First Study of Albanian Adriatic

The Albanian Adriatic Sea had never previously been studied when students and researchers from five nations headed there in 2008.

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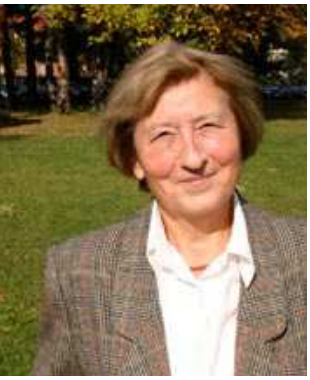


Professor in marine chemistry Bozena Cosovic from the Ruder Boskovic Institute in Zagreb, Croatia (Photo: Teresa Grøtan).

"This has been our greatest achievement," says Bozena Cosovic, senior scientist and professor of marine chemistry at the Ruder Boskovic Institute in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia.

Professor Cosovic, who represents the Croatian main partner in the five-nation cooperative project, speaks about the group's field trip to Albania in 2008. One of the main aims of the project was to offer advanced training in marine and freshwater ecology in the Adriatic.

"Everything that happens in the Albanian Adriatic is important to the whole Adriatic region, because there is quite a large influx of freshwater to the sea – comparable to the mouth of the River Po in the very north of the Adriatic Sea," Cosovic explains.

Months of preparations

It was not an easy task to get everything ready for students and professors from Norway, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia to come to Albania.

"It took months of work to prepare for the fieldwork. We came with several cars with equipment from the Boskovic Institute. We needed permission from the Albanian police for the cars and all the equipment to cross the border. All participants needed visas, and we had to find a suitable boat".

All the instruments for sampling the water and sediments came from the Croatian institute. Such equipment simply did not exist in Albania.

"This was the first time the Adriatic Sea off Albania had been studied. The Albanian partners were really happy. Until then, they had only studied freshwater lagoons, so this was a great opportunity for them," Cosovic says.

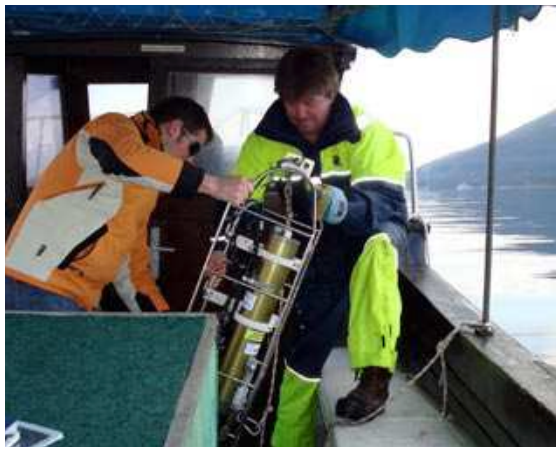
The Ruder Boskovic Institute is the largest Croatian public-sector research institute in natural sciences, biomedicine, marine research and environmental sciences. It is closely connected to the University of Zagreb, which is also involved in the project.

From research to education

The two main partners, Bozena Cosovic and Paul Wassmann, professor of marine biology at the University of Tromsø, met for the first time at a European conference in 1990. In 2000 they decided to cooperate on a bilateral research project. The cooperation was a success, and they discussed the possibility of enlarging the group, as well as bringing an educational perspective to the work.

The result was a major collaboration between Croatia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Norway, involving about 30 academics and 50 students from eight institutions in the course of the four-year project period.

"We all collaborated when it was still Yugoslavia," says Cosovic, "but we were interrupted by the war.



Friends and Foes

"It is foolish to think you can be friends in science and enemies in politics," says the project leader, Professor Paul Wassmann of the University of Tromsø.

***"You have said:** "Frequently scientists refuse to talk about politics, history, culture. This resistance is unfortunate and has opened doors to tragedies." Can you elaborate on this?"*

"Natural scientists are very reluctant to talk politics. They talk about science as if they lived on Mars. This is directly dangerous. By focusing on the scientific domain alone, they passively accept responsibility for the political developments of their times.

A rule in many cultures is that the post-war

> *We all collaborated when it was still Yugoslavia*

Afterwards, we wanted to renew collaboration."

"My only regret is that we didn't include anyone from Bosnia and Herzegovina. We didn't know anybody there. If we are to have third project, I will make sure they are also involved."

Winter, spring, summer and fall

The Albanian trip was not the only field-work done by the project. The team also explored the beautiful Bay of Kotor in Montenegro.

"We decided that for the courses in marine biology and marine ecology, fieldwork was essential, so we decided to study the Bay of Kotor over a whole year," Cosovic explains.

The team made four cruises, one in each season. The marine geologists measured sediments from a large boat, while the biologists and marine chemists used a smaller vessel to collect water samples in the deepest part of the bay.

"One result of this cooperation is that we have decided to make our doctoral studies more international," Cosovic says. "We can offer a very good training in oceanology in Croatia and are now planning to open these courses to the whole region."

PROJECT: *Marine Science and Coastal Management in the Adriatic Region, Western Balkans.*

MAIN PARTNERS: *College of Fishery Science, University of Tromsø, Norway and Centre for Marine and Environmental Research at the Ruder Boskovic Institute, Croatia. A total of eight partners from Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Norway were involved.*

PERIOD: *2006-2010*

OUTPUT:

- *Courses for MSc and PhD students: A total of 80 students from Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and Serbia participated.*
- *Field trips to the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro, and to the Albanian coast. Students and scientists from Norway, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and Serbia participated*
- *Exchange of students across borders in the West-Balkan countries and short-term visits of West Balkan scientists and students to Norway.*

generation block out communication about what happened. My generation of leaders in the Western Balkans – they just don't talk. I see the PhD students in this project; they are in the same situation as I was with my parents in Germany after the Second World War. Nothing happens unless you talk about things that are difficult."

"What impact could education and research cooperation in general have on a society in terms of development and mutual understanding?"

"Science and culture are often used to prepare for political changes and peaceful development. This is a good strategy. Take the European integration project, for example: it paved the ground for peaceful and constructive development. Central Europe, which we now call Eastern Europe, has been blocked from cooperation since the Second World War. Europe needs to learn to cooperate again. For that the élite is used – scientists, artists, and so on; then you reach the general public."

"And in terms of this project?"

"Cooperation has been essential for the academic development of oceanography in Albania and Montenegro. To my delight, my colleagues have been sending their students to Croatia, which is the only country in the region that offers education to European standards. Through this project, we try to build a system that will survive even if there are conflicts in the future."

"Does a cooperative project like this give any extra dimension to your work?"

"If I look at my personal academic career only, I would not focus on this. But for me as a person in the world, it does offer an extra dimension. I came to Norway from Germany in 1974, and as an immigrant I have always had a different angle to my life in Norway. I have learnt from living in a new region, and I try to share my experience with other, less-favoured regions."

"What is the most important outcome of this cooperation?"

"The main goal for a later stage is to ensure that PhD training in the Western Balkans will continue without the extra impulse from Norway. Another important issue is that the students, as future academics, now have made a start for cooperation in the future."

> *Nothing happens unless you talk about things that are difficult.*

FIELD-WORK: *Four trips of field-work were undertaken in the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro, throughout 2008.*

Paul Wassman, professor at the University of Tromsø, Norway.