

Let's shape the future of our Baltic Sea region together !

Contribution from the BSSSC Youth Network and BSSSC Working Group on youth policy to the "EU Baltic Sea Strategy" - December 2008

Introduction to the Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation (BSSSC) and the BSSSC-Working Group on Youth Policy (BSSSC- WGYP) and BSSSC Youth Network

Youth policy is one of the main priorities of the BSSSC. Since the establishing of the BSSSC, youth work and youth events have been supported and promoted by the BSSSC Board. In 2001 during the Pomeranian Region BSSSC chairmanship youth issues become an important working area. In 2002 youth workers network was established and young people participated for the first time in the BSSSC Annual Conference. In 2002-2004 the network organized many different seminars for the youth. In March 2004 Youth work was transferred to the BSSSC Ad hoc Working Group on Youth Policy. Today the work group consists of civil servants and youth representatives from the participating BSSSC subregions. Due to the demand of the young people participated in the annual conferences to have their own representation the BSSSC Youth Network was launched in 2005. Two members had an observer status at the board, this part got even more powerful in 2007, when they became "real" board member. The WGYP and the Youth Network are working closely together in organising youth events and develop the BSSSC youth policy as such. This ongoing dialoge between young people and decision makers brought a big added value to the cooperation.

The Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC) itself was established in 1993 as a response to a call by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) to improve subregional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. The BSSSC is open to all subregions of the CBSS Member States. More than 100 subregions, (counties, *länder*, *oblasts*, etc.), regularly participate in the annual conferences of the BSSSC. The objectives of the BSSSC are as follows: to promote cooperation among subregions around the Baltic Sea; to formulate a coherent Baltic Sea policy on the regional level; to represent the interests of the subregions towards national as well as European and international organisations. With support of the CBSS- Baltic Sea Working Group on Youth Affairs we succeeded in bringing the topic youth on prominent stage into the BSSSC annual conferences taking place in Finland and Lithuania in 2007 and 2008. The importance of young people and the topic youth was on several times even underlined by Mr. Arne Øren, former Chairman of the BSSSC After the participation of young people at the BSSC-Conference in Lithuania this year, we realized the urgent need of having an input of young people to the EU Baltic Sea Strategy. We formulated this paper according to the guidelines by the BSSSC-WGYP and understand it as part of the "Structured Dialogue" between youth and politics as central strategy of the EU for revitalizing the "Plan D".

Young people & the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Actually it won't be a worse idea to include the potential of the young generation if you are shaping the future of our Baltic Sea region. Most of the topics and actions mentioned in the scoping papers are directly linked with the reality faced by the young people of today, like risks of unemployment, environmental problems as well as stable social and political systems.

That is why we, the BSSSC Youth Network together with the BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy, are willing to give a contribution to the strategy itself and even more to its implementation.

Politicians and structures of today should not forget that their present decisions will influence the future generations to much higher extent than their own generation who has taken the decisions. Following the core principle of youth policy in Europe when speaking about involvement and participation of young people, we underline: "Nothing about us without us!"

So far the aim of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy is to bring the Baltic Sea region (BSR) more forward to be among the most competitive regions in Europe or even globally. Probably we can reach this goal by putting all the efforts and actors from all levels together. As the implementation of the ideas and strategies will not work out without strong involvement of all inhabitants of the region, the process should be held as open as possible.

Since the BSR is not (only) a place of a lot of polluted seawater, logistic chains and labour force, it is a region which was shaped by people living here, influenced by the sea which brought impact on their everyday life and many possibilities of trading and exchanges with the neighbouring regions.

That is why we see the big need that the strategy should not focus too much on infrastructure and competitiveness matters. It would be more successful if we will succeed connecting the human resources with a well functioning infrastructure, made for the people.

We therefore comment each headline of the Strategy itself. The headlines obviously were chosen to serve as guidelines. We, young people easily found a common perspective on them as the young generation living in the several regions around the Baltic Sea. Not all of us are coming from countries, which are EU members, but many live in different regions of Norway and of the Russian Federation, but we consider us all as interested in the Baltic Sea region and we all consider it as important that we can have a say on the "EU Baltic Sea Strategy".

„To make the BSR an environmentally sustainable place“

Young people are pretty much concerned about the situation of the environment. The Baltic Sea is our natural heritage, only if we can preserve the sea and the coastal zones, our region can be an attractive place to live in or for tourists to visit. We should take good care of this heritage, the Baltic Sea Action Plan is a milestone. **The implementation of the Action Plan is our biggest demand to decision makers.** Following this we should work for a changing in people's mind concerning a really sustainable use of the natural resources. We further expect concrete action against climate change.

„To make the BSR a prosperous place“

Compared with other regions in Europe the BSR is already living in rather good conditions, but there is still plenty of possibilities for improvement.

The first step would be to secure stable conditions in the economy all over the BSR. We are living in a knowledge based and virtual society, this gives us a big chance to develop ideas by cross-boarder & trans-regional cooperation of companies, universities, schools, etc. There is a big need to motivate young people for starting entrepreneurship. This should be a task already in highschools and universities. Young people should not only be taught in theory, but should also be given the possibility to put their energy and experience into practice.

A focal point is to harmonize and simplify laws on companies and enterprises further. Access to micro credits for young business men & business women is needed essentially as young people starting up

business projects can not provide any high financial security.

Young people entering the labour market are often highly skilled, multilingual, have a high IT knowledge, a university degree or a job education, good soft and social skills and a high mobility and flexibility. These human resources can be the ground for an even more prosperous Baltic Sea region. Even if there is a big need for an economic growth, we should not forget, that prosperity does not only mean money or to make money: To live in a prosperous place like the BSR means a fair salary and payment for your job and good labour conditions.

This issue is the biggest concern of young people living in Europe right now! We all are depending on finding a good and well paid job in our region – appropriate to our education.

If we want the BSR to develop in one of the most competitive region in Europe we should find a proper way to stop the “brain drain” from some of the BSR countries. **We instead should give the young, well educated people secure perspectives to stay in the region and offers to come back after a while living in other places of Europe or the world.**

„To make the BSR an accessible & attractive place“

For people living in the south of Europe or somewhere else in the world the BSR is may not that an attractive place, just because of the climatic conditions. The image of our region as such is not the best from an outside perspective: In people's mind it is connected with cold and long winters, a lot of rural areas and states of whom some people never had heard of in other parts of Europe. But if people had once a chance to meet the hospitality here and the open minded people, when they have explored the beautiful nature, they definitely know about the attractiveness of the Baltic Sea region. Probably these facts are not key factors for deciding to live in the BSR, but they are most of value for enjoying life.

One core element is the balance of private and working life. We need flexible working models and possibilities of lifelong learning combined with social security. Needs of people are changing with their age, this has to be faced by spatial planning:

For children and youth it is essential that they have an access to good and free education, without long distances to travel every day, the same is important for their later working places. Different generations all need certain infrastructure, like public transport at reasonable prices with regular schedules, they all need possibilities for spare time activities and good access to information and the internet. To handle the different demands and needs is one of the greatest challenges of demographic changes in the next years. Since there are hardly any metropolitan areas in the BSR we will need a decentralized system of traffic, education, day-care and information network based on the needs of all inhabitants.

We all will and can actively participate in the development of our region and our neighbourhood. A person is identifying her- or himself even more with her/his area, if they can take part in the processes of designing and developing it further. Young people are willing to take an active role in the decision making processes, esp. if they will effect them directly.

For our generation it became rather normal to move from one place to another, even to another country, It is happening every day that young people change working places or change their professions. Politics are calling for a high mobility of labour force, but this is meaning an illusion when thinking of social security: the present social system is normally based and organized in the respective countries alone. What is going to happen, if a single person or a family is moving to another country to start with a job there? What happen if they get ill, loose the job, etc.?

The European social system and social welfare should be working cross borders, its should provide guarantees to the individual and not mean a re-financing of hospitals etc. only in the countries of origin of the people moving.

A REAL European social system with a health, a social and an unemployment insurance covering insurance cases in all member countries in the EU would make it much more attractive to be mobile within the EU and the BSR. Our obstacles are no longer the languages or the different mentalities, it is most prominently the question of social security.

„To make the BSR a safe & secure place“

The question if you are feeling safe and secure is difficult to answer. Reactions on it differ a lot from the areas young people live in. In their closer surrounding they are faced with „smaller“ problems of a safe and secure place, e.g. violence, poverty, esp. of children, mothers and older people, alcohol and drug abuse among their friends, xenophobia or discrimination or even diseases bring risks into their lives.

If young people start to exchange their views on a more general perspective they are even worried about a **stable and reliable democratic system** without any corruption providing the **freedom to act and to grow up without violence**.

The problem of organised crime, esp. trafficking in human beings scares youngster, because it shows how hopeless and helpless young people of the same age can be and can be treated by adults and society.

Because of that we should have a joint effort to stop trafficking in human beings, esp. of children, and we further need strengthening the support of the victims.

One key element can be to give equal opportunities to everybody, the support of the society and the state for those who at risk, doesn't matter which risk.

Conclusion

The young generation is ready to take decisions on how our common Baltic Sea region should look like in the future. We are willing to do that together with the current decision makers, businessmen and business women and politicians since only if we join together there is the possible to design and develop the BSR into a leading region, based on traditions and history, enjoying certain values and providing the courage to meet the future challenges and to find solutions to them. **We therefore highly recommend to include the young generation in the implementation and in the process of developing the “EU Strategy for Our Baltic Sea Region”.**

Contact

Alexandra Ehlers
BSSSC YouthNetwork

Regional Youth Council of Schleswig-Holstein e.V.
Holtener Strasse 99
24105 Kiel – Germany
+49 431 800 98 40
alexandra.ehlers@ljrsh.de

Małgorzata Ludwiczek
BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy

Secretariat for the youth of the Westernpomeranian Region
Pl. Orła Białego 2
70-562 Szczecin - Poland
tel. +48 91 421 03 22
mlodziez@wzp.pl