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Newsletter 2

20 year anniversary of the North Sea Conference



In 2017 the North Sea Programme celebrated the 20 year anniversary of its annual conference. Over 300 attendants took part in the festivities and seized the opportunity to network and gather ideas for new projects. As an approved North Sea Region project, TOPSOIL was present to share knowledge with and acquire information from related North Sea Region projects.

The conference was kicked off by some distinguished guest speakers, among who Flemish prime minister Geert Bourgeois, Minister of the environment of Lower Saxony Stefan Wenzel and Jean Pierre Halkin from the European Commission's DG Regio.



Flemish prime minister Geert Bourgeois

All speakers emphasized the importance of cooperation within the North Sea Region. The North Sea Region is a strongly developed region and cooperation across borders is of the utmost importance to maintain that standard.

Flemish prime minister Geert Bourgeois used the following quote of the American philosopher William James to express his understanding of the North Sea Region: *"We are like islands in the sea: separate on the surface but connected in the deep"*.

In this spirit of cooperation the TOPSOIL project took part in one of the conference's 37 workshops, divided among the four priorities of the programme (Thinking growth, eco-innovation, a sustainable North Sea Region and Green transport and mobility).

Together with other North Sea Region climate resilience projects BEGIN, FAIR, Building With Nature and FRAMES, the TOPSOIL project shared experience and explored possibilities of creating synergies in the future. Attendants to the workshop were also invited to share their vision on the projects and on future cooperations between them. Off course this initiative doesn't limit itself to the five projects mentioned above. Other relevant projects, now and in the near future, are also invited to contribute to a joint solution to tackling the negative outcomes of climate change.





A pilot in the picture: Drenthe (NL)

The TOPSOIL project in Drenthe has got off to a flying start. In cooperation with the Danish company SKYTEM, partners at Aarhus University and GDN-TNO, geo-magnetic data was collected in the rural area of the Drentsche Aa last February. These data are now being (re)interpreted to improve the mapping of the deeper underground in the region.

Some background on the underground

Rinke van Veen, Project Manager for Topsoil Drenthe, explains what has been happening recently in his project area. "Firts, a little geology lesson. In the north of the province of Drenthe melt water till - a sediment from the first ice-age - can be found on a large scale. However, the deposits are irregular, vary in thickness and can be found at a depth of up to 50 metres, and more. The current information regarding the whereabouts of melt water till is stored in a national database and is mostly based on the interpretation of drill tests. The deeper these drillings, the less reliable the information".

Besides melt water till, glacial till from the last ice-age in the Netherlands (Saalien) can also be found sporadically beneath the surface. This layer is also irregular in structure and can be several metres thick.

Adapting water management to climate change

Both impermeable clay layers have an important impact on water management issues in Drenthe.

Rinke: "We also need to adapt to climate change. With improved and more extensive data we can better predict the consequences of intense rainfall. The quality of our drinking water and the storage possibilities are also influenced strongly by whether or not there are sub-surface clay layers".

Cooperating with partners

Following the TOPSOIL project kick-off, a meeting was organized with regional water-management and geology specialists and experts from Aarhus University to discuss the possibilities of using electro-magnetic measurements, taken from the air, to map the clay layers.

This resulted in contracting the Danish company SKYTEM to do just that! In February of 2017, SKYTEM flew a helicopter with electro-magnetic measuring apparatus over the Drentsche Aa area, covering more than 220 km² over a period of two weeks.



TOPSOIL in the spotlight

"As you can imagine, a low-flying helicopter with a strange appendage flying constantly over this peaceful rural area was quite an unusual sight and good communication, particularly with the locals, was key", according to the project manager.

"Before the first flights began we organized an information evening, which was very well attended, and we updated the flight planning on the provincial website and on social media daily so that everyone involved was aware of when to expect the helicopter in their neighbourhood".

With great interest from the regional press, the official start sign was given at Groningen Airport Eelde by Mr. Cees Bijl, Executive Board Member of the Province of Drenthe on 6th February. Rinke continues: "Partly as a result of this media attention, the TOPSOIL project in Drenthe and our cooperation within the NSR Interreg VB Programme, as well as our joint activities have been brought under the spotlight".



So, what happens next?

SKYTEM have delivered the rough data and this is now being converted by Aarhus University. "The first results are in, and we can see very clear differences between what we previously interpreted and where, in fact, these impermeable layers are under the surface", says Rinke enthusiastically. "Now these values are being transformed into geological information, defining the layers of melt water till and glacial till".

This information offers improved insights into the vulnerability of Drenthe's groundwater system in relation to climate change. And more importantly, forms the basis for future adaptation strategies in the region.

As already mentioned, the helicopter flights and the use of this technology in Drenthe caused quite a stir in terms of media attention. Besides presenting TOPSOIL at several regional and national congresses, Rinke van Veen and the Drenthe TOPSOIL team are planning an extra national meeting to tell more about the outcomes and forge future co-operations.

A final word from Rinke: "By sharing our experiences and findings we can co-create new possibilities for the future".



Rinke van Veen, Project Manager for Topsoil Drenthe, presents the project for regional politicians and policy makers at Europe day 2017.

TOPSOIL present at AquaConSoil conference 2017

From June 26 till June 30 of 2017 the 14th International Conference on sustainable use and management of soil, sediment and water resources took place in Lyon.

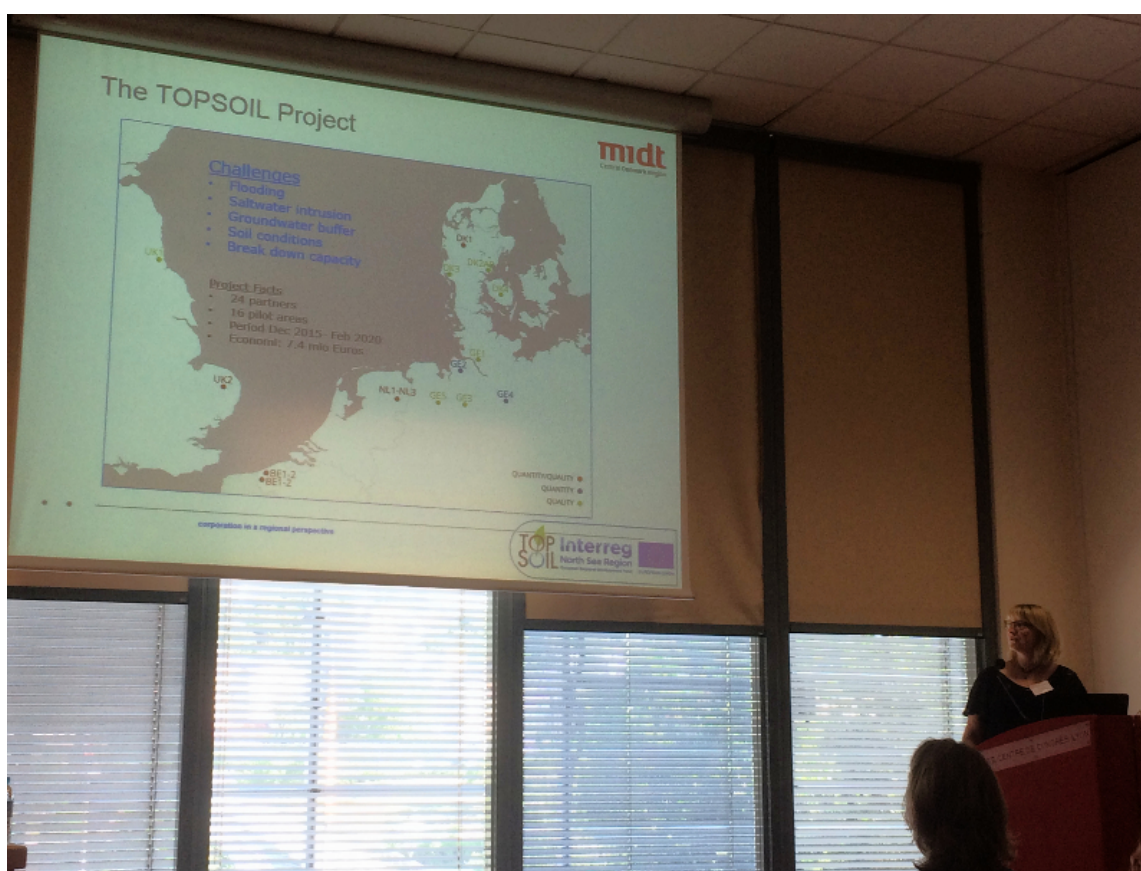
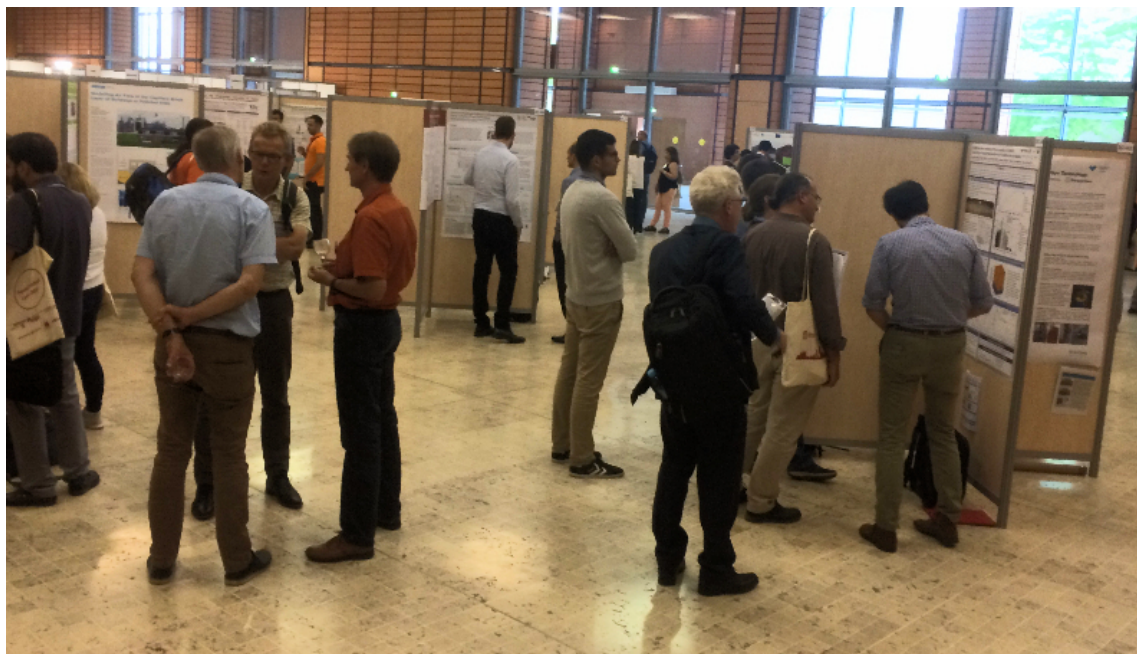
Lead partner, Central Denmark Region, got the honor to present TOPSOIL at the 14th AquaConSoil Conference. Why was the project's presence there such a big deal? Let us pause and look at the mission of the AquaConSoil Conference.

The programme of the conference states the following. In a context of global and environmental change, societies are facing challenging issues, such as water and soil preservation. Innovative solutions have to be implemented in order to address these issues and ensure a sustainable territorial development. A circular economy approach can't only be applied to waste, but also to soil, sediments and the course of water. New solutions still need to be developed to enhance the role of the soil and subsurface in the process of treatment and storage for water preservation.

The French consortium involved in the preparation of the conference is persuaded that AquaConSoil is not only about connecting people but that it will provide the possibility to build new networks and partnerships with people and organizations with different background (scientists, policy makers, industry,...), also across borders. AquaConSoil provides several platforms for continued interaction during and after the conference.

Needless to say that this conference provided a great amount of networking opportunity for the TOPSOIL project.





5 Questions to Barry Bendall - Stakeholder involvement

You are currently working as a director within the Rivers Trust. The organization describes itself as 'an umbrella body for charitable rivers trusts and river improvement groups across the UK'. What are your core activities and how are they linked to this TOPSOIL project?

The Rivers Trust is a registered charity aiming to improve public understanding of issues affecting water and the water environment and to enable the delivery of measures that protect and enhance the water environment for the benefit of people and wildlife. We represent a network of rivers trusts with objectives very similar to our own that operate locally to improve the environment by engaging with communities and partner organisations at a catchment scale to develop a more integrated 'ecosystem' based approach. Three of these rivers trusts (Essex & Suffolk RT, Norfolk RT and Wear RT) are also partners in the Topsoil project. Collectively we aim to increase our knowledge on issues surrounding the management of soils and water (specifically the interaction between the two) to improve the way in

which we manage our catchments. The Topsoil project provides us with a fantastic opportunity to do this specifically with regard to groundwater issues (often a missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle) and we are really looking forward to working together and learning from each other over the next few years.

Your main role within the TOPSOIL project is that of work package leader of WP 3 stakeholder involvement. Could you describe us what is expected of you in that regard?

The TOPSOIL project aims to develop new and ambitious approaches to the way in which we manage soil and water. From the work we do as rivers trusts, we know that a critical step to achieving this is obtaining the support of local stakeholders (those that own and manage the land) and that this will first require engaging and involving them as the project progresses. The work package is therefore partly about sharing knowledge on effective approaches to stakeholder involvement, but more importantly it is about 'learning through doing' – using the project as an opportunity to engage with key stakeholders in our respective pilot activities and sharing our experiences (good and bad!) so that we can adapt our own approaches and hopefully achieve some really positive outcomes.

Do you see areas where stakeholder engagement can be improved? What are your recommendations?

Of course there is no one size fits all and no secret recipe for effective stakeholder engagement –hence the need to adapt. What works well in one situation may not work so well in another and this may be down to many things from cultural differences to the personalities of the people involved. However, based on our own experiences, some important considerations include the need to be patient – involving stakeholders isn't always easy and getting it right is likely to take time, and making sure that you underpin the process with open and transparent sharing of information – this is usually critical in building trust with individual stakeholders and wider stakeholder networks.

What is according to you the added value of working in an Interreg VB North Sea Region project?

Right across the NSR it is clear that we are all struggling with very similar water management challenges and yet no country has either found all the technical solutions or has the perfect management system for implementing them. Therefore it is critical for us to work collaboratively in projects like this so that we can share knowledge, learn from the experiences of each other, challenge our own thinking and hopefully adapt our current approaches to achieve more resilient NSR ecosystems.

What are your expectations for the future of this project?

I am hopeful that the project will help create a shift towards a more inclusive and joined up approach to the way we manage the water environment. The management of soil and the water beneath our feet are such critical components to achieving this and yet there is so much that we either don't fully understand or don't currently integrate very well into everyday management practices. Therefore, with such a diverse partnership comprising enormous technical and practical knowledge I am sure that the project will provide us all with a chance to be inspired by the work of other beneficiaries and approaches in different countries and help us implement positive changes to our current management practices.