Network Mobilizers and Target Firms:
Analyzing Mobilization around the Issue of Clean Baltic Sea

Competitive Paper

by

Tiina Ritvala and Asta Salmi

Aalto University School of Economics

Abstract

This paper focuses on mobilization of networks. Our empirical study provides a rich case analysis of four initiatives to protect the Baltic Sea. We propose a model on mobilization setting and tactics, and use this model to analyze empirically how networks around the issue (environmental state of the sea) emerge. In order to understand better how issue networks are, or may be, mobilized we look both at the stakeholder theory (to investigate how a mobilizer may act towards its stakeholders, i.e. target organizations) and at the network theory (to investigate the connectedness of different stakeholders). We see that combining stakeholder and social movement literatures with (social) network approach brings along better understanding of mobilization of firms to issue networks, as well as of consequences of these tactics for (inter-organizational and interpersonal) networks.

Key words: mobilization, issue networks, stakeholders, Baltic Sea

1. Introduction

> Nowhere is the need for working together more essential than when it comes to water, arguably the most pressing problem for the world today – *Peter Senge* (2008:79)

Environmental problems are raising increasing concerns. Our focus in this paper is on the poor ecological state of the Baltic Sea and the efforts to save the sea. The success of these efforts depend on the ability to create cooperation between diverse types of actors, which can be seen as stakeholders of the issue (i.e. the state of the sea). The problems of creating collective action to avoid excessive consumption of common resources, such as seas, are well recognized since the provocative works by Olson (1965) on the logic of collective action and by Hardin (1968) on the tragedy of commons. Previous studies underlined the enormous difficulties of solving common issues, unless privatization of common resources or a coercive state was involved. However, recently theoretical and empirical alternatives have been drawn to solving common problems. Ostrom 2009 [1990] describes successful examples of solving common issues by voluntary organizations such as irrigation communities, which create new institutions through self-organized collective action.

While previous case studies on the political behaviour of multinational companies show that the relationships between business and non-business actors are issue-related (Hadjikhani and Ghauri, 2001), little understanding exists how issues may also shape the interaction between business actors. Several authors within the IMP research tradition have addressed network mobilization (Araujo & Brito, 1998; Brito, 2001; Lundgren, 1992; Mouzas and Naudé, 2007; Ritvala and Salmi, 2009). The stakeholder theory provides analysis of mobilization too, but focuses on bilateral relationships. By studying different types of actors involved in the issue network we expand stakeholder theory's focus beyond bilateral relationships (Zietsma & Winn, 2008) and acknowledge the connections between relationships. Thus, as we see that most studies of mobilization within industrial networks as well as stakeholder literatures tend to concentrate on the side of mobilizer, while the perspective of the targets of mobilization has received less attention. It is our intention here to start filling this gap in literature.

Our aim is to analyze mobilization from a dyadic perspective; that is, to consider the mobilization efforts, but also how these efforts are seen and reacted on by the target actors of the networks. Furthermore, we look at the role of business firms as targets of actions that often lie outside of their business focus, and see, why and how the companies may be activated to join the common efforts. This is a little researched area so far. And yet there is pressing need for understanding the linkages between the socio-political and business networks, given the fundamental (environmental and societal) problems of today. As an example of these, our empirical study investigates network activities around the poor state of the Baltic Sea. It is an ecologically unique ecosystem with shallow bays, which makes it highly sensitive to the environmental impacts of human activities. The Baltic Sea is said to be the most studied and protected, yet the most polluted sea in the world. Solutions to its environmental problems call for networking among different actors across borders. In our case, many actors, including governments and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) have for decades worked with the protection of the Baltic Sea. Alongside these traditional players, new types of actors (private foundations with political and business connections) try to tackle the issue with new ways by mobilizing actors on broad fronts to join the efforts. For concrete rescue results, it seems to become increasingly important to activate also the private sector and business firms.

The paper is structured as follows. Our conceptual discussion starts with the concept of issue networks, and investigates then the stakeholder theory and network theories. On this basis we build a preliminary model on mobilization setting and tactics. We then present our empirical case, starting by the data and methods of analysis. We use a single in-depth case study to investigate network mobilization over time. We concentrate on four distinctive initiatives to protect the Baltic Sea. We investigate how these network mobilizers approach different actors (different stakeholder groups) and how business firms in particular, have reacted to these initiatives. We conclude with a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications.

2. Understanding mobilization of issue networks through a dialog between stakeholder and network literatures

We analyze issue networks that emerge around the issue of the poor state of the Baltic Sea. Dahan et al. (2006) define an issue network as a loose, issue-based coalition of a large number of actors with asymmetrical resources and power, who argue about policy options, values and norms in order to induce institutional change through collective action. It is a temporary network in which contacts fluctuate in frequency and intensity depending on the issue lifecycle. This definition shows the importance of having both several actors and heterogeneous resources, and also, points to the dynamics related to issue networks – they are by their very nature temporary. Our perspective to issue networks, while based on this definition, pays more attention to the *relationships* between the actors. Further, because it is virtually impossible to study entire issue networks, our analysis will concentrate on subsets of the overall network, on the 'issue-based nets' (Brito, 1999, p. 92). Aligned with the definition of issue networks, an issue-based net is a net of relationships amongst actors who are concerned with a particular issue through mutual or conflicting interests (ibid.). In order to understand better how issue network are, or may be, mobilized we look both at the stakeholder theory (to investigate how a mobilizer may act towards its stakeholders, i.e. target organizations) and at the network theory (to investigate the connectedness of different stakeholders).

2.1. Stakeholder approach

Stakeholder theory has become fashionable among management scholars, organizations theorists and political scientists alike in trying to understand how managers deal with moral and normative issues increasingly present in their operating environments. A quarter of century ago Freeman (1984) argued that firms must consider not only the requirements of their shareholders but also those of a broad range of "stakeholders" who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives. The theory assumes that managers are aware of stakeholder interests and can prioritize among them based on the stakeholders' power, legitimacy and urgency i.e. "the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention" (Mitchell et al., 1997: 865). Stakeholders are typically classified to primary stakeholders (e.g. owners, employees, customers, and suppliers) and secondary stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, special interest groups, and media).

Given that secondary stakeholders are not in direct transaction with firms, firms are not believed to be dependent for their survival on secondary stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995). Not

surprisingly then, the literature to date focuses mostly on firms reacting and responding to their primary stakeholders and much less attention has been placed on understanding how secondary stakeholders are able to influence firms, especially in the context of other stakeholders making demands on the firms too (de Bakker & den Hond, 2008). In a recent study on secondary stakeholders, Zietsma and Winn (2008) find that secondary stakeholders use a variety of tactics to compete for public attention to the issue, and then build influence chains by linking issues to other groups that have resource control over important targets in the chain. In the study, as well as in stakeholder literature in general, stakeholders are typically considered in a relatively negative light. Likewise, stakeholders are often seen as unidimensional, homogeneous groups guided by predominately rational pursuit of their stake-defined interests (de Bakker and den Hond, 2008).

Because social movement theory inherently deals with the relationship between interests and group action it is increasingly combined with stakeholder theory in order to understand how collective inaction (Olson, 1965) may be overcome through mobilization of broad range of stakeholders (King, 2008; de Hond & de Bakker, 2007; Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003). Collective inaction is a by-product of free-rider incentives where free-riders obtain same benefits as those of active participants who incur the costs (Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003; Olson, 1965). Collective inaction tends to characterize collective goods such as water, air and soil, resulting into severe issues such as environmental pollution.

Social movement scholars argue that three key factors contribute to collective action: framing processes, corporate and industry opportunities; and mobilizing structures (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; King, 2008). *Framing* is the choice of particular words to formulate a problem or solution (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984) and involves the strategic use of shared meanings and definitions to invoke a sense of responsibility to a cause (Benford & Snow, 2000). The role of shared meanings such as common stories and collective identity or 'groupness' are emphasized by scholars studying framing processes in collective action (King, 2008). Major changes in company leadership or increased competition within an industry are examples of *corporate and industry opportunities* that increase collective action. Finally, m*obilizing structures* are formal organizations and interpersonal networks through which people mobilize and engage in collective action (King, 2008). Such formal and informal networks connect like-minded individuals (sharing opinions, beliefs and interests) and may influence even collective and personal identity.

Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) challenge the pure rational actor view of stakeholder action, and argue that an interest-based explanation does not adequately explain the variation of stakeholder group behaviors. For instance, we see very different types of behavior by environmental groups: Greenpeace promotes radical solutions while WWF relies more on cooperative action (see also Holzer, 2008). Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) argue that interests do not easily translate into action but a desire to express an identity is a key driver of stakeholder group mobilization. The power of identity, i.e. a set of logically connected propositions that a person uses to describe him-or herself to oneself or others, is argued to be a key driver of mobilization. However, the question of how stakeholder groups initially form and mobilize remains little understood (Ibid). We argue that by integrating ideas from network theory we may better understand both stakeholder and firm mobilization. Indeed, there is a need to move beyond the analysis of dyadic relationships between an individual stakeholder and a focal organization to broader networks of relationships (Rowley, 2003; Zietsma & Winn, 2008; Wilson, Bunn & Savage, 2010).

2.2. Network approach

Mobilization of issue networks is a complex task because issue solving necessitates the mobilization of diverse type of actors which may not have any previous contacts, meaning that there are structural holes (Burt, 1992) between them. Structural hole refers to the absence of connection between separate networks, resulting in different flows of information in the networks, hence a person belonging to otherwise disconnected networks may connect and act as a broker between the separate flows of information (Burt, 1997). The argument of structural holes builds on the concepts that emerged within sociology in the 1970s: most notably White (1970) on the importance of gaps as opposed to ties in social structure and Granovetter (1973) on the strength of weak ties. In contrast to strong ties which tend to form cliques, weak ties bridge cliques and bring everyone to the same network, so that weak ties may be expected to be important for solving collective action problems.

Marwell, Oliver and Prahl (1988) argued that collective action happens when a critical mass of interested and resourceful actors coordinate their efforts. The authors suggest that collective action is often produced by actions that originate with one or few people who plan a campaign and purposely seeks to draw others into it (Marwell et al., 1988). Bringing together diverse actors necessitates network centrality, which is argued to be crucial for stakeholder mobilization (Rowey, 2003) and for non-market strategies (Mahon et al, 2004). Network centrality refers to an actor's position in a network relative to others (Freeman, 1979). While it has been widely agreed that pre-existing social ties are important for collective action the findings of Marwell and colleagues (1988) showed the powerful effects on concentrating the mobilization efforts *selectively* to those individuals whose contributions seem likely to be largest. But how can such key contributors be identified and mobilized?

Research on actor attributes in social networks studies how actors' characteristics, such as attitudes and opinions, co-vary systematically with relationships and network positions (Mahon et al., 2004). It is well acknowledged in the literature that similarity breeds connection between actors. Homophily is the principle saying that contacts between similar people are more likely than among dissimilar people. Lazarsfeld & Merton (1954) distinguished two types of homophily: *status homophily*, in which similarity is based on informal, formal, or ascribed status and *value homophily*, which is based on values, attitudes, and beliefs (McPherson et al, 2001). In the context of voluntary organizations, the similarity of status has been found to drive interpersonal tie formation (McPherson & Smith, Lovin, 1987). Homophily relates also to structural network positions: people who are more structurally similar to one another are more likely to have issue-related interpersonal communication and compare themselves and their opinions (McPherson et al, 2001). Besides homophily, interpersonal tie formation is biased towards individuals with a reputation for being competent and towards others with whom they have developed strong working relationships in the past (Hinds et al., 2000).

We argue that one needs to go beyond pure structural network approach and actor attributes to deeper understanding of competing requests and dependencies made by stakeholders on firms. When it comes to mobilization of business actors into issue networks we need to understand the dynamics of long term business relationships between actors and rules that constitute and govern these relationships (Brito, 2001; Mouzas & Naudé, 2007). In mobilization of business partners, not only actors, but the interrelationships between actors, resources and activities are involved (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995). Actors with heterogeneous resources may control the activities that are needed to combine the resources

in a new way. To reach other actors and resources, network mobilizers resort to their personal contacts. Each individual has his/her personal contact network, which is based on his/her personal history, family, friends, education, and earlier tasks in various firms and organizations. This network, labelled 'the relationship sediment' by Agndal and Axelsson (2002), provides a basis for interaction, and may be used for working on the emerging issue.

According to business network scholars, mobilisation goes beyond dyadic relationships and interactions. It is seen as a dynamic process of forming groups or other associations for the pursuit of collective goals where organisations interactively shape and develop the rules that constitute and govern their relationships (Brito, 2001; Mouzas and Naudé, 2007). Araujo and Brito (1998) stress the role of multilevel games that a small number of actors play to mobilise collective action and to change power positions within networks. Mouzas and Naudé (2007) are the first IMP scholars to explicitly discuss the underlying processes of network mobilisation. Their model of network mobilizer articulates network mobilisation as a sequence of five interdependent phases as organisational challenges: *network insight, business propositions, deal, social contract*, and *sustained mobilisation* (Mouzas and Naudé, 2007). While the model recognises that these challenges (arising from attempts to either increase internal operating efficiency or to find new business opportunities) are affected by macro-level externalities, it lacks in the capability to discuss how societal level changes, such as promoted by different stakeholders, affect firms' operations and opportunity identification. The study by Wilson et al. (2010) on social partnership to increase highway safety is similar in spirit to our research. Their findings highlight the role of politics, leadership, trust, cooperation and communications for successful social partnerships between for-profit and non-profit organizations. While their study provides insights on partnership development and relationship dynamics within a stakeholder network of a single project, our study concentrates on the development of broader issue networks composing of multiple separate projects.

Our empirical study aims to understand why and how different stakeholders of the Baltic Sea get mobilized to join an emerging issue network. We conclude the conceptual discussion in the following model of mobilization setting and tactics, which is partly grounded also in our empirical insights from the field (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Mobilization setting and tactics
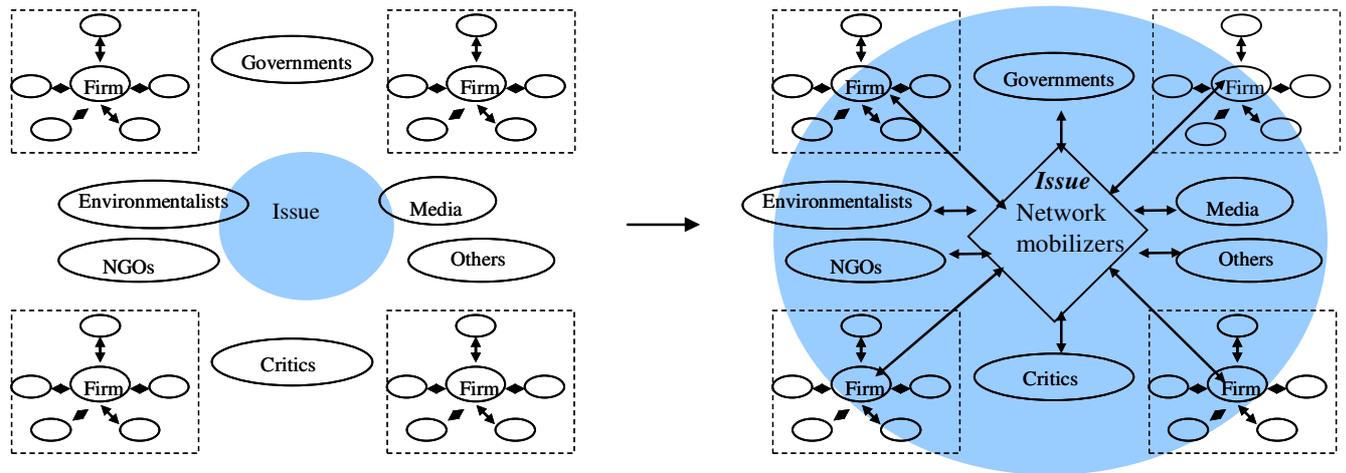
Phase 0: Antecedents:
▪Urgent issue
▪Diverse types of actors
▪Structural holes between actors

Phase 1: Mobilization processes
Tactics:
▪Selective,targeted mobilization efforts
  ▪ Relationship sediments
  ▪ Status homophily
  ▪ Value homophily
  ▪ Power and legitimacy
▪Framing
  ▪ Sense of responsibilty
  ▪ Business benefits

Contemporary severe issues, such as environmental pollution, tend to be multi-sectoral and multi-level phenomena, meaning that their solving necessitates the mobilization of diverse types of actors: from governmental to business and civil society and all types of interest groups and media. Freeman (1984) took a business actor view and proposed to look at the demands of various types of stakeholders on the firm. Besides firms' primary stakeholders, a number of secondary stakeholders, which are same for all actors around a specific issue, are present in "issue space", which is characterized by ambiguity and lack of coordination between activities. When trying to tackle complex issues actors from previously unrelated industries need to interact, often at the interface between established industries. (This can produce also a seed for new industries). But this to happen, someone needs to take the role of a network mobilizer. The task of such actor is with the help of various types of tactics to overcome collective inaction and bridge and catalyze between dispersed actors.

In this paper, we aim to answer to the following research questions: First, *what are the mobilization tactics used by the network mobilizers?* Second, *what are the responses and motives of target firms to participate in issue solving*? From the perspective of business firms, the network mobilizers in our study are secondary stakeholders – e.g. foundations, which are not usually playing a central role for business. Here, we investigate the dyad between the mobilizers and the target firms, as well impacts on the broader networks.

3. Research context and methodology

The model described before was built on the basis of earlier literature and our research project focusing on the emergence of issue network around the environmental state of the Baltic Sea. We chose to use a single in-depth case study because it is well suited to understanding of sentiments of actors and complex interaction processes, which are embedded in time (Woodside & Wilson, 2003; Quintens & Matthyssens, 2009). Single cases are often used to extend existing theories and to build new theories (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991; Siggelkow, 2007) and are commonly used to study network dynamics (Easton, 1995; Halinen & Törnroos, 2005). Focus on a specific case is also valuable for our understanding of how collective action emerges in a historical and cultural context (King, 2008). We have built the initial analytical frame from the earlier studies, but adopt an abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Accordingly, there is close interaction between the empirical and theoretical areas and the framework may be redirected during the process. Hence, we join the increasing number of industrial marketing scholars who criticize the linear process of theorizing from case studies (Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Welch, 2010).

3.1. Context

Our empirical case is the emerging issue network around Baltic Sea, which is in an alarmingly poor condition. We selected this particular case because it represents a contemporary pressing issue the solving of which requires the mobilization of new types of networks across borders. This context provides us with a fruitful setting to study network mobilization around a common issue, and enables us to make new theoretical insights on mobilization mechanisms and the emerging network itself. Thus, the case was selected based on theoretical sampling (Patton, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Further, due to the public interest on the issue, it is well documented in the scientific and popular press, making data collection feasible.

Our case has four embedded units of analysis (issue-based nets) consisting of four distinctive initiatives to protect the Baltic Sea. Each initiative provides us with rich contextual data, which permits a closer look at the network mobilization processes. The first initiative is the Operation Mermaid launched by WWF Finland in 2001 in which culminates the protection work of Baltic Sea by WWF started in the early 1970s. The other three initiatives are organized by new types of actors involved in solving environmental issues. First, the pioneering work done by a private foundation John Nurminen Foundation in removing phosphorous in the wastewater in St. Petersburg in cooperation with Vodokanal, which is a municipality-owned, and one of the largest and most modern waterworks in Russia. Second, the Baltic Sea Challenge campaign launched by the cities of Helsinki and Turku in Finland, which aims to mobilize different actors around the Baltic Sea in order to build concrete action plans to protect the sea. Third, the work by Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG), a two year old private foundation, to treat poultry manure in the Leningrad region.

3.2. Data

The main source of data for each initiative was in-depth interviews, which were supplemented with initiative-related documentation. For each initiative, interviews were conducted both with organizers of the initiatives (the network mobilizers) and with participating organizations. We conducted twenty in-depth interviews with twenty six people in Helsinki and Tallinn between February 2009 and June 2010 in order to discover the

motivations to join the initiatives, mobilization activities, and relationship dynamics. The interviewees represented private foundations and other NGOs (in total 5 organizations, 8 people), cities and public bodies (4 organizations/people), as well as companies (11 companies, 14 people). The companies operated in the fields of shipping, water chemistry, energy, waste management, metal processing, communications, consulting, and technology provision. In this paper we concentrate on the firm interviews, to analyze mobilization from a dyadic perspective (mobilizer – target firm), but we also analyze other interviews to understand the processes of mobilization, including other constituents such as researchers who also play key roles in the initiatives.

Table 1. lists the seven firms that we focused on in our analysis of firm mobilization. Two of the firms are headquartered in Estonia and five in Finland. One of the firms is involved in all four initiatives that we studied. All other firms participate in one or two of the four initiatives.

Table 1. Mobilized firms

Dimension	Firm 1	Firm 2	Firm 3	Firm 4	Firm 5	Firm 6	Firm 7
Participation in the initiatives	4 of 4	2 of 4	2 of 4	2 of 4	1 of 4	1 of 4	1 of 4
Closeness to core business	core	close	medium	close	distant	distant	close
Headquartered	Finland	Finland	Finland	Estonia	Finland	Finland	Estonia

Two different interview protocols were used depending on whether the respondent(s) represented a network mobilizer or a target organization of mobilization efforts. The key interview themes were, depending on the perspective of network mobilizer or target organization, the following: the motivations for targeting an organization/participating in Baltic Sea initiative(s), communication within the initiative(s), activities and resources involved, and outcomes (business, environmental, and social). The interviews lasted between one and half and two hours, and all interviews were digitally recorded. Both researchers were present in the interviews, which contributed to a rich dialog between the data, concepts and researcher perceptions when conducting the analysis.

Additionally, we used as a background material 28 webcasts from the Baltic Sea Action Summit organized by BSAG in Helsinki in February 2010[1]. The webcasts broadened our view, as they show how different types of actors from different positions and across countries present themselves and their intentions to tackle the issue. Such audio-visual records are seldom used within industrial marketing research despite their potential to provide a richer representation of reality (Borghini, Carù, & Cova, 2010).

Secondary sources of material include web page information (e.g. initiatives and signatories, Helsinki Commission, HELCOM), and documents (e.g. e-mail letters and seminar presentations of the initiatives, stakeholder magazines of companies, international and national journal articles). In addition, we rely on participant observation at two events held in Helsinki and related to the Baltic Sea Action Summit (BONUS Day;[2] BONUS169 – Joint Baltic Sea Research Programme 9 Feb. 2010, and Insight on the Baltic Sea Action Summit[3]

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[1] Webcasts from the Baltic Sea Action Summit held in February 10 2010 in the Finlandia Hall, Helsinki
http://formin.finland.fi/multimedia/bsas/videos/Morning_Plenary.html
http://formin.finland.fi/multimedia/bsas/videos/Afternoon_Plenary.html
[2] www.bonusday.fi.
[3] http://www.helsinki.fi/henvi/tutkimus/BSAS.htm

10 Feb. 2010). Participant observation data opened-up an interesting perspective of how researchers involved in major research programs concerning the Baltic Sea prepared a common voice on how research could be better used as a basis for policy decisions.

3.3. Data analysis

Given the complex research setting (overlapping and emerging issue-based nets) our data analysis consisted of a number of iterative steps. Central in our analysis was a constant comparison and dialog between our data and existing theory. First, based on deep immersion with the data, we did a first pass coding where broad themes and categories emerged from the data. Second, we continued with more fined grained coding of the data and found patterns in the data and started to link these with existing theory. We continued refining our analysis in moving up in the ladders of abstraction to form higher level categories. Based on these categories we built the conceptual model (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2002) on mobilization setting and tactics, which was discussed before, and will be illustrated and further-developed in our empirical analysis.

4. Four initiatives to save the Baltic Sea

Before the actual analysis we provide a synopsis of the four initiatives. The rationale for this is to direct greater attention to the embedded context within which relationships (Anderson, Håkansson & Johanson, 1994) and network mobilization occurs.

4.1. Operation Mermaid by WWF Finland

Operation Mermaid by WWF Finland is a part of WWF's global marine conservation efforts. WWF Finland was established in 1972 and ever since it has been involved in the protection of the Baltic Sea. WWF's Baltic Sea office at Stockholm coordinates the joint Baltic Sea strategy, which is implemented nationally. In 2001, WWF Finland started Operation Mermaid which aims at combating eutrophication, oil spill prevention, improving marine safety, and protecting endangered species as well as promoting sustainable fishing. In addition to concrete environmental projects, WWF actively participates in social dialogue and influencing decision-makers both nationally and internationally. This involves, for instance, national and international advocacy work with organizations such as International Maritime Organization (IMO) and Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), as well as awareness-raising at the grassroots level. For instance, WWF initiated and had a key role in getting through the PSSA (Particularly Sensitive Sea Area)[4] status for the Baltic Sea (with the exception of Russian waters).

When it comes to corporate partnerships, WWF with operations in all continents involving around 100 countries is able to collaborate with key global players. Examples of such global collaboration are cooperation with Procter & Gamble in the area of phosphate-free detergents and with Coca-Cola Company in protecting freshwater resources around the world (Senge,

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[4] PSSAs are areas of the seas and oceans that need special protection through action by IMO because of their ecological, economic, cultural or scientific significance and their vulnerability to harmful impacts from shipping activities (WWF, 2003).

2008). The study participants at WWF Finland describe that the key operating principle of WWF is cooperation and solution-centric approach, meaning that if a flaw is raised, also a possible solution is suggested. Operation Mermaid in Finland has company sponsors, while a major part of funding is received from civil society. The funds are used in broad range of environmental projects around the Baltic Sea as well as general awareness raising. This differs from the other three initiatives we studied.

4.2. Phosphorous removal from urban wastewater by John Nurminen Foundation

The John Nurminen Foundation (JNF), established in 1992, has two focus areas: cultural activities focusing on maritime history and cartography, and the protection of the sea. In spring 2004 JNF, on the initiative by the Chairman of Board Juha Nurminen, a fourth generation entrepreneur and dedicated fosterer of maritime culture and the environment, decided to start a concrete project called the "Clean Baltic Sea". The project concentrates on the reduction of eutrophication and enhancement of tanker safety. This is a pioneering civil society initiative, where besides foundation's employees also several individuals have worked pro bono for the foundation and its Baltic Sea initiative.

The foundation borrowed from business the rule of thumb of allocating activities where the best results can be achieved with the lowest cost. As a result, in 2005 the first target of the initiative was identified: chemical phosphorus removal from the three biggest wastewater treatment plants in St. Petersburg would cut phosphorus emissions by up to 70 percent, corresponding to 27 percent of the phosphorous load that is usable for promoting algae in the Gulf of Finland[5]. The ongoing project is a joint project with the water utility of the City of St. Petersburg – Vodokanal – whereby both partners finance half of the costs. The initiative and related construction projects have mobilized a broad network of actors in the construction and water chemistry industries among others. Establishing a relationship of mutual trust with CEO Felix V. Karmazinov of Vodokanal has been significant for the projects' success. Successful mobilization of high-level political decision makers to support the project, the President of Finland and the Governor of St. Petersburg in particular, has played a key role. High political pressure on wastewater treatment has also been reflected by the media's interest in the issue.

In 2008, JNF started work in Warsaw, Poland, the largest emitter of phosphorous and nitrogen to the Baltic Sea (in terms of quantity, not per capita), in co-operation with the Swedish private foundation, Baltic Sea 2020. Recently, as a part of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, JNF became involved in a project named PURE (Project on Urban Reduction of Eutrophication, 2010-213), which concentrates on selected wastewater treatment plants in Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, and Poland.

4.3. Baltic Sea Challenge by the Cities of Helsinki and Turku

In June 2007 two Finnish coastal cities Helsinki and Turku, made a commitment to improve the state of the Baltic Sea by challenging over 700 actors including cities and city networks around the Baltic Sea. The idea was that this positive competition between the two cities

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[5] http://www.puhdasitameri.fi/en/clean_baltic_sea_stpetersburg.html

would bode well both for the sea and for the attractiveness of the cities. The signatories of the initiative drafted their own action plans, whereby they listed concrete actions to improve the state of the Baltic Sea. In June 2010, 165 actors had signed the challenge. One our interviewees stressed that this project has both high "signal value" and concrete value for bringing these issues forward in various fields of administration.

The impulse for the initiative came from the two city mayors who had brainstormed this idea and then engaged their city administrations and related networks. One of the key measures of the two cities' own action plans concerns wastewater from shipping. In 2008, in cooperation with the Port of Helsinki and Helsinki Water, the ferry companies were challenged to discharge their wastewaters at ports into the city sewer system without a separate charge[6]. This is crucial as wastewaters of ships add significant amounts of phosphorous and nitrogen into the sea, and international law (MARPOL 73/78), somewhat strangely, permits the discharge of comminuted and disinfected sewage at a distance of more than three nautical miles from the nearest land[7].

As a part of the initiative, an international water seminar was organized together with JNF in Helsinki a day before the Baltic Sea Action Summit held in February 2010. The seminar brought together almost 150 actors primarily from cities, their waterworks and harbours, and financiers, and included participants from all coastal countries of the Baltic Sea and Ukraine and Belarus. Yet, extending the challenge to the whole Baltic Sea region has been met with some reservation, partly due to the economic downturn, but also partly because the idea of city mayors challenging other actors may seem too unconventional.

4.4. Bringing together policy and business by Baltic Sea Action Group

The Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG) was registered in March 2008 by three individuals, all with a background in JNF. While the founders' relevant experience and social networks could be capitalized to create a 'spill-over effect' (de Bakker & den Hond, 2008:12) on how to mobilize actors to protect the Baltic Sea, their approach was distinctive from that of JNF. Rather than concentrating on individual projects and fund raising, the foundation catalyzes a variety of projects, which are expected to benefit both the actors involved (e.g. firms and NGOs), as well as the Baltic Sea.

In spring 2009, the Baltic Sea Action Summit (BSAS) initiative, a platform for heads of state, companies, NGOs, and individual citizens to protect the Baltic Sea through concrete actions, was launched together with Finland's President and Prime Minister. The initiative called for a new type of moral and collaboration between public, private, and civil sectors to save the sea. All participants of the summit, which was kept in February 2010 in Helsinki, formulated a commitment to actions that best 'marry their interests with their abilities'. The idea is that all commitments (over 140 originating from all the nine coastal countries and the U.S., Belarussia, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Norway) are publicly visible[8], and that this transparency makes public screening possible. In their internet page (http://en.bsag.fi/) the founders claim that their novel concept has potential to be "the dominant design for saving

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[6] WWF made an appeal already in 2007 to ferry companies to stop the discharge of wastewater into the sea.
[7] http://www.imo.org/Conventions/contents.asp?doc_id=678&topic_id=258
[8] http://www.bsas.fi/commitments/all-commitments

the sea and other nature values in the future". They further describe their operating model as a "social innovation" with "targeted actions by positive interdependencies in a social context".

5. Mobilization of dyads and broader issue-based nets

In this section we aim to answer the questions we set out to answer, i.e. First, *what are the mobilization tactics used by the network mobilizers?* Second, *what are the responses and motives of target firms to participate in issue solving* ?Altogether we found four broad tactics used by the network mobilizers: 1) building on social networks and shared values, 2) careful targeting of high status business and policy makers, 3) positive framing – business and societal gains, and finally 4) broader network implications.

5.1.1. *Building on social networks and shared values*

Two intertwined characteristics of early mobilization efforts were the use of existing social networks and shared values. Existing relationships with high status individuals played a crucial role as explained by a network mobilizer to us:

> "We were able to take aboard private persons with considerable sums too…Many said that this is like making an investment to one's own cottage."

Also, in the mobilization of resources for the initiatives, weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) from school classmates or business acquaintances have been meaningful. The strength of complementary social networks of network mobilizers was also emphasized in our interviews:

> "One can say that our networks are completely different…He is Chairman of Board in a listed firm and is involved in politics…And I have contacts to my generation career people in leading positions of firms"

Also the target firms highlighted the role of earlier relationships for their decision to participate in the initiatives:

> "I think it was mutual [trigger to participate]…They asked us as we knew him beforehand…We also were interested to know if there was something we could do as we have people who were enthusiastic about this."

The close-knit community of experts and individuals working with the key issues related to the cleaner Baltic Sea in Finland enabled those with central network positions to efficiently and quickly bring influential people from different sectors together. *Shared values* and *emotional bonds* to the sea enabled quick mobilization. Religious terms were used to describe the atmosphere in seminars and summits both by network mobilizers:

> "The atmosphere at the seminar was extraordinary – like in a religious movement where people stand up and say I believe"

Also target firms used similar type of terminology:

> "Towards the end [of the summit] it became slightly amusing – everybody was 'same believers' – united and in trance"

The perceived value of the sea was frequently linked to hobbies connected with the sea. One of the target firm representatives explained that: "all these gentlemen are yachtsmen at least, meaning that they have experienced this sea quite deeply". One network mobilizer confirmed that this was deliberately done:

> "We didn't start fundraising from Rovaniemi [Northern Finland], but rather we started from the coast and screened people in terms of whether their hobby is sailing."

Hobbies are, indeed, one way to express identity, which has been suggested to drive mobilization (Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003) and to integrate a wide array of occupational statutes (McPherson et al., 2001).We also found that a shared value base legitimizes the 'exploitation' of the relationship sediment (Agndal & Axelsson, 2002) for the common goal. It also acts as a kind of glue that connects individuals with heterogeneous backgrounds, from political decision makers to business leaders and researchers. The strong role of individual's values for early network mobilization differs slightly from Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) who stress the role of group identity for successful mobilization. In our case group identity formed later, along with issue evolution.

5.1.2. *Careful targeting of high status business and policy makers*

One of the key themes that emerged from our interview data was the criticality of reaching the top decision maker level by the network mobilizers. Given the high political salience and strong role of regulators in solving environmental issues, reaching political decision makers and gaining some form of political consensus was essential ingredient for successful mobilization. The targeting of key policy makers was particularly evident in the Baltic Sea Action Summit, where the highest political actors from all the coastal states were present.

Also key industry actors in environmental business were targets of mobilization efforts. As one of our interviewees told us:

> " It was very important for them [network mobilizer] that we were involved. They were contacted by others who asked why our company was not participating. When they have a firm, which is a credible actor in the field of environment, as a commitment maker, it is much easier to go and ask next ones to join."

When it comes to the business sector, the highest level of decision makers of the firms were approached by the network mobilizers. According to one of our interviewees at target firms this was 'awfully smart' as explained to us:

> "They requested Executive Director level commitment…They didn't want these half-green firm employees who prepared these commitments, but those with influence."

This finding is aligned with earlier research which showed the powerful effect of selectivity, the mobilizer's ability to concentrate organizing efforts on those individuals whose potential contributions are largest (Marwell et al., 1988). Typically, business or technology managers or corporate responsibility and communications departments were in charge of preparing firms' action plans related to Baltic Sea, but it was often CEOs who represented the firms towards external stakeholders.

One tactic used by the network mobilizers has been to involve individuals with a high status to act as the member of foundations' boards or advisory boards. Our findings thereby largely

correspond earlier findings that collective action benefits from earlier social ties, as well as, status and value homophily (McPherson et al., 2001). However, our data showed that network mobilizers needed to rise above their own status to get highest level policy makers involved (heads of states, ministers and city governors).

5.1.3. *Positive framing – business and societal gains*

Among the most central tactics applied by the network mobilizers was positive framing of the issue, even when dealing with problematic practices of firms:

> "One of our values is optimism and the search for solutions. We are not interested in ranking the firms to wrong-doers and putting them in a line, but rather finding out the forerunners. "

However, Holzer (2008: 55) warns that the cooperative stance of firms is often symbolic window dressing and leads to "win-win rhetoric of ecological modernization and sustainable development" where environmental groups then reinvent themselves as "solution oriented" cooperation partners (Schneidewind & Peterson, 1998). This issue was also brought-up by our interviewee who continued:

> "If we would always share firms' opinions we would have no value added to give. Our value for firms would cease. If we would merely be kinds of green wash organizations it would not benefit firms for longer term. Quite opposite what accounts is that we challenge them all the time to do something better."

In fact, close relationships between network mobilizers (foundations) and target firms were consciously avoided. This is natural since too close an association between firms and their stakeholders may strain their relationship and affect both partners' integrity and reputation (Holzer, 2008). This approach may be called "staying distant friends", and is reflected in the following quote:

> "We don't go hand-in-hand, but go in completely separate routes, and try to consciously avoid each other."

All target firms emphasized the existence of positive business effects from the participation in the initiatives. More specifically, three different motives seemed to have driven firms to participate in the Baltic Sea initiatives: *business benefit*, *a must* or *enhanced employer image*. For firms whose core business was closely related to environmental issues the key driver for participation was an expected business benefit.

> "At the end of the day we have business idea here, and not that it is nice to work for the Baltic Sea as such…Two things comes simultaneously: the state of the Baltic Sea becomes better and we can make business. That is not prohibited here - quite the contrary."

Given the fact that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been high on the agenda of firms already for years and can be portrayed as "yet another management trend" (Sahlin-Andersson, 2006:603; Abrahamson, 1991), it was not surprising that this was picked-up on our interviews, too:

"Everything relating to environment and sustainable development is in. It secures funding and competitiveness. It's not any more a negative issue, but rather is seen as competitive advantage."

"Sustainability is a trend which is real, not only from the environmental perspective, but involves a lot of money. Big firms are forerunners but a lot of smaller firms too."

Firms whose activities have major environmental consequences often stressed that participation in the initiatives is a must:

"Due to the fact that we still are a company which has an influence on the environment, in one or another way, we thought that it is also wise to be a member of this kind of initiative. For us it is also a little bit, to be honest – a must. It is also quite reasonable solution, because at the same time all those commitments we had made during this process, they also fit with our own strategy and we really work with them. So it might also be wise to tell it to the world, not just work at your backyard but do something bigger."

Among the key motivators among the business participants was also the issue's media visibility and public acceptance which contributed positively to participants' image and business:

"They [foundations behind initiatives] get very different degree of publicity for the issues and our business benefits when people realize that they cannot dirty it [sea]…Technically, we could have done the same, but by no means received public acceptance that they did."

For those firms whose business was distant from environmental issues, the key motivator for participating in the initiatives was a strong individual level motivation for doing concrete measures to benefit the sea. One interviewee put it:

"This single individual was so excited about it, and received so much energy from working for the Baltic Sea, that one could see that it did good for these people [involved in the project]".

For these firms, higher employee satisfaction, and potential recruitment benefits, motivated participation in the initiative. Sometimes this became as a surprise to network mobilizers:

"We thought that they [company] had some motive, we thought that they wanted that their logo would be displayed — but they were not interested in it at all…They just wanted to have this local environmental project with which they could motivate their personnel."

5.2. Broader network implications

Both network mobilizers and target firms stressed that participation in the Baltic Sea initiatives is a way for a firm to reach wider networks beyond the initiatives. Most of the firm representatives we interviewed stressed that their participation in the Baltic Sea initiatives have broadened their understanding of networks relevant for their business. This relates to both public and private actors and networks. One of our interviewees described how

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participation has led also to the emergence of new social relationships and to the use of informal channels:

> "We update the situation in certain intervals…We have learned extremely much and good contacts have remained not only with them [network mobilizer] but also with the Ministry of Environment and people who deal with these issues…We deal with these things also informally so that they may call and ask my opinion of something quite different…Understanding of what they [actors not recognized before] do in the Baltic Sea region is good, because there may be other issues where we can cooperate."

Another interviewee picked-up the possibility for identifying new business partners:
> "One thing I was thinking about is that given that there are one and a half hundred other projects ongoing, which we haven't yet scanned through, whether we could cooperate on some issues. We know some of these firms, but there might be other possibilities for benefiting from this network."

In quite similar manner another participant explains:

> "It is the same thing if you go to some kind of conference and afterwards you have to report how many good contacts you got. It is difficult to say in a short term. I would say myself that the main benefit is that we are in the picture. That we are somehow part of the network and you never know. It might take one year, two – three years. It might never come, but it might come very quickly after certain time… The networks side – I would say really needs time. We sometimes joke that it is same like a good brandy or good wine - it needs time to mature."

The long time horizon was also brought-up by a study participant representing a family business who noticed with humor that their quarter is 25 years.

Overall, we may conclude that managers' network pictures, i.e. "subjective mental representations of their relevant business environment" (Henneberg & Mouzas, 2008:408; Ford et al., 2002) have broadened as a result of their participation in the Baltic Sea initiatives. These socially constructed sense-making (Weick, 1995) devices that managers use to interpret and act on issues may form a powerful tool for identifying new business.

Firms were in many cases also pro-active to participate in the initiatives. Sometimes their participation was triggered by a third party such as their customers as described by a network mobilizer:

> "At the beginning we did not contact the firms, but rather the consumers and then they [retailers] started to receive these nasty calls and inquiries"

Hence, influence chains are multilinked (Zietsma & Winn, 2008) when a network mobilizer first influences general public, which then influences firms, who then influence other firms in their supply chains In our case, these indirect influence chains brought wide attention to the common issue and new participants to the Baltic Sea initiatives.

The possible network implications go beyond any country borders or sea borders. When it comes to environmental innovations to save the Baltic Sea, their markets are global. This was

stressed by our interviewees both at the firm and network mobilizer sides. For instance, WWF possesses a global network of offices which enables transfer of good practices basically around the globe. The interaction between local and global levels was particularly evident on the business side:

> "Even though it is said that the Baltic Sea is the dirtiest sea, such dirty regions are elsewhere…Everything that relates to environment is in, which also brings money and competitiveness. Of course the Baltic Sea is one with a common denominator. But I would like to have a broader view. We are in search of business, new business around the world. "

Environmental issues themselves do not respect any country borders: environmental problems tend to escalate regionally and even globally. This was evident in our case: no actor or country can solve the issue of poor state of the Baltic Sea alone. This aspect was raised also at the Baltic Sea Action Summit in the speech given by Jorma Ollila, Chairman of Royal Dutch Shell and Nokia:

> "Nowadays, every time you are trying to solve a problem on the local level, you need to consider solution's global effects and ─ this is for you decision makers ─ when acting on global level, you always need to think consequences on local circumstances."

Finally, we want to stress, that the idea of doing concrete, measurable actions have a long history, originating largely from the USA, where individuals such as Al Gore and Bill Clinton with high media visibility have been active. It is also good to keep in mind, that the focus on a single geographical context easily downplays the links to broader societal changes, and risks overemphasizing the role of local issues and actors, rather than seeing them as local variants and enactors of globally circulating ideas (Ritvala & Granqvist, 2009). While the Baltic Sea is a pilot project in many arenas, for instance in EU marine environment work, many ideas have been imported here from elsewhere. For instance, WWF organized a series of workshops for the Baltic Sea's stakeholders where they could learn from the knowledge and experience of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Australia), which is a well known success story in protecting a vulnerable marine ecosystem.

To summarize our findings we have formulated the following propositions on the mobilization setting and tactics, as well as responses from target firms in issue network emergence.

Proposition 1:   *As value congruence between a network mobilizer and a target firm increases, the possibility of successful mobilization increases.*

Proposition 2:   *As an actor's ability to access highest level decision-makers increases, the possibility of successful mobilization increases.*

Proposition 3:   *NGO's capability to create a relationship of moderate depth with target firms, increases the possibility of continued mobilization*

> *Proposition 4:* *Publicity of the issue increases the probability for becoming mobilized.*

> *Proposition 5:* *Mobilization efforts make networks visible, which changes (enlargens) the network horizon of the target firms.*

6. Theoretical conclusions

This study was guided by our desire to understand the complexities of mobilizing issue networks composed of diverse range of actors. We aimed to contribute to the stakeholder theory, which still gives little understanding of mobilization beyond the dyad between the mobilizer and a target firm (Zietsma &Winn, 2008). Our approach stresses the opportunities which may be gained through cooperation, so we complement common conflict driven empirical studies within stakeholder literature. This paper is with Wilson et al. (2010) the first to combine stakeholder and business network literatures to better understand broad mobilization of actors to solve contemporary common problems. We built also on social network theory and showed the criticality of weak ties to key decision makers sharing similar values for successful network mobilization. With the present study we contribute to the earlier literature on business network mobilization (Araujo & Brito, 1998; Brito, 2001; Lundgren, 1992; Mouzas and Naudé, 2007; Ritvala and Salmi, 2009) by looking also at the targets, the mobilized firms.

Our study also confirms the promise of social movement literature in gaining deeper understanding of the mobilization processes to solve the problem of collective action (King, 2008). Social movement theory's focus on framing, mobilization structures and corporate and industry opportunities (McAdam et al., 1996) are valid when trying to understand the mobilization of business actors to participate in collective action. Our results extend and refine these categories by pointing at the importance of *positive framing strategies*, *value homophily in mobilization structures*, and the role of *global business opportunities* (Mouzas and Naudé, 2007) in solving today's big problems. Thus, we respond the call by de Bakker and den Hond (2008: 8) who claimed that "If stakeholder theory is to become a full theory of business–society relationships, it will have to develop a better understanding of processes by which stakeholders may gain and hold influence over firms."

7. Managerial implications

The insights gained from this study will assist practitioners dealing with environmental (and other societal) concerns as well as who are pursuing and integrating market and non-market strategies. The joining of broad cross-sectoral networks was seen as beneficial for "securing a place" and cooperation between business and political leaders as well as for bringing concrete new business ideas. The managers that participated in this research, brought up the long time horizons needed to nurture (the Baltic Sea) networks and to get financial rewards from such activities. However, several interviewees stressed that participation in such networks is even a must in the era of hightened environmental concern. It may well be that that participation in broader issue networks may even be required for organizational survival (at least in specific industries) in the future. Our study illustrates that, such concerns have led business firms to address the issue ahead of any explicit mobilization efforts.

In final, we chose the issue of poor ecological state of the Baltic Sea so that it reflects a contemporary pressing problem. Thus we may contribute to the ongoing public and policy discussion on how to tackle severe issues. The Baltic Sea is in many ways unique, but exemplifies a problem that concerns a variety of actors across borders. In general, concerns around fresh water are increasing, as the world's supply of clean, fresh water is steadily decreasing. Water demand already exceeds supply in many parts of the world and as the world population continues to rise, so too does the water demand. Awareness of the importance of preserving water has only recently emerged, but will grow in importance and have global ramifications. We hope that our insights provide food for thought, and inspire further research on the interaction between stakeholders, networks, as well as societal and business interests.

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