

What do marinas and leisure boating bring to the region?

Sustainable tourism and blue economy in the Baltic Sea area

Date: Friday, 26 April 2024

Theme: Resource Circulation

Workshop Summary

In one of the last sessions of the Mission Arena in Riga the focus was sustainable tourism from a leisure boating and marina perspective. **Jane Ihrfors** moderated the workshop (Expert marine geology, IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute) and it started with presentations from **Liisi Lees** (Junior Researcher, University of Tartu, Estonian Marine Institute), **Jūlija Jaunrodziņa** (Baltic Sustainable Boating project coordinator Riga Planning Region), **Ardo Robijn** (Marine geologist, IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute) and **Andris Klepers** (Associate Professor, leading researcher, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences).

The presenters set the context that leisure boating, harbors and marinas provide some of the most important opportunities for blue tourism and exemplified eco-friendly practices, but also highlighted some key impacts and challenges. Also, they highlighted that the connection must be made between tourism and communities, and that harbors play a crucial role in both developments. Boating and harbour development is generally lagging behind but must be integrated in societal development and host opportunities for businesses, locals and tourists. It is also ideal for education and creating awareness of a multitude of topics like sustainable tourism, local culture, businesses, etc. So, the question is how do we make sure that this is a sustainable sector?

The presentations were followed by a table discussion.

All tables were given the same question, with different focuses to fill in the blank.

How can we make more sustainable? What are the main challenges/opportunities?

- Small harbours and marinas
- Coastal tourism
- Boat and boaters

Boat and boaters

- Need: Education awareness and responsibility of the boaters. There is a need for bigger change in the awareness of painting, driving and the season.
- Need: Bring more people into boating without increasing the number of boats.
- Solution: Sharing economy
- Question: When the lifetime of the boat is over, what do we do then? Recycle?
- Need: Common approaches to maintenance.
- Need: Awareness raising. If the information is there and it is easy to go to the sea, more will take advantage of the opportunities. This is not available yet.

Coastal tourism

- There is an unbalanced development trend. We want to promote marinas and boost coastal tourism, but in places it is over-intensive.
- Question: How do we balance this in terms of environmental impacts and impacts on coastal communities?
- Need: Connect boaters and coastal communities in marinas (it's the intersection).
- Need: Strategic planning including community interest, international planning, regional planning. There need to be clear development directions. This supports the balancing issue and improves accessibility.

Marinas:

- Question: When developing marinas, what is needed?
- Problem: Responsibilities of costs of dredging.
- Need: Highlight and take advantage of the role of the marina as an infrastructure provider.
- Combine use of marinas, e.g. Fishing harbours and leisure boats. It can offer multiple roles at the same time.
- Need: Information for boaters is needed (where there are marinas, what facilities are there) so they know what is available. These need to be offline in the boat.

Conclusions

More local offers are needed in marinas to attract tourism, such as local food, culture, etc. Also, information on what infrastructure is available must be clear. We should cooperate more along the Baltic coast and see it as one coast, and together showcase information on accessibility and tourism opportunities such as festivals. Also, we need to realize what is unique for our coast, such as the horizon. We take it for granted, but it does not exist e.g. in Sweden. This can be a "unique selling point" bringing tourists from Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Boat rental businesses would be a great opportunity to increase tourism also from land. There are no such initiatives now, but there are examples in France and Croatia.