

## **BSSSC Youth Spring Event 2021 – Sustainability is the new normal**

The sustainable development triangle built the frame of the BSSSC Spring Youth Event 2021 which was held online on May 28 - 29<sup>th</sup>. Round about 25 young people from all over the Baltic Sea Region participated in three sessions on modern democracy, entrepreneurship, and environmental sustainability.

### **Brandenburg's calling**

As host, Brandenburg's Secretary of State for European affairs, Jobst Ubbelohde, welcomed the youth participants virtually. For him "it is so important to preserve regional diversity around the Baltic, strengthen regional identity and actively communicate and promote the interests of our more than 100 regions from all countries bordering the Baltic Sea. And since you are coming from these different regions around the Baltic, enriched by diversity, you can make a difference. You can contribute to stronger awareness of perspectives and opinions of the Baltic region in the process of solution finding, too."

### **Breaking the deadlock of politics**

Motivated by these encouraging words the event started with the first session on modern democracy. Marcin Gerwin gave a short introduction to the deliberative approach of Citizens assemblies, a new form of democracy which allows to make decisions at a city, national or even at the international level.

The session was then divided in three groups: Marcin Gerwin continued by giving a step-by-step presentation of how to organize a citizens' assembly, with the primary focus on climate issues. In the closing discussion citizens assemblies were seen by the participants as a tool to break the deadlock of usual politics. It shows that change is possible. "We should have much more of them in the Baltic Sea Regions" the youth considered.

### **The future of Europe is young and sustainable**

The second workshop was dedicated to regional involvement of youth into decision making processes on sustainable topics. Dominik Ringler from the Youth Participation Competence Centre Brandenburg presented the "Youth Forum Sustainability Brandenburg" (Jugendforum Nachhaltigkeit JUFONA). This Forum is based on a cooperation between the Youth branches of environmental NGOs like Friends of the Earth or Fridays for Future. The aim of this project is to bring the youth-protest against the Climate Policy from the streets into the political decision-making structures, where real influence is possible, a good example that could be transferred to other BSRs.

In light of the official launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe on May 9, in workshop 3 we looked at the participants' perceptions of and demands for Europe. After a presentation about the Conference on the Future of Europe and the topics and opportunities for participation via the multilingual platform „futureu.europa.eu“, the participants elaborated on the following demands on which European policy should have a stronger focus based on

the current mood and the issues that particularly affect young people in the participants' countries at the moment:

- 1) We demand a more transversal, consensus approach in order to link European Climate Policy to European Culture Policy and Common Foreign and Security Policy. All these issues should be addressed (more) at the European level.
- 2) We need to guarantee an easy access to health care for everybody and to prevent mental illnesses by dealing with small mental issues early
- 3) Ensuring equal rights for all minorities
- 4) We need to implement the European Green Deal fast and do something to slow down the fashion industry, especially the fast fashion industry and to provide easier access to sustainable materials.

### **Grew something – recycle everything – waste nothing**

The next two sessions were about how a sustainable transition of our economy and society could be possible. Valeria Svart facilitated a workshop that was about finding new perspective by giving good examples. Young people can make a change as Greta Thunberg (FFF), Boyan Slat (Ocean Cleanup) and Felix Finkbeiner (Plant for the Planet) demonstrates. Urban gardening, green universities and the transition town movement are other examples that can motivate and inspire youth to become active for a better future. Finally we collected ideas on how to become more sustainable ourselves. They can be summarized by the triptychon formula „Grew something – recycle everything – waste nothing”.

The final workshop dealt with blue economy and green entrepreneurship in the Baltic Sea Region, moderated by the Baltic organisation Submariner Network /Sustainable projects. To start Lina de Grunt and Susanne Altvater presented the Doughnut approach of social and planetary boundaries. It is a playfully serious approach to framing the 21st century challenges such as a stable climate, fertile soils, and a protective ozone layer. Young entrepreneurs should mind the planetarian boundaries when developing new ideas for susatinable enterprizes. The participants refelcted on new approaches like a Green Google, a Susainable Amazon, and green walking and biking tours. All in all we concluded that circular economy is not only about recycling. More important should be upcycling, reusing, less consumption, no/less waste and no/less plastic.

### **Delara Burkhardts European Parliaments perspective**

The final highlight was a Q&A with Delara Burkhardt Member of the European Parliament - MEP, (S&D Group). The 28 years old parliamentarian from the Baltic City of Kiel in Schleswig-Holstein explained that she started here international political career also in the Baltic Region and it was not here initial goal to become Member of the European Parliament. But she realized soon that political decisions are not taken in the streets but in parliaments. That's why she took the opportunity to run for MEP in 2019. For her parties are the place where politics are made. Her advice to the young BSSSC activists: “If you want to influence politics you not only should become members of an NGO or manifest. Join a party”. In one hour of

discussion she presented a firework of innovative ideas, new approaches and political strategies for the Baltic Sea youth. If they want to have sustainable decision making in the Parliaments, they should support progressive parties. For her the SDG's should be a frame and political compass for legislation. As there are too few young deputies in the European Parliament young people should be integral part of the decisionmaking processes. More coherence between different fields of politics like agriculture and environment would also be necessary. And the prizes should mirror the real costs. The habit of externalizing costs to society and environment should be stopped. Delivery chains for health, human rights and ecology should be implemented in Europe. Ecological and non-monetary indicators should also play a role for measuring economic growth.

### **Connecting SDG, BSR and Youth**

To summarize: The participants collected new ideas on how to connect the SDG's, Baltic Sea issues and modern forms of participation with youth involvement on local and regional level. They especially promoted the idea of installing local and regional Citizens' assemblies around the Baltic Sea Region. Moreover, they will participate more intensively in the Conference for the Future of Europe. Furthermore, young entrepreneurs with sustainable ideas should get as much support as possible. Education, and best practice examples should be disseminated for changing citizens and politicians' attitudes. The Baltic Youth has collected many ideas for youth activity in our region. All the small things we do can change our mindsets and give energy to convince others.