

From Small Country – to

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Suspicion and feel of danger were always followed by the relationship of Lithuanians towards the sea. In the pagan Lithuanian mythology the sea was the cradle of evil, home of the devil itself, while the land was a safe haven protected and cared by the gods. Historically, the Vikings raided villages and later first alien fortresses were built along the Lithuanian coastline by Teutonic invaders. In contrast to their northern neighbours Latvians and Estonians, the sea wasn't much important to Lithuanians in terms of goods and services either. Even for the modern citizens the sea is still mostly associated with summer holidays and leisure. This is probably not surprising for the small country, having only 91 km of the coastline – one of the shortest in Europe.

Nevertheless, in the last decades development of Lithuania's maritime industries has attracted large public and private capital investments. The Lithuanian maritime sector becomes an integrated system covering various maritime businesses: maritime transport, ports and their infrastructure, industry based on the coastal zone resources, recreational industry, etc. Unfortunately, little money was channelled into the development of the marine and maritime research and technologies. Moreover, scientific potential was scattered across the country in different institutions, in most cases situated far from the Baltic coast, in Vilnius and Kaunas. Such unbalanced development leads to the gap between the regional authorities, business community and research institutions subsequently complicating decision making process, related to use and management of marine resources.



the Big Ocean of Science

development of industry in the coastal region, environmental conservation issues, etc.

The important political decision has come in July 2008, when the Government of the Republic of Lithuania approved the Programme of Integrated Science, Studies and Business Centre (Valley) for the development of Lithuanian Marine Sector, which included substantial funding for a modern research infrastructure. As the infrastructure cannot function itself without knowledge and educated people, the consolidation of existing scientific potential was the pre-condition and Klaipėda University becomes the core of the Marine Valley and focal coordination point for marine and maritime activities.

The implementation of these ambitious and challenging ideas wasn't started in empty place, but rather was based on the already

existing developments. The Coastal Research and Planning Institute of Klaipėda University starting his history from the small research centre within the Faculty of Natural Sciences about 20 years ago, has developed into the EU Centre of Excellence with large scientific community, focusing on fundamental and applied marine scientific research and environmental consulting. Two main principles – cooperation and openness – were the main drivers of success of the institute.

Another advantage of the young and dynamic institute was the good balance between the applied and fundamental sciences comprising such fields as integrated coastal zone management, environmental impact and risk assessment, environmental monitoring, ecosystem studies and numerical modelling.

During the past 5 years the institute has extended its profile





from marine ecology based research towards geological and geophysical investigations. Investments into modern equipment, involvement of highly professional staff – experts in marine geology, coastal engineers and geophysics has made the institute an emerging centre of estuarine and marine oriented research. Nowadays, the institute is the leading Lithuanian institution in the marine science in general, providing international level scientific publications and actively participating in the international research projects including FP7, BONUS and regional co-operation programs. Since 2005 institute hosts the Baltic Lagoon Network which provides a forum for researchers and practitioners all around the Baltic.

Collaborating with local administration the institute is involved in regional planning initiatives, coastal zone management

and environmental monitoring programmes. Institute also acts as a scientific centre helping to implement EU policies relevant to coastal environmental issues. Recently implemented feasibility studies on offshore wind energy, industrial terminals and other port facilities are the part of environmental consultancy activity performed by the institute. Rapidly and continuously growing institute is the only place in Lithuania to be contacted when the need of multidisciplinary and integrated coastal and marine expertise is needed.

Institute, being the part of University is active in educational field. Institute is the partner in two international study programmes developed within the EU Erasmus Mundus scheme - Joint Master Programme „Marine Biodiversity and Conservation“ and Joint Doctoral Programme MARES „Doctoral Programme on Marine Ecosystem



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Amber fishermen



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Klaipėda Sea Port



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The Baltic sea coast



Health and Conservation". Due to the dedicated National Doctoral Studies programme, the institute is the only place in Lithuania, where PhD in marine science could be obtained.

The sea always was connecting different nations and cultures, being historically the dangerous place for rural communities where the raids and invasions originated, nowadays is the interface for trade and travel. The contemporary globalisation is changing the mentality in many countries and Lithuania is not the exception. In a more cosmopolitan, vibrant society the sea is no more associated with dangers but rather with the new opportunities. The Lithuanians only need to find it out like other maritime nations.

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