

My Mare Balticum

“East Sea, West Sea, My Sea”

Dear jurors of the Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue. My name is Simon Lightfoot, named after the fisherman Simon Peter, the son of John. I’m a 25-year-old Finnish-English man from Finland. I come from the Island of Suomenlinna (Sveaborg), a sea fortress located off Finland’s capital, Helsinki.

I’d like to start off by sharing some of my, and my family’s memories from life on the island. The island where my mother grew up, only to return once again, some decades later, with her own family. My earliest memories are from the little lagoon situated in front of my childhood home. I remember the distinct smell of the sea there, the gentle sound of the waves coming through our windows, my father’s boat moored at the jetty in front of the house, swaying to and fro as the cruise ships sailed past just 100 metres away. That’s where my life began.

The sea with its unrestricted horizons has always represented a feeling of openness, endless possibilities and adventure. Contrary to what the city people often thought, the sea meant freedom to me, a way forward. The further I looked, the further my imagination flew. I’m not sure when I first began to realise the sorry state of our beloved Baltic Sea is in. Not long after those aforementioned first memories, I recall seeing floating bits of Styrofoam, the rainbow colours caused by combustible oil on the water, plastic bottles gleaming under the summer sun. It felt strange and wrong, but it was “normal” as it was so commonplace. Perhaps I didn’t fully understand what had caused the changes. My mother told me that her father, my Grandfather, used to fish around the island weekly. So, it didn’t make sense to me why the fish I had caught just two decades later should be any less edible. Little did I know that between my mother’s childhood in the late 60’s and my own in the 90’s, a lot had changed.

Stuck in between seas and its realities

We often went on family holidays to Pärnu in Estonia, a coastal beach town, along the Bay of Riga. My picture and understanding of the Baltic Sea gained depth. Unlike Suomenlinna, which is built on hard grey granite skerries, Pärnu, with its golden sandy beach was from another world. Although it wasn’t. The same plastic Styrofoam and oil stains floated alike. The harsh reality came one step closer to the young boy I was back then.

After establishing a solid connection with Estonia, my mother went on to buy a summer cottage on the island of Saaremaa some years later. Once again, my Baltic reality gained a fundamental shift in understanding. The beaches there were different. This time they were empty, even though they were so beautiful. The towers along the beaches brought a hint. They were sniper towers from the Soviet times. I went on to find out that the sniper towers were there so that people trying to flee the island of Saaremaa, or perhaps just going for a swim or casting their fishing nets, ran at risk of being shot. Shock and horror: this was nothing like my experiences at home. The people there were not allowed to fall in love with

the sea. The sea represented a wall to them. A wall of death. – Quite different to my own experiences.

Hoisting the sails

After finishing my compulsory military service at Finland's biggest naval base, Upinniemi, I started a new chapter in my life alongside my Baltic Sea experiences. Once again one of the ships that had swayed my father's boat all those years ago took me to Estonia. Although this time on a journey I'm still on. I went to study at the University of Tartu. It was the first time that I had lived inland, away from my sea. It felt strange, although the river flowing through the university town, Emajõgi (Embach), brought comfort; and after the realisation that the river ends up in the Baltic Sea, it felt familiar again.

I longed for the sea. I went on my Erasmus exchange to the Hansaetic town of Greifswald (Autumn 2019). My journey there took me by car, once again past my home island with a ship, this time to Stockholm, from Stockholm to Malmö for the night and from there on to Sweden's seaport Trelleborg – and from there by ship to Germany's Sassnitz, on the island of Rügen, not far from Greifswald. Once again, the Baltic Sea had taken me on an adventure. All this within the boundaries of the bountiful Baltic Sea.

My idea

In order for the Baltic Sea nations and their peoples to get a better understanding of and connection to their sea, they need to be more in touch with it. Thus, I'd like to propose the establishment of a **Baltic Sustainable Way**. A route along the shores of the Baltic Sea, ready for the era of sustainable energy, where cars, cyclists and walkers alike, could stop by various locations along the Baltic coast to charge their electric vehicles (cars), their devices (cars, cyclists and walkers) or even camp overnight at these locations provided by the following:

At these locations, energy could be generated in front of people's eyes, e.g. an offshore wind turbine or other sustainable energy generation method, then fed into a grid scale battery, and from there, discharged to either cars or any other device that travellers might want to charge. This would be free of charge, motivating people to discover their sea and their coastal neighbours, raising generations to protect the fragile environment of the Baltic Sea. All this would promote the three priority areas of the Council of the Baltic States not to mention other sustainability goals. In addition, this would promote entrepreneurship and employment (service providers), as well as enhance our love for the Baltic Sea through a fun and sustainable way of discovery: **the Baltic Sustainable Way!**

Yours sincerely,
Simon Lightfoot

