



Short story of the Friends of Bothnian Sea National Park Association, Finland

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Maritime national park as the multifunctional playground

The Friends of Bothnian Sea NP was founded in 2013 as a supportive society for new Bothnian Sea NP in Finland. This NP was young then, founded in 2011 according a special law, number 37 in the network of 39 National Parks in Finland. The park is large, 91 200 hectares in size, lying in the south-west coast Finland. The park consists mostly of the sea bottom with 1500 hectares of islands and some capes on the continent. The park is the first in Finland, which truly tries to protect the biodiversity in the sea and the geological formations under the water.



Picture 1a and b. Park is the dark blue sea area within the Bothnian Sea and municipal borderlines. Map: Metsähallitus and National Land Survey of Finland.

Bothnian Sea NP is spreading over eight municipalities and two provincial regions. It is the playground of hundreds of SMEs and different specified associations and societies. Thousands of sailors, fishermen, ornithologists, divers and summer cottage dwellers visit the park annually. Nature and culture oriented tourism is gradually rising. The main part of the 20 different docks, harbours and service areas for tourism are on the continental villages outside the park. In the park itself the visitor may find a lot of rocky sailing routes, some fireplaces with or without fuelwood, some open huts for fishermen and a lot of migratory birds and fishing opportunities. This park has a realistic maritime profile. There are also free opportunities for professional fishermen and four hunting areas for seabird hunting in the special hunting season.

The Bothnian Sea NP was designated according to a regional initiative to meet the idea for developing the maritime parks network. The national park status was established by the law since in 2011. The plan for the park has been produced in a large participatory process in 2012-2014. The Park has no visitor centre, but it has connections to The Ark Nature Centre (regional Museum of Natural History in Pori) and several local and municipal info-points.



Picture 2. The common sea-buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) grows strongly in the islands of the Bothnian Sea NP. Local people pick the yellow berries, which have high content in vitamin C. In some coastline villages the berry has enabled extra earnings.
Photo: Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland.

The Friends grow out of the sea

The Bothnian Sea Friends have attracted some 20 private persons, three other societies and one regional council within the membership. One SME also has membership connection to the Friends.



Picture 3. Seaside recreationists and fishermen need safe harbours and docks and properly marked water routes. These are included in plan for the park. But the necessary resources to realise those plans are still missing. This creates opportunities for positive lobby for the Friends Association.
Photo: Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland.



Picture 4. The Friends of Bothnian Sea Association was founded soon after the Park in 2013. The founding meeting attracted 16 persons from different parts of the park, seniors and students, fishermen, summer cottage dwellers, seaside businesses and scientists. This core team has continued since then organising volunteering projects, cultural events, networking meetings etc. Photo: Lasse Lovén.



Picture 5. The mutual partnership commitment with the Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland was signed at the end of the year 2013 in the information centre of the World Heritage site of the Old Rauma. Photo: Lasse Lovén.

Renovation of a fishermen's hut 2014

In the Bothnian Sea NP lie several old huts, which fishermen have built and used mostly in the mid-18th century. The huts rarely have building licences and sometimes nobody even knows, who owns them today. One of these old fishermen's huts stands in a small isle called Idän Rähkä, less than 3000 m² in size, rising from the sea on the area where the land lift is still some 70 cm in 100 years. The Friends participated as volunteers in the renovation project organised by the Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife, Finland, in summer 2014. Now the small hut can stay on the small isle another 50 years as a symbolic memento of the local fishing culture. After that, another seaside hermit's hut is waiting for renovation actions. (All three photos on this page by Jan Eerala).



Renovation of two docks in Bothnian Sea National Park in 2015

The Friends helped the park manager in another renovation project in 2015. Two docks on Seliskeri island were damaged during winter. The park manager had not enough resources in the budget to make the necessary renovations. The park manager could offer only some 25 % of the estimated real costs for the project. On the same time a large scale marine industrial company was seeking a favourable target to make a small donation from their security project savings. But they could not give that support to the park manager, who represented government's agency for the park management. The Friends Association offered to organise the Seliskeri dock renovation as a volunteering project, if the marine industry would make a donation, which was necessary to cover the costs of the service ferry, cranes and the material needed for new anchors and timber constructions. After short negotiations the Friends could receive 10 000 € donation to cover the costs of the service ferry and anchoring materials, and in addition also two local sea-service enterprises were willing to support the Friends with labour, which was estimated to be on the same level than the first donation in cash. (Photo 1: Metsähallitus-Anssi Riihiaho, Photos 2 and 3: Lasse Lovén)



Photo1



Photo2



Photo3

Project on fishermen culture in 2014-2015

After the fishermen's hut renovation the association had an opportunity to join to another project task with Metsähallitus that would dig deeper to the tales and stories of the fishermen using that hut or those islands and shallow sea-bottom for fishing. Most of the old stories had disappeared with the fishermen who had passed away during the last 20 years. However, four fishermen were found in and nearby the Makholma fisher's village. They were interviewed with a digital voice recorder, their stories written in their dialect, a dictionary was compiled of their special vocabulary and place names and a map was created on Google Map application showing their fishing spots and the names of the special points of interest.

This fishing culture project was a real success. Main reports were published in the Friend's home pages (<http://www.selkamerenystavat.fi/joomla/index.php/design2/16-tietokanta/tutkimusjulkaisut/50-tutkimusjulkaisut>) and all the collected data was given to the local museum. Everything was done to honour the old fishermen. The Friends did all the work as volunteers, some 300 hours altogether. The Friends could get the travel costs covered up to 500 € and this was just enough for the running costs.

The fishermen project gave the Friends plenty of positive publicity in the local media. Half a year later the association was contacted by another fishermen village on the national park shoreline. Now, a new project is starting there in Merikarvia, with local partners from Cultural Heritage Society and fishermen's clubs and 70 % funding from EU/LEADER funds to cover the travel costs and some months work for data collection up to 12 000 €.



Photo: Museum of Satakunta Province. Graphical development by Jan Eerala.

Map: Published with Google Maps application with fishermen's sites and names of the places collected by the Friends of Bothnian Sea NP.

<https://www.google.fi/maps/@61.5198218,21.2897231,48569m/data=!3m2!1e3!4b1!4m2!6m1!1szoa2E8oITAuQ.k1Jo0syPZzuk?hl=fi>



The Bothnian Sea is the most important herring (*Clupea harengus membras*) fishing reserve in Finland.

Photo: <https://fi.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silakka#/media/Tiedosto%3AR%C3%A4im.JPG>.

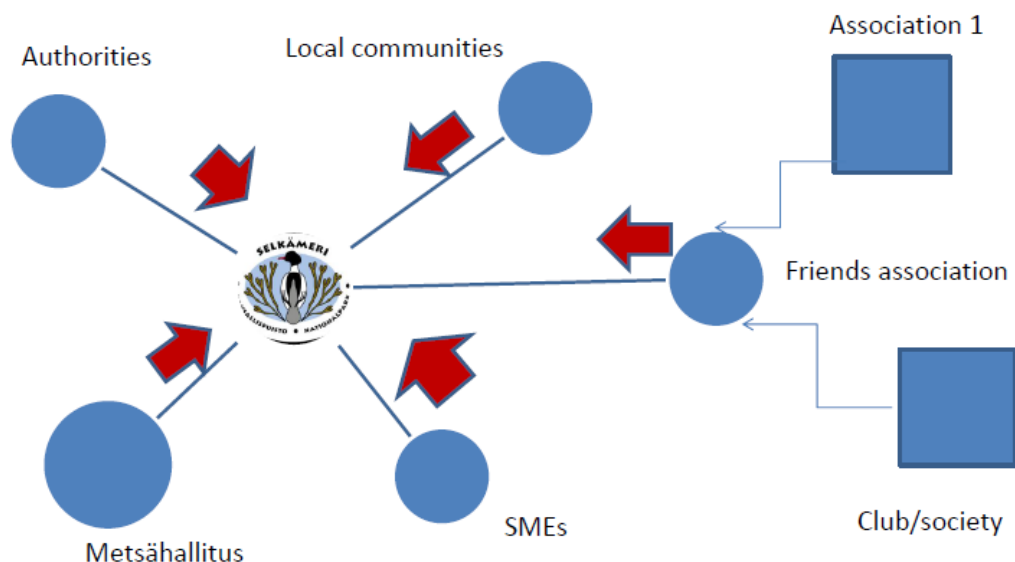
Developing the partnership model in Bothnian Sea NP

In a multifunctional large and new national park the models for organising effective partnerships are not available properly tested and ready. Metsähallitus as the park manager is constantly developing such partnership models, which may be economical, practical and functional and can be accepted also by the partners. Only after a while the reality shows if they are successful. The diversity blooms also in the groups of possible partners. There are other national, regional and local administrations, large industry for export and energy production, maritime industry, SMEs, research and education institutes, tourism business and several 3rd sector associations and societies, not to mention the local clubs, which have no legal body but may organise effective lobby pro or against the park management, when necessary.

The Friends Association related itself in the beginning to a group of pro-societies in the 3rd sector. Together with Metsähallitus a regional Network seminar was organised in the beginning of 2014, where all the possible 3rd sector associations and such seaside SMEs, who already made co-operation with the park or were interested to develop that activity were invited. More than 100 invitations were delivered. In the meeting about 30 different associations and SMEs were actively participating and developing thematic development plans for better networking and partnership actions for the future.

The Friends developed the following structure for the later organisation of the 3rd sector partnerships with the park manager. There the Friends Association acts as an information channel for the others transferring info to both directions; from associations to the park and other way around. This may help the park manager to concentrate more on practical management and project development,

when getting volunteering help for external communication. Later on, also the SMEs could develop similar communication channel for themselves. This model was also accepted by the other associations after the network meeting. In the beginning, the Friends got three other associations and one SME within its membership. Also one provincial region supported the idea with applying supportive membership without vote.



Picture: Friends' role in the proposed partnership model for the 3rd sector in Bothnian Sea NP.

After the first years' experience the model is functioning well. The Friends have now a web page and a Facebook account with 300 thumbs. The Friends deliver all the updates, which are coming from its member associations to the followers in the social media. The most popular posts have received almost 700 readers, while the number of the paying members is still some 25. This shows that the new channel for information is really important for developing positive actions for the national park.

How to proceed in developing the partnership with the national park and the network

During the first two years in the life cycle of the Friends of Bothnian Sea NP we have identified the following key points to be understood or solved to organise partnerships for better adaptation to the local and regional needs and expectations.

The strategic conservation and exceptions:

- National park is a tool for regional development – when well-organised it may bring visibility and positive awareness to the region also on the international level via marine park network.
- Fishermen with cultural reasoning as a priority in addition to four controlled hunting regimes in the national park mitigate the local conflicts in the young national park and support sustainable economy in region.

Better networking

- We need a new tool for effective virtual network meetings to save the environment and travel costs. The associations cannot afford to cover the running costs of face-to-face networking.
- When seeking international visibility and attractiveness to the park region we need better contacts and practical networking also outside the national park region. EUROPARC could provide proper platform for that development. We need to develop English version of Friends' homepage.
- Information channel connecting SMEs and 3rd sector needed.

Practical actions

- We may organise actions and events for youth and seniors, even for the refugees; volunteering in many versions.
- We may develop databank and research ideas to schools and universities.
- We may develop environmental education programs and awareness rising events for public.



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