Falaleeva, M., Rauschmayer, F. (2013):
Evaluating environmental governance in a Belarusian World Bank biodiversity project
Environ. Conserv. **40** (2), 147 – 156

http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0376892913000027

Evaluating environmental governance in a World Bank Belarusian biodiversity project

Maria Falaleeva

Coastal and Marine Research Centre
Environmental Research Institute
University College Cork
Haulbowline
Cobh, Co.Cork
Ireland

e-mail: m.falaleeva@ucc.ie

Felix Rauschmayer

Department of Environmental Politics
UFZ, Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research
Permoserstr. 15
04318 Leipzig
Germany

PREPRINT: This paper has been published as:
Falaleeva, M., Rauschmayer, F., 2013. Evaluating environmental governance in a Belarusian World Bank biodiversity project. Environmental Conservation 40, 147-156, doi: 10.1017/S0376892913000027

Summary

International aid projects in post-communist countries were meant to support environmental protection during the transition period and to introduce new standards of environmental governance. While the outcomes of the World Bank biodiversity project in the Belavezhskaya Pushcha national park in Belarus were evaluated positively after its (delayed) completion, an assessment using the same criteria 10 years later questions its long-term effectiveness. This paper links the current project outcomes with its implementation process and uses this knowledge to deduce lessons for designing and implementing future international initiatives in Belarus as well as applicable in t broader context of post-communist countries.

We see four interlinked and project-specific reasons for the observed unsustainability of the project outcomes: the predominance of the natural sciences, an unbalanced representation of the actors within the hierarchical system of governance, a powerful implementation by official high-level actors, and little knowledge regarding participatory methods and principles of multi-level governance. Two lessons can be drawn from this: In order to introduce new standards for environmental governance, international aid projects should (1) streamline communications between the actors at different scales including donor organizations, the implementing local agencies, and stakeholders in the receiving countries; and (2) use on-going project and, in particular, process assessment as a form of reflection on the project progress to achieve a longer term effectiveness of the project outcomes.

Introduction

Environmental governance, understood as 'the establishment, reaffirmation or change of institutions to resolve conflicts over environmental resources' (Paavola 2007: 93), has been through some significant transformations in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE countries hereafter) (Andonova 2002; Scrieciu and Stringer 2008; Kluvánková-Oravská et al. 2009). In addition to already existing international environmental obligations, new political conditions, such as the EU Neighbourhood Policy (Bosse 2009), caused the objectives of the national environmental policies to be further extended and management practices to be brought into line with European and international standards (Hicks 2004; Jörgens 2004). From the beginning of the 1990s, a number of international actors entered the CEE countries. International organizations such as the World Bank, EU, the European Bank

for Reconstruction and Development and many other governmental and non-governmental agencies played a significant role and influenced the process of designing and implementing national environmental strategies (Connolly et al 1996; Weimer 1997). This influence was conveyed through two "channels": first, by providing financial aid and, second, by setting new standards in project implementation and policy and technical advice (Derviş et al 1995; Carmin and VanDeveer 2004). Financial aid became important for a range of state activities (Keohane 1996) and had a power-shifting effect.

The international standards introduced in order to influence national practices can be divided into two groups: those relating to outcomes (e.g. quality of environment, measures taken, project reporting), and those relating to processes (effective organization and management, adequate representation of different groups, interests, knowledge and information). While deviations from standards relating to outcome are relatively easy to recognize, standards for processes and deviations thereof are rather difficult to monitor. Process standards are likely to be very sensitive to subjective factors, such as understanding and interpretation of what a "good" process means for different parties involved (Webler and Tuler 2006).

The role of international organizations in capacity building and bridging national practices and international standards has been widely discussed (Keohane 1996; Gutner 2002; Sagar and VanDeveer 2005; for the special case of 'europeanization' see e.g. Jordan and Liefferink 2004; Paraskevopoulos et al. 2006). Although the intervention of international donor agencies may benefit domestic environmental policymaking, critics argue that this potential largely remains unrealized (Gutner 2002; VanDeveer and Carmin 2004). 20 years of experience have demonstrated significant difficulties in implementing new environmental policies and standards (Lavenex 2006; Otto et al. 2011). In particular, international organizations often have tended to overlook and underestimate the importance of local conditions – traditions of governance,

scientific research, and often low social capital – while trying to apply practices developed for the Western democracies (Hallstrom 2004; Hicks 2004). The sources of implementation problems may lie within the sphere of operation of international organizations as well as in local implementers, third parties, and external conditions (Derviş et al 1995; Keohane 1996). The environmental authorities of CEE faced particular difficulties during post-communist transformation. Lacking the necessary financial support and expertise to develop and introduce innovative practices, the authorities often tended to use readily available approaches based on national natural science and technical expertise (Wolchik 1991; VanDeveer and Carmin 2004).

In the late 1990s, the analysts of international aid projects admitted the necessity to observe project results over a sustained period of time – normally between 10 and 20 years (Fairman and Ross 1996). Nevertheless, very little reflection has taken place on the lessons learned. In this paper we aim to contribute towards filling this gap by analysing the implementation of the World Bank project in Belavezhskaya Pushcha national park (BPNP) in Belarus (1992-1997).

The BPNP is a transboundary ecosystem, covering approximately 120 000 ha in Belarus and 87 600 ha in Poland, various parts of which were protected since the 16th century. The ecosystem of coniferous and broad-leaved lowland forests has remained undisturbed over centuries and possesses a unique landscape and biological diversity (Luchkov et al 1997; Martsinkevich et al 2004). The BPNP provides ecosystem services for larger areas in Europe, but also has significant meaning as a natural and cultural heritage of the Belarusian nation. The area supports the livelihoods of the local population through multiple land use and economic activities: harvesting forest products, hunting, agriculture, and tourism including game hunting. The national park is also the biggest employer in the area.

The Belavezhskaya Pushcha has been subject to various forms of protection throughout its history as a part of Poland, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and Belarus. The last

transformation from State Hunting Ground (special kind of nature reserve with mixed use) to State National Park at the beginning of the 1990s introduced new standards for biodiversity protection. The national park regime and zoning implied certain flexibility of economic use, partly less strict than the former regulations. This has facilitated resource exploitation for economic purposes. The management functions had also changed and passed from the Belarusian Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection (MNEP) to the Department of Presidential Affairs (DPA), the latter focusing primarily on economic development and welcoming new possibilities of more intense economic use.

Our study highlights one specific case in one CEE country; yet, this case is characterized by a constellation of international donor organisations and local administrations as well as by a public not used to active stakeholder participation. It therefore is rather typical for other cases in CEE countries in its initial setting.

For reflecting on any project's effectiveness, failures and achievements (Taut 2007), evaluation and monitoring represent important instruments. Transparent and well-designed evaluation is increasingly referred to as an integral part of effective project management and planning (Margoluis and Salafsky, 1998; Stem et al 2005) and an important part of capacity building within international aid initiatives (Sagar and VanDeveer 2005). The mission of international organizations as standard setters for outcomes and processes of environmental management can be closely connected with the debate on two types of policy and project evaluation, namely 'outcome' and 'process' evaluation (Kaufmann and Kraay 2007; Rauschmayer et al 2009). The former, more traditional form of evaluation is often based on quantitative criteria and indicators; it is aimed explicitly at reporting the project results and is widely used in communication and policy processes. Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition that outcome evaluations are unable to take account of the social and environmental complexities and fail to provide an

adequate picture of project realities and lessons to be learned (Ferraro and Pattanayak 2006). At the same time, an increasing number of studies reflect on the social processes behind the implementation procedures, as well as their effectiveness (Dietz et al 2008). It is obvious, however, that process evaluation provides a significant management and communication challenge because the criteria for the "good" decision making and implementation process are difficult to define (Blackstock et al 2012) and they depend highly on the actors' values and perceptions and interpretations of processes.

The first aim of the paper is to better understand the Belavezhskaya Pushcha project implementation process and shed some light on the durability of the project outcomes. Secondly, the concrete results are used as a background for a more generalized discussion to better understand further cases of internationally funded nature protection projects in CEE countries.

Case study and methods

Case study description

The "Forest Biodiversity Protection Project Belarus" financed by the World Bank was officially launched in 1992 as a part of a lager WB initiative for enhancing capacity for biodiversity preservation in Central and Eastern Europe – one of the pilot actions undertaken by international aid agencies in the former communist countries (World Bank 1992, 1998). One million US dollars was a significant investment for the period and one of the largest investments in the system of nature protection in Belarus in 1990s aimed to support the national park suffering from severe social and economic problems typical for the transition period.

The project, designed in accordance with up-to-date international standards of biodiversity protection, contained two groups of objectives (World Bank 1998). The primary group of

scientific objectives included: maintaining on-going studies on ecosystem functioning and conservation; establishing a system of air and soil monitoring and a forest gene bank; developing GIS for monitoring and management of the forest ecosystem; purchasing equipment (computers and monitoring equipment); and scientific training courses for the park personnel. In addition, management and social objectives emphasized a new aspect of the project and involved: expanding the area of the national park to support the integrity of the ecosystem; developing a complex management plan; fostering participation of the interested groups; enhancing sustainable economic and social development; and promoting contacts with the Polish side.

The World Bank project evaluation documents rightly report advances having been achieved, alongside with the difficulties in cooperation and different approaches by the WB managers and local implementers which lead to a delayed implementation (World Bank 2001). The initiative was officially completed in 1997, two years later than planned and received positive evaluations: in 1997 the Belavezhskaya Pushcha was granted a Council of Europe Diploma as a protected area of international importance. However, several years after project completion, the project appeared to be producing rather poor results, as indicated by a number of environmental and social conflicts, such as local unemployment, a relatively low level of economic development, and tensions between the administration and other groups (local population, NGOs and scientific community); as well as excessive logging, illegal use of forest resources by the local population, and improper forest management and planning (Dranchuk 2004; Datskevich 2010). From 2007 to 2010, the Council of Europe has in annual turns suspended the Diploma and the national park was requested to submit a management plan and to correct present management strategies (Council of Europe 2007).

The present context of biodiversity governance in Belarus significantly retains the features of the 1990s, although shifts have been made towards more flexible and decentralised governance (Otto

et al. 2011). Recent stakeholder interviews indicate continuing dominance of DPA supporting top-down management of protected areas and promoting their economic use (Otto et al. 2011). Stakeholder participation remains poor as well as the information and experience of participation. Remarkably, international organisations and joint projects are continuing to be seeing as potential agents of change and transformation, which makes reflection on the effectiveness of project implementation necessary and timely endeavour.

Data collection and analysis

We used administrative and scientific documents as well as interviews and surveys with stakeholders - individuals and groups influencing and (potentially) influenced by the outcome of the WB project. In 2005-2006, 7 semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with representatives from the current and former administration and employees of the national park, managers of the World Bank, national level agencies, public organizations and scientific community. In two cases, potential respondents – both formerly involved in the project management – declined to talk. Informal communications in 2005-2008 were used to back up the interviews. In 2006, a questionnaire survey (dealing with the conflict in the national park, the composition of stakeholders and their interests, power distribution, and the WB project implementation, see Annex 1) was conducted among the local population with the help of local activists. We received and analysed 20 responses from people selected to represent different age and occupation groups. Questionnaires had been spread by a local resident, an academic researcher who had good knowledge of the community as well as understanding of the purposes and methods of the research and selecting respondents. Collected material reflected reasonably well the age and occupation groups, although the actual response rate is difficult to determine due to the non-controlled spreading of the survey. The general tendency is that people seemed rather reluctant to give their opinion to a local activist, which is also confirmed by similar experiences by other researchers (M. Biriukova and L. Shushkova, personal communication

2006). This reluctance can be linked to the current atmosphere of mistrust between stakeholders which makes local people rather suspicious to any form of activism on the matter and poses higher demands on the confidentiality of the interviews. These factors partly explain the specificity of our methodical approach (implying also an indeterminate response rate) leading to limitations in the results.

To update the results of formal outcome-oriented self-evaluation by the World Bank project team, we summarized the data from official evaluations of the project outcomes by the World Bank and the Belarusian side, along with data from interviews concerning project implementation and the present state of affairs. The documents from the World Bank present a detailed account of how the planned outcomes were achieved. The indicators were primarily of a quantitative nature including: area covered by the national park, number of animal species, amount of equipment purchased, etc. (World Bank 1998, 2001). A similar approach applied by the Belarusian side was presented at scientific conferences during and after the project implementation as well as in a book published in Russian and English (Luchkov et al 1997; Luchkov and Artuchevsky 2002). Although described as "synthesizing the technical and scientific research, a social assessment, and specific management actions" the book, co-authored by the researchers and official project managers, has notable emphasis on biological research.

To better understand the process of project implementation, we analysed the interviews, the surveys and additional background materials along the criteria developed by Wittmer et al (2006)[1], namely:

- integration of knowledge and information (considering environmental and social complexity, different types of information and uncertainties);

[1] These evaluation criteria have been further developed by the EU projects IBEFish (e.g. Varjopuro et al 2008 and Berghöfer et al 2008) and GoverNat, (cf. Rauschmayer et al 2009; for a recent comparison of different evaluation criteria see Blackstock et al 2012).

- supporting legitimacy (compatibility with the existing regulations, actors' accountability, representation of different groups, transparency of rules and assumptions to insiders and outsiders);
- promoting social dynamics (supporting relationships and respect between the actors; providing space for learning and exchanging perspectives; balancing empowerment of different groups; facilitating convergence and illustrating diversity);
- cost-effectiveness of the measures taken (effectiveness of the investments made to compare with the results achieved, including in sustaining results in medium and long term).

Results

Our results show that the first, overall positive outcomes of the project could not be sustained, whereas the process objectives had either not been reached at all or not been sustained.

Outcome evaluation

The outcome evaluation is based on the five main groups of the objectives and criteria used by the World Bank in the project reporting (World Bank 1998, 2001) and presented at scientific conferences and in a book summarising the project results (Luchkov et al 1997; Luchkov and Artuchevsky 2002).

- *Expansion of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park as a protected area* (reported as "achieved")

Outcomes: Approximately 12,000 ha were added to the BPNP territory which provided necessary protection to ecologically valuable areas and improved the sustainability of the National Park.

Present situation: Additional areas have increased the spatial integrity of the ecosystem; however, not all the areas added correspond to the standards of management and quality of natural protected areas; there are requests for further optimization, e.g. for extension of the strict protection zone and limitation of the economic activity on the newly added areas.

- *Maintaining scientific research in the national park* (reported as “achieved in principle”).

Outcomes: A number of scientific activities (maintaining of gene bank, in-situ and ex-situ forest conservation, long-term monitoring programs and experiments) were supported; new research projects (optimization of ungulates population, air pollution monitoring, GIS for forest management, spatial planning) have been launched.

Present situation: Although the measures had significant immediate effects, the number of scientific programmes is currently declining also due to the personnel rotation; cooperation with the Polish side is still limited; scientific management is strongly dependent on the interests of economic use.

- *Support to research infrastructure* (reported as “achieved”)

Outcomes: The project provided equipment for research (pollution analysis and monitoring), computers, vehicles, and GIS software.

Present situation: While the official actors confirm that the research equipment is still being utilized, several non-official respondents report its ineffective use and lack of maintenance; there is no information suggesting any significant update of the existing research infrastructure during the last few years.

- *Professional development and training* (reported as “achieved”)

Outcomes: professional scientific training (workshops, study tours, professional contacts) has been evaluated as very successful. Training on technical and planning issues (sustainable agriculture and nature-based tourism) is reported to have taken place.

Present situation: There is almost no trained staff currently employed in the scientific or management divisions of the national park; no local respondent mention having been involved or benefited from the management training on sustainable agriculture or tourism.

- *Development of a Management Plan for Belovezhskaya Pushcha and bordering areas* (reported as "achieved in principle")

Outcomes: Suggestions by the group of planners and scientific objectives have been reported in a draft management plan; no other specific planning or policy document has been developed. Nevertheless, the World Bank deems the approach to be "more interdisciplinary and participatory" than the previous schemes for forest management in Belarus.

Comments on present situation: At present, there is no robust policy for national park development. Current policy favours those actors being interested in short-term economic profit rather than in biodiversity preservation; unclear perspectives and responsibilities cause mistrust between the actors, as well as explicit and latent conflicts.

Process evaluation

When looking at the history of the project implementation through from the viewpoint of process evaluation it is necessary to distinguish between two different perspectives: standards and procedures for the process described in the project proposal (World Bank 1992) and its actual implementation (World Bank 1998, 2001). With a certain degree of generalization, the former reflects the expectations by the World Bank regarding the establishment of new process standards for biodiversity governance in Belarus, while the latter shows whether and how the Bank and local partners succeeded in meeting those expectations. Our analysis along the mentioned criteria represents an independent expert ex-post evaluation.

- *Integration of knowledge and information*

Planned objectives: The project explicitly aimed to cope with the complexity of the socio-ecological system at hand and to integrate different types of environmental and social knowledge. An interdisciplinary project team had to conduct scientific research and to cooperate with other stakeholder groups. The management plan was supposed to integrate scientific and management

solutions for biodiversity protection, land-use and social development. Nevertheless, no specific training on multi-disciplinary projects management, knowledge integration and participatory methods for local managers had been planned or funded.

Actual process: The team had been formed representing technical and natural sciences – the areas of expertise of the Belarusian partners. During the series of scientific conferences, the experts had a chance to exchange ideas with the Polish side and with international partners, but otherwise had very limited support to develop and integrate social science knowledge. Stakeholder groups were present in some consultation events, but this participation was very limited in terms of its representativeness and, especially, its influence on the actual decision making process. No wider information about the project goals and possibilities of involvement was given to the public; no mechanisms had been provided for communicating scientific findings and planning solutions to non-experts.

- *Supporting legitimacy*

Planned objectives: The project design, planned measures and results were formally compatible with the existing legislation and procedures in Belarus. The project intended to promote the use of additional legal mechanisms that formally existed but were not implemented, e.g. the right to participate in biodiversity governance and to increase representation, transparency and accountability through participation and knowledge integration.

Actual process: The project implementation initially faced difficulties with the formal procedures of registration and the transfer of funds. The obstacles were resolved by enlisting support from the official actors at the top level, thereby handing over to them a significant part of the project ownership and control over the finances. Due to the lack of previous experience and/or information, several stakeholder groups did not realize their legal rights or claim them (e.g. for participation, transparency and accountability); no suggestions for promoting these rights and

monitoring their implementation had been provided by the international experts. Poor accountability resulted in the official actors and scientific experts largely dominating the process.

- *Promoting social dynamics*

Planned objectives: The project intended to facilitate new relationships between the actors, increase trust, support a more balanced distribution of power, and increase the capacity of less influential stakeholder groups. Stakeholder involvement, training courses for academics, managers and locals were planned to facilitate these social processes.

Actual process: The majority of the educational activities were academically oriented, and no training had been provided to enhance the capacity of the other groups or for trainers. Mechanisms for sustaining the training results had not been provided. Ineffective involvement and participation as "manipulation" and "therapy" (as described in classical work by Arnstein 1969) resulted in growing mistrust between the actors. Poor communication across the groups gave little possibility for mutual learning or for changing behaviour. Investments resulted in further empowerment of already powerful actors (e.g. administration) and had almost no positive influence on the other stakeholders.

- *Cost-effectiveness*

Planned objectives: The effectiveness and sustainability of the major investments in the scientific part of the project were to be achieved by implementing the management plan, running education activities and ensuring stakeholder involvement. The idea was that the management plan should be a document that provided guidance in integrating scientific findings into development strategies on the basis of new standards for biodiversity management, and therefore securing investments in the long term.

Actual process: Investments made in the scientific part had a significant positive effect on maintaining biodiversity protection upon project completion. However, failure to achieve

strategic objectives, including developing and adopting a management plan, and to introduce more effective biodiversity management practices resulted in poor effectiveness of investments in the longer run. A more transparent and balanced administration of the national park might have lessened the loss of human capital due to high staff turnover.

Comparative analysis of both types of evaluation indicates a significant emphasis on the outcome-related actions reflected in the reporting documents from both sides (Luchkov et al, 1997; World Bank, 1998). Having been articulated in the planning documents (World Bank, 1992), the process-related objectives were significantly overlooked during the implementation phase and there appeared to be very limited attempts to reflect on the implementation process. Three years after the project completion, World Bank (2001) introduced elements of process evaluation for future Bank's operations in Eastern Europe. However, the lack of structured evaluation criteria along with the internal character of the document means that it is not possible to communicate the failures identified to the other actors. At the same time, the official Belarusian actors portrayed a fairly positive evaluation of the process in the interviews that can be explained by the fact that the implementation process remained within the limits of their usual procedures. Moreover, the occasional involvement of other stakeholder groups in consultation and training events made it possible to report (perhaps in good faith) that the new standards for biodiversity protection had been successfully met. Nevertheless, fifteen years after project completion, the present situation in the national park suggests that an unbalanced emphasis on the outcome (purchasing equipment and commissioning additional science-based studies) was an obvious drawback of the management strategy and eventually led to low level of project sustainability. The lack of management processes (e.g. preparing a management plan based on stakeholder involvement), is likely to be important reason of why the investments have not been effective in longer term.

4. Discussion

The Belavezhskaya Pushcha case allows a certain reflection on whether the failure of the Belarusian project represents a specific case of mismanagement or whether it adds to a broader "web" of repeated errors in cooperation between international organizations and their local partners.

Operation of the International Organization in post-communist countries

Comparing insights from the Belarusian case study with theory and practical examples from academic literature on CEE experiences, three main groups of factors responsible for limited success of the international projects can be identified.

First, natural-science and technical expertise dominated the project. Although a multi-disciplinary participatory approach was indicated among the priorities of the World Bank initiative in Belavezhskaya Pushcha, many of the interviewees representing Belarusian scientific and management communities as well as local respondents admit that the purely natural-science character of the project corresponded to its initial objectives. This indicates poor communication on the project's objectives, which "by default" was considered a "scientific" initiative in line with traditional perceptions.

Second, the prevalence of technical expertise in CEE states – or rather, the lack of social science expertise – is increasingly recognized by the international research community (cp. Otto et al 2011). Nevertheless, it seems that very little has been done to address this problem at the management level. Thus, referring to Wolchik (1991) – more than ten years after his research – VanDeveer and Carmin (2004) identify the same problem, also stressing the role of the EU and international organizations in fostering an unbalanced use of technical expertise. While the local environmental ministries lack the capacity to implement complex international environmental

policies and – logically – tend to rely on traditional technical expertise, their international partners seem to follow the same logic in order to avoid possible management problems and to secure a timely and "smooth" delivery of the outcomes.

Knowledge integration is closely connected to the unbalanced actors' representation and to the unequal cooperation between international organizations and local partners. In their search for effective project implementation, the WB managers acquired support at the highest national level. Although this was extremely helpful during the early stages (World Bank 1998), the seizing of control by the official actors decreased transparency and the possibility of involvement (World Bank 2001; personal communication in 2005-2008). At the same time, data from the interviews and surveys show that a significant number of the respondents point towards international organizations as a potential external agency to balance the distribution of power at the domestic level, not least through empowering civic society.

Following Keohane (1996), the empirical evidence from the case study confirms that in CEE, where traditions of centralized top-down governance are very strong, international aid projects are unlikely to be a success without the active support of governmental authorities. However, the long-term effectiveness of financial investments will also not be effective without taking interests into account and developing strong ties between the international managers and "local recipients" (Keohane 1996; Fairman and Ross 1996). At the same time, VanDeveer and Carmin (2004) stress that international actors often ignore the opportunity to foster the legitimacy of civil society involvement. Instead, the international managers – much like the domestic officials – tend to prioritize technical expertise and to see civic society groups as a source of competition or, at least, as implementers of ready-made policy recipes "on the ground" (VanDeveer and Carmin 2004).

Third, alongside power distribution, the imbalance in representation strongly connects to the lack of knowledge about objectives and methods of participation. Despite the fact that there was no local expertise concerning organization of participatory processes in the Belarusian project, no funds or expert support had been provided to develop this expertise. During an interview, a project manager from Belarus mentioned that the domestic team was finding it extremely difficult to organize the participatory process according to "international standards" due to a lack of adequate knowledge.

The effectiveness of directly replicating "western" standards of democratic participation in CEE remains an open issue and one that has received very little attention from researchers to date (Hutcheson and Korosteleva 2006; personal communication in 2005-2008; Kluvánková-Oravská et al. 2009). The objectives and methods of "democratic participation" may be interpreted differently by foreign managers and local implementers (Hutcheson and Korosteleva 2006). The existing local formal and informal institutions are in many cases suited to domestic conditions. This does not mean, however, that they are acting effectively and that innovations in the form of international standards for participation are not needed. These controversies stress even more the need to make a careful selection of participatory methods that build on local realities and that, at the same time, reach the level of management effectiveness currently associated with democratic participatory techniques (cf. Agrawal 2000). Such an endeavour requires allocating human and financial resources to build fit-for-purpose institutional structures for participation.

Project evaluation: reflection, learning, communication

A critical issue raised in analyses of the early technical assistance projects is that foreign agencies often tended to ignore the actual reasons underlying the performance of local partners. Instead, international agencies focussed "on concrete and obvious (to donors) expressions of incapacity such as the absence of certain technologies or the failure to perform specific

functions" (Grindle 1997). This unbalanced approach makes local partners to mere recipients of "western" standards and practices, while the actual value and suitability of these standards for the local conditions are ignored by the donors (Sagar and VanDeveer 2005). Poor reflection on past experiences and a lack of institutional coordination between the partners are mentioned among the factors detrimental to mutual learning that leads to deficiencies in the implementation and sustainability of international assistance (Sagar and VanDeveer 2005). Project evaluation can serve as a learning tool helping to achieve such moves.

Links between project evaluation and mutual understanding between the parties relate to the broader debate on the development and interpretation of environmental assessments. Describing environmental assessments as a "communicative process" rather than "reports that they often produce", Farell and colleagues (2001) stress the importance of "perceptual lenses" reflecting the respective worldviews and determining underlying assumptions of the parties involved and procedures used. For successful communication, the parties need to share basic "perceptual lenses" (e.g. evaluation methods and criteria) or, at least, to be aware of the "lenses" the other parties are applying. International projects add an extra layer of complication due to the differences between international and local partners regarding standards, expectations and related evaluation criteria or, in other words, their impressions about "what is good and what is bad implementation". Therefore, effective evaluation needs to build upon a comprehensive system of flexible criteria that enable aspects of reality within and beyond the "lenses" of each actor to become visible and an appreciation of what is important to the other partners involved to be developed.

Whether explicitly (e.g. based on specific evaluation criteria) or implicitly (e.g. following their idea of common sense), the actors involved in the project often combine outcome and process evaluations when reflecting on project implementation and results. Drawing on the discussion

above, we suggest that both outcome and process evaluations have their advantages and limitations. The approach of combining different perceptual lenses in terms of different approaches (e.g. outcomes and process) applied by different actors (e.g. international organizations, local partners or third parties) is likely to provide the most comprehensive picture of the project implementation. A clear definition and communication of the perceptual lenses through evaluation criteria and methods is likely to advance mutual understanding.

[Figure 1]

Figure 1 offers a graphic representation of different evaluation systems used in an international project. In the first scheme *A*, both international organizations and local partners act in the project according to their own standards for the outcomes and the process and use their own "lenses" to interpret the results. In this case, the feedback is likely to be shared by a group that has the same "lenses" without directly affecting the area of mutual cooperation. For example, the standards delivered by the international organization are unlikely to affect the mind sets of the local implementers. Different evaluations of the project might eventually lead to communication and cooperation difficulties. In the second case *B*, the parties partially share their evaluation standards, for example having the same yardstick for the outcomes and different ones to reflect on the processes. The feedback on the outcomes achieved is likely to directly affect the area of mutual cooperation; however, there is still no agreement on the processes behind the successes and failures of the implementation. The last figure *C* shows the situation where both parties adopt a common system to reflect on both the process and the outcomes, which can potentially provide the most effective feedback to the cooperation process.

With a certain degree of generalization, the WB project in Belavezhskaya Pushcha illustrates the situation described in part B. Shared criteria and techniques for *outcome* evaluation provided "perceptual lenses" that were clear and transparent for both local managers and the Bank's

experts. The analysis of the *process* has remained at the level of "in-house" reflections, with no clear criteria communicated between the parties including such important but flexible objectives as "fair and competent organization" (World Bank 2001). The case study gives insights into how such a "situation B" may manifest itself over the longer term: while both parties agree that the scientific and technical outcomes have been achieved, a failure to communicate and agree on a common vision of the process can be among the important reasons leading to limited long-term sustainability of the investments.

5. Conclusions

Our analysis of the Belavezhskaya Pushcha case study sharpens and specifies the conclusions from several other examples of international aid initiatives in post-communist and shows problems for setting up new standards for environmental governance in CEE. The most obvious obstacles encountered were:

- dominance of technical and natural scientific approaches implying a lack of social science perspectives;
- unbalanced representation of different stakeholders;
- powerful implementation by official high-level actors;
- underestimated role of civil society (NGOs and local actors) as partners for donor organizations;
- lack of knowledge about and experience in participatory involvement; little support for developing this knowledge.

Although these problems are not new, they are still often overlooked by the official project evaluations, which traditionally focus on technical *outcomes* as reflected in quantitative indicators. Outcome evaluations have significant value in the context of reporting on the targeted

objectives achieved (or not) upon project completion. However, our example shows that even a correct and positive outcome evaluation is unable to guarantee the sustainability of project results and investments in the longer term. One reason for this is that project sustainability has a strong link to the effective organization of the implementation process (cp. Rauschmayer et al 2009).

Outcome and process evaluations have different but complementary functions; however, to make use of these functions, they should occur in parallel with the project implementation, as a constant reflection by all parties involved. An unbalanced composition of outcome- and process-related criteria, or "perceptual lenses", may have significant detrimental effects (e.g. in longer term) by introducing a "systems error" in perception and communication even despite good intentions of managers on both sides.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Saxonian ministry for research, the EU Training and Research project GoverNat (Contract No. 0035536, www.governat.eu), and LUMES International Masters Program at Lund University. We are grateful to Nina Hagemann the Participatory Research Cluster at IVM VU Amsterdam, Prof. Polunin and three anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier versions, and to Marina Biruikova, Elena Shushkova, Irina Usova and Yuliana Polishchuk for technical support.

References

Agrawal, A. (2000) Adaptive management in transboundary protected areas: The Bialowieza National Park and Biosphere Reserve as a case study, *Environmental Conservation* **27**(4): 326-333.

Andonova, L. (2004) *Transnational Politics of the Environment: The European Union and Environmental Policy in Central and Eastern Europe.* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

Arnstein SR. (1969) A Ladder Of Citizen Participation, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* **35**(4), 216-224.

Berghöfer, A., Wittmer, H. & Rauschmayer, F. (2008) Stakeholder participation in ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management: A synthesis from European research projects, *Marine Policy* **32**: 243-253.

Blackstock, KL., Dunglinson, J., Marshall, KM. & Waylen, KA. (2012) Linking process to outcomes – internal and external criteria for a stakeholder involvement in River Basin Management Planning, *Ecological Economics* **77**: 113-122.

Bosse, G. (2009) Challenges for EU Governance through Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership: the Values/Security Nexus in EU-Belarus Relations. Contemporary Politics **2**(15): 215 – 227.

Carmin, J. & VanDeveer, S. (2004) Enlarging EU environments: Central and Eastern Europe from transition to accession. *Environmental Politics* **13**(1): 3-24.

Connolly, B., Gutner, T. & Bedarf, H. (1996) Organization inertia and environmental assistance in Eastern Europe., in *Institutions for Environmental Aid* Eds RO Keohane, MA Levy (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA): 281-324.

Council of Europe (2007) Requests of Poland, Belarus and Romania concerning the possible revisions of the decisions of the Group of Specialists - European Diploma – to be examined by the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention. T-PVS/Inf (2007) *14. Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats*. Standing Committee. 27th meeting. Strasbourg, 26-30 November 2007.

Datskevich UA. (2010) *My life in Belavezhskaya Pushcha: thoughts and summaries* (In Belarusian) (Monlitera, Minsk).

Derviş, K., Selowsky, M. & Wallich, CI. (1995) The World Bank in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. *MOCT – MOST* **5:** 101-127.

Dietz, T. & Stern, PC. (Eds.) (2008) *Public Participation in Environmental Assessment and Decision Making*, National Academies Press, http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12434.html.

Dranchuk, V. (2004) *Belavezhskaya Pushcha. Résolution SOS. Chroniques of beauty and struggle* (Kauchah, Minsk).

Fairmann, D. & Ross, M. (1996) *Old fads, new lessons: Learning from economic development assistance* in *Institutions for Environmental Aid* Eds RO Keohane, MA Levy (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA): 29-52.

Farell, A., VanDeveer, S. & Jäger, J. (2001) Environmental assessments: four under-appreciated elements of design. *Global Environmental Change* **11:** 311-333.

Ferraro, PJ. & Pattanayak, SK. (2006) Money for nothing? A call for empirical evaluation of biodiversity conservation investments. *PLoS Biol* **4**(4): e105.

Grindle, MS. (1997) *Getting Good Government: Capacity Building in the Public Sector of Developing Countries* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA).

Gutner, TL. (2002) *Banking of the Environment: Multilateral Development Banks and Their Environmental Performance in Central and Eastern Europe* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA).

Hallstrom, L. (2004) Eurocratising enlargement? EU elites and NGO participation in European environmental policy. *Environmental Politics* **13**(1): 175-193.

Hicks, B. (2004) Setting agendas and shaping activism: EU influence on Central and Eastern European environmental movements. *Environmental Politics* **13**(1): 216-236.

Hutcheson, DS. & Korosteleva, EA. (2006) Patterns of Participation in Post-Soviet Politics. *Comparative European Politics* **4:** 23-46.

Jordan, A. & Liefferink, D. (Eds.) (2004) *Environmental Policy in Europe*, 81-98 pp., Routledge, Abingdon.

Jörgens, H. (2004) Governance of diffusions: implementing global norms through cross-national imitation and learning, in *Governance for Sustainable Development - The Challenge of Adapting Form and Function*, edited by W. M. Lafferty, pp. 246-283, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK.

Kaufmann, D. & Kray, A. (2007) Governance Indicators: Where Are We, Where Should We Be Going? *Rep. Policy Research Working Paper 4370*, The World Bank, Washington.

Keohane, RO. (1996) Analysing effectiveness of the international environmental institutions. in *Institutions for Environmental Aid* Eds RO Keohane, MA Levy (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA): 3-28.

Kluvánková-Oravská, T., Chobotova, V., Banaszak, I., Slavikova, L. & Trifunovova, S. (2009) From Government to Governance for Biodiversity: The Perspective of Central and Eastern European Transition Countries, *Environmental Policy and Governance* **19**(3): 186-196.

Lavenex, S. (2006) EU external governance in 'wider Europe'. *Journal of European Public Policy* **11**(4): 680-700 .

Luchkov, A., Artuchevsky, A. (2002) The GEF forest biodiversity conservation project and its implementation in the Belovezhskaya Pushcha In: *The Bialowieza Forest in the third Millenium. Challenges for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development. Proceedings of the cross-border conference held in Kamenyuki (Belarus) and Bialowieza (Poland), 27th to 29th June 2000, Brest*, eds. O. de Bruijn, H. Kazulka, CZ. Okolow. Brest, Belarus: S. Lavrov

Luchkov, A., Tolkach, V., Berwick, S. & Brylski, P. (eds) (1997) *Belovezhskaya Pushcha Forest Biodiversity Conservation,* World Bank Grant GEF 05-28621-BY (World Bank, Belarus).

Margoluis, R. & Salafsky, N. (1998) *Measures of Success: Designing, Managing, and Monitoring Conservation and Development Projects* (Island Press, Washington, D.C.).

Martsinkevich G, Shkaruba A & Falaleeva M (2004) Bielaviezhskaya Pushcha/Puszcza Bialowieska (Belarus/Poland). in *Learning from Transfrontier Landscapes – Project in Support of the European Landscape Convention* Eds DM. Wascher, Pérez-Soba, M. (Alterra Wageningen UR, Wageningen) Alterra report pp 964: 34-36.

Otto, I., Shakruba, A. & Kireyeu, V. (2011) The rise of multilevel governance for biodiversity conservation in Belarus, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* **29**: 113-132.

Paavola, J. (2007) Institutions and environmental governance: A reconceptualization, *Ecological Economics* **63**: 93-103.

Paraskevopoulos, CJ., Getimēs, P. & Rees, N. (2006) *Adapting to EU multi-level governance: regional and environmental policies in cohesion and CEE countries* (Aldershot, Ashgate).

Rauschmayer, F., Berghöfer, A., Omann, I. & Zikos, D. (2009) Examining Processes or Outcomes? Evaluation Concepts in European Governance of Natural Resources, *Environmental Policy and Governance* **19**(3): 159-173.

Sagar, A. & VanDeveer, S. (2005) Capacity development for the environment: Broadening the scope. *Global Environmental Politics* **5(**3): 14-22.

Scrieciu, SȘ. & Stringer, L. C. (2008) The Transformation of Post-Communist Societies in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: an Economic and Ecological Sustainability Perspective, *European Environment* **18**: 168-185.

Stem, C., Margoluis, R., Salafsky, N. & Brown, M. (2005) Monitoring and Evaluation in Conservation: a Review of Trends and Approaches. *Conservation Biology* **19**(2): 295-309.

Taut, S. (2007) Studying self-evaluation capacity building in a large international organizations. *Americal Journal of Evaluation* **28(**1): 45-59.

VanDeveer, S. & Carmin, J. (2004) Assessing conventional wisdom: Environmental challenges and opportunities beyond Eastern accession. *Environmental Politics* **13(**1): 315-331.

Varjopuro, R., Gray, T., Hatchard, J., Rauschmayer, F. & Wittmer, H. (2007) Introduction: Interaction between environment and fisheries – the role of stakeholder participation, *Marine Policy* **32**(2): 147-157.

Webler, T. & Tuler, S. (2006) Four Perspectives on Public Participation Process in Environmental Assessment and Decision Making: Combined Results from 10 Case Studies, *The Policy Studies Journal* **34**(4): 699-722.

Weimer, DL. (ed.) (1997) *The Political Economy of Property Rights: Institutional Change and Credibility in the Reform of Centrally Planned Economies*. (Cambridge University Press, New York)

Wittmer, H., Rauschmayer, F. & Klauer, B. (2006) How to Select Instruments for the Resolution of Environmental Conflicts?, *Land Use Policy* **23**(1): 1-9.

Wolchik, SL. (1991) *Czechoslovakia in Transition: Politics, Economics, & Society* (Pinter Publishers, London).

World Bank (1992) *Biodiversity Protection Project. Republic of Belarus. Project Document.* World Bank. Global Environmental Facility. [WWW document] URL http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/1992/09/01/000009265_3961019232955/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf

World Bank (1998) ICR: Implementation Completion Report. Republic of Belarus. Forest Biodiversity Protection Project. *GEF grant 28621, 1998. World Bank Document* Rural Development & Environment Sector, Europe and Central Asia Region, World Bank. [WWW document] URL http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2000/03/03/000094946_99030406204747/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf

World Bank (2001) PAR: Performance Audit Report. Belarus, Forest Biodiversity Protection Project. *GEF Grant 28621, 2001. World Bank Document* Operations Evaluation Department, Sector and Thematic Evaluation Group, World Bank. [WWW document] URL http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2001/05/08/000094946_01042508503144/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf.