

*Reflections on Mekong, Danube and Gulf of  
Finland Water Cooperations*

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(retired in 2012)

*Confessions:*

I am fond of transboundary conventions and cooperations and their linking of national sectors (public, academic, civil society, private) and providing a backbone for global cooperation for sustainable land, water and atmospheric future.

I am fond of civil service and civil servants and wish to refer to the ASEAN declaration (2015) on the role of civil service as the catalyst for achieving the ASEAN community vision 2025, with the following extract from the declaration

“RECOGNISING the significance of the civil service as the backbone of good governance in the region, and its critical mission not only in providing vital public services to the peoples of the ASEAN, but also driving national and social development, administering public resources responsibly, anticipating the changes ahead and managing the evolving relationships between the government and the people”.

*International Civil Service alliance* (as I dare calling it here) could also form the basis for international development cooperation and ensure a more efficient outcome of the valuable investments made by the countries (even reaching 1% of the GDP in some cases).

Today the development cooperation favors short term, even ad hoc, project cycles and commercial interest of the consultancy industry. An effective cycle in science and governance developments and progresses is closer to a generation than the 3 years typically applied in project cycles.

## *Personal experiences in water conventions and cooperations*

### **Helsinki Commission**

-state of the Gulf of Finland 1992-2008 (Finnish-Russian-Estonian cooperation): research and technical assistance to develop St.Petersburg sewage treatment to meet the European standards (biological-chemical process), achieved in 2008 as result of extensive cooperation and inclusion of scientists, civil servants, NGOs, foundations, politicians, private enterprises (expertise in waste water treatment technology) and finally the modernized treatment plants were inaugurated by the presidents of the 3 states, led by Mr. Putin.

The reduction of PO<sub>4</sub> load to the Gulf was remarkable, ca. 30%, as well as the

improvement of water quality along the Russian and Finnish coastal and littoral zones, and reaching to the pelagic open sea ecosystem of the Gulf.

The positive changes were well in accordance with the model forecasts. The forecasts had played a central role in demonstrating and motivating the investments, the images published widely in the media (newspapers and TV).

-Baltic Sea operational real time forecasting system for oil spill combating and search and rescue operations 1985-2000

**Hungary, Austria** (Lake Balaton and Lake Fertő-Neusiedl (sedimentation and recreational

management), Tisza-Danube (Baia Mare cyanide spill in Rumania in 2000, UNEP monitoring mission) (1985-2000)

## **Mekong (2001-present)**

-MRCS (Finn Team)

Technical Assistance (Developing Integrated Modelling Tools, basin wide and for hot spot areas such as Tonle Sap)

Inputs to SEA of the LMB mainstream dams

Providing the technical leader for the Council Study (Mr. Jorma Koponen, modelling expert)

Mentoring and evaluating Mekong Region Capacity Building networks for improving water governance, science-policy interfaces and capacities in IWRM (M-POWER, MRCS/JRP, WLE fellows 2002-2014)

*Reflection:* Don't let the fellows alumni (close to 300 professionals) disperse or fade away. It keeps existing and is sustainable (90 % of the fellows continue their active career in water sector).

Engage them in follow-up activities, in managing and mentoring the upcoming junior fellowship programmes as well as in thematic/strategic projects multidisciplinary water research and governance projects. The network is a group of change agents in their present positions at their institutions, whether

governmental, provincial, academic, civil society or other.

They also represent a unique set up of regionally thinking individuals with tendency of regional solidarity as result of interaction within their own batch of fellows and beyond.

Note.

Meanwhile, MRC is going through a major reorganization, after the unfortunate departure of a group of major donor countries (included Finland).

However, to me this appears rather an opportunity than a drawback: to gain true riparian ownership of the MRCS, highlighting the secretariat profile and mission and the necessity of enhancing member country



cooperation as well as within country cooperation (involving public, academic, civil society and private sectors). In all, MRC has an exceptionally strong and extensive human and technical capacity at its disposal (data, modelling and document base) to facilitate its emerging activities e.g. with the LMC (Lancang Mekong Cooperation).

It is rather strait forward to move on from the Council Study to a follow up phase and further specify the major impacts of the recent and foreseen basin developments in modification of the flood pulse and consequently, in the sediment transport and sedimentation in the floodplains (Tonle Sap first of all), nutrient inputs and fisheries productivity.