

## **- A Brief Overview**

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### **Introduction**

Several international environmental meetings and agreements, such as the Environment for Europe Conferences and Agenda 21, have forcefully documented the need for improved availability of information for decision-making within transboundary international eco-regions. The use of electronic networks, in particular Internet, has been highlighted as a most promising tool to achieve this. Examples of successful use of Internet have been demonstrated, e.g. for the North American Great Lakes region with their Great Lakes Information Network (GLIN).

BALLERINA - BALtic se region on-Line Environmental information Resource for INternet Access - is a recent initiative to serve the information needs of decision makers at all levels when it concerns environmental, natural resources and sustainable development issues of the Baltic Sea Region.

The purpose of this Executive Summary is to provide a brief overview of the BALLERINA Initiative, where it stands today one and a half years after idea inception. For more details, please visit <http://www.baltic-region.net/about/>, or contact the BALLERINA network co-ordinator

### **Aim and Objectives**

The overall aim of the BALLERINA Initiative is to support the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea region environment, by improving the availability of relevant information on Internet for decision makers. Main objectives are:

- To bring more substantive and accessible information on environment, natural resources and sustainable development from and about the Baltic Sea Region to decision makers.
- To make it easier for the increased number of people to find Baltic Sea region information and resources and sustainable development issues on the friendly 'top-level' Baltic Sea Region Information Network BALLERINA web site.
- To develop a voluntary partnership of persons and partners working towards the sustainable development of the Baltic Sea Region.

### **The BALLERINA Network**

#### **Partners**

The institutional basis for the BALLERINA network is a large number of institutions with a mandate to disseminate or communicate information on environment, natural resources and sustainable development about the Baltic Sea Region on Internet.

- Partnership in the BALLERINA network
- Partners in the BALLERINA network and persons taking an active role in the BALLERINA, network

- ◆ by providing pertinent information (in English) on environment, natural resources and sustainable development on Internet,
- ◆ by participating in the Annual BALLERINA Conferences, and taking an active part in the discussions regarding the development of the BALLERINA initiative, or
- ◆ by other means furthering the development of BALLERINA.

### **The Annual Conferences**

The Annual BALLERINA Conferences, of which the first was held in Riga, May 1997, is the main forum for the BALLERINA partners to express their views concerning the development of BALLERINA. There, the following issues can be discussed:

- Institutional issues including composition of lead parties and advisory board
- The BALLERINA web site
- Joint Capacity Building activities
- Any Other Business

In addition, the Annual BALLERINA Conferences will give ample time for presentations and discussion on various Internet projects, products and initiatives.

### **Lead Parties**

A strong lead party is required to have a dynamic, flexible and competent driving force underpinning the development of the BALLERINA initiative. At the First Annual BALLERINA Conference in Riga, May 1997, UNEP/GRID-Arendal and Stockholm Marine Research Centre were approved as lead parties for a period of three years.

### **Advisory Board**

A BALLERINA advisory board is a limited but competent and supportive group of representatives to oversee the development of BALLERINA to give the necessary guidelines for the First Annual BALLERINA Conference. The advisory board can be considered a highly important and substantive part of the development and objectives of BALLERINA.

The advisory board are composed of representatives representing a wide range of institutions and countries in the Baltic Sea Region with relevant experiences in the range of activities related to BALLERINA. The following Advisory Board members at the First Annual BALLERINA Conference:

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#### **Chair**

*Andrus Meiner* Estonia

#### **Co-chair**

*Nathaniel Trumbull* Transboundary Agency

#### **Members**

*Maria Andrzejewska* GRID-V

*Harijs Baranovs* Latvian

*Heidrun Fammler* Baltic E

*Ulrich Kremser* Helsinki

*Lars Kristoferson* Baltic 2

*Juha-Markku Leppänen* Finnish

*Bo Libert* Swedis

*Olle Nåbo* MDC E

*Hannu Saarenmaa* Europe

*Ruta Vaiciunaite* Lithuan

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### **The BALLERINA web site; <http://www.baltic-region.net>**

The first version of the BALLERINA web site was launched on 29 April 1997, and is now continuously being updated.

The BALLERINA site offer possibilities to find relevant, Internet-available information about environment and natural resource issues through a coherent, well structured, comprehensive and logically built and guiding web site. It functions as a well-informed and continuously updated gateway to information of interest in a Baltic Sea Region perspective for a broad spectrum of suppliers and users of information within and outside the region.

The ambition guiding the construction of the BALLERINA has been to make it customary for anyone looking for information about environmental, natural resources and sustainable development issues in the Baltic Sea Region first to consult the BALLERINA site and its links to relevant sources. The motto could then be: "If the information at all exists on-line, you will find it through the BALLERINA".

Furthermore, BALLERINA aims to be a virtual meeting place, encouraging communication and exchange of information and experience between like-minded within the Baltic Sea Region and with people world-wide expressing an interest in the region.

### **Capacity Building**

Due to the different levels of capacities among the countries and institutions in the Baltic Sea Region both in publishing material on Internet but also to access on-line information, various types of capacity building activities and efforts are needed to improve

this situation. These activities will be carried out in the CIS and NIS countries in the region. Conference in Riga, May 1997, the result of the conference is a comprehensive package of various activities proposed. Obviously, any proposal needs to be considered carefully needs to consider the situation in the countries or countries concerned. Some of the activities are:

- ◇ Network infrastructure support
- ◇ International, national and sub-national HTML/web site construction - product-oriented.
- ◇ National/Regional BALLERINA
- ◇ Small equipment grants.
- ◇ Grant programs to support of information

### **Further information**

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