

Integrated Management of European Wetlands, Project description Funded by 5th EC Environmental Action Programme

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Introduction

The Integrated Management of European Wetlands research programme (EVK2-CT2000-22001) carried out in four wetland regions is a unique cross cultural project encompassing a holistic, comparative and multidisciplinary approach. It aims to address important issues of biodiversity maintenance and is concerned that stakeholders, including wetland inhabitants and international, national and local organisations, are involved in a collaborative effort to solve actual or perceived conflicts within a sustainable development framework (making an important contribution to EU research programme Human Dimensions of Environmental change).

Problems to be solved

The major issue that will concern the research teams is how to accommodate socio- economic development with the goal of maintaining biodiversity. The Saimaa Lakes in Finland, Nemunas Delta in Lithuania, Danube Delta in Romania (both targeted for the EU Enlargement Programme) and Kerkini Lake in Northern Greece are important regions of biodiversity, which also support the human population in the form of commercial fisheries. Conflicts can arise between people and wetland species as well as conservationists and local inhabitants so research will focus on the precise nature of these conflicts, identifying social and cultural factors involved in order to provide a better awareness of how local populations understand and relate to their environment and whether they accept outside conservation measures and legislation. Such interdisciplinary, cross-cultural research will contribute significantly to the 5th EC Environmental Action Programme, "Towards Sustainability" and responds to issues outlined in the Rio Convention and European Biodiversity Strategy.

Scientific objectives and approach

Research will be carried out under five project headings or work packages. Multi-disciplinary wetland teams working in the four research sites will cover each of these work packages to answer the following interlinking questions: - how wetland inhabitants think about the ecosystems they exploit, how these ideas relate to a biological understanding of the ecosystem, the institutional framework within which such understandings are produced and regarded and factors relating to fishing and tourism that will influence participation in the conservation of biodiversity. These work programmes will be co-ordinated by work package leaders. An important aspect of the research will be the interpretation of data in relation to results of the other work packages. A sixth work package deals exclusively with the managements of the programme. Research will involve a range of methodology including participatory tools. Communication between teams and co-ordinators will be through meetings, e-mail, web page updates, tri-monthly reports and a cross-cultural examination of data.

Expected impacts

An important outcome of the research will be to demonstrate how end users such as wetland inhabitants and institutional stakeholders within the four Countries and beyond can work together combining the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity with education, training and awareness. The research programme expects to contribute to the development of tangible strategies for the successful management of these environmentally sensitive regions, which has a wider relevance to all European wetlands. Publication and dissemination of its findings via the web site and in reports to policy makers, notably those concerned with the Common Fisheries Policy and Environmental Action Plan, aim to ensure that economic, technical, and institutional policies are feasible and integrated with social acceptability.

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Brief project presentation

Integrated Management of European Wetlands

- Central question – How to reconcile the maintenance of biodiversity with socio-economic development?
- Location – Four important European wetlands
 - Saimaa Lakes, Finland
 - Kirkini Lake, N.Greece
 - Nemunas Delta, Lithuania
 - Danube Delta, Romania.
- Funded by 5th EC Environmental Action Programme, ‘Towards Sustainability’

Structure of IMEW Research Programme

Five interrelated projects known as Work Packages (WP).

WP1 – Local Perceptions

- How and why do people evaluate the fish and other animals in their wetland ecology?
- How and why are these evaluations arrived at?
- To be investigated through the use of participatory action research techniques?

WP2 - Conflicting Interests

- How do fisheries catches compare with consumption by predators?
- In Greece, Romania and Lithuania predators are birds. In Finland the predator to be studied is the threatened Saimaa Ringed Seal.
- To be investigated by a range of scientific techniques.

WP3 - Public Understanding

- What are the sources from which people derive their environmental awareness?
- How do variations in access to environmental knowledge affect understandings across time?
- How do people establish and negotiate their ‘environmental entitlement’?
- To be investigated by a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques

WP 4 - Institutional Dynamics

- How does the management of wetland sites and use of resources acknowledge local needs?
- How do formal and informal institutional dynamics influence the relationship between the environment and local communities?
- How are ‘environmental entitlements’ established and negotiated?
- To be investigated at the household level by interviews and focus groups and at the level of institutions through interviews and the examination of relevant documents.

WP5 - Responsible Tourism

- How can the promotion of responsible tourism effectively encourage local people to co-operate with ecological measures designed to maintain biodiversity and provide sustainable economic development?
- What in the light of data emerging from the other Work Packages can be said about the capacity for the development of responsible tourism?
- What proposals can be made for each wetland site?
- To be investigated by the compilation of case studies for each wetland location.