

No. 1, 2024. *Post-Anthropocentric Water Relations at the Bothnian Bay*

POST-BOTHNIA POST

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What is the POST-BOTHNIA project all about?

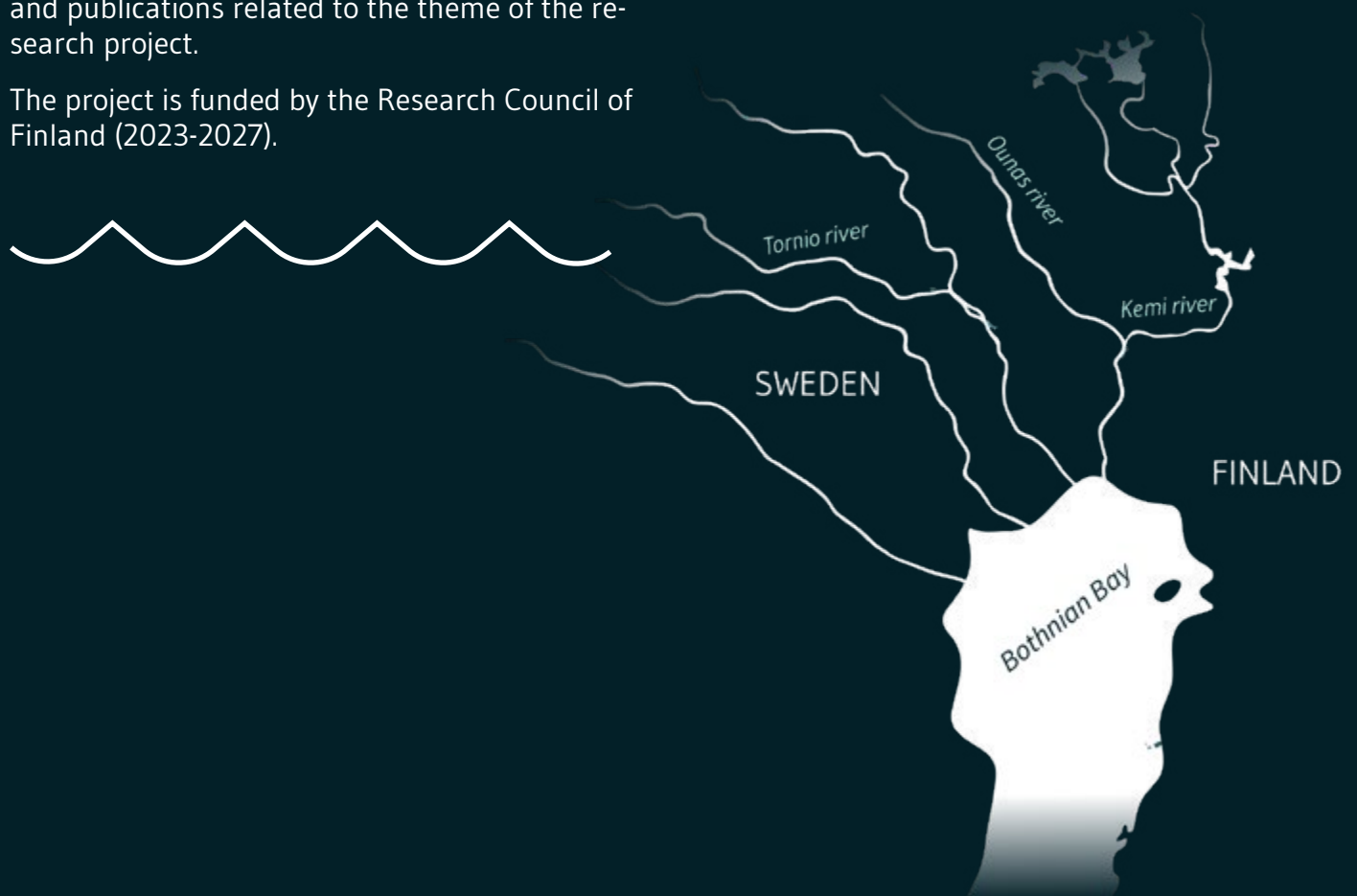
Text: Monica Tennberg

The Bothnian Bay in the European Arctic provides an excellent case for exploring complex water-society relations in a subarctic context. The bay, the sea and islands, coasts, deltas, and rivers, and the catchment area as a whole is an interface where people, land, and water meet. The bay has a rich history of cross-border interactions, the cultural, political, and economic significance of the sea, islands, and rivers, a complex system of governance, and multiple transformations in human-nature relations.

Contemporary water management and water research separate water from its social context. Our project problematizes this approach. We explore complex, entangled water-society relations as multiple water-related, everyday encounters and unfolding processes in water-society relations and their governance. Our project challenges the dominant Arctic hydro-hegemony, that is, state-centric and anthropocentric international marine regionalism, with our relational theoretical and methodological approach focusing on multispecies watery relations.

This newsletter informs about our project and its progress as well as about activities, events, and publications related to the theme of the research project.

The project is funded by the Research Council of Finland (2023-2027).



Our researchers talk about their personal and academic interests in water-society relations:



Monica Tennberg, PI, research professor

I lived in my childhood and youth near the Gulf of Finland being close to different sea-related activities, such as a shipyard in Helsinki, and an oil and gas terminal in Porvoo. I have also enjoyed summers in a family cottage by the sea. At the time, I could not have imagined life far away from the sea, but life took its turn, and I ended up living in Rovaniemi, in the middle of Lapland and near the Kemi River for more than 30 years now. Here, academically, water-society relations have emerged as my research questions concerning possible water wars in global environmental politics, and Arctic politics of flood protection and the return of salmon to Kemijoki in Lapland.



Hannah Strauss-Mazullo, PhD

In my hometown in the North of Germany, snow has become a rare sight. I sympathize with the millions of tourists who flock to Lapland every year to experience this magic with their own eyes and hands, and I worry about their physical well-being when the temperatures drop below -20C. To live with snow and ice for more than half of the year is, however, an entirely different experience, demanding continuous attention and daily routines, which I had to adopt as an adult. Beyond the question of dealing with water in its various shapes in my own private space, I am fascinated by how water is organized as part of societal routines, including the landscaping for fresh- and wastewater, electricity production, and timber extraction – and how these routines and their underlying paradigms are changing in the advent of bigger, climatic changes.



Sohvi Kangasluoma, Post-Doctoral Researcher

My relationship with water and ice began on the shores of the Bay of Bothnia, from my hometown Kokkola. The sea was present in my childhood both in summer and winter, as a place to swim in the long summer days, and as an ice field that seemed to extend endlessly – or at least to Sweden. Later in life, sailing and living on a sailboat in northern waters came to be my life, which has greatly influenced how I think about water and life in general. In my postdoctoral research, in the Post-Bothnia project which I will begin in the fall of 2025, I am focusing especially on the role and agency of ice, and the human-ice relations, of my hometown.

Photo: Juho Karhu



Heidi Konttinen, Researcher

I grew up in the suburbs of Kajaani and every summer we spent time on the Ärjä island. We traveled to the island on the great waves of Oulujärvi usually with our handmade wooden boat. I remember every inch of that boat: the smells of tar and fish; the warmth of the wood after soaking in the sun the whole day; and of course, the joy and freedom of sitting in the front at high speed, facing the wind and feeling the water splashing on my feet that were hanging outside the boat. I remember also the times of being scared, soaking wet and cold, wrapped in a safety vest, and holding the bench while the storm bounced the boat. Thankfulness for reaching the shore safely. Much later, in 2020, my PhD research led me to learn about the sea and the creatures in it, precisely seals. It has been a whole new world to me, but luckily, the journey has been guided by the locals who live by the sea and from the sea. I am looking forward to continue exploring this world within this project.

Photo: Ari Laakso

Thinking with Water: Exploring the Edges – CAS Symposium in Rovaniemi

Text: Sohvi Kangasluoma, Photo: Heidi Konttinen

One of the highlights of the fall was the Critical Arctic Studies symposium, which was held in Rovaniemi early in October 2024. The theme of the symposium was Thinking with Water: Exploring the edges. Monica Tennberg, Hannah Strauss-Mazzullo, Heidi Konttinen, and Sohvi Kangasluoma from the Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, and Frank Sejersen from the University of Copenhagen organized the symposium.

With the theme, we wanted to encourage the participants to address various meanings of an edge. Edge of water – as the physical boundaries of a waterbody, the sense of being on an edge, the edge of the human imaginary.

The first keynote was by Professor Philip Steinberg (University of Durham). He discussed the creation and meaning of the ice edge discussion and addressed different ways and historical narratives of understanding and unfolding the sea ice in Norway, demonstrating the complexity and the political nature of sea ice. The second keynote was by Associate Professor Solveig Joiks (Sámi Allaskuvla/Sámi University of Applied Sciences). She offered insights into the difference between comprehending the fish and the

river from the viewpoint of the field biologist, and from thinking about the salmon with Sámi knowledge and care practices.

The various presentations by participants addressed multiple themes from the materiality of the Arctic Ocean to seal-hunting traditions on the Bothnian Bay, from Arctic fiber cable projects to the role of oceans within the Law of the sea, and from artistic practices for understanding a river, to municipality projects of restoring wetlands.

Like waves, throughout the symposium, some themes emerged repeatedly: the legal rights of nature—and entities such as oceans, rivers, and salmon—and how far they could go, why so many things are still defined only by natural science discourses while ignoring Indigenous and local knowledge, and how new ways of constructing human-nature relations could enhance the well-being of the earth and its waters.

The edges of academic watery discussions remain still to be found.



Searching for the agency of ice

Text: Sohvi Kangasluoma, Photo: Juho Karhu

This summer, our post-doctoral researcher Sohvi Kangasluoma sailed through the Northwest Passage, with her sailboat Lumi.

After spending a few years in Alaska in our boat Lumi, we wanted to return to the Atlantic via the notorious Northwest Passage. The Northwest Passage is a waterway connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic, stretching from the Bering Strait to Baffin Bay, traversing above North America. From Seward, Alaska to the coast of Greenland, the journey is about 5000 miles. The route is situated in the Inuit Nunangat, the homeland of the Inuit. Most of the year the route is completely frozen.

We left Nome, Alaska at the end of July. First, we sailed north, and at Point Barrow, the route then took us east. We encountered our first sea ice just after rounding the northernmost part of the U.S. Meeting sea ice was exciting, yet it makes you nervous. When traveling the route with a sailboat, ice truly dictates everything, and the agency of it is tangible. When we could sail, to where and how fast, were all questions we didn't have that much to say ourselves, as it was the ice in the form of the ice charts, satell-

te images, and our visual observation, that had the agency to decide those things.

The border drawn on state-centric maps changed from the U.S. to Canada without us noticing, on a sunny afternoon sail. We waited for a few weeks before the ice in Victoria Strait gave up, allowing us to continue. We then sailed through the Bellot Strait, glided past Lancaster Sound, and after a stop in Mittimatalik we continued onwards to cross the Baffin Bay, to Greenland.

Now it was not the sea ice anymore, that we had to consider. It was icebergs, huge, beautiful, and perilous. The big ones showed on our radar at night, the small ones didn't.

Throughout the passage, I made autoethnographic field notes on how ice affects our journey at the NWP, aiming to understand the agency of ice. Currently, I am writing a journal article on that. In addition, I have been conducting research interviews with people living with ice in Alaska, and Nunavut, and will continue them in Greenland, as well as in Central Ostrobothnia, on the shores of the Bothnian Bay.

What connects the northern seas surrounding the Northwest Passage, and the Bay of Bothnia, is the role of sea ice. Both are covered with it, and the ecosystems (including us humans) of these waters depend on it. For some, ice in these waters is an obstacle, but for some, it's home.



Learning the forgotten knowledge: Tanning seal skin with traditional methods on Kemiö island

Text & Photos: Heidi Konttinen

It is a sunny, frisk afternoon in the Turku archipelago. I am walking toward a tannery, a small house made out of grey bricks and red wooden cladding. The tannery is located on the edge of the scattered school and dormitory buildings, which are all surrounded by fields filled with donkeys, goats, horses, and sugar beets. This is my first time on Kemiö island, and my fingertips are tickling with excitement to finally learn about seals through my senses. Shape the skin, to be shaped by the skin, and learn to interpret the behavior of the skin. Feel, smell, see and hear. Create an embodied understanding of the stories I have listened to during past years. (The author memorizing the first day of the course).

Seals have been the center of my research interest for years. My master's thesis was about decolonizing the seal trade; in my ongoing PhD I work with seal hunters on the Bothnian Bay of Finland and with the makers of seal skin clothing in Greenland; and seals will have a role

in my forthcoming post-doc in the Post-Bothnia project. Having a background in design, making is a significant way of knowing and I am trying to include it in my research as much as possible. During the past years, I have been taught to sew seal mittens in Finland and seal skin embroidery in Greenland. On 23.-27.10.2024, my dream of learning to transform a raw seal skin into a tanned one was fulfilled in a seal skin tanning workshop given by Hanna Nore, one of the rare traditional tanning masters in Finland.



Water-society relations in the European Arctic

Text & Photos: Hannah Strauss-Mazullo

Welcome to submit a paper to our panel at the Conference of the International Society for Cultural History, ISCH2025, onsite in Rovaniemi 16-19 June!

"Water is what we make of it, but it seldom stays that way for long. [...] Water and society can be understood to make each other" (Linton 2010, 4f.)

In the tradition of Critical Arctic Studies, this panel invites papers with a focus on the cultural history of water-society relations in the Fennoscandian North. How has the fluvial landscape shaped European Arctic societies locally and regionally, and how have human interventions altered land, water and sea in the past? What knowledge of hydro-social realities can we bring together in the aim to explore complex human-nature relations beyond state-centric perspectives and managerial hegemony? How do recent advances to restore fluvial landscapes

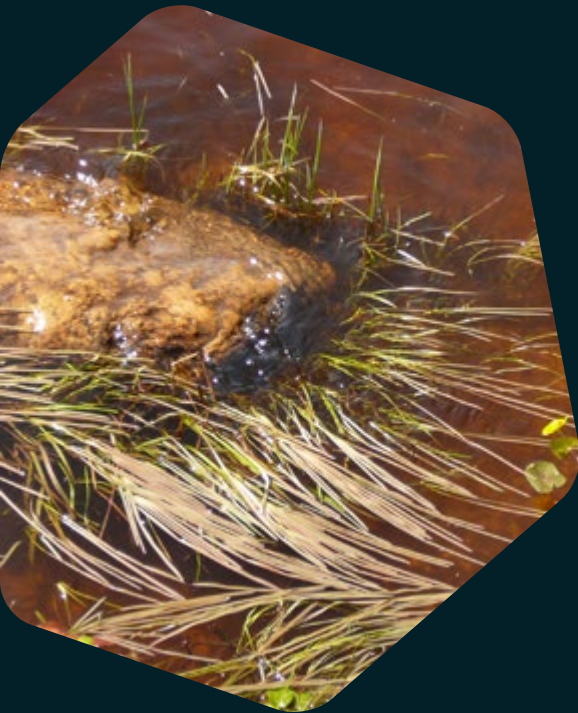
support or disrupt historically grown hydromentalities (Hommes et al. 2020)?

The time frame we suggest for the discussion will be the "modern" society, with the beginning of the industrial revolution which caused large-scale and long-term pollution of land and water bodies, and which is ultimately the cause of climate heating. It is also the time when "modern water" was conceived of, depicting water as an abstract quantity, an economic resource, fundamentally devoid of social and ecological relations (Linton 2010).

The panel will be convened by Hannah Strauss-Mazullo, Monica Tennberg and Heidi Konttinen.

Submit your 300 word abstract until 15 January 2025 to <https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/77153/submitter>

Looking forward to welcoming your submissions!



Conferences and seminars with a focus or section on water in 2025

Text: Monica Tennberg & Hannah Strauss-Mazullo

A Climate of (De-)Civilization? Shifting Dynamics between Nature and Society, March 12-14, 2025, TU Dortmund University, Germany. "The conference *A Climate of (De-)Civilization: Shifting Dynamics between Nature and Society* aims to explore the value of process sociology for the study of socio-environmental crises at multiple levels, related societal conflicts, and sustainability issues in general." (<https://us.sowi.tu-dortmund.de/forschung/veranstaltungen/tagung-a-climate-of-de-civilization/>) CFP deadline 30 November

An interesting panel on "*The Substance of Water: Therapeutic Uses and Water Quality in Italy, 1500-1900*", panel HEA-05 by David Gentilcore and Lavinia Maddaluno as well as other water-related papers in different other sessions at the *European Social Science History Conference ESSHC* in Leiden, NL, 26-29 March 2025 (<https://event.esshc2025.exordo.com/>) <https://esshc.iisg.amsterdam/en>

It is not too late to submit a paper or session proposal to the *Baltic Connections* conference (21-23 May 2025, at the University of Helsinki). A glimpse at the call for papers: "As with the earlier conferences, we aim to bring together scholars working on comparative, economic, social, global, and other types of history and related social sciences to address various "East-West" historical processes and events as well as comparative and transnational analysis, including at the Baltic region, Europe, and the world. Potential topics include but are not limited to trade, migration, comparative development, international political economy, and the diffusion and transplantation of institutions, ideas, and cultural influences." (<https://www.helsinki.fi/en/conferences/baltic-connections/call-papers>) The deadline for submissions is 15 February 2025.

While the deadline has passed for paper proposals, we'll be waiting for news on the upcoming conference *A Water's History of the United States* (Middelburg, the Netherlands) May 21-23, 2025 (<https://baas.ac.uk/news-and-events/2024/08/call-for-proposals-conference-a-waters-history-of-the-united-states-middelburg-the-netherlands-may-21-23-2025/>). "This

conference seeks proposals that contribute to further de-territorializing historical narratives of the US by shifting our focus from land-based processes to the roles and dynamics of water. Regional and local historiographical productions, such as those about the American West, have long-established traditions in water studies, drawing on the country's stark hydrogeographic disparities. Similarly, coastal and oceanic analyses have provided enlightening accounts of America's interactions with regional and global waterscapes. A growing body of scholarship has recently come to appreciate the extent to which water access and water-related issues have propelled the nation's industrialization, enabled its international entanglements, and shaped its multifaceted identities. This novel interdisciplinary approach reveals how water, far from being a mere resource or backdrop, has actively sculpted the country's trajectory."

International Interdisciplinary Conference on Land Use and Water Quality: Agriculture and the Environment in Aarhus, Denmark, 3-6 June 2025 (<https://www.luwig2025.nl/>). "Agriculture provides food, fiber, energy, and, last but not least, it provides a living for many people around the world. The potential drawback of agricultural production is pollution of the terrestrial and aquatic environment by nutrients, pesticides, trace elements, antibiotics, and natural and synthetic hormones. Growth in agricultural production, as it has occurred in Europe and North America since the 1950s, and more recently in many other parts of the world, threatens the quality of groundwater and surface waters or has already led to deterioration of the quality of these waters."

The *One Ocean Science Congress* will feature a mix of plenary sessions, including opening and keynote speeches, and parallel oral and poster presentations. The conference aims to enhance interactions between science and society, action and policy, and to engage civil society more broadly. The congress will be held in Nice, France 2-6 June 2025. Congress site: <https://one-ocean-science-2025.org/>

How nice to have a great conference taking place on our home turf: The International Society for Cultural History (ISCH) is going to hold its annual conference in Rovaniemi on 16-18 June 2025 on the theme *Human/Nature – Entanglements in Cultural History*. (<https://isch2025.com/>) Watch out for papers from our group and hope

to see you there! CFP ends on 31 January 2025.

"Cultural history has mainly studied humans: their actions, experiences, and ways of thinking. Yet the past is not shaped by only human actions and thoughts. Human beings inevitably interact with the nature surrounding them, which further means that history has not been shaped by human agency alone, but by the actions of various living and non-living beings. Some research has already been conducted in the field of cultural history within environmental history, as well as multispecies and/or more-than-human history, exploring, for instance, the historical relationships between humans and animals, plants, or landscapes."

With melting ice sheets on its front page, the European Society for Environmental History invites to the biannual conference on the theme "*Environmental histories*" in Uppsala, Sweden 18-22 August 2025 (<https://eseh2025.com/>) (CFP ended 15 Nov). "Environmental history is a powerful form of storytelling. Under the 'Climate Histories' theme we ask, how might we rethink the written and material records of social adaptabilities and transformations to understand better what it means to live through an era of rapid climate change? Though the climate crises of today are unprecedented, all societies have negotiated the passing of the seasons and long and short spells of floods, droughts, and unusual cold periods. As catastrophic events attest to the undeniable effects of climate change, we are reminded of the historical depth of living with climate variability. The cry of the hunger stones that were exposed due to the central European droughts – *If You See Me Weep* – serves as a signal to consider the bad years that have been and will return. This conference then will act as a record in itself, a 2025 'hunger stone' capable of documenting and reflecting on how climate change is experienced today and in the past."

ESEH announced: "The next conference will be held with the theme 'Climate Histories' in order to synthesize historical research on climate variability with present-day lived experience as a means to further discourse and enrich perspectives on climate change. ESEH 2025 has the ambition to initiate collaborations with the arts and the broader public to achieve these aims." (<http://eseh.org/eseh-conference-2025-climate-histories/>)

Participate online or on-site in Stockholm, Sweden, 24-28 August 2025, in the *World Water Week 2025: Water for Climate Action* <https://worldwaterweek.org/>, organized by SIWI, the Stockholm International Water Institute. "World Water Week's 2025 theme is 'Water for Climate Action'. The Week will focus on addressing the linked emergencies of climate change, environment degradation, and biodiversity loss." "The Week will cover every aspect of water: freshwater from source to sea; blue water; green water; salt water in seas and oceans. This broad scope links to the UN's 2025 Theme of glaciers and the cryosphere and also overtly recognizes oceans as vital parts of the hydrological cycle linking water and climate."



Recent publications

Related to the water-society relations in the European Arctic:

Ahopelto, L., Sojamo, S., Belinskij, A., Soininen, N., & Keskinen, M. (2024). Water governance for water security: analyzing institutional strengths and challenges in Finland. *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 40(2), 153-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07900627.2023.2266733>

Haapala, Auni (2024). Fishy windows to an Arctic city: Urban (in)visibilities of global fisheries in Tromsø. *Polar Record* 60(e2), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247423000359>

Konttinen, Heidi (2024) Dwelling in Ice: A Relational Approach to the Finnish Seal-Hunting Tradition on the Bothnian Bay. *Arctic Anthropology* 59(2), 193-211. <https://doi.org/10.3368/aa.59.2.193>

Krause, Franz (2023). *Thinking like a river: An anthropology of water and its uses along the Kemi River, Northern Finland*. Transcript publishing.

Lépy, Élise (2023) Living with Baltic Sea Ice. In Hannah Strauss-Mazzullo & Monica Tennberg (eds.), *Living and Working with Snow, Ice and Seasons in the Modern Arctic: Everyday Perspectives*. Palgrave McMillan.

Related to the sociology of water:

Boelens, Rutgerd, Arturo Escobar, Karen Bakker, Lena Hommes, Erik Swyngedouw, Barbara Hogenboom, Edward H. Huijbens, et al. 2023. 'Riverhood: Political Ecologies of Socionature Commoning and Translocal Struggles for Water Justice'. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 50 (3): 1125–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2022.2120810>.

Linton, Jamie, and Claudia Pahl-Wostl. 2024. 'Drawing from Indigenous Ontologies and Practices to Rethink European Water Policy'. *River Research and Applications* 40 (9): 1671–86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rra.4126>.

Rinaldi, Parisa Nourani. 2023. 'Dealing with Complex and Uncertain Futures: Glimpses from Transdisciplinary Water Research'. *Futures* 147 (March):103113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2023.103113>.

Schulz, Peter, and Alexis Gros. 2024. 'Toward a Sociology of Water: Reconstructing the Missing "Big Picture" of Social Water Research'. *Water* 16 (13). <https://doi.org/10.3390/w16131792>.

Wantzen, Karl Matthias. 2024. 'River Culture: How Socio-Ecological Linkages to the Rhythm of the Waters Develop, How They Are Lost, and How They Can Be Regained'. *The Geographical Journal* 190 (2): e12476. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12476>.



Interesting water-society related projects

Unfolding sense of water: care across boundaries (2022-2026)

This transdisciplinary project will create a new boundary concept, 'sense of water' (veden taju), to understand, recognize, and foster collective care for water. The research will produce new knowledge on how perceptions of water and its environmental change are embedded in situated knowledge, emotions, and practices, and how narratives, water literacy, and embodied practices are connected to care towards water environments. Integrating science and art, the project is conducted in collaboration with researchers from the Finnish Environment Institute, Natural Resources Institute Finland, and Aalto University.

More information: <https://www.luke.fi/en/projects/sow>

Transnature: Transboundary governance models of biodiversity protection: case studies for enhanced protection of natural resources in Europe (2023-2026)

The project TRANSNATURE strives to improve knowledge about alternative models for biodiversity conservation by comparing four European cases of transboundary cooperation. These case studies encompass cooperation between Spain and Portugal, Italy and Slovenia, the Netherlands and Belgium, Finland, Sweden and Norway. The project also has strong stakeholder involvement to identify shared challenges and effective strategies for safeguarding biodiversity. The project will formulate policy recommendations that enhance the effectiveness of transboundary biodiversity governance. The recommendations support policy-making in the study areas and contribute to the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

More information: <https://www.transnature.eu/transnature-project>

TRIWA LIFE - The Torne River International Watershed LIFE (2023-2030)

The TRIWA project aims to restore the natural environment in several Torne River tributaries to provide the conditions for biological diversity that have been lost. The project aims to restore

the environment of almost 100 km of waterways, remove 399 migration traps, and restore 2,500 hectares of wetlands. On the Finnish side, circulation for fish at the two power plant dams in Tengeliönjoki will be made possible. The project improves living conditions for all species. Especially it will benefit salmon, otters, green snake tails, freshwater pearl mussels, bullheads, and other species. The TRIWA project contributes to the goal of "good or high ecological status" in the watercourses, according to the EU's framework directive for water. The project also improves the so-called conservation status of the watercourses and benefits the species according to the Natura 2000 directives.

More information: <https://www.lansstyrelsen.se/norrbottn/om-oss/vara-tjanster/publikationer/2023/environmental-management-plan-for-triwa-life-2023.html>

Other

Finland's response to Sweden's maritime spatial plan for the Bothnian Bay 2024 (23.2.2024). https://www.ymparisto.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Finland%27s%20response%20to%20Sweden%2023%20Feb%202024_0.pdf.



ARCTIC CENTRE
University of Lapland



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UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND



Suomen Akatemia
Finlands Akademi
Research Council of Finland

Project homepage:
www.arcticcentre.org/EN/postbothnia

Layout & Illustrations: Heidi Konttinen