



1st Network meeting for communicators around the Baltic Sea

16 June 2015 at 14:00–17:30, Jurmala, Latvia

Part I – Setting the scene

Welcoming words

Lena Viktorsson, Baltic Eye; **Maija Sirola**, BONUS & **Johanna Laurila**, HELCOM

Aims of the meeting

Johanna Laurila, HELCOM

Weighing in the potential of a regional communicators’ network:

- Aims of the network? Working methods of the network?
- Pros and cons / opportunities and threats
- Concrete methods & way forward

>>“Why NOT do the same things at the same time?”<<

1. Learning from the best – national level

Case study from Finland. **Tuula Putkinen**, John Nurminen Foundation, Finland

Goals: Baltic Sea Communicators Network of Finland has been working since 2009 to act together for a cleaner Baltic Sea and to make people aware of the condition of the Baltic Sea.

Who do we want to influence? Media, citizens, politicians

Through Social media, High-quality training days for the media, National and local events, Key educational materials, Information sharing

Overview: In 2009 first attempt was made to coordinate the work of Baltic Sea communicators. The first 20 participants have grown to over 100 contacts in the list of participants. Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) has been leading the network from the start. Meetings have been held 2-4 times a year, but mostly the communication is done by emailing. The network is a handy communications tool as you can reach everybody relevant with just one email and it is easy to organize meetings with other communicators.

Finnish media is very critical and interested when it comes to the Baltic Sea topics. Media scene in Finland is open with captive audience; there is even investigative journalism on Baltic Sea topics.

Key working methods:

- a. Events: Having a network offers a possibility to take part/be visible in events as a one body. A lot of the working practices depends on which organization takes turn in the driving seat. Importantly: Why NOT do the same things at the same time?
- b. Media trainings: Training days for the media have been popular, organized under one main theme: The Baltic Sea and
 - ... Chemicals (2014)
 - ... Climate Change (2013)
 - ... Food (2013)
 - ... Technology (2012)
 - ... Research (2011)
 - ... Agriculture (2011)
 - ... Money (2010)
 - ... Can politics save the Baltic Sea? (2010)
 - (next: Gulf of Finland in 2015)
- c. Joint materials, e.g. a leaflet (in Finnish, Swedish and English) on what one can personally do to save the Baltic Sea.
- d. Regular meetings: peer support, sharing information, sharing experiences.

Plans for future: Joint campaigns in social media; concerted effort in key events; going international.

>>“*Same problems unite people*”<<

2. Learning from the best – European level

Communications panel of the European Science Foundation Marine Board. **Kjartan Maestad**, Institute of Marine Research, Bergen, Norway.

[Introduction of the Institute of Marine Research, Norway, has a communication department of 12 people.]

The European Marine Board has a Communication Panel (EMBCP), is an open-ended operational pan-European network of science communicators focused on marine science communication, education and outreach, and facilitated by the European Marine Board Secretariat. The number of members has grown since 2006 from 8 to 20, representing now as many as 14 countries.

Main features and aims of the Communications Panel:

- Exchange ideas, methods and best practices in communication and sciences. Communication is usually about the research projects, so one future goal is to make results and topics more time-proof
- Mutual assistance between the network members
- Shared (re)presentation at major events
- Communicate at the national level the products and activities of the Marine Board
- Popularize marine science, advocate *ocean literacy*, and raise awareness of what is happening in the oceans
- Social media is widely used and members have developed good ways to use for example Facebook.
- Meetings twice a year. Organizations or institutions have to provide financial support as the panel has no funds
- The strengths of this network: the country or institution may vary, but problems and situations stay the same. Same problems unite people who are easy to work with.

Major strengths:

- (1) Good spirit & team
- (2) Unique Pan-European platform for exchanging expertise (“learn from each other”)
- (3) Support from the EMB secretariat
- (4) Different backgrounds of the members (former journalists, scientists, communicators, educators,

What’s in it for me?

- Nice group of friendly, helpful people, so I know who to contact in other projects - and they know me
- We might work at different institutions and in different countries, but we have the same problems
- Best practices, exchange experiences
 - expertise varies among members
- “Listening post” what is going on in other countries
 - good/new ideas
 - other solutions to same challenges
 - what not to do
- Problem: popularizing EMB position papers
- Takes time and money to be present and get in position

Weblink: <http://marineboard.eu/european-marine-board-communications-panel>

>>“The network should focus on educating journalists”<<

3. Media perspective: what the needs and expectations to such network could be in operating on science-policy interface? **Sandra Kropa**, journalist, Latvia.

Journalists should consider the challenges the communicators meet when delivering messages to the audience. Journalists’ task is to present and uncover stories or problems more thoroughly. Journalist must connect with the audience and address it in a simple manner by bringing the topic closer to the people.

One method is to express inspiring examples and talk about values to make an impact on the audience, and/or use positive versus negative examples. However, one cannot operate only on emotions and we need scientific facts to back us up.

How to show “what’s under the surface”?

- take diving
- create a story
- show the connections
- talk about inspiring examples
- focus on values

“People protect what they love”, said the iconic Jacques-Yves Cousteau. Journalists can help people to love topics, and media can contribute in changing people’s values. On the other hand, social sciences and marketing research could be better exploited when communicating environmental issues, to engage the audiences more effectively.

The link between scientists, media and policy makers has a major part, and this triangle should

- educate
- inspire
- motivate (changing behavior)
- translate the messages

- connect
- activate and strengthen Intrinsic and Self-transcending values

In Latvia, the main target is to educate audience and raise awareness, and also motivate people to change their habits because they have the power to affect legislative power.

Networks should focus on organizing workshops etc to get journalists involved and educated. It is necessary to educate the communicators.

>>“*More voices mean we can be better heard*”<<

Part II: Perspectives and brainstorming from Baltic Sea coastal states

Roundtable 1: Baltic Sea viewed through the political situation of my country

Moderator: **Maija Sirola**, BONUS

Participants:

- Sven Paulus**, editor of research news, Estonia;
- Saara Reinimäki**, Finnish Environment Institute, Finland;
- Barbara Hentzsch**, Warnemunde Institute, Germany;
- Ieva Firere**, Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia;
- Olga Senova**, NGO Baltic Sea Friends, Russia

Preparatory questions:

1) How are Baltic Sea issues covered in my country, in terms of environmental research and politics?

Judging by the media - give three case examples

2) Best practices: In your national context, what are/would be the optimal means to “tell it louder” with regards to Baltic Sea issues? How the new network could add value to these efforts?

3) Regional network for communicators: What are the keys to success for such a new network? Give three

1. Summary of national examples on Baltic Sea issues covered:

1.1. Bad news travel fast - Negative news about the Baltic Sea more common than positive.

1.2. “Big players”:

- Nordstream pipeline was big news (EE, DE), NGO concerns, protests, also extensive data collection.
- Oil spill in 2006 in Estonia, eventually causing the death of 2,000 birds.
- “Deadly algae” satellite image was a big media scoop in Germany about turned out that calculations were wrong, the news false and the issue died fast.
- Latvian EU presidency 2015 – 5 events out of 23 are related to science and environment
- Krasnyi Bor is a landfill near St Petersburg, Russia, posing an environmental threat as the hazardous waste stored has the risk of leakage. The concerns have been widely covered by media – and it helps if there is a clear link to the “common people”

1.3. Good cases:

- “2020” scientific talk show series in public broadcasting, running non-stop for 20 years (in Estonia).
- Algae forecasts are very popular in summer, as where to swim is an obvious interest (Finland)
- Results from research vessel trips are popular stories (Finland)

- Topics of the journalist Baltic Sea training days sell well and many stories are produced as outcome (Finland)
- Plastics and microplastics are a current topic and has good potential as have a connection to everyday life – the media is trying to raise awareness (Germany).
- Microplastics - amounts, sources, showing how people are connected to the problem – have been successfully communicated about (Sweden), and this is particularly important as this research needs expensive and sophisticated equipment thus justification needed
- Wastewater treatment plants in St Petersburg – after major upgrades, over 98% of the water are adequately treated. However, not much information on what is still missing. No information about the smaller communities – which sometimes no wastewater treatment at all. We need to educate people that many things can be done at the consumer level - and here media can help
- Year of the Gulf of Finland 2014 was a success. Lot of sharing information, making recommendations etc.

1.4 Engaging the people:

- Summer algae sightings from the citizens, will help reporting (Finland).
- Online personality test: which creature of the BS you are? Campaign in July for connecting with below the surface (Finland)

2. Challenges in “Telling [the Baltic Sea issues] loud”:

- Baltic Sea is not easily covered in Latvian or German (federal level) media – however, quite the contrary in German regional press and Finland - **how about elsewhere?**
- Barriers to BS media stories are coded language, also weak linkage points between scientists and others.
- Baltic Sea politics easily concern EU affiliation, not very sexy for the media (German experience)
- If every story ends up with emotions it may jeopardize the scientific approach. The journalists should find a better balance between drama and making a difference. One solution could be to encourage the scientists to collaborate with experts for example from museums, for sharing knowledge and methods.
- BS is the most researched seas, but the spread of knowledge is not even. There is work to do in leveling out the knowledge amongst all the regions’ countries.
- The connection between scientists, policymakers and media is too weak – or, missing completely?
- Scientists often speak too difficult and forget to explain well, why something is done.
- Journalists reluctant to discover the story potential (case from Russia: Children did tests and samples in watercourses and took it to journalists who rejected the story as they considered it not important for people and lacking content).
- Challenges and open questions for the Baltic Sea communicators’ network:
 - o How do we bring it all together?
 - o How do we make decisions?
 - o What exactly could we do together?
 - o How to ensure added value to me and to this network? How to ensure the time and money (though there are free ways to cooperate, too)?
 - o We have the story and the audience - how do we connect the points? Do we also want to bring media to the network?

3. Added value of and future ideas for “Telling it together” – and the Baltic Communicators’ Network:

- More voices mean there are more chances to be heard by the public. E.g. in Estonia the information about Baltic Sea [for journalists, general public] is scattered – a network would be handy to have one source for the issues
- Potential for cross-sectorial information about the Baltic Sea

- Crowd-sourcing communication products within the network: e.g. producing a video; infographs with the possibility to change the text into the language needed
- Helping to
 - o identify the dedicated journalists in all the countries, already with the expertise to the topic
 - o distribute more widely any outcomes or e.g. press releases for a larger audience – also to Brussels, and prestigious international media
 - o choose opinion leaders to convey the messages
 - o “encode” the message & also selling them in packages
- Sharing
 - o skills and tools, getting together to make it even better and share; learning from colleagues, peer support
 - o costs!
 - o verified examples and stories from different countries, local level, concerning the common people’s lives and needs, and show opportunities on how to improve the environment, by using many channels and even elevating them to international level
 - o media contacts – and other contacts (arranging events, conferences etc)
 - o e-mailing lists
 - o campaigns & events, possibly with shared themes
 - o social media visibility
 - o presence in a conference, seminar etc.
 - o resources – resource bank for materials; infographs where texts can be changed, etc.
- Everyone in the network can become a better communicator through sharing ideas, learning from others
- Connecting to other existing networks: for science journalists (national – European – global); researcher/expert networks in different countries; Communication Leadership Initiative by the Swedish Institute, EUSBSR Communication Task Force, etc.
- Funding -? there may be options for applying together in the future

Part III - Regional communicators’ network: What does the future hold?

Discussion led by macro-regional actors on considerations and expectations, as well as brainstorming on incentives, added value, and investment by all participants

Moderator: **Maija Sirola**, BONUS

Participants:

Ulf Wikström, InterAct Turku;

Marie Von Stauffenberg, Council of the Baltic Sea States;

Johanna Laurila, HELCOM

The regional network for communication professionals has demand, this has become clear already before this afternoon. Particularly for macro-regional actors such as HELCOM, the benefits would be evident and many of them have been listed in Parts I & II above.

We all try to do the same thing around the Baltic Sea, so why not to streamline these efforts. Baltic Sea is connecting us naturally as ultimately we all deal with the same – or similar – issues. This is an asset which for instance the Communications panel of the European Science Foundation Marine Board can’t have.

There is also the Communication Task Force for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, currently finalizing a communication strategy and starting an action plan, and a potential cooperation network.

For such a network to survive, we need enthusiasm, but also time, money and plans. In spite of positive attitudes we must find ways to make it work – a declaration of aims and values; a justification for its existence, and some structure. Nevertheless, there are also ways to cooperate without funds, through sharing information and resources.

How should we move forward next? First step has been taken by organizing the meeting today. There is now a distribution list which will likely expand. We can advance in a realistic manner, step by step, and see when the next network meeting would take place.

We should first be internally strong before proceeding for reaching out – the members can be profiled and we can have a mapping exercise for exploring everybody’s connections.

The network should have a LinkedIn page, and/or Facebook page, as these have proven useful tools to e.g. ask and share. HELCOM is proposed to be the “list keeper” of all the members of the communicators’ network.

Closing remarks

Johanna Laurila, HELCOM

One main aim of the meeting was to get scientists, communicators and journalists come together and explore ways for better communicating Baltic Sea issues together, and to gain more attention on the Baltic Sea particularly concerning science, policies and environmental issues.

I think today, as was the intention, we have analyzed well some features, both strengths and weaknesses, of communicating the Baltic Sea across the region. The awareness of Baltic Sea situation varies across the countries. Language can be an issue – on the other hand, English is already widely used in the web and research, and translating materials is a much lighter exercise than producing from scratch. I think we can identify a gap on the policy side, as this time we succeeded having a better representation from the “science side” than governance and policymaking. Other points are rather well covered above in Part II, 2 – Challenges (p. 4-5).

Likewise, the opportunities and threats of a joint communication network have been explored today in a balanced manner. Very interesting future prospects, collected from all the participants, can be found in the list of Part II, 3 - Added value and future ideas (p. 5).

Going back to the beginning and the **aims of the meeting**, as listed in page 1 –

I think the pros and cons / opportunities and threats of a regional communicator’s network have been nicely reviewed today. These will be useful in the future work, as if need be, we can go back to the listings for ideas on how to cooperate, as well potential mitigation methods for any challenges.

To me, the aims of a communicators’ network are to provide peer support, learn from each other, share skills and tools and many practical items ranging from contacts and joint events to stories and infographs, with the larger goal of more efficiently communicating the Baltic Sea issues.

The concrete working methods of the network have been touched upon quite a bit but can be deliberately left a little open at this stage. Meetings would be ideal and hopefully such get-togethers could be organized in the future. A shared LinkedIn/Facebook page will help to get us to know each other more and start the peer support. There is even the wild card of becoming more organized in the future and apply for funds for regular operations.

More voices mean there are more chances to be heard by the public. This is what I strongly believe and I am glad that so many of you seem to agree.

