agrarian countryside. The functions of urban and rural used to be conventional; the urban centre has been the centre of trade and services and rural areas have been used mainly for food production employing eminent number of individuals. However, during the last few decades the line between these two spaces has blurred and both urban and rural have gained diversified meanings.

Reasons for the recent development are varied but similar with many other modern societies. New technologies and improved production mechanisms have declined the labor demands in agriculture, and in the same time the city-region’s urban areas have been developing fast, for example through new businesses in manufacturing, technology and tourism. Some of the new developments and businesses have come directly to the rural environment, too. Within Lithuanian context the Kaunas city-region has some special advantages for rapid development. These characteristics include the number of universities, logistical situation among two of the European nine main transportation corridors and the atmosphere of an old but living town.

The changing roles of urban and rural have brought new challenges to the regional planning. Increasing number of people is commuting everyday from countryside to the city-centre and the public transport system has not been able to follow this development. Individuals are becoming more and more aware of sustainability and require also to be heard when the decisions of their living environment are being made. The Mayor of Kaunas District Municipality Mr Valerijus Makunas has said it well: “We have to develop manufacturing, create new employment opportunities, but we can’t forget to see the people who live in the environment. Also, we must not see the rural environment like a second place, reserved for the city and its residents. And, while building, manufacturing and developing we have to remember to save the environment for the next generations“. Kaunas District Municipality joined NEW BRIDGES to reinforce urban rural interactions and their management in their region and to find new solutions to the current challenges.

During the first year of the project Kaunas Municipality District has carried out an empirical resident inquiry and organized two Local Stakeholder Meetings for indicating the three urban rural and quality of life related priority challenges of the city-region. The priority challenges that have been defined based on the analyses and discussions are:

1. To develop integrated regional public transportation system
2. To provide more sustainable mobility options in regional level, such as improved cycling routes
3. To involve residents and other stakeholder groups in regional planning

Furthermore there has been a lot of discussions on how to strengthen the interaction between the City of Kaunas and the District Municipality and thus to improve the quality of life and sustainable development of the whole city-region. Each new possibility to collaborate between the city and the district is an important step in creating safe, sustainable and comfortable environment within the region.
NEW BRIDGES in a nutshell

In the city-regional context the urban rural interactions and the quality of individual's life are influenced by certain key elements – mobility & accessibility, provision of services and residential preferences. NEW BRIDGES aims to improve the management of the urban rural interactions and to strengthen the quality of life within these interactions by linking together individual perspective, planning and policymaking in seven city-regions in the Baltic Sea Region. The project will build up new urban rural partnerships and identify new ways for cooperation and lessons for best-practices by implementing pilot actions in the partner city-regions.

The three-year project (2009 – 2011) was approved in the 1st call of the Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013. Besides project management (WP 1) and communication (WP 2) NEW BRIDGES consists of three content related work packages; potentials for quality of life in BSR city-regions (WP 3); piloting actions for improved management of urban rural interactions (WP 4); and multilevel cooperation for quality of life in BSR (WP 5).

The outcomes of the project include: partner city-regions’ implemented pilot actions and integrated management plans; methodological guide for better management of urban rural interactions; and set of policy and practice recommendations on coherent planning, implementation and management of urban rural interactions in BSR.

Sustainable urban rural development is one of the strategic areas of cooperation for Baltic 21, an Expert Group within the Council of the Baltic Sea States. NEW BRIDGES has the Baltic 21 Lighthouse Project status and the project is one of the key pieces in understanding and developing the urban rural interaction in BSR.