Communication Action Concept

Output 5.2 of Interreg Baltic Sea Region project NOAH

Protecting the Baltic Sea from untreated wastewater spillages during flood events in urban areas

Contents

Introduction

The NOAH project aims to protect the Baltic Sea from untreated wastewater spillages during flood events in urban areas. For this purpose, actions such as holistic urban planning and real-time control of urban drainage systems are carried out. The project focuses on developing holistic urban planning tools that can be widely shared and used in the Baltic Sea region. To reach the experts of the field, the general public and other stakeholders, the project puts special effort on project communication and stakeholder involvement in various ways.

Effective communication, both internal and external, is the basis of cooperation and essential to ensure the achievement of the goal of the NOAH project: protecting the Baltic Sea. The work package 5 (WP5) covers the full scope of the project's communication activities, including the dissemination and exploitation of project results. It involves not only the WP5 leader SAMK, cooperating closely with the project lead partner TalTech, but all partner organizations of the NOAH project.

The activity *5.2 Communication actions* focuses on the implementation of effective project communication activities by providing appropriate material and functioning tools for the partnership regarding the communication with the key stakeholders and dissemination of the project results. This output *5.2 Communication Action Concept* brings together the principles, tools and channels used in the NOAH project communication. It is a compilation of the methods and activities that make the communication concept of the project.

This report was compiled in project period 6, in December 2021 (the activity was extended due to the project prolongation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic).

1   Overview of the activity

Communication of project actions and dissemination of project results – to target groups and in cooperation with the key stakeholders – are in the core of the NOAH communication actions. The implementation of these tasks demands appropriate tools and strategies. SAMK is the leading partner of the communication activities, but each partner organization is responsible for fulfilling their role in the communication actions, ensuring the results and material to be documented, disseminated and exploited within their network and range of stakeholders locally.

The project's initiation included the creation of the project brand – the visual identity with the logos, templates of the documents to be used by the partnership and the promotional material of the project, as well as the creation of the project website and NOAH pages in selected social media channels. The project's communication strategy (Output 5.1) was created to outline the goals and phases of communication for the entire project lifespan. The group of stakeholders was managed in the form of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool, which was generated and supplemented along with the project progress.

For creating visibility, the selected tools and channels were utilized with the focus on reaching out to the target groups. In projects like NOAH, existing networks play an important role and thus the partnership of 18 organizations in six countries in the Baltic Sea region gave the project important assets in acquiring and achieving visibility.

Measuring or evaluating the impact and the visibility of the project is a complex task. Insights of social media channels or data of websites can be used – however, in NOAH the main tool for following the communication actions was the periodical follow-up of the output indicators of e.g. publications, posts, page visits and project events.

The main communication activities include:
- Providing a functioning frame for the project communication, including internal communication within the partnership.
- Creating the project brand for efficient external communication.
- Making the project visible with the main goal of disseminating gained knowledge in urban areas of the Baltic Sea region and beyond.
- Developing a database of key stakeholders from different fields of expertise and regions or countries by using a CRM tool to get key stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the project activities.
- Managing appropriate online tools and communication channels to create the visibility of the project, e.g. project website and social media channels.
- Providing project partners and stakeholders appropriate offline tools and channels to support the communication and the visibility of the project, e.g. printed materials and events.
- Networking with other relevant projects, creating synergy in the field.
- Following and evaluating communication-related output indicators.

2 Project brand

The NOAH project communication was initiated by building the project brand identity in January 2019. The visual identity, including e.g. the project logo, colors and illustrative elements, was designed by WP5 leader SAMK. The project logo, with the simple color scheme and the recognizable wave element, was produced in a few different formats and versions for efficient use in different channels. To support the project brand, a photo that well describes the themes of the project – pluvial floods in urban areas – was selected from a Latvian photographer Martins Plume. The project logo, the wave element and the flood photo have been the key elements in creating the project brand for NOAH.

Picture 1. The round and horizontal NOAH logo.

Picture 2. Photo of a pluvial flood by Martins Plume.

The above given elements, together with the financier logos, were integrated in all project material and channels, such as:

- project website,
- project poster A3,
- project roll-up and leaflet,
- project videos,
- MS Office templates.

Picture 3. Use of the brand elements in the website banner, project roll-up and project leaflet.

The aim of building the brand for projects is similar to that of products or companies – with the difference that regional development projects do not focus on brand

building for reasons related to making profit etc. But, for projects like NOAH, the goal still is to build an image that makes the project recognizable and well-known among stakeholders and target groups. The use of the selected visual elements of the project brand coherently makes reaching users in social media, for example, more efficient. With a strong visual identity, the interest groups are more likely to recall the project, which is an important factor in making an impact.

In addition to creating the visual identity, the project brand includes the mode and tone of the communication, as well. Depending on the channel used for communicating project activities and results, NOAH partners have aimed to convey the message in a matter-of-fact way, but with a specific human approach. Committing stakeholders and other groups alike to the project benefits from an easily approachable style of communication, with the value put in the accurate and interesting way of presenting the topics and results of the project.

All in all, a coherent project brand, including the visual identity and the tone of communication, makes a good compass for implementing project communication and creating project visibility in different channels. With that compass, it is fluent to produce content that tells stories of who the experts working within NOAH are, what the partnership does and what the project has to offer for its stakeholders.

3 Project communication & visibility

Already in an early planning phase of the project activities, it was decided that the tools for disseminating project data and creating project visibility are widely utilized in NOAH communication. The two main channels for project communication are:

- *The [project website](#), established and developed with the purpose of giving plenty of project-related information via one source. The content ranges from partner introductions, pilot site photos and media release links to project reports.*
- *The social media channels* [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), used for sharing information on current project activities and interesting topics. These channels give the possibility to reach stakeholders from various groups and fields.

In the frame of the project brand and with the help of the selected channels, a few main principles were utilized in NOAH communication. Interacting in media, using the possibilities of visual assets and cooperating in networks have made it possible to create visibility and share project achievements widely and diversely. Being a large-scale project, both thematically and geographically, following certain main principles in implementing project communication helps to build a solid base for the work.

Utilizing the possibilities of media is nowadays a rule rather than an exception for development projects, especially international ones. It makes a difference to be actively present in social media and to be visible in traditional media, i.e. releasing articles, publishing scientific papers, giving TV interviews etc. What is important with these various media opportunities for NOAH is the possibility to disseminate project results not only in English but in local project partner languages, as well. By communicating in Estonian, Latvian, Polish, Danish, Swedish and Finnish, reaching stakeholders locally becomes more efficient. For this, the partnership has made an effort to provide translations and presentations of the NOAH main themes in their local languages throughout the project.

Delivering project results in a comprehensible way by using visual tools has been a core value in NOAH. To complement written reports, project information has been constructed into the form of e.g. interactive maps and informative leaflets, story-telling videos, and illustrative captures of the project pilot sites, activities and results. With the help of visualization, plenty of project material can easily be shared both in print and digitally, and together they form a coherent entity giving a variety of information of the project achievements.

Picture 4. Examples of the NOAH visual tools used on the project website: interactive map of the pilot sites, pilot site video of Rakvere, informative leaflet of the NOAH Extreme Weather Layer tool.

Building networks is an important factor in international projects – especially if dealing with a transnational area and task such as protecting the Baltic Sea. In NOAH, three associated partner organizations were selected in the beginning of the project to reinforce the visibility and effectiveness of the communication. In addition, other projects working in the same field of interest have been an asset as the synergy has provided possibilities to discuss, develop and share project innovations in channels managed by other project entities. To mention one of the most important ones, the Baltic Smart Water project has been of great support and assistance for NOAH by providing the possibility to participate and present project topics in seminars and by incorporating the NOAH tool, the Extreme Weather Layer, in the Baltic Water Hub.

Another important way of networking and sharing project advancements has been the NOAH Stakeholder Representative Panel. The panel consists of experts of the field from countries of the Baltic Sea region, mainly from outside the project consortium. As invited members, they have been given the possibility to receive a detailed overview of periodical project activities in biannual online meetings. Their expertise

has been an asset in assessing the NOAH activities and giving feedback on the novelties developed by the project. And more importantly, the panel has played an important role in sharing the NOAH knowledge outside the project community, including the Baltic Sea region countries Lithuania and Russia.

Making people visible in the project and its communication has been the final and most important value in all communication actions within NOAH. Despite being a very technical project, it is valuable to emphasize that all project actions are taken by people, and all project achievements are made for the people in the Baltic Sea region. Human interaction is needed in one way or another to generate innovations, to develop them and to bring them into action.

Creating project visibility is not a clear-cut task, there are no shortcuts for projects like NOAH to get a foothold in its own field. Utilizing the selected tools and channels wisely and relentlessly, without forgetting the value of networks, helps to build a solid base for project visibility. To gain commitment among stakeholders, it is essential to make sure that the project results are easily available, that they are presented in a tangible way and serve the stakeholders and their interests.

4 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

The communication with the key target groups of NOAH is supported by a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool, which has been populated and used by all partners of the project. The CRM was planned for enabling the efficient communication and use of the website, newsletter, events etc. for the greatest visibility of the project.

In general, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a process implemented to different activities to gather, manage, and analyze data with the intention to communicate and to cooperate with stakeholders, partners, and key target groups. It is useful in building commitment within people interested in the topic. The CRM needs to be kept constantly up to date, as it helps sharing general knowledge and interacting with the target groups about upcoming events, project results etc. It also helps to target specific content to relevant key target groups by country or region, e.g. information on events which have been of their interest in the past.

Personal security is an important matter in CRM as it contains personal and identifiable information. General Data Protection Regulations, GDPR, sets the guidelines for using personal data. The CRM must be used accordingly in all situations and the use must follow the regulations that has been set on regional or national level.

Collecting the information for the NOAH CRM started immediately when the project launched and continued during the project's lifespan. The information was collected from online and face-to-face events, using registration forms and email sign-ups. The Covid-19 pandemic caused challenges for NOAH as for many international projects, and the number of projected events was lower than planned. Some of the seminars, workshops and other events were cancelled or transferred online, but NOAH was able to reach its audience despite the challenges.

The CRM has been utilized in NOAH as a support tool, supplemented and used by everyone involved in the project to enable efficient communications and achieving the greatest visibility of the project. It was managed cooperatively by the partnership via Google Drive. The CRM was used in marketing activities, such as contacting event participants, sharing information, and communicating of the project results, e.g. in newsletters, and other material.

5   Output indicators

When communicating the results of the key project milestones and outcomes, the aim is to keep the stakeholders engaged. However, measuring communication and project visibility is not a straightforward task. In NOAH, the project communication actions have been numerically followed up by collecting a list of output indicators periodically throughout the project lifespan.

The output indicators include
- the number of news and other material published in webpages, social media and printed media,
- the number of NOAH-related events carried out in partner countries,
- the number of participants at the trainings, workshops and events,
- the number of events project partners have participated,
- the number of followers on NOAH social media channels.

The development and accumulation of e.g. the publications and social media followers increased steadily during the project periods from January 2019 to December 2021. In the number of events, it is clearly visible how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the possibility to organize seminars and meet stakeholders face-to-face. In regard to online events, acquiring participant information was not always possible.

For project communication purposes, collecting and following even a simple set of output indicators gives valuable information of the communication actions implemented in the project, and especially of the reach that the actions have among the stakeholders.

6   Conclusions

In NOAH, the aim has been to create a project brand and project content that serve a wide range of people, from experts of the field interested in the technical aspects of NOAH all the way to residents of the pilot municipalities interested in the effects the results have in their everyday life. To gain visibility for the project, communication actions have been taken inside and outside the project community.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, networking and participating events has experienced a rapid change as international and even local events have been turned into online events. Luckily technology still makes it possible to organize seminars and meetings – but the lack of real human interaction has still significantly affected building project networks and reaching out to stakeholders.

All in all, successful project communication provides the input for building the capacity of public authorities involved in the NOAH project, delivering results through different channels, and to communicate the positive effect of the project throughout the Baltic Sea region. By increasing knowledge, NOAH has the possibility to raise awareness, and finally to aim at changing the behavior of its stakeholders.
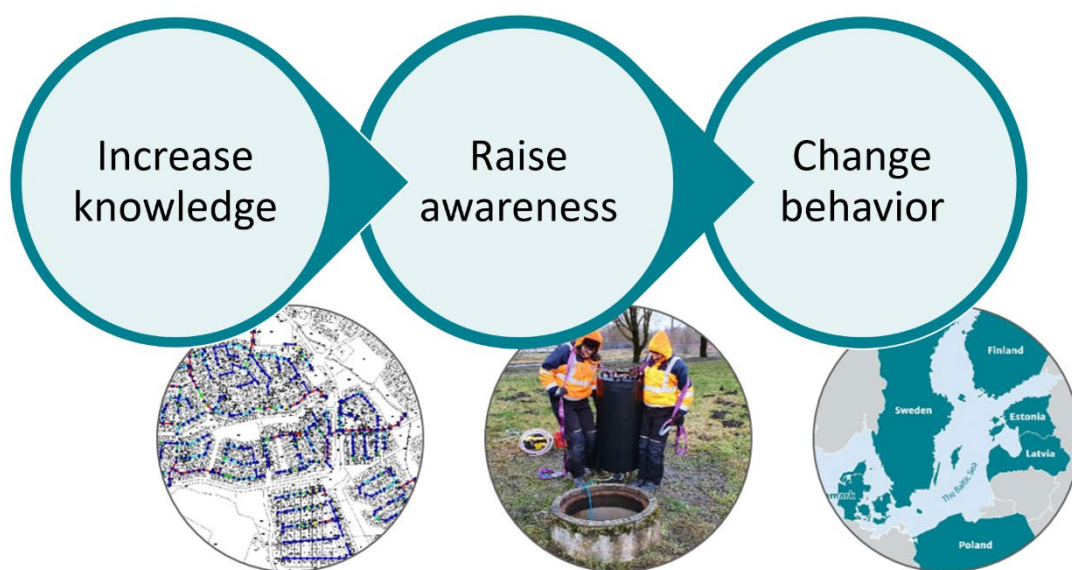
Picture 5. Aims of the NOAH project communication actions.