9.6 The international organizations as environmental information producers and disseminators – CASE HELCOM

Helsinki Commission – the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – is governing the Helsinki Convention and playing a major role as a central environmental actor in the Baltic Sea area (see Chapter 5.1.1 and BOX 3). The structures, procedures and programmes of Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) have been recently reviewed. According to the review HELCOM should be refocused to take account of changing needs, and adapted to make it more coherent, proactive and flexible. [54] HELCOM and the review process have been frequently informed on the proceeding and preliminary results of this project.

The 1992 Helsinki Convention stated, that the Contracting Parties – the coastal states and EEC – shall individually or jointly take all appropriate legislative, administrative or other relevant measures to prevent and eliminate pollution in order to promote the ecological restoration of the Baltic Sea area and the preservation of its ecological balance. Therefore, all the environmental policy instruments (see Fig. 2.1) could be used for implementing the statement. The principal kind of measures for work are common regulations, regional action programmes, preparation for combatting oil spillages and other pollution incidents, coastal zone management as well as nature protection programmes. The role of HELCOM in this could be concentrated to specialized information and analysis, common regulations and standards, and joint programmes and operations. The working process of HELCOM consist of a circle of setting new goals regularly, implementing the needed activities, analysing the results and their impacts on the environment and on the society, evaluating how well the goals are filled and the quality of the work done in HELCOM and assessing the new needs for knowledge and investments (see Fig. 9.2). Open communication within HELCOM and outwards from it is needed through all the phases of this working process.

HELCOM is active in the whole catchment area including parts of 14 countries. According to the results of the project questionnaire distributed to different professional groups in the Baltic Sea area, HELCOM enjoys a good reputation among those who are already familiar with this organisation. On the other hand, HELCOM and its activities still remain unknown among various professionals – not to mention the general public in this area. The feedback to the questionnaire supports a broader and more comprehensive communication as a future task for HELCOM. However, the information created through HELCOM activities should be more popularised. Considerable amount of valuable information is now left in the administrative and scientific reports that are mainly distributed through expert channels. To be able to transform an important scientific and administrative expert organization to an actively communicating entity is a challenging but an important task.

The development of HELCOM activities is needed in order to improve the role and capacity of HELCOM as a provider of specialised information and analysis. This information and analysis form a basis for the political adoption, public acceptance, technical design and environmental evaluation of measures to protect the Baltic Sea. In order to be a prominent information provider HELCOM needs to be known and to have a good credibility along with a fast and reliable information dissemination and communication system. This should consist of channels and forms of communication enabling the effective exchange of messages be-

tween the original sender – in this case HELCOM – and the target audience (see Fig. 9.2).

HELCOM would need an information and communication policy and system with a limited number of core tasks that should be based on the HELCOM's strategic vision for its future development.
See Chapter 9, the corresponding item no. 5.13.

The structure of HELCOM consists of Secretariat in Helsinki, Heads of Delegation and various contact persons of the Members and of the Observers belonging to the Helsinki Convention or HELCOM PITF, which is governing the Baltic Sea Joint Comprehensive Environmental Action Programme (JCP) (see Fig. 9.3). In addition, there are subsidiary bodies such as working groups.

In the process of creating an information and communication policy and system it is important to define the relevant tasks in it for different parts of the HELCOM structure. This report – all the findings and conclusions in it, and special proposals concerning HELCOM – serve as a basis for formulating this information and communication policy.

HELCOM should investigate how the implementation of the 1992 Helsinki Convention, art. 16 and 17 has proceeded.

As part of the planning process HELCOM should collect the experiences so far concerning information producing and dissemination.

In order to make the interaction effective, HELCOM should join the major existing information provider networks that are active in the area or promote the development of a network with backbone information carriers, for instance, UNEP, UNESCO, UN/CSD, UNECE/WHOEURO, OECD, EU/EEA, IMO, ECE, CBSS, Baltic 21, VASAB 2010 and IFIs.
See Chapter 9, the corresponding item no. 1.1

An efficient tool for raising environmental awareness would be a network of actors which can distribute information that enables a receiver to understand the state of the environment and the ways to improve it as well as to strive for comprehending and using new relevant information. HELCOM – as an appreciated and neutral actor – could play a prominent part here as an initiator/coordinator of the network. The network which is discussed in a greater detail in chapter 7.1.1 could also include clearing house functions.

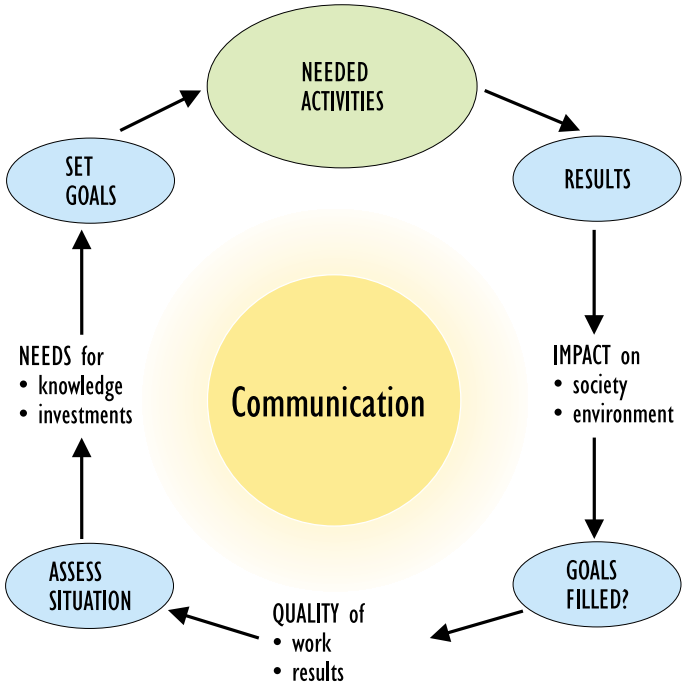

Figure 9.1. HELCOM activities and communication.

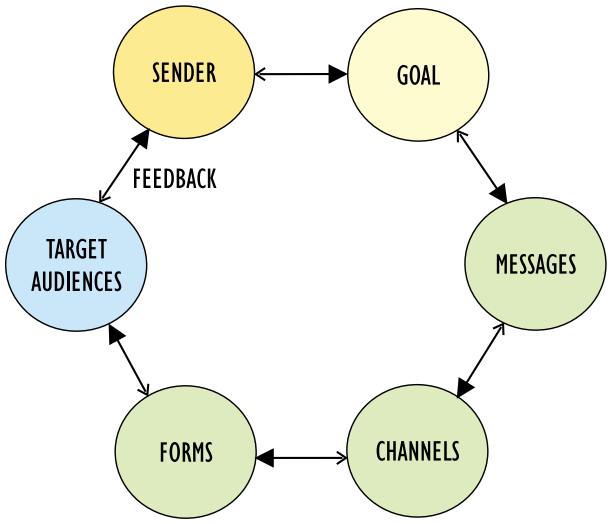

Figure 9.2. Elements in communication.

During the process of developing the network the present initiatives and activities should be taken into account – and maybe included in the network. Examples of these are BALLERINA which is an Internet approach to increase access to transboundary environmental information in the Baltic Sea Region and BALTICSEA WEB for bibliographic material and documents.

During the planning process of the new information and communication policy, HELCOM should reconsider its mission and role among the international and national information producers that are active in the Baltic Sea area.
See Chapter 9, the corresponding item no. 1.1.

The interaction should be improved, in order to save resources and avoid unnecessary duplication. Moreover, HELCOM should maintain and develop contacts also with those environmental information producers that are active outside the Baltic Sea area, to be aware of the contemporary activities and future plans in the different parts of the world.

HELCOM should decide how to communicate with and promote information among the decision makers and other key persons in the Baltic Sea catchment area.
See Chapter 9, the corresponding items no. 3.5, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.11, 5.12, 5.14, 5.15, 5.16.

These target groups should embrace, among others, politicians, administrators, researchers, educators, farmers, business and media persons, and people working for NGOs – which all have different cultures for receiving information. Also it has to be beared in mind that the stage of environmental awareness varies in the countries, organizations and among more specific target audiences considerably. Raising environmental awareness should include considering the quality of environment as an essential part of a functioning economy and sustainable development as a whole, including public health and well-being. All these factors have an influence on the contents, channels and forms of needed information, see Chapter 2.

While making the goals and activities of HELCOM more known and appreciated among a broader public, HELCOM should take into consideration the use of local languages spoken in a specific area.
See Chapter 8.4: _

In the project questionnaire the need to use local languages that are accessible and attractive for the receiver was clear even among target audiences where the skills to use foreign languages are good. The objectives and activities of HELCOM and other basic information should be distributed with leaflets in several languages. Also HELCOM homepages should include basic information in several languages of the area.

HELCOM should promote creating an international measurement method for assessing the level of environmental awareness. The assessment of environmental awareness should be carried out in the Baltic Sea area countries with a coordination of HELCOM.
See Chapter 9, the corresponding item no. 1.3.

Environmental awareness can be seen to consist of motivation, knowledge and skills. The indicators chosen to measure these could be studied by surveys focusing on attitudes, the level of knowledge or skills, as well as on practical actions and their results. This kind of indicators should be carefully selected in order to allow time-series analysis and the comparison of environmental awareness between different countries and regions.

HELCOM should develop its internal information dissemination and communication system in order to raise its capacity for fast activities as well as dissemination and utilisation of information.
See Chapter 9, the corresponding items no. 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2.

Because of the complexity of HELCOM framework (see Fig. 9.3) and the elemental interdependence of the different bodies in it, a competent internal communication system is essential for a high degree of coordination and cooperation.

HELCOM information policy should take into account and utilise the growing importance of the electronic communication in the Baltic Sea area. The HELCOM WWW pages should be the subject of continuous improvement.
See Chapter 9, the corresponding item no. 1, 3.6 ,and Chapter 8.4:

The answers to the project questionnaire point to the strengthening role of new integrating communication systems such as the international TV-channels, the Internet and multi-functional mobile phones – all over the area.

In order to raise knowledge on the environmental state of the Baltic Sea and HELCOM actions to improve it, the HELCOM Secretariat and other bodies should not only be experts of the environmental issues of the Baltic Sea but also be competent to communication and information practices.
See Chapter 8.4.

The promotion of environmental awareness is important in many different fields of society (see Fig. 8.1). The possibilities to choose channels and forms to raise environmental awareness are numerous. Moreover, the multitude of information producers and distributers as well as target audiences are overwhelming. In order to be a successful information provider and communicator the whole HELCOM including all its subsidiary bodies needs a clear policy, and competent decisions and effective actions in accordance with it.

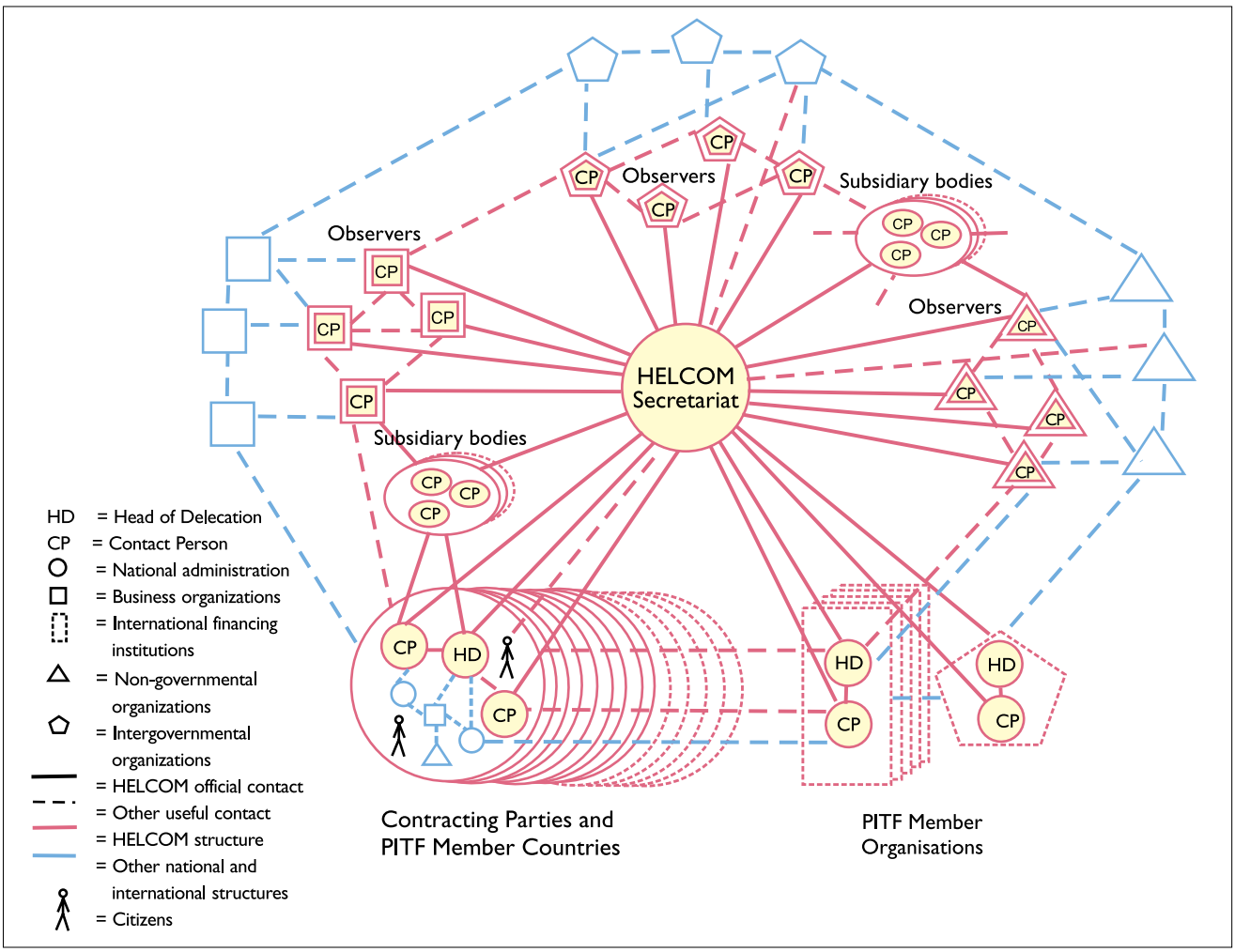

Figure 9.3. Information and communication structure of HELCOM.