

NEWSLETTER 03

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

Sequoyah completed their feasibility study into the establishment of a European Recreational Navigation Observatory (ERNO) in February this year. The VNE funded work looked at the methods, costs and potential management issues associated with setting up ERNO.



Put simply – ERNO would be a large web based database that includes a whole host of waterway based information. This would cover technical, administrative and marketing data that boaters and industry professionals could access for their travel and work around the waterways of Europe. For example intrepid boaters planning a trip from Limerick to Kiev (sound familiar?) could find out everything they need to know in just one place. Lock and bridge dimensions, facilities, local tariffs, tourist information etc.. Will the canal be open? Will the pub be open?!

A brief summary of their findings were:

- / Each country would be responsible for its own data, update of this data and the integrity of this data;
- / An organisation would need to be appointed to manage the whole Observatory and co-ordinate the updates;

- / A yearly quality audit would be needed to ensure a high standard of data was maintained;
- / A yearly budget would be required to fund the management and upkeep of the Observatory.

No decision has been made regarding taking the Observatory forward as yet. Some considerations and observations concerning funding and organisational issues have been made though.

There's no doubt it would be useful to have such a 'super' website but the maintenance of data (as with all websites) would be a crucial factor. Each country has different waterway management structures and someone would need to keep this information up to date. Does everyone have the capacity to do this? In the UK, British Waterways is the major waterway authority - but not the only one. We would probably need to look to an 'Umbrella' organisation such as AINA (the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities) to get involved.

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To do the job properly everyone would need the funding and time to carry out data input and maintenance. We'd also have to contribute to the management costs. If all twenty seven member states were able to 'chip in' it may be less onerous than it sounds. Conversely this commitment would need to be long term and is it likely that all countries would want or be able to be involved?

One other question was "What is the demand for such information?" Some feel the demand is there providing it's available for free. Professionals though may feel more comfortable with their trusted sources and would perhaps need some persuasion to use ERNO. That however could be an incentive to keep the site's standard to a recognised professional level?

Guy Toye represents the European Boat Association (EBA) and believes that his organisation could support ERNO but that they would need it to have a "bottom up" approach – their members would use their experiences to populate the site for the benefit of others undertaking similar trips. They would be less inclined to use the site for administrative and legislative issues.

The subject was discussed at the Budapest partner meeting and it was agreed that Yvo Peeters of W&Z would work to develop the concept and put together a proposal for submission as a separate Interreg IVC project.



Hungary / 13–14 July 2007

Second seminar

"benchmarking in the new member states"

The partner meeting in Hungary started with formal welcomes and a short introduction to VITUKI (Environmental protection and water management research institute) – by Dr. Péter Bakonyi (Director of Scientific and International Affairs). This was followed by presentations on Water Management in Hungary – by Kálmán Papp (VKKI, International Coordinator) and recreational waterways in Hungary (including Study 4 outcomes) – by Andras Magyarics (VKKI).

These updates on the VNE studies and the Steering Group Meeting took place in the VITUKI offices in Budapest.

The study visit started with a visit to Lake Balaton and the entrance to the Canal Sió at Siófok. We were given a presentation on the development of ideas to link recreation activities with the Canal Sió at the town hall of Simontornya.

The study visit trip continued the next

day with a presentation of the Gemenc forest area at Pörböly railway station by a representative of the Environmental and Water Directorate of Székesfehérvár. Afterwards the group travelled along the forest railway to the bank of the River Danube and went on by boat along the River Danube to the town Baja and on the "Sugovica" branch to the Deák Ferenc lock.

We heard a presentation of the planned recreational development of the Ferenc Canal and Sugovica – Szeremlei – Danube waterways by a representative of the Environmental and Water Directorate of Baja which was followed by a visit to the "Water Management Museum".

At the informal dinner Glenn Millar expressed his thanks for a well-organised study visit trip and the interesting presentations and discussion with the representatives of the regional and national authorities.

Liverpool / 22–23 November 2007

Final conference

"future of recreational inland waterways"

As reported in the last Newsletter, our Final Conference is being held in Liverpool, UK.

This historic city will be the 2008 European City of Culture and we hope to show our partners and guests some of what the city has to offer as well as learning how regeneration of the area is making full use of the waterspace it has.

We also want to concentrate on the future of our waterways. We'll hear from professionals involved in Liverpool's regeneration and then will be asking partners for their input and assessment as to how these good practices can be applied in their region.

We'll also be talking about Waterway Management, EU Funding, Marketing and PR, Legislation and New Technology. The conference will be a great opportunity to exchange ideas and sell the idea of Waterway development.

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10 OUT OF 10 FOR RESTORATION

The restoration of canals in Britain has been a feature of British Waterways work in recent years. This has delighted the real enthusiasts – the ‘Canal Buffs’ – but what does restoration mean for everyone else? There’s actually a huge range of benefits.

We’ve come up with our Top Ten Restoration benefits:

(1) **Connect Communities** – Waterways can become low level transport routes (commuting by cycle is a good example) and they connect communities.

(2) **Working Heritage** – Visitors can see the canals as they were intended for use 200 years ago. It’s working heritage. Operating locks and bridges is much the same and there’s still freight transport taking place.

(3) **Biodiversity** – Rather than destroying the wildlife species, restoration can be used to enhance and conserve some species. The *Crosscut* project demonstrates some examples of how this can be done.

(4) **Regeneration** – the economic and social benefits are widely known. Sustainable regeneration is a big winner because it tidies up old sites whilst creating jobs and prosperity in doing so.

(5) **People’s Participation** – Local people are invited to take part in the restoration. This gives them a real sense of ‘ownership’ of their local canal.

(6) **Interpretation and (7) Education** – Interest in the canal is stimulated through signage and notice boards. School projects get children involved at an early age and we’re recruiting the enthusiasts of the future.

(8) **Training and new Skills** – Again locals are encouraged to get involved in the physical restoration through activities such as stonemasonry, bricklaying, carpentry etc.. Their training and new skills not only help them re-build the canals and structures but also set themselves up for employment opportunities in the future.

(9) **Recreation and Health** – By improving facilities such as towpaths we’re providing the places for people to walk, cycle and canoe – for an increasingly unfit UK this is a real boost!

(10) **Activity** – a fully restored waterway will have “Honeypot sites” to attract big crowds, particularly on special set days. Waterways Festivals and Boat Rallies are very popular, bring income to the area and are a great occasion to highlight the delights of the Waterways.

If we want to back our list up with some facts and figures how about these? BW’s Regeneration Manager Andrew Stumpf summarised BW’s work over the last five years:

- / 220 miles of waterway restored
- / 20,000 jobs created
- / 54,000 jobs supported
- / 27 towns & cities and scores of villages regenerated
- / Involved in over £2bn worth of urban and rural regeneration over last 10 years
- / £1.5bn spent by visitors to the waterways every year
- / 300 million visits to the waterways every year

I trust you’ll agree they’re impressive statistics and our Top Ten can be applied to most Waterways in Europe. We’d like to think VNE has been able to encourage others and has helped with our work in the UK.



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NETWORKS ARE FOREVER

This was the title of a presentation given by former BW Regeneration Director, Derek Cochrane at the *Canal Link* Final Conference in Bremen. I asked myself – Is he right? Are they forever or will we all go away and just do our own thing? Why are they important?

The thing with waterways is they are truly transnational. They cross local and national boundaries and good or bad management in one area can have a big effect on another. Think of flooding, drainage, ecological and freight issues and they all rely on a consolidated approach from a variety of countries and administrations. We'd like to think that such co-operation is done out of choice but that's not necessarily the case – it's in all our interests to do so. We benefit financially as well as environmentally in the long run.

In projects such as VNE we've looked less at environmental issues and more on the economic benefits of co-operation. This works because we all look at waterway restoration and regeneration issues slightly differently but can take the best bits, the good practice, from others. In the UK we've learned a lot from our Partners in Norway and Sweden how tourism development is handled. We'd like to think our partners in Milan and Castilla have seen how waterway restoration can be successfully carried out in their areas. The city of Bremen has shown the real benefit of a network is its ability to use its collective 'might' to effect change. Can we or have we done that?

We've certainly done this with the 'Classification Study' and the Network map (which is being developed in partnership with other Interreg projects *Canal Link* and *Crosscut*). Future projects will continue this when we address the implications of the Water Framework Directive. If the 'Observatory' (see article on front page) gets off the ground this will be another example where we'll be seen as a true pan-European network.

What we need to do in future is to ensure our efforts remain 'joined up'. The 'networking' we do at meetings, seminars and events is very useful and productive but needs to be backed up by tangible outcomes. These could include Europe wide guidelines that can be used as a template for waterway restoration and regeneration across the continent. We also want to build a network of entrepreneurs

who want to develop businesses in different areas to their own and are willing to share this expertise. We also want to retain a strong lobbying front to argue our case on legislation and to gain funding for our own local work.

I hope we'll be able to continue our co-operation through VNE to a successor project. If we can extend our network to new member states and beyond we'll all benefit and our waterways will continue their renaissance. Here's to *Waterways Forward!*

Article by Chris Barnett, British Waterways



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