Study investigates what the Living Coasts project means to the community

BalticSea2020’s major coastal zone project, Living Coasts, will provide information about how Baltic bays can be restored and regain good ecological status. The measures to be carried out as part of the project do entail costs, but can also bring benefits associated with an improved water environment. In the evaluation study “Measures for living coasts – how does the community benefit?”, the environmental economists Kajsa Johansson and Tore Söderqvist from Enveco Environmental Economics Consultancy Ltd examine the benefits and consequences of the measures taken in the Living Coasts project for people with links to the study areas of Björnöfjärden, Säbyviken and Torpe-Infjärden.

Tore Söderqvist is a docent in Economics, specialising in environmental issues and Chairman of the Board at Enveco, and has worked as an environmental economist for more than 20 years, of which the last eight have been at Enveco. Last summer he came into contact with Kajsa Johansson, who was doing her degree project at the County Administrative Board of Stockholm. After graduating with a degree in Economics, specialising in the environment and natural resources, from the University of Birmingham (UK), Kajsa started work as an environmental economist at Enveco in the autumn, working with Tore Söderqvist on the “Measures for living coasts – how does the community benefit?” study. As the name of the study implies, they will investigate the value of the Living Coasts project.

- I’ve seen the changes in the Baltic myself. That’s what makes it interesting to evaluate – what the decline has really cost society and what the benefits would be if it went back to how it was before. Many people talk about what it would be like if the Baltic went back to the way it was in the 1950s, and what the benefits would be, says Kajsa Johansson.

Enveco works with investigation, research and education in environmental and ecological economics. Their speciality is financial assessment of the environment. In this study, the task of the environmental economist is to investigate the ways in which it is worth improving the marine environment. To find this out, Kajsa and Tore look at what the marine ecosystem means to society by investigating the economic value of better water and better coasts to various stakeholders.

- Actually, we don’t often have the opportunity to really go in-depth in an evaluation study. Here, we’ll be meeting all the potential stakeholders that are involved in the Living Coasts project area. It’s therefore an unusually in-depth investigation of how the various stakeholders are affected by a better water environment. That is what makes this so interesting, says Tore Söderqvist.

Survey of benefits and consequences

The study, which started during the summer, is in its first phase; Kajsa and Tore are currently surveying
what stakeholders consider of value in the Living Coasts project, i.e. the benefits generated by the project and its actions. The people with links to the study area can be divided into four main categories: business people, permanent or holiday residents, sailors, and other visitors. These are surveyed either through written questionnaires, phone interviews, on-site interviews or through open meetings. The first questionnaire at the bay system was undertaken last summer, with the aim of interviewing visitors. Another one will be conducted in Stockholm Municipality, because last summer’s survey showed that many visitors to the bay came from the Stockholm area.

In October, Kajsa and Tore organised an open meeting in Brunns School in Värmdö for residents’ associations and boat clubs, so that they and Linda Kumblad, project manager for Living Coasts, could provide information about what the Living Coasts project aims to achieve. Between 12 and 15 associations came to the meeting and Kajsa and Tore had the chance to meet a number of representatives to talk about what they associated with a good water environment.

- Many different types of benefit were brought up at the meeting, both directly and indirectly. But it was also clear that there is an existence value in improving the water environment. Many people had historic ties to the area, they had grown up there or lived there for a very long time, says Kajsa Johansson.

- All the interviews in the study are conducted by Kajsa; so far she has completed four. The people Kajsa has met so far have told different stories; one person she interviewed has long had contact with the bay system, for a number of decades, and he could describe what the bay used to look like and how it has changed over time. Another stakeholder was new to the area and hadn't previously spent time there before establishing a business, so instead made contemporary observations.

- This study is about investigating a range of people’s impressions of the Living Coasts project. Their impressions can also indicate their ideas about improvements, or which benefits don’t actually correspond to those that we expect the Living Coasts project to lead to. This can have great significance to the degree to which people feel that the improvements the Living Coasts project wants to achieve are motivated, says Tore Söderqvist.

- This is a classic approach, though the different stages can be described in different ways, but in principle this is what authorities do to determine what is appropriate in various action programmes. What can be seen in practice is that is unusual that there is time for the types of supporting efforts among stakeholders that are being made in this study. When authorities conduct impact assessments there is usually more time pressure and it can be difficult to do everything well, says Tore Söderqvist.

- Because we are able to go in-depth with various stakeholders we can expect an unusually solid foundation as regards benefits to stakeholders in the study area, which we can then weigh against the costs of the measures taken, says Tore Söderqvist.

- One way we describe it is well-supported. What we mean is that the cost-benefit analysis can be thorough and hopefully very useful to Living Coasts, says Tore Söderqvist.

- In order for the study to gain an accurate picture as possible, it takes into account all the benefits that individuals, groups and other stakeholders experience through the Living Coasts action programme. Phase I is expected to be completed by the end of the year, when the study’s initial conclusions will be presented. The study will be able to present its final results in 2013 at the earliest, with the ultimate aim of evaluating what the Living Coasts project entails in financial measures, i.e. whether the Living Coasts project is worth the money.

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