

Interview with Award Winner Mikko Jokinen

3rd April 2019

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

My environmental story starts from coasts of inland lake Näsijärvi near to city of Tampere. As a schoolboy I became interested in nature, especially of fishing and bird watching. A small papermill in my neighborhood was polluting the lake causing deaths of fishes, which I still remember well. Anyway, birds started soon to dominate my hobbies, partly motivated by Pentti Linkola, who started to get reputation as a person, who was defending the Finnish nature.

In 1968 I started my biology studies at University of Turku. Very soon after that, first the Turku Archipelago, then Åland Islands and later The Baltic Sea rose up on the top of my interests.

I spent 6 turns of the years (1970-75) at Signildskär bird station in Eckerö studying hares and birds. After graduating in 1976 I was working in the University of Turku teaching biology and environmental protection. My professor was at that time Rauno Tenovuo, but also earlier Östersjö-prize winner Professor Erkki Leppäkoski had an important role in increasing my understanding of the Baltic ecosystems. Every year during 1976-1984 I spent one month at Seili Research station in Turku Archipelago with students teaching environmental and ecological topics to them.

1984 I started my career as the first environmental director of city of Turku and worked in this post until my retirement in 2015.

Municipal environmental management was covering a wide set of issues including air pollution control, waste management control and development, water protection, nature protection and environmental awareness raising and education as main topics.

City of Turku used to have a long tradition in cooperation with Nordic cities and some other twin cities, like St Petersburg. After the collapse of Soviet Union the situation in the Baltic region changed dramatically and caused e.g. heavy demand for new kind of cooperation in the region.

Environmental questions were among the first sectors raising on the Baltic Sea Region cooperation agenda. The cities of Turku and St Petersburg added environmental questions officially into their bilateral cooperation in 1992 and the work was intensive with the Committee for Natural Resources and Ecological especially after the appointment of Mr Dimitry Golubev as chairman.

Union of the Baltic cities (UBC) was founded in Gdansk in 1991. Environmental Commission of UBC became soon the main cooperation platform for Turku. I worked in the chairmanship of the Environmental Commission long time (1993 – 2015) together with my colleagues from Århus, Sundsvall and Nacka.

The Finnish and Swedish membership in EU speeded up international cooperation, especially by making EU funding available also for local governments. After the EU membership of the Baltic states and Poland, the whole Baltic Sea was an ideal forum for cooperation, with the Sea being important connecting factor. The EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region 2009 was then later strengthening this approach.

In 1997 Turku offered to UBC to host a small secretariat for UBC Env Commission and first employer was hired and placed as part of Environmental department. This has shown to be fruitful decision for the Baltic Sea cooperation. During past 20 years more than 60 Baltic cities and big number of other stakeholders have implemented almost 100 joint environmental and sustainability projects with total value of more than 100 million euros, thus strengthening remarkable the sustainable development in the region.

Today a team of 20 young international experts are running the cooperation in Turku and local governments are recognized as important actors in the Baltic Sea region cooperation. Beside UBC member cities, the key partners are different networks like Eurocities and ICLEI, governmental bodies like HELCOM and CBSS and many academic institutions and networks, like BUP (Baltic University Program).

After my retirement in 2015 I returned back to traditional nature conservation hobbies and now chairing Archipelagia Seura ry, which is e.g. improving the habitats for Apollo butterfly and Adam and Eva orchid in Turku Archipelago.

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

The main driving force has been my endogenous interest to understand nature, added with own experiences of different aspects of the Baltic Sea during the last 50 years.

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

Professional highlight was the first participation in UN Summit of Sustainable Development at Johannesburg 2002, to feel the atmosphere of the meeting and the optimism which then was to be seen concerning the common future.

Locally the main achievement has been the change in people's behaviour concerning waste management and recycling- Turku became in 1990's as one of the leading cities in waste recycling in Finland.

Regionally great success has been the development in local level environmental cooperation; how it has entered into very concrete level in so many Baltic cities

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

Difficult to select, there are so many fine memories; adventures on winter ice in order to study grey seals, the sound world (eiders, seals, gulls) of outer archipelago at spring time, mild and warm summer nights on an remote island with boat and family.

But to select one specific and memorable event; A trip to Innarahu, West part of Saarenmaa (Estonia) to study grey seal cubs in March 1993 with a group of scientists from Estonia, Latvia, Russia and Finland. To understand, in that fascinating environment, that people of Baltic states are now free to cooperate in all possible ways – the world had changed and the future was full of hope.