

The deciding factor behind development

by Marcin Burchacz

Coherent cross-border spatial planning is of utmost importance if the Vistula Lagoon, both on its Polish and Russian sides, is to be developed the way it should be and at a pace it deserves. Despite numerous obvious differences between spatial planning systems existing in the two countries, some common dynamic changes have recently been taking place. But there are clear signs that more can and needs to be done.

One such characteristic is the increasing significance in strategic spatial planning at regional levels on both sides of the Vistula Lagoon – new developments are often based on internal factors and focus on the local strengths (resources, potentials), thus improving territorial competitiveness. Nonetheless, over the course of the VILA project it has become apparent that there is a necessity for closer integration of strategic planning of economic and social development within the area of spatial planning, even though currently existing legal regulations are inadequate in this respect and approach economic development and spatial planning separately. Another joint trend observed is the importance of environmental protection (like the EU Natura 2000 area to be established on the Polish side later this year), which is increasingly being reflected both in the legal systems and spatial planning practice, since it is an essential condition for sustainable development of any given region.

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The Polish side, in line with its EU obligations, has already initiated preparation of spatial plans of maritime areas and within a few years plans for the Polish part of the Vistula Lagoon, classified as internal maritime waters, will also be ready. They should be coherent with the existing spatial plans for Baltic waters of other Member States and also enable realisation of the Polish development strategy regarding the aquatorium and the surrounding area.

Defining functional areas is a new element within regional planning. Results of regional studies, aimed at recognising specific spatial planning determinants behind development of a given subregion, may become beneficial in a few ways: firstly, the in-depth analysis of development conditions is the basis for a proposal on a regional spatial plan. Secondly, it is a tool that supports activities of regional authorities aiming at realising particular goals of spatial management policy addressed in specific areas. Thirdly, as a search tool

for good practices and their eventual implementation in regional development initiatives, e.g. when occurring issues (existing conditions, challenges, development problems) concern more than one commune territory.

The Vistula Lagoon subregion may be recognised as a multifunctional area (due to its location and water potential), attractive from the perspective of economic development and potential for regional tourist products. However, it is still to be determined if the area can be classified as functional in accordance with the recommendations of the "Concept of national spatial planning till 2030". Here, the results of analysis regarding Elbląg city region are of vital importance.

The existing spatial planning analysis indicates the unexploited potential of the subregion, difficulties in overcoming different development barriers as well as threats for already ongoing development processes. What's more, there are no legal tools for proper control of accepted spatial plans that are being implemented. Changes that would improve the existing spatial planning system are delayed. It is therefore necessary to create a coherent and strong development vision for the entire subregion that would overcome individual interests of each commune and their authorities; foster cooperation and dialogue between the Lagoon area's individual communities, and increase regional identity. If the process is to be successful and beneficial to its inhabitants, an interregional functional area should be defined that would include both Polish parts, Pomerania and Warmia-Masuria, of the Vistula Lagoon. The minimal effect would be to indicate the municipality area of Elbląg as a functional area.

The Russian part of the Vistula Lagoon subregion consists of 10 municipal units, and the entire Kaliningrad region consists of 75 units, of which 72 participate in the Kaliningrad Region Municipal Units Association. The side in question is convinced that cooperation of Russian and Polish authorities as well as institutions in the area of spatial planning in the Lagoon subregion should be of a permanent and systemic nature, providing not only information exchange but also allowing for a discussion on development plans between all interested stakeholders. In the future this would

also give a chance for joint preparation of spatial planning documents for the entire subregion that would include the interests of all parties.

Therefore, close cooperation between municipal units of the Russian Vistula Lagoon's coastal zone and the Polish communes in Pomerania and Warmia-Masuria should be initiated. The best platform that would allow for implementing such activities seems to be the euroregion formula that has been recommended and implemented by the EU since 1958 as a development tool enhancing transboundary cooperation on a regional level. Above-mentioned establishment of the new euroregion can be initiated by the Polish-Russian council on cooperation of the Kaliningrad Region of the RF with Polish regions, which is an authorized body which implements official Polish-Russian agreements on regional cooperation. Apart from applying the formula of the euroregion, a working committee, functioning under the auspices of Kaliningrad Duma, could be established.

Elaborating a common Polish-Russian development strategy for the Lagoon subregion, accepted by both sides, with coherently defined targets, problems, tasks and specific activities, may be a deciding factor behind future development of unused potential of the subregion. An attempt to elaborate such strategy within VILA was only partially successful, but it may be used as a starting point for further works that should be done at the level of regional spatial planning. ■

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 in January 2013. This initiative is realized with the following 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.

Cooperation over war games

by Lena Lorenc

A port is a city-forming institution, history has seen many cases of business growing around port towns and regions, as harbours and related industries provide a variety of jobs and opportunities. We talk with Arkadiusz Zgliński about the realities of the largest Polish port of the Vistula Lagoon, Elbląg Sea Port, its current condition and development plans.

■ **Trade with Russia constitutes a vast share of Elbląg's turnover. Experiencing fierce competition from land transport, what is shipping's competitive advantage in this exchange?**

The trade exchange with the ports of Kaliningrad Oblast accounts for some 95%, whether in imports (108,000 tn in 2014) or in exports. About 4% of the remaining share represents the short sea shipping connections with European ports. Water transport is one of the least expensive ways of moving cargo. Also, a ship can carry more freight than a truck and the border clearance takes less time. As far as railway transportation is concerned, the need to shift from the Russian track gauge (1,520 mm) to the European standard (1,435 mm) at the Braniewo border crossing requires another transshipment service. This is where water transport offers an advantage, since all component costs affect the final price and determine the choice of the transport means.

■ **Did the current political situation translate to Elbląg's cargo turnover last year?**

Despite the unfavourable geopolitical situation stemming from the sanctions against Russia and the resultant drop in value of the ruble, last year can be regarded as a successful one. The amount of cargo handled (358,000 tn) was 73 thou. tons higher than the 2013 score (+25.6% yoy). However, the effects of sanctions are becoming visible now, so we are not too optimistic about this year. Although statistical data do not reflect any drastic downturn, if the cargo volumes remain at the 2014 levels, it can be regarded as a very good result.

■ **How did the port benefit from cooperating in the VILA project?**

Owing to VILA, an inventory of the Vistula Lagoon ports and their infrastructure was taken and we now know our resources and how they might be used for the purpose of future collaboration and development, providing favourable geopolitical and social circumstances, of course. If the latter

does not improve, a risk exists that free shipping will be restricted in the Russian part of the Lagoon. What's also important, VILA has brought an idea of building a navigable channel across the Vistula Spit in a manner eliminating all the existing barriers to navigation, dredging the water lanes, modernization of quays and building new border crossings. All these activities should stimulate collaboration, trade exchange and tourism. We would also like to see the reactivation of inland shipping, but this requires major capital expenditures and arrangements to restore the inland water ways after many years of neglect.

■ **Does the port have an organizational strategy associated with the possible project of creating the Vistula Spit Canal?**

A canal across the Vistula Spit will be a window to the world for the Port of Elbląg. This is the only way for us to gain sovereign access to the Baltic Sea basin and the ports of Western Europe. Although having set some general guidelines, it is hard for the port to speak of any strategy yet, since the city of Elbląg has only just obtained the funds needed for preparing a feasibility study. However, upon completion, we shall be able to increase our collaboration with the Port of Kaliningrad, since the new channel will be navigable for larger tonnage vessels, reaching Tri-City's ports (including to the established hub at Gdańsk's Northern Port, DCT), as well as for cabotage vessels now operating on the Hamburg and Rotterdam directions. The very special inland location of the Port of Elbląg constrains its accessibility from the Baltic, therefore our over-size cargo transport services and metal structures handlings to Western European ports are now very infrequent. We have gathered data and technical analyses needed to design the entire waterway planned to connect the Vistula Lagoon and the Bay of Gdańsk. Water lanes will be 5 m deep, so as to enable easy navigation of ships with a draught of 4



m. Apart from resulting in a better use of the existing potential and further growth, this investment is also an invitation for the business to open new branch offices, build terminals, warehouses or storage facilities here. We are analysing variants with the canal and without it. Certainly, we are not passive – we are modernizing our terminals, acquiring new land sites which can be offered to potential partners, seeking the local authorities' support to our application for EU funding to modernize our quays, construct hydro-engineering infrastructure and even new terminals.

■ **How does the condition of inland shipping and river cruising look at the moment for Elbląg?**

As far as international shipping is concerned, *Johannes Brahms* was operating here until last year, but this year a contract was not signed and the shipowner withdrew these cruises from its offer. The past two years Ostróda-Elbląg Shipping Company, the most active tour operator, had to reduce its operations due to the modernization of the Elbląg Canal. In 2015 works are expected to end, so we hope that ships will come back here and consequently, the passenger traffic decline will cease. Meanwhile, the Sigismund Augustus Boulevard quays were modernized last year. This is where cruise ships can berth at a minimum charge, while tourist yachts and sports boats are not charged any fees at all. What's important, reactivation of cruise and passenger shipping requires local municipalities to participate in the expenses and subsidize the tickets. As we all know very well, any private shipowner has to see profits of the business. Any town with a harbour status, i.e. with access to a water body and waterways, should support and promote the development of passenger shipping. ■

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