Transboundary water benefits: contributing to regional integration between Sweden and Finland

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Torne River Watershed

- 40,157 km², mostly in the Arctic
- From alpine to coast - climate gradient
- Fragile environment
- 60% in Sweden, the rest in Finland, a small fraction in Norway
- Unregulated, no significant structures in the main channel Könkämäeno, Muonio and Torne Rivers
- Flooding normally in two stages (May, Midsummer)
- Average flow 380 m³/s & bifurcation in Tärendö, Pajala
- Natural habitat for wild Baltic salmon and sea trout
- NATURA2000 area, national landscape, significant cultural environment
- Home to 77,000 people, 3 nations (Fi, Swe, indigenous Sámi) 2 official languages, 2 minority languages
The River Torne as a nation-state border ca 200 years, since 1809

*Border (-) barrier, different paths of development, social separation, cultural losses, slowing interaction on several levels, remoteness*
- Adding national policies on various sectors & policies regarding languages, minorities, etc.

- contributing to building & *strengthening* the *bordering processes* both within society and on an individual level as time goes by

- ➞ *De-bordering processes possible* through transboundary water cooperation, "for the benefit of the border region"
Transboundary Cooperation outcomes Fi-Swe 1/2

- **Transboundary River Agreements from 1970 and 2010, both with a coordination body, but with very differing mandates**

- Shared infrastructure in sewage water treatment: treatment plants built to receive sewage from Sweden to Finland, and vice versa, Karesuando-Karesuvanto and Tornio-Haparanda

- Physical infrastructure for combatting flooding
  - Jointly prepared plans to prevent flooding risks & information inputs

- Joint regulations on fishing in the 500 km long border river (wild Baltic salmon, white fish, grayling)
  - With the re-emerging salmon stocks in the River Torne regulations lay framework for fishing tourism development despite the border
  - Joint fish stock and fishery data gathering and analysis
Transboundary Cooperation outcomes Fi-Swe 2/2

- Cross-border research and cultural projects emerge
  - Fishery data gathering and analysis
  - e.g. EU-Interreg Nord project on traditional fishing culture (Kukkola rapids traditional dipnet fishing for whitefish: nationally recognized cultural heritage activity from the Lapland County)
  - Fi-Swe research on coastal marine ecology

- A yearly *search for cooperation initiatives*
  - with funding assistance from the Fi-Swe Commission: possibility to stretch beyond the scope of plain "water cooperation" if transboundary
  - *focus on e.g. environment, cultural co-op, youth involvement*
- Building trust at every encounter – consequently & persistently

- Finding both opposing & shared interests and goals, from grassroots to regional
  - making them visible, within communities & externally

- Finding key issues & developing joint strategies, and actions, with stakeholders
  - Finding partners inside and outside the transboundary basin (utilizing available human resources in cooperation)

- Executing jointly agreed actions
  - informing of the results, within communities & externally
Transboundary co-op lessons 2/2

- Overcoming cultural and language barriers is done step by step, no shortcuts
- Opening up paths to other areas of activities is possible, but not automatic
- Activating the individuals & organisations which have a will to cooperate
  -> learning by doing in all positions, backgrounds and age-categories

What next?

- Room for more integration in preparedness in the midst of the systemic environmental (climatic) change in the north/Arctic
- Strengthening stakeholder dialogue throughout the basin
- Building up local environmental-social resilience possible: finding ”an ally” on the other side of the border vs. top-down interaction with the ”central powers” -> A more diversified dialogue (versus 100% national approach) on development paths for the basin area have a possibility to emerge
Closing remarks

- In order to move forward in co-op, wanted:
  
  - Participation by them who are living by and from the transboundary waters
    - what co-op over the border can give for the people: youth, village elders, women, entrepreneurs, tourists, etc?
    - Possibility for progressive initiatives - the most important and most unutilized resource in the north/Arctic is the human resource
  
  - Engagement of the authorities (local, regional, national)
    - without that: weak execution of joint plans and initiatives
  
  - Engagement of the ministries and/or state institutions involved
    - without that: the operational space for local/regional actions gets small, in the long run lack of support from the state may well erode local cooperation
Kiitos - Tack – Giitu

Thank you

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