

## EDITORIAL



## Celebration of Three Decades towards Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region

**Dr. VISVALDAS VARŽINSKAS Assoc. prof.**

Institute of Environmental Engineering Lithuanian National BUP Centre Director at  
The Baltic University Programme

Strong and long-lasting organisations or collaborative networks share several important characteristics. First, there is a relevant common goal in the name of which the action is being taken. The second important criterion is people who, while creating their personal stories, move in one direction and create the history of the organisations in which they work. Celebrating the honourable 30-year anniversary of the Institute of Environmental Engineering of KTU and examining the results of research carried out by the institute's researchers or implemented projects, we see that the best results can be achieved when all interested parties unite for the sake of sustainability: small and large businesses, representatives of science, the state itself and politicians. Researchers and students of the Institute of Environmental Engineering (APINI) of KTU not only have developed the concept of sustainable development on a regional scale, but also actively participated in international networks, and one of them, also celebrating its 30th anniversary, is the Baltic University Network (BUP). Researchers and students from Lithuanian universities (together with KTU, Klaipėda University and Vilnius University have also become members of the BUP) have been active members of the network covering the Baltic Sea region since the establishment of the BUP in 1991. In 2021, the Baltic University Programme celebrated its 30-year anniversary. Since the beginning, the BUP has worked to enhance strong regional educational and

research communities, and to foster the knowledge of focus areas, which have sustainable development as their umbrella term, and of the Baltic Sea Region. All along, contributing to a greater sustainability of the Region has been the main goal.

KTU APINI involvement in the creation of the international BUP network was vital in shaping the culture, attitude, and availability of resources of the academic community of a new, democratic, and independent country. The Baltic University Programme originates from the years of dramatic political change at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. Until then, the East-West divide had been very solid, a real iron curtain, which offered few opportunities for academic co-operation. The Baltic University Programme as a regional university co-operation became a success, and it is one of the largest networks of its kind. The first decade was dedicated to the establishment of the university contacts over the whole region and to the common effort to produce new study materials for the students. Researchers and teachers were invited to produce study materials and videos to the new learning materials. Examples were then gathered from all parts of the Baltic Sea drainage area. The Baltic University Programme was outstanding in its regional focus, a perspective that had been missing in previous learning materials. After the first decade the Baltic University Programme further established the position as producer of modern courses and learning

environments. Furthermore, the network offered new opportunities for contacts, competence development and internationalisation for students and teachers. These activities were also mirrored in the BUP's role in international co-operation and capacity development in higher education and as a strategic partner in policy development. Sooner or later, it happens in all organisations, and the Baltic University Programme is no exception: the time came for a critical mass of colleagues engaged in the Programme to begin their retirement years. For the BUP, this generational shift started around 2015 and led to several changes regarding organisation and management. New academic initiatives took place. During this transitional period, our priority was, first, to develop the co-operation within the BUP, to focus on the participating universities, to have functional National Centres, Secretariats, and to employ new staff, as well as to tweak the old and adopt new routines and policies.

The Baltic University Programme has grown to be one of the largest university networks worldwide, with a total of 97 participating universities at the end of 2021.

There is undoubtedly more to say about these past years of the Programme, and even more to predict and wish for the future. As a result of passion for internationalisation and regional co-operation, teaching, research and innovations, and hard work of hundreds of enthusiastic colleagues from the participating universities and its administrative and strategy-shaping bodies, the BUP is in good hands. Together we learn from each other, by communicating, cooperating, and contributing to the Programme. The focus on sustainable development and education for sustainable development, as well as promoting inter-cultural and inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinary co-operation, is more important than ever.

30 years ago, the world was totally different. No one could imagine online meetings, and even fax machines were not very common yet. At the same time, many things are similar now, 30 years later. People still want to unite with neighbours around the Baltic Sea and to form networks where they could meet and share knowledge.