

Baltic Sea Project presentations within Finland's national Unesco ASPnet schools' meeting 2 Sept 2020

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The full presentation can be downloaded here: <http://www.borderregions.org/martin.pptx>.

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A brief introduction to the BSP: On its history and future

Dear colleagues in Finland, dear all everywhere in the Baltic Sea Project, it is a great pleasure for me being here with you today.

What I am going to tell you today is not THE official history of the BSP, a kind of result of several years of scientific research or something like that, no. I don't think such a scientific research has yet been done on the Baltic Sea Project, unfortunately it hasn't. I am sure the BSP and its history would be a wonderful research field!

Instead, what I would like to do today is sharing some thoughts with you, some very personal thoughts about what the BSP has been to me and what I experienced in the BSP over the last two and a half decades. In fact, it is for the first time that I talk about these thoughts in front of a larger audience.

<Damp-Logo>

I would like to start with a small story that happened two years ago, in summer 2018, when I got a message from a lady working for the National Commission for UNESCO in Seoul, South Korea. That was the time when the BSP in Germany together with the UNESCO ASPnet in Germany was preparing a large international BSP summer conference in Damp in Germany. To the conference in Damp in September 2018 we had invited teachers and students from all nine countries of the BSP to take part. The National Commission for UNESCO in South Korea had got to know about that, and now they were asking, if we would allow a small delegation from UNESCO South Korea to participate in our conference as observers.

UNESCO in South Korea had heard from us, they were interested in the BSP! How wonderful! Of course we accepted, immediately, we felt honoured and pleased and a lot more.

<Damp-Auditorium>

Here is the Damp conference. Seoul – Damp, that's a couple of thousands of kilometres to travel – why would the UNESCO people from South Korea want to exactly see us, the BSP conference in Damp?

Or, in other words, what is that that makes the BSP so successful, still, after three decades? This is not an easy-to-answer question, and I have no general answer to this. What I do have is a couple of ideas, and these ideas are what I can talk about.

The BSP brings together the students and the teachers of a world region. Many of you might know, the BSP has not been the only UNESCO school project that does so.

Twenty years ago there were many so-called Sister Projects in other world regions, there was a Caribbean Sea Project, a Western-Mediterranean and a South-East-Mediterranean Sea Project, there was a Great Volga River Project and even a Great Zambezi River Project in southern Africa and others – they are all gone, as far as I know, they existed for a certain time, and then they disappeared.

So the question is not only: What makes the BSP so successful? Another important question is: Why has the BSP survived, for 31 years already? And there is no end in sight, the BSP is a very lively project, currently having a strong and successful general coordination in Finland, doing such great things as holding webinars and asking international BSP people to join the webinar and hold a speech there, how wonderful!

What has made the BSP so successful, and why is it still there?

Part of the answer might be: The BSP is so successful and it is still there and very active, because the BSP has developed great fascination. The BSP has at all times been developing fascination for international cooperation on topics that matter. From its very beginning it has been developing fascination through its great international conferences and many other activities, where young people and their teachers meet, very often on an international level, feeling united following a common and highly interesting idea.

Just one example from my early times in the BSP:

<Sodankylä-Map>

In March 1999 I, as a teacher, was invited to join a BSP coordinators meeting, a consultation meeting, as it was called in those times. The BSP consists of nine countries, every country has a national coordinator, these nine coordinators meet in one place, usually twice a year, this is still the same today. At that time in 1999 every coordinator brought a BSP teacher from his or her country. On that meeting in March 1999, I was the BSP teacher from Germany, and the meeting took place in Sodankylä in Finland, a fascinating place for a young German teacher, high up in the north, beyond the Arctic Circle, where it still was deep winter with a lot of snow in these days in March.

In 1999, Denmark was in charge of the BSP, the general coordinator was Ms. Birthe Zimmermann.

<Coordinators Picture>

This picture was taken in 2006, it shows five BSP general coordinators: Birthe Zimmermann is second from the right, standing next to Liisa Jääskeläinen on the right, in the middle we see Ute Grönwoldt from Germany, and then Jolanta Mol from Poland, and to the left Ruta Jociute from Lithuania.

During the meeting in Sodankylä, Birthe Zimmermann presented us her draft of a new small BSP textbook. This should be a textbook for BSP students in all the nine countries of the BSP.

Birthe's idea was: She was planning on a large international BSP conference to take place in Denmark in June 2000, which was 15 months ahead at the time when we met in Sodankylä. Birthe wanted all the people in the BSP to prepare for the Danish conference in June 2000. Her plan was: During that large conference in June 2000, together with all the teachers and students from everywhere in the BSP, she wanted to create something greater, and this is why she wanted everyone in the BSP to prepare for this conference. This is why we wrote a textbook in the coordinators conference in Sodankylä, 15 months before the large conference in Denmark. We got the textbook ready.

<Yellow Textbook Picture>

Here is the Textbook: Birthe got it printed in the summer of 99, and in autumn 1999 everyone in the BSP received this book, everyone in the BSP could prepare for the large conference to come in June 2000. What a great plan! What a great preparation! What a great process! I was deeply impressed when I saw this for the first time in Sodankylä.

<Sonderborg 2000 Picture>

The conference in Denmark in 2000 was outstanding, extremely fascinating, creating a "We" among the 350 participants, I was one of them, we all felt that we belonged together, we all felt that we were helping to work for a better future of our Baltic Sea region, we all felt we were doing something really good and valuable. Maybe this conference in Sonderborg in Denmark in 2000 was the best international conference I have ever seen. You might say I felt so because it was my first one, but I doubt it's just because of this. Sonderborg 2000 was awesome. One of the many results of this conference was that we, all the 350 BSP people in Sonderborg, created Baltic 21, an agenda for the Baltic Sea region for the 21st century. Moreover, Birthe made these results a book after the conference, a textbook for educators and students, a BSP Learners' Guide called "Baltic 21", published in 2003, still available on the BSP website, as well as articles about the fantastic conference in 2000 in Denmark, you can find these articles in the BSP Newsletters on the BSP website, everything is still there.

The conference in 2000 was not the first international BSP conference, and luckily it wasn't the last, it's just the opposite, it was followed by a large, large number of wonderful, outstanding international conferences in all nine BSP countries in all the years and until today. Three years before the Danish conference, in 1997, there had been the international conference "From Words to Action" in Nyköping, Sweden, another three years earlier there was "Save the Baltic Sea" in Karlskrona, also in Sweden, and the very first one, at least as far as I know, was "Schools working for the Baltic Sea" in Kotka in Finland in 1992.

This is taking us back to where the BSP comes from, where it was founded, this is taking us to Finland and to Liisa Jääskeläinen. Liisa made the idea of an international school project, uniting schools from all around the Baltic Sea come true in 1989. Since 1989 there has been a BSP, it's been thirty-one years now, and Liisa was the first BSP general coordinator.

<Green Map of BSP general coordinations>

In 1989, the map of Europe looked quite different from what it is today. There was no Lithuania, no Latvia and no Estonia, they were all part of the Soviet Union at that time, instead there were two Germanies.

The BSP has lived through many political changes, besides its smashing international conferences over the years it developed great programmes and many other activities students and teachers can work with, the latest ones are Global Citizenship Education and Citizen Science.

And in 1992 the general coordination, after its first three years in Finland, started to move around the Baltic Sea, counterclockwise, you can see it on this map.

From Finland it went to Sweden in 1992, where it stayed for five years until 1997, and then it moved on in three-year turns all around the Baltic Sea through Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Russia, all these countries served for three years as generally coordinating countries.

And then, in 2018, something happened that had not happened before. As the first country, Finland took over for a second time,

<Picture of Aira>

and this is why we have Aira, as the second Finnish BSP general coordinator, and if my estimation is correct, Finland is willing to serve for the full three years, so at least until 2021.

I feel very, very thankful for this. Thank you, dear Aira, Paula, Tiina, Elina, Jussi and all you others from Finland! You have been working hard for the current Finnish campaign that started in 2018, the BSP is doing very well, it is working and it is very innovative.

Here is my next thought: The BSP is more than its structure with its coordinators, programmes and conferences.

Here is another short story to illustrate this:

In the spring 2014 the BSP held a small conference, just coordinators and some teachers, from all the nine countries, in Copenhagen in Denmark. This small conference was about developing ideas on the future of the BSP and about fund raising. During one of the sessions we had a group work, being followed by a plenary session. In this plenary session my task was to present the results of the group work I had been a part of. I presented my results, I talked for maybe two or three minutes.

And here I would like to talk for a moment about Kersti.

<Picture of Kersti>

Kersti was the BSP general coordinator for a while, when it was Estonia's turn from 2012 to 2015.

At this moment, when I had presented my results, Kersti raised her hand and asked whether she would be allowed to give **her** version of the report. Kersti had attended the same group, she had been sitting two metres away from me during the group work. Kersti's report was different. In fact, it was totally different, you could very well get the impression it must have been another group where Kersti had been, not mine. But it wasn't. Kersti had attended the

same group as I at the same time. I had reported what I had thought was important. So had Kersti. Two reports from the same work group, emphasizing totally different aspects. Kersti and I, we are from different countries, Estonia and Germany, we are from different areas in the BSP, with different heritage, different age, different education, different culture, most probably in some fields very different thinking. And this applies for the entire BSP. Working internationally in the BSP means: working with differences, accepting differences, respecting differences, respecting each other as we are, nevertheless figuring out all the time what that is that we have in common, figuring out what that is that unites us and thus work on a common agenda. This is, and has always been, the key issue and at the same time the greatest challenge in the BSP.

And yes: Having many different people from so many – nine – nations in the Baltic Sea region working hard and laughing and eating and drinking and having fun together and in this way finding out all the time what they have in common, despite all differences, has always been and still is the key to the success of the BSP.

This leads to my last point:

<BSP-Map>

When Liisa Jääskeläinen founded the BSP in 1989, she followed the wonderful idea of bringing nations together that wouldn't sit in one place if we don't push this somehow. When Liisa and Finland did that in 1989, there was still the Iron Curtain across the Baltic Sea, dividing the world and also the Baltic Sea into East and West.

Already at that time, and until today, the BSP is more than a project of students and teachers and plants and animals and rivers and the Baltic Sea. It is also a peace project. It is a peace project, following the simple idea: People who know each other, people who have worked with each other, people who have had fun with each other probably don't shoot at each other. Yesterday, it was 81 years ago that my country, Germany, started World War II. I, as a German, born twenty years after World War II ended, feel deeply grateful for what has been possible since World War II ended, with Germany now being an accepted democratic country among friends, after all what Germans had done to so many in so many countries until 8 May, 1945. I feel extremely grateful for the peace we have been living in for a long time in most of Europe now. But: Today's peace is no guarantee for an everlasting peace in the future. And even more: 1945 is such a long time ago, that today's decision makers everywhere haven't experienced a war in their lifetime. This is a great success, 76 years, a lifetime of peace, longer than any time before in modern history, not everywhere, but in most of Europe.

Did you hear what Turkey and Greece talked about, on government level, a couple of days ago? They talked about the possibility of going on war, because of some offshore gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. They just talked about it, but they said "war".

To me, here lies another major task for the BSP in the future. It's not only down in the Mediterranean where peace could be at stake, some time in the future. It is our task to keep on building a culture of peace in the Baltic Sea region, in our region that has seen so many terrible conflicts and wars in the past.

<Årø Camp Picture>

This is a picture from the International BSP Camp on Årø in Denmark in 2017. Working for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea region through international cooperation and intercultural understanding is working for peace in the Baltic Sea Region.

And that's exactly why the delegation from South Korea joined the BSP summer conference in Damp in 2018. The UNESCO delegation from South Korea wanted to study an example of how an international school project can successfully work for education for sustainable development and for peace in a world area. It might happen that we will see a new international school project emerging in another world area: in East Asia, maybe lead by South Korea, with such countries as Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines. They might be taking us, the BSP, as a blueprint, as an example.

Or, with the words of one of the members of the South Korean delegation: What the Baltic Sea Project does, working with students and teachers, for sustainability, intercultural understanding and for peace, that's simply the best thing an international project can do.

Dear colleagues and friends in Finland, dear all, thank you for your commitment, thank you for being a part of the Baltic Sea Project.