



Editorial



The Baltic Sea Region – Towards Sustainability

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There was a lot of attention paid to the Baltic Sea issues in the end of 2013. Several important reports on future development scenarios of the Baltic Sea have been published ('The Baltic Sea – Our Common Treasure. Economics of saving the Sea' and 'Counter Currents, Scenarios for the Baltic Sea Towards 2030'). Two big events – Baltic Sea Conference and the 4th Annual Forum of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) – took place in October and in November correspondingly.

The Baltic Sea is known as most polluted and vulnerable sea on our planet Earth. Eutrophication, pollution by hazardous substances and overfishing: primary recognised threats in the region. At the same time the Baltic Sea is the best researched sea in the world, but still countries around the sea are failing to stop its deterioration. The international agreements are implemented at the low rate and have not resulted neither in major reduction in nutrients inputs nor any other environmental improvements. The World Wide Fund (WWF) has released in 2011 so called 'Scorecard' report aiming to evaluate country performance implementing environmental measures and agreements. The total score for the region was F: failing to take needed actions.

All this make obvious importance to keep the Baltic Sea issues high on the political agenda. Besides, the problems in the Baltic Sea region are similar to the global ones. Thus, solving them here might result in the creation of solutions applicable on the broader scale. The Baltic Sea is seen often as a pilot area for inventing solutions for other areas as well.

The 4th Annual Forum of EUSBSR focused on environmental challenges in the region and the potential to turn these challenges into opportunities. Up to 10 thematic workshops focused on the integration of environmental issues into other sectoral policies was held besides plenary sessions.

Marine environment and economic growth – these two highly interdependent issues again both were on the discussion table. The difficult and rather unfruitful discussion on what do we want – sustainability or economic growth, it seems, does not relevant any more (if it has at all). On the political agenda we have now sustainable growth goals. Besides inclusive and smart growth options, as described in EU Strategy 2020. Blue growth goals

– as they are called in case of maritime issues. So, Annual Forum as previous Baltic Sea Conference also emphasised growth where a role of growth technique was left for sustainability.

This shift in paradigm has been absolutely necessary. This allowed to overcome sustainability vs. growth or vice versa dilemma. At least this leaved door opened for future discussions on sustainable and unsustainable growth patterns and let to believe that emerging innovations will turn “adversity into opportunity”.

What are these opportunities? There are plenty of them. Starting from cross-sectoral, cross-governmental integrations, shared visions and ending with innovations allowing to achieve higher efficiency and reduce material flows. Innovations, that will let us be less dependent on resource consumption based growth. Analysis presented jointly by WWF and the Boston Consulting Group showed that just three industries – tourism, agriculture and fishing – could amount to 550 thousand jobs and 32 billion Euro in annual value added if importance to preserve the healthy Baltic Sea will be taken seriously by the governments and supported by the wide civil society. For that we need changes that strengthen commitments and encourage social behaviours.

The trouble is that liberal market economies promoting consumerism and freedom to choose even above the social goals, and strained with strong and sometimes illegally lobbying profiting corporations might swamp all efforts to change the trend. A new vision of government – society interaction is required to secure the process. Such a vision can be realised on the open and wide democracy base. We need “innovative democracy”, what means existence of strong influence of organisations independent from existing economic interests, says prof. Frede Hvelplund from Aalborg University (Denmark). His insights presented during one of the Forum workshops Growth Within Limits: Sustainable Economy, organised by the Centre for Sustainable Development, Environmental Engineering Institute and the CSR Network, Lithuania have not to be forgotten.

Here we publish prof. Frede Hvelplund article Innovative Democracy, political economy, and the transition to Renewable Energy. A full-scale experiment in Denmark, 1976-2013 where reader could find very comprehensive analysis how Denmark’s transition towards renewable resources took place and what was the role of society in this process. We think that this Denmark case can be very revealing for Lithuanian audience and good lessons can be taken from that