

7th Environment Conference of the Regions of Europe

Challenges for a Sustainable Europe

Contributions from the Regions



ENCORE, Åre 2006

7th Environment Conference
of the Regions of Europe



Åre Action Plan 2006 - 2008



County Council
of Jamtland

Åre

Jämtland, Sweden



www.encoreweb.org

I General results of Åre 2006

1. At the 7th Environment Conference of the Regions of Europe (ENCORE 2006) held in Åre, Jämtland (Sweden), on 15-16 June 2006, the participating Regions reaffirmed their commitment to improve the environment and to promote sustainable development in Europe.
2. The Ministers expressed the strong desire to engage in a continuous political dialogue and to strengthen international political cooperation among the Regions of Europe with the aim to:
 - have a greater impact on EU decision-making;
 - function as a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience;
 - give greater transparency to innovative policy practice.
 - enhance the role of the Regions in the development and implementation of environmental and sustainable development policies at the regional, national, European and international level.
3. The Conference adopted the Revised Valencia Charter that contains the objectives, the instruments and the priority actions of regional environmental policy in Europe. Compared to the original Valencia Charter of 1995, the Revised Charter refers to new developments in Europe such as the Lisbon Strategy and the Strategy for Sustainable Development. All European Regions are invited to sign the Charter by depositing their formal accession with the Valencia Ministry of Territory and Housing. (www.encoreweb.org)
4. The Conference also confirmed its commitment to monitor the implementation of ENCORE decisions and welcomed the Report on the monitoring of the Florence Action Plan (FLAP) presented by Tuscany Region.
5. The participating Regions took note of the regular contacts between ENCORE and the EU institutions. Increasing contacts with other European networks and with global networks for environment and sustainable development were also met with general approval.
6. The Regions acknowledged the efforts undertaken by ENCORE to establish partnerships between “old” and “new” Regions. With the help of the EU institutions, more can be done to make sure that best practices on environmental and sustainable development issues can be shared.
7. The Conference instructed the ENCORE Steering Group to supervise a series of initiatives to be undertaken in the period 2006-2008 as part of a long term strategic vision of the work of ENCORE.

II ENCORE objectives and core structure

8. The Valencia Charter describes the driving motive behind the work of ENCORE:

We believe that solutions to global environmental problems can only be achieved by coordinated actions at all levels of government. In accordance with the principle “think global, act local”, regional governments and regional-level solutions have much to contribute. We recognise the importance of regional differences and the opportunity to test new ideas and policies at regional level. It is important that these are taken into account in the formulation of environmental policies, both at national and EU levels.

9. ENCORE activities are organised by individual European Regions or by Regions jointly under the supervision of the ENCORE Steering Group. The Steering Group consists of Regional officials from as many different Member States as possible. The Steering Group is Co-Chaired by the Region that will host the next Conference together with the Region that has hosted the last Conference.

10. ENCORE engages in the following core activities:

Conferences:

The driving force of ENCORE is the biennial Conference for the regional environment Ministers. Each Conference has one or more specific themes. During each Conference, a progress Report is presented of the activities carried out since the last Conference.

The conference arrangements and other activities are handled by the Regions in close cooperation with the ENCORE Steering Group.

Seminars, workshops, (virtual) working groups, partnerships with other networks, research and (virtual) exchanges of best practice:

To carry out activities in between the conferences, the leaders of the different themes in the work programme will organise workshops, seminars, (virtual) working groups, partnerships with other networks and (virtual) exchanges of best practice to which politicians and administrative staff from European regions and other relevant stakeholders will be invited. Regions may also commission research projects under the ENCORE umbrella.

Meetings of politicians

In between ENCORE Conferences, regional ministers meet to discuss current political events. These meetings are organised by the Co-Chairs of ENCORE.

Yearly meeting with the EU Environment Commissioner

Representatives of ENCORE meet each year with the European Commissioner for Environment to discuss current political issues as well as the preparation of the next Conference.

Cooperation with other European networks

ENCORE seeks to collaborate with other European networks which have an interest in environmental and sustainable development issues.

Web site:

The web site will be a central tool for communicating these activities, and encouraging co-operation between the different partners and the exchange of experiences.

III ENCORE strategy

11. At the ENCORE Conference in Åre in June 2006 the following strategy was adopted by the Regions:

- to strengthen international political cooperation among the Regions of Europe by organising meetings of political leaders and Ministers;
- to strengthen the environment and sustainable development throughout Europe by promoting Agenda 21 at a regional level in co-operation with citizens, organisations, enterprises, other governmental levels and other social and economic partners;
- to work in partnership with businesses at a regional level and to involve educational and research institutions in this co-operation in order to acquire new environmental research and knowledge - and to implement this in both enterprises and public institutions;
- to co-operate with the European Commission in implementing the 6th Environmental Action Programme and ensure that the practical experience of the Regions in implementing EU law is reflected in the future work of the Community.

To implement this strategy, the Regions will work on selected themes.

IV ENCORE priorities 2006 - 2008

12. The Conference agreed to the following priority themes for ENCORE for the period 2006 - 2008

- Sustainable Development
 - Sustainable tourism
 - Education for sustainability
 - Tools for sustainable development
- Water
 - Integrated River Basin Management
 - Water Quality Management
 - Application of the Water Framework Directive
 - Flood Control
- Soil Protection
 - European Soil Protection Strategy
 - Sustainable land use
- Climate Change
 - Renewable Energy and Energy efficiency
 - Transport
 - Adaptation to Climate Change Effects
- Biodiversity /Natura 2000
 - Implementation of the Fauna/Flora habitat directive

V. ENCORE Work Programme 2006 - 2008

13. The Åre Conference highlighted the special importance of soil protection and the challenge of climate change. The conference urged the Regions of Europe to adopt innovative and effective policies in these areas and to work with the Steering Group to communicate these policies to other Regions of Europe, associations of regions in member states, national environment ministries and other public bodies, particularly the European Institutions. It is envisaged that seminars, (virtual) working groups and other activities will be an appropriate means of achieving such communication and all Regions of Europe are encouraged to contact the Steering Group with their ideas for such ENCORE events.

14. ENCORE has the opportunity to become a forum to communicate ideas and best practice on sustainable development issues. The Steering Group will work with the Regions to develop new ENCORE initiatives.

15. The ENCORE Work Programme 2006 – 2008 proposes the following six different kinds of activities:

- A. Contacts with other networks and European institutions
- B. Implementation and monitoring of ENCORE decisions
- C. Promoting the Valencia Charter
- D. Seminars, workshops, (virtual) working groups, partnerships with other networks, research and exchanges of best practice

- E. Partnerships between "old" and "new" Regions.
- F. Preparation of ENCORE 2008 – Zaragoza, Aragon (Spain)

A. Contacts with other networks and European institutions

15.1 The Conference welcomed the meeting of ministers from ENCORE Regions led by the President of Jämtland Hans Lundqvist with Commissioner Stavros Dimas which took place in November 2005. The Conference asked the Steering Group to seek to organise such meetings with the Commissioner each year in cooperation with the host of the next ENCORE Conference.

The Regions of Europe should seek dialogue and co-operation with the EU institutions in the preparation of policies, plans and indicators in the field of environment and sustainable development. The Steering Group was asked to pursue these matters with the European Commission and with the Committee of the Regions.

There exist a number of other bodies with an EU-wide mandate which includes environmental and sustainable development matters. The Conference asked the Steering Group to consider co-operation with such bodies if this could lead to benefits for the sustainable development work in the Regions of Europe.¹ The proposal by the Network of European Regions on Education for Sustainability (RES) to elaborate a work programme in partnership with ENCORE was received with enthusiasm.

Similarly, the Conference supported the idea to have exchanges to strengthen relations between ENCORE and the global Network of regional governments for sustainable development (nrg4SD), created at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, in order to promote participation by ENCORE Regions in international partnerships for sustainable development, the so-called Type 2 outcomes of WSSD.

B. Implementation and monitoring of ENCORE decisions

15.2 The Åre Conference asked the Regions of Europe to contribute actively to the monitoring of ENCORE activities carried out by the Regions in the period 2006 - 2008. The Steering Group was asked to work together with Jämtland Region on the Monitoring Report of the Åre Action Plan that will be presented at ENCORE 2008.

The Conference expressed its appreciation for the work by Tuscany on the FLAP Monitoring Report. The Report includes a description and analysis of the ENCORE activities that took place in the period in between the ENCORE 2004 and the ENCORE 2006 Conferences. The Report was accepted by the Conference.

C. Promoting the Valencia Charter

15.3 The Revised Valencia Charter was adopted by the Conference and signed by the participating Regions:

In order to give maximum visibility to the new Charter, the Conference asked the Steering Group together with the depository Region Valencia to make publicity for the Charter as the Constitution of the European Regions for Environment and Sustainable Development Policies.

D. Seminars, workshops, (virtual) working groups, partnerships with other networks, research and exchanges of best practice

15.4 The Regions are invited to present initiatives they would like to develop under the ENCORE umbrella, in particular in relation to the implementation of the Valencia Charter and to the priority themes listed in Article 12, to the ENCORE Steering Group. So far, the following activities have been announced:

Thematic seminars/workshops

1. **Soil Protection.**
to be announced

2. Climate Change Expert Seminar

Leading Region: Basque Country, Spain; in collaboration with: North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

Objective: This two-day international conference aims to present international progress made with respect to combating climate change and to foster debate on potential future action in the field. It will also serve as a framework for encouraging the formulation of proposals to be incorporated into the Basque Plan to Combat Climate Change while increasing awareness by involving all interest groups.

Participants will debate issues offering potential answers to climate change and will examine progress in the fight against climate change as part of sustainable development. One of the main subjects of debate will be how to promote different international actions in order to improve the global response to climate change.

Date and place: 27 - 29 November 2006, Bilbao, Basque Country, Spain.

Activities: Expert Seminar

3. Education for Sustainability (see also under Partnerships with other networks).

Leading regions: Umbria and Emilia Romagna, Italy

Objective: continued cooperation and exchange of information among Regional authorities specialising in education for sustainability.

Date and place: Autumn 2006, Brussels, Belgium; Spring 2007, Perugia, Italy

Activities: the Network of European Regions on Education for Sustainability (RES) plans to organise two meetings per year, one in Brussels and one in a participating Region, in order to develop and implement its work programme. Currently, the focus is on launching the website of the RES and on preparing a database of education centres in Europe. RES Working Groups on specific themes will be activated through the website. Teaching materials will be made available through the website as well.

4. Water scarcity issues and drought management.

Leading region: Emilia Romagna, Italy

Objective: To draft an Action plan on water scarcity mitigation measures in the context of the Water Framework Directive. The Action Plan will be based on the Report that was presented to the Water Directors Meeting in Austria in June 2006 that describes water scarcity mitigation measures and practices implemented in Europe and Mediterranean non-EU countries in order to provide and share information. It is a living document that will need continuous input and improvements as application and experience build up in all countries of the European Union and beyond.

Date and place: 2007, Bologna, Italy

Activities: workshop

5. Water Management and Agencies

Leading Region: Basque Country, Spain; in collaboration with Aragon, Spain

Objective: A new Water Law will be adopted in the Basque Parliament. Its three main objectives are to:

- Implement the European Water Framework Directive;
- Coordinate water management tasks between different levels of administration and between different institutions;
- Take into account the financial aspects of water as an environmental resource.

The entity responsible for (the coordination of) water management issues will be the Water Agency. The aim of the workshop is to learn about the experiences of other agencies around the world and to establish permanent links between those agencies and their experts.

Date and Place: 29 September 2006, Bilbao, Basque Country, Spain.

Activities: Workshop

6. Sustainable Tourism

Leading regions: Jämtland, Sweden, and Valencia, Spain

Objective: To compare small scale tourism in Jämtland and mass tourism in Valencia.

Date and place: to be announced

Activities: one seminar in Jämtland, Sweden, and one seminar in Valencia, Spain

7. Waste - a Resource

Leading region: Bavaria, Germany

Objective: Starting point is the review of the Waste Framework Directive, which will be the basis for Europe's waste management during the next 20 years. Regarding energy recovery in incinerators, the Commission proposed criteria based on energy efficiency. In this regard, the CEWEP (Confederation of European Waste-to-Energy Plants) will present the Waste-to-Energy (WtE) Industry. The objective of the talk- and discussionround is an informal exchange of ideas with representatives of the Commission, members of the European Parliament, representatives of the regional representations in Brussels as well as representatives of associations and industry.

Date and place: 9 October 2006, Brussels, Belgium

Activities: Seminar in the Bavarian Representation in Brussels („Brussel Talks“)

Thematic (virtual) working groups

The working groups are asked to define a work programme and set measurable objectives.

1. Virtual working group on climate change

Leading region: North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

Objective: to present Regional activities in the field of Climate Change; to provide a platform of communication between Regional experts and decision makers; to extend and intensify networking and co-operation between Regions; to share best practice; to develop and refine Regional strategies.

Activities: establishing a working and information platform on the ENCORE website; sharing information on best practice; identifying projects with a common interest.

2. Virtual working group on biodiversity

Leading Region: Tuscany, Italy

Objective: to present Regional activities in the field of Biodiversity and Protected areas and to share best practices; to confront different approaches and different outcomes in the planning and management of protected areas and ecological networks; to increase networking and co-operation between Regions in order to develop regional strategies for connected areas and projects of common interest.

Activities: providing a platform of communication between Regional bodies and establishing a working and information platform on the ENCORE website; sharing information on best practices; defining projects with a common interest.”

Partnerships with other Networks

1. Network of European Regions on Education for Sustainability (RES)

Leading regions: Umbria and Emilia Romagna, Italy

Objective: The Network of European Regions on Education for Sustainability (RES) was created in 2005 at the initiative of the Italian Regions Umbria and Emilia Romagna. A first meeting took place in Brussels in September 2005. This initiative is in line with the priority actions in the Valencia Charter. Moreover, it gives the European Regions the opportunity to react in a coordinated manner to the challenges put forward by the United Nations at the beginning of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) and to the Strategy for Education on Sustainable Development of the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

Activities: The (RES) will host two annual meetings that will be open to ENCORE participants. ENCORE Regions are invited to join the RES and to participate in the initiatives developed through the RES website (www.regionres.eu). Working Groups will be activated on the website about the themes identified during the meeting in Brussels in September 2005. A plenary meeting will be organized in Brussels, at the end of 2006, and one in Perugia in 2007. The RES will work on the drafting of a Charter on the Role of the Regions in Education for Sustainability in Europe.

2. Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD)

Leading Regions: Tuscany, Italy; Basque Country, Spain; Flanders, Belgium; North Rhine Westphalia, Germany

Objective:

Activities: to be announced

Thematic Research Projects

1. Regional Competences in the Member States

Leading Region: Tuscany, Italy

The Final document of the Research project on Regional Competences in the Member States by Tuscany, Italy, is available on the Encore website. Regions are asked to contribute to the research by updating the information using the website forum.

Exchange of best practice

1. Exchange of best practice on Adaptation to Climate Change Effects

Leading Region: Tuscany, Italy

Objective: To make available information about adaptation measures to the effects of climate Change. The EU will publish in 2006 a Green Book on Adaptation to the effects of climate change. The Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, chaired by Tuscany, is setting up an exchange of information under the leadership of the French Region Ile de Réunion. These activities will be coordinated with the ENCORE Working Group on Climate Change.

Activities:

2. MUGI 21 - Computer Application for Monitoring and Evaluation of LOCAL ACTION PLANS

Leading Region: Basque Country, Spain

Objective: MUGI 21 is a computer application designed to help municipal officers and technicians, making it easier to manage and monitor Local Agenda 21. The MUGI 21 application is user-friendly, and consists of a

number of screens accessed by forward and back buttons. The application contains forms to enter information, and reports to extract information, depending on the user's requirements. It also features explanatory notes on screens, and help messages which appear when the cursor stops on a field. This instrument can be a real tool to work at the local level, and at the same time to identify the synergies between different realities. A virtual working group could exchange their experiences in order to adapt this tool to local needs.

Activities: Exchange of Expertise and Best Practices.

3. Regional Greenhouse Gases Inventory

Leading Regions: Basque Country, Spain, in collaboration with: North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

Objective: One of the environmental priorities of the Basque Country is to fight Climate Change. Therefore, we have created a Climate Change Office. Its first task is to elaborate a Climate Change Plan. The Plan will have two main lines of work: mitigation and adaptation.

Basque Country has made an Inventory of Greenhouse Gases for 2004 and 2005. The methodology is based on IPCC, and adapted to the regional characteristics.

Our proposal is to offer a common methodology to calculate the Inventory, in order to allow us to make comparisons among Regions.

Activities: Exchange of Expertise and Best Practices

E. Partnerships between "old" and "new" Regions

15.5 The Regions were asked to continue to improve contacts with and start new partnerships with Regions from the new member states. The Steering Group was asked to ensure that Regions from new member states are represented in the ENCORE Steering Group

F. Preparation of ENCORE 2008 – Zaragoza, Aragon (Spain)

6.6 The Conference welcomed the offer of the Spanish Region of Aragon to host the next ENCORE conference in 2008 and asked the ENCORE Steering Group to work with Aragon to organise a successful conference. Following changes introduced in 2004 and 2006, the organizers were asked to create the circumstances to guarantee a high level of interactive debate and ample opportunities for Ministers and political leaders to meet .

As of the closure of the ENCORE 2006 Conference, the Co-Presidency of ENCORE is in the hands of Jämtland and Aragon.

The Conference thanked Tuscany for its extraordinary contribution to ENCORE during the last 3 years.

16. The Steering Group was asked to keep the Regions of Europe informed of the progress on all these issues through the ENCORE website, e-mail and other forms of communication. The Steering Group was asked to produce a full report on its work in 2006-2008 at the next conference in Aragon in 2008. This report should also include its proposals for the following two years. These proposals are to be debated and agreed upon at the next conference.

Adopted by the Environmental Conference of the Regions of Europe (ENCORE), Åre, Jämtland, Sweden, 16 June 2006

(Footnotes)

¹. Examples include: the Environmental Platform of the Regional Offices (EPRO), the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Council of Europe, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), Eurocities, the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions in Europe (CPMR), the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), The European Network of Environmental Authorities for the Cohesion Policy agencies (ENEA) and the Network of European Regions on Education for Sustainability (RES).