

**German Russian Conference
Living Lakes – 10 years of partnership at Lake Baikal**

Resolution

In 1992 the German-Russian environmental agreement was concluded, from which the German-Russian Baikal co-operation emerged. Among others, the co-operation led to the registration of Lake Baikal into the list of the UNESCO world natural heritage sites as the first Russian area. Lake Baikal was accepted as a member in the international Living Lakes network in 1999 and is represented by the two Buryatic NGOs, club FIRN and the Baikal information centre GRAN.

The aim of the Living Lakes Conference 2009 in Ulan-Ude was to draw a balance of ten years of partnership and collaboration. Almost 80 participants discussed to what extent Lake Baikal developed in a positive way and where further efforts and collaboration are needed.

The results of the conference and the recommendations of the participants can be read in this resolution and will be handed out to the Russian-German environment working group in order to provide suggestions for concrete actions and projects.

Tourism development in the Baikal region

„Tourism is like fire: You can either cook your soup with fire or burn down your house.” This saying from Sri Lanka is still true and can also be adapted to the Baikal region and Buryatia.

Tourism is a global industry and therefore affected by global trends and changes. The trend from the formerly so called soft tourism via socially responsible travelling towards the more recent term sustainable tourism is growing and becomes even more relevant with the discussions about climate change. A contemporary sustainable tourism incorporates - with equal priorities - environmental compatibility, social responsibility, economic efficiency, culture, education for all as well as participation. From 1994 to 2004, the niche market nature and ecotourism was expanding three times faster than conventional tourism. “A temporary trend”, might a pessimist say. “A clear sign for the future“, argue optimists. With regard to the numerous eco-labels in the field of tourism, in 2008 the Global Baseline Criteria for Sustainable Tourism (GSTC) were introduced, an international standard that was developed by the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and international environmental and tourism associations. This standard includes 40 criteria for a socially and environmentally friendly tourism.

Our recommendations

The Tourism Agency of the Republic of Buryatia should take into consideration the criteria for sustainable tourism and the GSTC standard right from the beginning of any planning concerning touristic activities at Lake Baikal or in the region of Lake Baikal. The GSTC should also serve as basis for an own national touristic eco-label. If these criteria are considered while planning and establishing the infrastructure (transport, energy, waste management, waste recycling, waste water treatment) and are regarded as an obligatory standard by investors, then they could be the basis for a sustainable tourism development.

International organisations such as the World Tourism Organisation UNWTO and UNEP and NGOs like Global Nature Fund can play an important role in commercialising the touristic products and will do so if the products are fulfilling the criteria for sustainable tourism. The Green Globe Certification offers e.g. a worldwide recognised certification and different marketing tools as well.

Modern planning of sustainable tourism relies on an integral way of viewing tourism, including all aspects of the product travel: besides hotels, restaurants and tour operators also traffic (arrival/departure, local transport), agriculture (regional products), culture, administration, nature conservation, energy, waste, water supply, destination marketing.

Representatives of these sectors should develop a tourism concept and implement it progressively within the framework of a round table "open tourism forum". A professional destination management organises the brands development, the core business, the quality of the offers, the marketing and especially the sale as well as the knowledge transfer among each other.

Sustainable tourism should also be part of education and training programmes for current and future employees in the field of tourism as well as for communities and its inhabitants that are interested in agritourism and ecotourism. Regular education and training in all aspects of sustainable tourism, especially in the field of quality including hardware (e.g. infrastructure), software (e.g. service) and environment (e.g. resource care), are needed in order to pick up new developments in marketing, environmental technology and standards and trends in sustainable tourism.

We suggest the establishment of a school for sustainable tourism and ecotourism in which employees of the tourism sector can obtain a certificate for participating in the training course "environmentally and socially friendly tourism". This project could be jointly financed by the German government and investors of the economic sectors.

Small hotels and private hosts need financial support in order to implement environmental measures for which large investments are necessary. We recommend to the Buryatic government the setup of an aid programme.

A big problem is "wild, uncontrolled tourism" at Lake Baikal and in the region. The buryatic population with low income must also be able to spend their holidays at Lake Baikal or in the region. In order to direct wild camping into controlled and environmentally friendly ways, the region needs infrastructures including a regulated waste management, sanitary facilities, BBQ areas and information about ecologically friendly behaviour. Those areas should be installed at ecologically harmless areas. It is important to discuss and resolve the question of who will be responsible for the long-term maintenance of these areas. The costs for this cannot only be provided by the communities. We further recommend providing modern eco camping sites and cheap accommodations in form of B&Bs, not only directly at Lake Baikal, but also in the districts (Rajons) of the Republic of Buryatia.

At present, the small specialised buryatic tour operators have big problems to set up their business successfully. Bureaucratic barriers must be reduced and mandatory financial guaranties must be adapted to the possibilities of the small tour operators.

Only by this way, local tour operators have the possibility to develop in an economically sustainable manner and can contribute to an added value of the region.

Sustainable development is a dynamical process. In parts, big tourism projects are planned in the five economic zones and in the special economic zone. One example: the “Baikal Harbour” with 5500 beds and the Tunka Resort with 1200 beds. We recommend to realise these big projects in phases and to check the ecological, economical and social consequences after each phase. The next phase should only start if all three dimensions of sustainability have developed positively.

GRAN and GNF are involved in a common project to develop ecotourism in the Oka region. This tourism should ground on a careful behaviour towards natural and cultural values of the ethnical minority, the Soyots and should furthermore contribute to create sources of income, especially for the young Soyots. This project has a model character and can serve as a positive example for other regions in the Baikal region. This is why it should be supported by the Buryatic and the German governments.

Also, the Tunka region has asked GRAN and the GNF for their support for the development and implementation of the intended tourism resort. GRAN and GNF should contribute to the implementation of this project meeting exemplary environmental quality standards including education programmes for future employees in the field of sustainable tourism. A sustainable Tunka resort could serve as a pilot project for a concentrated tourism destination with classical offers in the wellness and sports sectors. That is why the cooperation between GRAN and GNF and the municipal authority of Tunka should be financially supported by the Buryatic and the German governments.

Promotion of the sustainable development of the Oka region

The special ecological, cultural and social situation in the Oka region as well as the ongoing planning and development pressures due to the existence of raw materials require special efforts in the use of natural resources according to sustainable development principles. As basic requirement, we consider a comprehensive and systematic recording and assessment of the ecological, cultural, social and economical situation.

We recommend

To analyse the Oka region in form of a comprehensive and systematic environmental and social compatibility test that in the end ought to provide a recommendation for the sustainable development of the Oka region. This analysis should be supported by both the German and the Russian side. Further, we recommend the support of a pilot project (see chapter tourism).

Economic development and special economic zones in the Baikal region

The importance of Lake Baikal and its declaration as world natural heritage site require a particularly careful planning of the economic development and its implementation. Buryatia has set up five economic zones and one special economic zone (“Baikal Harbour”) in which ecotourism, wellness, ski, sports and cultural tourism shall be developed. In Europe and Germany a range of examples exists on how in particular environment-friendly economic initiatives can also be successful in an economically sustainable way. Nevertheless, some buryatic authorities and parts

of the population consider the ecological guidelines rather to be a limitation of their economic development than a chance.

The prerequisites for a sustainable economic development are already set at the planning phase. Therefore, regional and land allocation plans were and are one main focus of the German-Russian cooperation. Economic development and above all tourism projects must be adapted to the carrying capacity of the region. We have worries that some of the projects presented at the conference are oversized and advantageous for investors rather than for a long lasting, secure and local added value.

We recommend:

- To consider regional and land allocation plans as legitimate and binding basis for all economic projects.
- To actively involve the population and the concerned stakeholders in the planning process of the economic zones and the special economic zone. Therefore, transparent information and an adequate participation structure (e.g. external moderated round tables) must be provided. Further, it is important to give regular feedback to all stakeholders on the response to their recommendations.
- To implement large tourism projects (with more than 1000 beds) in form of phases and check continuously the ecological, social and economical impacts. The next phase should only start if the monitoring proves that the progresses correspond to the objectives that were set up at the beginning and no negative impacts are noticed.
- To focus not only on tourism, but rather diversify the economic development in order to be independent of tourism that is known as susceptible to crises and trends.
- To build a waste and recycling structure and promote recycling as one of the new sustainable economic sectors.
- To consider the impacts of climate change, particularly the impacts on Lake Baikal and the boreal forests. Regional climate models can give hints on future climatic circumstances and can help to define necessary activities for the management of Lake Baikal and the forests in the watershed. Germany has first experiences in this field and is willing to deepen those within the German-Russian cooperation.
- The protection of the boreal swamps is of high importance due to their function as carbon storage. Further destructions and depletion of swamps must be avoided, also in order to protect the water balance and the biodiversity of the swamps. Renaturation has a high potential to bond carbon dioxide. Therefore swamps must play an important role in the international negotiations on climate protection and should benefit from the financial instruments available.

Ecological forest management and wood-working

75% of the surface of Buryatia is covered with wood, 25% of it is used economically. Most of the forest areas are barely tapped and there are still complete intact primeval forests. The protection of the boreal forests is of particular importance as they present huge and essential carbon storage. Russia has nearly 800 million hectares of boreal forests that store about 40 billion tons of carbon.

We recommend:

- To especially protect the old boreal forests and to avoid their cut off because of new infrastructure projects.
- To ensure diversity of tree species.
- To install sample areas that serve for observing the state of the forest
- To increase and strengthen the added value in Buryatia through further processing steps (e.g. the added value can be increased by the production of sawn-wood).
- Europe has made bad experiences with extensive forest fires and has therefore developed successful measures to contain them. We recommend an exchange of experiences with partners from Europe. The Living Lakes network can contribute to the organisation of this exchange.

Renewable Energies

First frameworks for the development of renewable energies have already been installed at the federal level. The Baikal region has high potential in the field of biomass and due to the high number of sunny days also good requirements for solar energy.

We recommend:

- To analyse the potential of biomass.
- To amend the political framework and provide more direct aid through support programmes (e.g. compensation for electricity fed into the grid, cogeneration-bonus).
- That small hotels and public buildings like schools cover their energy demand through renewable energies and that therefore special support programmes must be developed.
- To use the leftovers from the sawmill industry in an energetic form.
- The development and realisation of two concrete pilot projects: On the one hand renewable energies in ecotourism as well as the equipment of a school with renewable energy supply.

Water quality

Together with the WWF and numerous other organisations the Living Lakes network is involved in bringing forward the ratification of the UN Watercourses Convention for the protection of the international water ways. Germany has signed this convention. Lake Baikal is an international lake of outstanding importance. In order to reach sustainable protection of Lake Baikal, its complete watershed must also be taken into account.

We recommend:

- To Mongolia and the Russian Federation to sign the UN Watercourses Convention
- Intensive cooperation of the responsible authorities of Buryatia, Irkutsk and Mongolia for the protection of the water quality of Lake Baikal and its more than 330 tributaries – especially the Selenga tributary. In 2010, the Baikal Institute will present its recommendations resulting from a three year research about the pollution of the river Selenga and its deltas. These recommendations should be considered imperatively and respective activities should be implemented, especially to reduce the contaminations with heavy metals, quicksilver and

cyanide from gold and other raw material mining activities as well as industry factories.

- To implement the buryatic legislation with emphasis and to stop mining of raw materials in the watershed areas with no adequate purification of the sewage.
- The modernisation of the sewage plant should be an essential part of the planned infrastructure activities.
- The development and implementation of a structure for a professional disposal of oil residues and other dangerous substances, in particular in small communities.

Biodiversity

2010 is the international year of biodiversity. Lake Baikal with its tributaries is a particularly outstanding area with high biological diversity. The participants of the conference are glad that the Baikal Seal has developed so well. This is also a clear sign of a good protection concept and good awareness rising. Protecting forests and swamps does not only contribute to climate protection, but also conserve the livelihood of rare species.

We recommend:

- The ratification of the UN convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, and its regional agreements.
- To sensitise and gain the tourism sector for biodiversity conservation (Business and Biodiversity Initiative).
- To start an awareness campaign for the public about the significance of biological diversity.

Environmental education and education for sustainable development

Local people, particularly the youth, should be informed and participate actively in conducting measures and projects for environmental education. Environmental organisations and civil initiatives, like Living Lakes Network and its partners GRAN and FIRN, play an important role in this process. By implementation of projects they inform people and show them the possibility of conducting long-terms initiatives. These actions provide people living in the region with a good base for creation and development of new initiatives on their own. Only in this way they can consciously choose a sustainable development. However, the environmental foundations need organisational and financial support from the government to be able to implement projects.

The youth and scholars should be involved into the process of environmental education. So they can acquire necessary competences for solving environmental problems to safeguard a sustainable development.

We recommend:

- To the buryatic ministry for nature resources and to the buryatic ministry for education and sciences the establishment of an international education centre in Maksimicha (Baikal) and the promotion of the cooperation between NGOs in Buryatia, Irkutsk and Mongolia. Furthermore, practical environmental projects for schools should be developed and implemented.
- To German NGO partners and the government to participate in education and training programmes for employees in the sectors tourism and environmentally friendly technologies.

Cooperation with private environment associations and citizens' initiatives

With Lake Baikal, Russia has put under protection a unique world natural heritage site – unique in its size and in its importance as ecosystem and fresh water resource. The conference participants know from their own experience that it is not easy to achieve protection status. The people in the region have a right on advancement, a good living standard and the right to actively participate in the development of the region. Today, there are a lot of examples showing that particularly with the careful use of natural resources, a good standard of living can be reached and secured in a long term.

But the citizens must be informed and involved. Therefore, environmental associations and other citizens' initiatives such as the Living Lakes partners GRAN and FIRN play a very important role. With their projects and campaigns they inform the local population and show sustainable alternatives. So the local people have a better decision basis, can develop their own initiatives and can decide in favour of an environmentally and socially responsible and sustainable development of their region. Environmental organisations need institutional and financial support of the government in order to realise their important work.

Moreover, young people in schools and other educational institutions must acquire knowledge and competences in the field of sustainable development. Therefore, continued programmes for environmental education and education for sustainable development are needed, so that young people can contribute to the resolution of problems in a sustainable manner. Education also contains international and intercultural offers for pupils and adults of Mongolia, the other bordering countries of Lake Baikal, Germany and others interested in the conservation of the world natural heritage. The intercultural exchange facilitates the international support for the conservation of Lake Baikal.

We recommend:

- To the Republic of Buryatia to stimulate innovative and environmentally friendly technologies in its programme of social and economic development, in particular in the forest industry, tourism, renewable energy sources and concerning the quality of drinking water.
- To the Russian ministry for nature resources and environment and the buryatic government to finance environmental education projects and social projects of the Living Lakes partners BIZ, GRAN and FIRN. These projects should also be supported by the German government within the German-Russian cooperation.
- To the participants of the conference to promote a broad social partnership and through the exchange of experiences to contribute to the establishment of Lake Baikal as model region for sustainable development.

If we succeed to translate these recommendations into action, then we have the chance that hopes and expectations of all conference participants will be fulfilled and that in ten years we have a sustainably developed Baikal region, which can serve as role model for other lake regions.

We thank all organisations – in particular GRAN and FIRN – and also all supporters for the excellent conference and the warm hospitality. We look forward to seeing you again!

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