

ACTIVITY REPORT

YOUTHFUL CITIES COMMISSION

January 2020 – September 2021

1. General description

- chairmanship

As agreed by the members of the Commission in autumn of 2019, in January 2021 the chairmanship was taken over by the city of Riga (Latvia) for a two-year term.

Since there were no candidates for the vice-chair position, the Commission has been running without a vice-chair.

For the next two years the city of Riga will continue chairing the Commission. We expect to elect the new vice-chair during the next physical meeting of the Commission (with a prospect a prospect for the newly elected city to replace Riga in its position in January 2024).

- secretariat

Traditionally, the chairing city performs the functions of the Secretariat of the Youthful Cities Commission as well. Hence, for these 2 years it was done by the city of Riga.

- aims & goals

As revised during the Future Workshops held in 2020, the goals of the Commission for the upcoming years include:

- empowering and supporting project-based cooperation between the cities involved in the work of the Commission;
- providing space for mutual learning between the cities' youth workers and youth policy officers;
- creating a participative structure within the Commission to ensure meaningful and impactful involvement of young people.

2. Meetings/seminars/conferences

One of the key internal tasks of the Commission for 2020 was to rethink its purpose, format and operation.

In line with this task two Future Workshops were organised on 8th and 22nd October 2020 (with 6 and 7 people participating in them respectively). During the online workshops participants analysed the results of the questionnaire about previous work of the Commission and shared their ideas about ways how to improve communication, structure, topic coverage, youth participation and external partnerships within the Commission.

The conclusions of the Future workshops were presented during an online meeting of the Commission on 3rd December. Its 11 participants discussed practical steps how to put into practice ideas from the Future Workshops (topics of particular interest were identified and ideas for possible events were elaborated).

However, since the number of participants was quite small, participants agreed to come back to the abovementioned points during the next physical meeting of the Commission to have a joint agreement on how to move on.

Since the Commission haven't met in person in 2021 due to Covid-19 related circumstances, there hasn't been any straightforward development. An online meeting of the Commission is planned in late autumn of 2021 to prepare the activities and event to take place in 2022 (hopefully, in a physical realm).

3. Projects

Just before the beginning of the pandemic, the Commission started implementation of an Erasmus+ strategic partnership project "Baltic Sea Youth Platform" (the official partner of the project is the UBC itself alongside with CBSS, BSSSC, Euroregion Baltic, Lithuanian Youth Council and ESN Finland).

The project lasts for 31 month (until 31st August 2022) with a total budget of EUR 239 829.

The aim of the project is to connect and empower youth in the Baltic Sea area in the most efficient and effective way by three main measures:

1. Improving the political impact of youth on Baltic Sea policymaking.
2. Developing tools for better knowledge transfer.
3. Facilitating various innovative projects relying on youth's interests and capacities in a broad range of policy areas.

The Baltic Sea Youth Platform (BSYP) has been thoroughly built up despite the pandemic. It reached out to many stakeholders such as national youth organisations, transnational organisations with a youth branch and other political multipliers. The BSYP has been recognised on a high political level by the Foreign Ministers of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and was mentioned in their Bornholm Declaration (June 2020), highlighting the importance of youth cooperation in the region.

In spring 2020 the partnership organised online the so called "Baltic Sea Youth Camp" (established as a youth format and brand in 2019). During the meeting, lectures and panel discussions were held and workshops for youth were organised by the Policy Area (PA) coordinators of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). After the event, young people from all over the region could apply to be part of one of the working groups of the BSYP. A total of six Working Groups was offered: Advocacy, Toolkits & Guidelines, Research, Culture & Cities, Communication, and IT.

During autumn 2020, the strategic partners organised hubs for physical meetings of young people interested in the EU cohesion policies within their cities or sub-regions - and offered training and dialogues together with the PAs' coordinators within the EUSBSR. In October, an online follow-up meeting took place back-to-back with the postponed EUSBSR Annual Forum. The BSYP compiled a well-appreciated youth declaration with various policy recommendations for the PAs within the EUSBSR. Young people representing the BSYP were involved as panellists during the Annual Forum and discussed current issues with experts. The BSYP received much positive feedback, and interesting collaborations between the BSYP and several among the 14 PAs were initiated due to the Forum.

Furthermore, the BSYP strategic partnership collaborates with a youth-driven online platform called ACTER to develop a long-term virtual platform. The BSYP partners support the platform with content and advice, which is needed to tailor the platform for macro-regional youth initiatives. We plan to introduce the platform to the UBC cities in a dedicated online event later this autumn.

4. Cooperation with other organisations

The abovementioned BSYP project has created a natural framework for cooperation on youth issues among the biggest networks of public bodies (CBSS, BSSSC and UBC) in the region. The stakeholders exchange information between themselves via the platform and run joint events (such as “Baltic Sea Youth Camp”).

BSYP youth declaration 2020 that was presented during the EUSBSR Annual Forum 2020 is a good example of the fruitfulness and visibility of such cooperation.

5. Communications

As the role of virtual communication has become more important than ever before during the last years, the Commission has mostly relied on two tools:

- newsletter;
- Facebook page.

Over the 2 years course the Commission has issued 4 newsletters that covered activities, projects and opportunities offered by the Commission itself and by its external partners. Each newsletter reached ~400 people – cities’ officials, youth workers and young people who had participated in Commission’s events earlier.

In addition to that, a Facebook page of the Commission was managed. Mostly information about upcoming events (within and beyond the UBC) was published there.

In order to support experience exchange between the cities in between the meetings of the Commission, a series of “coffee breaks” was launched on the Facebook page this spring. In these semi-structured live talks professionals share about their projects and good practice examples related to a specific topic of interest for the practitioners from other cities (youth participation, inclusion, etc.). The series will continue this autumn.

6. Other activities

This summer, in cooperation with UBC Secretariat and the City of Riga, the Commission contributed for the development of the proposal for the Erasmus+ strategic partnership project “YUPAD – YoUth PARTICipatory Budgets Empowering Young People Using Big Data” (coordinated by an NGO “Out of the Box International”). The project commits to prototyping and testing methodology for participatory budgeting in the youth field in municipalities of different scope (using the modern IT solutions).

If approved, implementation of the project will start in 2022.