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WeSea – Region for the World: A new approach of embracing environmental challenges in the Baltic Sea Region

Christoph Walther

Christoph Walther, volunteered one year for the NGO Monte Azul in the suburbs of São Paulo/ Brazil, doing social community work. After that, he studied for another year at the Youth Initiative Program in Järna/ Sweden. Since then, he has been studying Environmental Sciences at Leuphana University Lüneburg and São Carlos School of Engineering/ University of São Paulo.

*Man knows himself only to the extent that he knows the world;
he becomes aware of himself only within the world,
and aware of the world only within himself.
Every object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ of
perception within us.*

- Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe (1981, p. 38)

WeSea is a network that strives for a clean Baltic Sea. WeSea facilitates the connection between individual potential and the need of the sea, so it therefore offers structures for individuals to meet, share ideas, and implement projects.

The WeSea initiative is based in Järna, Sweden, and was brought to a larger scale in March 2012. The idea has been developed and is being held by graduate students of the International Youth Initiative Program (YIP), an alternative educational program that focuses on social leadership. After completing YIP, they decided to design their individual studies with personal mentors and teachers, as opposed to a formal education.

In that sense, WeSea continues as a learning platform for the individuals that shape it. On the other hand, it can be understood as a pro-active initiative that seeks to create environmental and cultural transformation in the Baltic Sea Region, through facilitating workshops, hosting multi-stakeholder dialogues and hands-on projects.

During the year of 2012, four events called "TimeFrames" have been set, for WeSea collaborators and people interested in the work to meet and develop a personal relationship to the challenge of the Baltic Sea. In between the TimeFrames, the work is being further developed and implemented around the WeSea office in Järna, and the respective places where WeSea collaborators are engaged.

Since WeSea is at its very beginning, the essence of it is very much dependent on the contributions of the people involved in the work and their personal inspiration. I therefore asked my fellow collaborators to contribute individually to this article in a very open form, in order to enable the reader to have a better grasp of WeSea and look at it from different perspectives:

'Human attention, unlike anything else in the world, has the possibility to give space for the transformation. The act of giving attention to such an "object" be it the environment or another human being, both uplifts the object and expands the capacity of attention itself. Every object, well attended will reveal its future and the possibilities to co-create with it. It is out of this understanding, that we want to work with the Baltic Sea region.'

– Philip, Germany [coordinates WeSea in Järna, musician, artist]

'WeSea is about connecting to nature. And not just connecting, but understanding that active cooperation is required for the health of both nature and humanity. WeSea is about being inspired by this understanding, meeting fellow human beings and acknowledging their place as co-creators of the world. It is not about looking to the past, and blaming. Its about openly observing the current situation and co-creating the future we collectively imagine, now.'

– Tania, New Zealand [coordinates WeSea in Järna, visual artist]

'For me WeSea is a platform for inspiration, networking and communication. Its potential can be to provide a space where we have the opportunity to share our questions, our experiences, our call, and our opportunities, asking questions to our limits, and finding out where we are in life, whilst welcoming the future wherever we are on our journey.'

– Elizabeth, Norway [runs the ØQ government project on organic food, teaches cooking and studies Cultural Sciences in Oslo]

'[...] I will bring the questions that WeSea also has, into my artwork. It could manifest through working with environmental or social questions. For example by connecting a jewellery collection up to the region of the Baltic Sea with a specific theme, or connect the work to the area I am in. I think WeSea has a potential to bring awareness about what we can create where we are, and see the connection to the whole world.'

– Andrea, Norway [based in Oslo, starting studies at Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Does artistic jewelry]

'WeSea has to work more together than ever before. WeSea has to create networks where things are possible and make sense to all partners - today and tomorrow.'

– Jonas, Sweden [student of environmental and societal sciences, Södertörn University, Stockholm, coordinates WeSea]

Looking at the different statements, a few essential aspects of our emerging work stick out and thus need further explanation. Firstly, the power of conversation is very central to the work. How are we able to creatively collaborate in a larger group, to co-create the emerging future? In this context, we draw on learning experiences with WeSea mentor Orland Bishop, who is based in Los Angeles, where he employs the African tradition of Indaba or "deep talk" in his work with at-risk youth in and around the neighbourhood of Watts/ LA. Additionally, the work of C. Otto Scharmer (Presencing Institute/ Massachusetts Institute of Technology), which seeks to implement the social technology of *presencing* in business and governance processes (Scharmer, 2009), is very central to the facilitation of our TimeFrames, workshops and our collaboration.

Secondly, the re-integration of the matter-mind gap, which can be seen as one of the key-challenges regarding problems of unsustainable development (Scharmer, 2009, pp.53-54), is a very central concern of our work. In that sense, we constantly ask ourselves how to work with our natural environment. WeSea mentor Michael D'Aleo¹ (2006) puts it: "Careful examination of how meaning arises shows that the intentions we bring to our experiences affect what and how we perceive. By recognizing this activity we become more sensitive to the world as interaction rather than as simply self and objects." Hence, we cannot see ourselves as something separated from the Baltic Sea, our working environment. This paradigm-shift is the premise of our work and therefore the guiding element in our activities.

Considering both elements described above, our basic intention becomes clear: Giving birth to a new world in ourselves and the environment. Therefore, the Baltic Sea as a learning partner, "[...] opens up a new organ of perception within us" (Ghoete, 1981, p.31), which will be crucial for both social and environmental healing in the Baltic Sea Region. However, the *WeSea-Approach* is not restricted to the Baltic Sea Region: it inspires groups and individuals all over the world, and fosters positive change at the places where people engaged with WeSea, truly implement these elements in their work, their learning and their relationships.

¹ Saratoga Experiential Natural Science Research Institute



Figure 1: Baltic Sea

WeSea TimeFrame 2 will happen between September 27-30 in Järna, Sweden. For further information please visit www.wesea.org or contact the organizers at info@wesea.org

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