

## **Day of kindness for Miedzyodrze.\* Transboundary Round Table on Miedzyodrze as a good example of stakeholders inclusion (westpomeranian voivodship, Poland)**

\*The chosen day appeared to be Day of Kindness in Poland what additionally influenced the meeting.

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### INTRODUCTION

Environmental values and flood protection - are these two aspects in conflict in terms of water management? Is there a shared approach that would represent the interests and needs of all the stakeholders? These questions are valid especially now, in 2018 where Water Framework Directive is actively consulted widely with European citizens to not to weaken its position [[www.livingrivers.eu](http://www.livingrivers.eu)].

In the region of considerable tourist potential that covers Nature 2000 areas, has plans and duties for ensuring safety of the inhabitants and prospective large investments, **responsible water management is paramount**. At the joint Round Table, alongside with consulting side we met "between Odras" (east and west Odra), in possibly the broadest circle to work out a recommendations for Miedzyodrze, in line with the provisions and objectives of the **Water Framework Directive**.

### MIEDZYODRZE - IN BETWEEN ODRAS

The Miedzyodrze area is an inland delta between two main branches of Odra and is a relevant part of the EU **Natura 2000** sites:

- SCI PLH320037 (Dolna Odra),
- SPA PLB320003 (Dolina Dolnej Odry).

As [subcomponent 1A.3 of the Odra-Vistula Flood Management Project](#) [1] financed by the World Bank and co-financed by the European Investment Bank and the European Commission, the polish water management authorities planned to:

- (re)build the historical dykes and flood gates around the Miedzyodrze, separating the area from the Eastern Odra and the Western Odra
- dredging/excavating the natural water arms within the Miedzyodrze as well as some old channels within the Miedzyodrze.

(Note: The historical dykes and flood gates and drainage actions had been conducted around 1930 in order to establish a polder for agricultural purposes. After 1945 the dykes, flood gates and the drainage system was not used anymore, so that the Miedzyodrze area could renaturalize itself in an amazing way.)

The by the authorities planned actions in the Miedzyodrze, namely:

- rebuilding the dykes
- rebuilding the flood gates
- large-scale dredging of the water arms

were regarded with concerns by the NGOs/Umbrella Organisations\*, since these actions were supposed to endanger the Natura 2000 coherence and would have endangered the whole populations of:

- Ramshorn Snail (*Anisus vorticulus*, EU Habitats Directive Annex II and

- IV, according to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form the SCI PLH320037 hosts a relevant population of this endangered species)
- Mud Loach / Weather-Fish (*Misgurnus fossilis*, EU Habitats Directive Annex II, according to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for SCI PLH320037 also inhabiting the area)
  - Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*, EU Birds Directive Annex I, according to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form the SPA PLB320003 hosts 120-140 breeding pairs which is more than 2 % of the whole breeding population of Poland)
  - White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*, according to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form the SPA PLB320003 hosts 5 breeding pairs)
  - Water Soldiers / Water pineapple (*Stratiotes aloides*) as important breeding habitat of Black tern (see above)

The result of these planned actions (rebuilding the dykes, rebuilding the floodgates, large-scale dredging of the water arms) would have also deteriorated the ecological state of Miedzyodrze and river Odra which would have endangered the goals of the EU **Water Framework Directive**:

- during the time, when the planned flood gates would have been opened, the huge peatlands of Miedzyodrze would have been drained by the excavated river arms and excavated artificial channels in direction to the Western Odra, not only raising the danger of Carbon emissions, but also of Nitrogen emissions into the water, reducing the water quality as relevant part of the physical component defining the ecological status of a water body, according to the EU Water Framework Directive.
- during the time, when the planned flood gates would have been closed, the ecological connectivity between the river arms of the Miedzyodrze and the Eastern Odra and the Western Odra would have been blocked, reducing the habitat quality of the fish fauna as relevant part of the biological component defining the ecological status of a water body, according to the EU Water Framework Directive.

However, the authorities as well as the World Bank justified the planned activities with the statement that they were necessary for flood protection and therefore would be of an imperative overriding public interest (which indeed - at least partially - could have justified these planned activities, since Art. 6 sect. 4 EU Natura 2000 Habitat Directive and Art. 4 sect. 7 EU Water Framework Directive allows at least partially such exceptional cases, where an imperative overriding public interest can be proven).

The NGO submitted their concern to the European Commission, who forwarded them to the World Bank, describing why they do not see any advantage for flood protection and therefore no imperative overriding public interest.

In the following, both the Umbrella Organisation as well as the Polish water management authorities ordered hydrological studies, independent from each other:

Both studies came to the same results - that the planned activities will have no positive effect on flood protection; this happened in May 2018.

As a result, the Polish water management authorities decided in summer 2018 to stop the plans, and to not rebuild the dykes and the flood gates, and to also reduce the planned excavation of the river arms.

At this point the communication between the Polish water management authorities and their advisory company, Sweco Consulting, on the one side and the Umbrella organisations on the other side became much more fruitful than before, and both sides agreed to try to find a common solution for the Miedzyodrze area in an open dialogue. This was the time when the idea of the "Roundtable" arised.

## ROUNDTABLE - INCLUSION

**Roundtable discussion** took place in a constructive and friendly atmosphere 21th of November .2018 in Szczecin, organized by [Save The Rivers Coalition - KRR](#) and its member [Stepnicka Organizacja Turystyczna](#), in cooperation with [DNR](#) as water umbrellla organisations in Poland and Germany. Supported by [CEEweb](#) and Flow:Europe.

We met in the [oldest working cinema in the world](#) to show the life of rivers on the screen - threats, reality and opportunities and to discuss its future as regional case.

Presented movies were served our guests to enrich our talks:

Nie zabierajmy rzekom przestrzeni / Let us not take space from the rivers (PL)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aht\\_60-TpXQ&t=215s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aht_60-TpXQ&t=215s)

Oder Delta Safaris - rozwój uslug turystycznych w oparciu o nature / development of tourism services based on nature (ENG)  
<https://vimeo.com/258065658>

Wodne Skarby Powiatu Goleniowskiego <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfEeTgxPpqk&t=7s>

Hidden rivers <https://vimeo.com/wemayfly>

What's river for? <https://vimeo.com/190947032>

Water & Wood <https://vimeo.com/58400710>

Roundtables swirling between the topics "flood protection", "nature conservation" and "tourism" took the main stage of our careful time with Miedzyodrze. Common moderating by both sides set the tone of discussion, ensuring an atmosphere of joint commitment to achieve the goal.

## 'FRUITS OF THE RIVER' - OUTCOMES

**The basic outcomes of the Round Table** appeared as:

A) Miedzyodrze - common points of view related to the following points:

The Polish-German Umbrella Organisations - KRR and DNR together with the flood protection and water management authorities agreed that:

- the dykes shall not be rebuilt
- the flood gates / sluices shall also not be rebuilt and shall stay open
- the connection of the water bodies of Miedzyodrze to the Eastern Odra and to the Western Odra should be improved.

B) Miedzyodrze - different points of view related to the following points:

Different points of view concerning the question how the connection of the water bodies of Miedzyodrze to Eastern Odra and Western Odra could be improved:

- The Umbrella Organisations suggest to remove some parts of the old dyke rests, so that the water from Eastern Odra can flow more easily into the

Miedzyodrze and further to the Western Odra, finding its own way through the Miedzyodrze.

- The flood protection and water management authorities suggest to clean the dirt in the old flood gates and also reconnect the water arms within the Miedzyodrze again, but for this purpose they suggest to also drain / excavate parts of the water arms

Concerning this idea of dredging /excavation, the Organisations are sceptical - the idea is not generally wrong, and if this would be conducted by a limnological expert, this could indeed improve the situation, but the Umbrellas have doubts whether the argument of dredging / excavation could be used by the flood protection and water management authorities for a large-scale dredging with adverse effects such as drainage of the Miedzyodrze to the Western Odra (which is a little bit lower than the Eastern Odra), which could drain the peatlands (CO2) and also reduce the filter function of the wetlands (N, P). This is why the Organisations don't agree at the moment to these actions.

C) Modelling the effect on flood protection of a dyke relocation at Swieta (as suggested in the Gerstgraser alternative flood protection report submitted by the Organisations)[2]

The flood protection and water management authorities suggested during the meeting, that the Organisations can suggest their idea of a large-scale dyke relocation in the large wetlands close to Swieta (around 8.000 ha north-east of Szczecin) as a flood protection alternative to Miedzyodrze, so that it could be checked, whether it could be possible to change the master plan of the OVFMP in such a direction, that a large-scale dyke relocation at Swieta could be included into the OVFMP (first, modelling the effect of such a large-scale dyke relocation, and finding out whether the modelling would have a positive result or not, following the statement of the NGO during the meeting)

#### CONSULTATION PROCESS IS A KEY

To get common non-conflicting vision of plans well managed **consultation process** and **transboundary cooperation** (institutional, governmental, organisational) is a 'must have', if we would like to have solid, consistent and **responsible water management** on border rivers. If there is no communication in terms of data, documents and best practices we use on both sides of the border, if there is lack of institutional talks there is no glue to make a bond, to take care about our transborder waters. Not only a will but there is a law which needs to be respected - transboundary water conventions [The Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes \(UNECE Water Convention\)](#) and [The Convention on the Law of Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses \(UN Watercourses Convention\)](#). Both transboundary river conventions aim to ensure the sustainable use of transboundary water resources by facilitating cooperation. [3]

Having this awareness and experience from previous Water Roundtable in Poland [4] Odra Team from Save The Rivers Coalition/KRR, alongside with DNR found this model as best solution to work common vision for Miedzyodrze out - with its inhabitants and users. We believe **transparency** and **social participation** is vital for success if one wants to have balanced development of region, including nature, safety and economy.

\*NGOs/Umbrella Organisations - Save the River Coalition/KRR and Deutscher Naturschutzring/DNR

1. [http://www.odrapcu.pl/en\\_popdow\\_dokumenty\\_POM.html](http://www.odrapcu.pl/en_popdow_dokumenty_POM.html)  
<http://bs.rzgw.szczecin.pl/zadania/zadanie-1a3>
2. <http://www.ratujmyrzeki.pl/185-przyjazna-ludziom-i-przyrodzie-ochrona-przeciwpowodziowa-obszaru-zlewni-rzeki-odry-ze-szczegolnym-uwzglednieniem-regionu-doliny-dolnej-odry>
3. [www.siwi.org/what-we-do/source-to-sea](http://www.siwi.org/what-we-do/source-to-sea)
4. <http://www.ratujmyrzeki.pl/dokumenty/WSR.pdf>

Source of information with presentations, photos, leaflet and agenda:  
<http://ratujmyrzeki.org.pl/203-wodny-okragly-stol-ws-miedzyodrza>

Organisers:



Supporters:



**flow : on tour**  
A film fest for the love of water

