Transfer initiative and actions in the region of Latgale (Latvia)

The most comprehensive transfer activity has been with the region of Latgale. This region borders the Russian Federation in the east, the Republic of Belarus in southeast, and the Republic of Lithuania in the south. According to the current administrative division, Latgale Region incorporates 19 counties.

Based on previous working contacts in Latgale, the Region of Zealand (Denmark) in co-operation with the Environmental Policy Research Centre (Germany) and the Latvian Environmental Investment Fund, started a transfer co-operation initiative which was later joined by the Chamber of Agriculture of Lower Saxony (Germany) and the University of Roskilde (Denmark).

The comprehensive transfer concept used in the Latgale case was based on two basic principles:

- Interaction with local and regional actors in order to identify input for the recommendations on developing strategic bioenergy actions.
- Motivation for regional co-operation and encouragement for actors to take on co-ordinating responsibility.

The transfer comprised the following activities:

1. Several transfer visits to Latgale including roundtables and workshops with municipal decision-makers and other stakeholders.
2. Fact finding - identification of basic data and overview.
3. Site visits - getting insight into the current situation and demonstration projects.
4. Meeting stakeholders - regional and local government, energy companies, farmers and foresters, other business representatives, etc.
5. Getting input from stakeholders.
6. Additional data and information - for making calculation and assessments.
7. Developing recommendations.
8. Ensuring continuation, e.g. by handing over recommendations to key stakeholders.

Two workshops were held in the city of Rēzekne in April 2013. The first workshop addressed mainly municipal decision-makers and other stakeholders, and was dedicated to regional and local bioenergy strategy development and planning. The workshop highlighted bioenergy initiatives and experiences of the Region of Zealand (Denmark), Rotenburg (Wümme) and other German regions. The aim was also to encourage municipalities to join the Covenant of Mayors initiative and to plan the municipalities and region's energy activities. The workshop also raised the issue of alternative energy crops for the biogas sector, specifically those which are suitable to replace maize to supply biogas plants, such as sugar beet, cup plant and various species of grass from intensive or extensive grassland management. Here, the potential of pruning material from the maintenance of hedgerows along county and municipal roads and streets was also presented. Project partners entered into a dialogue with the audience about the specific lessons for Latgale.

The second workshop addressed mainly forestry stakeholders. The Chamber of Agriculture of Lower Saxony presented recent research results with regard to estimating the potential of logging residues, and possible restrictions due to the nutrient regime (cf. chapter 4.3). On the Latvian side, presentations were given on short-rotation coppicing and the Grey Alder as a resource for bioenergy. This species resembles to some extent the Black Cherry in the Rotenburg (Wümme) region, since it was for many decades considered a "forestry weed". Now it is welcome as biomass for wood chips, the more so, since its use is independent of the market for the main grades of trunk timber, which is usually the case for logging residues. The visits to Latgale revealed an enormous potential for activity and innovation also in the field of wood biomass, and the Bioenergy Promotion transfer mission to Latgale can, from the forestry point of view, be regarded as a fruitful *mutual* exchange of information.

The Latgale region has huge potential biomass resources, but there is a lack of effective and predictable support mechanisms to mobilize and exploit this potential. The situation is aggravated by the absence of reliable information about the resource potential at the national and regional level, a lack of vertical co-operation between different levels of government and administration, a lack of horizontal co-operation among organizations in the region and the lack of regional co-ordinating and facilitating organizations (e.g. regional energy agency).

However, a number of local governments in Latgale started to assess and utilize the existing biomass potential and have committed themselves to developing Sustainable Energy Action Plans (SEAP) under the Covenant of Mayors.

One of the important lessons of the transfer initiative was that there is a strong need to intensify co-operation among key stakeholders in Latgale and to strengthen the Latgale Planning Region's role as the co-ordinator of this process. Another finding was that the Latvian, German, and Danish project partners joining the transfer initiative are committed to continuing and intensifying the dialogue with the Latgale Planning Region and the municipalities in Latgale.

Info box 1: Creating Latgale as a bioenergy region – recommendations from Bioenergy promotion 2

The transfer team developed a set of recommendations on how to create and develop the region of Latgale as a bioenergy region. They contain a series of proposals for strategic action in the following fields:

1. Vision & Objectives

2. Regional co-operation - including identification of actors to take on co-ordinating responsibility.

3. Supporting structure - including knowledge centres both in the region and outside the region.

4. Technology and Action Catalogue

a. Good practice from Latgale Region/Latvia

b. Good practice from other regions in the BSR

5. Implementation - how to make it happen?

6. Priority project(s) - starting with feasible and important practical steps.

7. Appendices - illustrating key components mentioned in the different strategy elements.

To put the recommendations into practice it is essential that one or several key Latvian stakeholders take responsibility for developing and implementing the recommended actions. Other transfer activities similarly call for various follow-up actions. In all cases the inspiration, specific practice cases, guidance and recommendations have been instrumental to the target region's efforts to mobilize the development potential related to bioenergy solutions.

Based on experience from the transfer activities, the following approach can be recommended for similar transfer initiatives in the future:

1. Special attention must be paid to transfer to non-partner regions. This must be the case from the drafting of the application, and the necessary resources must be devoted to this task.
2. Commitment from "receiving" regions must be ensured at an early stage.
3. A transfer team should comprise 2-4 project partners.
4. Transfer activities are carried out based on the principles as suggested above.
5. It is essential to get assistance from a project partner or another actor in the country where the transfer mission takes place.
6. Follow-up after the project has come to an end should be ensured. This could take the form of a strategy process, various supporting activities or a concrete project.