BALTIC STORIES

ISSUE 1

The team of Urb-Cultural - Planning talk about Minecraft in activating young residents of the cities around the Baltic

Julia and Martin comment and share their point of view of the cooperation around the Baltic Sea Region

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EU STRATEGY
FOR THE BALTIC
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get to know

The EUSBSR is implemented in concrete joint projects and processes. Projects and processes named Flagships of the EUSBSR shows perfectly the progress of the Strategy and the tangible results it achieves.

EUSBSR flagships serve as pilot examples for desired change. They inspire new initiatives and provide evidence on what the macroregional cooperation is all about and how it contributes to the Region and its inhabitants.

How to change the world with the help of a game?

Wałowy Square in Gdańsk. Once a recreational area surrounded by impressive chestnut trees and a epresentative fountain in its centre, a nice spot for a Sunday stroll. Today, no trace is left from the years of glory. The beautiful hundred-year-old tenement houses are in a deplorable condition. The lawns are scattered by cars, chaotically parked wherever there is a few square metres of free space. You wouldn't hear children laughter or see elderly couples enjoying a read on a park bench. The square does not encourage walks, neighbour chat or having a coffee with friends. There is, however, an interesting neighbourhood: Mała Zbrojownia - a former weapons warehouse, which houses the sculpture department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk. It is close to the historic Lowland Gate, the Gothic towers and bastions of St. Gertrude and Żubr and the historic, tourist centre of Gdańsk.

This scenery serves as a perfect testing-bed for using culture and creativity to make living better in cities, which is one of the goals of UrbCulturalPlanning, one of the flagship projects of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

The project contributes to two of the overall objectives of PA Culture', says the Policy Area Coordinator- Anja Uhlenbrok and explains:

'Through its support of cultural and creative SME's and other cultural actors as well as its fostering of cross-sector cooperation between cultural and non-cultural actors (digital/technological, urban development, research, environmental) the project is contributing to the prosperity of the region and connects people in the BSR. It will use culture as a driver for social and eco-friendly innovation. The project directly addresses the cultural and creative dimension of BSR as smart, inclusive and sustainable region'.

Anja Uhlenbrok,
EUSBSR Policy Area Culture Coordinator

PHOTO BY M. CZARNECKA-GALLAS

DIGITAL TOOLS AND CULTURAL-PLANNING

And one of the methods that can boost this process is citizen-driven cultural planning. But how to involve the citizens to take an active stance on some of the challenges that are faced by contemporary cities? How to enable residents to fight with social inclusion, gentrification, lack of community life and others? How to unleash the citizens' creativity in finding the best solutions for local challenges and open up for new opportunities?

The answer could be gaming, which is among several tools proposed and promoted by UrbCulturalPlanning. '*The game allows the youngest residents, most often left out in public decision-making, to be brought into cultural planning in their own neighbourhood* - claims Mārtiņš Eņģelis, Communication Manager of the Project Consortium, and explains:

*'It explores their opinions in decisions that affect them and allows to receive and give information and **ideas**. By creating an opportunity for them to **influenc**e, shape and design urban spaces, **Minecraft** has become a convenient tool to **reach out** for those who will only make their big decisions in cultural planning tomorrow.'*

Mārtiņš Eņģelis, Communication Manager
Urb-Cultural-Planning Project
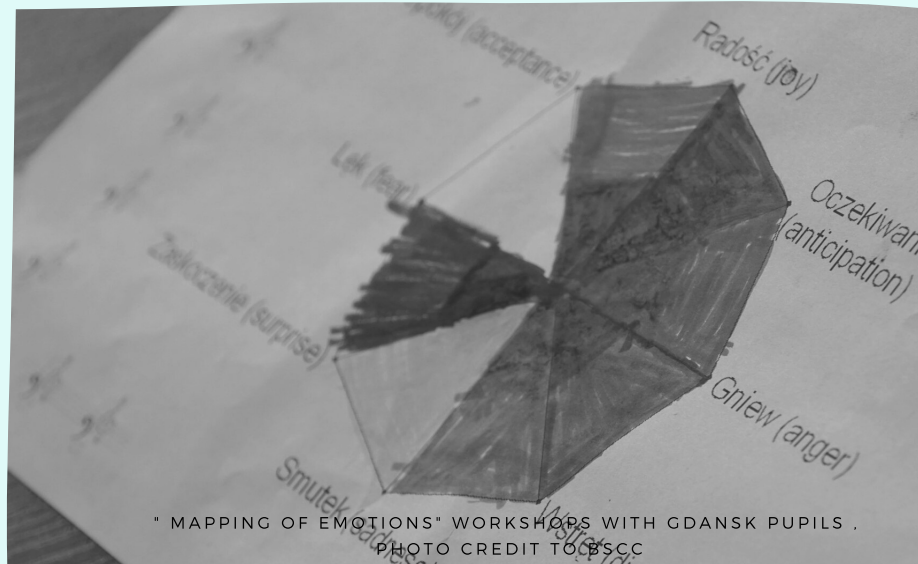
" MAPPING OF EMOTIONS" WORKSHOPS WITH GDANSK PUPILS .
PHOTO CREDIT TO BSCC

FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE STREET
… AND BACK TO A COMPUTER LAB

Last year the Baltic Sea Culture Centre in Gdańsk, one of the project's partner organized a series of workshops with pupils of the 4th grade of the Primary School no 67 in Gdansk. With the assistance of a psychologist, architects and Minecraft experts, the pupils worked with different elements of urban space, as well as the emotions they evoke. Equipped with the knowledge gained in class, the children went on a tour around Wałowy Square and tried to map their emotions within the Minecraft model of this part of the city.


PHOTO CREDIT TO
URB-CULTURAL-PLANNING PROJECT

'We talk very little about our emotions at school and in general. And later we cannot express them in various contexts. Neither in our private lives nor in public space. Yet, we observed during the workshop with these 10-year-old kids that they have a very similar perception of the urban space, as we- the adults. They didn't like the dilapidated buildings and chaos of cars crowded all around. They felt bad in such an area and they intuitively wanted to beautify it, revive it with greenery or a small ice-cream stand…It shows that everybody, no matter how old he/she is, has the need for aesthetics and this need should be cherished, not muted'.

Magda Zakrzewska-Duda
The Baltic Sea Cultural Centre (BSCC), Gdańsk

BIAŁA BASZTA, GDAŃSK

In order to make a change, you very often need to leave your comfort zone and look around from a new, fresh perspective

PUPILS WITH ARCHITECTS DISCOVERING THE SURROUNDINGS OF PLAC WAŁOWY.
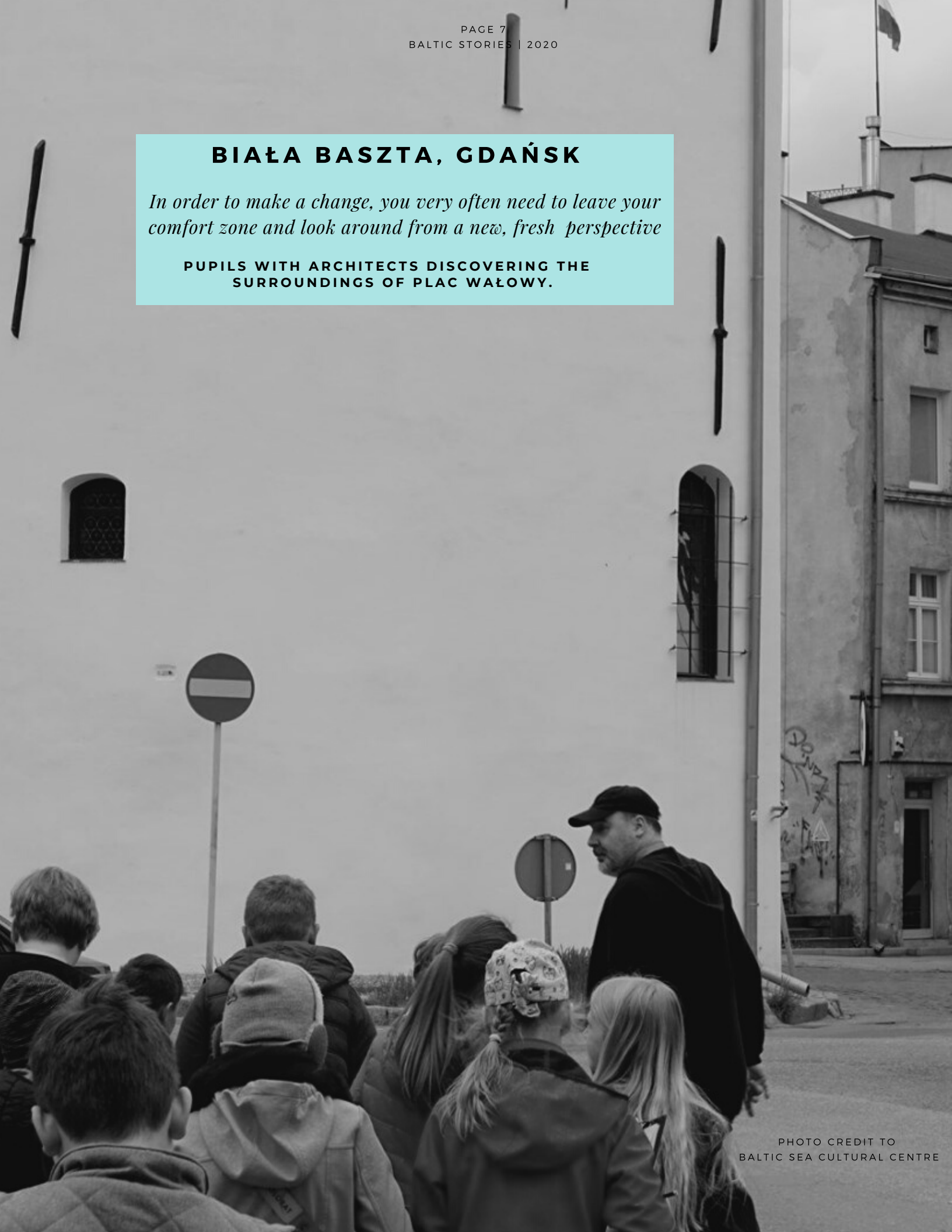
It is not only in Gdańsk that Minecraft is intensively used as a digital tool to engage young people in their local community.

Within UrbCulturalPlanning, similar activities are undertaken by Riga City Council. *'Although Minecraft as a tool for strategic, urban planning isn't completely new, the methods and approaches vary a lot depending on which specific outcomes you are working towards. At this point, the City Council is exploring Minecraft as a non-verbal tool for communication to foster local activism among pupils in school settings. This will help the local youth become more connected to their neighbourhood'*, explains Justīne Panteļējeva, who works at the Riga City Development Department.

'At the moment, the department is testing gaming activities with pupils (age 10–14) from Bolderāja Music and Art School. Bolderaja is a suburb in the north of Riga with around 12,500 inhabitants. It is an area segregated mentally and physically from the rest of the city and therefore is an interesting case to work with. The goal for the specific activities at Bolderāja Music and Art School is to give the students an opportunity to feel better connected to their city. For us at the department, it is an opportunity to see the neighbourhood from a perspective of the growing generations who live there. The specific activities that the pupil will work with, will – from a cultural planning perspective –give them a chance to find out more about their suburbs and to learn about architecture and history in Riga with Minecraft as their playground.'
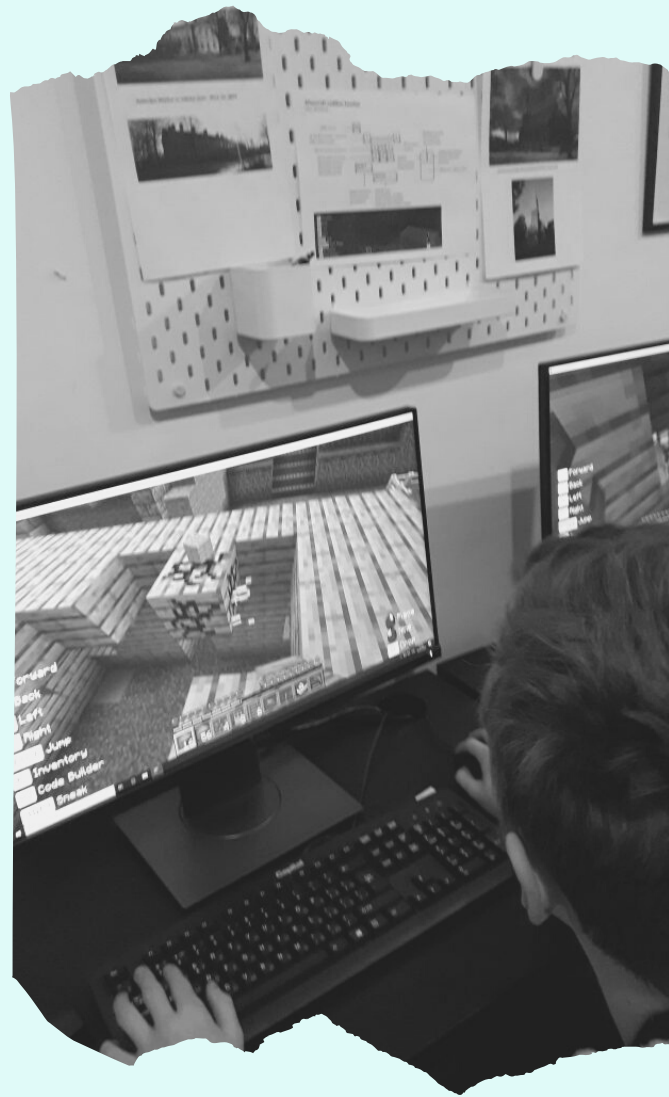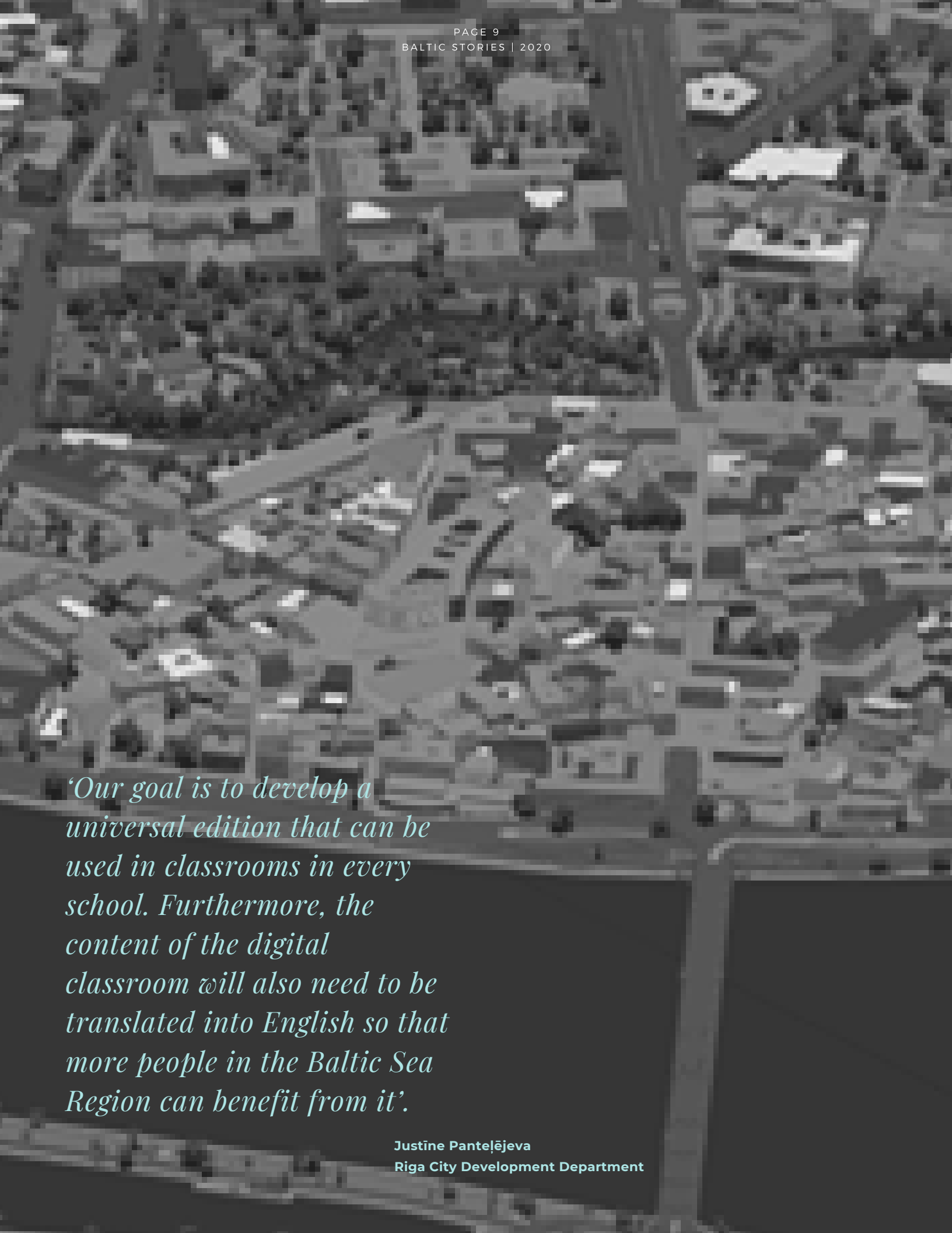
PHOTO CREDIT TO
URB-CULTURAL-PLANNING PROJECT

Justīne is full of enthusiasm about the benefits of gaming for resident-driven innovations in the context of city planning.

Although aware of some constraints of the method (for example a very basic one resulting from the fact that Education Edition of Minecraft is not compatible with other versions of the game such as Java, which is the most common one you use to play at home), Justīne dreams big.

'Our goal is to develop a universal edition that can be used in classrooms in every school. Furthermore, the content of the digital classroom will also need to be translated into English so that more people in the Baltic Sea Region can benefit from it'.

Justīne Panteļējeva
Riga City Development Department

DIGITALISATION
IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

Minecraft is only one of many examples of digital tools used for cultural planning and citizens-driven innovations that can be implemented in local communities and the whole cities. It shows the importance of digitalisation as an accelerator and enabler of many, perhaps all of the EUSBSR objectives.

The Baltic Sea Region ranks on top of the European Union as far as digital development is concerned. According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), which is a composite index summarising relevant indicators on Europe's digital performance and tracks the evolution in digital competitiveness, six out of eight EU member states from the Baltic Sea Region (Norway is not included in the ranking) get above-average scores. Finland, Sweden and Denmark rank on top of the digitalisation scoreboard with particularly good results on human capital and use of internet services.

The Baltic Sea Region countries as a whole are much better on average in connectivity indicators (mainly access to broadband Internet) and digitalisation of public services, compared to the whole EU.

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Regions strongly supports further development of digitalisation within its policy areas and integration of digital technology into various sectors of the economy.

Digital innovation and transformation is one of the core actions of PA Innovation but especially after the COVID-19 pandemic it appeared obvious for everybody how important digitalization is in many other aspects of our lives, like education, health, safety, culture, etc.

In the revised Action Plan of the EUSBSR through an almost eighty-page-long-document, the words 'digital' or 'digitalization' are mentioned 61 times, in various contexts, proving that it is a cross-cutting topic.

This conclusion will probably stay with our societies also in post-pandemic times.

CONNECTIVITY   HUMAN CAPITAL   USE OF INTERNET SERVICES   INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY   DIGITAL PUBLIC SERVICES
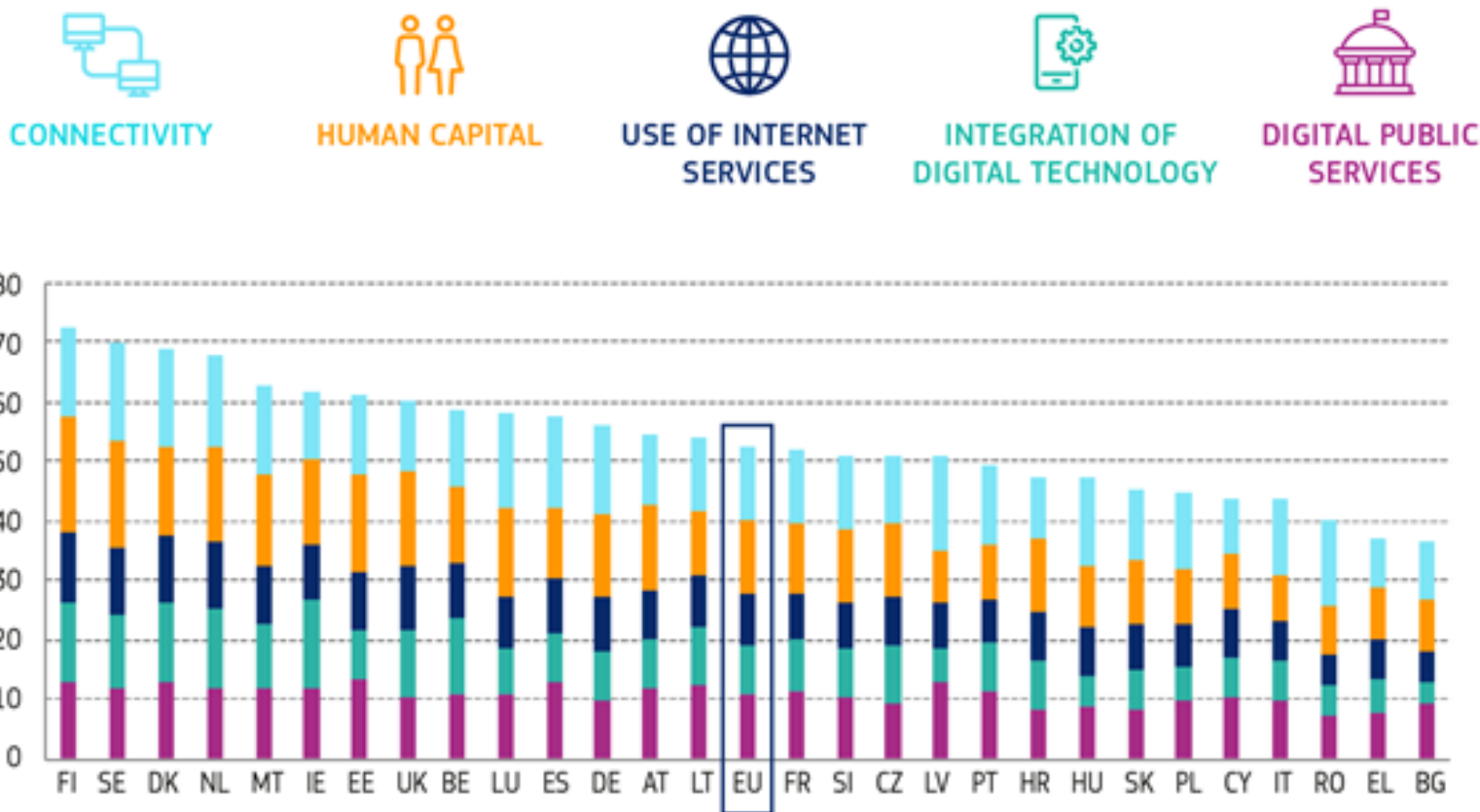
Source: https://digital-agenda-data.eu/, accessed: 21.07.2020

'2020 has already taught us there is a different "public space". "Tours" might have a different meaning now and too many video calls can cause fatigue. The virtual, cyber, digital or other intangible culture online has finally made its mark on us and has become an undeniable place or a destination many ignored. The faster we embrace it as a fundamental part of the new age cultural planning, the faster we can make a change in tangible realms. After all, the virtual world is a very inhabited place. Can we approach it with urban cultural planning?'

Mārtiņš Eņģelis, Communication Manager
Urb-Cultural-Planning Project

let's meet

The EUSBSR implementation is coordinated in close contact with the European Commission and all relevant stakeholders, i.e. other member states, regional and local authorities, inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies. The EUSBSR also welcomes cooperation with EU neighbours.

But all of these are the engaged and dedicated people who dream big and do their best to realize their visions on a better, more inclusive, innovative and developing Region, starting from their own backyard. Let's meet some of them and get inspired to act!

The Younger Side of the Baltic Sea Region

YOUTH INITIATIVES CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMON GOALS OF THE EU STRATEGY OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION.

I met Julia and Martin for the first time almost two years ago. It was in September, at an Annual Conference of Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) in Gdańsk.

For her, it was just the onset of an adventure into the Baltic Affairs. For him, it was a big step forward. At that time Martin was in the middle of his cadency at BSSSC Board as a Baltic Sea Region Youth representative and he had already earned his reputation as an engaged and visionary lad with lots of ideas on the youth empowerment in the Baltic Sea Region.

After these almost two years and some personal and online encounters, I talk with Julia and Martin again.

It is a very specific time.

The Spring is at the full thrust but many in the Baltic Sea Region, Europe and the world still cannot indulge in the simple joys it usually brings. The lockdowns our societies have experienced, the social distancing on a mass scale and numerous limitations to daily life and work have changed our perception of things.

It is just before the online Baltic Sea Youth Camp, the initiative which aims to use the power, vision and ideas of the young generations to contribute to a more sustainable EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

So how Martin and Julia are doing today? And what has changed in these two years in the youth empowerment and inclusion in the EUSBSR?

FULL OF ENERGY, FULL OF PASSION

'On a perfect day, I wake up before my alarm rings, go for a small run, get a big pot of tea and start working or studing, sitting at my desk with a view on the Baltic Sea at the place that I call home due to Covid-19' – starts Martin. Now a 26-year-old-student of Innovation Management at Sino-Danish Center, a collaboration between Aalborg University and the Chinese Academy of the Sciences.

Martin:

'At work I really enjoyed days on which I could meet many of my great colleagues, pick up on challenging tasks. After work, I like to go for a longer run, meet up with friends, and cook fresh. I have many hobbies, the first of which is to get politically engaged. But I also go for running, love taking photos and be a part of the Young European Federalists'

Being active within many different fields is also a feature of Julia. Just like her broad and constant smile, which opens many doors, she knocks at with her ideas. Julia, who is currently a first-year student of International Economic Relations at Gdańsk University and the President of Euroregion Baltic Youth Board, is also a great fan of baking (she brings to our meeting homemade carrot muffins in a quantity that could feed a small army unit) and extreme sports.

When you see the passion Julia and Martin speak about the things, which are important for them and hear how they try to change the world around them, it seems clear that having Youth onboard EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is the key to make it work.

'The Baltic Sea Affairs include many important issues that will decide, on how we will live in the region in the future- says Martin.

'For example, when discussing sustainability, responsible consumption and production, we can try to avoid polluting the Baltic Sea with too much plastic that will make it impossible to eat fish from the Baltic Sea in the future due to microplastic.
Also, we can take action against climate change to do our fair share to ensure that our children can show their grandchildren the beautiful cities along the Baltic coast how I can experience them without extreme weather situations and food insecurities. To young people, this is all much more relevant as they will ask themselves, „in what kind of world do I want to have my future children living in one day?"

The outcome of this question is essential and needs to be taken into account when discussing Baltic Sea topics.

Julia agrees with that completely and confirms that ecology and economy are important issues for the young generations.

'I come from Gdańsk and I am very proud of my city because of its long and inspiring history. I also observe how much Gdansk has benefitted from international cooperation, exchange of experiences and knowledge transfer. This proves that the whole Baltic Sea Region will be better off while acting together'.

While being active in the Baltic Affairs, Julia got more sensitive to environmental issues and is a great advocate of sustainable development goals. She would explain to her grandmum why resigning from meat can contribute to a cleaner planet and with an unhidden satisfaction observes some changes in her diet in this respect. She helps her neighbours to understand the philosophy behind garbage segregation and inspire her parents to ask in a restaurant whether the potatoes on their plates come from a local farm.

Julia:

'For me, the realization of the SDGs simply means becoming a better person'

MARTIN RUEMMELEIN

currently studying Innovation Management at Aalborg University
and the Chinese Academy of Sciences offered through the
Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research, the University
Partnership between China and Denmark. Apart from his passion
for politics, he is interested in business and digitalization.
He is a former chairmen of the State Students Board of Vocational
Schools and former Board member of the Baltic Sea States
Subregional Cooperation, involved in Baltic Sea Youth Platform.
Loves jogging, taking photos and cooking with friends.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

There is much scope for Youth involvement in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. 'I firmly believe that the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region can empower Youth to be more active', claims Martin. 'However, this will not just happen on its own. We need to implement structures, where the Youth governs. The Baltic Sea Youth Camp, the Baltic Sea Youth Platform and the Baltic Sea Youth Declaration are a good start. Now we need to ensure that they get a fixed role in the EUSBSR, and take care that it is the Youth that governs in these initiatives.'

Julia underlines that the Youth cannot be only a nice adding to the picture.

Julia:

'We don't want to be invited to the discussion because it's cool to have a hashtag #Youth or similar while twitting from a conference. At one event I participated, young people were asked to present their statement but it even wasn't brought up by the moderator. No one reacted to what we said. We felt completely ignored and this is very demotivating'

Such practices certainly won't earn youth engagement. 'In debates, we need to understand that young people are not better scientists but should be able to advocate their values and ideas and point of view to the discussion', Martin adds and continues: 'In my opinion, we do not need a culture in the EUSBSR were everyone nods and agrees to everything that the Youth proposes, and forgets about it a minute later. We need a culture where proposals of the Youth are critically discussed on the same eye-level. For this, we need a fixed role of the Youth in the EUSBSR.

The institutional culture of the Baltic Sea Region favours active citizenship. Numerous organizations from very local to transnational allow for youth involvement in various projects.

The first step into being young activists on an international scale for both Julia and Martin was taken during their school years. That is why they strongly support initiatives like the Baltic Sea Youth Camp or Baltic Sea Youth Platform, dedicated to young people in their secondary and tertial education.

'When we drafted the concept for this in Gdansk last year, we stated clearly, that it needs to be governed by the Youth, and that it should not be a one time project', Martin explains.

'If the Youth is not enabled to drive the platform further and ensure continuous funding, then we will not see the Youth making a significant impact. I think we can understand the youth platform as a constantly sailing boat. Now we have the sailboat. We need to set the sails, sail to the right harbours to pick up support for continued funding beyond the Erasmus project and give the command to the Youth which can choose which direction to sail and what goods to take along, which are represented by the Contents of the Baltic Sea youth declaration'.

MRKS Gdansk

JULIA ORLUK

a second-year student of International Economic Relations at Gdańsk University. Chairwoman of the Euroregion Baltic Youth Board. Member of the Young Diplomats Forum. Youth representative of Pomorskie Region, also in the Board of Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation. Passionate about her home city of Gdańsk, baking and a Lhasa Apso dog, called Taker. Addicted to extreme sports.

let's talk

ABOUT COOPERATION & TOGETHERNESS

The Strategy is an agreement between the Member States of the EU and the European Commission to strengthen cooperation between the countries bordering the Baltic Sea.

In order to meet the common challenges and to benefit from common opportunities facing the region we need to talk, discuss and exchange ideas constatntly. Only then the EUSBSR will be kept truely alive and realize its full potential !

How the EUSBSR can capitalize on the Baltic Sea Region cooperation networks?

The Baltic Sea Region has a long history of cooperation. This fact is very strongly present in the collective memory of its inhabitants.

From the times of Hanza through an intensive post-second-world-war collaboration of Nordic countries to the whole region's integration after the EU enlargement in 2004, the Baltic cooperation has been driven by pragmatism and the will to make the region strong, innovative and sustainable.

The number of organizations from different governance level prove that the Baltic Sea Region has a very diverse and well-embedded institutional environment, which can be even better utilized by macro-regional strategy framework.

The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) serves as a perfect platform to help transfer solutions, knowledge, innovations, etc and make them truly sustainable in the whole region.

The existent networks in the Baltic Sea are numerous and diversified. They include intergovernmental bodies, like the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission HELCOM), Vision And Strategies Around The Baltic Sea (VASAB), ARS BALTICA; voluntary organizations of cooperating regions: Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), Euroregions with Euroregion Baltic as an example, or The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions' The Baltic Sea Commission (CPRM BSC) and cities (Union of Baltic Cities, UBC). Besides, there are also the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC) and a Forum of non-governmental organizations.

This variety can be also observed in a thematic coverage of the organizations, with some concentrating on a very specific or narrow topic and others covering many themes and policies, most of which are of interest of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Talking about BSR cooperation bodies one should not forget about networks of special interest groups (e.g. the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network, BASTUN), universities and research institutes (e.g. The Baltic Sea Region University Network, BSRUN; The Baltic University Programme, BUP), clusters (e.g. ScanBalt) or a plethora of projects.

But how the organizations and networks in the Baltic Sea Region can actually support the EUSBSR in practice?

In many cases, the synergy between the EUSBSR and existing Baltic networks seems very natural and unquestionable, as is in the case of the Helsinki Commission, HELCOM.

'HELCOM and the EUSBSR complement and benefit a great deal from each other', says Dominik Littfass, HELCOM's Communication Secretary.

There are plenty of similar complementarities in the Baltic Sea Region and many organizations whose goals perfectly suit the EUSBSR's objectives. This is the case of VASAB, which fosters cooperation of 10 countries of the Baltic Sea Region in spatial planning and development and together with Helcom co-coordinates the EUSBSR horizontal action spatial planning.

Another example is Ars Baltica, the network connecting the Baltic Sea states by encouraging cultural cooperation and combining cultural policy development with close collaboration with cultural operators, which clearly support the EUSBSR Policy Area Culture.

'The current EUSBSR objectives of "saving the sea, connecting the region and increasing prosperity" overlap with those of HELCOM, especially on the protection of the marine environment. Since the start of the EUSBSR, HELCOM has been heavily involved in its policy areas, horizontal actions, flagships, and Interreg projects, often in a leading role. The outcomes of these various processes led to concrete contributions to HELCOM work, such as on HELCOM recommendations, regional strategies, or status reports, all serving the attainment of our respective objectives. Some examples of fruitful cooperation are joint work on hazardous substances, pharmaceutical, waste and litter, nutrients inputs, climate change, as well as maritime spatial planning and sustainable shipping practices, among others''

**Dominik Littfass,
HELCOM Secretariat**

Another example is Ars Baltica, the network connecting the Baltic Sea states by encouraging cultural cooperation and combining cultural policy development with close collaboration with cultural operators, which clearly support the EUSBSR Policy Area Culture.

At this point, it is worth acknowledging the role of various organizations and networks in the EUSBSR's implementation.

Being a part of the Strategy's governance system is important for the Union of the Baltic Cities. 'UBC is one of three coordinators, together with the Swedish Institute and Norden Association representing the Baltic Sea NGO Network, of the Horizontal Action Capacity, as Paweł Żaboklicki, the Secretary-General of the organization explains.

Paweł:

'Its task is to increase the project capacity, skills, and competence of all stakeholders involved in the Strategy, through the training programs. The other dimension of the Horizontal Action Capacity is to ensure broad participation of local and regional authorities as well as all other stakeholders. Manifold capacity building activities of HA Capacity include, among others, workshops for PAs/HAs, annual meetings of EUSBSR stakeholders, as well as support to other stakeholders such as PA Focal Points/ steering group members, and managing authorities of two networks of ERDF and ESF. HA Capacity has also been responsible for organizing the Networking village and Participation Day linked to the EUSBSR Annual Fora. The UBC Commissions namely Sustainable Cities Commission, Safe Cities Commission, and Task Force on Youth Employment and Well-being have been running the EUSBSR flagship projects'

Having experience in cross-border and transnational cooperation on a regional and local level, the organizations in the Baltic Sea Region can add an interesting perspective and context to the EUSBSR.

Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło, the Head of the Euroregion Baltic International Permanent Secretariat, claims that the ambition for all stakeholders of the EUSBSR should be to strive for good information flows, as well as multilevel and intersectoral communication.

'In Euroregion Baltic, we believe there is still a room for improvement in this sector, especially when trying to raise awareness about the EUSBSR goals and activities and engage local and regional actors, small municipalities and NGOs' she explains and shares some thoughts and good advice coming from her organization's experience: 'To make the EUSBSR more transparent, it is essential to improve the organizational structure of the Strategy. In our opinion, it seems necessary to strengthen the role of the Policy Area Coordinators and Horizontal Action Coordinators and make them more visible. They should also reach more to local and regional stakeholders and, i.e. form smaller task force groups, enabling smaller actors to be more engaged. It is also crucial we further encourage the involvement of new partners, allowing those who were not active in the EUSBSR implementation to become an active partner. We also believe it would be good to develop the EUSBSR Annual Forum to be an arena for all stakeholders to meet, discuss the progress and needs for improvements, therefore we should invite more 'newcomers' and NGOs representatives to the Forums to engage them in the dialogue with PAC, HAC and NCs working with the Strategy', she concludes.

Magda:

'There is a need for improved multi-level governance and the regional anchoring of the Strategy. Therefore, Euroregion Baltic encourages the Baltic Sea regions to embed the EUSBSR in their regional action programs and development strategies'

The macro-regional cooperation framework represented by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is designed to integrate and coordinate the work of all the relevant formal and informal BSR networks to fully benefit from their activities. During its ten-year-existence, the EUSBSR has done a lot to improve the capacity of BSR network governance, especially by bringing the many existing bodies together around the common goals of saving the sea, connecting the region, and increasing prosperity.

"*Our region* is facing many wicked problems which can only be tackled by working together *across disciplines* and *generations*. The EUSBSR gives us the framework for *collaboration* and the development of a common *Baltic Sea identity* which is needed as the basis to successfully implement *sustainable* common policies in our Baltic Sea Region".

ALINE MAYR

CBSS Secretariat, Stockholm
representative of Baltic Sea Youth Platform