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BONUS

SCIENCE FOR A BETTER FUTURE OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION

briefing

PROBALT

Improving societal conditions for the Baltic Sea protection



PROBALT aims to find out ways to improve the Baltic Sea eutrophication governance at three institutional levels: the level of the European Union, the regional level, and at the level of coastal countries. On the basis of the case studies carried out in order to improve the Baltic Sea eutrophication governance, PROBALT puts forward four sets of measures that are urgently needed at various governance levels ranging from international to local. These include 1) a macro-regional, binding, cost-effective and fair agreement on the prevention of eutrophication in the Baltic Sea, 2) spatial and temporal specification of policies 3) more effective and thorough integration of different policy sectors and 4) increased publicity, environmental awareness, and deliberative democracy.

of the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea more effective by analysing how the different societal conditions can be better adjusted for this goal at different institutional levels.



Figure 1

PROBALT analyses the societal conditions for the effective protection of the Baltic Sea at national, regional and European Union levels, examines nutrient trading as an instrument to more effectively combat eutrophication and works to increase national concern about the state of the Baltic Sea in individual countries.

OVERVIEW

The failure of transforming scientific knowledge into effective, politically and socially acceptable protective practices is the underlying issue behind the relative failure to protect the Baltic Sea from eutrophication, not a lack of knowledge on ecological restrictions and requirements for the protection. Designing policies is ultimately a social activity conditioned by different socio-economical, political and cultural factors, and conflicting rationalities and interests (Figure 1). Thus the PROBALT project aims to make the prevention

KEY RESULTS

CHALLENGE OF THE BALTIC SEA EUTROPHICATION GOVERNANCE

The Baltic Sea eutrophication governance is shaped by three major challenges. The first challenge stems from the ecological characteristics of the problem, making eutrophication less manageable than, for example, toxic substances. The second challenge is rooted in the societal history of the region, on the one hand, and the nature of the sea as an international common property resource, on the other. The sea as a common property resource implies that the sea can



freely be utilised by each and everyone, while no-one has any binding obligation to protect and nurture it. The third, and related, challenge is the one created by the multitude of actors and governance levels involved in the use and stewardship of the sea.

Following from the ecological and societal challenges, national and sub-national aspirations and abilities to address eutrophication in national policies vary across the region. Each Baltic Sea country carries out its national environmental policies with nationally agreed foci influencing local and municipal level policies, and practical implementation of protective measures. The fact that there is no legal arrangement of the Baltic Sea protection to cover all the coastal countries makes the situation intricate. Thus, it is evident that some sort of a transnational 'primus motor' for protection is desperately needed. At the moment two main alternatives for such a motor stand out; namely, the European Union and the HELCOM.

Since the European Union enlargement in 2004, its role in the eutrophication governance has changed significantly as most of the riparian countries are now legally bound to implement various European Union directives that either directly or indirectly affect the state of the sea. This enforcement power gives the European Union the potential to enhance eutrophication prevention significantly in the eight riparian countries. Two drawbacks remain, however. From a pan-European perspective the Baltic Sea environment appears to be a rather marginal problem. As a result, many directives are too lax for the environmentally sensible governance of the Baltic Sea. Moreover, the exclusion of Russia and other relevant countries within the catchment area is considered the biggest deficit of the European Union as an international actor in the Baltic Sea region. Therefore, cooperation with these countries is a challenge that the European Union cannot afford to ignore.

Opposite to the European Union, the regime of HELCOM is based on (voluntary) participation of all the nine riparian countries and recommendations are derived from mutual agreements achieved by joint deliberation. These recommendations, however, are not legally binding. As a result and moreover after the European Union enlargement, the role of HELCOM in the protection of the Baltic Sea has been questioned. The participating countries of HELCOM hold the key to its future as they are the main source of funding to keep the Commission functioning.

IMPROVING THE BALTIC SEA EUTROPHICATION GOVERNANCE

According to the PROBALT results from a set of case studies the following sets of measures need to be urgently taken at various governance levels ranging from international to local in order to improve the Baltic Sea eutrophication governance:

1) A macro-regional, binding, cost-effective and fair agreement on the prevention of eutrophication in the Baltic Sea;

As noted above, the European Union has potential to enhance eutrophication prevention significantly in the eight riparian countries. With the introduction of the Baltic Sea Strategy and certain directives, most notably the Urban Wastewater Directive and Water Framework Directive, it has already taken steps towards more determined management of the Baltic Sea eutrophication. The leading role of the European Union in the Baltic Sea environmental governance is, however, not seen unproblematic in Russia. As a major polluter Russia is a central actor, the viewpoints of which need careful consideration. In addition, not all countries located in the catchment area are members of the European Union. This implies that while the position of the European Union as the primus motor of the Baltic Sea environmental protection is not self-evident, there are also a number of problems related to the regional level arrangement with the HELCOM regime and the Baltic Sea Action Plan established under its auspices.

Firstly, relating to international law, the Baltic Sea Action Plan and the underlying Helsinki Convention are not binding agreements; they can produce only recommendations. Accordingly, countries have leeway to burnish their image by committing themselves to the BSAP only ostensibly, taking only few practical steps towards its implementation. As shown by the case studies, the recommendations of HELCOM do not necessarily materialise in national regulation.

Secondly, while stemming merely from ecological principles, the Baltic Sea Action Plan leaves socioeconomic and political questions related to the division of protective responsibilities unsolved. Cost-effectiveness and net benefits are discussed implicitly, if at all. The large differences in the country-wise reduction targets lead to huge differences in abatement costs. When measured in monetary terms, improvement in water quality makes some countries better off or



break-even, but Poland, Russia, Latvia and Lithuania face large negative net benefits. Therefore an all parties wide commitment to abatement measures is difficult to achieve.

In order to motivate the parties to implement the planned measures of protection, a legally binding agreement is needed. In addition, the proposed actions need to be cost-effective. Mechanisms such as nutrient trading (see below), for instance, are among the possible solutions towards improving the cost-effectiveness. Moreover, the agreement needs to take into account the financial standing of the countries and take the socioeconomic heterogeneity of the Baltic Sea countries into account. In other words, the allocation of responsibilities should be fair.

2) Spatial and temporal specification of policies

Due to the multiplicity of spatial and temporal scales related to the problem of eutrophication, (i.e. 'regionality' of the problem) a governance framework that takes the entire system as a starting point does not work. Currently, the region-wide frameworks (introduced by HELCOM and the European Union) lead to inefficient protection policies: the inaccurate allocation of responsibilities and, ultimately, the waste of the funds targeted to protection. Therefore, some sort of differentiation and specification of policy instruments and forms of implementation is necessary. Agriculture is a prime example of the loads critically depending on local features of fields. To certain extent, this implies neglecting administrative borders — not by enlarging the framework but by adjusting it. Protective policies should be taken there, and only there, where the benefits are the greatest. Spatial specification in turn implies focusing on specific situations and differentiating management practices on the basis of certain eco-social entities.

By character, an approach emphasising the spatial specification of policies is bottom-up rather than top-down. Thus, it takes also the experience-based knowledge of local stakeholders more carefully into account, thereby engaging various stakeholder groups, such as farmers and other local practitioners, closely into planning and implementing protective efforts. In essence, this approach adjust better the various European Union and national policies, recommendations by the HELCOM as well as practical activities taking place at various levels.

Given the large and asymmetrically distributed abatement costs, defining intermediate steps towards the final goal would facilitate implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. Temporal dimension is built in Nordic Environment Finance Corporation's suggestion for developing a nutrient trading system in the Baltic Sea. Starting nutrient trading between point sources would bring reductions in nutrient loads quickly in contrast to the inevitably slow progress achievable in agriculture. Nutrient trading has two favourable features: 1) initial allocation of load permits works at the same time as a means to redistribute net benefits more evenly and 2) the reduction in nutrient loads is achieved with the lowest possible costs.

3) More effective and thorough integration of different policy sectors

Various land-based activities throughout the catchment area affect the state of the sea either directly or indirectly. Therefore, the state of the Baltic Sea cannot be improved by exclusively focusing on marine/water protection. Instead, protective activities should be closely linked to all societal activities. When the land-based activities affecting the problem of eutrophication are targeted, many policy sectors come intertwined with the environmental policy sector. The use and nurture of the Baltic Sea thus exceeds the administrative borders not only geographically but also in terms of policy sectors. This indicates that the protection of the Baltic Sea from eutrophication should be seriously taken into account in most of the administrative branches, especially industrial, energy, transport and in every policy sector including in particular agricultural and fisheries policy.

4) Increasing publicity, environmental awareness, and deliberative democracy.

In order to achieve the good ecological status of the Baltic Sea by any date, it is of crucial importance to strengthen environmental awareness in general and concerning the Baltic Sea in particular throughout the region. Higher environmental awareness opens up possibilities for public pressure, everyday activism, greening of business culture; all growingly important instruments of environmental policy-making. It could also generate attention for the various double benefits that may emerge from combating eutrophication and which could additionally convince the public that it is worth to take action. Positive effects could be expected both with regard to other environmental objectives e.g. climate protection,

biodiversity and in terms of socio-economic interests, e.g. improved drinking-water quality, cost savings by increasing fertilizer efficiency and improved conditions for the tourism and fisheries sectors.

NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE PLANS

PROBALT conclusions on how to improve the Baltic Sea governance give scope for further research. The practical ways how to

renovate the governance institution, including the spatio-temporal specialisation and sector integration could be studied through a broad range of local and regional level case studies. Policy scientists of the Baltic Sea region need to join forces to elaborate options for such a governance renovation. Nutrient trading scheme needs to be analysed in broad range of implications and prepared for its adoption on the policy level and subsequent implementation.

IN BRIEF

PROBALT Improving societal conditions for the Baltic Sea protection

PROBALT aims to make the protection of the Baltic Sea from eutrophication more effective by analysing the ways in which the societal conditions can be adjusted for this goal at national, regional and European Union levels and examining nutrient trading as an instrument to more effectively combat eutrophication.

KEY RESULTS

On the basis of the case studies carried out in order to improve the Baltic Sea eutrophication governance, PROBALT puts forward four sets of measures that are urgently needed at various governance levels ranging from international to local:

1. A macro-regional, binding, cost-effective and fair agreement on the prevention of eutrophication in the Baltic Sea
2. Spatial and temporal specification of policies
3. More effective and thorough integration of different policy sectors
4. Increased publicity, environmental awareness, and deliberative democracy

WHO NEEDS THE INFORMATION

This information is useful for different actors and stakeholders involved in eutrophication governance in the coastal countries of the Baltic Sea, HELCOM, and EU, and to those involved in policy-making in particular.

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