

Baltic Sea Accelerators: Pioneers for Better Pollution Monitoring and Reporting: Problem Solution Workshop

16 November 2017, Panevėžys City Municipality (Laisvės a. 20)

Background

The City of Panevėžys together with RACE FOR THE BALTIC (RFTB), and other Swedish, Finnish and Polish municipalities have participated in "Baltic Sea City Accelerator" program - an open knowledge-sharing platform, where municipalities, partnering with stakeholders from various areas, e.g. science, business, NGOs, solution providers and water institutes, such as SIWI Swedish Water House (SIWI) jointly work to clean up the Baltic Sea. The program seeks to catalyze the transformation of challenges into opportunities bearing in mind nutrient pollution, one of the greatest threats to the health of the Baltic Sea, its coastal areas and inland waters. By strategically addressing nutrient pollution, the pioneer cities aim to capture economic, social, and other benefits for their community and the region at-large.

Because of their work with the cities in the Baltic Sea City Accelerator, SIWI and RFTB initiated a project focusing on "Pollution Monitoring and Reporting", to address the need and opportunity for further investigation with respect to the municipalities' monitoring and reporting of nutrient data to regional and national authorities, as well as HELCOM. The City of Panevėžys is a participant in this project which comprises research, network building, and dialogue (workshops and seminars).

Dialogue in The City of Panevėžys

On 16 November 2017, the Problem Solution Seminar was organized in Panevėžys. It aimed at discussion on possible avenues for closer engagement between municipalities and HELCOM. This was important with respect to how municipalities and citizens can improve their communication to HELCOM and with other BSR municipalities/stakeholders on the effectiveness of measures recommended by HELCOM to reduce pollution to the Baltic Sea. An increasing public awareness could clarify the role and purpose of the Panevėžys local Baltic Sea Action Plans and the connection between Panevėžys and the Baltic Sea.

MORNING SESSION

In welcoming the seminar participants, the Director of Administration Rimantas Pauža stressed the importance of cooperation of countries around our common Baltic Sea. Only in joint efforts can we achieve real results.

Lotta Samuelson from SIWI Swedish Water House presented the project background and objectives, as well as the initial research study on how municipalities can work for better pollution monitoring and reporting.

The participants introduced themselves, presented their expectations for the workshop and experience on working with Baltic Sea issues. The wide variety of institutions and stakeholders represented, from local, regional and national authorities, and also from a broad variety of municipal sectors, such as Planning, Investment and Budget, Environment, Communication, Construction and Utilities, Water Supply and Treatment, Infrastructure and Academia, etc. led to pan-thematic, valuable discussions - as water is a connector between most sectors.

The representative of HELCOM, Dmitry Frank-Kamenetsky spoke about HELCOM in general terms. He shared an interest from HELCOM that municipalities and other local actors should work together to help to achieve the national Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) commitments.

The representative of Panevėžys City Asta Puodziuniene presented the first Local Baltic Sea Action Plan in Lithuania which has been prepared within the framework of the BALTIC SEA CITY ACCELERATOR program. She shared the experience of work done and encouraged representatives from the other Lithuanian municipalities present to join this initiative.

AFTERNOON SESSION

The second part of the day was devoted to the Problem Solution Workshop. The purpose was to feed in ideas for future actions (objective, content, participants, financing) and investigation of interest among participants to be part of joint future project.

The following topics were discussed:

LOCAL ACTIONS TOWARDS HELCOM TARGETS/BSAP

A closer engagement between HELCOM and municipalities and other local actors was discussed (attractiveness, relevance, feasibility (finance/governance/stakeholders/partners) using the project background paper based on HELCOM recommendations. The most interesting benefit for the participants in this respect was the engagement of citizens, motivation and awareness-raising of local politicians, good quality of water, and clean Baltic Sea for the future generation.

It was agreed to focus on challenges, the things we need to overcome, to change thinking of inhabitants, that even though Panevėžys is far away from the Baltic Sea, we are connected by the river Nevėžys and still need to take care for Baltic Sea future.

It was pointed out that the largest obstacles are: shortage of financial allocations and experts as well as motivation of local communities. Here educational system should be included.

For insufficient legislation, a common system has to be created for water sensitive issues. HELCOM should be made more well-known to municipalities, as it is a rather unknown convention in Lithuania.

COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Discussions related to benefits for people to understand that they are responsible for the future of Baltic Sea and for access to clean water.

A major challenge identified was how to inform the citizens who do not read newspapers or watch public announcements on TV. It was set up that the ways of information distribution should be improved, such as:

- Meetings with HELCOM representatives and municipalities, politicians should be arranged.
- Attractive visual presentations to public to share updates on pollution and water quality.
- Indicators of pollutions areas should be identified, and data statistics should be published to citizens to enable them to follow progress towards cleaner water. Comparing data with other municipalities could motivate citizens to improve their own behavior and contribute to better water quality.
- Children should be taught – beginning in kindergarten - about ecology, how to take care of water, how to take care of the Baltic Sea.
- Dialogue with neighboring (upstream) countries on water quality measures (transboundary dialogues). Today polluted water flows in from upstream countries. This problem is shared with many other regions sharing the same water sources, and examples of good practice can be shared from areas where this problem is being addressed.

MONITORING AND REPORTING EFFECTIVENESS OF MEASURES

Water monitoring and reporting measures are determined based on current national laws. A good understanding of the actual situation is needed to take effective preventive actions/measures. Information should be made available for the public and could be used by students for graduate research.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

The result and the summary of the workshop will be used in further discussion on possibility to propose a future project where the governance, reporting structures, and use of key indicators will be investigated and piloted, and where guidance can be given to EU financial mechanisms.