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Commitment of stakeholders – magic or an everyday practice?

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BLOG

Commitment of stakeholders – magic or an everyday practice?

Interreg Baltic Sea Region project NOAH, one of the COST DAMOCLES pilot projects, has worked closely with stakeholders to protect the Baltic Sea from compound events in flooding. NOAH's task is transnational and requires engaging people in all areas.

Blog post written by:

Minna M. Keinänen-Toivola, Hanna Rissanen

Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Stakeholders, a term every project team has to think about from the very beginning of the project idea, through project implementation, and even after the end of the project. The stakeholders vary depending on the theme of the project, but within compound events, everyone is a stakeholder. The groups of stakeholders may be influenced and determined e.g. by environmental, economic and societal aspects. In COST DAMOCLES, the key stakeholders have been identified also based on their relation to the main DAMOCLES themes such as flooding, heat waves, drought and fire.

When the stakeholders have been identified, the key question is how to communicate with them? Or how to have commitment and actions by stakeholders?

The NOAH project (Interreg Baltic Sea Region: Protecting the Baltic Sea from untreated wastewater spillages during flood events in urban areas) is one of the pilot projects in COST DAMOCLES. In NOAH, the main themes have been climate change and extreme weather events contributing to flooding events. Floods lead to financial damage in built environments, as well as wastewater overflows, which pose a risk on the environment and the state of the Baltic Sea. In NOAH, tools and knowledge for smart urban planning have been developed through the processes of 1) planning & risk assessment (modelling of NOAH pilot areas & flood risk analysis),

2) control & prevention (installations of equipment for monitoring and adjustability) and 3) holistic planning (NOAH tool: Extreme Weather Layer (EWL) and combining spatial planning + water management + climate scenarios). The key stakeholders in the NOAH project have been decision makers and urban planners, water utilities, universities and research institutions, as well as general public, societies and individuals. The driving force in NOAH has been the question on *why* to communicate and aim at gaining the commitment of the stakeholders (Fig. 1).

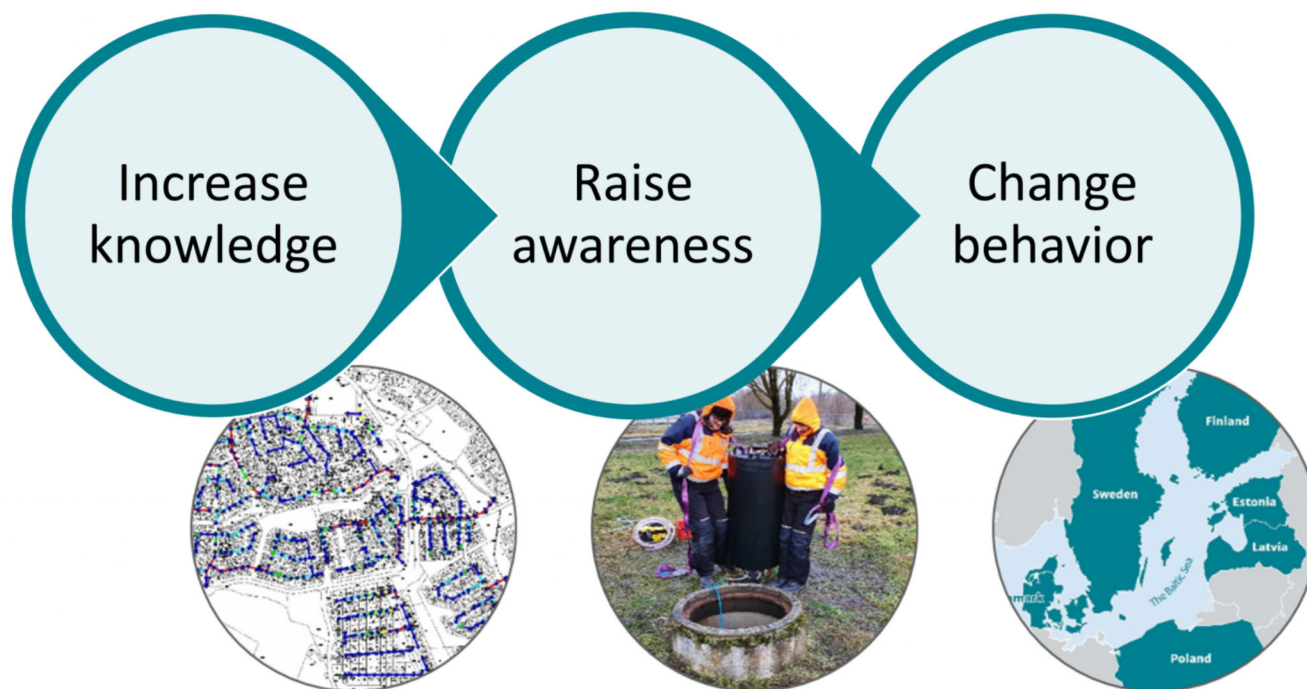


Fig. 1 Why to communicate and have the commitment of stakeholders.

In NOAH, project themes and activities have been communicated to a range of stakeholders, disseminating information on climate change and its effects; pilot site descriptions, flood risk evaluations; installations, measurements, sampling; partner meetings, cooperation activities, and events, publications and outputs.

The world is full of information and projects such as NOAH has been competing for the attendance of the stakeholders. The communication has utilized the possibilities of media such as active presence in social media and articles and interviews both in English, and in local language. One key of success has been delivering project results in a simple and comprehensible way by using visual tools such as interactive maps, informative leaflets, and story-telling videos.

However, the successful stakeholder commitment is not about results or communication tools. At the core of the project are the people working for the solutions. In NOAH, building networks with associated partners and other projects of the field, in local and international events, and by establishing the NOAH Stakeholder representative panel has played a key role.

The stakeholder commitment is not magic, it can be an everyday practice but requires planning and actions. To gain commitment, it is essential to focus on the questions what, to whom, how and why to communicate.

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