Since 2007 BalticSea2020 has been supporting Folke Rydén and Mattias Klum in the decade-long initiative Baltic Sea Media Project. The project will result in five documentaries by the journalist and documentary filmmaker Folke Rydén and two nature films by the photographer and filmmaker Mattias Klum. Folke Rydén has so far produced four documentaries - "For Cod's Sake", "The Second Wave", "Dirty Waters" and most recently "Shipping Pollution". Folke is currently working on the last film: "Baltic Sea: Closure", which will air in mid-2019. After portraying the Baltic Sea’s problems and opportunities for over ten years, Folke gives us his view on the sea’s future and how his journey has been.

Last time we met Folke was when the documentary "Shipping Pollution" was released - a film about the environmental impact of shipping on the Baltic Sea, a problem that was not well known. Today, three years later, a lot has happened.

- The film covered two aspects of shipping: emissions of noxious gases and emission of so-called black water. Black water is wastewater from the vessels’ toilets - simply dumping of toilet waste into the sea. In Sweden, we got a lot of attention regarding the issue of emissions of black water. The TV program Agenda showed a longer excerpt from the film and an interview with the responsible minister which was followed up by Agenda making its own factual review of the minister’s statement.

But the documentary also received attention internationally. It was shown in Norway, Finland, Estonia and Latvia. Folke believes that the public opinion has contributed to the adoption of the IMO (International Maritime Organization) ban on black water emissions in the Baltic Sea, which will be implemented for new vessels in 2021.

- Regulations have also been introduced to reduce carbon dioxide and sulfur emissions from shipping. It’s amazing that things can be changed! I do not mean that the film had any direct impact except to highlight the problem, but it’s nice to follow a matter and see a positive development.

Right now, Folke is in the process of filming the last documentary within in the media project. Time has flown by since the project started, but he still feels that it is as meaningful today as it felt back in 2007.
- The documentaries have had more effect than I initially thought, both in terms of political action and active decisions. "For Cod’s Sake" contributed to an opinion to introduce the discard ban (ban against discarding of unwanted catches back into the sea). "Dirty Waters" led directly to that the chicken and pig farms in the documentary introduced measures to reduce their emissions to the Baltic Sea. "The Second Wave", which describes environmental pollutants and how they are transferred from mother to child, led to a study on infants. So, all the films contributed to something, in bigger extent than I could have hoped for.

Folke says that, on a private level, the project has also opened his eyes for the Baltic Sea. Even though he grew up in the Stockholm area, he did not feel a strong connection to the Baltic Sea until the project started.

- I have discovered a brand new amazing, fascinating and beautiful part of our environment. It has been incredible rewarding. It has also been interesting to work with these issues. Me and Mattias Klum made a movie a few years ago where we traveled around the world and highlighted environmental problems. During the trip, we began to question why we went to the other side of the planet to point out to the Malaysian government that they shouldn’t cut down the rainforest when we have problems in our own back yard. It was an important lesson for me.

The media project also differs from other projects that Folke has been working on over the years. Due to the long-term nature of the project there have been continuity that is not always easy to get as a journalist. Folke believes that this has partly contributed to the success of the documentaries.

A challenge during the project, where time was key, was to create trust with the different people we meet in the documentaries, explains Folke. In "For Cod’s Sake", we meet fishermen, scientists and politicians. But it was not easy to find people from the three professions willing to participate in the documentary.

- Fishermen often feel that they do not get their voices heard or that their opinion is skewed in the media, which means they prefer not to participate. Scientists think that the issue is too complex and that media simplifies it and avoids us for that reason. And politicians do not want to touch the subject with a ten-foot pole.

Time was crucial. Folke and his team were patient and with time trust was created. Having time is also vital in other respects.

- Recently we went out and filmed seals. We had a window of two days when the ice and weather conditions allowed us to reach the location. We have been waiting for it for several years and now the chance came, it was incredible!

Photo: Mattias Klum
The filming of seals is part of the last documentary in the media project - “Baltic Sea: Closure”.

- We return to the people and the environments we have visited in the previous documentaries to see what has happened. We are revisit the fishing trawlers from “For Cod’s Sake”, now another skipper has taken over, but he fishes in the same water with the same boat. And we’ll meet Cecilia, the mother who gave birth to Alfred, and all of the other women who participated in “The Second Wave”. We will visit the chicken and pig farms which now have functional sewage treatment and also revisit the issues regarding shipping.

Folke also believes that the environmental problems that we can affect will only get better, for example emissions of environmental pollutants, release of nutrients into the sea and shipping emissions.

- Change takes time, but the awareness and willingness of fellow citizens is increasing all the time and actions are being taken. In that respect I am very hopeful! But you have to keep two things in mind at the same time – even though things get better all is not good and new problems can also emerge.

Climate change is something Folke believes will have major consequences on the Baltic Sea. We will have a different ocean in the future, but exactly how different is hard to say.

Even though the media project ends in 2019, Folke will not abandon the Baltic Sea.

- The project has given me the opportunity to travel around and talk about the Baltic Sea. There is a great interest in my and Mattias Klum's story - why we chose to do this project, what has happened since the start of the project and the state of the Baltic Sea. I think that will continue. Then there have been a lot of spin-offs. We have made films on environmental issues that are not linked to the media project, for example, we have made a documentary on plastics in the ocean and another one about how contraceptives affect fish stocks in a Canadian lake.

We believe and hope that we will see more of Folke in a Baltic Sea context. Because one thing is certain, his dedication for the ocean is at least as strong now as it was ten years ago.

You can watch the trailer for the documentary “Baltic Sea: Closure” on www.ourbalticsea.com.

To watch all of Folke’s documentaries produced within The Baltic Sea Media Project, please visit http://balticsea2020.org/english/alla-projekt/information.

Are you a teacher? You can find all the films and study material on http://balticsea2020.org/english/study-guides.