



## **Interview with Award Winner Olga Senova, head of Friends of the Baltic NGO** 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2019

### **Briefly tell about yourself. What road have you travelled to get where you are now?**

Until 1991 I have been working as a scientist, and one of my most important hobby was nature tourism with family and friends – boating, cycling, mountain hiking.

After the crash of the Soviet Union when many scientific institutions were destroyed I've decided to apply my hobby experience to professional work - in the Youth Environmental Tourism Center in the small town Lomonosov on the Gulf of Finland coast. It was a symbolic decision, which turned my life more close to Baltic Sea environment and nature protection activism.

We made the environmental trips along the Gulf coast and rivers with youngsters, and one day we came to the source of the small Karasta river, which flows to the Gulf in our town. We have seen the clean spring in the forest, so different of the dirty river in its low stream in the town – and sitting at the fair in the evening we have decided to help our river and establish public organization - its first name was Children of the Baltic – after some years we have decided that we are doing serious work for rivers and the Baltic Sea conservation, and we have grown up enough – then renamed our organization to Friends of the Baltic.

Now we have 22 years old organization “Friends of the Baltic” which consist of more than 30 local environmental groups active in River Watch and other environmental work. Friends of the Baltic NGO manages regional, national and international projects on the Baltic Sea, climate and energy, green consumerism, etc. Since 2000 Friends of the Baltic is a member of Coalition Clean Baltic

I am also the coordinator of the CCB River Basin and Waste Water Management Working Group and develop the Public River Watch methods; organizes experience exchange of NGO activists and local stakeholders on the solutions to prevent human negative impact to the Baltic Sea, develops several projects, devoted to the Baltic Sea conservation. Here are some examples:

- Public information center on green solutions, established in St. Petersburg in 2007. It works up to present time, attracting annually hundreds citizens, schoolkids, students, teachers to learn about the Baltic Sea, environmental challenges and examples on local sustainable solutions.
- Rus-Fin-Est bicycle tours as a “Moving environmental conference” organized during several years (2000-2013): around the Gulf of Finland (2004-2005), lake Peipsi (2006) and Ladoga lake (2007) - to meet local people and learn their concern about the Baltic Sea, exchange NGO experience in nature protection work and together attract attention of local authorities and residents to local hot spots and opportunities for good solutions.
- Developed Ecosupport system in St. Petersburg in cooperation with Finland – education kit on eco-solutions for schools and offices prepared, 87 eco-advisers trained in 2013-2015 - they work and disseminate experience until now.
- International manual for Public River Watch elaborated (in 2015, update in 2018 with new issue of marine litter and microplastic), tens Coalition Clean Baltic member organizations and partners in all Baltic Sea countries use it in practice.
- Promotion of small-scale solutions to reduce nutrient load to the Baltic sea – dry toilets - 4 pilot demonstration sites in Leningrad oblast established in 2016-2018 to attract people



attention to this simple and ecofriendly way for nutrient recycling in the households and local communities – more than 1000 visitors.

- Involvement local citizens on the South shore of the Gulf of Finland to public river watch, and motivating them for actions to reduce nutrient pollution from agriculture and household wastewater through consultations, seminars, local information actions and study trips – more than 1500 residents, farmers, NGO activists involved.

### **What has been your driving force, inspiration and motivation in the work for the Baltic Sea and the environment?**

I live on the Gulf of Finland coast the whole my life, this is my Baltic Sea, my childhood, my family life and professional work (especially last 29 years) was closely connected to the Sea...

Cooperation with partners in the Baltic Sea region within the Coalition Clean Baltic, common concern and exchange of ideas and experience always inspire me.

Communication with young "Friends of the Baltic», with new generation of eco-activists motivate me to be young, active and innovative...

### **What has, in your own opinion, the highlight and biggest successes of your career?**

- The network of partners and followers in our River Watch network in the Russian part of the Gulf of Finland basin,
- Enthusiasm of young colleagues, who joined Friends of the Baltic with respect to results achieved, and with new proposals and ideas;
- Friends of the Baltic as a stable organizations with visible position and clear actions, addressed to local solutions for the Baltic Sea conservation.

### **What is your finest Baltic Sea memory?**

Thousands swans in spring at the South shore of the Gulf of Finland (in the Lebjazhje nature reserve – Ramsar area) – they rest there every year on their migration way from Europe to Russian Arctic. It looks like fluffy snow on the water...

One more great feeling was many years ago when I visited Hanko first time - I was staying on the rock where Gulf of Finland was on the left, and Bothnic Gulf on the right – It was absolute feeling that I'm part of the Baltic Sea.