A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots. Some dots are larger and colored red, forming a stylized shape that resembles a map of the Baltic region.

The Baltic Organising Academy

How to Build a Multinational and Multisectoral Organising Program

MIKA HÄKKINEN
November 2013

- Due to globalized economy the trade union movement more and more needs to look for ways to work across national and sectoral borders. By organising new, active members heedless of national and sectoral boundaries Unions have to improve their organisational and collective strength to develop employees' working and living conditions in workplaces, industries and in society as a whole.
- The Baltic Organising Academy (BOA) is such a multinational, multisectoral organising program whose purpose is to evolve unions capable of organising and growth in the Baltic countries. 32 different organisations from seven nations are contributing directly either financial or human resources. Participating unions collect resources, develop organising strategies and campaigns, train and coach staff and volunteers for actual organising campaigns across national borders.
- Current participants represent Nordic, Estonian and Lithuanian trade unions and focus their work on industrial, service and transportation sectors. Jointly they build well-organised and durable union structures in strategically selected target companies. This paper openly highlights the challenges, barriers, solutions and successes encountered during the BOA's life cycle. The story focuses on the choices that made the program into what it is today and gives practical hints how to organise and implement similar programs.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Difficult beginning in a state of uncertainty.....	2
2.1 Union-free Baltic is a threat to trade union movement in the whole Baltic Sea region ...	3
2.2 Organising in an anti-union environment	3
2.3 Resources for joint action.....	4
3.. Preparation phase 2010–2011	4
3.1 Organising from the start.....	4
3.2 Either together or not at all.....	4
3.3 Get organised to organise.....	5
3.4 Commitment.....	5
4.. Construction phase 2011-2012	6
4.1 Channelling of resources	6
4.2 Development of organising model and preparation of campaigns.....	8
4.3 BOA training program	9
5. Fieldwork 2012 to date	10
5.1 Leading and coaching	10
5.3 External organising	11
5.3 Internal organising.....	13
6. Strategy 2014-2015.....	13
6.1 An industry strategy in external organising.....	13
6.2 Majority strategy in internal campaigns.....	14
6.3 Organiser Strategy.....	14
6.4 Into an organising Union?.....	14

Introduction

Faced with global market economy, the trade union movement needs to look for ways to work across national or sectoral borders. Building a single-union organising program is not easy, let alone a collective multi-union one. But Baltic Organising Academy (BOA) has demonstrated that a cross-national and cross-sectoral joint organising program supported by 32 different organisations from seven nations contributing directly either financial or human resources is possible. It is likely to be the largest-ever effort undertaken to promote trade union organising in the Baltic countries. Current participants in the BOA represent Nordic, Estonian and Lithuanian trade unions and operations are focused on industrial, service and transportation sectors. By producing results very few dared to expect in the beginning of the process BOA has encouraged confidence in Unions. And BOA not only seeks to create organising capability, but also is built using the very same methods that the organisers are exercising in their campaigns. The entire development process can be seen as an organising campaign in which a newly founded organisation tries to change prevailing, adverse conditions, which hinder unions from growing. Hence, the perspective of the present article includes tracing the BOA's steps towards this desired goal, too.

But instead of telling a success story, this article is mainly motivated by the growing interest in how the experiences of the BOA could be shared and utilized. All organising work worldwide is characterized by regularities that have also governed the building of the BOA program. The story focuses on the choices that made the program into what it is today and tells about challenges, barriers, solutions and successes encountered during the BOA's life cycle. Thus, the article can provide solutions to problems that are likely to be encountered while setting up similar programs. It does not, however, offer any clear-cut mode of action. Rather, the article brings together the author's views on what the development of an organising program that involves many different unions, nationalities and sectors, has entailed at different stages.

The first section concentrates on the 2010 background against which the idea of the program was born, and how the initial hurdles were overcome. The second section describes the preparatory phase of 2010-2011, when the idea was transformed into a concrete plan, and how the different organisations got themselves involved in its implementation. The third section deals with the BOA's building phase in 2011-2012, when, on the basis of the project plan, the cross-national and cross-sectoral joint organisation was created to carry out the program. The fourth section describes practical results of the BOA program and the challenges faced. The last section of the article discusses choices the participating organisations will have to ponder and to define the BOA's focus areas and strategy for 2014-2015 in order to ensure BOA is continued until its results guarantee its sustainable future.

Difficult beginning in a state of uncertainty

At the beginning the opposing arguments were at their strongest. Without resources, dedicated people, concrete plan, mandate and, above all, clear examples of results; requisites for building a successful, organising-focused project were very difficult to see. The biggest obstacle was the prevailing notion of unavoidable failure.

Organising is always about people who see the need for change and decide to join forces in order to do something about it. Indeed, the decision to set up Baltic Organising Academy was born within a relatively small group of Nordic and Baltic unionists who had years of experience in Baltic Sea cooperation and international projects.

The idea took shape in individual bilateral discussions. Getting started, however, required a group of people who knew each other well enough to be able to talk about things by their real names. They had the courage to recognize and, in particular, the experience to acknowledge main flaws which should be corrected to achieve results. But the need for change smouldering beneath broke to surface during these discussions. Thus, beginning was painful, because it exposed the participants' own roles in relation to the

faults. Although Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian unions have been supported in a number of ways since their independence at the beginning of the 90's, membership kept declining dramatically since then. The discussions were not about putting blame, but rather about the desire to learn from past experiences. Open examination of the flaws gave space to search new solutions, to start with a clean slate.

The idea took a concrete form with a situation analysis. In short, it resulted in the real danger of having union free Baltic States within a short lap of time. This defined the main purpose for the joint program, a purpose deemed so important that a decision was made to start taking action. Without that decision in a state of uncertainty, the BOA program would never have been born. The conclusions of the analysis gave birth to the following new strategic guidelines, on the basis of which the Baltic Organising Academy was later built.

Union-free Baltic is a threat to trade union movement in the whole Baltic Sea region

Hardly anywhere else in the world is the gap in unionization rates as steep as it is between the Nordic and the Baltic countries. The actual rate slumps from about 70 per cent to 10 per cent.

In the Nordic countries, the high unionization rate has led to industry-specific collective agreements, regulated industrial sectors, and extensive influence on those aspects of legislation and social security that bear importance to workers and their families. In the Baltic countries a low degree of organisation density and the lack or weakness of collective bargaining agreements characterizes the labour market. Many different sources place the workers' socio-economic conditions in the Baltics among the worst in the EU.

The story of the Baltic Organising Academy began at the recognition that the lack of members and influence affect unions' conditions across national borders. Since both labour and capital move freely in the Baltic Sea region, this gap has inevitable effects. Due to the transnational interdependence, breaking the Baltic countries' vicious circle of declining unionization and declining power is therefore in the best interest of the whole Baltic Sea trade union move-

ment. The ability of a trade union movement to improve the living and working conditions of Baltic workers would benefit all. As no one is safe from globalization, BOA is not a case of pure charity. In addition to solidarity, underlying reciprocal interests are in play. Workers simply cannot afford union-free Baltics.

The degree of unionization has a bearing on the employers' behaviour. Employers exploit union-free areas. As national borders no longer constrict the employers, it was concluded that they should not constrict trade unions, either. Hence, unions needed to look for cross-national solutions before it was too late.

Organising in an anti-union environment

Two decades of trying to transfer the Nordic labour market model to the Baltics had proven in vain. Objectives such as high organisation rate and comprehensive collective agreements were not abandoned, but one needed to recognize that sectoral collective agreements and an effective bargaining position stem from organisational power – not vice versa. The continuous decline in trade union membership had led to a vicious and self-fulfilling circle in the Baltic countries. In the Baltic countries, the unionization rate had dropped from almost 100 per cent to about 10 per cent in two decades.

Without an adequate membership base, trade unions fall short of collective power. Thus they cannot enter into comprehensive collective agreements and have no influence legislation. Furthermore, they lack of adequate resources to provide good member services, which in turn is no incentive to stay in the unions. There were two choices: either the decline in membership would come to a halt by hitting rock bottom, or the Baltic trade unions had to start adopting new, effective means of organising.

The first option would have meant complete surrender. And mere maintenance of structures or developing services for the existing members was not enough. The only way to break the vicious circle was to focus on the growth of organisational power and membership. The aim had to be the creation of func-

tional organisations. Baltic unions could survive only by organising.

The analysis was based on the belief that, in spite of all the obstacles, unionization and stronger Baltic trade unions were possible to achieve. A big shift in thinking was that the organising model and methods should accommodate to Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian environments, not to the Nordic model. The solution was to start utilizing organising models that have worked in anti-union environments such as the Baltics.

Resources for joint action

Since early nineties, the Baltic unions had received millions of euros of support in various forms. The analysis revealed that the unions' mainly bilateral projects and strict sector-specific approach had scattered the funds. Hence, even with substantial overall resources, the resulting projects had been quite small or focused on single issues. Seminar-based project structure had also proven to be inadequate. Too often meetings had taken priority, not the work to achieve real results in between. The clear conclusion was that the project structure and resourcing principles should be changed.

The program should be based on the following principles:

- All participating unions should commit to resourcing – in one form or another.
- It was decided to start gathering a large group of supporters to back the BOA, so that relatively small single contributions would be sufficient for comprehensive operations.
- Both the Nordic and the Baltic unions would participate from the start with monetary or human resources.
- Mechanisms had to be found to allow the Baltic unions to gradually increase their stake based on the results of the program.
- All parties would be accountable for both the operational and financial aspects of the project.
- In order to ensure true framework of action the timespan should be sufficiently long for organisation and management structures to be created.

- Feasible organising methods would be collected from around the world and utilized in development.
- Campaign target selection and planning would be done together.
- A training program would support implementation, where the organising skills of campaign leaders, professional organisers and volunteers would be developed.
- Long-term success of the organising model would depend on operational collaboration.

Preparation phase 2010–2011

Until summer 2010, BOA's development had involved only informal small-group ponderings. The big question was how to turn the idea into a viable program. How could the different organisations be committed and start implementing an idea which already seemed overly ambitious?

Organising from the start

The challenge was overcome by realizing that the setting up of the BOA was in itself an organising process. In fact, fundamentals of organising were learnt as a side product. The significance of personal relations, leadership, planning and commitment were understood. As the process unfolded, the core group's ability to use organising methods increased. Practical application of accrued skills to build the program itself was an essential part of the BOA's creation. Different steps were broken into manageable entities. As the saying goes, the elephant was eaten in pieces.

Either together or not at all

The program was based on a fundamental notion that there should be enough participating unions for it to succeed. Joint action could only be taken if the unions were committed enough. Mandates to start concrete preparations had to come from top union management.

Most of those involved in developing the BOA worked in international roles in different sectors. Also the Baltic colleagues acted in key roles in their respective countries. The group thus had the neces-

sary contacts in order to discuss the idea directly with union leaders. Without the systematic utilization of these contacts, it is likely that the whole idea would have remained just that, an idea.

Virtually all Nordic unions are members of their industry-specific Nordic organisations. Through them, the Nordic trade union movement has been able to gain also international importance. Thus, the Nordic sectoral organisations were good forums to collectively reach out to Nordic unions and their leadership. In autumn 2010, the BOA idea was taken to the boards of Nordic industrial, service and transport federations. In this way, the Nordic union chairmen were able to discuss the matter quickly and thoroughly. All three sectors showed green light to the commencement of concrete project planning, provided that a sufficient number of Baltic unions would get involved in the preparatory process. This was to ensure that the project would be planned together or not at all.

The Baltic unions were given an opportunity to decide on their involvement by presenting the idea separately in each of the countries. The visits were made during the fall of 2010, and involved all three sectors. In the end, a number of Estonian and Lithuanian unions showed interest, and it was decided that this was sufficient for the preparatory process of the BOA to be initiated.

In retrospect, it was crucial not to focus solely on group presentations. Yes, they attracted a lot of key people, but resulted mostly in long lists of reasons why the idea would be hard to implement. Meetings provided more insight, but were insufficient to convince anyone. In regard to unions that did decide to get involved, personal contacts played a key role. One-on-one talks made it possible to discuss the idea in more detail and get new perspectives for further development. Above all, doubts about the program could be put to rest. The trust and commitment achieved by these talks paved the way through the long and hard preparation stage.

Get organised to organise

A preparatory committee was founded to coordinate the work with the task of drafting a clear and feasible

project plan. The decision to initiate the preparation only meant a mandate to start making concrete plans. At this stage, no one had committed to anything more. The premise was that if the preparatory work across national and sectoral borders proved impossible, the whole project would be pointless.

The preparatory committee brought together the various stakeholders from different countries and sectors. It was the key to a successful preparatory process and a major step within the whole project. Management structure and direction of work were set up. As organising skills were still quite limited, committee members had to deepen their knowledge of different organising models and methods, and to keep in touch with the key people in their own areas of responsibility. Various trainings and events were attended, and an abundance of know-how gained to support the planning which at the end has been a very time consuming process.

During the 8-month planning phase, a project proposal was prepared with a very detailed description of BOA's practical aspects. At the heart of the plan were four program elements: 1) channelling of financial and human resources to organising, 2) research and preparation of organising campaigns, 3) organising training, and 4) implementation of organising campaigns together. This process was completed on the eve of summer 2011. The planning phase brought about a strong support network for BOA of crucial importance. The network carried the knowledge upon which the BOA was built and many of its members later had different roles in the program.

Commitment

In order to assure its ability to act a BOA agreement was drawn up on the basis of the BOA plan, defining the responsibilities and obligations of participating organisations. Through the adoption of the agreement, each organisation committed to the implementation of the plan with certain resources.

With that the project had come to a point where a choice had to be made. Everybody involved in the planning was asked to discuss the matter with her/his union leader to determine his/her participa-

tion. And in order to be taken forward the program needed to gather sufficient resources and volume by getting as many organisations as possible to commit. This process took place in summer and fall of 2011. The Nordic unions lent strong collective support for the program by joining the program collectively through their Nordic organisations. The decision did not, however, bind individual member organisations. Each union was to decide independently on the level of its participation.

In order to assure Baltic unions' ownership of the program the Nordic made their commitment depending on the participation of their Baltic counterparts. Without that the BOA would have remained a project proposal. In Estonia, 6 industrial, service and transportation sector unions, as well as the Association of Estonian Industrial Trade Unions (ETAÜ) decided to take part as well as the Estonian Trade Union Confederation (EAKL). In Lithuania, two unions in the industrial sector showed green light. In Latvia, all the unions declined.

Only now the Nordic unions took their final stand: In the end, 11 Finnish, 2 Swedish and 4 Danish unions in different sectors committed to sustain the program with financial or human resources.

Essential to the success in this phase was that the members of BOA preparatory committee were dedicated to convince their union leaders of the program. But they could also present an elaborated program plan that described what such a program would really mean. The plan introduces the BOA program as a comprehensible, credible and feasible solution to the existing problems of Baltic unions. Thus the plan was of major importance convincing the relevant decision makers to commit to the BOA idea.

With the unions joining the program others could be won: Friedrich Ebert Foundation was encouraged to take part in the implementation and the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS), representing all Nordic central union organisations, lent its support to BOA. With that the program was not only sufficiently multinational to agree with its strategy, but sufficiently financed as well. All in all, a total of 32 organisations had made a political decision to implement BOA. In fact, the program now had more participants than

anticipated. It was time to transfer the elements of the program from paper into concrete action.

Construction phase 2011-2012

Both the preparatory committee and its support network were harnessed directly to the execution of the program. This group of already committed people started to implement the BOA program elements immediately after the decision. Here, process management took the central stage, which radically changed nature of the project. An increasing amount of work necessitated more hands to get involved. Simultaneous processes had to be coordinated and managed. Different program elements were broken down into tasks, placed in the timeline and distributed to the persons in charge.

As most of the committed Baltic unions were from Estonia, it was decided to concentrate the initial operations there. A kind of "wave strategy" was created. Once things were set up in Estonia, the second wave would concentrate on Lithuania. Should interest arise, a third wave in Latvia would follow. As the operational work structure and the organising model had to be created as if from scratch, which was very time and energy consuming, focusing on a single country was a smart move. In hindsight, with the available human resources, setting up the program simultaneously in several countries would simply not have been possible.

Channelling of resources

In the BOA, resources include people, time and money. The first step in the construction of the program was to create a viable organisation that could implement the program elements. Since there was no staff, a kind of matrix organisation was built, consisting of personnel the participating organisations had designated for the various tasks. For the organisation to function, it was not to lean on those working in international roles.

First of all, BOA needed professionals whose job was to handle similar organising-related matters in their own organisations. They brought in professional expertise while having an own professional interest to participate.

Secondly, operations had to be managed in the target countries themselves. Therefore, the Baltic unions had to be at the heart of the operational decision-making. A board of directors was set up consisting of union presidents and other key people. Union leaders could personally participate in the implementation, or designate someone from their organisation to be in charge.

Thirdly, the Nordic unions established support teams with someone representing each participating organisation. The Finnish and two Swedish unions concentrated on supporting Estonia as they already had strong ties with them, as well as had the Danish organisations with Lithuanian unions. The purpose of these teams was to support operations in the target countries, to take part in resource collection, and to make sure that the Nordic unions involved knew what was going on. Sectoral Nordic organisations took responsibility for the overall coordination.

To assure parity so-called BOA coordinators from each sector and country were put in charge of coordination and management of the hands-on work. They turned out to be the most important human resources. The preparatory committee was strengthened and turned into the BOA steering group, which brought together BOA coordinators overseeing the country and sector-specific operations. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Council of Nordic Trade Unions are also represented.

Thus the steering group includes the main stakeholders responsible for the budgeting, planning and implementation of the program. In practice, the program revolves around this group's cooperation. The work is coordinated with regular meetings and communication is on-going.

Since the BOA has no staff, approximately 45 staff members, chairmen and officials from the above-described partner organisations use a part of their working hours on the BOA program. However, the time dedicated by different people to BOA varies quite a lot. Most monitor and take part only when needed. About a dozen people, staff and elected officials, allocate a part of their weekly hours to really move the program forward.

Overcoming barriers between the work for the own union and BOA work, as well as between national and multi-national work, has proved to be a challenge. Unions have found it difficult to make use of a matrix organisation¹ that goes beyond national and organisational borders. It has turned out helpful to communicate clearly that if a person has been named to a BOA task, the organisation should count his/her respective duties as normal working hours. This is the only way to ensure that the person can in fact contribute to the program and work in its matrix structure. However, despite the problems, operational controls, structure and responsibility areas created have managed to hold this cross-national and cross-sectoral program together.

Contrary to most international projects, the BOA's funding is based on annual fundraising. Funding for the next year's action plan is sought from the participating organisations. Resources from different sources can be channelled to collective operations. Since there were many funders, investments of individual unions could remain relatively low (e.g. Nordic unions have contributed about 5000–15000 Euros each), but added up to quite a significant sum. The funds raised are directed sector-wise to operational organising work. While costs of hired organising staff and organising campaign expenses are covered by union contributions, Friedrich-Ebert Foundation and the Council of Nordic Trade Unions support the BOA's overall operations and training program.

The Baltic unions are committed to invest at least 35 per cent of the campaign-generated membership fees into organising work. In this way success in organising increases resources, and should eliminate the need for external funding. Logically thinking, the Baltic unions would do wisely to invest maximum resources into something that spawns more growth.

¹ This form of organisation combines two management systems: One system is "functional" and assures that each type of specialist in the organization is well trained and guided by a senior expert in the same field. The second system is "executive": In order to complete certain projects the project manager deploys the specialists.

The organisation and funding model rests on mutual commitment and accountability. Only if everybody is committed, it creates incentive for all to achieve desired results. Even if the organisation is far from perfect, and there have been quite a few bumps along the way, the model has worked. In practice, the BOA organisation was erected in late 2011 following the official participation decisions. Its first task was fundraising, and in December 2011, the budget for 2012 was successfully adopted. The BOA's hands-on work could finally be initiated and other program elements actively developed.

Development of organising model and preparation of campaigns

The second step of the program was to generate expertise in order to create a successful organising model for the Baltics. This model would then be utilized in the preparation of the organising campaigns and in fieldwork.

As said above the biggest challenge from the outset of development work was the argument that an organising program would not be possible:

- “We have already tried everything!”
- “Organising does not work!”
- “No one is willing to put in resources!”
- “The Baltic and the Nordic unions are not ready to commit to a joint cross-sectoral project!”
- “People think unions are a thing of the past!”
- “Nobody cares!”
- “In the Baltic countries, union structures make it impossible to organise!”
- “The Belts are individualists who do not believe in collective action!”

It is difficult to deny the truthfulness of such arguments as they stemmed from people's experiences. When developing the BOA's organising model, questioning those claims was essential. In a research on unions that successfully had implemented organising strategies it was realized that all around the world most diverse unions were successfully organising amongst the most diverse groups of people. Examples of organising were also found in history. For example, before Second World War, several Finnish

unions had organisers whose purpose was to establish union structures.

Most important reference group for learning came from “Change to Win Europe” and “Global Alliance”, a network focused on organising, and its dozens of unions around the world. It was learnt that organising methods were already utilized in various European unions, such as IG Metall, Ver.di, Unite and FNV Bondgenoten. In addition, several Nordic unions involved in the BOA, among them the Swedish Transport Union, 3F, and the Finnish Metalworkers' Union, had employed or were developing their own organising programs.

Those programs have a common denominator: Workers and their need to influence their own affairs and issues together with others. Collective strength is always the key not only to improve working conditions but makes it possible to improve living conditions and status of workers, in societies as a whole. Hence, organising as generating a growing and active membership is the only way to build sustainable and effective unions. Pitting the organising model against the service model is pointless. After all, for a union to work, it needs to be able to do both: to achieve and demonstrate collective strength as well as to provide adequate member services. However, member services do not lead to influence and change in working conditions. Collective strength is the basis for union work. BOA organising model is based on this philosophy.

In 2011-2012, the BOA coordinators visited key unions and invited experts to train the necessary skills. The idea was to use anything that had worked elsewhere. Everywhere workers have similar problems and human behaviour is more or less alike to each other. Obviously, there was no need to reinvent the wheel. Joint training sessions with representatives working with organising from other unions were particularly beneficial. An own organising model was developed and campaigns planned. A lot of it was bluntly copied. There was no reason why the same methods would not work in the Baltics, too.

Nevertheless, development of the organising model was a bumpy process that kept pushing those involved to the very limits of their expertise and know-

how. No one setting up the program was an expert in the field. But it turned out to be important to make constant progress even if all the aspects were not under control. The groundwork was done as well as possible and the actors tried to minimize risks. Eventually, it became evident that only through hands-on fieldwork it would be possible to develop a model reflecting the reality in which the Baltic unions operated.

But before entering fieldwork some different basic framework conditions had to be acknowledged. For that purpose, Estonian and Lithuanian country profiles were drawn up in 2012, examining the legislation and labour market specifically from the unionization point of view. This information contributed to the selection of strategies and preparation of campaign plans.

The selection of the target companies in spring 2012 was a hugely important step when preparing the organising campaigns. Leaders of the Estonian unions, in collaboration with the Nordic coordinators, focussed on strategic key companies in each sector. Especially Nordic companies were included so that the Nordic unions could deploy support measures should problems arise. Company profiles were compiled to find out what kind of companies the unions were dealing with. Finally, campaign plans were completed by May 2012, when fieldwork in Estonia kicked off.

BOA training program

The construction of a training program was the third of BOA's program elements. For an "Academy", it is a kind of a core product. Only by training organising skills one could ever get to the actual organising work. However, the construction of the training program was not a carefully thought-out process, but rather born as a part of the collective learning process.

The strategy was to put the things learnt from elsewhere into immediate use by training organisers who would then execute the planned campaigns, but it was quickly realized that this was not nearly enough. In spring 2012, additional demand became more and more evident, and training sessions were held accordingly: The first training focussed on target selec-

tion and profiling. The next dealt with campaign planning and preparation based on the target profile. Soon it was realized that in order to be able to lead the organisers, campaign leaders (presidents and other key people of unions in the target countries) needed training. After that it was the organisers' turn. Fieldwork was started, at which point it was quickly discovered that also the activists needed to be trained.

The BOA training program has evolved to include the following:

- Leadership training I "Development of an organising union"
- Leadership training II "Strategic analysis, target selection and building of an organising campaign"
- Leadership training III "Leading an organising campaign"
- Organiser training I "Organising fundamentals"
- Organiser training II "Building of a union organisation and collective action"
- Member training I "We are the union: Basics of organising for members"
- Member training II "Workplace leaders in action"

The biggest challenge in setting up a training program was that no one had any hands-on experience in fieldwork organising. Therefore, despite expert help in planning, the trainers pretty much ended up repeating what they themselves had just learnt in a classroom.

But in spite of the initial hassle, risk-taking paid off and the program was set up. Thus far more than 40 people in Estonia and Lithuania have participated in first and second organiser training to date. In 2013, basic trainings have been successfully carried out by Estonians without outside help. The organisers have also trained nearly a hundred activists as part of their on-site work. Definite increase in skill capacity has been one of the primary outcomes of the BOA program. The idea behind the BOA training program is the same as for an "open source code": It is constantly evolving and available to everyone.

Fieldwork 2012 to date

Although the setting up of the BOA can be seen as a triumph of transnational cooperation, the only way for it to succeed is to break the myth of the impossibility of organising, and to provide opposite experiences out in the field. Fieldwork as BOA's fourth element combines the other elements and makes them operational: The collectively gathered resources are used to hire and train organisers to execute jointly prepared campaign plans.

In summer 2012, the foothold of the BOA's myth busters was set up in the Tallinn area. Immediately after basic training, operations began in industrial, transport and service sectors as per the campaign plans. Six months later, the next foothold was founded in Lithuania, where the campaigning started in metal and food sectors. The goal was a breakthrough in at least one of the sectors during 2013.

Leading and coaching

An organising approach based on people's active participation and cooperation is a difficult one. It is not about selling a membership, but something much more comprehensive. Of course there is member recruitment involved, but the real challenge is to get people involved – to mobilize them to act in an organised manner, together.

Organisers need to identify important issues that concern the workers and to find those capable of leading. Leaders are the key to organisation. They need to be committed to take action, and lead the on-site organising process with the organisers' support. The workers set up a union organisation, elect their representatives and take collective action to solve issues. The resulting conflicts of interest are settled by negotiations. Bargaining will resolve conflicts but it is not the way to win. Union organisations have to have collective power behind that. It is the most important tool of the union since it allows workers to participate, to be the subject, not the object.

Organising is based on human relations, leading and well planned actions. The chain of leadership runs from the grassroots level through the campaign organisation up to the whole union. Transition to operational fieldwork again changed the BOA's character in a radical way. Now the management of cam-

paigns, organisers and volunteers took the centre stage. Both the leadership and the organising staff were equally inexperienced. All were learning at the same time. And campaign results turned out to be directly proportional to the ability to develop leadership skills. Classroom training is not enough to make a professional organiser who can independently execute workplace campaigns. Practically effective learning how to organise requires lead organisers who support and train people as part of everyday organising work.

A campaign centre was set up to coordinate the daily operations. Management and monitoring systems were established to review the overall situation, evaluate the progress of the campaigns, and to make necessary corrections. Campaigns were punctuated with daily and weekly team meetings to plan and develop the operations. Organising staff of the various sectors worked together. The aim was to create a culture of togetherness where the organisers could learn and support each other even while working in their respective sectors.

Online reporting and management system and online weekly meetings were set up to coordinate cross-border campaigns and to increase the Nordic BOA coordinators' involvement. It is an integral part of the BOA program. With it, the organisers, lead organisers, union management and an extensive group of key people from different countries and sectors have been able to contribute in campaigning. In addition, continuous evaluation and planning of operations was possible. The network of experienced organising experts, developed around the BOA program, has been a constant source of advice and support. With them strategies and tactics could be assessed and fine-tuned.

In order to deepen the support and speed up development, in spring 2013, a decision was made to hire a BOA coach for an initial period of six months. The person recruited is a Polish organiser with 12 years of experience in campaigns and campaign management. He coaches organisers and campaign leaders out in the field, spending two weeks a month in Estonia and one week in Lithuania.

In practice, the ultimate success of the BOA program will depend on how well the entire group handling

and managing the operational fieldwork can develop in its work. They all are accountable. Breaking the myth of organising being impossible is in their hands.

External organising

The main objective of the BOA is to create conditions in which the unions can learn to grow into new, non-organised areas. In the Estonian and Lithuanian target companies, unionization has been virtually non-existent. To overcome this it needs so-called external organising in which most of the BOA's resources are spent.

In Estonia, unionization rate is 6-7 per cent, and in Lithuania, about 10. Hence, in Estonia, there are close to 100,000 unorganised workers in the industrial sector, 57,000 in the service sector, and 36,000 in the transport sector. In Lithuanian metal and food industry, the corresponding figure is 56,000. Therefore unions in both countries have great growth potential.

In Estonia, the Association of Estonian Industrial Trade Unions (ETAÜ) was founded by four industrial trade unions to organise and to train in the sector. Through BOA, ETAÜ has enough resources for three organisers. The service employees' union can hire two. The Estonian transport workers' union, and the railway workers' union have resources for one organiser each. In Lithuania, the metal workers' union and the food workers' union both have resources for one organiser. In sum, Estonian unions have funds for 7 organisers and Lithuanian unions for two. Due to staff turnover, however, this capacity has yet never been achieved. In practice, during the first year, Estonia had 5 organisers; one of them has also worked as a lead organiser (He/She leads the campaigns and develops the skills of the organisers). In Lithuania, for the past six months, there has been only one organiser after the other resigned.

Campaigns are in progress in the following sectors in Estonia and Lithuania:

- Industry sector: electronics and electrical industry; bakery and poultry industry,
- Transport sector: logistics centres, airport, and rail support services,

- Service sector: retail and hotels.

In each sector, the organisers are concentrating on a few strategic target companies. Despite the underlying sectoral strategy, the campaigns are still purely organising single workplaces and sites, not whole companies or sectors. Within the target companies, organising work has been targeted at some pre-selected key locations or production units. The aim has been to achieve a clear majority, i.e. an above 50 per cent unionization rate, to set up an on-site organisation, elect shop stewards and board members, and start collective actions to achieve a company-specific collective agreement.

When assessing the following results, it is worth remembering that the campaigns literally started from a scratch. There were no contact details available. Targets in other than the service sectors were closed areas and without access. The organisers have had to build relationships with the employees outside the workplace, on streets and buses, in cafes, restaurants, and homes – wherever they have been able to reach them.

By autumn 2013, the campaigns had entailed about 3500 organising conversations and 100 organising meetings of different sizes. The number of new members was around 550 (gross). In a little over a year's time, union organisations had been set up in 6 target companies with 23 elected shop stewards. In three of the companies union members are now a majority, meaning that the unionization rate is above 50 per cent. In two targets, the corresponding rate is 25-40%, and in the rest 5-15%.

Since the idea of organising is to get the workers involved, campaigns have included various collective tactics such as petitions and delegations. Workers have organised demonstrations by using uniform clothing or symbols, or by suspending work for short periods of time. All these workplace tactics are an essential part of the organising process. They are a way to demonstrate that the majority supports the actions. The workers can experience the power of collaboration. Little by little they understand that together they can form a union and by so doing achieve something.

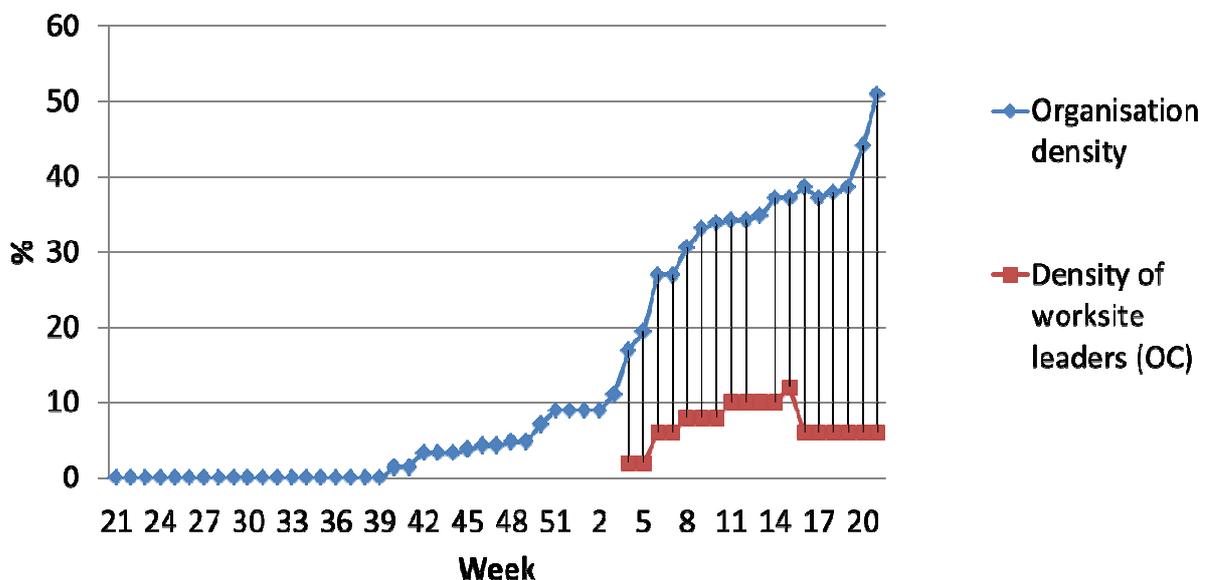
The workers' actions have been supported with a variety of external tactics. They have, for example, received public support letters. Finnish shop steward has been in contact with the target company's top management and showed support to their Estonian counterparts. These are just a few examples of how external tactics can be deployed in order to participate in a campaign, even across national borders.

In the summer of 2012, there was still much scepticism in Estonia about whether the majority goal of the campaigns was realistic. The table below breaks this myth. "Logistics terminal" in question was the first target site to reach a majority. The table below

shows how time intensive external organising really is. After five months of groundwork, results finally started to surface. Groundwork included forming relations with the workers and locating leaders with whom an organising committee was established.

The table shows how an on-site organisation has directly contributed to the progress of the campaign. Worksite leaders have taken action and in practice organised the others. At its best, the number of union members increased by 10-15 a week. In some departments, even a 100 per cent unionization rate was reached.

Logistics terminal (145 workers)



After the majority was achieved organising soon paid off: A short work stoppage was organised and the employer agreed to the proposed working time arrangements, granted the organiser access to other company terminals, started to deduct membership fees from salaries and accounted them directly to the union, and recognized the union as its negotiating partner. This is not an isolated example. Negotiations on a collective bargaining agreement and related activities are in preparation in four target companies.

The aim for 2013 is to break the myth of the impossibility of organising, and to get a breakthrough in at least one of the target companies. The myth buster's foothold has successfully endured its first year. Through campaigning, concrete results have been reached and the achievement of the goal for 2013 is getting close. Time will tell which will break first, the myth or the foothold.

Internal organising

Internal organising refers to campaigns organised in companies where union structures already exist. The goal of an internal organising campaign is to strengthen the organisation by increasing membership even more and to activate members to work for common goals.

Target countries show a significant potential for growth also in companies with an existing union structure, but low level of organisation density. Hence, a decision was made to test internal organising in the spring of 2013. Willing shop stewards and activists were provided with the same training as the professional organisers. In Lithuania, shop stewards and activists from 12 target companies attended, while in Estonia, five of the companies were represented. As a result, in just four months, unions in Lithuania received 125 and in Estonia 46 new members.

The results were achieved with minimal effort. Support for the activists would boost operations in a significant way. The results do indicate, however, that under these circumstances quite simple measures can yield good results.

Strategy 2014-2015

Operational campaign work has gone on for only little over half of the time spent on planning and setting up

the program. The results so far are promising, but not enough to achieve the ultimate goal to build unions able to organise effectively and grow.

The BOA aims to provide the Baltic unions with means to learn how to organise and to create successful campaigns. What are the next strategic choices? What are the focus areas for 2014 and 2015? The Baltic unions themselves are in a key position. The level of participation is directly proportional to results. A group of organisers focused on external organising cannot succeed alone. Without the adoption of a deeper organising philosophy, the results obtained through the BOA are mere individual victories without strategic importance. The unions must go all-in to break the vicious circle of declining membership and loss of influence and attraction. They have to begin to grow significantly.

An industry strategy in external organising

Workplace-specific campaigning must be replaced by sector-specific, strategic campaigning directing resources at strategic sectoral industries, and their primary companies selected as targets. The goal of the organising campaigns is to achieve a majority in these companies and eventually influence the whole sector.

The unions must have courage to venture into public struggles to activate the workers and get individual issues fixed by using collective power. Collective actions prepare the employees to work together to achieve collective bargaining agreements. By going public, awareness spreads in the industry, and others can make a decision to join in and get organised.

Conflict is not a goal, but rather a part of the process. The aim is to conclude extensive collective agreements, which regulate the key businesses. This will create minimum conditions for employment and prevent distortion of competition between organised and non-organised companies.

In accordance with the BOA agreement, 35% of the campaign-generated membership fees are invested back to the sectoral organising work. This cumulates additional resources for campaigning and a clear

organising-orientation of the resulting union organisation.

Majority strategy in internal campaigns

The Baltic unions have great growth potential also in companies where union structures already exist. By reaching a majority there, many unions would double their memberships. Unions should use their own resources to fund the necessary internal campaigns. This refers, in particular, to activist participation. First step would be to map those companies in which the activists wish to strengthen their own organisation. The BOA can support internal campaigning by training and utilizing organisers as advisors.

Organiser strategy

Without knowledge and people there can be no results. The staff and activists of the participating BOA unions can be trained over the next two years. In this way the organising philosophy can gradually develop into a cross-sectional mode of action. The BOA's training modules and a part of its resources can be utilized for this purpose.

Professional organisers are important, but here too, volunteers are the union's key resource. Union activists can be trained into volunteer organisers who take part in internal or external campaigns as needed.

Shop stewards are the backbone of workplace organisations, and can utilize organising also in their own work. Elected officials can only succeed if they have an organised workers' backing. Next BOA training element could be the development of an "organising shop steward" training module to train elected shop stewards.

The aim is to spread organising know-how throughout the union organisation. This will increase skills and create an organiser pool from where organisers could also be hired for short projects or permanent employment. **Into an organising union?**

There are international examples of unions that have doubled, tripled or even quintupled their membership in ten years. Such unions have made a decision to change into organising unions. Such unions have believed that all workers have an interest to maximize organising resources as that will benefit them collec-

tively. They have changed their membership fee distribution system and made sure that the funds are directed strategically to the whole union, not an individual workplace. A significant proportion of union resources have been invested in external organising, and the rest in internal organising, collective bargaining and member services.

Where appropriate, sector-specific union mergers have resulted in bigger entities and generated more resources for industry-specific, comprehensive organising campaigns. In other words, organising has been core of the union's mission. Increased organising skills and resources lead to a cumulative process. A positive growth spiral is created. The workers are finally powerful enough to achieve sector-specific collective agreements and influence their working conditions.

Through the BOA program, the Baltic unions have unparalleled resources to invest in external organising and growth. To demonstrate the fact, on an average, these unions have one organiser for every 2000 members. If that held true for all unions, IG Metall would have 1100 organisers and the Finnish metalworkers' union 75 organisers to concentrate solely on external organising.

By using the BOA wisely, the Baltic unions can obtain good results. However, since the external support is available for a limited time only, the real question is: are the participating unions willing to use their own resources for organising work? Baltic unions are relatively small organisations, in which development can take place quickly. They also have a growth potential of tens of thousands of workers. They do, however, need to make a choice of whether to become organising unions. At the moment, they have an extraordinary amount of resources for implementing the change at their disposal. The entire BOA program and its organisations are willing to support the process. All it takes is faith and will.

The choice is theirs.

About the author

Mika Häkkinen is Chairman of Steering Committee of Baltic Organising Academy (BOA) and Organising Coordinator of Finnish Metal Workers' Union.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Regional Project for Labour Relations and
Social Dialogue in Central Eastern Europe
Ulica Podwale 11 | 00-252 Warsaw | Poland

Responsible:

Joachim Schlütter

Direktor Regionalprojekt Arbeitsbeziehungen
und Sozialer Dialog in Ostmitteleuropa

Tel.: +48-22-8870867 | Fax: +48-22-6350393

<http://www.fesmoe.eu>

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organisation for which the author works.