



Road Map Recommendations

The South Baltic Youth Core Groups Network Project.

An integrated approach presented throughout the consultations with project stakeholders



SB YCGN
South Baltic Youth Core
Group Networks



European
Regional
Development
Fund

During the last two decades a growing concern about the decline of youth civic engagement and political participation has been observed. The academic discussion about the youth a loss of interest in civic and political affairs, growing apathy (when compared to previous generations) and little interest in community wellbeing has started. It has been discussed that such phenomenon is leading to the weakening of the democracy. Youth civic and political participation is a process of involving youth in municipal policy decisions that affect their lives. It includes local initiatives that emphasize cultural and sport activities, ecological matters, community, education, public services and other issues. The purpose of these road map recommendations is twofold: the first one is to collect and present synthesis of consultations with stakeholders, in addition, the present recommendations aim to determine what are the main gaps in the networks of youth political participation and how to increase the synergy and the cooperation between different factors.

The recommendations are organised as follows: in the next part, there will be a brief project overview; next, an outline about participants (organisations of stakeholders) and importance of the topics (forms of youth civic and political engagement, best methods, major approaches, etc.) will be provided; finally, the recommendations - outlined a set of recommendations for future action for stakeholders' decisions and policies will be presented.

The SB YCGN PROJECT

The project has a total budget was implemented by formal and associated partners from Poland, Sweden, Lithuania and Denmark. The core partnership is represented by local communities, an international association of polish communes for cross-border cooperation (EUROREGION), academic sector and two local community foundations and that support youth engagement. Project implementation period is January 2018-March 2020. The overall idea of SB YCGN is to increase youth participation in the decision-making process at local level, and to strengthen local and regional actors' capacities in the fields of youth policies and sustainable development in the South Baltic Programme area. In its whole lifetime, the project has the ambition to create a youth cross-border network through the organization of joint capacity-building events. The latter will be launched on the basis of international participatory campaigns- through the research and analysis of partner countries.

SB YCGN aims to increase capacity building for local actors working with youth, demonstrating the benefits of soft cross border cooperation to solve youth issues. Enhancement of young people's cross border cooperation in partner countries will be seek through civil dialogue, improvement of local governments and their representatives' capacities, and dissemination of project results. The

final outcome will consist in the development of future plans for an increased youth participation in local and cross border issues in the South Baltic region.

The SB YCGN PROJECT

Consultations with stakeholders

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The aim of this report is to provide recommendations on how to develop municipal and regional policies in order to enhance youth political participation and civic engagement. The target audience is municipal and national governments, policy makers and responsible EU institutions.

The recommendations were received from stakeholders with a small set of organizations members in each city during the consultations. Advisers were chosen from municipalities, NGO and other organisations (except universities). This has included representatives from municipalities, NGO's, youth workers and some youth activists. They have replied to the key questions and shared experiences, best practices and relevant issues. Consultations were made in the final phase of the project, allowing to structure aspects of project activities (as best practises or positive aspects of activities) and experiences.

These consultations have helped to provide a nuanced and detailed insight about youth civic and political engagement of both the municipal policies and local contexts. The proposals for models and methods for working with youth, both in terms of development and challenges, and effectiveness of interventions that seek to promote their engagement, have been collected.

A total of 30 consultations with municipal politicians (members of councils), public administrators, youth workers professionals, youth organisation leaders and representatives of youth-serving NGOs across the five cities have been conducted. The total number of participants - 62 (Table 1).

Table 1. The number of consultations

| | Elbląg | Gdynia | Ilawa | Nowe Miasto | Telšiai | Hässleholms |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------------|---------|-------------|
| Politicians and Public administrators | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Youth workers | 2 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NGOs leaders or members | 7 | | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Youth organisation leaders | 9 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 4 |

The 3 (6 participants) consultations have been made with representatives of the organisation based in Warsaw. The most of the consultations have been recorded and some parts transcribed or summarised. Several consultations (5) have been conducted with the representative of town and commune of Dzierzgon.

The consultations have been organised in Elblag, Ilawa, Gdynia and Nowe Miasto.

They were organised in 2020.02.18-21.

The consultations had two different forms: 1) group discussions (groups from 2-5 people); 2) individual consultations. Consultations were semi-structured. They were guided using open-ended questions in regard to the specific stakeholders or organisations or informants. Stakeholders had opportunities to raise new proposals for policies and actions. The questions have covered perspectives on a series of topics, including:

- views on future civic and political engagement or actions in regard to young people;
- the importance of trying to promote youth centred and more effective civic engagement;
- the vital youth municipal policy outlines or frameworks that seek to promote youth engagement in consultation with governments; the key models for the effective participation;
- the best practices of projects and recommendations for future development. The challenges and critical issues for adaptations of these practices.

In terms of importance for final recommendations, the opinions and proposals of key stakeholders were the most important. They were made during individual consultations in the form of small groups (2-3 persons) (Table 2). Specific additional consultations were provided for proposals with project participants or project activities participants.

The consultations with key stakeholders were:

Table 2: Key Stakeholders and number of participants of consultations

| | Number of consultations |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Association of Polish Communes of Euroregion Baltic, Poland | 7 |
| Civis Polonus Foundation, Poland | 5 |
| Telsiai Community Foundation | 1 |
| Telsiai District Municipality Administration | 2 |
| Hassleholm Municipality, Sweden | 1 |
| Iława Municipalit, Poland | 2 |
| Municipality of Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Poland | 1 |
| Town and Commune of Dzierzgon, Poland | 5 |
| Municipality of City of Elblag, Poland | 2 |

Recommendations

The following sources of data have been used for summaries: 1) consultation with key stakeholders; 2) additional consultations with experts; 3) project reports and activities.

Stakeholders had a number of proposals and more general ideas about how to improve and promote young people engagement in civic life and consultations with municipalities.

Across stakeholders' organisations (in different countries and cities) there was broad agreement in particular to four proposals:

1. Developing new forms for consultations with municipal government. The road tables in municipalities and local youth councils have been proposed as the best practice models; improving methods for working with youth in civic and political training, education etc.
2. Evolving networks for the cooperation of youth organisations and promoting cooperation and exchange of best practices among a wide range of stakeholders at local, Baltic region and European levels.
3. Supporting youth civic and political actions, projects relevant to young people interests. Focusing on youth-led or youth-serving organisations' initiatives and actions.

4. Establishing infrastructure in regard to youth expectations and relating it to civic activities. Open youth centres (Swedish municipalities, Gdynia, Klaipėda) have been proposed as exemplary models.

The recommendations are based on two criteria: 1) thematic relevance; 2) the target groups.

The structured target groups are: 1) local politicians and public administrators, 2) youth NGOs; 3) national and regional policy makers; 4) EU institutions.

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1. New forms for consultations with municipal government

Recommendations for national and regional policy makers.

- 1.1 Many stakeholders have discussed and stressed the role municipality level actors (conciliators, administrators, workers in municipality-controlled organisations) and youth organisations (mainly youth councils, but also others) in order to promote and enable young people's capacity for the political engagement by using most effective forms. Regarding this theme, relating to the forms of young people participation, generally the best possibilities are related to the local forms and within a municipality's context.
- 1.2 The stakeholders have proposed **structures to support young people's involvement** in municipal policy advising (local authorities in on different level) special consultations with young people. Stakeholders have proposed to start or to continue the use of more youth-oriented forms and methods.
- 1.3 **Round table consultations.** The stakeholders from Polish and Lithuanian municipalities have proposed to continue round table consultations between youth and municipal representatives. This has been seen and proposed as the best practice experience model which was tried in four municipalities during YCGN project activities. Members of local authorities have pointed out minor possible negative factors (like youth disengagement; misrepresentations of some young people, agenda for consultations forming issues, etc.). Nevertheless, they have also pointed out potential and positive effects of these consultations.
- 1.4 **Design of round table consultations.** Stakeholders have proposed to design the round table consultations according to local issues, youth and municipality needs. A number of examples of this deliberative form have been provided by three stakeholders' organisations. The Lithuanian stakeholders pointed that the process of consultations should be youth-led.

- 1.5 **Specially trained youth advisers.** Polish stakeholders have emphasized the importance of training young “advisers” (mainly representatives of youth councils). They have also recommended for youth to take leadership roles.
- 1.6 **Development of Local youth councils.** Lithuanian municipal governments had taken the path of the cooperation with the youth councils and other organisations based on ‘a formal framework’. Stakeholders have discussed that this approach is not always responsive and attractive for youth engaged in political processes. The interview participants have recalled the need for the bottom-up approach for consultations between youth councils and municipalities (These practices are consistent with the adult-centric approach). They have recommended to change the model. Polish stakeholders have discussed the need to support local youth councils’ involvement in discussions and policy advising. They have also noticed that this process is embedded in public policy, but needs to be more supported in some cities. It has been recommended to focus more on the capacity and skills development in order to motivate young people further to engage in political and civic issues.
- 1.7 **Encouraging a culture to listen to youth councils.** Some stakeholders have pointed out that local politicians and public administrators should be trained to be more delicate and sensitive to youth viewpoints and more encouraging of their engagement in consultations through youth councils. It has also been recommended to change participatory climates in regard to undertakings with local youth councils.
- 1.8 **Other forms of structured participation.** Swedish municipalities have used broad-based and diversified approaches for the communication and consultations with youth (including municipal youth council members or leaders open youth centres). Mainly it takes a top-down approach, but it also combines a voluntary bottom-up approach with the guidance of youth workers, multi-structured engagement process which responds to the needs of youth (they are designed with the purpose or problem situations) and municipality (satisfies the interest to consult the youth). In Sweden, the youth play the role of ambassadors in the decision making of the local government. These practices are consistent with the youth-centric approach. Swedish stakeholders proposed to fix the gaps in participatory patterns which happen due to some inconsistencies in municipal youth policies (exampled by case of communication between municipality and youth in building).
- 1.9 **Local youth councils.** Polish stakeholders have recommended to develop local youth councils’ undertakings for giving young people opportunities to have a voice in relation to community issues and local policies. They have recommended to train young conciliators for

getting better competencies in government decision making Lithuanian stakeholders advised to change.

- 1.10 Innovative forms for engagement in consultations.** Consultations with stakeholders reveal that youth political and civic engagement encounters some communicative barriers which are based on the inflexible nature of formal processes (Lithuanian and Polish municipalities) and the lack of knowledge about public policies and bureaucratic language used in municipalities. The majority of stakeholders suggest to introduce innovative methods and forms which are more appropriate for young people. Stakeholders from Scandinavia have suggested the use of relevant participatory “spaces”, digital engagement, and other innovative forms for communication with decision makers.

Recommendation for youth helping NGO

- 1.11 Agenda for consultative structures with municipalities.** Stakeholders have seen the consultative structures and deliberative forms as central for communicating between young people and governments, and they have advised to bring new methods, relevant to youth needs agenda issues etc. The main point was to make politics and the round tables forums have this potential for increasing civic and political engagement in young people. Some stakeholders have recommended to engage youth with issues that affect them (local ecology issues, building or modernising of youth infrastructure) or local community (especially in smaller municipalities). These issues could be the starting point for raising political awareness. It has also been recommended from several stakeholders to engage NGO for helping the youth in solving agenda forming issues for consultations.

- 1.12 NGOs careful and reasonable observation of consultative structures with government.** Some stakeholders have been critical about formalised youth structures (round tables or local youth councils). Their concern has been based on the argument that these structures attract only youngsters from higher classes and leaves aside others. They have also pointed to the problem of tokenism and reproduction of mimic adult structures. These stakeholders have recommended to have careful and reasonable observation of this engagement.

Recommendations for national and regional policy makers.

- 1.13 Youth council’s representation on national and regional policy making levels.** Polish local youth councils have national and regional level structures for the representation of local interests on the national and the regional level policy making processes. These deliberative forums (provided by umbrella organisations) gives young people mechanisms to express their interest and priorities in regard to the public policy making.

2 Evolving networks of youth organizations, youth helping NGO and governments

Recommendations for local, national and regional policy makers.

- 2.1 **Networked partnership with governments.** All the stakeholders have expressed the importance of young people formation of skills and the development of the networks for the effective engagement in the civic and the political activity. Some of them have pointed out the importance of personal networks with local and regional authorities. Other stakeholders have expressed the importance of organisational networks with municipalities or regions.
- 2.2 All stakeholders have highlighted and recommended networked partnerships as community or regional mechanisms. The last one could bring forth international partnerships. It has been expressed that South Baltic Youth Core Group Network could be seen as an exemplary model. In this network, the key structural element are local structures (encompass local councils, local institutions, youth supporting NGO and some youth councils); regional and transregional structures (encompass organisations from several local communities). Their relations are built on mutual trust, social capital (personal networks, high participation) and activities (projects, meetings). The network is based on the commonly agreed standards as well as main principles. It has been recommended to governments to support these networks in two ways: 1) actively engaging and participating in these networked partnerships; 2) giving financial and organisational support.

Recommendation for youth helping NGO

- 2.3 **Longer-term networks.** Some stakeholders have recommended to form more targeted networks and supportive projects to promote youth civic and political engagement. They have pointed out that some networks are time-limited and lack continuity. They have recommended building foundations for the long-term engagement. The effect of these networked partnerships could be more opportunities for young people and better civic actions.
- 2.4 **The aims behind the rhetoric of youth networked engagement.** Some stakeholders have discussed that engagements have different meanings, efforts for partnerships, should be focused on, aimed to and intensive towards the implementation of actions. They have also pointed out the importance of normative approach for working in networks. The network norms have to be followed by all formal members and participants.

3 Building youth friendly infrastructure for civic participation: Open youth centres.

Recommendations for local, national and regional policy makers and EU institutions.

- 3.1 Open youth centres for civic participation.** Promoting the participation of young people has been the key issue for stakeholders. It had been discussed what could be the most relevant (in terms of youth needs and expectations) mechanism. Some of participants pointed out to complex and inter-related strategies and mechanisms (promoting volunteerism, social actions, engaging in sport, arts, trainings etc). In Sweden and Denmark: “here are numerous organisational platforms for youth civic participation and youth socialisation. These organisations are affiliated with municipality in forms of financial and administrative assistance or owned and controlled by them”. Project partners municipalities (Swedish, Danish as well as visited in Gdynia, Klaipeda during project activities) have open centres as platforms (the main features of the organisational variety are formal or informal memberships (voluntary basis)), voluntarism and activities oriented towards the civic socialisation. Most of open youth centres are working on the development of civic skills, but some of them provide services to youth. The youth are building trust with communities and social networks in these organisations. It is important to notice, that some of skills developed in the centres are relevant for youth political participation. Thus, it is possible to claim that these organisations often serve youth as “schools of local democracy and civic engagement”. On the other hand, these centres more often function as the spaces for youth leisure activities. Project partners have visited 6 open centres and most of them were impressed by organisation and activities. Most of the participants have recommended to finance the establishment of such centres in Lithuanian and Polish municipalities and give support. The main argument was that these structures could be the main mechanism for civic engagement activities for young people and as the principal mechanism to get them engaged.
- 3.2 Civic dimension in activities of open centres.** For many stakeholders the civic dimension of youth work in open centres is of the critical importance. They have discussed that youth work plays a critical role in the development of youth civic engagement activities. In this regard, activities related to the young people entertainment, sport etc. are limiting the civic engagement. The stakeholders have agreed that they are important for corresponding the need and the nature of open centres, while at the same time promoting volunteering and civic activities are important too.
- 3.3 Youth led initiatives and projects.** The stakeholders had different insights about adult and youth-led (contributing ideas, protesting, actively criticising or acting in other ways) engagement. Some stakeholders have been aware of the need for youth to be guided and supported, while others have argued that youth could not engage in community activities, local politics without facilitation of special adults. Despite all the different views, it has been

agreed that youth led activities should be encouraged. The youth workers have presented the relevant good practice examples from youth centres “Wymiennikownia” (Gdynia) and “Fabriken – Allaktivitetshuset” (Vimmerby).

- 3.4 The Polish stakeholders have recommended to engage young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The open centre has an effective mechanism for this purpose.

4. Supporting youth civic and political actions, projects relevant to young people interests

Recommendations for local, national and regional policy makers.

- 4.1 **Alternative forms for civic and political participation.** The stakeholders have stressed that youth are progressively expressing themselves politically in a range of different behaviours i.e. campaigning, protesting, volunteering and are using other ways. In this regard, traditional methods of consultations with government, participation in party-political youth organisations and similar activities are not popular. The tendency is that collective action has the key meaning in forming strong civic and political identities. They are trying to find alternative forms in municipal establishment. Stakeholders from NGO have suggested that the use of alternative forms for civic and political participation should be supported by municipalities, schools and other institutions. The inability of municipalities to understand and accept young people’s inputs and support if there is the need could limit the participation for growing.
- 4.2 **Online activism.** The stakeholders from Scandinavia have expressed that online activism as new form of the civic participation could facilitate links between young people and municipalities.
- 4.3 **New media for consultation.** It has also been pointed out that Swedish municipalities are very effective in consultations with young people by using different methods. They shared good project activities in regard of youth engagement in making surveys on building planning. It has also been pointed out that public bodies could be consulted through the new media.
- 4.4 **Youth participatory budgeting.** Stakeholders (especially representing Polish city communities) have recommended the use of the participatory budgeting mechanism for involving and teaching young people. It has also been noted that this form of deliberative democracy is mobilising active youth groups if it is used in targeted mode. Participatory

budgeting practices motivate young people to pursue the interest in community issues, among young people. Some stakeholders recommended to use youth participatory budgeting for giving the possibility to spend part of municipal budget.

- 4.5 **Supporting use of participatory methods.** The stakeholders have recommended municipalities to be more open and supporting to a range of methods for facilitating and engaging youth participation in politics and civil life. Municipalities should encourage innovative approaches for supporting young people. The stakeholders have agreed that it is necessary to train youth workers in the wide range of approaches to youth civic engagement.
- 4.6 **To form skills amongst active youth.** Political participation enhances and civic engagement and their abilities to define municipal policy problems, debate community issues, communicate, negotiate, consult and make decisions.

Recommendations for national policy makers.

- 4.7 The stakeholders have suggested that national institutions wishing to encourage new participatory and engagement forms could develop funds or programmes for supporting the development of new approaches and methods.