

An initiative from the three municipalities of Klaipeda, Ustka and Simrishamn:

An international forum for Baltic Sea fishermen to enhance dialogue and cooperation

Vesa Tschernij, iconex@co.inet.fi

Background

Concern for the future is spreading?

Throughout the history of the Baltic Sea, commercial fishery has played a major role as one of the corner stones that coastal communities have been built on. However, during the past 20 to 30 years, people living along the coastline have been witnessing a dramatic decrease in the fishing sector, with fatal economical consequences. So far, the highest price has been paid mostly by the smaller communities or coastal cities as the fishing fleet and, along with that, the rest of the fishing industry has been concentrated to larger cities. Now, a concern for the future of the fishing sector is starting to spread to the larger fishing centres as well. Despite an intensive strive to restore a balance between the fishing fleet and marine resources, the international authorities have not succeeded to fully convince neither the fishing industry nor the local decision makers about a better future. Investments are crucial if the remaining fishing centres want to keep up with the technological development, but will an eventual investment in fishing industry pay off in the future?

Simrishamn is a typical example of a coastal city struggling with the questions presented above. Simrishamn has a long tradition of being an important centre for commercial fishery. The fishing harbour is situated right in the heart of the city and is not just the biggest remaining fishing harbour along the Swedish east and south coast, but also an important meeting place for the inhabitants as well as for tourists visiting the town. But for Simrishamn the fishing industry is still far more than just tradition or an important part of its image. Counting all jobs generated by the fishing fleet, the harbour, the service enterprises and other infrastructure, the fishing sector is the second largest employer in the city. In other words, commercial fishery is still a “life line” here.

Therefore, viewed from a strictly economic perspective, it is understandable why local authorities in Simrishamn, instead of continuing to be passive onlookers, choose to become, or actually are more or less bound to become, more active in trying to find ways to promote a positive development within the fishing sector and thereby their city.

Is Simrishamn alone?

To investigate if other major fishing centres in the southern Baltic Sea region struggle with similar questions and whether these communities share the same concern for their future, Simrishamn contacted two cities in the east: Klaipeda in Lithuania and Ustka in Poland. Owing to an extremely positive response from both cities, a meeting was held on the 26th of March 2009 in Ustka. Besides representatives from the three municipalities, small groups of fishermen were invited to participate in the meeting. The outcome of this first meeting was a conclusion that the first and most important step is to enhance a dialogue between fishermen coming from different places around the Baltic Sea. Without them getting to know each other, and understanding how the other one is thinking, all attempts to improve the development risk to be in vain. To find out if this is a widely held view among Baltic Sea fishermen, two meetings were set to be held already during the coming autumn. The first one, which was planned to be arranged for a smaller group of fishermen, was scheduled to August 25th - 26th and the second, larger one, was to be held on October 15th - 16th.

The program and objectives for 2009

The overall objective for the ongoing process is to have the Baltic Sea fishermen reconcile on a declaration where they emphasise the importance of the initiated “International Forum for Baltic Sea fishermen”. Furthermore this document is suggested to include a clear indication of the topics put forward within the forum and preferably also some indication of the type of activity needed. The program to achieve this overall objective was planned as follows:

1. Initial contacts and meetings	Jan - April 2009	<i>finished</i>
2. The planning meeting in Klaipeda	August 2009	<i>finished</i>
Reporting (video & short report)	September 2009	<i>ongoing</i>
3. The conference in Simrishamn	October 2009	
Reporting (video & report)	November 2009	
4. <i>The activities within the forum begins</i>	<i>Depends on the result</i>	

The progress and results so far

The initiative welcomed by fishermen - it's essential that we start to speak to each other

There is no doubt that there is an interest for the kind of activity that is proposed; at least among the fishermen that has participated in the process so far. But how likely is it that other fishermen will share this interest? Based on the results so far, the prospect of fishermen finding a dialogue and cooperation in the technological field welcome seems quite likely. Actually one of the most important results from Klaipeda was that after spending some time together, fishermen from Lithuania, Poland and Sweden discovered that deep down there seems to be one thing uniting all fishermen; namely a deep devotion to their work and to the sea. Despite differences in the cultural and socio-economic background, fishing techniques and strategies, all fishermen share the same concern about the future. Moreover they discovered, that in terms of practical issues they all speak the same “fisherman language” and furthermore that there is hardly any one other than fishermen who can solve the existing and future practical and technological problems concerning fishery. Thereby the fishermen attending the Klaipeda meeting decided unanimously to recommend a continuation of the ongoing process with the aim to establish not just a venue for enhancing a dialogue but a network as well, where fishermen could start working together by solving technological problems.

Fishermen think practically - spending time together while doing things unite

Acknowledging the fact that the majority of fishermen think practically and that most of them are more interested in practice than in theory, the initiators of the meetings have deliberately avoided long indoor discussions in typical meeting rooms. Instead the agenda has included visits to e.g. fishing harbours or, like in Klaipeda, a trip to see the new fish auction. By arranging activities in which fishermen can meet each other in an authentic environment to discuss new ideas or techniques eye to eye, we may be able to create an efficient, but most of all very natural, way of “transferring technologies and exchanging experiences”. As a matter of fact, this meeting strategy was found so successful that the initiators plan to continue with the same concept in Simrishamn in October. There will be at least five outdoor activities in the harbour area in which the participating fishermen will be offered an opportunity to see and learn from each other. Moreover initiators did not use detailed agendas on the meetings in order to allow the fishermen to have as much influence as possible on the topics discussed.

Agenda or preliminary plan for the Klaipeda meeting August 25 th to 26 th	
Day 1 - Tuesday	Day 2 - Wednesday
Check-in and welcomes	Breakfast
12:00 Lunch with initial discussions	09:00 Ideas, reflections on the discussions so far
14:30 Break/preparations for trip	11:00 Preparation of an outline and a list of the issues discussed and to be put forward
15:00 Trip to Klaipeda harbour and fish auction	12:00 Closing of the meeting
19:00 Dinner	

Discussions opened with “traditional issues”

Right from the start, already during lunch, the discussions were intense, touching a wide range of topics. During the first hours, with the atmosphere still a bit reserved and the fishermen acting in a more formal way, the discussed issues varied from TAC (Total Allowable Catch) to the role and activities of the Baltic Sea RAC (Regional Advisory Council) and topics directly related to the Commission and CFP (Common Fishery Policy). One particular issue that was brought up several times was the state of the eastern Baltic cod stock. Many of the fishermen raised questions concerning its true size. According to the Polish fishermen at the meeting the gap between the scientific and the industrial view seems unrealistically big. In principal the Swedish fishermen were inclined to partly share this view and said that it certainly would not be an unfavourable thing, if the fishermen's idea on the size of the cod stock would better correspond to that of the scientists.

With less tense atmosphere focus was moved toward “everyday-life”

Gradually, the more the fishermen at the meeting actually started to communicate with each other, the more the discussions moved away from general and political topics and toward more “everyday-life” issues. There were several statements indicating that if other fishermen were to find this new forum interesting, then the focus must be put on real, “hard”, issues only. Furthermore the fishermen pointed out that they had absolutely nothing against talking, but to talk without doing anything useful would not bring any ease to fishermen already struggling with a number of problems. There was a consensus that the first thing necessary to do was to learn to view fishing and the problems connected with it in a more objective way.

Focus on socio-economic, technological and environmental issues

One thing acknowledged by all fishermen at the meeting as increasing the gap between fishermen around the Baltic Sea was differences in national preconditions. Despite that today, “on paper”, there is more or less only one, united EU fishing, the fact is that looking at it from a socio-economic perspective the fishermen around the Baltic Sea are far from equal. In order to learn to better understand the way “other fishermen” think, we have to be more interested in each other and learn more about our backgrounds. Examples of topics that were discussed concerned the way fishermen get paid when their vessels are scrapped or whether or not vessels are paid subsidies during a fishing ban. Other socio-economic issues were touched as well, e.g. the possibility for fishermen for an early retirement etc. One particularly interesting thing came up while discussing the differences in fishermen’s everyday-life. According to the Polish fishermen in Poland there was only one price for all size classes of cod. Moreover, while visiting the fish auction, the group found out that this far auctioning had not affected either the quality of products or the price levels positively.

That issues such as fishing gear selectivity was passed relatively quickly at the Klaipeda meeting does not indicate a lower priority (see the list of topics). On the contrary it should be interpreted entirely the other way around. The question of improving size-selectivity in fishing gears is today for fishermen as self-evident a way forward as it is to become more environmentally aware. For instance, those fishing companies planning to continue fishing should be allowed to take measures to lower their costs. That is an extremely efficient way to improve the profitableness of especially small and medium size enterprises. Already today fuel costs sum up to almost one third of all costs and looking into the future there seems to be only one way for the fuel price and that is up. Vessels should be allowed to invest in modern, more powerful engines. By doing that we could not just lower the running costs; we could decrease the carbon dioxide emissions as well.

The list of topics put forward

Actually, the above reported topics are just a fraction of everything that was brought up during the discussions in Klaipeda. Obviously there is no need to consider all these particular issues to characterize the entire picture yet, as it still represents the view of just a handful of fishermen coming from three regions/nations.

During the morning session of the second day, the fishermen were asked to sum up the discussions to a preliminary list of high priority topics.

1. Developing more selective fishing gears
2. To aim at solving the problem with “ghost nets” (“removing and preventing”)
3. Promoting a development toward more environmentally friendly and cost effective vessel engines
4. Inventory and mapping of the Baltic Sea cod stock
5. Promoting subsidies for modernization
6. Defining the economic boundaries of a profitable commercial fishery
7. Mapping marine areas where fishery should be prohibited

These topics are suggested to be further discussed in Simrishamn the 15th to 16th October 2009. The participating fishermen are naturally welcomed to bring up other issues as well.

Participants at the Klaipeda meeting

The Polish delegation:

Andrzej Wysoczanski	-	fisherman
Grzegorz Halubek	-	fisherman
Andrzej Tyszkiewicz	-	fisherman
Adam Jakubiak	kirustka@poczta.dnet.pl	fisherman

The Lituanian delegation:

Daiva Berankiene	daiva.berankiene@klaipeda.lt	civil servant
Algirdas Ausra	baltzvej@takas.lt	fisherman
Vaida Sakaite	lfpa@takas.lt	fisherman

The Swedish delegation:

Olle Viberg	olleviberg@tele2.se	fisherman
Jan von Tourtchaninoff	-	fisherman

The initiator representatives:

Jan Lundmark	jan.lundmark@simrishamn.se	civil servant
Vesa Tschernij	iconex@co.inet.fi	consultant

The meetings and conference described in this report are being carried out with support from the Municipality of Simrishamn and the Baltic Sea Unit at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).