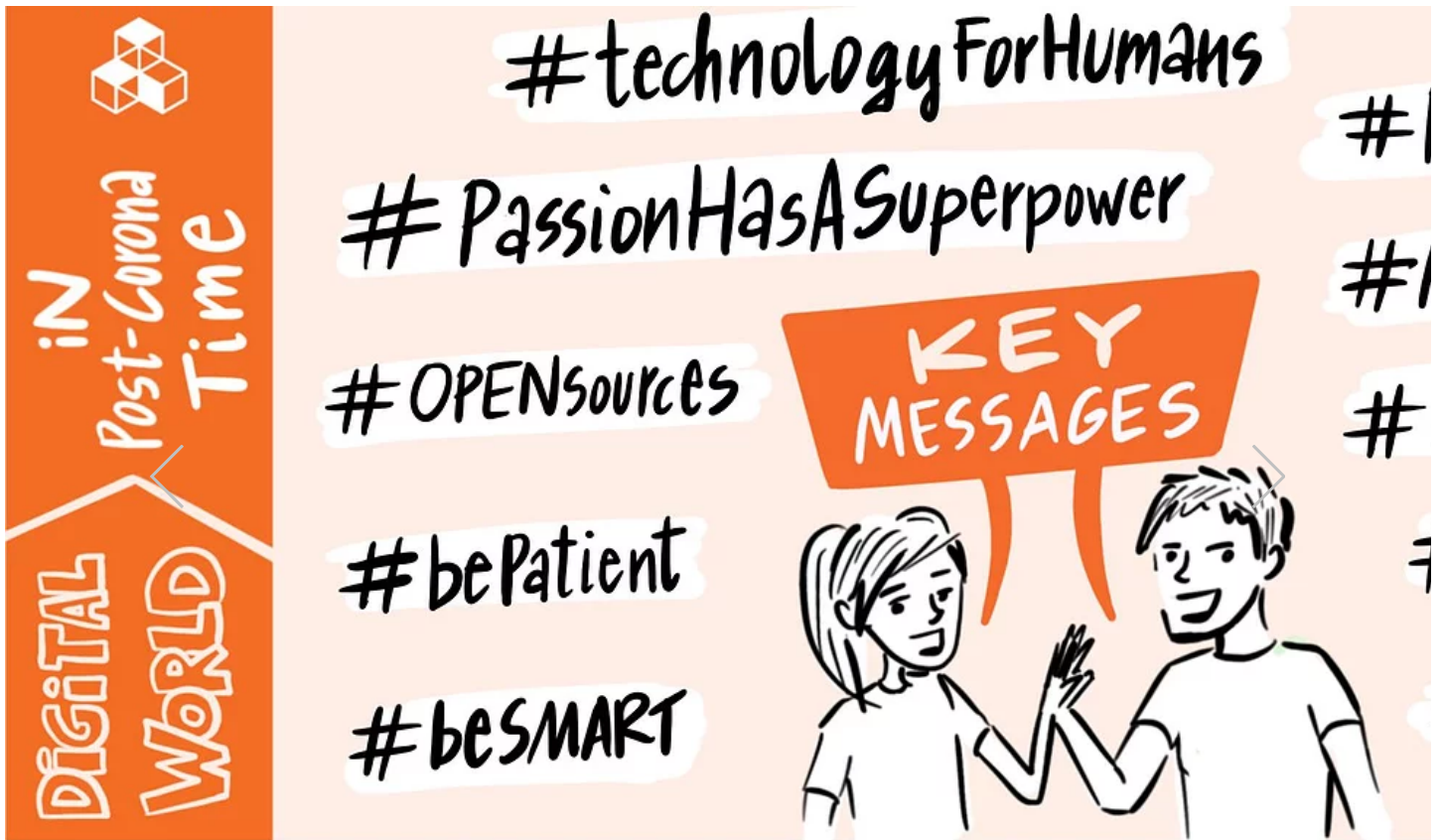




Baltic Sea States
Subregional
Co-operation

BSSSC News POLICY AREAS PROJECTS EVENTS YOUTH More



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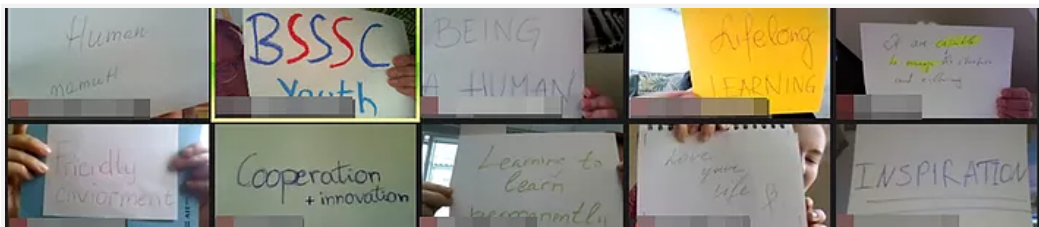
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Baltic Sea Youth in times of Corona



Youth have the voice!

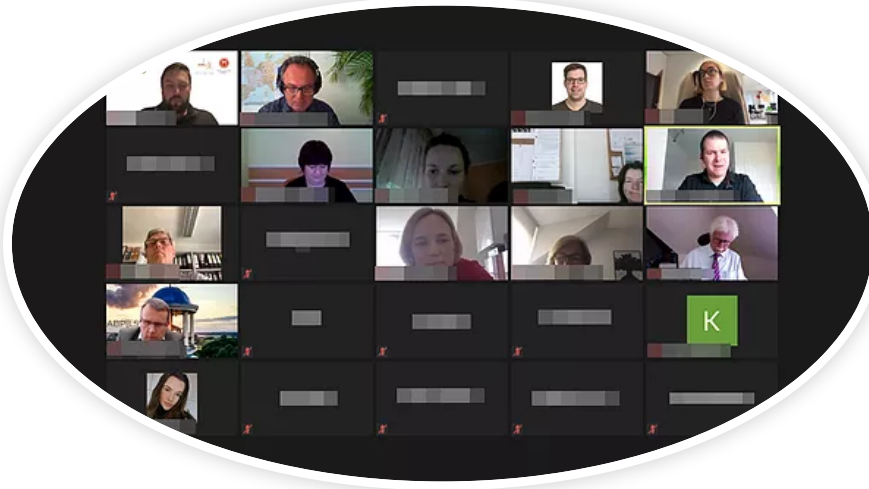
The current COVID 19 crisis brought societal disruptions and had large economic consequences. But has it additionally weakened and isolated young people?

During the BSSSC Spring Youth Event – online edition 2nd-5th June 2020 - we gave young people opportunity to exchange views on the Corona crisis and to discuss the lessons learned with expert politicians from around the Baltic Sea Region. Particularly we discussed the corona-impact on you



connection with four UN Sustainable Development Goals - the Climate crisis and the European Green Deal, digitalisation, education and finally democracy and youth participation.

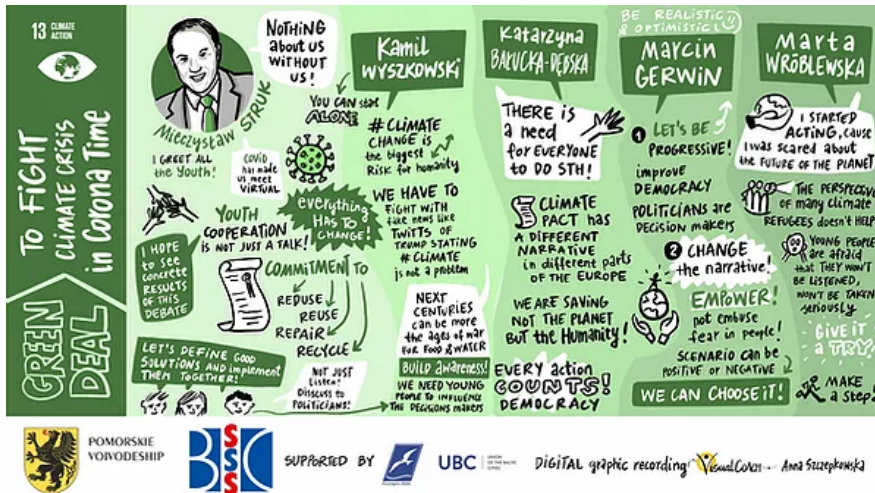
After the welcoming address by the Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship and BSSSC Chairman Mr Mieczysław Struk, up to 70 young people from 10 Baltic Sea countries with a total of 18 experts, activists and 6 politicians got to know the different views on Corona around the Baltic Sea.



Green and sustainable recovery – going forward to the normal

The discussion of the first day was dedicated to the climate crisis and the answer of the European Commission in the form of the New Green Deal. The Corona-Virus proved: Change is possible. We were forced to totally shutdown mobility form one day to the next with the consequence of a strong reduction of CO2 emissions worldwide. But can concrete actions be taken to stop the earth heating in a sustainable way? What can we do to convince more citizens to change habits? And how can we influence politics and decision making towards the “green” direction?

The answers of the experts: Essential is that the youth protests continue, but the narrative should be changed from panic making and pessimism to positive perspectives, hope and optimistic messages. A second way could be to improve democracy by public consultations and implementing local citizens assemblies on climate actions. These assemblies could have an important role to play in shaping a green recovery as we should take the opportunity of the corona shutdown in order to go forward to the normal and not backwards to our old routine.



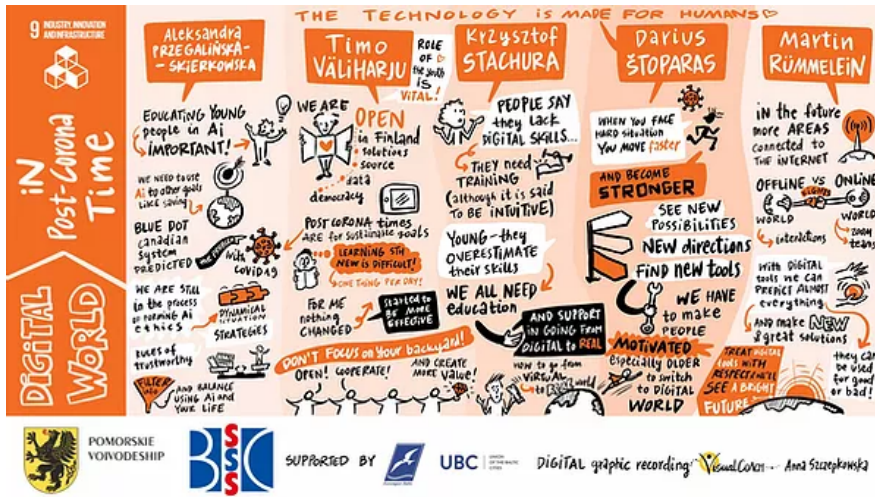
The good and the bad sides of the Brave new digital world

The second day we discussed one of the most obvious consequences of the Corona-Crisis: the boost for digital communication and learning tools. Has the corona crisis changed our attitude towards digital tools? The panellists agreed that – due to COVID-19 - we all got used to zoom, skype and other digital tools. Most have overcome their initial concerns quickly as the advantages became clear: Digital communication tools are not as complicated as feared and we can gain lots of time and we have access to many open learning tools.

Overcoming scepticism is one thing. But we have also to be aware of risks and challenges: They concern fake news and hate speech, data protection and artificial intelligence. The respect for digital codes is essential for critical handling of new technology. As there are always two sides technology we also have to consider the risks, for example, the widening social gap. We need to those who have difficulties to keep up with technological progress and include those who feel left



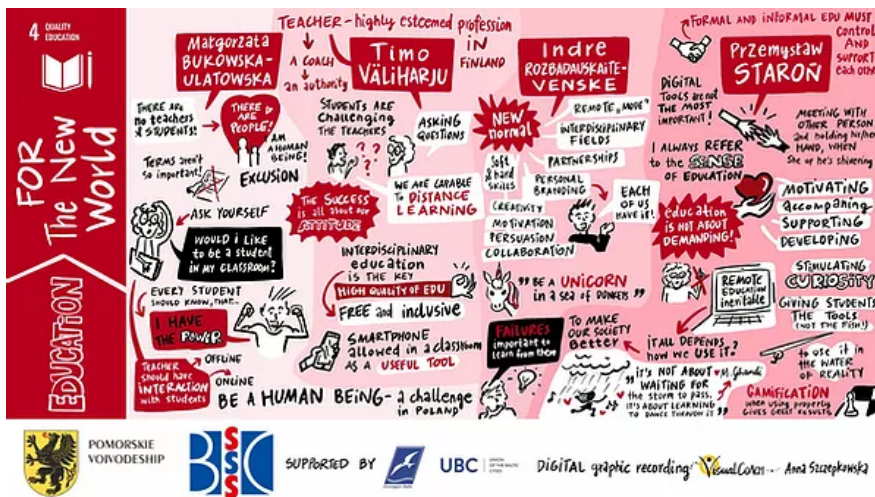
For all of us to keep up with the requirements on digital literacy the new technologies mean a lifelong learning process.



Education: Being a Unicorn in the sea of donkeys

Education in the digital world was also the keyword for the third workshop day. Learning and teaching digitally are challenging even under normal circumstances. However, during the COVID-19 outbreak, digital schooling was the only option. Most of the schools around the Baltic Sea were not prepared at all for this real-time experiment. They were thrown into the cold water, some drowned but some learned to swim in the digital pool, and some countries - like Finland - even were well prepared and could already swim.

The opinion concerning the issue of whether digital learning can replace physical learning in the long run however diverged between Finland and the other countries. Most of them believe that digital learning can only be an added value and added tool and can never replace offline and physical learning and contact. In the discussion, the experts agreed that learning should be about motivation, curiosity, independent and critical thinking and not only about facts and learning by heart. "Being a Unicorn in a Sea of Donkeys" could be a motto as we are all individuals – also in the learning process. Therefore non-formal tools and soft skills should play a more important role and they should also be certified and recognized.



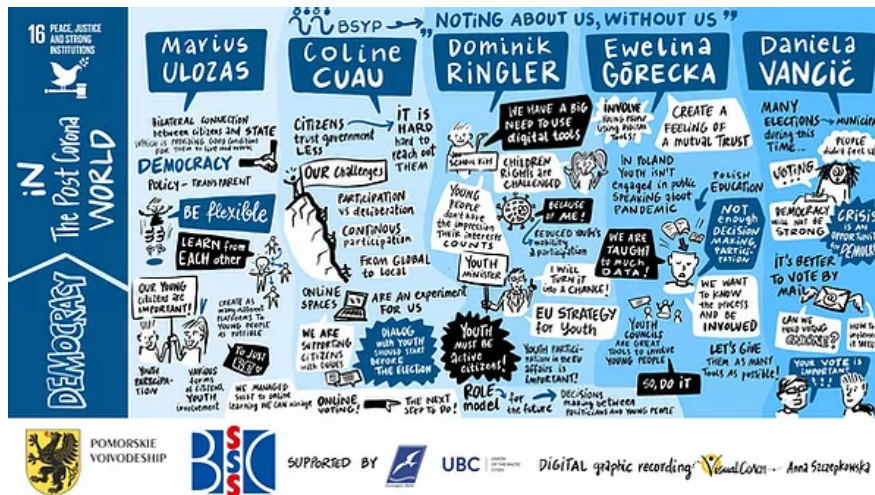
Youth participation: A "must-have" from the beginning

On the last day, youth participation and democracy were in the focus of our discussion. How were young people involved during the Corona-Crisis in decision-making processes? How were their special needs and rights respected? And is youth participation a cherry on the cake or is it a "must-have"? In the perspective of the experts, participation should be perceived as more than just the voting opportunity. Participation is a learning process. In lots of the cities around the Baltic Sea, other instruments like local youth councils and project cooperation play already an important role. Participation tools should be sustainable, open to all and inclusive. They should offer the possibility to experiment in a safe place, to empowerment and to non-formal skilling.

Unfortunately, all these existing structures were forgotten the moment, the Corona crisis hit our societies. Youth participation had to stand back and was mostly ignored by the decision-makers although and young people were affected in a very special way by the anti-corona measures. Youngsters largely reduced to their role as pupils and students without understanding them as holistic people with special wishes, needs and rights. There was a great consensus between the experts and the participants that youth participation on every political level from local to international helps



participants that youth participation on every political level, from local to international, helps to solve problems. In the daily struggle for the best solution (a definition of politics) we cannot exclude one part of society. And youth participation is not a fair-weather event, it is moreover tool for times of problems and crisis.



Corona: the driver for change – going forward to normal

To summarize: What is the outcome of our event? What are the lessons learned from the crisis? During the final discussion between youth and political decision-makers, the four mayor topics were once again summarized and sharpened. Many hopes, ideas for reforms and recommendations were discussed, but also doubts and concerns of the youth around the Baltic Sea were expressed.

All agreed that this crisis is an opportunity for democracy and change. We can learn from the crisis as it made existing deficits more visible. And we have seen that change is possible. The digitalization got a real boost, we will surely use more digital communication tools in the future for exchange, meetings and learning. But it will never replace the physical direct exchange and learning, the face to face contact. Blended learning will become the new normal. We also need more intergenerational learning and more special offers for lifelong learning for socially excluded and elderly citizens. The green deal will help us to rebuild our economy in a more sustainable way. And young people with their perspectives, their way of life and their sensibility for problems will hopefully be an integrated part of the upcoming and ongoing policy processes.

The crisis gives us a chance to implement reforms, to change attitudes and behaviour. And it delivers good arguments to influence political decision making. For things to remain the same, things will have to change. It is up to all of us to take a stance and advocate for a better future together, to get engaged, and to set the right political course now.

The event has proven that cooperation across borders is essential not only to enhance the ability of youth mobility but also to bring different cultures and backgrounds together to tackle problems and to shape future policies. Our BSSSC Youth participants are motivated and skilled and they believe in cooperation beyond borders. They live in the Baltic Sea Region and take the opportunity to share their visions and bring forward the debate on the future of cooperation in Europe as a whole. Especially in times of crisis, we should count on them more.

By Christopher Lucht, BSSSC Youth Coordinator



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