

## Saving the Baltic Sea with public-private cooperation, result-orientated actions

By Saara Kankaanrinta

The Baltic Sea is a very interesting area in many ways. The biggest concern is its ecological status: Baltic Sea is the most polluted sea in the world.

90 million people – in 14 different states - who live in the catchment area of the Baltic Sea constitute a substantial burden on the naturally vulnerable and fragile sea. But this is a possibility as well, since the Baltic Sea is of supreme importance to these countries (and companies operating in the area), in terms of economy and policy and in key areas such as security, energy, transport. Even the United States is linked to the Baltic Sea area –on the basis of bilateral agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic, the US plans to station missile defence systems on their territories.

The Baltic Sea is a good example of how the environmental policy meets energy-, foreign and security policies, and how the positive co-operation in the environmental matters is particularly important and strengthens the relations of the states in general. It is of everyone's interest that the Baltic Sea is maintained healthy, peaceful and secure.

### Speeding up the implementing of measures

We are in a hurry with the Baltic Sea. It is dangerously close to the hospice phase, but there's still hope, and we need to ensure that all possible steps are taken in order to save the Baltic Sea marine environment. It is obvious that only actions across borders will achieve sufficient changes. In order to save the Baltic Sea we need to have clear vision of what should be done, strong political will to push these enhancements through, and the fastest way to implement the measures in practice.

Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG) was founded to tackle with major challenges of the Baltic Sea with a holistic approach, but well-focused projects. All three founders of the Baltic Sea Action Group, **Ilkka Herlin, Saara Kankaanrinta and Anna Kotsalo-Mustonen** have common background in John Nurminen Foundation, which played a key role in getting St. Petersburg to implement chemical phosphorous removal to its wastewater treatment plants. As John Nurminen Foundation continues to have its focus strictly on municipal wastewaters, the new foundation scales up the concrete actions with public private cooperation to the other major problems of the Baltic Sea: agriculture, marine transport and hazardous waste.

The purpose of the new foundation is to act in concrete projects that make a difference. BSAG acts as an initiator and a catalyst. We identify and analyze the problem with experts and then gather actors needed to carry out the project - whether those being states, local governments, other public institutes, researchers, private companies or individuals.

Experience from business brings new practices and useful perspective to the field of environmental protection. With our contacts to the private sector we are aiming that the business sector will contribute actively to the projects. Our approach is very conscious of economic realities, aiming to find the drivers and incentives that spur different sectors to participate in saving the Baltic Sea. Our arsenal of methods is wide, and we try to think 'out of the box'. The very essential idea of the BSAG is finding the best and the most efficient ways of doing things, not just take the traditional approach. Here we see that the business sector has new ways and approaches to offer.

Main principle is good and genuine cooperation with every actor. One of our biggest assets is the high level political network that we have created. Many projects need a strong political backup - the funds and an identified solution are not enough.

BSAG's emphasis will be in cost-effective, well-focused and tangible actions that are essential to the recovery of the Baltic Sea. All the actions are based on best available knowledge and BSAG is working closely eg. with the Academy of Finland to focus research into direction that gives practical guidance to initiate projects. BSAG works also closely with HELCOM in order to implement The Baltic Sea Action Plan by HELCOM (adopted in November 2007).

BSAG has four programs, which all include several project possibilities. The programs are: AGRICULTURE AND BIO ENERGY, CLEAN & SAFE SHIPPING, HAZARDOUS WASTE and NEW CHALLENGES.

### Strategic philanthropy creates social value

We wish to supplement the efforts of the public sector, and create social value by generating greater social benefit for comparable cost, or achieve an equivalent social benefit faster - in other words with fewer euro. Our aim is to enhance the society's capacity in protecting the Baltic Sea. The work of the non-profit and civic sector should bring more resources to the environmental protection and speed up the process in general, not to replace or diminish the use of public funds or efforts to the matter.

This has been our vision: to approach philanthropy professionally and strategically, and thus use our potential to a full scale. Our potential is created by the role of being a catalyst and solving the problem as quickly as possible by agile operations and gathering of all the forces – including resources that would not have been in the picture with the traditional approach.

There are two points of view on the best way to operate using the resources available and maximizing the "social return on investment". First, the targets were chosen strategically, emphasis on the importance to the Baltic Sea,

cost-efficiency and feasibility. Second, the organization itself has to be effective and professional.

Our strategy commits us to the goal of superior performance, and it forces us to be demanding towards ourselves. Above all, our strategy defines concrete goals to serve as the basis of evaluation. We want to make sure that BSAG brings some added value to the field of saving the Baltic Sea. That is to say that we avoid being in the field just for the sake of it: in the end outcomes matter more than intentions.

*The official name of the foundation, 'Foundation for a Living Baltic Sea', has been translated to the 14 languages spoken in the catchment area, but for simplicity's sake we work with the brand Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG).*

*[www.bsag.fi](http://www.bsag.fi)*

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