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Multilateral Call for Research Projects within the Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme

BONUS+

United efforts for sustainability in the Baltic

The Baltic Sea is home to one of the world's most unique ecosystems. Key research funding organisations from the eight EU Member States, along with the Russian Federation, have teamed up to work on the ERA-NET Plus project, BONUS+ (Multilateral Call for Research Projects within the Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme), to focus on the sea's future prosperity. Their goal is to introduce an ecosystem-based approach to environmental management. Once introduced, this will be a major first for the region, and is intended to contribute to long-term sustainable development in the region – an achievement in environmental protection, and an asset for each country that benefits from the resources of the Baltic Sea and its surrounds.

'The first ever joint effort of the research funding agencies from the Baltic Sea region.'

In one of the most ambitious projects the region has ever seen, the BONUS+ action has succeeded in uniting all the countries that border and gain most from the Baltic Sea. It promises to create the foundations of an environmental management system which will produce benefits not only in the short term but also for generations to come.

Even though it neighbours the Atlantic, the Baltic Sea possesses a very low saline level. This has resulted in the evolution of a very unique ecosystem which is populated by marine life that cannot be found elsewhere in the world. The Baltic Sea herring is one such fish; it is a major staple of the region and represents the livelihood of local fisheries. This major body of water also figures prominently in future tourism plans for the region, as sailing activities and other water-based events are envisioned for the future.

Need for action

The Baltic Sea's importance for the region cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, it has increasingly become more apparent that the ecosystem has been adversely affected by increased pressures, both manmade and naturally occurring. This has resulted in the reduced capacity of the Baltic Sea to provide the goods and services to which everyone has become accustomed. As a result of work conducted under the Sixth Framework Programme's (FP6) BONUS ERA-NET, its consortium hopes to reverse

this downward spiral of 'un-sustainability' through a Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme using an ecosystem-based approach to the environmental management of the Baltic Sea.

By introducing a holistic approach to environmental management, the partners hope to diminish marine pollution and its impact, improve maritime conservation, protect biodiversity, and tackle the effects of climate change. However, to introduce such a system effectively, it must overcome the age-old problem of 'the commons', a term used to describe areas in which there is no clear ownership or where ownership is divided among many people.

The BONUS+ action has overcome this problem by successfully uniting research funding organisations from all the countries that border the Baltic Sea. Together, they will start implementing their Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme. BONUS+ is designed as a bridging measure toward a possible joint European programme in the field of Baltic Sea research that could be implemented on the basis of Article 169 of the EC Treaty for the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region. These countries include eight Member States of the European Union (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden) as well as the Russian Federation. The commitment signals a significant breakthrough, and one in which common ground can be found and common action agreed upon. This is a goal the ERA-NET Plus scheme was designed to achieve. Developed under the Seventh Framework

BONUS+ ERA-NET Plus Action

Project reference: 217246

Research field

Sustainable development

Coordinator

- Baltic Organisations Network for Funding Science EEIG (Finland)

Partners

- FIRD (Finland)
- Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (Denmark)
- Estonian Science Foundation (Estonia)
- Agency for International Science and Technology Development Programmes (Lithuania)
- Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Sweden)
- Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning (Sweden)
- Latvian Academy of Sciences (Latvia)
- Foundation for the Development of Gdańsk University (Poland)
- Forschungszentrum Juelich Beteiligungsgesellschaft GmbH (Germany)
- Russian Foundation for Basic Research (Russia); not a member of EEIG but participates in BONUS+ call

'By combining the interests of environment protection and research and development, we have managed to drill holes into the walls of the traditional sectors of society.'

Programme (FP7), it aims to assist in structuring the European Research Area, enhance the scale of common European research efforts, and make borders less of a barrier.

A vision for sustainable development

To achieve the aims of BONUS+, the action opened a joint call for research projects which will focus on introducing an ecosystem approach to management of the Baltic Sea. All research conducted as part of this call will aim towards enhancing the understanding, analytical and predictive capacity of the Baltic Sea, and its ecosystem's response to impending changes. This will help researchers better understand the link between environmental problems and the social and economic dynamics in responding to them. In turn, this improved knowledge will form the basis for a precautionary management system which will safeguard the sustainable use of the ecosystem's goods and resources.

Proposals received as part of the joint call will focus on the seven key research themes described in the joint Baltic Sea research programme, as follows: linking science and policy, understanding climate change and geophysical forcing, combating eutrophication, achieving sustainable fisheries, protecting biodiversity, preventing pollution, and integrating ecosystem and society. Proposals which link themes, and which promise to carry out research in an interdisciplinary manner, will be given priority.

BONUS+ is a continuation of the networking of research funding agencies conducted during the BONUS ERA-NET action of FP6. In conducting the BONUS+ calls for research, the partners expect that the number of collaborating institutes will increase and further stimulate new research cooperation, particularly in the fields of the social and economic sciences. Perhaps more importantly, it will also be the first ever joint effort of the research funding agencies from the Baltic Sea region. This means going beyond simple collaboration to the development of a Baltic Sea research area.

Some of the results the consortium hopes to achieve include the creation of new environmental management approaches, tools and strategies. This may also lead to new and revolutionary solutions. One of the most innovative solutions BONUS+ could provide is to act as an example for other regional sea- and water-bodies. While scientific knowledge and measures created by BONUS+ will be specific to the Baltic Sea, good practice and measures devised here could be transferred or help inspire action elsewhere around the world.

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■ kaisa.kononen@bonuseeig.fi ■ **EC funding:** ca. EUR 7.3 million

■ **National Baltic funding:** ca. EUR 15.1 million ■ **Total budget of the BONUS +**

joint call: ca. EUR 22.5 million ■ **Duration:** 56 months

■ www.bonusportal.org

