



Baltic Sea States
Subregional
Co-operation

Baltic Sea Cooperation Beyond 2000

**-Visions and Strategies on the
Local and Regional Level**



BSSSC, APRIL 2000

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Preface

The Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) has initiated this paper in order to present future areas of interest and actions to be taken in the Baltic Sea cooperation. This paper was adopted by the political Board of BSSSC on April 29, 2000. Hence, this paper presents BSSSC' objectives of Baltic Sea Cooperation, but it also presents a list of concrete project areas that are connected to these overall objectives.

The paper should be seen as the culmination of a long process within the BSSSC, starting in June 1998, gathering information from the sub-regions around the Baltic Sea by launching a workshop in Brussels discussing EU funding and the regional contribution to the accession process. Later on, in the spring of 1999, a Consultation Process was conducted, covering all 10 countries around the Baltic Sea, in order to gather the experiences and perspectives of the sub-regions in relation to interregional co-operation. The picture drawn both in Brussels and through the Consultations Process was very useful, leaving the BSSSC with a vast amount of information on the sub-regions' international involvement and its financing.

The conclusion was that in order to further facilitate cooperation in the Baltic Sea a common programme financing the work was needed. Therefore an effort was put into explaining both the national governments and the European Commission what the needs and deeds of the local and regional level were. The national level was somewhat open to the idea but so far only the Danish Government has set aside financial means. Furthermore, the European Commission signalled clearly during 1999 and spring 2000 that an actual EU Baltic Sea Programme financing local and regional cooperation was not realistic at this point in time.

However, the European Commission was very much interested in the visions and strategies of the local and regional level. Therefore this paper is outlining precisely that, and at this point not speculating directly about actual programmes. That way this is a paper for inspiration, inspiration for the European Commission, for the national governments but also for the individual local and regional authorities who are the experts on regional development. A common future for the Baltic Sea Region needs an overall vision to avoid randomisation.

Therefore, it is the hope of BSSSC that this vision based on experience and general know-how, can provide regional authorities around the Baltic Sea with important inspiration to their own formulation of visions and strategies.

Content

Summary	p. 4
Why Baltic Sea Co-operation?	p. 7
One Region? – Status so far	p. 8
The Future Topics of Baltic Sea Co-operation?	p. 10
-in the economic sphere	p. 10
-in the wider political sphere	p. 14
Final Words	p. 15

Appendix

Summary

Baltic Sea co-operation must be considered vital for those living inside, as well as for those living outside, the Baltic Sea Region due to the security implications that a hostile Baltic Sea environment would entail. Security aside, many other problems in the Baltic Sea Area also finds their solutions in the common co-operation (within spheres such as environment, transport, energy infrastructure, employment and education, fighting international crime, etc.).

Considerable co-operation is already taking place - and on many levels. States, regions, municipalities, companies, NGO's, etc., are all working together, trying to re-establish the Baltic Sea Region's historic, cultural and economic ties. The *regional and local authorities* together with *local companies, NGO's and associations* play an increasingly important role. The local and regional level is always closer to the real problems than the central level, - and, simultaneously, closer to their solutions. The nearness makes the difference.

The basic foundation for the future cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region has been laid down through the Pre-Accession process and the Northern Dimension initiative. These compose the overall framework within which areas of co-operation can be specified and these are the cores of the regionalisation process that is going on in the Baltic Sea Region leading to a more mature region.

Economically it is essential for the individual local and regional authorities to improve their competitiveness when it comes to attracting new – and developing existing – industries/businesses. In a world dominated by global markets local, regional or national competitiveness is no longer only a question of natural resources or inheritance in any way, but primarily a question of whether or not a location is capable of facilitating dynamism, innovation and competition. It is a matter of creating a fruitful business environment, and that is exactly a task for the local and regional authorities since they are in charge of regional and local development.

In order to create this beneficial business environment, one of the regional and local authorities' primary tools is to co-operate, to exchange knowledge and ideas as to how tasks should be solved in all policy spheres. In order to ease the cooperation/exchange between authorities and organisations across the Baltic Sea the newest information technology should be put into use. Besides facilitating inexpensive and continuous communication, an extensive use of IT will directly enhance capabilities of all authorities and actors involved.

The main priority fields of cooperation in the Baltic Sea Area are business and regional development, education and training, environment, and health and social security.

Cooperation in these fields creates added value for all regions and municipalities, but for some, especially on the Eastern side of the Baltic Sea Region, this cooperation is essential if they are to develop economically and prosper further within the next few years. The importance of cooperating can therefore not be overestimated.

This paper defines common objectives in Baltic Sea co-operation and it points to ways to reach them, it is a vision as well as a concrete strategy.

Copenhagen, April 2000

Why Baltic Sea Co-operation?

When the cold war ended new possibilities opened up for those living in the Baltic Sea Area. Since the very outset of the new security scenario it has been obvious that elimination of the old dividing lines were crucial if history should not be allowed to repeat itself. Therefore those dividing lines that separated Europe in two, and cut across the Baltic Sea Area for 45 years, had to be overcome by a new era of cooperation.

In this light cooperation in the Baltic Sea is essential not only for actors inside the region but also for external ones due to security implications. Baltic Sea cooperation must be appreciated and supported as such. However, security matters aside, the Baltic Sea Area also have many other problems that can only be solved in cooperation. The environmental issues are well known, but there are many equally important challenges related to better transport systems, to energy infrastructure, to employment and education, to fighting international crime, etc.

The cooperation process in the Baltic Sea area has already begun and many co-operative networks already exist. The cooperation is taking place on many levels. States, regions, municipalities, companies, NGO's, etc., are all working together, trying to re-establish the Baltic Sea Region's historic, cultural and economic ties in order for it to regain its identity and position among the Regions of Europe. However, all levels of co-operation must be strengthened. Co-operation at the State level is very important, but true confidence between the peoples of the Baltic Sea Region must be build at the level where people actually meet. In this context, the *regional or local authorities* together with *local companies, NGO's and associations* play an increasingly important role. The local and regional level is always closer to the real problems than the central level, - and, simultaneously, closer to their solutions. Co-operation at the regional and local levels is therefore an instrument to ensure that political, economic and social interests converge and result in effective common actions to solve the challenges, which are jointly faced. The nearness makes the difference.

The many words that have been spoken about peace and development for both Eastern and Western Europe, and the many promises made about assistance from the West to the East, are with the ongoing negotiations about an Eastward EU-enlargement closer to being realised. The political division of the Baltic Sea Region will be partly terminated with the accession of Poland and the three Baltic states to the European Union giving the region an opportunity to restore its former coherence.

This eastward enlargement is truly historic in the sense that it will, to some extent, bridge the gap between East and West. However, the Baltic Sea Region has problems that cannot be covered by the EU pre-accession process alone. The development in Russia is of vital importance to peace and

stability in the region and therefore it is essential to include Russia when discussing solutions to Baltic Sea problems. If we are to develop a true Baltic Sea region, then the participation of Russia is an absolute necessity. This is why the issue of the Northern Dimension has recently been raised. Whereas the pre-accession process is exclusive in the way that it too divides the Baltic Sea Region; between members and non-members (and non-members into candidates and non-candidates), the Northern Dimension is inclusive, embracing not only the EU or the Baltic Sea Region, but the whole of Northern Europe.

Hence the basic foundation for the future cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region has been laid down through the Pre-Accession process and the Northern Dimension initiative. These compose the overall framework within which areas of cooperation can be specified and these are the cores of the regionalisation process that is ongoing in the Baltic Sea Region leading to a more mature region.

One Region? –Status so far

The most basic notion of the concept “region” is a geographical unit delimited by more or less natural physical barriers and marked by ecological characteristics. For this kind of region to develop into a higher level of maturity a substantial amount of economic interactions and cultural exchange and as well as political stability, a high level of security and some degree of institution-alisation are needed. A mature region is an acting subject with a distinct identity, actor capability, legitimacy, and structure of decision-making, a region that is able to solve its own conflicts whatever they might be¹. Up till now the actions taken to establish cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region has not led to such results, however, efforts have been made at all levels.

On the European level, the European Union is increasingly focussing on the Baltic Sea region especially in relation to the above mentioned Northern Dimension initiative and the enlargement process. As to the latter, the European Commission has launched financial support programmes supporting the Eastern applicant countries in their preparations for membership. The three Baltic countries and Poland benefits from this, as does Russia from other financial programmes – though to a lesser extent. The European Union is hereby assisting the development in the eastern part of the Baltic Sea Region, which also have positive effects on the Western part, and in general helps tying the region together.

On the state level, national funding has been provided for financing bi- and multilateral projects on various levels. Furthermore, the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) was established in 1992. The objective is to have a regional forum to strengthen stability and prosperity through co-operation.

On the regional and local level, various organisations have arisen in order to deepen the relations and to strengthen the participation of the regional and local levels in a common process for the whole region. The local and regional organisations are very diverse focusing on either multiple political issues or on more sector specific ones (i.e. environment).

In order for actors to involve themselves in Baltic Sea Cooperation in the first place it is essential that the participating parties believe in the overall idea of a Baltic Sea Region, a prerequisite for this is that there exists widely recognised common cultural and historic ties. Surveys among the subregions in the area have shown that there is indeed agreement on the strong historical and cultural ties that exists within the Baltic Sea Region, and that the subregions share common interest in a variety of fieldsⁱⁱ.

Hence, numerous local and regional projects in various sectors between partners in different countries are initiated. Surveys have shown the main priority fields of cooperation to be most prominently related to economic development (business and regional development), but also education and training, environment, and health and social security are prioritised. And cooperation partners for all projects are nearly always found within the Baltic Sea Region according to the same surveyⁱⁱⁱ.

Hence, Baltic Sea Co-operation is for the moment influenced by the following factors:

- *A number of top-down formulated strategies and policies for Baltic Sea Co-operation that has to be put into concrete action. Examples are the EU Pre-accession policy, preparing Poland and the three Baltic States for accession to the European Union, and the Northern Dimension policy, creating a future framework for cooperation in the wider Baltic Sea Region.*
- *A remarkable number of concrete projects initiated at regional and local level based on a local and regional development driven bottom-up process. Project partners are found within the BSR.*
- *A multitude of institutions and organisations trying to express the needs and demands of Baltic Sea actors, including local and regional authorities.*

In order to create the best environment for co-operation in the Baltic Sea area we need to ensure that mechanisms are developed which are going to balance the local and regional dynamic with the

strategies of the levels above. The national and EU level strategies for creating economic and political cohesion need to be complemented by the regions' bottom-up approach to international co-operation. How should regions on this basis organise the future Baltic Sea Co-operation, or more explicitly, around what specific topics should it be organised?

The Future Topics of Baltic Sea Co-operation

The Northern Dimension and the EU enlargement process are the general frames for the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region but when it comes to implementing those concepts the local and regional authorities are essential since they are the ones conducting many of the concrete tasks.

As to the Northern Dimension, the concept is still in need of a more specific content. The local and regional level is ready to contribute to fill out the framework and the EU and the national governments should indeed consult them. Furthermore, when the overall Northern Dimension policy will be in place implementing authorities will be needed.

As to Pre-accession, from the point of view of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, harmonisation of the legislation generally comes first, implementation second. As harmonisation is well under way, it is now the right time to plan for the involvement of the local and regional level. The EU clearly stated in a report from April 1996 that regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea could contribute to the membership of candidate countries in the European Union and to enhance economic and social cohesion in an enlarged union.

So much for the general framework, the actual fields of cooperation that are important in order to create a mature, prosperous and political stable Baltic Sea Region must be specified:

In the Economic Sphere – competitiveness

In a world ruled by globalisation, the nation-state is restrained from using many of the traditional macroeconomic tools to solve their problems because of the global market forces. In order to cope with these market forces, countries are choosing macro-regionalisation as the middle way between the national level and the global. The united volume of many countries leaves them with a better chance to stand up against globalisation.

However, besides that the globalisation process pressures the states to adopt macro regional strategies, the states are also forced to allow the micro regional (subregional) level to take on more responsibility for solving the national and regional economic problems. As the macro-regional arrangement (i.e. EU) takes over some of the tasks of the states, they restrict the manoeuvrability of the national governments, and the solution to national problems such as low economic growth and high unemployment must be found at a different level - the local and regional level.

It is the local and regional level that is in charge of local and regional development, that is, creating a beneficial business environment supporting competitiveness. Since competitiveness is a matter of productivity, and since the roots of productivity lie in the national and regional environment for competition, it's one of the essential tasks for the local and regional authorities. An enhanced competitiveness in the individual subregions and municipalities is the key to a stronger and more prosperous Baltic Sea Region.

It is obvious that so far the classical inputs to the production process, such as natural resources, are central to for instance the EU policy of the Northern Dimension. However, factor inputs have become less and less valuable in an increasingly global economy; the relative share of labour and raw material costs in the value added to final products continue to decline. At the same time the value added share of information and service inputs (the cost of marketing, distribution, transport, financing, information, technology content, etc.) continues to rise. Hence, prosperity depends on creating a business environment along with supporting institutions that enable the region or nation to productively use and upgrade its inputs.

Locations that are able to make instantaneous adjustments are rewarded, merely using the resources available, or assembling more resources, is not enough for prosperity. Competitiveness is no longer limited to those localities with a favourable inheritance, but policy has to be directed so as to enhance competitiveness. That is the choice for the actors; a choice that can lead to prosperity. The chances of prosperity is improved if a municipality, region or state for example upgrade the capabilities of all their citizens and invest in the type of specialised infrastructure that allow commerce to be efficient. Limited wealth will be the result if policy is chosen that erodes the productivity of business, if skills are reserved for the few, if wealth is secured by family connections or government concessions rather than productivity, etc^{iv}. Business needs good government. Business leaders in the Baltic Sea Region and the BCCA also support this conclusion^v.

For the municipalities and regions to obtain good government and a fruitful business environment creating competitiveness for its companies, co-operation with similar authorities in other parts of the region is essential. The local and regional level in the established EU member countries can of-

fer considerable expertise in how to establish and develop local and regional authorities within the EU context. This will directly benefit authorities in the Eastern countries, however in general the benefits of exchange goes both ways, providing both the Eastern and the Western local and regional authorities with new inputs and better long-term strategies.

A concrete example of such co-operation benefiting the business environment is the setting up of regional development agencies. These agencies work to improve the business environment in their particular location and thereby helps attract businesses. In this process, as in general, cooperation provides knowledge and ideas and helps those involved to avoid making the same mistakes as others already have. For all municipalities and regions this is a vital input, but for some, especially in the Eastern side of the Baltic Sea Region, this cooperation is vital if they are to develop and prosper within the next few years.

Based on this, some basic recommendations for co-operation spheres and actual projects are:

Industry	Promote transfer of technology know-how via co-operation and exchange of information regarding this topic.
Trade and SME development	Facilitate trade missions and fairs, organising conferences and publishing material in support of business contacts, business training and networking for SME's
Institution building	Emerging regional institutions in the candidate states (for example, the new regional development agencies and associations of municipalities and towns) should identify and strengthen their ties with "sister" organisations in the whole region

To obtain the needed qualifications for the general public at large and the authorities/civil servants specifically, exchange of know-how between actors in different countries is crucial. Therefore projects should be initiated within:

Administrative training	Exchanges of civil servants and experts, Training seminars
Education	Student and teacher exchanges, Language training for different levels and age groups, Vocational training

In order to ease the exchange between authorities and organisations across the Baltic Sea the newest information technology should be put into use. The Internet is of course vital but also Video

Conferences and other tools could help remove the traditional obstacles to cooperation. Besides facilitating inexpensive and continuous communication, this use of IT will directly enhance capabilities of all authorities and actors involved.

Therefore projects within IT and science is an absolute necessity for both the everyday work and in the wider development perspective:

Technology and Science	Developing co-operation between research institutions; joint research projects, Exchange know-how and practises in relation to the everyday use of IT.
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Still the more traditional infrastructure is also important for a location to develop an attractive business environment:

Transport, Infrastructure and Construction	Connecting and developing motorways, railways and related transport systems, Studies of technical and financial conditions, Opening new border crossings, Improving harbour facilities
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Productivity and competitive advantage in an economy require specialisation in the form of interconnected firms, suppliers, related industries and specialised institutions in particular fields that are present in particular locations. These “clusters” reduce transaction costs, boost efficiency, improves incentives, enables innovation and creates collective assets like information, specialised institutions, etc. Local and regional authorities should strive for the creation of such clusters and in the process they will be able to benefit from experiences from cooperation partners all across the Baltic Sea.

Summing up, it is important to realise that many of companies’ competitive advantages lies outside the firms, rooted in locations and industry clusters. This is the level of the local and regional authorities, and co-operation projects between these authorities can help everyone involved to advance and prosper. An extensive and persistent use of the newest information technologies will ease this cross border co-operation and contribute to the beneficial and dynamic business environment.

In the wider Political Sphere

Also in the wider policy sphere government (on various levels) and business must cooperate; old distinctions between laissez faire and intervention are obsolete. In some areas the role of the authorities must be minimal (e.g. trade barriers) and in others activist (e.g. ensuring vigorous competition, providing high quality education and training). Authorities can influence all parts of the business environment, hence artificial distinctions between social and economic policy must fall away since the two are inextricable tied in defining the environment for productive competition. Thus, educated citizens who are healthy and work in a safe environment is not only desirable in general, but it is also a bare necessary for productivity. All public institutions can contribute to this, including schools, universities, standard setting agencies, the judicial system, etc.

This is only one more reason why cooperation projects should be initiated in policy spheres like Social Security, Health and Environment:

Health care and social services	Exchanging experience in health care and social services, hospital administration, institution building, new information technologies, staff training and exchange programmes
Environment and energy	Environmental protection plans and awareness actions, co-operation in impact evaluations, new energy sources and opportunities for energy saving, co-operation between institutions in monitoring and development of statistics

Finally, as a last point in relation to what should be the future topics of co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region it should be kept in mind that even though it is not directly connected to the economic development of the region, which should be the first priority, further elaboration of a common Baltic Sea identity could be necessary in order to get actors involved in the first place. Consolidation of this common idea of the Baltic Sea Region commands concrete projects of Cultural Exchange, extended Youth Cooperation (shaping the future conception of the Baltic Sea Region project) as well as projects aimed at facilitating an increase in Tourism. Seminars and conferences are also contributing to this process even though these initiatives should to a higher extent be coordinated for instance via the larger Baltic Sea organisations not to waste scarce resources. Too many conferences are today covering the same issues and in too many instances no real and rewarding follow up on the conferences are being conducted.

Suggested spheres of cooperation projects are:

Culture, Art and Cultural Heritage	Cultural events, cultural exchange for artists and artisans; Artisan training and small business development
Tourism and Rural development	Town-twinning, networking of local associations, NGO's, tourism promotion, entrepreneurship and small business development for rural communities

Final Words

The advice that has been put forward here is that the local and regional authorities around the Baltic Sea should work at providing good government for the local businesses. This involves being proactive and dynamic, developing new ways in co-operation with others. And it covers many policy areas since a fruitful business environment beyond 2000 is not only dependent upon the traditional factors, but also on education, innovation, flexibility, etc. These modern virtues are today even more important for the individual location than a favourable inheritance.

For the local and regional authorities to develop this modern approach, co-operation across borders is essential, since it provides new and stimulating inputs. Innovation – private as well as public – needs these inputs. Politically everyone agrees on this, but the financial backing has not been adequate. Baltic Sea Co-operation on the local and regional level are therefore not as extensive as it could be, not as coordinated as it should be. The national governments and the EU system should understand this and try more eagerly to support (also financially) the co-operation between those local and regional authorities that are willing to co-operate, to learn from others and adopt new ways. Otherwise opportunities are missed.

ANNEXE 1

BSSSC encourages the European Union;

- to overcome existing - and in addition probably forthcoming - lacks of interoperability between EU funding instruments available in the region (INTERREG III A and B, PHARE and TACIS) as outlined the latest in the Common Strategy on Russia, and in particular:
 - to harmonise the rules governing INTERREG, PHARE and TACIS and to establish similar regulatory frameworks, time tables and project selection criteria as well as joint decision procedures and bodies (under INTERREG as well for strand A as strand B).
 - to indicate a certain share of the PHARE main programmes for transnational co-operation and to provide multi-annual budgeting of PHARE in order to allow multi-annual joint projects under PHARE and INTERREG III B.
 - to increase the budget for cross-border co-operation under TACIS and to allocate these fundings to the regions adjoining actual and future EU Member States, in particular in North-West Russia.
- regretting the decision of the European Commission to abandon BSPF, to establish a new programme replacing the abolished Baltic Small Projects Facility (BSPF) aiming at facilitating the bottom-up process in the whole region in a broad sense by funding smaller scaled subregional co-operation projects; a decision making structure should comprise regional Baltic Sea organisations as well as the respective national associations of sub-national governments.
- to ensure that the use of the European Parliaments Budget line for the Baltic Sea Region (B7-537) will be influenced strongly by the recipient countries (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) who, in the Joint Baltic Committee, have expressed their interest in smaller interregional projects, and that these countries (each being represented by a regional representative) will themselves construct the actual programme prioritising the funds.

ANNEXE 2

This annexe outlines some of the efforts made during the last years by BSSSC in order to collect information on Baltic Sea matters, and formulate policy accordingly, leading to this vision and strategy paper.

Summer of 1998, information was gathered from the sub-regions around the Baltic Sea at a workshop held in Brussels discussing EU funding and the regional contribution to the accession process.

Autumn 1998, the 6th annual BSSSC Conference takes place in Roskilde, Denmark, 350 local and regional representatives from the Baltic Sea countries are gathered discussing Institution Building, Nature Protection and Economic Development in the Baltic Sea Area.

Spring of 1999, a Consultation Process by the Chairman to member-regions in all Eastern Baltic Sea countries, and an extensive survey covering all 10 countries around the Baltic Sea was conducted, in order to gather the experiences and perspectives of the 162 member regions and related organisations in relation to interregional co-operation. The results were published and distributed widely.

Spring of 1999, BSSSC in co-operation with other Baltic Sea actors agrees on how to break down the European Parliaments budget line B7-537 for the Baltic Sea Region. The implicated partners present their ideas to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Summer of 1999, after pressure from BSSSC the Danish Government agreed to set up a special fund for interregional co-operation in the Baltic Sea Area. The amount given is modest but the Danish government along with BSSSC puts pressure on other national governments in the BSA to follow the Danish example.

Autumn of 1999, the annual BSSSC conference with more than 400 participants from the local and region level takes place in Kaunas, Lithuania. Main topics are the EU enlargement process, the Northern Dimension initiative and finally the elaboration of the Information Society in the Baltic Sea Region. Policy papers are adapted by the political BSSSC Board and presented.

Spring of 2000, a political BSSSC seminar is held on Bornholm, Denmark, where the Baltic Sea Region and Baltic Sea co-operation beyond 2000 is discussed. As a result BSSSC prepares a policy paper on the Northern Dimension as well as an overall vision for the future Baltic Sea Co-operation beyond 2000 (this paper).

Except for these specific events, BSSSC is on a daily basis engaged in concrete work facilitating contacts, projects, exchange of know-how, etc. The very organisation of BSSSC (a political Board consisting of two representatives from each of the 10 countries, 3 permanent Working Groups consisting of two representatives from member regions in each country and ad hoc Working Groups consisting of volunteers from the member regions) ensures that BSSSC is continuously in contact with a broad network of local and regional representatives from all over the Baltic Sea Area; hence, legitimacy is sought continuously.

ⁱ For a thorough debate on regions and regionalisation; Björn Hettne, Andreas Inotai, etc.; *The New Regionalism*, 1999

ⁱⁱ BSSSC; *The Consultation Process*, 1999

ⁱⁱⁱ BSSSC; *The Consultation Process*, 1999

^{iv} Michael Porter; *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*, 1997

^v *Report on Conditions for Growth and Development in the Baltic Sea Region*; Baltic Sea Business Summit 2000