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## Editorial

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This issue of the journal is thematic. It is part of the follow-up to the research forum of the Baltic University Programme, which took place in August 2020<sup>1</sup>.

A long-standing partner in the programme, the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University has assumed the role of a media outlet of the forum to publish the finest of its proceedings. Like the forum itself, the issue is devoted to sustainable development, as pursued in the Baltic Region.

The Baltic University Programme [1; 2] defines the Baltic Sea Region as countries in the catchment areas of rivers discharging into the namesake sea, including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Belarus. This definition follows the ecological approach based on the postulate that the quality of the Baltic Sea influenced the cleanness of rivers draining into the sea. Vital factors here are the environmental attitudes of people living in the area and the environmental laws in effect in their countries. A series of studies conducted under the aegis of the Baltic University Programme has extended the definition of the region to include not only its traditional constituents that have access to the Baltic Sea but also the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

Sustainable development is more than a mere combination of the ecological, economic and social dimensions. Sustainable approaches become effective only when underpinned by ethical principles. As early as 1987, the Brundtland Commission introduced the idea of sustainable development, presented in the Brundtland report. Three decades later, sustainable development is an established concept. Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region was approved in 1998 by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) of which the Russian Federation is a member<sup>2</sup>. The document lays down the principles of sustainable development for different sectors of the Baltic Sea economies. Recognized by all the countries of the region, this programme provides an institutional framework for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region.

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<sup>1</sup> Research and Innovation for a Sustainable Baltic Sea Region, 2020, *BUP Symposium 2020*, available at: <http://www.bupsymposium2020.se/> (accessed 10.05.2021).

<sup>2</sup> Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region, 1998, adopted at the 7th Ministerial Session of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Nyborg, June 22–23, *European Union – the United Nations*, available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/action/baltic.htm> (accessed 10.05.2021).

The 2030 Agenda, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, promotes sustainable development goals<sup>3</sup>. In the Baltic Sea Region, the 2030 Vision for the Baltic Sea Region<sup>4</sup>, supported by the CBSS, has categorized the 17 UN sustainability goals into six focus areas: sustainable and resilient cities, climate action, equality and social well-being, transition to a sustainable economy, quality education and life-long learning, and partnerships for sustainable development.

Articles in this issue concentrate on these six priorities.

Goran Roos, Natalia Kubina, and Yulia Farafonova (Roos G., Kubina, N. Ye., Farafonova, Y. Yu. 'Ensuring sustainable economic development of coastal areas of the Baltic Sea region in the context of digital transformation') demonstrate the dependence of sustainable economic development on openness to digital innovation. In coastal regions, the **transition to a sustainable economy** is also closely connected to blue economy sectors. The authors conclude that this transition requires digital infrastructure and conditions for new technologies to generate new products and services.

Tourism, one of the greenest industries, is the focus of the contribution by Larysa Satyr, Ruslana Zadorozhna, and Leonid Stadnik (Satyr, L. M., Zadorozhna, R. P., Stadnik, L. I. 'Statistical analysis of tourist flows between Ukraine and the Baltic Sea region countries in 2012–2019'). In investigating tourist flows between Ukraine and the Baltic region states, the authors emphasise an increase in the popularity among Ukrainians. This change affects demand for tourism services in the region and stimulates sustainable **economic cooperation**.

Anniya Apsite (Apsite, A. 'In search of a theoretical framework for factors influencing work and life balance') outlines an important determinant of the quality of life, which relates to sustainability in terms of a healthy society. Work and life balance has grown into a major problem during the pandemic when ubiquitous teleworking has changed the roles of stakeholders. For example, workplace and workflow management is not any more the sole responsibility of the employer, but the employee has to contribute their organisational talent as well. Remote working both brings about a shift in work-life balance and **contributes to more sustainable development of cities and communities**: lighter traffic levels mean a reduction in the use of fossil fuels and lower emission rates.

Varvara Altunina and Inobbat Alieva examine a national model of green financing and reveal the role of green investment in achieving sustainable development goals (Altunina, V. V. Alieva, I. A. 'Current trends in the development of a green finance system: methodology and practice). The authors focus on Russian institutions active in the market of climate bonds. The proceeds from the sale of such bonds to investors (governments, banks, municipalities, and corporations)

<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goals, 2020, *United Nations*, available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> (accessed 10.05.2021).

<sup>4</sup> Vision for the Baltic Sea Region 2030, 2018, *Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea*, available at: <https://vasab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Achievement-of-the-2030-Agenda-in-the-BSR.pdf> (accessed 10.05.2021).

are to be used for projects aimed at **climate conservation**, renewable energy, ecosystem support, energy conservation, a low-carbon economy, green transport, etc. Thus, green investment has a principal role in **climate protection**.

Problems caused by social disparities result in various forms of inequality and depopulation of rural regions. Even in the protected areas of coastal Lithuania with unique and diverse natural and cultural sites some villages are losing the population due to not developed social-economic infrastructure, lack of entrepreneurship skills, ecological education, and restrictions of farming and management. Daiva Verkulevičiūtė-Kriukienė, Angelija Bučienė, and Erika Čepienė from Klaipėda University look into this problem and propose ways to improve the situation by creating new jobs in a sustainable area such as rural tourism and suggest rethink the ecological restrictions. This solution is in line with the **'equality and social well-being'** priority (*Verkulevičiūtė-Kriukienė, D., Bučienė, A., Čepienė, E. 'The depopulation of rural coastal Lithuania: do regional parks stabilize the situation or not?'*). **Partnerships** are the key to attaining **sustainable development goals**. Cross-border cooperation programmes, which have been actively developing in the Baltic Sea Region, are a prime instrument of cooperation between the EU and Russia. Commitment to sustainable development is a principle laid down in all the programme documents. Some programmes identify the conservation of natural and cultural heritage as a priority. One of the projects run as part of the Russia-Lithuania 2014–2020 cross-border cooperation programme led to the development of a new ecological route — the Geological and Geomorphological Chronicle of the Baltic Sea Region. The collaborative use of the Curonian Spit, a UNESCO site, for ecological initiatives and tourism is a perfect example of a partnership for sustainable development. Aleksey Anokhin, Elena Kropinova, and Eduardas Spiriajevas analyze the project results (*Anokhin A. Yu., Kropinova E., Spiriajevas E. Development of geotourism based on the use of geoheritage (on the example of the Curonian Spit — a UNESCO site)*).

## References

1. Sörlin, S. A. 1997, *Sustainable Baltic Region. Session 1*, Uppsala, The Baltic University Programme, Uppsala University.
2. Ryden, L., Migula, P., Andersson, M. (eds.) 2003, Environmental Science, *The Baltic University publication*, available at: <https://www.balticuniv.uu.se/publications/text-books-and-publications/environmental-science/> (accessed 10.05.2021).

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