



Emotions, their role and potential in increasing the willingness to protect the Baltic Sea

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The oceans of our planet are not only of central importance for the provision of water, oxygen and food as well as for global climate regulation. They also play an increasing role in economic activities and in the generation of renewable energies. This multitude of functions highlights the urgency of ocean protection and the need for continuous monitoring and control of ocean health. In many areas of the Baltic Sea, which are of great importance for the numerous bordering states, the endangerment of the seas and the negative development in the well-being of our nature are emerging as examples and are causing increasing concern due to the already limited fulfillment of human needs.

Our research investigates how the inclusion of emotions can improve the effectiveness and impact of marine conservation interventions in the area of the German Baltic Sea. To explore how people are emotionally attached to the sea in general, we conducted a systematic literature review of existing studies.

In addition, we organized a large-scale regional survey (n=628) on parts of the German Baltic Sea coast to examine the relationship of people who, as visitors or residents, are connected to a particular sea.

The survey covered reasons for visiting the Baltic Sea, emotional attachment to the place, activities, as well as attitudes and behavior regarding environmental issues.

By subsequently using appropriate behavioral and place attachment models, it can be deduced how emotions influence environmental and marine behavior and affect decision-making.

The results show that emotions play a key role in shaping so-called “ocean literacy” initiatives and enable the development of more effective communication strategies for ocean-protecting behavior.

The Baltic Sea is often perceived as a place of silence and relaxation and is associated with positive memories, which contributes to its perception as worthy of protection.

This connection to the sea can be explained at both the individual and cultural level.

Overall, our results show that emotions play a crucial role in promoting behavioral change. Future ocean communication efforts should therefore take greater account of factors such as regional elements, emotional ties and psychological distance to the ocean.

