



Developing the business potential of the Vistula Lagoon region, ports and harbours

# A complex and long-term process

**The on-going transformation of the Vistula Lagoon region into an area with a clearly prevailing ecological and environmental orientation is to a high degree a result of the deepening economic decline this part of Poland has been experiencing since the 1940s. In this context, when working out a development strategy, it would be worth reviewing the eco-policy for the region while focusing on finding a good compromise between environmental goals and economy-related objectives, as the latter has so far been quite neglected.**

**T**he Vistula Lagoon's harbours and ports still offer an idle potential for business growth. Yet, the nature of this potential varies, depending on the hinterland behind it.

Geographically, the hinterland of the Pomeranian Voivodeship ports and harbours is limited to the Vistula Spit, a relatively small area subject to significant restraints imposed by wildlife and landscape protection requirements. It seems that there is no space for locating or developing any business functions here other than non-colliding with the environmental restrictions – such as a combination of tourism, leisure, spa treatments and healthcare services with small, local fish-processing plants and – in the western part of the Spit – farming.

With such hinterland limitations, the ports and harbours of the Vistula Lagoon's northern shore are doomed to handle passenger ships (including cruise boats operating within the Lagoon's waters), sailing yachts and other leisure vessels and fishing boats. Also, transportation of supplies to the villages and hotels situated on the Lagoon, can also be expected. The traffic will only be intense during the high summer season here. Even the most optimistic, long-term planning does not provide a basis for justifying the cost of winter traffic (ice breaking).

In the case of the ports in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, especially Elbląg, but



also Tolkmicko, Frombork and even Nowa Pasłęka, which is also a harbour in part, the hinterland is much bigger geographically and more diversified in terms of the economy. Geographically, the whole area of the Voivodeship can be regarded as a hinterland for these ports provided, however, that their existence will be a convenient and cost-effective option (due to the cargo volume, for example) for transportation of materials and intermediate products for businesses located here, as well as for shipping their products.

Assuming the optimistic variant of hinterland development south to the Vistula Lagoon, the basic difference between the ports of both Voivodeships, i.e. Pomeranian and Warmian-Masurian, lies in cargo shipping. But for this category of transport to grow, a regular route to the open sea needs

to be launched (via the Strait of Baltiysk or via the canal to connect the Lagoon with the Baltic Sea) and the depth of the Lagoon's main waterway and the waterways leading to individual ports have to be increased. This, however, requires that a hinterland development program be devised and implemented, which would guarantee a sufficient cargo volume to justify the cost of port-related infrastructure expansion, modernization and maintenance. Appropriate political decisions also need to be made.

Should the shipments volume justify this, one might even consider the possibility of keeping the Lagoon traffic going all year long – provided that the benefits would make up for the cost of ice breaking in winter. ■

Marcin Burchacz

## VILA events

# Shaping Polish-Russian cooperation

**The conference opening the VILA project attracted immense interest and became a starting point to a series of successful meetings and visits, all of them contributing to the process of moulding future Polish-Russian cooperation in this area and determining the future directions of regional development.**

A cycle of seminars with experts, dedicated to the opportunities the Vistula Lagoon offers turned out to be of particular value. Topics discussed included the need to create a common assessment of natural and social determinants that would facilitate sustainable development of the Vistula Lagoon.

Through implementing the activities and initiatives planned, the project partners are striving to achieve the project goals. Working meetings and seminars organized under the project support and strengthen social and economic relations among the Vistula Lagoon regions.

Previous analyses focussing on the region's natural and social environment have revealed a direct asymmetry between the Polish and Russian part of the Vistula Lagoon. Differences can be seen in the research methods used as any common vision for development that would be beneficial to all partners is missing. These discrepancies were confirmed by the first of the public consultations that were planned, where cooperation aimed at using the immense potential of the region appeared to be a complex and long-term process.

Moreover, studies on the economic and social factors of the Vistula Lagoon's development have been commenced under the project. Study visits of the project partners to Polish and Russian ports and harbours of the region have given them an opportunity to take a closer look at the condition of these facilities and to reflect together on the actions that should be undertaken and solutions to be devised in order to succeed and make the most of the region's advantages for both business and tourism.

The VILA Project Mid-Term Conference planned for 2013 will be another opportunity to become familiar with what has been achieved so far and to establish cooperation between Polish and Russian partners. The event will be held onboard a ship cruising the Lagoon. This additionally promotes inland shipping as an effective transport mode, which should be used more widely in the Vistula Lagoon region. Initiatives of this type are indispensable to present the vast socioeconomic and environmental benefits of intensifying inland shipping in the Lagoon area. ■

Rafał Koba



## About the project

The project "Opportunities and Benefits of Joint Use of the Vistula Lagoon – VILA" is implemented jointly by Polish and Russian partners, within the framework of the cross-border Cooperation Programme Lithuania-Poland-Russia 2007-2013 and financed by the European Union. Its main objective is to identify opportunities to fully take advantage of the economic and social potential of the areas located within the Vistula Lagoon region. This first-of-its-kind initiative, with a total budget of approx. EUR 1.07 mln, could also become a model for similar Lithuanian-Russian actions, regarding the Curonian Lagoon. VILA, led by the Maritime Institute in Gdańsk, will be implemented over two years, starting from January 2013. This initiative will be realized with Russian partners: the Atlantic Department of the P.P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Administration of the City of Baltiysk and the Polish partner – the City Commune of Elbląg. **More information at: [www.vilaproject.eu](http://www.vilaproject.eu).**