



Documentation

Vibrant, Resilient, Well-connected – The Baltic Sea Region in 2040

Experts Conference on the updated VASAB Vision

Wismar (Germany), 01 June 2023

Presentations and further materials are available for download here: <https://vasab.org/event/experts-conference-on-the-updated-vasab-vision/>

This document summarises the results of the Experts Conference on the VASAB Vision for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region in 2040, which took place on 1 June 2023 in Wismar, Germany. The conference celebrated the completion of the VASAB Vision 2040. Policymakers, practitioners and researchers in the field of spatial planning and regional development came together to discuss what the updated VASAB Vision means for the Baltic Sea Region and how it can be turned into reality. The conference took place back-to-back with the adoption of the Vision 2040 by the Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development in the VASAB countries of the Baltic Sea Region on 2 June 2023. It complemented the Ministerial Conference by providing different practical and research perspectives and by highlighting what would be necessary for its implementation. Participants learnt more about projects and initiatives and had the opportunity to discuss, network and reflect on future initiatives. The expert conference and ministerial conference also marked the end of the German VASAB chairmanship 2022/2023.



Federal Ministry
for Housing, Urban Development
and Building



Federal Institute for
Research on Building, Urban Affairs
and Spatial Development



WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Welcome words

Vera Moosmayer, Deputy Director General for Urban Development and Spatial Planning, Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building, warmly welcomed all conference participants and informed about the conference programme. She highlighted the new and pressing challenges for the Baltic Sea region and praised the VASAB Vision 2040 establishing a positive perspective as well as a framework for sustainable and future-oriented growth linking the conference with the 9th VASAB Ministerial Conference on the next day.

Introduction by Moderator and who is in the room?

Hauke Siemen, REM Consult, moderator of the conference, shortly introduced conference objectives and invited all participants to take part in a Slido poll to get a better overview of participants. About a third of the participants represented national public authorities, followed by representatives from academia/research (around 25%) as well as regional public authorities and civil society organisations and pan-Baltic organisations (approx.10% each).

In terms of the level of involvement in the VASAB Vision 2040 the participants' experience differed, but the majority had some (active) level of involvement or at least read (parts) of the document (see below).

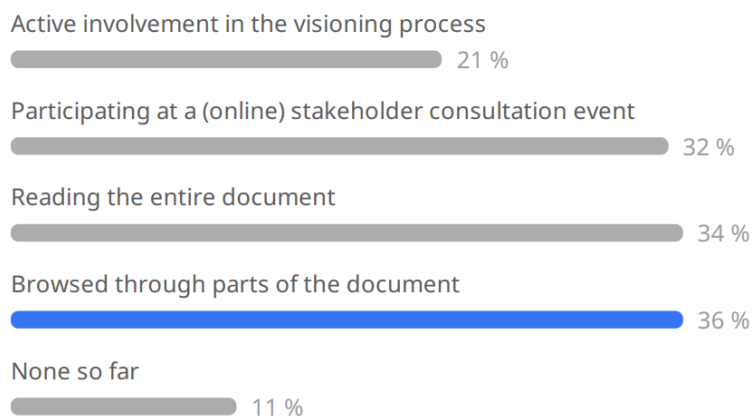


Fig. 1 Slido results: What is your level of involvement in the VASAB Vision 2040?

The VASAB Vision 2040

Kai Böhme, Spatial Foresight, and Luciane Aguiar Borges, Nordregio, the lead authors and researchers of the drafting process towards the VASAB Vision 2040, presented the core narrative and spirit of the document which is built along four metaphors: *Pearls*, *Strings*, *Patches* and *Systems*, representing the different territorial dimensions and stemming from the very first VASAB Vision from 1994 (entitled "VASAB 2010. Towards a Framework for Spatial Development in the Baltic Sea Region"). The Vision is informed by and sketched along an underlying contemporary territorial baseline and trend analysis – elaborated in the accompanying "Background Synthesis Report" – as well as a co-creation and stakeholder consultation process, which culminate in a Vision for each metaphor in 2040. These are in a nutshell:

Vibrant *Pearls* of all sizes.

Rural areas are the local pearls of the Baltic Sea Region. Small and medium-sized towns are the gears of the Baltic Sea Region. Green, blue and vibrant metropolitan areas characterise the Baltic Sea Region internationally by 2040.

Well-connected *Strings* between people and places.

The Baltic Sea Region offers sustainable, secure and balanced physical and virtual connectivity from the regional to the global level by 2040. Both goods and people transport benefit from efficient and sustainable transport networks connecting the Baltic Sea Region within and beyond by 2040. Sustainable maritime transport supports the integration across the Baltic Sea Region by 2040. Reliable, affordable, green and secure virtual connectivity is thriving in all parts of the Baltic Sea Region by 2040. Carbon neutral, decentralised, secure and independent energy in the Baltic Sea Region by 2040.

Resilient *Patches* of ecosystems and unique areas at sea and land.

Blue patches are at the heart of the Baltic Sea Region. A clean Baltic Sea Region is the reward of cooperation. *Green* patches are the lungs of the Baltic Sea Region. Their rich and healthy ecosystem ensure the longevity and livelihood of the region. *Tasty* patches are the 'breadbasket' of the Baltic Sea Region. Sustainable rural areas and regional food production are essential for all people in the region.

Cooperative sea and land planning *Systems*.

Planning systems are efficient, interoperable and communicate smoothly across systems on relevant developments, observations, measures and objectives.

Reflections on the VASAB Vision from spatial planning and research perspective

The introduction to the vision was followed by an exchange round with two researchers – **Prof. Jacek Zaucha, University of Gdańsk, Poland** and **Prof. Jörg Knieling, HafenCity University Hamburg, Germany** – and two representatives of the cities and regions of the Baltic Sea Region, **Paulina Szewczyk, City of Gdynia, UBC Planning Cities Commission** and **Mats Brandt, Ostrobothnia Region, Finland**.

After short statements about their personal and professional relationships with VASAB, Prof. Zaucha and Prof. Knieling were asked how they look upon the Vision 2040 and the influence it can have on the spatial development of the BSR from the perspective of a researcher. Prof. Zaucha highlighted that the enthusiasm from the past is needed, but at the same time avoid the buzzwords of that time. Prof. Knieling noted that the vision is very ambitious and that time changes very quickly, also during the visioning process, as shown by the military aggression towards Ukraine by the Russian Federation, supported by Belarus., For him, pursuing the vision is not possible without further

discussions about the related consequences of this on the vision, for instance in the field of energy; a disclaimer to exclude these countries in the beginning is not sufficient.

Asked about the practical relevance of a long-term vision for the Baltic Sea Region for the daily work of spatial planners in the cities and regions, Mats Brandt highlighted the importance of "resilience", a key term in the vision. For his region, an impactful driver for spatial development is the renewable energy production. Paulina Szewczyk acknowledged that the vision provides a common direction but remarked it may sometimes be somewhat forgotten, because of the many details that need to be respected during spatial planning processes. She called for VASAB to promote the vision and for cities and regions to implement it step by step and exchange experiences throughout the process. For this the new VASAB Planners forum focussing on spatial planning on land is promising.

Hauke Siemen then asked the audience via Slido to indicate where they see the most pressing for the future spatial development of the Baltic Sea Region, with following result:



Fig. 2 Slido results: What do you see as the most pressing challenge?

Further, participants were asked in which field they would see the highest likelihood that the vision is realised by 2040. This poll showed that participants most likely see potential when it comes to *Digitalisation* and *Secure and renewable energy supply* (multiple answers were possible, 49 participants):

- Digitalisation (51%)
- Secure and renewable energy supply (47%)
- High-speed transport connections (29%)
- Preservation of biodiversity in green and blue patches (27%)
- People-centred public services (22%)
- Circular economy (20%)

- Vibrant medium and small towns (20%)
- Climate neutrality (18%)
- Sustainable agriculture and food production (10%)

The panellists were asked to reflect on the poll results and offer their own perspective on the questions. Prof. Knieling wondered what impact VASAB could have for the future green transition. He highlighted that VASAB should not only focus on spatial, but also regional planning and development. Connecting regional and economic development, as for instance practiced within the STRING cooperation, could prove beneficial. Prof. Zaucha stressed the “fading image” of the EU and BSR in some places and the need to foster an uplifting “VASAB spirit”. Special attention should be given to peripheral areas and small towns, and digitalisation can help in this regard. Mats Brandt stated that to him, green transition and digitalisation go hand in hand. At the same time, other components and objectives, like social sustainability and biodiversity should also be kept in mind. Finally, Paulina Szewczyk noted that the biggest future challenge is uncertainty and that here is a need to be flexible and ready for changes.

To close the discussion the panellists were asked for their individual recommendations to the Ministries responsible for Spatial Planning and Development in the BSR and the VASAB Secretariat to ensure that the Vision 2040 does not remain a “daydream” but leads to meaningful action in the cities and regions of the BSR. The following have been mentioned:

- Provide clear targets as it facilitates discussions on regional level. Further, commitment for transborder transport connections is of great relevance.
- Have a stronger dialogue with small cities and equip *pearls* accordingly. Finally, there should put emphasis on promoting the Vision.
- Highlighting long-term and short-term goals. In that sense, a new [Wismar Declaration](#) is needed, but not exclusively on Ministers level but shared among the wider group of stakeholders.
- Mainstreaming and implementation on national and regional level as well as monitoring is needed. Further, regular conferences/events could stimulate the implementation of the Vision.

Making the VASAB Vision 2040 a reality

National stakeholder processes

Dr. Daniel Meltzian, Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building of Germany and **Tiina Tihlman, Ministry of the Environment of Finland**, briefly reported about the national stakeholder processes that were carried out to involve various relevant actors in the development of the vision. Overall, there was an inclusive and broad participatory process. In Germany a national advisory group has been established and workshops on national and BSR wide level took place. Further, there is a federal support scheme in place that also might foster the implementation.

Pearls and Patches

Patrycja Artymowska, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, Poland, member of the VASAB Committee for Spatial Planning and Development (CSPD/BSR), introduced two metaphors of the Vision - "pearls" and "patches". She highlighted the symbiosis of pearls – cities and towns with their economic, cultural and social function- and patches as places to relax and experience the natural richness of the Baltic Sea Region. Her introduction was followed by several presentations of currently ongoing projects that are contributing to the objectives laid down for the "pearls" and "patches" in the Vision:

- **Liveability** (Andrea Cederquist – Heinrich Böll Foundation)
- **Urban Testbeds.JR** (Jörg Knieling – HafenCity University Hamburg)
- **GreenIndustrialAreas** (Claudia Meier – Ministry of Economy, Infrastructure, Tourism and Labour Mecklenburg Vorpommern).
- Project snapshots via videos **BEACH-SOS** and **BaltSusBoating**

Patrycja Artymowska and **Eeva Rantama (Interreg BSR MA/JS)** as well as some participants from the audience reflected on the projects regarding pearls and patches and their potential contribution to a positive spatial development of the BSR. During this exchange round the following was mentioned:

- Many projects are not related exclusively to one metaphor, but to several of them.
- It is positive that there are many people-centred projects ongoing.
- For the future, it would be beneficial to see more projects addressing biodiversity as well as preservation of blue and green infrastructure (patches). The Interreg BSR programme will launch the 3rd call for proposals in early 2024 and would like to see applications on these topics, but Eeva Rantama noted due to depleted funds it might be a rather restricted call.
- The planned VASAB Planner Forum for land-based planning would be beneficial and bring added value.
- The durability and transferability of project results remains a topic of major importance.

Strings and Systems

In his Introduction to "systems" and "strings", **Talis Linkaits, former Minister of Transport Latvia**, reported that for him strings are closely linked to daily life (commuting, transport). In this regard, the Rail Baltica project which was already mentioned in the VASAB Vision 1994 will make a real difference. When it comes to strings, he emphasised that this also includes a feeling of friendship and networking, although the term is quite technical. Again, several presentations of projects related to these two metaphors followed:

- **BOWE2X** (Dàmir Belltheus Avdic – Institute for Climate Change, Energy and Mobility)
- **BalticSea2Land** (Màrtiņš Grels – Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia)
- Project snapshot: **Energy Equilibrium, UrbFrail, eMSP NBSR and PV4All**

In the following discussion round with representatives of the BOWE2H and BalticSea2Land projects as well as reflections from Talis Linkaits, **Ronald Lieske (Interreg BSR MA/JS)** and the audience, the following aspects were mentioned:

- Inviting young planners can be of added value.
- The Interreg BSR Programme can be seen as a "System" and as such, it can help fostering the implementation on local and regional level.
- Virtual strings are not really covered by project so far incl. digital services.
- "Systems" also include people, which are of most importance and should not be overlooked.
- 2040 is not that far away considering the lengthiness of planning processes.
- Keep an eye on "mental strings" fostering the spirit of the BSR as one single area.

The VASAB Vision 2040 and the EUSBSR – How to ensure interaction and synergies?

The conference continued with a panel discussion with **Dmitry Frank-Kamenetsky, HELCOM / PA Spatial Planning, Liene Dreimane, PA Energy, Tarmo Ots, PA Transport, Tom Schumacher, Baltic Sea Strategy Point** as panellists, **Liene Gaujeniete and Elina Veidemane, VASAB Secretariat / PA Spatial Planning** as moderators. The aim of the session was to share views on existing and potential linkages between the VASAB Vision 2040 and the EUSBSR and to discuss potential collaboration among networks of VASAB and EUSBSR in the future. In the beginning the panellists reported about their personal vision for the Baltic Sea Region in 2040 and most important developments and changes. Key points mentioned were:

- Autonomous shipping, transport, (e-)aviation on regional level
- Belonging together, join forces, "mental strings"
- Changing lifestyles and habits, think more about opportunities instead of challenges
- Clean and healthy BSR, common cultural pearl

Asked about linkages between the VASAB Vision and the EUSBSR and recognition among Policy Areas, Tom Schumacher stated that both documents include long-term objectives and there are institutional linkages between EUSBSR and VASAB. He also stressed that the EUSBSR has no own funds available but relies on other sources. In course of the panel discussion, it was also noted that it is of importance to consider connections with other Policy Areas and foster a structured dialogue and long-term cooperation in general. From the panellists' point of view, the following aspects could be common objectives and areas of cooperation for the VASAB Vision and the EUSBSR in the future:

- Planning for resilience,
- Biodiversity,
- Common tools (e.g. for MSP)
- Accessibility,
- Monitoring tools and
- Cross-sectoral thinking.

Wrap-up: Expectations to the Ministerial Conference

Before the conference closing, Hauke Siemen asked the audience via Slido how optimistic they are that the Baltic Sea Region will look as it is described in the Vision in 2040. On a scale 1-10, most participants are quite optimistic (see Fig. 3).

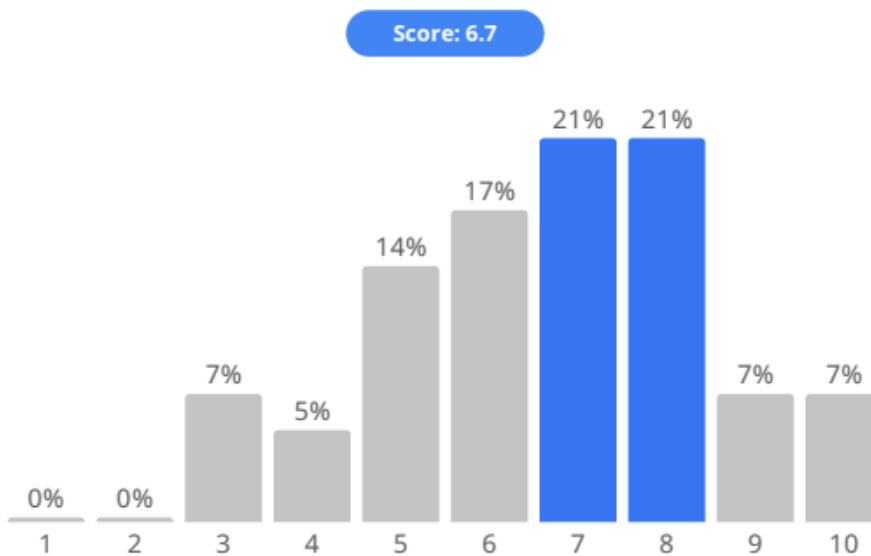


Fig. 3 Slido results: On a scale 1-10, how optimistic are you that the Baltic Sea Region will look as it is described in the Vision in 2040?

Afterwards **Prof. Dr. Rainer Danielzyk, Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association (ARL)**, rapporteur to the Ministerial conference, summed up the main take aways of the Experts conference. In his speech he focussed on two questions:

- How to implement the Vision, considering different kind of stakeholders and also rural areas?
- How could the Vision react to a changing world, including energy issues and climate change, demographic change (growing nationalism, regionalism, migration) and social challenges.

More flexibility, dynamics and changing foci are needed, containing “milieus” conducive for innovation, balancing competition and cooperation and be aware of social justice. Against this background, the VASAB Vision should not only focus on spatial planning, but also on regional planning/development.

Passing on the baton from Germany to Finland

Finally, Daniel Meltzian, Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building, Germany handed the VASAB chairmanship over to **Anna-Leena Seppälä, Head of the Land Use Unit in the Ministry of the Environment, Finland**, who will take over the VASAB chairmanship for the upcoming one and a half years. Some of the main themes for the Finish chairmanship will be security of energy supply and the promotion of the new planners’ forum for land-based planning.

Daniel Meltzian thanked all participants for their active contribution and invited to the guided tour through Wismar and a get-together dinner.

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