**Transcription of the Gullkrona podcast Feb 22, 2024**

**Hanken School of Economics**

**Sustainable Organizing in Time of Crisis**

**Jalmari**

Hi listeners, this is a podcast done for the Hanken course called Sustainable Organizing in times of crisis. The topic of this podcast is the Gullkrona Maritime Conservation Area in the Baltic Sea, and the organization is called Baltic Sea Action Group. For this podcast, we are a group of four with Tea, Ebba, Tim and Jalmari.

The Baltic Sea is a wide sea area surrounding Finland from East South Finnish Bay up to Bay of Bothnia up North. The Baltic Sea stretches all the way to the Atlantic. This wide sea area is important to Finland and especially natives in the archipelago. The beautiful archipelago is also for summer cottages, boating and day trips. The Baltic Sea is also important for moving goods, as the Baltic Sea is our main gateway for all import to Finland and export from Finland.

The Baltic Sea is the second largest inland sea in the world, characterized by brackish, where the salt level is lower than in oceans but higher than in freshwater lakes. The number of different species is low, and the size is generally smaller than in the larger oceans. Due to its characteristics the Baltic Sea is vulnerable to changes in the ecosystem.

The Gullkrona project is a new concept where individual participants have protected the water areas they own and with many of these individuals a large-scale protected area has been created.

Today we are talking with Anna Klemelä from the Baltic Sea Action Group about the Gullkrona project. The Gullkrona maritime conservation area is located in the Archipelago Sea, South of Turku city. This private conservation area is an example of how it is possible to protect and preserve marine biodiversity with a group of individuals who have the same goal.

Next, you will get to listen to the podcast between Tea and Anna, the project manager for the Gullkrona project, where many interesting aspects are brought to light.

**Tea (interviewer)**
Hi, Anna! It's great to have you here today with us talking to us about the Baltic Sea.

Could you tell us a bit about the Baltic Sea Action Group and introduce yourself?

**Anna (BSAG)**
Yes, thank you. My name is Anna Klemelä, and I work as a project manager at the Baltic Sea Action Group and my work focuses on protecting marine biodiversity.

BSAG is a Finnish non-profit organization, and we work to restore ecological balance in the Baltic Sea, and we do this by protecting marine biodiversity and also by promoting regenerative agriculture and advancing sustainable maritime traffic.

**Tea**
That's interesting. You are working with projects in the Baltic Sea, which is said to be one of the most polluted sea areas in the world. Could you tell us about your view on this; what is the state of the Baltic Sea and what problems is the sea facing?

**Anna**
The state of the Baltic Sea is not great, but I will also I want to add that it's significantly better than it would be, if we hadn't taken any action to save it, for example, by reducing nutrient loads. There has been for decades a lot of work done for the Baltic Sea and the state of the sea is better because of that. But it's not so great. Biggest threats at the moment are eutrophication and climate change, which are both sort of existential threats for the sea. But then there are also many humans induced direct pressures such as industry and traffic and things like that.

**Tea**
Why do you feel it's important to protect the Baltic Sea?

**Anna**

Firstly, because the sea and its ecosystems and species, they have intrinsic value, so they have value in themselves, and they sort of deserve to be protected just because of that. But secondly, the sea's processes such as like carbon sequestration, that affect us all as well here on dry land. The sea is not separate from our terrestrial ecosystems and also not separate from the atmosphere, so for example, a healthy sea acts as a carbon sink, but a degraded one is a carbon source that accelerates climate change. These things are all intertwined, that’s why protection of the Baltic Sea is a part of that.

**Tea**
You are working on a project called the Living Baltic Sea, which started in 2019. What can you tell us about this project?

**Anna**
For the background a bit, currently a large section of the most biodiverse underwater areas in the Baltic Sea are not protected and they are often located in privately owned water areas. Protecting them is important because underwater ecosystems face many of those human induced pressures that I mentioned earlier.

In the Living Baltic Sea project, we work in collaboration with landowners or sea area owners to bring their water areas under protection. We also want to highlight to the general public that the Baltic Sea is not dead or a lost cause or anything like that. Therefore, it's not futile to try to protect it.

**Tea**
As part of this Living Baltic Sea project there is a private maritime protection area called Gullkrona and this is the one, of course you refer to with these types of areas in your reply just a minute ago. Could you tell us about this Gullkrona project; how did it start then what it's about, and maybe the aim of the project?

**Anna**
The aim of the goal Gullkrona was firstly to protect this large water area, it had some great underwater nature values. It was important to bring that under protection, but secondly also to show that it's possible to do that in collaboration with the landowners who share the water area. There are 22 landowners in the Gullkrona Water area, and we began the process by contacting different environmental officials to find out if the nature values are indeed sufficient for an MPA, a marine protected area. Then we contacted all the landowners and asked about their opinions on how they feel about protecting the area and started the negotiation with the landowners. Those took nearly three years because an MPA requires restrictions on the use of the area and it's really important to negotiate those with the people who actually own the area and actually use it. So that's what took the longest and it was really carefully done.

**Tea**
Why in specific, did you choose Gullkrona area to become the marine protected area? You mentioned that it had this marine nature you wanted to protect, but why was it exactly this area?

**Anna**
The nature values were one reason, but also because the founders of our organization; the founders of BSAG, are part owners of the area. This gave us sort of an into the area and also this Gullkrona area is located next to other protected areas. This means that the Gullkrona MPA sort of connects them, and it creates a larger protected wholeness, so also the location was really great.

**Tea**
Could you then describe a bit of the marine life and ecosystems that are present in the area and what specific challenges do these ecosystems face?

**Anna**
There are these important underwater habitats, so reefs and underwater sandbanks and lagoons, and they have a lot of underwater life within them. Especially underwater sandbanks are threatened by mining because we are in need of sand in the world. So underwater mining is a big threat at the moment and dredging as well (it's “ruoppaus”in Finnish). It's a major threat to all underwater ecosystems. And then there are also many birds nesting in the area, and they are also included in the protection.

**Tea**
Are there any endangered key species in the area?

**Anna**
There is eelgrass, blue mussels, and bladder rack. None of those are endangered, but they are extremely important key species there. I'm not sure there could be, like, many endangered species in the area because, of course, the area is super large. It's 4800 hectares, so it's impossible to completely know everything that lives inside the area. There might be some endangered species as well, but our focus has been on those key species because they sort of hold up the entire ecosystem.

**Tea**
That's interesting to hear. Now let's talk a bit about the creation of the area. You mentioned earlier that there are a lot of different stakeholders involved in this. Could you tell us which specific stakeholders and communities were affected by the creation of the Gullkrona area?

**Anna**
There are those 22 landowners. They are in a way affected, but actually they are not affected that much, because we were able to negotiate the restrictions. For example, they are still allowed to maintain both harbors or docks or anything that they might need to do. So, they are still able to live in the area. There is the Gullkrona guest harbor in the area, but it already operates very sustainably, so they didn't really have to make any changes to their operations because of the MPA. Maybe the biggest effects are for people who might want to, for example, open a fish farm inside the area; it would not be allowed. It's more about preventing the sort of future endeavors that might endanger the area, so those are mostly affected.

**Tea**
How did you involve the stakeholders and the private landowners, authorities, and everyone in the establishment of the area?

**Anna**
We began like I said, with contacting the environmental officials. There's the Centre for Economic Development and Transport (ELY) and the Environmental Centre in Finland and the Finnish Forest and Wildlife Service (“Metsähallitus” in Finnish). We contacted them and then we actually sent letters for the landowners because many of them are old and don't use e-mail. We had to send these traditional letters by post, and we did that really early on. And then the restrictions in the area were made in collaboration with the landowners and the officials. Our role as BSAG, was acting as an initiator, but also sort of a facilitator and a translator between those landowners and those environmental administration administrators. That made the process a lot quicker than it would have been otherwise. And also, the landowners, they had to give their consent to establish the MPA. Without the landowners consent an MPA cannot be established in private areas.

**Tea**
Ok, so you had this kind of intermediate role in the consultation, but how did you talk with the landowners? Was there any resistance from them?

**Anna**
Yes, some of them were skeptical at first, but actually most of them were just really thrilled about the suggestion and they were really happy about it. But there were a few who were kind of skeptical and in large part this was because of some misunderstandings. For example, some of them thought that the MPAwould also include and limit access to their terrestrial property, like their islands, and that's not the case. And there was also maybe some general distrust towards environmental administration in general. But then when we just like started the negotiations and they understood that we are actually genuinely listening to them, and we want to hear about their thoughts, then also these misunderstandings were cleared. Everyone got on board after that.

**Tea**
And the project could start. What kind of partnerships and forms of cooperation have been crucial to the project implementation and how have they strengthened the work to help the Baltic Sea or Gullkrona in specific?

**Anna**
Cooperation between the landowners and the environmental officials has been maybe the most important one. It's something that is maybe a bit rare in Finland, that landowners often maybe have felt that they haven't been heard or they're not really listened to. Or that the officials don't really take them seriously or something like that. In this process, it was super important that there was this trust between everybody. Or it well, it wasn't at first, but then finally there was the trust that we are actually all working together, and we have the same goal.

And how has it strengthened the work to save the Baltic Sea? I think in the future, because this has also been a learning experience for everyone involved, we now know in the future how to do these projects more efficiently.

**Tea**
Can you find any challenges or opportunities that took place in implementing the Gullkrona area as a pilot?

**Anna**
One of the challenges was that this was all done during the COVID pandemic. That was also one of the reasons why it took so long because we couldn't hold any meetings and we couldn't really like see each other. And also, like I mentioned, when people don't use e-mail, then it's kind of difficult because we have to communicate by post. So those were kind of specific challenges.

But then also opportunities were like the way that the landowners reacted, the ones that were really on board from the beginning. It was wonderful to hear that protection isn't a bad word for everybody. So, they were really excited about it. And also, to see that it's possible to make people understand what you're trying to do. If you're just being clear enough and you just listen to them enough. That was also great to see.

**Tea**
That's wonderful to hear that you have had these positive experiences also about this and in meeting people.

Now we are getting into measuring the impact of the project and we would be interested to hear about your findings so far. How has the protected area contributed to conservation of the marine environment and ecology?

**Anna**
Well, like I said earlier, maybe one of the biggest ways that it has contributed is that it connects those other protected areas. The Gullkrona area, it was like sort of like a missing piece of a puzzle in that area. When we got it protected, it created this much larger whole. And it protects those key habitats such as reefs and underwater sandbanks and lagoons, which then are really important for many species. It also created this model for these private MPAs, and this is really needed to protect the seabed. Now we know how to do that, and we know how to get people involved.

**Tea**
Can you tell us a bit more how you are conducting monitoring and progress follow up of the protected area?

**Anna**
Monitoring MPAs is super difficult and really expensive because of these large underwater areas, the movement of water and nutrients that come with that water and everything. It's super difficult to measure, but we do have data on some of the key habitats and species in the area. There has been the Velmu program, which is by the Finnish Environmental Institute. They have conducted for 20 years now these studies in the Finnish marine areas to map out the key habitats and species. We have some data on the species that we have there. It's possible in the future then to compare this data and to make new mappings in the area to find out if the species still live there or if they have maybe expanded, which is of course what we hope that would happen.

And then we are also involved in this two-year project called Saari, that measures water quality in the protected area. It started last year (2023) and it continues for this year (2024), and it creates a baseline so that we now know what kind of water quality there was in the beginning of the protection and then hopefully we get more funding and we can continue those monitoring’s and then in the future this baseline can be utilized to see if there have been any major changes in the water quality of the area.

**Tea**
That would be interesting to see the results of it.

Could you also tell us a bit more how the corporation between BSAG, the Bank of Åland and the partnerships with sea area owners have developed since the Living Baltic Sea project started?

**Anna**
The Bank of Åland continues to finance our project and we also have new potential private MPAs that we are working on. So, the project continues. We also have some communication with the landowners in Gullkrona and one of them was actually in a panel discussion with us just a couple of days ago at Venemessut (Boat Fair in Helsinki). We also sort of use the landowners to talk about their experience, because that's also important if we want to encourage other landowners in the archipelago. They might be more inclined to listen to someone who's also a landowner from the archipelago rather than some project manager from Baltic Sea Action Group for example.

**Tea**
Yes, you might be right about that. Based on your experience with the Gullkrona conservation area, what are some key lessons that could be applied to also other conservation initiatives, maybe locally and also globally?

**Anna**
The most important one is to involve the landowners from the beginning and to really listen to them when planning the MPA and not just telling them that we will listen and then ignore what they have to say. To genuinely listen, because they often also have really valuable information about the area and they also know what types of restrictions are completely impossible, for example, if they have some boat harbor, something like that they need to upkeep, so they need to do some dredging in that specific area to arrive by boat on their islands for example. We need to know about that so that we don't like unintentionally create restrictions that are impossible to follow. And this apparently has been an issue also globally that when MPAs are established, the locals aren't really consulted enough. This of course also sort of results in resentment, and they don't really respect the protected area and also, they might be completely unable to follow the restrictions if they're not heard properly. So that's the biggest (lesson).

And then also maybe one of the lessons is people living in the archipelago, for example, are often pretty curious about what goes on under the water surface, because obviously we don't really see there. If we have any data or information about the habitats or species that live there, people are often really curious to hear about them. Also being able to give them that sort of it, it’s also makes it more understandable for them to see why this protection is needed and what lives there. It's easier to commit to the protection then.

**Tea**
Yes, to have a concrete goal.
How do you think the project will ensure long term sustainability?

**Anna**
I'm not sure if I understand the question, but well, the protected area is protected, sort of like forever so that's kind of long term also. Of course, because of the restrictions it means, that there cannot be any future mines or these major building projects in the area or anything like that.

**Tea**
Yes, I think that was something we were we were looking for correctly understood.

Do you see the Gullkrona project to become a flagship project for other future projects and or are there any future projects in creation right now?

**Anna**
Yes, definitely one of the goals of the pilot was also that it can be a flagship and it can be an example for others. And we have utilized it pretty much and there are also future projects in creation. At the moment we are in the final stages of establishing a private MPA to Inkoo archipelago and it's done in collaboration with the Inkoo Congregation, the local church that owns the area. And then we also have a few other areas we are working with, but they are really at the early stages. I can't really name them right now, but the Inkoo is called Stora Fagerö, and it's going to be the next one.

**Tea**
That's interesting. How would you advise for local people or individuals or communities to get involved in this kind of conservation project or protecting biodiversity in the marine environment? Can you give us any examples?

**Anna**
If they own water areas then of course I would advise them to contact BSAG so we can check into it and see if it could be a protected area. Also, municipalities and cities can own water areas and they can also establish these protected areas. As a citizen you can also sort of pressure the decision makers to establish MPAs.

Dredging like I mentioned it earlier, it's one of the biggest threats for underwater biodiversity. Currently at the coastline, dredging is done at such large volumes that I find it hard to believe that all of it is completely necessary. Sometimes it’s really necessary, and that's fine. But I would encourage people to maybe think a bit if there are any alternatives to dredging or is it done just because it has always been done; is it really needed.

And then all kinds of like if you're a sailor or a boater to act responsibly at sea and also, don't throw trash at sea and things like that.

**Tea**
So really simple things also count.

I would have one more question. The Baltic Sea is a big sea area and it's surrounded by a lot of countries. How do you see that this project can have an impact on the other countries, or has it been influential to the other countries? How do you see the other country’s role in this?

**Anna**
Finland is sort of unique in the sense that we have so much privately owned water areas. Apparently, that's really uncommon in other countries, so the living Baltic Sea project for that reason, it's really like Finland specific because it operates within like because we have this anomaly here of private ownership of the sea. I don't think it doesn't really directly work then in other countries. But of course,MPAsare, in general they are a thing everywhere and in Finland. Because of the Velmu program, we have this really great data about our underwater sea life. It would be great if other countries could maybe do something similar, because it's a lot easier to establish MPAs and to sort of locate them correctly if we know what lives underwater. That's maybe the first step that other countries could do.

**Tea**
This is really interesting, and I would like to thank you Anna, for this conversation, for taking the time to talk with us about the Baltic Sea and Gullkrona and also the Baltic Sea Action Group.

I would also like to thank all of our listeners and for joining this podcast. Thank you!

**Anna**
Thank you for having me.