

COURSE MATERIAL

COMMENTS

REPORTS 135

RESEARCH REPORTS

Annika Kunnasvirta & Martti Komulainen (eds.)

BalticSeaNow.info

Experiences in Public Involvement



TURUN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
TURKU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

COURSE MATERIAL

COMMENTS

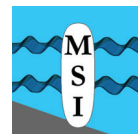
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Experiences in Public Involvement



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



**CENTRAL BALTIC
INTERREG IV/A
PROGRAMME
2007–2013**

REPORTS FROM TURKU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES 135

Turku University of Applied Sciences
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FOREWORD

The BalticSeaNow.info project, funded through the Central Baltic Interreg IVA Programme 2007–2013, was launched in November 2009 to develop communication tools for public involvement in the discussion about the Baltic Sea environment. The Baltic Sea, suffering from heavy loads of nutrients and increased risks of marine traffic, needs remediation actions on many levels. The discussion about the state and the future of the Baltic Sea has been institutionalised, however, and the role of individual citizens has been suppressed under summits and declarations presented by the “official” actors.

The project idea arose from the needs for public discussion and involvement, an issue which has been acknowledged in many Baltic Sea policy programmes. In order to achieve active public participation, Baltic Sea awareness has to be raised. In addition, meaningful channels for people to get more concretely involved and to make a difference have to be introduced and developed.

The BalticSeaNow.info project tackles these challenges by developing tools for public communication, discussion and participation. The project consists of a web portal (www.balticseanow.info) and events organised in partner countries.

The current publication summarises the first experiences of the project in public participation. Our aim was to open these experiences, in a way as a mid-term evaluation, to be used in other contexts requiring public involvement measures, and also to outline project motives and its theoretical background. These will be further analysed later in the final report of the project.

Turku, April 27 2012

Martti Komulainen
Project Manager, BalticSeaNow.info

INTRODUCTION – TOWARDS ACTIVE BALTIC SEA CITIZENSHIP

Martti Komulainen
Turku University of Applied Sciences

THE ROLE OF CITIZENS IN THE PROTECTION OF THE BALTIC SEA

There is a general consensus that the state of the Baltic Sea is alarming. The most notable problem is eutrophication – a consequence of excessive amounts of nutrients – but also alien species, increasing marine traffic and climate change are threatening the sea ecosystem.

The concern on the poor state of the Baltic Sea has been shared among countries and actors bordering the sea, and many initiatives and protection plans have been launched (e.g. HELCOM 2007). Also more concrete protection measures have been undertaken to prevent agricultural nutrient run-off and to decrease waste water loads from St. Petersburg, for example. There is still much to be done on many levels from nations to individuals.

According to the recent BalticSurvey (Söderqvist et al. 2010) the majority of people living in the nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea shared the concern about the state of the sea. They viewed, however, that they personally play a minor role in the sea protection, but instead industry, farming and nations should do more.

Our view is that despite the unanimous concern, the discussion about the state and the actions needed to improve the state of the Baltic Sea are more or less institutionalized, carried out at the level of official bodies. In addition to this, also the level of individual citizens has to be acknowledged as actors in the “everyday’s environmental policy”.

The role of citizens can be divided into consumer and active citizen roles. For example, according to a recent survey by FOODWEB project (Vorne & Patrikainen 2011), the role of the food chain is prominent in the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea, and changing one's food habits to meet diet recommendations could, according to model estimations, decrease nutrient loads by 7 %.

In addition to choices in food, housing and moving, citizens can pressure decision makers to step forward in the sea protection, and even be part of a collaborative process in environmental problem solving. This can be accomplished through the dialogue between different stakeholders.

The need to engage the public and stakeholders in activities promoting a healthy Baltic Sea and to actively promote public participation in decision making is mentioned in many policy programmes, such as the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (HELCOM 2007).

CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

As a general theoretical background for public involvement in environmental discussion, a generalisation of several conceptual models is presented in Figure 1. Models of environmental education (e.g. Volk 1990; Palmer 1998) state that environmental sensitisation is a prerequisite for active involvement: people act only for issues which matter at a personal level. Eutrophication, for instance, is evident and clearly perceivable in the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea, intruding the shores and diminishing the desire to swim.

Environmental awareness, in turn, emerges through a deep understanding created by personal experiences and knowledge. Empowerment refers to confidence for an individual's own capacity. These elements do not necessarily have a linear relation, but instead can be present simultaneously.

In many environmental education projects of the Baltic Sea the main focus has been on raising environmental awareness. The empowerment part of the model described above has not received, according to our view, as much attention. It is evident, however, that awareness raising is not enough; meaningful ways for more concrete involvement also have to be developed and introduced.



FIGURE 1. *Generalisation of several conceptual models of environmental education.*

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the BalticSeaNow.info project is twofold: it aims to activate discussion, raise awareness and commitment, even “strengthen the Baltic Sea identity”. Secondly, and maybe more importantly, it examines and develops communication methods for public involvement. These experiences can be used in other contexts requiring public involvement measures.

More specifically, the project aims to

- develop innovative communication tools for environmental awareness raising, discussion and participation
- activate people to observe the state of environment and discuss it
- promote environmental consciousness, concern, involvement and commitment
- strengthen integration and a common “Baltic Sea identity”
- bring forth everyday choices making a positive effect on the future of the Baltic Sea
- improve the dialogue between research and the public
- affect policy making by informing decision makers about the views and ideas of the public
- bring the Baltic Sea beauty and the diverse nature attainable via new communication methods (web cameras, online environmental information, sensors etc.)
- promote networking of educational institutes.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

BalticSeaNow.info has developed and introduced innovative communication tools to foster information sharing and discussion about the Baltic Sea environment. The project comprises a web portal, events, educational materials and co-operation between educational institutes to develop curricula about Baltic Sea environmental issues for university-level students.

In the BalticSeaNow.info portal, environmental and research information distributed in a public-friendly way, web cameras, discussion groups as well as other observations and stories produced by the public create a framework for joint discussion, information sharing, development and participation.

A number of events with a participatory approach have been organized in partner countries. In addition, interactive exhibits have been produced for different kinds of events to help engage the public to make personal judgements on their own role as protectors of the Baltic Sea.

The structure of the portal, some of the events relating to the project and the first experiences in public involvement are presented in the report at hand.

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BalticSeaNow.info – DISCUSS, OBSERVE, EXPLORE AND FIND OUT!

Martti Komulainen
Turku University of Applied Sciences

SUMMARY

BalticSeaNow.info portal offers the public forums to discuss, observe, explore and find out about the environmental issues of the Baltic Sea. The portal structure reflects the general environmental education models carrying elements of environmental sensitisation, awareness raising and empowerment. The first experiences reveal that web cameras are attractive elements for the public, but other means to trigger environmental discussion have to be used in parallel with them.

CASE DESCRIPTION

The BalticSeaNow.info portal was launched in February 2011 introducing forums for discussion, observation and the exchange of views on the Baltic Sea environment for the public. The basic structure of the portal reflects the environmental education model presented in Figure 1, comprising elements which aim to sensitise, raise awareness and empower the public for more concrete commitment (e.g. observations on water quality, tips for environmentally-friendly choices).

The general structure of the portal is presented in Figure 2. The web cameras, for example, raise interest by presenting views of beautiful landscapes and remote sites, but also nourish the desire to learn about nature objects (e.g. ospreys' life). By cross-linking different sections the visitors are encouraged to visit different pages and to recognize thematic connections (see Figure 3).

| DISCUSS | OBSERVE | EXPLORE | FIND OUT | MISSION | NEWS |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blogs • Discussion forums | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secchi-observations • Nature observations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web cameras • Panoramas • Real time water quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature • Politics • State of the sea • Marine research • Sustainable boating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection tips • Protection promises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News • Events • Topical articles |

FIGURE 1. *The general structure of the BalticSeaNow.info portal.*

The layout of the portal uses the map of the Baltic Sea area. Maps are used relatively often throughout the portal and site-specific information is presented frequently. The aim is to make comparisons between different areas of the sea and to present the wide variety of landscapes and habitats as a whole. The original idea was to have a completely map-based interface with updated and site-specific contents, but this turned out to be too costly and challenging in technical terms.

Shared pages are realized in English, but all co-operating countries have designed their own subpages in their own language. Project partners are in charge of keeping these pages up-to-date. The purpose of the pages in different language versions is mainly to direct people to shared pages and discussion areas produced in English.

In more detail, the web portal consists of

- discussion areas of different topics (fauna, flora, environmental risks)
- “think tanks” offering arenas for novel ideas about the actions needed to protect the Baltic Sea (Mission section)
- blogs of different stakeholders (e.g. a fisherman, a teacher, an environmental activist; currently 4 bloggers from Finland and 3 from Latvia)
- nature and other observations (water transparency, fauna and flora, oil spills, Cyanobacterium etc.)
- news, articles, event information
- protection tips (e.g. how to make a difference with everyday choices)
- competitions like the photo contest “Baltic Sea in My Eyes”
- online information on the state of the Baltic Sea
- webcam and panorama pictures of different locations around the Baltic Sea.



FIGURE 2. Layout of the *BalticSeaNow.info* portal.

On the project website, one can see real-time images from the Baltic Sea as well as from beneath the waves. Altogether eight cameras have either been newly installed or some previously existing ones have been embedded to the portal, transmitting images from places difficult to reach and opening windows to the beauty and diverse nature of the Baltic Sea.

The project website offers possibilities to follow the state of the Baltic Sea online. Monitoring sites offer the public the opportunity to follow several water parameters from a site near Seili island, South-West Finnish Archipelago, as well as sea level and weather information from several other sites around the Baltic Sea. The data has been simplified and modified for general public needs.

People are also encouraged to send in their own observations of e.g. birds, seals or oil emissions to observe the state of the sea and to compare findings with others. Personal observations can be seen also as a means to sensitise people to the subject.

Easy all-available methods to monitor the state of the sea have been introduced to the public. The project produced several hundreds of copies of so-called Secchi disks to measure water transparency and these were distributed to volunteer observers for free. The data has been presented in the portal.

A photo contest was launched in the portal in spring 2011. There were two categories in the contest: one for the project jury to be judged and the other for the public to vote. Altogether 753 photos arrived to the contest representing contestants from Finland, Latvia and Estonia. Due to large number of photos, the jury previewed and selected a set of 100 photos for the public voting. The winners were announced in February 2012.

RESULTS

The Google Analytics service was used to monitor visitor numbers and behaviour in the portal pages. The visitor statistics revealed that between May and December 2011, there were ca. 80 000 unique visitors with 300 000 visits and over 900 000 page views in total in the BalticSeaNow.info portal. After the portal launch the number of visitors increased steadily and peaked in July, levelling off thereafter (Figure 3). The osprey nest web camera page was clearly the most visited page (over 30 % of the views), followed by the other pages with a web camera.

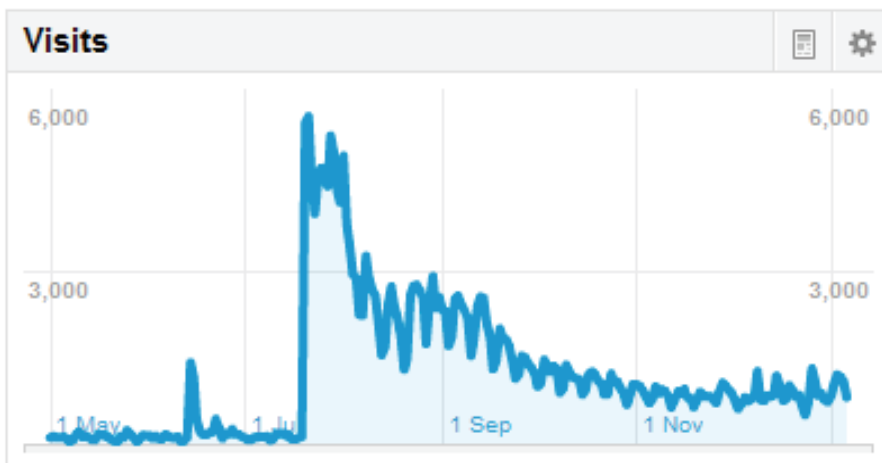


FIGURE 3. *Number of BalticSeaNow.info portal visitors May–December, 2011.*

The osprey nest inspired the public also to discuss the nest happenings, and a certain group of “activists” (mainly Finnish) continued to discuss even after ospreys’ departure from the nesting site.

The photo contest was a success. Also the Secchi water transparency monitoring seemed to interest people and almost all 300 Secchi disks were distributed to volunteers in all partner countries. Only a few of them, however, were active in sending observations.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The osprey nest web cam has clearly been the single most appealing element in the portal, as indicated by the visitor statistics and the lively discussions. It has even turned out to be a “community-forming” factor. Interestingly, strong emotions were raised whenever some technical problems and power-cuts occurred.

Although there were some remarks in the discussions about the state of the Baltic, in general the ultimate goal to activate discussion on the state and the future of the Baltic Sea was not very well met. Web cameras have surely been most effective in raising interest, but they have not necessarily led to a general concern on environmental problems and the needed protection measures. Nevertheless, they have offered the public the opportunity to take a peek into places and natural objects not so easily reached, and thus have increased the nature knowledge of the public.

It is still premature to draw final conclusions since more promotion is needed to raise the popularity of the portal. It is also clear that some “baits” for discussion are needed, possibly in the form of some provocative statements. The contents also have to be updated constantly to maintain the attractiveness of the portal.

However, the experiences from the photo contest and the Secchi water quality observations suggest that people are willing to join some concrete actions and campaigns for the better future of the Baltic Sea.

EXPERIENCES ON PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AT THREE DIFFERENT EVENTS

Katariina Kiviluoto
Turku University of Applied Sciences

SUMMARY

Turku University of Applied Sciences and the BalticSeaNow.info project have been gathering experiences from public involvement at many different kinds of events. In this case study two events and an excursion organised during summer 2011 are presented. One of the events was a discussion event organised at a local pub. The second event was an environmental education day for schoolchildren organised with other local environmental actors and the third was a bus excursion along Aura River aimed at local people. The events and the excursion were closely linked to the Baltic Sea and were intended to both raise awareness and encourage civic engagement through active participation.

CASE DESCRIPTIONS

Case I: Baltic Sea goes Kapakka

The BalticSeaNow.info project aims to research different methods on promoting active participation. From our previous experiences we have observed that events organised in a formal setting do not necessarily encourage people to participate in discussions, leaving the outcomes vague and at a relatively general level.

With Baltic Sea goes Kapakka (Baltic Sea goes “Pub”) discussion event the aims were to explore

- how the milieu affected the level of public participation
- whether or not an informal setting would promote active participation and a free flow of ideas
- to test a wireless polling device with a restricted audience and see if it is a worthwhile technical aid to be used in public involvement events.

The Baltic Sea goes Kapakka event was organised in late May 2011 at a local pub called “Koulu” in Turku city centre. Being a popular spot for discussion events, the pub was seen to fit our objectives as the locals already identify the pub to have a conversational atmosphere.

Expert contributions and hosting the event

In order to enable and encourage a dialogue between scientists and the general public, three expert speakers were invited to speak at the discussion event. We approached expert contributors, who would have excellent knowledge on their subject matter, but who would not be shy to express their own views and to take a stand.

One of the expert speakers recruited to the event was the head of Marine Research at the Finnish Meteorological Institute (FMI). The second was the environmental manager of Turku City and the third a water expert at Valonia (The Center for Sustainable Development and Energy at Turku City). FMI’s representative was asked to speak about the state of the Baltic Sea, the environmental manager of Turku City was asked to address the fate of the Baltic Sea and what should be done to correct the situation. Valonia’s speaker spoke about the role of the consumer in the Baltic Sea issues.

We decided to use a professional host to ensure public participation and to minimize any awkward or quiet moments. The professional presenter was also in charge of the wireless polling device, which was used to keep the discussion alive and on track.

The plan of the event

The two-hour discussion event began with a short introductory presentation of the BalticSeaNow.info project. After this, each expert speaker held their short and provocative speeches followed by questions and comments from the audience. The presenter then led the discussion. Both the expert speakers and the audience were encouraged to contribute to the discussion. The discussion was punctuated with regular polls on Baltic Sea issues.

Devices used to promote active participation

A wireless polling device was used in the event. The objective was to test the device in practice and see how it worked as a discussion initiator. The wireless polling device consists of a computer program and credit card sized wireless polling devices, which are distributed to the audience.

The device allows people to remain anonymous while voting, which can be seen to lower the threshold of answering truthfully to the questions asked. We had prepared ten questions beforehand on Baltic Sea environmental issues ranging from people's personal relationship to the Baltic Sea to the worst environmental problems the sea is facing. We also asked questions on the attendees' views on how they saw their own role in this problematic situation and what measures they were prepared to take to protect the Baltic Sea. The presenter was in charge of asking the questions.

Marketing

The event was not heavily promoted. There are a few reasons for this. First of all, the marketing budget was limited. Secondly, the location we chose had room for about 40 people. Thirdly, we wanted to create a familiar setting and encourage people to participate in the discussion spontaneously – a goal which, in our view, limited the number of people attending.

The event was promoted with two advertisements in the local newspaper Turun Sanomat. A press release was also issued and some promotional work was done via the local radio station. The press release resulted in one article at Turun Sanomat and the City of Turku also mentioned the event on their homepage. We also printed a poster which was distributed to local libraries. Promotional e-mails were also sent to our stakeholders and a Facebook event was created.

Case II: Environmental education day for fifth graders

The environmental education day for schoolchildren has been organised a few times before, but neither BalticSeaNow.info nor Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) has been involved before. The day had a water-related theme, which suited our purposes. We also wanted to test the Baltic Sea Net, a hands-on device designed by students of TUAS. It was also interesting to work with schoolchildren and see how differently they would participate in comparison to the general public, the project's main target group.

The environmental education day for fifth graders was organised by the Fisheries Management Center of SW-Finland. In addition to Turku University of Applied Sciences, a number of other local environmental actors attended the day. The event was organised in late August 2011, at an old miller's house in Turku close to the Aura River and the Halinen rapids making it an ideal milieu for a water-themed day.

The plan of the event

The day was split into two parts with around 70 children coming in the morning and 70 children in the afternoon. There were five checkpoints with different kinds of water-related activities.

BalticSeaNow.info and Turku University of Applied Sciences had a checkpoint, where the fifth graders were asked to

- choose from a mix of both Baltic and non-Baltic marine species the ones that in their view belonged to the Baltic Sea
- to name the species they chose
- to make food chains from these species.

Baltic Sea and the environmental problems it faces were also discussed.

Devices and materials used to promote active participation

The Baltic Sea Net was the main thing used to encourage participation. The Baltic Sea Net has a very simple and flexible construction that can be used for different purposes. It basically consists of a net, a stand for the net and a prop boat. In this particular event a set of both two- and three-dimensional Baltic and non-Baltic species were attached to the net. Other kinds of attachable items could also have been used.



FIGURE 1. *Fish net exhibit in use. Photo: Katariina Kiviluoto.*

Marketing

The event was marketed for the schools already in the spring and the registrations came almost instantly. The registered schools were reminded of the event after the beginning of the school year in the middle of August. The marketing was handled by the Fisheries Management Center of SW-Finland. A press release was made and the event was covered by at least the local radio station.

Case III: Bus Excursion to River Aura

Eutrophication is one of the biggest environmental problems in the Baltic Sea. The rivers carry nutrients from the fields to the sea. Agriculture is the most important contributor to the problem and the Finns are quite aware of the situation and the role agriculture has in the eutrophication problem. Some farmers have, however, taken the excessive nutrient runoffs seriously and converted agricultural land bordering e.g. rivers or bigger dikes into buffer zones. The idea with the bus excursion to River Aura was to acquaint the general public with some of the measures taken in the fight against eutrophication.

The excursion was organised in the middle of May and involved some walking in the fields. The excursion was targeted to the general public and anyone interested in the subject.

The plan of the excursion

The excursion lasted the whole day. The farm visit was the first happening, followed by a stop at a nature trail along the river. After lunch, a rapid and another nature trail were visited. Three expert guides were used. One had extensive knowledge on River Aura, its nature and Baltic Sea issues; the second guide was an expert on agricultural matters and offers guidance to farmers in agri-environmental support. The third guide had a culture-historical background.

Some promotional materials were distributed to the attendees. These included brochures and postcards.

Marketing

The excursion was promoted with two advertisements in the local newspaper Turun Sanomat. We also printed a poster, which was distributed to local libraries. Promotional e-mails were sent to our stakeholders and a Facebook event was created.

RESULTS

Baltic Sea goes Kapakka

The discussion event “Baltic Sea goes Kapakka” had a restricted audience due to its more intimate setting at a local Turku pub. All in all around 35 people gathered to the discussion event. The audience, three expert speakers, the professional host as well as the project personnel made the location quite full.

Environmental education day

The attendance to the environmental education day for elementary school children was restricted to close to 200 local school children in the Turku area. Originally around 190 schoolchildren registered for the event, but three school classes cancelled on the day before the event. All in all around 140 fifth graders and their teachers attended the event.

Bus Excursion to River Aura

About 45 local people attended the bus excursion. In addition to this three people (three guides, one project representative) and the bus driver took part in the excursion making the bus totally packed.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Baltic Sea has a special meaning for the Finnish people. After taking part in a number of public events in the Finnish coast, we have noticed that Finns are very concerned and quite well aware of the poor state of the Baltic Sea.

The majority of the people we encountered were already somewhat sensitised to Baltic Sea issues. Finns living in the coastal areas seem to have an especially close-knit relationship with the Baltic Sea, which could partly explain their awareness of the problems the sea is facing. A lot of Finns have personal experiences from e.g. blue-green algae blooms, making the environmental problems more concrete and easier to grasp.

Baltic Sea goes Kapakka

The objective of the event was to create a lively discussion event, where ideas would flow freely and a dialogue between expert speakers and the audience would be ignited. Another objective was to test the wireless polling device, and this objective was also reached with encouraging results. The wireless polling device was easy to use and served its purpose well in keeping the discussion both alive and on track. As the objectives were reached, the event can be considered as a success.

Even though the event was a success and reached its objectives, there are a few things that could be improved when planning future discussion events. A more precise marketing plan should be made to ensure a wider attendance. Especially alternative marketing methods (e.g. social media) should be carefully planned beforehand. The questions asked from the audience with the wireless polling device should be more carefully formulated. Some of the questions asked were a bit unclear and even naïve.

The duration of the event should also be considered. Baltic Sea goes Kapakka could have been maybe a half an hour longer. The audience was just starting to warm up to the subject when the event came to an end. The audience could clearly have continued with the discussion even longer. The professional host and the expert speakers were vital to the success of the event and their importance cannot be stressed enough when planning future discussion events.

Environmental education day

The main objective of the event was to test the new Baltic Sea Net. This objective was reached and the net proved out to function relatively well.

Another objective was to see how differently schoolchildren react to and participate in Baltic Sea issues in comparison to adults. This objective was at least partly reached, even though no official data on reactions or participation was collected. The schoolchildren were a very heterogeneous group, with very varying knowledge on Baltic Sea, its flora and fauna and environmental issues. Some of the schoolchildren were quite informed, whereas others had little or no knowledge on the Baltic Sea.

It is also worth mentioning that group dynamics and the accompanying teacher had a big impact on the motivation level of the schoolchildren. An actively participating teacher kept the schoolchildren motivated. If the group leader was not motivated, the group's motivation dwindled as well.

The day succeeded well despite the rainy weather in the morning. It was interesting to see how much the children knew about the Baltic Sea. Almost all seemed eager to hear about the flora and fauna of the Baltic Sea and quite a few dared also to ask questions about the species, maybe even more openly than adults. The general attitude was positive and the tasks at the BalticSeaNow.info workstation kept the children motivated long enough. The level of participation varied from group to group.

Below are some thoughts on how to organise future events with a similar target group:

- The workstation requires preferably two persons. There were two people in the morning, but only one in the afternoon.
- The tasks need to be simple and concrete, but not too easy or difficult. If the tasks are too easy or too difficult, the kids grow tired and start to fidget.
- Humour and storytelling are good ways to engage the schoolchildren and get them to listen.

Bus excursion to River Aura

The main objective of the excursion was to raise awareness on some of the factors that contribute to the state of Baltic Sea. Another objective was to present methods of decreasing nutrient flow into the River Aura and the Baltic Sea. Both objectives were reached, although no official data was collected. People seemed to be interested and asked a lot of questions.



FIGURE 2. *Bus excursion attendants visiting a buffer zone along the River Aurajoki. Photo: Katariina Kiviluoto.*

Here are some thoughts on how to organise future excursions:

- The route should not be too long. The excursion to River Aura followed the schedule quite nicely.
- People should be well-informed, if the excursion takes place in a rougher terrain and includes a lot of walking.
- More promotional material could be distributed, as the people have time to read while sitting on the bus.
- Some people complained that they could not hear the guide while walking. This should be taken into consideration.
- There could be even more guiding during the bus ride, but then again some people want to sit quietly and enjoy the scenery.
- Even better coordination and guidance while outside the bus. Now some people got lost in the nature trail at Hypöistenkoski.

INTERACTIVE EXHIBITS AS A TOOL IN GETTING THE PUBLIC INVOLVED

*Nora Forsman, Aija Bäckström & Katriina Murto
Keep the Archipelago Tidy Association*

SUMMARY

Keep the Archipelago Tidy (KAT) participates in various boat shows, exhibitions and happenings each year. This year the BalticSeaNow.info Gallup wall was a part of KAT's expo stand at four events: the boat shows in Turku, Naantali and Helsinki as well as the Kotka Maritime Festival.

The purpose of the Gallup wall was to attract attention and attract visitors to the stand, but first and foremost to stimulate a debate on environmental problems in the Baltic Sea and to promote the BSNI portal. The Gallup wall consisted of an expo stand with a transparent box divided into compartments. The public had a choice to vote by putting plastic coins into proper compartments representing different alternatives for question asked. The idea of the Gallup wall came from the first year students of Sustainable Development at Turku University of Applied Sciences. The students received an assignment from BalticSeaNow.info project to think up ideas for hands-on devices for public participation. The Gallup wall was one of the ideas that ended up in production.



FIGURE 1. *The Gallup wall. Photo: TUAS.*

CASE DESCRIPTION

In 2011, the boat shows KAT took part in, and also that had the Gallup wall as one of the elements of the stand, were *The Helsinki International Boat Show* on February 11–20, *The Turku Boat Show* on March 10–13 and *The Naantali Boat Show* on May 27–29.

Boat shows are mainly targeted at boaters. *Kotka Maritime Festival* on July 29–30, however, is Finland’s largest maritime fair that offers for example maritime culture, visiting vessels and a music concert programme. Therefore the target group of the festival in Kotka is broader compared to boat shows as it covers almost everyone.

In Kotka, KAT was part of the Baltic Sea Village, which may be described a separate event within the festival. The Baltic Sea Village was comprised 18 different Baltic Sea actors, all of which presented their own work. The common denominator for these actors was that they all work for a cleaner Baltic Sea.

What brought all the organisations together is the umbrella organisation called Baltic Sea Communications, a newly formed network whose purpose is to make the work for the Baltic Sea more effective.

Keep the Archipelago Tidy is an environmental non-profit organisation, whose main target audience is boaters. Therefore all the four happenings gathered together the best possible target group for KAT and for the BSNI project.

RESULTS

The Baltic Sea is a sensitive and an always current topic. The Gallup wall attracted a lot of attention and visitors were willing to offer their opinions and take part in voting. Generally speaking, expo and fair stands are usually quite static and they do not necessarily encourage people to discuss. Interesting hands-on devices are great in achieving attention.

The number of visitors reached 78 000 people in Helsinki, whereas in Naantali there were around 5 000 visitors. About 200 000 people visited both Turku and Kotka, of which about 3000 visited KAT's tent during the events,



FIGURE 2. *BalticSeaNow.info tent in the “Baltic Sea village” at Kotka Maritime Days. Photo: Riku Lumiaro / SYKE.*

LESSONS LEARNED

In Kotka, there were a lot of children visiting the Baltic Sea Village, because each stand or tent had a task especially for children. Children collected stamps which they received after visiting each stand and completing the task. The idea was great, but in practice the Gallup wall was too difficult for small children. Otherwise the whole event was a great success when measured by visitors, but most of the time the tent was so crowded with people that there was not enough time to discuss with everybody.

Unfortunately the weather at the Naantali event was very bad, as it was raining almost all weekend. Around 300 people voted in the Gallup wall. The number of people is not much, but on the other hand there was enough time to discuss with people.

In Turku and Helsinki the wall worked the best, the visitors were old enough (not children) and there was a lot of them. People clearly liked the wall; it attracted a lot of attention and the voting aroused plenty of debate. People also wanted to know where they can check the voting results.

The only negative aspect about the Gallup wall itself was its size. It was a bit too high and wide to fit into our expo tent. At the exhibition centres the size did not matter. Also when used outdoors, the wall felt a bit light and unsteady, but that is a common problem in exhibition furniture.

CREATIVE INSTALLATIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE – “PALLOMERI” AND “MERI VALVOO”

*Susana Nevado & Beverley Carpenter
Arts Academy, Turku University of Applied Sciences*

SUMMARY

Artists and students from the Arts Academy of Turku University of Applied Sciences came together with marine biologists and science specialists through the Baltic Sea Now.info project in order to create a public artwork at Turku Central Library. The event was an ambitious way to engage the public through art into action in response to information about the endangered marine environment and ecological problems of the Baltic Sea.

Two separate events took place: “Pallomeri” in March 2011 and “Meri Valvoo” in November 2011. The installation “Meri Valvoo” occurred during the popular Polar Nights library opening and comprised an outside projection of undersea moving image together with a large random construction of discarded items collected from the archipelago. Inside, a clinic offered respite to contemplate the health of the sea and to listen to sea sounds and poetry. Other interactive elements throughout the library engaged audiences in discussion and gave them an opportunity to recount their stories of the sea.

CASE DESCRIPTION

The events formed part of a collaborative, creative enquiry – finding new ways for audiences to engage with the subject of the Baltic Sea. They offered a unique way for artists and scientists to work together around materials, concepts and delivery outcome possibilities.

The educational idea of the subproject was to explore how a group could come together to deliver large installations in key public spaces that had ecological and aesthetic considerations. How this impacted the general public and motivated them was a key element throughout the subproject. The artwork was a creative interpretation of the information and data that was received from the Baltic Sea Now team.

The event was an opportunity for artists (both professional and in training) to work together with scientists in order to address an ecological problem that they all feel strongly about. It enabled us to explore the working method and had the potential to engage audiences in new ways. The engagement of a range of people within the working method, i.e. the setting up of a temporary creative collective, proved to be a good way to deliver an ambitious project within a short time frame. This method has been the subject of creative research and is being reflected upon with a view to using it in future work.

The first event, “Pallomeri” (meaning ‘ball pool’), was planned during late 2010, following on from a previous collaborative work that took place in Turku with artists and students. BalticSeaNow.info took a role in the project alongside other partners. The second event, “Meri Valvoo” (meaning ‘the sea stays up / keeps watch’), was planned between April and October 2011. Preparation and production of the installation enabled a detailed and informed collaboration with BalticSeaNow.info that included scientists such as a marine biologist.

The subproject focused around the Baltic Sea but enabled the site-specific locations of the events to be used to the full. The workshops were constructed around site-specific art, the ecology of the Baltic Sea and particular problems faced, and interactivity at the events. Both artists and scientists learned from one another during the process and this led to exciting outcomes which were not only well informed by scientific data, but also very engaging for the audience.



FIGURE 1. *Video projections in the “Pallomeri” event. Photo: Salla Keskinen.*

The process of developing the work dictated the outcomes enabling a testing of ideas and artwork along the way. Constant dialogue between BalticSeaNow.info project and the artists led to sharing of visual material, underwater camera footage, webcam images, photography and presentation tanks. Organisation of some elements was undertaken together, i.e. collection of materials for the large scale front of library installation.

The target groups differed in the two events. “Pallomeri” was publicised in new ways, including a ‘moving image’ advertisement on all 25 screens at the local shopping mall. The audience there engaged with artist/performers who distributed tickets – much like tickets for the ferry to Stockholm. The ‘journey’ for them started there. They later took a bus to the event site outside Turku that was very dramatic in the snow with performers to greet them. This experience was linked to the idea of a journey across the sea and enabled the audience from the city to engage in a fun way.

The target group for “Meri Valvoo” was the city centre audience who came to the library for the Polar Nights opening. This was a family event with music.

The Pallomeri event was a cooperative effort with Turku Arts Academy, Brinkhalli and the Central Library (City of Turku). The idea behind this was, in the example of the Brinkhalli collaboration, to gain access to the wonderful building (Brinkhalli Manor) and its grounds. The Brinkhalli trust also contributed financially to the project and had an existing partner agreement with the Turku Arts Academy. The Academy provided experienced and motivated artists and students.

The Meri Valvoo event was a cooperative effort with the Turku Arts Academy and the Central Library. The large film projection at the front of the library in particular was very successful, and the library was keen to be involved. They provided the venue and also access to some technical facilities, projectors, screens and publicity materials.

At both the events, the method used to initiate public involvement centred around the approach to the building. A large scale moving image projection was present in both. In the case of “Meri Valvoo”, this comprised undersea footage with enlarged microscopic images of algae and other organisms. In the case of “Pallomeri”, large netting covered the building together with webcam sequences.



FIGURE 2. *Video projection in the Turku main library. Photo: Hertta Kiiski.*

Inside the buildings at the Pallomeri event there were a number of exhibits ranging from live performances (singer, live art, dancer), a ballroom – a room full of balloons – to a room full of strobe lights and black plastic debris, ship photographer’s studio and tranquil areas of video and sound elements. Interactive live stream video feed images, demonstrations of contamination through timed sculptural objects and a ‘clinic’ whereby people could hear the sea, relax and write their own responses were presented at the Meri Valvoo event.



FIGURE 3. *Baltic Sea clinic in the Meri Valvoo event. Photo: Hertta Kiiski.*

RESULTS

The participators to the interactive events were mostly adults with some family engagement at the Central Library. Visitor numbers at the Pallomeri event reached 150 at Brinkhalli and 1500 at the Central Library. The Meri Valvoo event reached a total 9250 visitors during the weekend. People left comments, their memories of the sea, their concerns and took away information on how to actively take steps to make a difference through their future activities.

At the time of writing the organisers of these events are in the process of producing a book that documents the project including both the outcomes, “Pallomeri” and “Meri Valvoo”. With the aid of professional photographers and video makers, this will include commentaries by artists, scientists and BalticSeaNow staff. There will be a DVD of the events that forms part of the book in the rear cover sleeve. Within the publication, information will be offered on the key problems facing the Baltic Sea and on how to take active steps toward ensuring a sustainable future for this area.

LESSONS LEARNED

The project team very much enjoyed working on the project. Lead artists went to Tallin and delivered a day’s teaching which resulted in three young artists working on the project. Two of them came to Turku and became part of the delivery team. One performed a live art work that received press coverage. On-going dialogue around the subject has continued with the whole team.

Both events were successful. The organisers have received feedback and seen that people have learned about the problems facing the Baltic Sea. The event “Meri Valvoo” was considered to be the most successful perhaps because of the large audience numbers. Both the outside imagery and the ‘clinic’, which engaged people very well, have received much response.

There was good press coverage of the Meri Valvoo event and subsequently the venue has won an award for its performance including this event. Negative experiences perhaps had to do with the level of work required to deliver the event. This was due to the ambitious nature of the final works. In view of the support for the project the final result was very good, but working hours were not well calculated and budgeted.

The elements which worked well with the public were the ‘clinic’ within the Meri Valvoo event in particular and the live performance and projections within the Pallomeri event. Much positive feedback was given by the public and the venue management on these elements. The public enjoy having an experience that is ‘themed’, where they can interact in a way that is unusual or event-specific. It appears to give them a freedom to improvise in their own

behaviour, to consider new behaviours and to take an active role in responding to the ecological crisis. The public also enjoyed considering their own positive relationship to the sea.

The area where many experimental sculptural objects (courtyard of the Central Library) operated during “Meri Valvoo” was not so successful, because there was not a strong enough overall theme to enable the public to explore their roles.

All in all it can be stated that the target groups were reached. The target was a wide and varied section of the public, people who would typically be addressed as ‘consumers’ within the urban environment. We hoped to address them as ‘collaborators’ at the events, inviting them to find meanings and messages, to respond passionately and to engage in new ways. Adults of all ages did this well, spending time laying on beds in the ‘clinic’ and listening to poetry. They told their stories and asked many questions. The parents shared the key questions around the ecology of the Baltic Sea with their children, and they were fascinated by the creative ways that they discovered this information.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT VIA VOLUNTARY WORK AND PHOTOGRAPHING IN “MERI PUHTAKS!”

Ivar Tamm
Estonian Fund for Nature

SUMMARY

Estonian Fund for Nature’s (ELF) maritime campaign “Meri puhtaks!” (“Clean-up the sea!”) consists of a number of different events and activities. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness about the Baltic Sea and the problems the sea is facing. The campaign is an on-going process and this case study is the conclusion of the campaign that took place in the summer of 2011 in Estonia.

CASE DESCRIPTION

“Meri puhtaks!” concentrates on the public and invites people to take action. All campaign activities share a common aim with the BalticSeaNow.info project – that is to get people to show interest in the Baltic Sea and to get involved in the discussions that could benefit the Baltic Sea region and its environment. Getting people involved in the BSNI portal is one important outcome the campaign is hoping to achieve.

So far Estonians have shown a lot of interest in the problem, but they have been reluctant to get more involved. Due to the Soviet occupation, during which people were not allowed access to the Baltic Sea, Estonians have a rather passive position, which means the promotion of the sea itself has to be included in the campaign.

Maritime issues know no state boundaries, so ELF is working side by side with other environmental organisations in the countries by the Baltic Sea. We are trying to find opportunities to protect the species of the sea, and to support the efforts aimed at avoiding major maritime disasters and lessening the load of pollution. Without support from the general public, however, this seems to be impossible. Therefore it is crucial to raise the interest of the general public in environmental issues regarding the Baltic Sea. That is the reason ELF's "Meri puhtaks!" campaign concentrates on educating the general public and on actively being involved in cleaning up the Baltic Sea region.

The main idea behind the campaign is participation and active involvement. ELF uses two different approaches: conservation holidays on the small Estonian islands and taking part in major maritime events in order to reach as many people as possible.

In the summer of 2011 ELF mobilised volunteers all over Estonia in two major events: "Talguregatt" and photographing for a big photo project on Facebook. The campaign was organised during the summer, when general interest is at its peak because of seaside leisure opportunities and the high-time of algae blooms in the Baltic Sea, which always attract media attention.



FIGURE 1. *Participants on the nature conservation holiday on the Baltic Sea. Photo: ELF*

“Talguregatt“ was a nature conservation holiday on Estonian islands. Volunteers from all over Estonia travelled the islands on a historical vessel, ‘jahta’, and undertook nature conservation work on the islands. The time the volunteers spent at sea brought the sea and the problems it is facing closer to people, and volunteers had an opportunity to actually do something for the sea – a truly hands-on experience.

In summer 2011, ELF participated in four big maritime festivals. The events were planned by a number of different partners and sponsors in four different locations on the coastline of Estonia. ELF carried out a photo campaign that took place in Tallinn Maritime Days, Tartu Hanseatic Days, Kuressaare Maritime Festival and Matsalu Nature Film Festival. During the events people learned about the problems the Baltic Sea is facing and showed their favourite places by the beloved sea on a big graphic map. All the people were photographed. Afterwards those photos will be compiled into one big mosaic with a clear message about common responsibility and caring.



FIGURE 2. *Children were very willing to have their photo taken during the maritime festival. Photo: ELF.*



FIGURE 3. People can also download their photo via BSNI Facebook page, which adds a personal touch. Photo: ELF

The target group was classified as the general public and people who are especially interested in the Baltic Sea. The Baltic Sea is important to Estonians. Surveys have revealed that almost 90% of Estonians have spent their leisure time on the shores of the Baltic Sea, and also that Estonians are worried about its state and future. Moreover, they are worried about its environment and feel that its problems can be considered among the top three environmental problems in Estonia.

The summer maritime festivals also target tourists and are therefore a great location for pan-Baltic Sea campaigns. Many of the people photographed in Tartu and in Kuressaare were tourists from the Baltic Sea region.



FIGURE 4. *One of the many tourists at the Kuressaare Maritime Festival. Photo:ELF*

The ELF maritime campaign took part in major festivals already organised annually with many visitors. This way a high number of participants and a potential for many direct contacts was guaranteed. During the maritime festivals ELF worked alongside different organisations. During the Tallinn Maritime Days, for example, the photographing campaign was held on a research vessel alongside Marine Systems Institute (Tallinn University of Technology). In Kuressaare, the campaign was held in cooperation with the Estonian Maritime Administration, and at the Tartu Hanseatic Days with the Tartu Environmental Education Centre.

The other major event, “Talguregatt” (meaning ‘sailing race’), was carried out in close cooperation between ELF and Wooden Ship Society Vikan, and it was sponsored by Varaku Refonda OÜ and the Port of Tallinn.

Cooperating with organisations that partly share the same objective or operate in the same field as we do offers easily manageable opportunities for effective communication. Combining our campaign with other organisations' campaigning activities was an efficient organisational tool. For example the practical organisational tasks (e.g. tents, layout spaces, transport) were made more efficient and stress-free.

ELF's marine campaign includes both traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio channels, and, as it has already become a tradition, great emphasis on on-the-ground activities, local partnerships and digital media outlets such as blogging, YouTube and Facebook. Campaigning uses wide-ranging messaging at the national level and also more targeted activities at the local community level – e.g. Tallinn Maritime Days and activities connected to conservation holidays on Estonian islands.

The photo campaign held during the summer of 2011 was directly focused at the festival visitors who want to share their concerns about the Baltic Sea, and would also like to have a personal memento of the summer festival by the sea. The photos were uploaded to BSNI Facebook page. The visitors were also given hand-outs (stickers, postcards, brochures etc.) about the Baltic Sea and ELF. If more interested, people had an opportunity to see the BSNI portal on the web, talk about the Baltic Sea's health and ELF oil combatting volunteers.

“Talguregatt” was a maritime conservation holiday that let the people have a hands-on experience. The general public also had a chance to read about “Talguregatt” on a blog kept by the participants. The first-hand experience and blogging about it combined with Facebook posts and a press release made the otherwise closed event accessible to the greater public.

RESULTS

The campaign “Meri puhtaks!” is still in progress, concluding in 2013. Mid-campaign conclusions are promising, but there is room for development.

The first-hand feedback from people who have participated in the campaign events is very positive. Firstly, the participators in nature conservation sailing trip “Talguregatt” shared their positive emotions via blogging. Unfortunately

the novelty of the blog had its high the previous summer (2010 summer – 7000 visits) and by this summer the number of followers had dropped (2500 visits).

The feedback from the photo campaign was also positive. People at the maritime festivals were rather self-aware, with varying degree from location to another. For example people in smaller towns were reluctant to pose but more keen on seeing the final mosaic picture. The idea of making a big mosaic picture with the photos of people living by the Baltic Sea was often the “selling-point” for the otherwise shy Estonians.

TABLE I. *Statistics from the photo campaign.*

| Photo campaign location | Visitors | Number of photos | Hand-outs distributed | BSNI Facebook* impressions |
|---|----------------|------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Tallinn Maritime Days (15.–16.07.2011) | 100 000 | 80 | 60 stickers 20 badges | 1563 |
| Tartu Hanseatic Days (22.–23.07.2011) | 60000 | 44 | 35 stickers | 1488 |
| Kuressaare Maritime Festival (5.–6.08.2011) | 70000 | 81 | 60 brochures 70 ELF stickers 100 BSNI stickers | 1494 |
| Matsalu Nature Film Festival (14.–18.09.2011) | 8032 | 56 | 200 BSNI postcards 20 stickers | no data** |
| TOTAL | 230 000 | 261 | 285 stickers 200 postcards 70 brochures | 4545 |

* Number of fans approx. 250

** The number of Facebook impressions is not final. During the film festival the time for taking photos was rather limited and we did not have time to ask people if they want their picture to be uploaded to Facebook. The photos taken will be used for the big mosaic.

TABLE 2. *Statistics from the “Talguregatt”.*

| Event | Participants | Wordpress blog visits | ELF Facebook impressions* |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Talguregatt 17.–31.07.2011 | 35 | 2,537 | 7,415 |

* Facebook impressions are calculated only on the posts made about Talguregatt; The number of fans approx. 2500.

All the campaign activities were covered by the traditional and online media.

During the peak of the campaign in July 2011 there were nine articles in the media – three connected to the EU environmental policy and its effect on the Baltic Sea, two connected directly with the campaign events, and four articles covering the issues the Baltic Sea is facing and connected with other ELF maritime activities.

Online and social media are two very prominent tools of communication. Local radio stations were also good communication channels that covered the “Talguregatt” and maritime festivals.

LESSONS LEARNED

Make it personal and simple

The aspect that proved very effective in the campaign was the personal approach both in the nature conservation sailing trip and the photo campaign. It made easy for the volunteers and festival visitors to know what the campaign wanted them to do – to get involved, to use their hands or smile for a photo.

The challenging part of the campaign was personally approaching people during maritime festivals. Children and youngsters were mostly happy to oblige, but grownups were camera-shy. For the campaign staff it meant many hours of convincing people that they look great. Making 200 compliments to strangers in six hours combined with distributing more information about the Meri puhtaks campaign is quite challenging for one person. The number of staff is therefore important for “catching” people.

Stickers and postcards proved to be an effective hand-out – not too big, not too small and a good reminder where to access the photo taken.

Make it memorable and interesting

Conservation volunteers and visitors photographed during the maritime festival had an experience – they did something that leaves a mark. Positive face-to-face feedback and increased Facebook impressions are both signs of increased interest.

The aim of promoting the Baltic Sea itself was successful, but getting the people to take the next step is problematic. Lack of personal contact with the sea makes the task of getting people to act and discuss rather difficult – Estonians worry about the sea, but they do not feel responsible. Hopefully seeing hundreds of people in one big Baltic Sea photo mosaic will change that.

The photo campaign can be broadened and implemented in other countries by the Baltic Sea. One huge photo mosaic of many nationalities living by the same sea takes the idea of the campaign to another level and shows graphically the common responsibility we share for the Baltic Sea environment.

The online environment (Facebook, BSNI portal) can be a great source of interesting information. Constructing such an online information centre is a constantly on-going process. Online environment by itself is not a solution, but it is a great communication channel for people already interested in the environment of the Baltic Sea.

INTRODUCING MARINE SCIENCE FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN – RESEARCH VESSEL VISITS

Karin Ojamäe

Marine Systems Institute, Tallinn University of Technology

SUMMARY

Two one-day study trips were organised for school children in July 2010 and 2011 (altogether four trips) in the region of Gulf of Finland and Gulf of Riga. To promote the protection of the Baltic Sea, the children were given the chance to experience the feeling of taking part in a sea research expedition by participating in a variety of exercises on-board. Different environmental parameters were measured and their connection to antropogenic disturbances was explained.

CASE DESCRIPTION

The idea behind the study expeditions was to demonstrate to the public, schoolchildren and teachers what marine science is, what we need to know about the marine environment and how scientists are able to collect necessary information to study the sea. The study trips were organised to raise public awareness and concern about the state and future of the Baltic Sea.

When organising this BalticSeaNow.info event, the aim was to generate new activities and hence support participation among schoolchildren in subjects related to the Baltic Sea. Practical activities onboard RV Salme are a worthy way to offer guidance for youngsters so they could understand the physical, biological and chemical processes in the sea that are affected by the human population living in the Baltic region.



FIGURE 1. *Urmastants tutvustades mõõteseadmeid. Foto: Karin Ojamäe.*

The arrangement of the study trips was as follows. RV Salme took a group of schoolchildren and their teachers out to the sea. The vessel was scheduled to visit several research stations to collect biological and chemical samples. The day for youngsters consisted of a lecture, practical demonstrations of the scientific equipment, taking measurements and sample collections in each station. Vertical profiles of temperature, salinity, chlorophyll a, fluorescence, oxygen concentration and Secchi depth were measured and their attributes carefully explained.

The Marine Systems Institute (MSI) at Tallinn University of Technology provided access to RV Salme and allowed the use of scientific equipment on board. Visitors received BalticSeaNow.info promotional materials like post cards and chest badges. Furthermore, to initiate the visitors' involvement, online environmental information provided by MSI was introduced onboard as well.

RESULTS

The events were targeted at Estonian educational institutions. During two summers the study trips were organised for four groups, each consisting of ca. 20 persons in the age range from 10 to 19 years.

LESSONS LEARNED

In contrast to younger schoolchildren, who visited RV Salme with their whole class, the high school student groups were formed by choice from different classes and schools. The latter had a higher potential to be more engaged in activities and talks since they were of an older age group and likely to be interested in natural sciences.

However, on the first half of the day, these groups probably experienced a “mixed group effect”. Some of them were strangers to each other and it took hours to find any group spirit and to be actively involved in exercises to accomplish a common goal. Younger children usually have more questions than there are existing answers and love taking part in more playful activities, especially if they belong to a familiar and a friendly group.



FIGURE 2. *Students observing the set-up of the CTD rosette measuring device.
Photo: Karin Ojamäe.*

For better involvement, short talks in between practical activities could be a substitute for a longer lecture. The lecture (about the state of the Baltic Sea) could be divided into three or four smaller sections.

Another idea is a list of study questions that the schoolchildren need to have answered by the end of the day to complete their project. They could, for example, draw or make lists to keep up their focus during the talks and fill the time while the vessel sails to the next station.

SCIENCE MEETS ART – NATURE CONCERT HALL

*Jana Gičevska
Videsprojekti, Latvia*

SUMMARY

Nature's Concert Hall ("Dabas koncertzāle") is a symbiosis of art, nature, music, science and poetry held each year in Latvia. Each summer the event offers a possibility to learn on a new topic in a creative way. In 2011, the central figure of Nature's Concert Hall was bladder wrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*). Nature's Concert Hall was then held in Nīca by Pūsēni Dune and in Mērsags, gathering about 8000 attendees.

CASE DESCRIPTION

You see everything that flourishes and blossoms around you as a miracle.

A fragment from *Songs about Beauty of the World* by Pēteris Brūveris gives a great reflection of the general story of Nature's Concert Hall, an emotional experience and a message which has been carried on since 2006.

Nature's Concert Hall is a symbiosis of art, nature, music, science and poetry which is held alfresco every summer, gathering people to inform them about unexplored elements or creatures in the world of nature in a creative and interesting way. BalticSeaNow.info acted as one of the organisers of the event, providing the expertise on the bladder wrack. BalticSeaNow.info also provided a creative workshop on the state of the Baltic Sea, giving the audience a possibility to demonstrate this with Secchi disks.

The topic of the event and its central figure changes every year. This year the central figure of Nature's Concert Hall was bladder wrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*), algae that live in the waters of the Baltic Sea.



FIGURE 1. *Bladder wrack was the central figure in the Nature Concert Hall. Photo: Anne Hemmi.*

The topic of bladder wrack at this year's Nature's Concert Hall has explicitly shown the importance of the preservation of the Baltic Sea and the diversity of its nature. The Baltic Sea gives so many benefits, but we often forget about the limited protective properties of the sea against the harm caused by people. During Nature's Concert Hall, the visitors had the opportunity to remember the riches of the Baltic Sea and the necessity to be careful to prevent losing these values.

Nature's Concert Hall was held in Nīca by Pūsēni Dune and in Mērsags, gathering about 8000 attendees altogether. Intensive preparation work was done for the events, and the event was advertised in various media. A page was made in the portal *Draugiem.lv*, radio interviews with the organisers were held and a special Twitter account was made. Raimonds Vējonis, the Minister of the Environment in Latvia, organisers of the event and participants of creative workshops (including representatives of *Balticseanow.info*) took part in the press conference shortly before the Nature's Concert Hall event in Nīca.

The visitors of Nature's Concert Hall had the opportunity to learn about the diversity of the Baltic Sea nature, make badges, paint shells, taste seaweed sweets and conceive poetry. In the evening they got a chance to enjoy an emotional music and visual art concert.

In a creative workshop arranged by Balticseanow.info project, information on the state of the Baltic Sea was presented together with a presentation of how to take water measurements using Secchi disks. Bladder wrack, or brown algae, only lives and breeds in clean water. If the water is dirty, murky or the water transparency is low, the brown algae will not grow. Like many other living organisms, they need sunlight to survive. Setting a Secchi disk into the water and measuring its visibility, the viability and behaviour of the bladder wrack can be predicted.

At the Balticseanow.info workshop, visitors were asked to vote for a problem of the Baltic Sea they believed to be the most significant. The questionnaire included the following options:

- 1) Overfishing in the sea.
- 2) Hazardous chemicals in the sea.
- 3) Eutrophication or excessive amount of organic substances in the water which reduces oxygen concentration and negatively affects various species.
- 4) Growth of invasive species moved by human activities which hinder natural concurrence and suppress other species.
- 5) Pollution caused by ship traffic, wind parks and other industrial sites.



Figure 2. Voting for the most prominent problems of the Baltic Sea was carried out with seashells. Photo: Anne Hemmi.

Both in Nīca and Mērsrags people regarded hazardous chemicals in the sea water as the greatest danger to the Baltic Sea.

This year Nature’s Concert Hall was also an international event, as it was attended by scientists and visitors from other countries. Finnish expert Ph.D. Anne Hemmi, invited by Balticseanow.info, participated in the laboratory “Underwater Aquarium” and spoke about the bladder wrack. Hemmi has been studying the positive influence of this alga on the Baltic Sea and the specifics of its viability for many years. Anne Hemmi as well as Latvian scientists Andris Andrušaitis and Solvita Stārķe made a speech at the concert, conveying a message about the central figure of the Concert Hall and emphasising the international view of the Baltic Sea.

RESULTS

Nature's Concert Hall is an annual event for everyone who wishes to experience nature, music and art, uniting with other visitors in a joint adventure. Nature's Concert Hall is mostly attended by families with children and young people. This trend was also noticed this year. Everyone could find something convenient and interesting, as the mission of the concert hall is to allow people to view the nature from an unusual point of view and to show the most interesting things which often remain unnoticed in everyday life.

In the course of time, Nature's Concert Hall has developed successful cooperation with several international organisations like the United Nations Development Programme and Global Environmental Facility. Local municipalities, companies and nongovernmental organisations also provide significant support.

LESSONS LEARNED

People are more willing to learn and inquire if they gain emotional satisfaction during the learning process. In the course of time, Nature's Concert Hall has become a successful project which helps the society to understand processes of nature and climatic changes, for example. It is important for people to relax together outside, enjoy the music and learn something new in a simple and educative way. Nature's Concert Hall is also a meeting place for organisations and various projects with a united goal and motivation – the protection of nature and the environment.

Balticseanow.info activity attracted wide public attention and reached the target groups – adults, children, students, environmental activists – due to the workshop about Secchi disks and the artistic voting wall. Positive experiences were achieved, because during the event people had a possibility to observe water visibility and depth as well as to receive answers to questions they deemed important. Since most people had never seen Secchi disks before they liked to hold them in their hands and discover their size and weight. Some visitors asked for practical Secchi disk demonstrations in the water, but unfortunately it was not possible for that many visitors at the event. Taking into account the great interest on the use of Secchi disks, the inclusion of practical examples will be considered in future events.

Positive experiences were also achieved with the artistic voting wall. The public liked to vote using shells and to see how the shells sink in water-filled voting tubes. The tubes also presented visually the problems' symbolic side. The most significant problem results in more shells in a tube, thus also higher water level. Experiences gained showed that Latvian people like to work and learn things in an innovative way. Thus also in the future we must turn our attention to even more attractive activities when organising events or campaigns.