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EUROPEAN YOUTH GOALS - TRANSFORMING YOUTH POLICY AND BEYOND

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BALTIC CITIES BULLETIN



Dear UBC Friends and Colleagues,

As Europe grows older, the importance of early and meaningful participation of young people in social, economic, cultural, and political life of the society becomes more and more evident. However, participation is never only about intrinsic motivation of the young and the space. It is also about timely and tailor-made support structures that are there to help young people overcome the challenges they face, take the next step and truly fulfil their potential.

The 11 European Youth Goals represent young people's vision for youth policy in the European Union. However, they also represent a benchmark for all the stakeholders regarding the areas that are most crucial for investment of time, energy, and financial resources, if we dare to say that we invest into youth and into the future.

UBC both as an organisation and as a network has a long history of youth-related projects and initiatives. We boast to have a permanent commission focusing on youth (Youthful Cities Commission) and until recently we also had a designated Task Force on Youth Employment and Well-Being (that have grown into Learning Cities Commission). What is more, for more than a decade now UBC General Conferences have been supplemented with Youth Conferences happening back-to-back (thus directly providing the decision makers with young people's feedback on UBC agenda).

The autumn 2024 issue of the Baltic Cities Bulletin focuses on cities' success stories regarding provision of innovative services for young people, as well as encouragement of their participation and support to their initiatives, all of which foster a more skilful, more prospering, healthier and happier Baltic Sea Region for and with young people.

The landscape of youth policies is constantly changing and it's up to each of us to keep looking for ever new solutions to current challenges!

With Baltic Sea greetings,

Mantas Jurgutis
President of UBC

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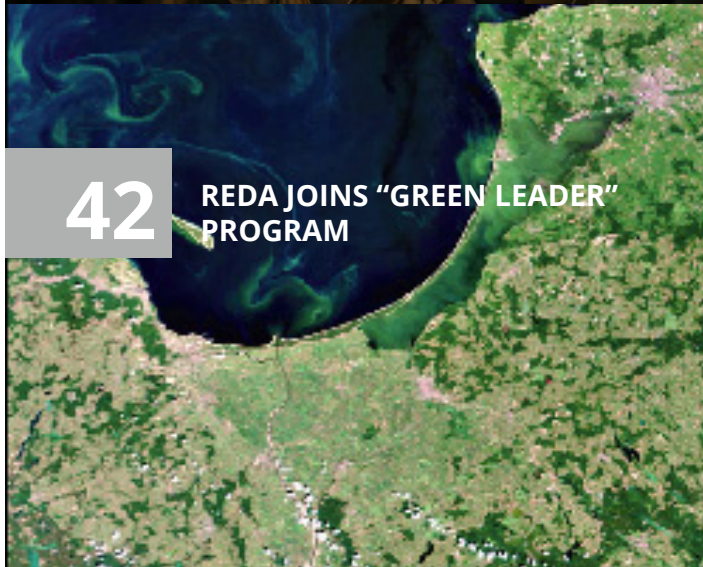
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EUROPEAN YOUTH GOALS – TRANSFORMING YOUTH POLICY AND BEYOND



by Dmitrijs Zverevs | Dmitrijs.Zverevs@riga.lv

Since 2000s policy makers and practitioners in different policy areas have used abbreviations like MDGs (Millenium Development Goals) and, later, SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). Since 2018 there's another set of goals we are referring to more and more, as awareness of young people and their needs improves in public policies on European, as well as national and local level in the Baltic Sea Region – EYGs (European Youth Goals).

European Youth Goals were developed by young people themselves during the EU Youth Dialogue in 2018 and represent a common vision of those involved about transformation that is necessary in Europe in order to enable all its young people to reach their full potential.

The aim of 6th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue (that took place in 2017 and 2018) was to collect voices of young people and contribute to creating the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. During its consultation phase, more than 50 000 young people took part in a diverse range of focus groups, surveys and other methods. Building on the results of this consultation, youth delegates and decisions-makers formulated together the 11 European Youth Goals. The defined goals were supplemented with concrete actions and became an integral part of the EU Youth Strategy.

EU Youth Strategy

EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 focuses on 3 core areas – engage, connect, empower:

- Engage. The Strategy aims towards a meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people;
- Connect. Connections, relations and exchange of experience are a pivotal asset for solidarity and the future development of the European Union. This connection is best fostered through different forms of mobility;
- Empower. Empowerment of young people means encouraging them to take charge of their own lives. Today, young people across Europe are facing diverse challenges and it is necessary to work collaboratively on policies that tackle the specific situation of young people. Youth work in all its forms can serve as a catalyst for empowerment.

As stated in the Strategy, EYGs identify cross-sectoral areas that affect young people's lives and point out which challenges need to be tackled. Even though EYGs do not represent legally binding goals the Strategy invites the stakeholders to draw inspiration from the European Youth Goals and “include this vision wherever suitable in all related policies and agendas”.

Agenda for youth - responding to the challenges

Being a subject to subsidiarity, similarly to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, implementation of EYGs can be enhanced on different levels considering local context.

Even though the EYGs and the vision behind them is clearly articulated and rather practical, there still might be room for a degree of doubt as to why we need a separate agenda for youth in the first place. The answer is equally simple and frightening. It's not just about providing platform for young people's voice because they are naturally underrepresented on democratic platforms due to their age. It's mostly because young people are becoming a scarce resource of Europe and we as the society, to a bigger extend than ever before, can't afford losing a single one of them.

According to the publication “Young people in Europe – a statistical summary” created by Eurostat as a dedication to the European Year of Youth, in 2021 young people aged 15 – 29 comprised 16.3% of the population (which is by 2.1 percentage points less than in 2010). Another decrease of 1.4 percentage points is expected until 2080.

What is more, in 2021, 9.7% of young people were early leavers from education and training and 13.1% of young people aged 15 – 29 were neither in employment nor in any education or training. One quarter (25.3%) of young people in the EU in 2021 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion - for people of all ages, the share was lower, at just over one fifth (21.7%). Between 2018 and 2021, the life satisfaction rating for young people aged 16-29 years decreased from 7.7 to 7.5, compared with a decrease from 7.3 to 7.2 for all people aged 16 years or over.

These examples show that there's no single intervention that can immediately improve situation of young people neither in the EU, nor in the Baltic Sea Region. It us up to all of us – the practitioners, policy makers and decision makers - to cooperate among ourselves and, specifically, with young people to enhance that all young people meet their full potential.

11 European Youth Goals

	#1 Connecting EU with Youth	Foster the sense of youth belonging to the European project and build a bridge between the EU and young people to regain trust and increase participation.
	#2 Equality of All Genders	Ensure equality of all genders and gender-sensitive approaches in all areas of life of a young person.
	#3 Inclusive Societies	Enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society.
	#4 Information & Constructive Dialogue	Ensure young people have better access to reliable information, support their ability to evaluate information critically and engage in participatory and constructive dialogue.
	#5 Mental Health & Wellbeing	Achieve better mental wellbeing and end stigmatisation of mental health issues, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people.
	#6 Moving Rural Youth Forward	Create conditions which enable young people to fulfil their potential in rural areas.
	#7 Quality Employment for All	Guarantee an accessible labour market with opportunities that lead to quality jobs for all young people.
	#8 Quality Learning	Integrate and improve different forms of learning, equipping young people for the challenges of an ever-changing life in the 21st century.
	#9 Space and Participation for All	Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society.
	#10 Sustainable Green Europe	Achieve a society in which all young people are environmentally active, educated and able to make a difference in their everyday lives.
	#11 Youth Organisations & European Programmes	Ensure equal access for all young people to youth organisations and European youth programmes, building a society based on European values and identity.





LIEPĀJA - LATVIA'S YOUTH CAPITAL 2025

by Agija Menike | Agija.menike@liepaja.lv
photo: Liepāja Municipality

Liepāja is set to break boundaries in 2025, proudly carrying the slogan, “Youth Break Stereotypes!” as Latvia’s Youth Capital. This is more than just a title for the city; it’s a movement led by a generation determined to shape their future.

On International Youth Day, August 12, Liepāja was named Latvia’s Youth Capital for 2025, marking the second time the city has earned this distinction, with the first being in 2017. The announcement sparked a wave of pride and energy among the youth, especially those who had travelled to the town of Līvāni, the Youth Capital of 2024, to celebrate and share in the moment of triumph.

While Liepāja already boasts a wealth of opportunities for its youth—supported by top-tier infrastructure, educational resources, and a vibrant cultural scene—this recognition as Latvia’s Youth Capital amplifies the city’s voice in shaping youth policy and linking it to the broader development of the municipality.

The 2025 program, centred around the slogan “Youth Break Stereotypes!”, will not only highlight the potential for young people in Liepāja but also address the challenges they face. A series of events and initiatives will empower and uplift the youth while dispelling outdated notions and misconceptions. The year promises to be an extraordinary one, as Liepāja also celebrates its 400th anniversary.

The program will feature discussions, conferences, creative workshops, cultural events, music, sports,

hiking, project competitions, and masterclasses. Notable highlights will include the national youth festival “Kopums” and the prestigious “Best in Youth Work” awards ceremony. Throughout, participants will engage in deep conversations about youth involvement, aiming to challenge stereotypes and explore the true meaning of youth participation in today’s society.

Youth have been at the heart of this initiative from the beginning, actively contributing to the decision to apply for the title, drafting the application, and producing a video presentation. They will continue to play a vital role in organizing and executing the 2025 program. This emphasis on youth engagement aligns with Liepāja’s broader vision of fostering collaboration with local NGOs and advancing youth policy initiatives.

Liepāja’s youth work appreciation

Liepāja is also making history as the first city to win the title of Latvia’s Youth Capital twice. Organized by the Ministry of Education and Science, the competition promotes best practices in youth work, strengthens cooperation between municipalities, and elevates the role of youth in shaping societal progress. It’s a call to action for greater youth involvement in social and civic processes, underscoring the critical importance of youth policy in creating a better future.

For a glimpse of the enthusiasm driving Liepāja’s youth, you can watch the video they created here: Liepāja’s Youth Capital Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9H1_QphF5U

GULDBORGSUND MUNICIPALITY BOOSTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION



by Stine Knüppel | sekn@guldborgsund.dk
photo by Guldborgsund Municipality

Guldborgsund Municipality is currently engaged in three EU-projects, all aimed at elevating youth perspectives on local democracy, participation, mental health and empowerment.

Youth on the agenda and new cross-border networks Guldborgsund Municipality is strengthening its commitment to youth with a new initiative titled “The Young People’s Guldborgsund”. The main purpose is to empower local youngsters, giving them more agency and opportunities to contribute to how Guldborgsund can evolve into a more inclusive and vibrant place for young people to study and live.

In building on this foundation, we are happy to announce our cross-border cooperation with inspiring colleagues from various locations across Europe. Over the next few years, Guldborgsund will actively participate in two Interreg South Baltic projects and one Interreg Europe project – and we are thrilled to have started the work on these existing projects together!

EU projects focusing on youth

- D-EFFECT: This innovation project will host over 10 cross-border youth democratic festivals across five different South Baltic countries. These festivals will be designed, tested and evaluated by young people in collaboration with local youth stakeholders! We encourage everyone to join us!

- Youth Mental Health Alliance: Recognizing that mental health among young people is a pressing issue,

this project will facilitate planned study visits across borders. It will also implement local activities driven by the young people themselves alongside relevant stakeholders. The ABC method for mental health will guide the planning of these activities, ensuring they are effective.

- Urb Citizen Power: In the UCP project, the aim is to empower citizens, especially the youth, to take action and drive local positive changes. Guldborgsund will work with a specific policy instrument that involves young people and youth groups in municipal planning and decision-making processes. This initiative may lead to the reveal of a youth city council, let’s see what decisions the young people make!

The projects Youth Mental Health Alliance and D-EFFECT are supported by EU Interreg South Baltic Programme and Urb Citizen Power by EU Interreg Europe.



CULTURAL AND SOCIAL UNITY UNDER THE TEMPORARY OCCUPATION



by Andrii Dolzhenko | office@rmva.gov.ua
photo by Rubizhne Municipality

Rubizhne is a small town in the Luhansk region of Ukraine, which was known for its chemical and pulp and paper industries before the war in 2022. The town was home to around 57,000 people, who worked and built their peaceful lives, full of daily concerns and hope for a better future.

Today, Rubizhne is under Russian military occupation, which has brought radical changes to the lives of its residents. Before the full-scale war, Rubizhne was part of the Sievierodonetsk-Lysychansk-Rubizhne agglomeration, which formed a powerful industrial cluster in Ukraine. The city specialized in the production of chemical products, and it was home to one of Ukraine's largest chemical plants — "Zorya". This enterprise provided thousands of jobs and played a vital role in the region's economy.

In addition to its industrial strength, Rubizhne had rich cultural potential. The city had numerous educational institutions, including universities, vocational schools, and colleges, attracting young people from all parts of the Luhansk region. Since 2014, the city has faced difficult times due to the fighting in eastern Ukraine, and after the full-scale invasion in February 2022, Rubizhne found itself at the heart of the war. The Russian military invaded the city, and due to intense fighting, a significant number of residential buildings, schools, and hospitals were destroyed.

Maintaining connection

After the occupation of Rubizhne, many residents were forced to leave, but the cultural and social ties between them have been preserved, even at a distance. Social media has become an important tool for maintaining these

connections: Rubizhne's people exchange news, help each other adapt to new environments, and preserve their shared identity.

Entrepreneurs who once developed businesses in Rubizhne are now connecting with each other and launching new projects in other regions, often providing jobs for fellow Rubizhne residents and supporting economic and social initiatives for internally displaced people. In early September, to mark Entrepreneur's Day, a significant event took place in Kyiv—a meeting with the relocated businesses of the Rubizhne community, which became a powerful symbol of resilience and hope for the future.

Preserving the heritage and identity

The Rubizhne City Military Administration is working to preserve the cultural identity and traditions of its hometown. In September, it organized events to celebrate the community's traditional holiday — Family Day. The city honored the memory of the heroes who died for Ukraine and hosted gatherings with Rubizhne's labor dynasties, families, educators, athletes, doctors, and talented children.

This celebration reminded everyone of their deep connection to their hometown and the importance of maintaining traditions and preserving memories. For the residents of the Rubizhne community, now scattered across hundreds and even thousands of kilometers, cultural and social unity during the temporary occupation gives them strength, reinforces their sense of cohesion, and fosters hope for the return and revival of Rubizhne after the war.

MOBILIZING FOR THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

by Fredrik Sandblad | fredrik.sandblad@vaxjo.se
photo by Våxjö Municipality



Young people are increasingly experiencing both physical and mental health issues. Prolonged sedentary behavior is a risk factor for poor health, and the importance of limiting it has become increasingly clear.

Children and youth need to move more and sit less to create good conditions for healthy development. Too few children and young people meet the daily recommendations for physical activity today, while activity levels within associations have continuously decreased. This trend, especially in areas with socio-economic challenges, highlights the importance of efforts for more equitable health for children and youth. Collaboration and common goals are seen as an important part of the solution.

Addressing the challenge

Long-term health promotion work for children and youth involves monitoring, analyzing, and highlighting children's living conditions. It also involves developing methods and approaches to improve the health of children and youth. This can include knowledge-raising initiatives, urban planning for accessible and inspiring environments, and efforts that promote health, movement, and physical activity in schools and during leisure time. Våxjö has been tasked with developing a strategic plan, including proposals for prioritized activities and initiatives to create long-term change. The mission aims to challenge and change current systems and structures based on needs and to create a cohesive strategy across different parts of the municipality.

Over the past year, Våxjö has also made conscious investments in sports, both in terms of grassroots and elite sports. Municipality's culture and leisure plan emphasizes

the importance of efforts to lower the barriers to activity, create environments that promote movement, and create conditions for the development of associations. The city works to create equal opportunities for an active leisure time throughout the municipality. In Våxjö, girls are less active in associations during their leisure time compared to boys, and the Municipality is therefore working specifically with initiatives for the target group of girls. Through Araby Park Arena, free cultural and sports activities are offered for children and youth in the socio-economically disadvantaged district of Araby. Some of these activities are specifically aimed at girls.

Further inclusion efforts are made through sports schools in collaboration with associations and the Leisure Bank. Våxjö Municipality has long worked with the concept of a "safe and secure association." The program contributes to the development and quality assurance of association activities for children and youth, where integration and gender equality are important elements.



MODERN SUPPORT SPACES FOR YOUTH IN GDAŃSK



by Aleksandra Dylejko | aleksandra.dylejko@gdansk.gda.pl
photo by Dominik Paszliński

In the face of growing challenges related to the mental condition of its residents, Gdańsk is focusing on sustainable solutions aimed at improving the mental health of young people.

The Blue Sneakers (Niebieskie Trampki) youth club has operated in the city since 2022. It was established as a result of cooperation between the local authorities, a non-governmental organization (FOSA Social Support Foundation) and a business partner (Forum Gdańsk Shopping Centre). This is a response to the growing demand for psychological support in the place where young people spend their time. The Club has become a safe place where young people can spend time, develop their interests, and find specialist support in difficult moments.

According to the FOSA Foundation estimations an average of sixty young people use Niebieskie Trampki youth club every day. Young people are eager to participate in workshops and psychoeducational classes that help them cope with everyday problems and stress. Notably, the club also offers access to “safe adults” - psychologists and animators, to whom young people can turn in moments of crisis. At the end of 2023, thanks to the support of the LPP Foundation and the Metropolia Gallery, Niebieskie Trampki expanded its activities to another location, this time in Gdańsk Wrzeszcz district.

Development of modern spaces for young people

In 2024, the club was commissioned at the Dolna

Brama Centre at 8 Dolna Brama St. The Watermelon (Arbuz) Association is creating a place there where young people are the hosts. Under the supervision of mentors (musicians, visual artists, scientists), they can develop their interests, obtain support in learning, and use the help of a psychologist. In addition, the club focuses on intergenerational integration based on the model of mutual inspiration (young people will help older people in technology and entertainment, in return receiving invaluable experience and wisdom).

Gdańsk intends to expand its network of youth spaces. The sum of the efforts is to reduce the number of new cases of addiction, improve mental state, strengthen bonds, improve results at school, reduce the number of risky behaviours and improve self-esteem. All this contributes to preventing mental problems and providing support at an early stage before young people's problems become more acute.

A long-term strategy for mental support

Gdańsk not only responds to current problems but also lays the foundations for lasting changes in the approach to mental health, promoting integration, personal development, and safe support in everyday challenges. Activities for young people's mental health are an essential component of the Gdańsk Mental Health Protection Program for 2024-2026. The program assumes the development of intersectoral cooperation, the involvement of specialists and systematic monitoring of the mental condition of residents, in particular children and young people.

EVACUATION OF DISABLED YOUTH FROM POKROVSK



by Oleh Frolov | frolov.o@pokrovsk-rada.gov.ua
photo by Pokrovsk Municipality

Comprehensive rehabilitation for people with disabilities in the Pokrovsk urban territorial community of Donetsk region was carried out by complex rehabilitation center “Mercy” in Pokrovsk. The charges of this center are disabled adults, children as well as children under the age of three who belong to the group being at risk of getting a disability.

The Pokrovsk community is currently on the frontline of Ukraine's defense. Recently, the enemy has been shelling the community almost every day, killing civilians and trying to cause significant damage in the infrastructure. The war affected all residents without exception, and children with disabilities suffered considerably.

In connection with the significant deterioration of the situation in the Donetsk region, in April 2024, a decision was made to relocate the “Mercy” center to a safe region of Ukraine. The main goal of the relocation was to preserve the life and health of the residents and staff, ensuring that rehabilitation and care services were provided. Those were the principles for moving out the facility that initiated the search for a new, safe location.

The issue of relocation was under the personal control of Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk, the Department of Social Protection of the Population of the Donetsk Regional State Administration, and the Pokrovsk City Military Administration. As a result, the Center was relocated to the premises in the village of Neresnytsia, Zakarpattia region. It was renovated with the support of the charity organization “East SOS” and

adapted to the needs of people with disabilities and those with reduced mobility.

New shelter for “Mercy”

At the new place, “Mercy’s” charges underwent a medical examination. Currently, daily classes are organized in the Center, with psychological, pedagogical, physical and social rehabilitation services on the spot. Classes with a speech therapist are organized remotely. Educational activities and activities to improve mental health are held for children and their families, including visits to local cultural institutions, where circus and theater artists share their positive emotions and upbeat mood.

The “Mercy” center is greatly supported by public charitable organizations. Psychologists and lawyers of NEEKA - International Charitable Foundation “Carpathian Region” provide each family with the necessary consultations and help to solve urgent needs. Thanks to NEEKA, the Center received the necessary household appliances and furniture. The International Organization for Migration provided humanitarian assistance in the form of long-term storage products for the families of foster children.

Charges of the “Mercy” center, together with their parents and the center's staff, will stay in the village of Neresnytsia until the situation in Donetsk region improves. This relocation not only ensured safety but also gave the opportunity to experience the warmth and hospitality of the Zakarpattia region.

EMPOWERING YOUTH IN A FRONTLINE CITY



by Inna Stashchuk | reception.irmz@zp.gov.ua
photos by Kateryna Klochko

Despite being only 60 km from the frontline, the city of Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, encourages young people to become agents of change and invites them to co-create the first municipal youth centre.

A City Youth Centre will open in Zaporizhzhia soon. It will be the first municipal, youth-led institution. Moreover, the staff will be recruited from young people selected through an open competition who have completed professional training.

The new centre will be located in the historic part of Zaporizhzhia, a modernist district, 'Social City.' The building is also historical—a constructivist library over 100 years old. The City Council is currently carrying out repairs and partial reconstruction to make the space suitable for educational and leisure activities for youth, while preserving its unique architectural features. Young citizens contribute to the process, too. Their creative ideas are incorporated into an outdoor design solution, in particular.

Joint Efforts to Support Youth

The project, a collaboration between the city, local NGOs, and UNICEF, is innovative and experimental for Ukrainian municipalities. While many communities involve youth in creating such spaces, this is the first time a municipal institution will recruit paid staff from the young candidates ambitious enough to revitalize the city youth policy.

Equally important is that new residents of Zaporizhzhia— young women and men displaced by the war—can also apply to join the team. There are about 50,000 such young



individuals in the city who found shelter after escaping from temporarily occupied communities, a quarter of the total youth population.

The City Department of Family, Youth, and Sports plans to hire up ten young people to serve as managers, youth workers, and agents of change in the community.

In August, 35 young candidates who applied for positions began training in youth work and youth centre management. The candidates were selected from more than 100 applications based on their motivation, qualifications, volunteer experience, and ideas for improving youth policy in Zaporizhzhia. So far, trainees have completed courses on communication, advocacy, youth work, and youth needs assessment, equipping them with essential skills to become young leaders and effective managers. Some candidates have already been interviewed for the position of director.

While the training continues, young people are working on the local youth programme for 2025–2027 together with the City Council. It is the first time when such a document will be developed by young citizens of Zaporizhzhia.

RUMIA SEES POTENTIAL IN YOUTH RESIDENTS



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photo by Rumia Municipality

How to activate young people in a small town and involve them in the life of a local government? Rumia has a solution: education, supporting, creating special programs and projects for the youngest residents and allowing them to participate in a real changes process. The result? Young people are eager to share their bold ideas about the city and feel connected with it.

The boldest step that gave youth a sense of agency and equality with adults was a participatory budget intended for residents of all ages – children can not only vote for selected projects together with their parents, but also submit their ideas and seek support among the local people. It is a practical lesson in self-government and an encouragement to get involved in city life. Young people also participated in a consultations on the development strategy of the city of Urmia, making their voice in a serious, long-term plan.

The youngest residents are involved in decisions from the beginning of their education. Every year there's a Children's Session of the Rumia City Council, where preschoolers work together with adult councilors and, with their support, share their ideas. Visions are taking the form of resolutions. This way the city learns what the next generations expect, including for example new places of recreation or pro-ecological projects.

Events and competitions also build local identity. The most important of them are „Rumia oczami dzieci” („Rumia seen through the children's eyes”) and the art and literature competition. Children's creations are awarded and published by a municipality and participants learn about

local culture and history. They can also test themselves in an interactive test of knowledge about the European Union or a Rumia's knowledge quiz, where they compete for attractive rewards. These activities encourage them to learn the secrets of their own city and participate in its life.

Empowering young people

Young people in Rumia can also receive an important support. The Municipal Cultural Center runs a cyclical project called “Young people – it's your time!”. Teenagers meet with a local psychologist, share their problems and observations and build a new community around the cultural center. The meetings are focused on, for example, the problem of depression and help them understand complicated emotions. New youth spaces are also being created in the city – for example, in Stacja Kultura (Culture Station), where a part of the library reading room are being transformed into a new zone for young people.

The future is the key to the city's relations with young people. This is why the local government's company, Rumia Invest Park, regularly opens job prospects to young residents in the offshore industry that is developing in the region. They've created the Pomeranian Centre for Competence in Renewable Offshore Energy, experts also regularly educate youth about the possibilities of studying and working in this sector, and, just in one project called „Wind Energy – The Energy of Freedom”, over 900 students from Rumia's schools learned a lot about the wind farms. All this to ensure that the young generation of residents develops and connects their life plans with the city.

KAUNAS ENCOURAGES YOUTH INVOLVEMENT



by Laurynas Greblikas, luzsienio.rysiu.skyriaus.praktikantas@kaunas.lt
photos by Kaunas Municipality, Adobe Stock

Kaunas is a vibrant city that recognizes the vital role of its youth in driving positive change.

With 33 active youth organizations, the city fosters a culture of engagement and participation, encouraging young people to take charge of their futures. These organizations focus on a range of issues, from politics, community service and even religion to personal development, inspiring youth to cultivate leadership and build a strong sense of belonging.

One of the central missions of these groups is to ensure that all young people, particularly those facing challenges, have access to opportunities that allow them to thrive. By developing inclusive programs, they amplify the voices of all youth, ensuring everyone feels valued. Moreover, these organizations play a crucial role in helping young people gain work experience before reaching adulthood, enhancing their confidence and preparing them for future careers.

Addressing the challenges

A significant initiative this year was the conference titled "Response to Children and Youth Delinquency: Efficient Approaches to Navigate High-Risk Behaviours." This event, part of the Scandinavian Days in Kaunas, brought together participants from the Nordic and Baltic regions to address issues surrounding risky behaviours and youth crime. The discussions emphasized the need for political changes and showcased Kaunas as a proactive leader in youth development.

The conference featured four key sessions that explored child and youth crime, institutional support, and the crucial roles of municipalities and local communities in providing

quality services. Key decision-makers and stakeholders participated, sharing insights to shape future strategies for tackling youth delinquency in Kaunas. This collaboration is essential in creating a safer environment for young people in Kaunas and Lithuania.

The conference was more than just a gathering; it represented a significant step toward empowering Kaunas youth, ensuring their voices are heard in discussions about the challenges they face. By addressing these critical issues, Kaunas sets an example, demonstrating a commitment to the well-being and future of its youth.

As Kaunas continues to embrace the potential of its young citizens, it not only nurtures creativity and innovation but also reinforces the foundation for a brighter tomorrow.



THE YOUTH CITY COUNCIL OF GDYNIA PROMOTES MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS



by Wiktor Grydyk & Anna Melki | mrm@gdynia.pl, a.melki@gcz.gdynia.pl
photo by Michał Salata

Where is the line between a healthy brain and an ill one? How do psychoactive substances affect our health? How strong is the power of words? Does nutrition have any impact on our mental wellbeing? Should we acknowledge or ignore our emotions? These were just a few of the questions that became the focus of the Mental Health Awareness Congress, an initiative of the Youth City Council of Gdynia, organised in June 2024.

The event, mostly aimed at primary school students (above 14 years old), secondary school students and teachers, brought together professionals and youth to foster open debates, share resources, and promote strategies for mental wellbeing of the young generation. The day was full of inspiring lectures, workshops and discussions led by experts. By addressing stigma and encouraging dialogue, the event aimed to empower attendees and strengthen the community support for youth mental health initiatives.

This year's event was a continuation of the 2023's Depression Awareness Congress, also prepared by the Youth City Council, this time, though, the organisers decided to extend the main theme to other areas of mental health in youth.

Acknowledging the need for discussion and action

"Depression, mental health and its crisis, are some of the greatest civilisational challenges of our time. Hundreds of statistics and studies show that such a thing is needed, and the meetings with psychiatrists in hospitals also prove to us that creating awareness among other people – not just young people, but also adults, parents, teachers, educators – is a very important task in today's world" – said Janek Górecki, the chairman of the Youth City Council of Gdynia.

He also recounted: "We sat down at a meeting of the Youth City Council and said that the problem of mental health among young people is getting wider, more widespread and needs to be touched, solved. But not by adults to young people, but by young people to young people. And I think this is something that distinguishes our congress."

The Mental Health Awareness Congress was also an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas and develop recommendations that will be forwarded to local and central government.

Collaterally, the mental health of children and adolescents is continually supported by the City of Gdynia by financing a help centre which carries out comprehensive operations for prevention of mental health crisis of youth, such as psychological support, psychoeducation, psychiatric consultations, or social skills trainings.



VAASA MEETS THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE



by Mika Pietilä | mika.pietila@vaasa.fi
photo by Susanna Saari

Youth work camping van offers a new kind of space and activities for young people in Vaasa. The City of Vaasa's youth services have been using a camping van for a year. The camping van has increased mobile youth work, i.e., reaching young people in different neighborhoods, streets, squares, and parks. In the past, youth services have tried similar activities by renting a van, and this year they acquired it for year-round use.

Some of the youth facilities of the City of Vaasa Youth Services are on summer break. When the facilities are closed, youth leaders organise summer activities in the form of camps and summer work for young people. Some youth leaders travel with the camping van where young people spend time together. The car is on the move throughout the summer from Monday to Saturday, late afternoon, and early evening. There are always at least two employees on board.

"In the summer, the importance of mobile youth work is growing, and the camping van supports us well in this. We have flexible access to different areas and reach more young people than in traditional youth facilities in summertime. The camping van is also a visible sign that we are there," says Mika Pietilä, Director of Youth Services.

The youth facilities will reopen in August when schools start, but the camping van will continue to operate throughout the year. When young people are on holiday, they like to be outdoors more. Considerably fewer young people visit youth facilities during the summer, so youth work focuses on mobile youth work, Mika Pietilä continues.

"In particular, we want to move into areas where youth services do not have their own youth facilities. We get a lot

of contacts from young people and citizens from various places where they want the camping van to move. The van stops at various places according to the daily schedule. We organise various activities at "the stops" according to young people's wishes, Pietilä says. The camping van is a mobile activity point for youth leaders. Activities take place next to the car and we also take advantage of the car's interior.

Youth work changes with the times

Youth facilities will continue to be important, but not all young people use our services. Mobilization of youth leaders and the use of camping van make it possible to reach even more young people, Pietilä describes.

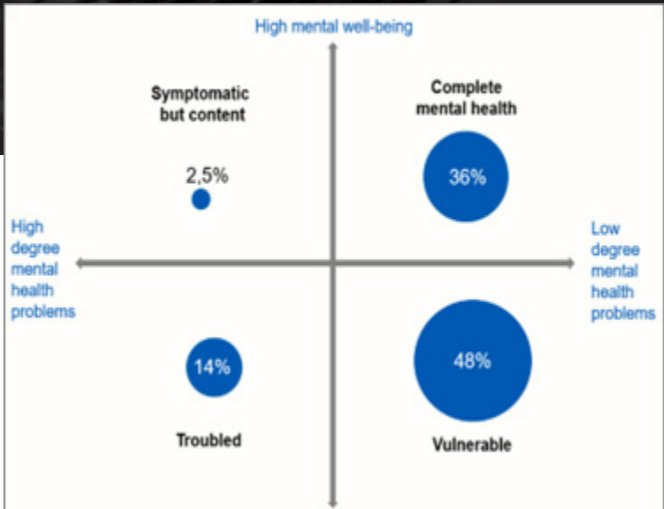
Over the past year, mobile youth work has already encountered nearly 3,000 young people. In August and September, the youth services' camping van and youth leaders have travelled to parks where there has been restlessness on weekends, especially at the request of citizens. The aim has been to ensure that young people spend their free time safely and to offer them the opportunity to engage in various activities.

The camping van has been a very profitable investment in youth work. We reach more young people. Youth leaders visit places where young people naturally enjoy themselves and spend their free time. The camping van is already well known in Vaasa. For example, young people can spot a car's route on social media or send a message and ask where the motorhome is. The cheerful greetings and waves that youth workers receive from people they drive past also brighten their day, comments Mika Pietilä.

GOTLAND: UPDATED FACTS – A BASIS FOR INTERVENTIONS TO STRENGTHEN ADOLESCENTS' MENTAL HEALTH



by Veronica Hermann | veronica.hermann@uu.se
illustration by Gabriella Werkander



Adolescents' mental health is an area of concern in Sweden. As a foundation for interventions aimed at improving adolescents' mental health, a fact-based overview of their own views on mental health, along with measurements of their mental health status, is needed.

However, such research was lacking on Gotland, Sweden's largest island in the Baltic Sea. To fill this knowledge gap, a collaboration was established between the public sector (Region Gotland), academia (Uppsala University), and the business community (the insurance company Länsförsäkringar Gotland) to facilitate local research on adolescents' mental health. In the research project, 32 adolescents aged 15–18 were interviewed, and all lower and upper secondary schools participated in a survey on health and living conditions.

The results indicated that the adolescents had a nuanced understanding of mental health. They believed that mental health consists of two components: mental well-being and mental health problems. They perceived mental health problems to be caused by various factors and stated that

anyone can experience mental health problems. The increase in mental health problems was attributed to greater openness and current societal challenges, such as school-related stress and social media. Stigma related to mental health problems was perceived to stem from a lack of knowledge and to be influenced by stereotypical gender norms and rumors.

Survey's findings

Through survey measurements of mental well-being and mental health problems, the respondents were sorted into four mental health groups (see Figure 1). More than one-third (36%) of adolescents had complete mental health, i.e., high mental well-being and no signs of mental health problems. Almost half (48%) had a vulnerable mental health status, i.e., moderate to low mental well-being despite the absence of mental health problems. A total of 14% had troubled mental health status, i.e., moderate to low mental well-being along with symptoms of mental health problems. Finally, 2.5% of the adolescents had symptomatic but content mental health, i.e., high mental well-being despite the presence of mental health problems.

Adolescents with mental health statuses other than complete mental health were more likely to be female, experience high stress levels, have low resilience, report low subjective social status in school, engage in truancy, or receive a failing grade in school subjects.

The results suggest that interventions are needed to promote adolescents' mental well-being, in addition to preventing mental health problems. For example, activities to increase resilience and reduce school-related stress and stereotypical gender norms could be beneficial.

LULEÅ FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

by Lisa Reinholdsson & Jenny Ekerljung | lisa.reinholdsson@lulea.se, jenny.ekerljung@lulea.se
photos by Jonas Jonnerby, Luleå Municipality



How do we create a city for youth together with our young people? Houses, roads, schools, and jobs is not enough. What you are able to do on your spare time is important for your well-being as well as having the opportunity to influence the range of activities offered. Ung i Luleå works for and with the young people of Luleå Municipality aged 13 to 20, focusing on their spare time.

Ung i Luleå is the municipal unit tasked to run youth centres where young people can meet and socialize in a safe and inspiring environment, where a foundation for social interaction and personal development is established. Here, young people can participate in various activities, from sports and games to art and music. By offering a wide array of activities, Ung i Luleå unit ensures there is something for everyone, regardless of interest, background, or financial means. The activities mix young people's own initiatives with challenging and inspiring activities arranged by the youth workers – to broaden the visitors' view of what their spare time could include. The activities are free of cost and based on youth participation and influence – from small ideas and wishes to larger events.

Ung i Luleå also allocate financial support to activities and events created by and for youths. This type of support is crucial in providing young people with the tools and resources they need to express themselves and influence their spare time and community.

Youth centres supporting young people

A central part of the work in the youth centres revolves around inclusivity where young people feel welcome and



respected in an open and accessible environment. However, sometimes we also need to create safe spaces for certain groups of youth such as cafés for young LGBTQ+ individuals and allies or adapted activities for young people with disabilities. By offering tailored activities and support, Ung i Luleå ensures that youths can participate and contribute on their own terms. The goal is for every young person to feel seen and valued, regardless of background or circumstances.

Ung i Luleå continues to develop and adapt its activities to meet the needs and interests of youth in the municipality of Luleå. By offering youth centres, funding events by and for young people, and running projects, Ung i Luleå cooperation creates a place where young people can grow and develop. The future looks bright for Ung i Luleå, with many exciting projects and initiatives on the horizon.

KALMAR'S YOUTH COUNCIL POLITICAL DEBATE



by Sophia Sundlin | sophia.sundlin@kalmar.se
photos by Jenny Nyströmsskolans, Adobe Stock

On May 29, a political EU debate was held at Jenny Nyström School in Kalmar. The organizer was the Kalmar Youth Council, which, together with the school, invited young people to gain more knowledge about the EU and the most important issues in the EU elections for young people.

For two hours, nearly 200 high school students listened to the political youth parties debating many vital societal issues. Gathered youth had the opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the parties' positions on EU matters. The debate received significant coverage in the local newspaper and was greatly appreciated by both the school, the youth council, and the audience.

Increasing young people's participation and creating more opportunities for them to influence their everyday lives and societal issues is an important mission for the youth council. Especially issues such as the environment and labour market were widely discussed. Moreover, the current international situation and major conflicts worldwide brought young people's attention and engaged the audience during the debate.

The Kalmar Youth Council is politically and religiously independent and consists of young people aged 13-25 who enjoy discussing and engaging in societal issues. The members of the council arrange debates, visit schools, spread awareness about youth policies and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they also talk to young people about things that are important to them.



INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE IN PORVOO



by Eeva Hyttinen | eeva.hyttinen@nuvaporvoo.fi
photos by Porvoo Municipality



Creating opportunities for intergenerational dialogue is crucial for a well-functioning society. Recently, the Porvoo Youth Council met with the Porvoo Elderly Council for a discussion. We talked about shared concerns, such as the decreasing physical activity and the risk of social isolation among both young people and the elderly. By involving young people in decision-making, planning, and community actions, we can foster meaningful dialogue between different generations. Such activities also make the city much more youth-friendly, as young people are often forgotten in these processes. A city should be accessible to everyone and attentive to the needs of its residents.

Expanding on this idea, intergenerational dialogue provides a platform for mutual understanding and learning. Younger generations can gain valuable insights from the life experiences of older generations, while older people can become more aware of the challenges and perspectives facing today's youth. This exchange promotes social cohesion, reduces stereotypes, and enhances empathy across age groups. For example, organizing community events

where youth and the elderly collaborate on local projects or engage in shared activities like gardening, arts, or storytelling sessions can create lasting bonds and improve overall well-being.

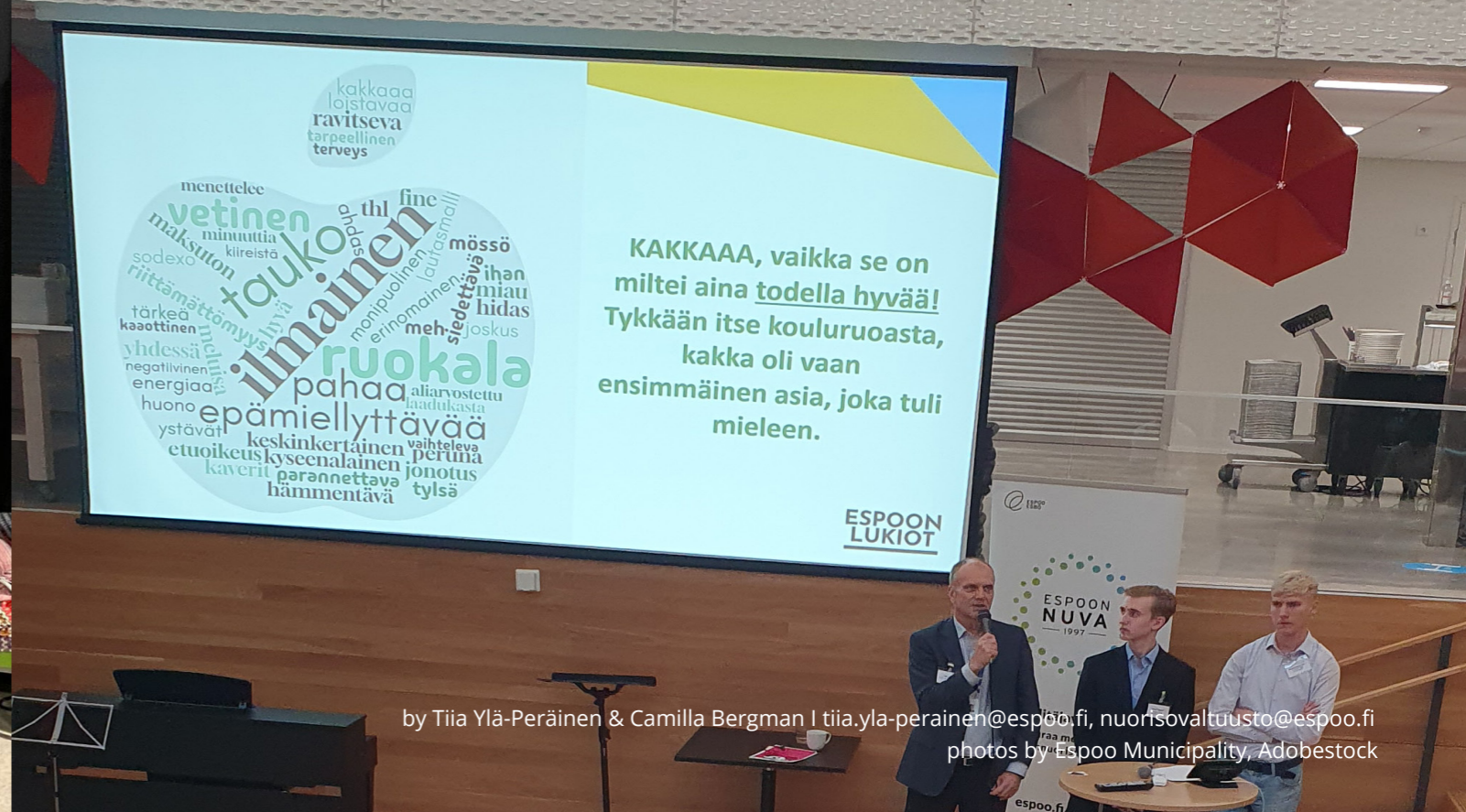
Moreover, such dialogues can help combat loneliness, a growing problem for both the elderly and young people. Many elderly individuals suffer from social isolation after retirement or due to loss of loved ones, while young people can feel disconnected in an increasingly digital world. Structured intergenerational activities allow for real, face-to-face interactions that address these issues and contribute to mental well-being on both sides. Social connections can be powerful in reducing anxiety, depression, and the feeling of alienation.

Joint efforts for better communities

Sustainable solutions for improving mental health and well-being must therefore consider the importance of community involvement and cross-generational interactions. It is not enough to focus on just one age group when it comes to building a healthier society. By encouraging intergenerational collaboration and creating inclusive spaces, we can foster a sense of belonging, resilience, and purpose in people of all ages. This holistic approach is essential for both mental health and the overall strength of communities.

In conclusion, nurturing intergenerational dialogue is not just a nice-to-have aspect of community building; it is a necessity for creating a more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable future. By learning from each other, different generations can contribute to a society where everyone feels valued and heard.

ROUND TABLE IN ESPOO



by Tiia Ylä-Peräinen & Camilla Bergman | tiia.yla-perainen@espoo.fi, nuorisovaltuusto@espoo.fi
photos by Espoo Municipality, Adobestock

The Espoo round table of the student council boards had their yearly summit on the 7th of October where student council members from upper secondary schools gathered to discuss current matters and develop municipal services. The themes of this year's summit were school lunches and mental health and well-being.

The round table of student council boards was founded in 2020 as an initiative of the Espoo Youth Council to foster cooperation between upper secondary school student councils in Espoo. In the past few years, the round table has received support from the upper secondary education and youth services unit, and the action plan of the round table is an integral part of the city's strategy.

The round table includes the chairperson and one vice-chairperson of the student council from each general upper secondary school in the city. The round table meets four times a year and organizes a yearly summit with different main topic each time.

The summit gathered around 80 representatives of the upper secondary student councils. The summit was opened by speeches from the Director of Upper Secondary Education and Youth Services Tapio Erma and Chairperson of the round table Kasper Reunanen.

During the summit, each participant joined four different workshops. Themes of the workshops included developing school lunches and mental health and well-being. The workshops were facilitated by experts from the city of Espoo as well as from the well-being services county (in charge of organizing regional health care services in Finland) and other organizations.

Lessons learned

The summit was a success and received positive feedback from both participants and organizers. "The discussions with the youth were extremely important to us. Most of the time different discussions are structured around our views and answers. This time it was the young people who had a chance to tell us how things should be", commented one of the specialists in the mental health workshop.

The round table had designed the concept, topics and invitations for the summit thus making the summit more relevant for participants. Ten different workshops voiced both wider social phenomena to be tackled and concrete ideas were developed to improve well-being in schools and beyond. This summit was also the first one which included representatives from vocational schools which highlights the importance of hearing youth voices more broadly.



CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION CONFERENCE IN ROSTOCK

by Sebastian Hampf | Sebastian.Hampf@rostock.de
photos by Rostock Municipality



On March 13, 2024, the State Parliament passed the Children's and Youth Participation Act M-V (KJuBG M-V), which entered into force on April 1, 2024. On the same day, the inaugural Children's and Youth Participation Conference was held at the Rostock Town Hall, aiming to promote effective participation of young people in local governance.

The conference featured a series of expert presentations on the legal framework and implementation strategies for youth involvement. Discussions emphasized the importance of integrating youth perspectives into community decision-making processes. The KJuBG M-V mandates that children and youth be included in planning activities that affect their interests, reinforcing the notion that their participation is essential for effective governance.

Workshops during the conference provided attendees with practical tools and methods to engage young people meaningfully. Participants explored various approaches to foster youth involvement, focusing on ensuring that children and adolescents feel empowered to voice their opinions and contribute to community matters.

The event aimed to challenge common stereotypes regarding youth disengagement, showcasing that young people are eager to participate and have valuable insights to offer. By creating an open environment for dialogue, the conference facilitated the exchange of ideas between young people, local officials, and community stakeholders, fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

Recognition for the youth perspective

Mayor Eva-Maria Kröger highlighted the significance of prioritizing youth involvement in civic processes. She expressed support for the establishment of a Youth Council, emphasizing that their contributions are crucial for shaping policies that impact their lives.

To ensure the continued engagement of young people, an editorial group was formed during the conference to develop guidelines for implementing the KJuBG M-V. This group will work collaboratively with various stakeholders to create actionable strategies that promote meaningful participation of children and youth in local governance.

The conference marked a significant step toward embedding youth participation as a core value in community planning and decision-making. By recognizing the rights and voices of young people, the event aimed to inspire a cultural shift toward inclusive governance, ultimately benefiting the entire community.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.buergerbeteiligung-rostock.de/kinder-und-jugendbeteiligung/aktuelles-zur-kinder-und-jugendbeteiligung>



ELECTION FOR THE YOUNG MAYOR OF PANEVĖŽYS

by Dalia Gurskiene | dalia.gurskiene@panevezys.lt
photos by Panevėžys Municipality

The Council of Youth Affairs of Panevėžys City Municipality and the Union of Panevėžys Youth Organizations ROUND TABLE, in celebrating Local Self-Government Day, organized the traditional election for the Young Mayor of Panevėžys. Juozas Balčikonis Gymnasium, Juozas Miltinis Gymnasium, Gymnasium Nr. 5 and Raimundas Sargūnas Sports Gymnasium nominated the candidates for this title. Julija Daugytė, a student of Juozas Balčikonis Gymnasium became the winner.

The gymnasium students competing for the title of Young Mayor were Jonas Dalidėnas (Gymnasium Nr. 5), Julija Daugytė (Juozas Balčikonis Gymnasium), Paulius Klimovas (Juozas Miltinis Gymnasium) and Vanesa Mėlinauskaitė (Raimundas Sargūnas Sports Gymnasium). The candidates presented their election platforms, where they shared their vision of the city from a youth perspective, discussed current youth issues, and proposed possible solutions.

The students emphasized the importance of civic engagement, the need to improve city infrastructure, to expand youth activities, and the significance of mentoring with businesses. Among their proposals were ideas to create a cultural passport program for youth, strengthen Panevėžys College and the Institute or to establish an independent higher education institution, to encourage youth to return to the city and improve access to youth services.

Local Self-Government Day

The candidates' platforms and competence were evaluated by representatives of Panevėžys City Municipality Administration, non-governmental organizations, the Youth Affairs Council, and other experts. The Young Mayor elections are

held annually to celebrate Local Self-Government Day. The campaign aims to promote civic engagement among youth and increase their interest in local governance. This process provides young people with an opportunity to better understand the work of local government, express their opinions on decisions that may affect the entire community. It ensures that the younger generation remains active, responsible and ready to contribute to the future development of the city.



by Dace Ribena & Veronika Saulīte | dace.ribena@riga.lv | lvfriends3d@gmail.com
photos by 3D Friends



During 2020-2022 a non-governmental youth organization called “3D Friends” (based in Riga) led their first youth inclusive theatre group. Their main goal was to create a unique art space, where deaf and hearing communities could create art together and feel safe and happy. Besides, during pandemics the mental state of youth was damaged, and their regular rehearsals helped participants stay positive and have this safe space for them to express and share their emotions.

This project, named “Think.Feel.Act”, was supported by Latvian Agency for International Youth programmes and financed by the European Union.

Together they made a 50-minute-long performance that included various theatre practices. The rehearsals took place either outside (due to pandemic regulations) or at the current spaces of the organization - a basement area in the city centre that used to be a location of a theatre observatory led by a well-known theatre director. Some might say, it was meant to be...

Currently the organization is implementing the second part of the project - creating five short videos with exercises that can be used for inclusive events. Of course, based on theatre exercises. After working together with deaf youth, they have created a list of tasks that are most interesting and easy to implement. No special skills are required, and everyone can understand and use it in their work - teachers, youth workers, or youth initiatives.

The videos of drama theatre exercises and performances can be found on the project's Youtube channel: <https://shorturl.at/K2EU>

International cooperation

The idea of integrated theatre is growing rapidly. The “3D Friends” team is starting a big international project with partners from Romania and Croatia soon. In the framework of this project participants of their theatre / studio will have a possibility to travel on intercultural youth exchange, perform on local stages and meet new friends.

The collaboration and inclusion do not end there, with the theatre. Deaf youth have become an integral part of other events and projects led by the “3D Friends” team, for example, various initiatives within the Eurodesk network.

More information on the project and organization “3D Friends” can be found here: <https://3dfriends.lv/thinkfeelact>



by Laura Janusiene | laura.janusiene@palanga.lt
photos by Palanga Municipality

The youth of Palanga not only share kindness, contribute to shaping the image of the resort, develop relations with partner cities, but also get involved in decision-making processes and initiate changes

The Palanga Youth and Volunteering Centre together with the youth volunteers are happy that, together with the Lithuanian Red Cross, we were able to give the children of Bucha (Ukraine) a safe and peaceful vacation in Palanga. 60 children and young people, 8 accompanying adults had the opportunity to enjoy the tranquility of the resort.

This is the second year that we have been able to share our peace, warmth and safety in a friendly manner. The initiative gathers supporters, partners, volunteers, thanks to all of them we were able to create a meaningful recreation for children from war-ravaged Ukraine. The participants of the camp said that at the end of their stay they had a feeling of support and a clear determination not to give up.

Fostering the image of the Palanga resort that is friendly and open to young people

This summer, from July 17-24, the youth of Saint Gilles Croix de Vie, the partner of Palanga city municipality in France, visited Palanga. This was the first trip of 14-16 year olds and their accompanying leaders from France to Lithuania. The guests have been planning and coordinating the week-long program and details together with the staff and youth volunteers of the Palanga Youth and Volunteering Center since February, regularly organizing remote meetings for preparation. The French youth spent most of their time with the local youth: they enjoyed rich cultural and entertainment programme that included i.a. visit to the Palanga resort

museum, the house of Antanas Moncys and the Lithuanian Maritime Museum as well as many others sporting activities. The French youth also contributed to the initiative of sidewalk mosaics and put up a sardine drawing for locals on Vytautas Street, which will also welcome other guests from Saint Gilles Croix de Vie.

NGO's and young people in Palanga - community activities and participation in decision-making processes

A grant of EUR 47,585.00 from the EU funds has been allocated to the “Inclusion Recipe” project implemented in Palanga. Project started in 2024, October 11, and will end in 2026, April 10. It aims to create opportunities for young people to better integrate into the community and become an example of how to be active and participate in the decision-making process. Young people will be able to get involved and learn to participate in civil society, they will be formed as future decision makers who will nurture democratic values in their activities. It will be possible to actively participate in the civic, economic, social, cultural and political life of the society (relevant workshops are organized), paying a lot of attention to those with less opportunities.

The awareness of young people about the common values of the EU, rights and opportunities to contribute to the European integration process will be increased (in meetings with politicians, in activities carried out by Palanga's city partners, etc.), digital and social skills of young people will be developed, and attention will be paid to the formation of critical thinking (understanding of disinformation, fake news and propaganda). In this way, the ability of young people to participate in democratic life will be developed.

VOLUNTEER WORK SYSTEM IN JĒKABPILS



by Margita Liepiņa | margita.liepina@jekabpils.lv
photos by Adobe Stock, Jēkabpils Municipality

Implementation of the Volunteer Work System in Jēkabpils Municipality in 2024 – Promoting Youth Participation

Starting from 2024, Jēkabpils Municipality has implemented a youth volunteering work system and its accounting! Every young person of Jēkabpils region between the ages of 13-25 years has the opportunity to enter into a contract and perform volunteer work at the Jēkabpils region Children and Youth Center or any other municipal institution. Young volunteers can keep a record of volunteer hours and indicate skills, knowledge, attitudes and competences acquired during volunteer work in general. Similarly, municipal institutions can report the need for volunteers for their events.

The regulations provide that the municipality of Jēkabpils region issues an official certificate to all young people who perform at least 50 hours of volunteer work during the year.

Although the system has only been operating for the first year, more than fifty young people have signed contracts and some have already done 50 hours of volunteer work, while others are still doing it by organizing and implementing youth activities.

Awards, recognition and a sense of belonging

On December 7, the awarding of the Youth of the Year award is planned, in which the municipality wants to thank all the young people who have done volunteer work. Young people will receive a certificate from the municipality and small gifts, after the official ceremony an informal party will be organized by the youngsters themselves.

The youth work team of the Jēkabpils Region Children and Youth Center has been actively informing young people throughout the year about the opportunity for the youth to get involved in voluntary work. Informal trainings were also organized to promote young people's understanding of the forms of participation and actualize the benefits that youngsters can gain by doing volunteer work.

The youth work team also observes that young people feel more belonging to the youth center and youth facilities in the parishes, because they are more active themselves and organize more informal activities.



REDA: A CITY FOR THE YOUNG AND GROWING



by Katarzyna Osiecka-Brzeska | k.osieckabrzeska@op.pl
photos by Adobe Stock

Reda, a charming town in northern Poland, stands out as one of the youngest cities in the country when it comes to the age of its residents. Situated near the Tri-City (Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot) area, Reda has become a popular destination for young couples, who are choosing to settle there and start their families.

Unlike many other Polish cities that struggle with an aging population and a declining birth rate, Reda is one of the few places with a positive natural population growth. This unique demographic trend is reshaping the community and influencing the city's future direction.

The influx of young families is no accident. Reda has made a concerted effort to create a welcoming environment for its youthful residents. The city is committed to fostering cultural opportunities and building the infrastructure needed for a thriving community.

One of the most notable initiatives supporting this mission is the establishment of a Youth City Council. This council provides a platform for the town's younger citizens to engage in meaningful discussions on topics important to their age group and take an active role in the city's development.

The Youth City Council has already proven its value. For example, one of the key initiatives it spearheaded was the renovation of the local skatepark. Initially proposed by the council, the project was adopted into Reda's 2021 budget, making it the only external initiative included that year. The renovation was more than just a facelift; it revitalized a crucial recreational space for the city's youth, fostering a sense of community and offering a safe space for physical activity.

Comprehensive support for the youth

Reda's efforts to support its young population extend far beyond infrastructure improvements. In the challenging times following the COVID-19 pandemic and during the ongoing war in Ukraine, the city has recognized the need to provide tailored support for its young people. One example of this is the FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) training for teachers, aimed at equipping educators with the knowledge and tools to support students who may be facing additional challenges.

Moreover, Reda has joined the "Childhood Without Violence" campaign, which includes workshops on mental health for schoolchildren, helping to raise awareness and provide much-needed resources for students and their families.

Janina Żerańska, Reda's Deputy Mayor, emphasized the importance of these initiatives: "In these difficult post-covid times and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are committed to ensuring the proper development of our youth by providing essential trainings for teachers and engaging in mental health campaigns. Our goal is to create a supportive environment for every child and young person in Reda."

As Reda continues to grow, both in population and in spirit, the city's focus on the well-being of its youngest residents serves as a model for other communities in Poland. By empowering its youth and investing in their future, Reda is setting the stage for long-term success and prosperity.

UBC meeting with European institutions in Brussels



by Jakub Rybicki | jakub.rybicki@ubc.net
photos by Adobe Stock

The 93rd UBC Executive Board combined with the meeting with EU institutions will be held in Brussels on 5 December 2024.

The policy debate in the European Parliament will refer to the topic “Reinforcing the role of Baltic Cities in EU policy dialogues”. Participants will have an opportunity to meet representatives of various European institutions, in order to exchange ideas how UBC, its member cities and stakeholders, could cooperate in the future.

The agenda features presentations by key EU stakeholders, including the European Commission (DG REGIO), the Committee of the Regions, and the European Economic and Social Committee, each followed by Q&A sessions with UBC delegates. The event will conclude with closing remarks from the hosting MEP, Ms. Magdalena Adamowicz, highlighting pathways for future cooperation. Meetings with EU institutions will be arranged by UBC Antenna in Brussels. Next point in the agenda will be Executive Board meeting when most urgent internal matters will be discussed, link: <https://ubc.net/event/93rd-executive-board-meeting-brussels-4-5-december-2024/>

PITCH project Final Conference

The last main event will be the PITCH project Final Conference: Shaping the Future of Integration Strategies for Foreign-Born Women in Europe. This important event brings together policymakers, local authorities, and other key stakeholders from across the Baltic region and Europe to discuss and shape innovative integration strategies that empower foreign-born women based on our wealthy experience of the PITCH Model. The conference will provide a platform to explore new approaches on designing and implementing integration strategies, share best

practices, and foster collaborations that promote the integration of foreign-born women in our societies, link: <https://ubc.net/event/pitch-international-conference-in-brussels/>

The event's programme will conclude with cocktail attended by PITCH project partners, representatives of UBC cities and Brussels offices.

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Planning Cities Commission at EUSBSR Annual Forum

by Paulina Szewczyk | p.szewczyk@bpp.gdynia.pl
photo by Mariia Andreeva | mariia.andreeva@turku.fi



This year the UBC Planning Cities Commission took an active part in EUSBSR Annual Forum held in Visby, Sweden, on 29-31 October 2024. The main topic of the event was “Sustainability • Resilience • Security”

On 29 October, the Round Table on Stakeholder Involvement in the Update of the EUSBSR Action Plan was held. The meeting was organised by BSSSC, CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and UBC. On behalf of UBC the statement was made by Paulina Szewczyk, the chairperson of the UBC Planning Commission. The stakeholders discussed among others the way the local and regional authorities were involved in the EUSBSR, and the expectations towards the future and the update of the Action Plan for 2024-2025.

Then, the UBC PCC took part in the Engagement Day. It was a great opportunity for all participants to engage with the EUSBSR Introduction to the strategy and a panel discussion related to the importance of a broad engagement when addressing complex societal challenges, including the Ukrainian perspective.

30-31 October were the days of panel sessions and parallel seminars and workshops. The UBC Planning Cities Commission Steering Group representatives, including Frida Brunner, Visby Sweden the deputy chairperson of the Commission, and Irbe Karule, Riga, Latvia supported the UBC Stand at the networking village.

Liveability seminar

This year UBC Planning Cities Commission joined the efforts with the Interreg BSR project “Liveability” and VASAB Secretariat (in cooperation with Policy Area Spatial Planning) and co-organised the SEMINAR “Designing

Liveable Cities in the Baltic Sea Region.” The seminar took place on 30 October 2024 and engaged over 60 participants who took part in a discussion on what makes their cities liveable.

The keynote speech was made by Charles Landry – an international authority on the use of imagination and creativity in urban change, who spoke about Public Interest Design as a way of creating liveable cities.

Then, the VASAB strategic perspective was presented by Egija Stapkēviča, Deputy Head of VASAB Secretariat. Paulina Szewczyk, the Chairperson of the UBC Planning Cities Commission and Deputy Director of the Spatial Planning Office of the City of Gdynia spoke about how the UBC Member Cities work to be more liveable. She presented some good practices and underlined the importance of networking, cooperation and exchange of experiences actually ongoing within the UBC Planning Cities Commission activities. A journey toward becoming a liveable city was presented by Marta Kotello, an architect representing Grīziņkalns neighbourhood association in Riga, involved in a process of transformation of the district.

Next, Kateryna Baulina, Deputy Director of the NGO Analytical Center «Reformator», UBC counselor in Ukraine, presented the perspective of Ukrainian Cities and the challenge of building liveable cities under extremely difficult circumstances.

Finally, Andrea Cederquist from Heinrich Böll Foundation, who is engaged in the Interreg Liveability Project, explained the specifics of the Liveability Design Approach and introduced the Liveable City label and network as a new offer to cities in the Baltic Sea Region.

Sustainable transformation for resilient coastal city



by Paulina Szewczyk | p.szewczyk@bpp.gdynia.pl
photo by Mariia Andreeva | Sustainable Cities Commission

This autumn UBC Planning Cities joined forces with the UBC Sustainable Cities in organising the UBC Commissions meeting in Gdańsk, Poland, on 9-12 September 2024.

In the heart of the UBC community, in Gdańsk some 60 participants from 13 UBC member cities exchanged experiences working together on the ways of enhancing urban spaces close to the city centre, focusing on creating greener, more inclusive and accessible public areas through innovative and adaptive approaches.

The participants were greeted on Monday afternoon by Piotr Grzelak, Deputy Mayor of Gdansk and Vice-President of the UBC, the Secretary General of UBC, Paweł Żaboklicki, and the Deputy Mayor of Gdańsk for Spatial Development and Housing Emilia Łodzińska who also presented the current situation of the city's urban planning and its challenges.

Head of UBC SCC Secretariat, Turku Agnieszka Ilola and Chairperson of the UBC PCC, Gdynia Paulina Szewczyk reported on the Commission's activities. After introductory information on the city of Gdańsk environmental challenges given by Dagmara Nagórka-Kmiecik, Deputy Director of Department of Ecology and Energy, Piotr Lorens, Gdańsk City Architect talked about Gdańsk Design Workshops and Dorota Kamrowska-Zaluska (Gdańsk University of Technology) clarified the Interreg BSR project „Liveability”.

The second day of the seminar began with the inspirational presentation by Monika Arczyńska (A2P2 architecture & planning) of new trends visible in the city of Gdańsk under the provocative title: Quality of life in Baltic cities –

value or curse? Then Marcin Wołek (University of Gdańsk) brought up the importance of “Developing Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans”.

Colleagues from Malmö and Gdańsk shared their extensive experiences in harbour development, and finally Anna-Leena Jokitalo presented the results of the joint Commissions seminar in 2023, in Turku, that marked the start of the strategic discussions and became the base for further design of the areas, which now form the sea-side Turku vision.

Onsite visits for sustainable future solutions

The participants were introduced to the workshop area by Dani Giorewa-Brach from Gdańsk Development Agency and visited the areas.

The goal of creating two visions and urban concepts for each of three areas: two parts of the harbour zone and the area next to the football arena built for UEFA Euro 2012, was achieved to everyone's great satisfaction. The city received urban concepts for further discussions, while the participants could exchange their extensive knowledge in a practical way, seeking solutions to particular and real challenges.

Issues such climate-resilience, greenery, safe and inclusive neighborhoods, attractive and vibrant pedestrian public spaces, low emission mobility, cultural heritage were very prominent in all the concepts. The resulting plans were presented on the last day in the New Town Hall.

The next UBC Planning Cities Commission Seminar will be held in Riga in the autumn 2025.

Fresh Start for Collaboration in the Cultural Cities Commission



by Sofiia Yakovyshyna | sofia.yakovyshyna@espoo.fi
photos by Cultural Cities Commission

The City of Espoo started chairing the Cultural Cities Commission (CCC) in the beginning of the year 2024. City of Kaunas, the former Chair continues the work as Vice Chair.

In 2024 CCC focuses on revitalizing connections, expanding the network of active cities, and fostering greater collaboration in arts and culture across the Baltic Sea region. Priorities for 2024 are professionalization of the cultural field, strengthening regional identity, and participation through art and culture.

Working together towards the future in Espoo

The first on-site UBC CCC meeting was held in Espoo in June 2024. Key themes included Participation, Co-creation, and Meaningful Life through Art and Culture, bringing together cultural specialists from six UBC cities.

The study visit to Espoo's newest Lippulaiva library highlighted how thoughtful, sustainable design and inclusive spaces can bring communities together. This sparked discussions on how cultural venues can play a key role in engaging people in meaningful ways.

Exploring Tartu as a European Capital of Culture 2024

The second on-site CCC meeting was held in Tartu,

Estonia, in September. As a European Capital of Culture 2024, Tartu hosted CCC members from 13 UBC cities, facilitating an exchange of ideas on key themes such as City Identity, Safer & Better Cities, Resilience, Finances, and Cooperation. Representatives from Espoo, Tartu, Kaunas, Turku, Gdańsk, Kamyanets-Podilskyi, Riga, Panevėžys, Tauragė, Palanga, Mariehamn, Jēkabpils, and Rakvere participated in the meeting.

The second day of the meeting was dedicated to exploring the long-term impact of European Capital of Culture projects, with examples from Riga (2014), Kaunas (2022), and Turku (2011). Discussions centered on how the projects have influenced city life and whether their legacies justify the financial and human investment required. The most important remark in every example was the increased engagement of citizens through programs that were created together with the citizens.

Looking forward to 2025

The Cultural Cities Commission (CCC) agenda for 2025 will continue to emphasize resilience, sustainability, and cross-border cultural cooperation, with a focus on increasing engagement with Ukrainian artists and cities. Next year CCC will invite member cities to share their expertise. Kaunas will share its best practices of collecting data for decision making and Gdansk its expertise in cultural tourism.

Art and culture are more than just creativity - they are essential in building resilient, sustainable communities. In times of crisis, the arts have been instrumental in healing communities and providing a platform for dialogue and hope.

An international crisis management conference in Liepāja

by Kaspars Varpins | kaspars.varpins@liepaja.lv
photo by Elva Lubāne



On 1-3 October, in Liepāja, in the “Great Amber” concert hall, the crisis management conference “Crisis communication - how to reach the stakeholders” took place with participants from 11 different countries.

The conference was attended by almost 80 participants representing Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Poland, Austria, Ukraine, Germany and Slovenia. Liepāja Mayor Gunārs Anšiš opened the international conference, emphasizing the importance of the topic on a global scale, as well as the need to be united and learn from each other by sharing experience.

As one of the main guests of the conference, Guna Šnore, senior expert of the NATO Center of Excellence for Strategic Communication, spoke about how to reach target audiences in the era of hybrid warfare, underlying the impact of artificial intelligence on human habits, thinking and decision-making. Afterwards the representative of the Danish Civil Protection League together with two young people shared their experience on how to involve young people in disaster risk reduction activities, which they successfully succeeded in creating a youth volunteer fire brigade.

Exchanging experiences

Other participants of the conference also shared their experience of reaching different target audiences, for example, representatives of the Latvian State Police presented a communication campaign on how to reach senior citizens and warn them about the threats posed by telephone fraudsters; representatives from the Tallinn Municipal Police presented a game developed by them, with the help of which children can be encouraged to think about safety at home; Representatives of the Vienna municipality shared their experience of how communication takes place in the municipality, focusing directly on persons with disabilities; a representative from the Council of the Baltic Sea States presented a project

in which a child participation mechanisms in disaster risk reduction activities and strategic guidance for the implementation of inclusive crisis communication is being developed along other tasks

Within the framework of the conference, practical work in groups was also organized, where the participants had the opportunity to analyze different target groups and develop messages for them according to the crisis situation. In addition to the conference, a short, animated video on media literacy was also developed, highlighting the need to check information published on social networks in official information channels.

On the final day of the conference, participants visited the NGO “Tabitas sirds”, which shared their experience of working with volunteers and cooperation with municipalities during various crises. In addition, various Liepāja objects were also examined to remind of the need to communicate with wide and diverse target groups during the crisis.

European framework

The international crisis management conference took place within the framework of the project “Connecting Resilient Cities” financed by the EU. The aim of the project is to realize sustainable and citizen-friendly communication channels for crisis management at the international level. The project was developed in cooperation between two leading crisis and public safety city networks in the European Union - the International City Network for Crisis Management (ICNCM - <http://www.cmcitynetwork.eu>) and the Union of the Baltic Cities Safe Cities Commission (UBC - <https://ubc.net/>), whose management is entrusted to the Liepāja Municipal Police. Active partners of the project are Vienna, Ljubljana, Liepāja and Rostock - these are the cities where conferences on topics related to security, crisis management and communication will be held within the framework of the project. The first conference was already held in May of this year, in Vienna.

UBC Education Conference in Riga

by Matti Mäkelä | matti.makela@turku.fi
photos by Learning Cities Commission



UBC Learning Cities Commission arranged an Education Conference and Study Visit in Riga on the 23rd and 24th of October 2024 with over 100 participants.

“Last year we had around 80 participants in Turku, which was already a great result. This time the number was over 100, which truly shows that there is a real demand for this kind of event where experts and policymakers can share their thoughts, ideas, and best practices”, says Matti Mäkelä, Chair of the Learning Cities Commission. “Organising the conference was a huge joint task and success for the whole Commission, for which I want to thank each and everyone in our team”, Mäkelä continues. Moreover, Mäkelä points out, that special thanks go, of course, to hosting team in Riga.

“The conference was a remarkable success, not only in terms of participation but also in the range and depth of the discussions during expert’s panels. Diversity of the workshops allowed participants to gain insights from various perspectives and provided inspiration. Additionally, the study visits on the second day were a highlight, offering participants a firsthand look at the education system in Latvia in various stages. It was a great pleasure to provide a welcoming atmosphere for all attendees. We look forward

to strengthening cooperation in the field of education and expand our network in cities of Baltic Sea Region”, concludes Ilona Donina, Head of the International and Investment Projects Division in Riga’s Local Government and Education, Culture, and Sport Department, from the team in Riga.

Main topics

The conference and study visit centered around themes such as school attendance, educational technologies, artificial intelligence (A.I.), STEAM, student support, and enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. The program featured keynote presentations, panel discussions, and workshops, focusing on two major themes: “Education is the Future” in the morning and “The Future of Education” in the afternoon.

“The conference met expectations: the diversity of the program gave the participants the opportunity to look at the changing field of education from different angles. It inspired, raised thoughts and questions, to which answers were also found. In addition, the conference enabled the always valuable meetings of experts and the creation of new contacts”, says Anu Parantainen, Director of Children and Youth Services from City of Turku.



Relaunch of the Inclusive and Healthy Cities Commission

Youthful Cities Commission's meeting in Espoo



by Aleksandra Dylejko | aleksandra.dylejko@gdansk.gda.pl
photo by Adobe Stock



by Dmitrijs Zverevs | dmitrijs.zverevs@riga.lv
photos by Patrik Fagerström, Elias Metsämaa

Among the commissions of the UBC is the Commission for Inclusive and Healthy Cities. Its activities are based on the assumption that an inclusive city is governed by its community, and a healthy city is well-connected, accessible and safe. Its essential elements are independence, autonomy, and integration. Their development give local communities strength, a sense of agency and subjectivity.

This can take place by exchanging experiences and good practices between cities belonging to the Commission for Inclusive and Healthy Cities, which is an effective way to strengthen the competencies of cities at various stages of advancement in implementing social policies. It is also vital to implement and disseminate the idea of human rights as widely as possible. It is about acting in solidarity with other local governments and promoting a just, democratic, and sustainable Europe. How to achieve this? For example, by participating in networks or teams of cities and regions working for human rights and sharing knowledge and experience with cities and regions.

Human rights in practice

It is worth noting that Gdańsk – a city belonging to the Commission for Inclusive and Healthy Cities – initiated work on the City of Human Rights policy in October 2024 to continue our Model for Equal Treatment. The resolution, which will be put to a vote by the Gdańsk City Council, will be a commitment to strive for the protection and full realisation of the human rights of its residents, and to be guided by the principles of human rights in its decisions, programs, investments, and procedures. This

direction results from the Strategic Plan for 2023-2028 “Human Rights Cities in the EU” adopted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Gdańsk's policy is in line with the direction of activities aimed at localising human rights in cities and regions, promoted and implemented by such European cities as Vienna (Austria), Lund (Sweden), Utrecht (Netherlands), Nuremberg (Germany) and Barcelona (Spain).

Together we can do more

When implementing the statutory tasks and goals of the Commission, it is worth acting similarly: disseminating and cohering the directions of the development of local social policies. The value of such joint work and reflection is learning about local policies from the perspective of their implementers: strengths and weaknesses, successes and challenges, and plans for the future. Areas for common reflection for the Commission's member cities may include, for example, demographic changes, health prevention with an emphasis on, for instance, lifestyle diseases, and developing inclusive offers for young people.

So far, the cooperation of cities within the Commission for Inclusive and Healthy Cities shows that such activities bring satisfactory results and are worth continuing among cities with similar aims. The priority for the near future seems to be disseminating the idea of human rights, as well as dialogue and joint reflection on how to effectively implement it in activities carried out at the local government level.

At the previous meeting of UBC Youthful Cities Commission in Gdansk earlier this year, the participants agreed there is still a lot of space for mutual learning and experience exchange between the UBC member cities in the field of youth (and youth work in particular). Therefore, the Commission is now renewing its working format to having face-to-face meetings twice per year. Thanks to the initiative of the city of Espoo, the next meeting will be taking place in Southern Finland on 5th- 7th November.

During the meeting we will explore the diverse landscape of youth services provided by the city of Espoo and visit some of the infrastructure for youth (like Ohjaamotalo one stop guidance centre), as well as EMMA - Espoo Museum of modern art.

There will be also plenty of opportunity for mutual learning based on the interests of participants (detached youth work, youth councils, participatory budgeting, digital youth work and youth work in schools are among those topics that we are planning to address in an interactive way).

Preparations for establishing the Youth Board

Of course, during the meeting we will also be working on the concept of UBC Youth Board in order to elaborate on the results of previous brainstorming and discussions (keeping in mind the bold ambition of having a formal vote on setting up the UBC Youth Board during the next UBC General Conference). Even though the Commission has already accumulated a range of proposals and

suggestions, we are looking forward for more input from the UBC member cities and other commissions. Therefore, if you have any feedback, ideas, or concerns, please share them with the Commission before the event or join us in Espoo to discuss them.

Detailed programme of the event is available on the UBC web page: <https://ubc.net/event/youthful-cities-commissions-meeting-in-espoo/>. The registration will have been closed by the time the Bulletin is published. However, if you have missed the registration deadline and still want to come, please do not hesitate to contact us directly to see what the options are.

I would like to thank the staff of the city of Espoo for making the meeting possible and developing an exciting programme for those of us who are not afraid of Finland in November. See you all in Espoo!



Sustainable Cities Commission offers capacity development for UBC cities

PITCH project – implementation phase



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photo by Sustainable Cities Commission



by Anna Sośnicka | anna.sosnicka@ubc.net
photo by Adobe Stock

Autumn activities of the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission have spanned across the wide range of topics currently trending in the Baltic Sea Region. Only during Autumn-October 2024 we have created opportunities for developing capacities of 25 UBC member cities through our events: Commission meeting, topical workshops, and the UBC TALKS webinars.

Joint Commissions meeting 2024 in Gdańsk

The UBC Sustainable and Planning Cities Commissions joined forces in organising the meeting in Gdańsk on 9-12 September. This seminar “Sustainable transformation for resilient coastal city” merged the best of our approaches: co-creative planning and smart transformation of selected city areas with sustainable practices and climate-preparedness measures. This event brought together 60 participants from 14 UBC member cities!

Boosting sustainable mobility in BSR

A shift towards sustainable modes of transportation is crucial in cutting down emissions from urban mobility, one of the biggest sources of emissions in cities. To promote active mobility, the SUMP for BSR project (led by UBC Sustainable Cities) launched an international Active Mobility Photo Competition reaching over 155 000 people in 6 UBC cities. The Sustainable Urban Mobility Indicator workshop highlighted the importance of monitoring and evaluation for sustainable urban mobility planning and explored the feasibility of a wide

range of indicators. This online workshop of the SUMP for BSR project on 5 September brought together mobility planners from 10 UBC member cities.

Expanding cities’ awareness about PFAS threat

One of the urgent environmental threats increasingly recognised in our region is PFAS and other organic micropollutants. At the international workshop “Assessing risks and finding solutions to PFAS in local urban environment” organised in Riga on 10 October, we explored the cities’ role and possible actions to address it. Over 70 participants, including municipalities and local operators of 6 UBC member cities, as well as representatives of ministries and national water associations, joined this event hosted by the EMPEREST project (led by UBC Sustainable Cities).

UBC TALKS webinars

At every UBC TALKS webinar edition we highlight the current sustainability and climate trends from the Baltic Sea Region and supply our audience with best practices for addressing them locally. At the latest UBC TALKS webinar on 24 September, we dived into the sustainable urban mobility planning, building capacities of experts from 13 UBC member cities who joined us.

Next learning opportunity: UBC TALKS webinar about green public procurement on 26 November 2024 at 9.30-11.00 CET! Join our events: www.ubc-sustainable.net/events

The PITCH project - a model for gender-sensitive integration strategies based on Personalised, participaTory, loCal, and multistakeHolder approaches, where UBC is a partner, entered the dissemination phase.

UBC prepared the White Paper on the PITCH Model, based on the pilot - testing in the 7 countries. The document presents the Model, the lessons learned by the project partners during implementation phase. It also contains recommendations for the utilization and adaptation of the PITCH Model in the future.

The dissemination phase combines numerous activities. In each implementation country a series of 8 Capacity Building workshops will be organized to increase the competence of organisations’ staff, social workers, and other professionals to respond better to the integration needs of migrant women.

Local panel discussions with 40 participants in each country will be arranged to share and discuss the results of the project with local and regional authorities, thus promoting dialogue with policymakers at local level and contributing to the sustainability of the local integration strategy.

PITCH model Regional Webinar

UBC will organize a Regional Webinar on 5 November addressed to different municipalities, regional authorities, and other relevant stakeholders, aiming to promote the White Paper and thus mainstream the

PITCH Model for local integration strategies. Also, one webinar introducing the White Paper in each project country will be held. “Meet the Neighborhood” event will be held in all countries to present the project results at local level.

PITCH Final Conference

UBC is also an organizer of the Final Conference, entitled “Shaping the Future of Integration Strategies for Foreign-Born Women in Europe” which will be held on 5 December in Brussels.

The project partners, the migrant women and other participants of the process will share their experiences from the implementation. Policymakers, local authorities, and other stakeholders will discuss new approaches on designing and implementing integration strategies, share best practices, and foster collaborations that promote the integration of migrant women in the societies. More information: <https://pitch-eu.eu/>



**Co-funded by
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Decarbomile – Shaping the Future of Urban Logistics

by Igor Jojkic | igor.jojkic@gmail.com
photo by Adobe Stock

The Decarbomile Consortium’s fourth meeting took place on October 9-11, 2024, in Nantes, France, bringing together partners from across Europe to advance the project’s vision of decarbonizing urban freight. The event included three intensive days of presentations, workshops, and demonstrations aimed at pushing forward collaborative logistics solutions and Living Labs use cases.

The meeting commenced with a warm welcome at Nantes Métropole, where participants were introduced to the latest management and communications updates. The first day featured initial presentations of Living Labs use cases, focusing on local initiatives in Nantes. Attendees gained insights into governance, business models, hardware, and software innovations that are shaping the logistics landscape.

On the second day, hosted at IMT Atlantique, participants delved deeper into Living Labs, with further case presentations from Hamburg, Istanbul, and Logrono. Discussions highlighted implementation strategies and technological integration, followed by a session on the open framework architecture for collaborative logistics.

The final day at Nantes Métropole showcased updates from satellite cities such as Getafe, Sarajevo, and Tallinn, followed by a co-creation session on upcoming workshops and an impact assessment workshop. These activities fostered active collaboration and ensured that the project remained on track to meet its ambitious decarbonization goals.

Next steps for sustainable urban transport

The meeting not only provided a platform for discussing

logistical innovations but also reinforced the commitment to shared environmental objectives. Participants emphasized the importance of integrating new technologies with sustainable practices to reduce carbon emissions in urban transport. Through lively exchanges, the consortium identified practical steps and collaborative actions that could drive meaningful change across participating cities.

By the end of the meeting, the Decarbomile project had set clear pathways for the next phase, ensuring that each partner had a defined role in achieving the consortium’s long-term vision. The event strengthened the network of experts and stakeholders dedicated to transforming urban logistics, paving the way for a greener and more efficient future.



Minecraft for Resilience – A Different Perspective

by J Auguste Taru | auguste@outofthebox-international.org
photo by Adobe Stock, Golib Tolbov

Youth involvement in city planning is no longer a distant ideal—it’s happening now in creative and unprecedented ways. More than just residents, young people are increasingly viewed as key players in shaping the future of their cities. The European Youth Goals highlight the importance of empowering young people to actively participate in decision-making processes, particularly in designing youth-friendly urban spaces.

But how do we engage youth in ways that resonate with them? Enter Minecraft—a digital tool that has become more than just a game. With its versatile design environment, Minecraft is being used by cities to foster youth participation in urban planning.

The idea behind Minecraft for Resilience is simple yet transformative: by giving young people a virtual platform to express their ideas, cities are offering them a tangible way to influence real-world change. The MC-YOU Project taps into this concept, allowing young people to step into the role of “MCs”—the emcees of their communities—giving them a voice in urban development processes.

Scientific studies on gamification and policy engagement show that interactive platforms like Minecraft foster meaningful participation. The immersive and creative nature of the game enables young people to better understand the complexities of urban planning, while also equipping them with the tools to propose sustainable solutions. In this way, youth are not merely participating—they are leading.

The process is grounded in five key phases:

Analyse & Commit: Participants explore how Minecraft has been

successfully used in youth engagement across several case studies.

Educate & Empower: Young people are trained as MC Multipliers, gaining the skills to further engage their peers and local communities.

Consult & Develop: Using the Agora Methodology, the project creates spaces for public consultations, where youth present their ideas and receive feedback. They then refine their proposals through Minecraft workshops, repurposing urban spaces.

Advocate & Sustain: Advocacy efforts involve holding public hearings where youth present their final urban projects, developed through Minecraft, to city policymakers.

Celebrate & Multiply: The final phase includes awards ceremonies and sustainability conferences to promote the ongoing success of the MC-YOU model across other cities and regions.

With the first cities of Riga, Faro and Sandanski joining to pilot the MC-YOU model, the results are beginning to speak for themselves. By blending traditional policymaking with innovative, youth-driven approaches like Minecraft, cities will be able to foster resilience and sustainability while building trust between generations. Initial results from the MC-YOU Project are promising. The collaborative design process between youth, educators, and city officials is leading to more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient urban spaces. The next phase of the project aims to gather comprehensive data on the long-term impacts of these youth-driven initiatives, which will be shared in upcoming publications.

by Marta Gallas | projekt.gallas@gmail.com
photo by Marta Gallas

Secure Kids Project Liepaja's meeting

by Kaspars Vārpiņš | kaspars.varpins@liepaja.lv
photo by Safe Cities Commission

The Secure Kids project, focused on enhancing child participation in disaster risk reduction (DRR), convened in Liepaja for a workshop aimed at developing risk and crisis communication scenarios for and with children.

The Secure Kids project event, hosted by the Union of the Baltic Cities Safe Cities Commission and Liepaja Municipal Police, was held in Liepaja, Latvia, from 17–19 September 2024. It brought together all project partners and the project's crisis communication experts to collaborate on developing effective communication strategies for use during emergencies.

The primary goals of the workshop were to identify and develop various risks, along with the resulting crisis scenarios, and to design effective crisis communication-related scenarios that could be used in interactive workshops with children. This process involved creating both the storyline for each scenario as well as the format and framework for the corresponding exercises. Since the partner organisations will also be responsible for conducting these interactive workshops, this step was crucial not only for understanding the work but also as a form of indirect training to ensure they are well-prepared to conduct these workshops with children.

Youth involvement

The Secure Kids project considers inclusive crisis communication with children to be an important aspect of meaningful child participation in disaster risk reduction. Therefore, a key component of the workshop was a visit to a local high school, where the project team worked directly with children (students aged around 15) to identify risks and scenarios relevant to their lives. This hands-on approach allowed the team to understand children's perspectives,

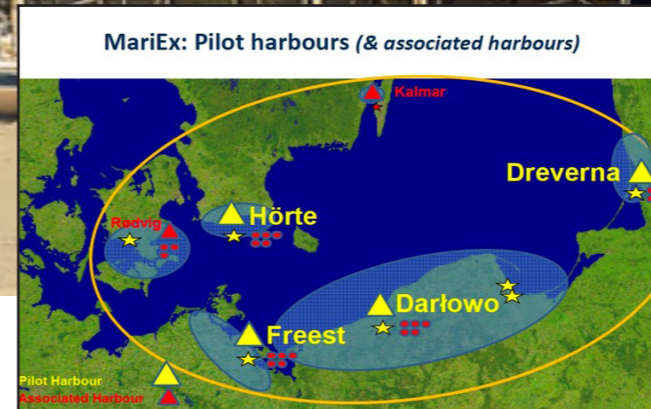
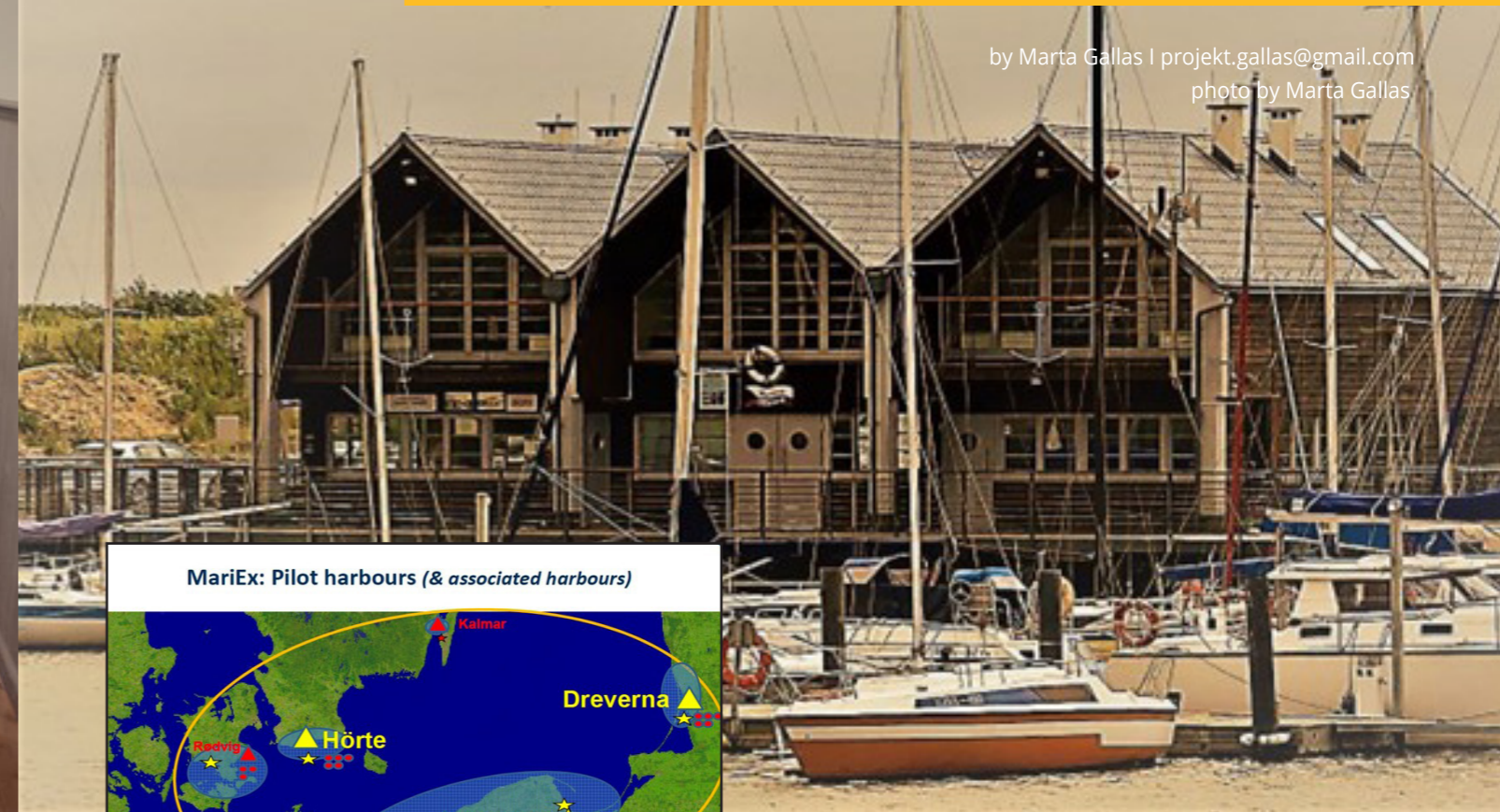
which was essential in enhancing the effectiveness and credibility of the project's work.

Another important part of the meeting was the risk-identification walk – a “tool” already identified in the previously developed Strategic Guidance for inclusive Crisis Communication as a relevant exercise for collecting input and identifying potential risks that communities may experience in everyday life. This activity, led by Liepaja Municipal Police, focused particularly on risks affecting children. The police representatives shared their expertise with the project partners that might have a stronger background in child participation.

Practical knowledge for future use

The workshop in Liepaja marked an important step forward for the Secure Kids project, which is co-funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice (DG Justice) and the project's partner organisations. The insights gained from this workshop will directly inform the interactive workshops for children, ensuring that the scenarios developed are both practical and engaging.

For more information about the project, visit the Secure Kids project page - <https://cbss.org/projects-cbss/secure-kids/>.



The South Baltic region, renowned for its coastal beauty and maritime charm, boasts over 350 smaller harbours that have become a central part of the tourism landscape. From bustling daytime activities to serene evening visits, the harbours are a pivotal part of the region's tourism ecosystem. Whether through cycling trips, as an escape from beach life, or on days with poor weather, tourists consistently find themselves drawn to these coastal hubs.

The MariEx Project, an initiative aimed at enhancing the region's maritime tourism appeal, was founded on a simple premise: authentic harbour life is a major draw for visitors. While curated experiences like historical exhibitions, vessel museums, and harbour festivals are popular, the real allure lies in observing ongoing maritime activities. Tourists are captivated by the sight of fishermen mending nets, vessels being repaired, and large ships docking or departing. This authentic glimpse into harbour life provides a deeper, more genuine connection to the region.

However, the traditional maritime activities that have long defined these harbours are increasingly at risk. Coastal fisheries, short sea shipping, and other commercial operations that once animated these smaller ports are in decline. Factors driving this transformation range from economic shifts to societal changes, with many former fishing harbours now repurposed for leisure marinas, restaurants, art events, and other tourist-centric activities.

This transformation, often seen as part of a larger waterfront redevelopment trend, presents challenges. There is a delicate balance between creating appealing tourist experiences and preserving the authentic maritime character of these places. Some

view the rise of restaurants and art galleries as a departure from the region's genuine, waterborne activities. Conflicts may arise over how much space should be allocated for land-based tourism versus maintaining areas for traditional sea-based users, such as sailors and fishermen. Another concern is whether tourism development risks overshadowing the harbours' role as focal points for local community life. The push to maximize tourism potential may conflict with preserving the authenticity that makes these ports meaningful for both residents and visitors.

As the MariEx project continues its work through 2027, these are the central questions it seeks to address. What is the right path for the future development of these small harbours? How can the South Baltic region evolve as a maritime destination without sacrificing its authenticity? Should harbours be tailored primarily for land tourists, or should they maintain space for genuine maritime activities and local life? The MariEx project aims to strike a balance by transforming smaller harbours into inclusive “Maritime Experience Points.” This initiative seeks to preserve the interests of traditional port users, land tourists, and local residents alike. A key goal is to create a marketing approach that highlights both the authentic and evolving aspects of harbour life, ensuring the region remains an attractive destination while staying true to its maritime roots.

Since the Project has been just launched, there will be ample opportunity for stakeholders to explore solutions and shape the future of the South Baltic harbours as vibrant, authentic maritime destinations. Being one of the MariEx partners, Union of the Baltic Cities encourages to share the best practices and get inspirations from the Project's solutions so they could be really implemented by the coastal communities and enhance local tourism as well as regional development.



MEET ALEX - KAUNAS NEW INNOVATION PARK

Aleksotas Innovation and Industry Park (ALEX) is an exciting new development located in the Aleksotas district of Kaunas, Lithuania. This project is part of a national initiative to foster sustainable industrial growth and technological innovation. The park aims to transform a former military site into a vibrant hub for research, development, and high-tech industries.

ALEX is committed to sustainability, featuring eco-friendly infrastructure and facilities designed to attract businesses in fields like biotechnology, green technology, and industrial innovation. Recently, ALEX welcomed its first investor, Wellgem Biopharma, a biotechnology company that specializes in genetic engineering and biopharmaceuticals. Wellgem is investing over €50 million to establish advanced production and testing services in Kaunas. Their facilities will include state-of-the-art laboratories for cell cloning, biosynthesis, and purification, as well as spaces for biopharmaceutical formulation and quality control. The Innovation Hangar will also provide administrative offices and workspaces. Wellgem plans to have the laboratories operational by mid-2025, leading to full-scale production soon after.

Kaunas was selected for this project due to its strategic location and strong connections throughout Europe. Wellgem views ALEX as an ideal environment for growth, benefiting from the local talent pool and partnerships with prominent universities such as Lithuanian

University of Health Sciences, Vytautas Magnus University, and Kaunas University of Technology, all of which are among the most recognized institutions in Kaunas and Lithuania, ensuring a steady supply of qualified professionals for the industry.

Andrius Veršinskas, Head of the Business Department at Kaunas IN, emphasized the significance of Wellgem Biopharma's arrival, noting that ALEX can enhance collaboration between academia and industry, creating a dynamic innovation cluster that strengthens Kaunas' position in the life sciences sector and drives technological development. Kaunas Mayor Visvaldas Matijošaitis described ALEX as a key project that positions the city as a centre for technology and innovation, particularly in life sciences, IT, and the automotive industry. The park is projected to attract €90 million in private investment by 2048, create over 1,100 jobs, and engage around 500 researchers.

Deputy Minister of Economy and Innovation, Karolis Žemaitis, noted that the transformation of the former Aleksotas Aviation Factory site into this thriving innovation centre reflects Lithuania's growth in the life sciences sector. Recognized as a project of national importance in 2020, ALEX is a vital asset for the country's long-term strategic interests.

ALEX Innovation Park is now open to prospective investors and can be explored further at their new online presence: <https://alexinnovationpark.lt/>

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DEPOSIT SYSTEM FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Riga is actively working to improve waste management and waste prevention in order to move towards waste reduction and minimise waste production. Riga is committed to work towards sustainable solutions.

The Riga City Council Housing and Environment Department is currently implementing a major project of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme "Change(K)now!". The aim of the project is to promote a transition of the food supply system from single-use to reusable packaging and, above all, to promote a change in mindset. This project is important not only for promoting sustainable social behaviour, but also for international cooperation. The project involves 23 partners from nine Baltic Sea Region countries.

We are currently collaborating with partners to research and identify good practices to find out the most effective ways to reduce single-use packaging and implement sustainable solutions. Several project partners have already successfully implemented a deposit system, where you have to pay a deposit when you buy glasses, plates and cutlery from a merchant. When you leave, the container is returned to the collection point and the paid money is recovered, the containers are washed in a special washing machine and returned to the system to be used again. The municipality has also introduced this practice in Riga, we currently use deposit glasses and, learning from the experience of other countries, we would like to implement other containers and cutlery at our events.

Binding regulations have been approved in Riga, which stipulate that the organiser and participant are prohibited from selling drinks in non-reusable glasses during a street sale event and during a street sale of a temporary nature, where the number of visitors does not exceed 5 000. From 1 January 2025, the binding rules will also apply if the number of visitors exceeds 5 000.

The introduction of deposit glasses has already led to a significant reduction of generated waste in Riga this summer, as beverage glasses are a significant part of the waste collected during public events. Studies show that deposit glasses without printing have a life cycle of up to 1000 washings and up to 500 for glasses with printing, which is a significant benefit in the long term. Deposit glasses can be rented or purchased by merchants and event organisers.

Riga has actively used reusable glasses this summer and next summer, as part of the project, Riga City Council is planning to conduct practical trials at events including glasses, plates, and cutlery, to provide businesses with information materials and good practice training. This is an important step in changing public thinking and attitude towards waste management and sustainable resource management in the future.

To inspire people to change their habits, the municipality must show an example. This ranges from events where colleagues can bring their own reusable containers to organised activities that promote sustainable attitude. Riga City Council plans to introduce a requirement to use reusable containers in all municipal institutions

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REDA JOINS “GREEN LEADER” PROGRAM

The city of Reda has embarked on an ambitious journey toward sustainability by joining the prestigious “Green Leader” program, organized by the Sendzimir Foundation and the Polish-American Freedom Foundation. After three months of intensive preparations, including participation in webinars and completing a variety of tasks, three prominent figures from the city—Councilor Zofia Dzielińska, Councilor Katarzyna Osiecka-Brzeska, and Deputy Mayor Dominika Kudlińska—have been accepted into the program. Together, they will lead Reda’s transformation into a “Green City” under the team name “Zielona Reda” (Green Reda).

Councilor Zofia Dzielińska, Chair of the Environmental Protection and Green Spaces Commission, and Councilor Katarzyna Osiecka-Brzeska, Vice-Chair of the City Council, will be instrumental in developing strategies for the city’s sustainable growth. Working alongside them is Deputy Mayor Dominika Kudlińska, who is committed to guiding Reda’s transition in line with European Union’s green and blue policies aimed at combating climate change and enhancing urban resilience.

The main task of the “Zielona Reda” team is to develop guidelines for both public and private investments to focus on key sustainability issues such as water retention and the expansion of green spaces. The team will explore practical ways to manage water resources more effectively, with an emphasis on capturing and utilizing rainwater, thus reducing the risk of flooding and droughts that are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

Additionally, a significant focus will be put on the urban spaces that are currently dominated by concrete and asphalt. They will be rede-

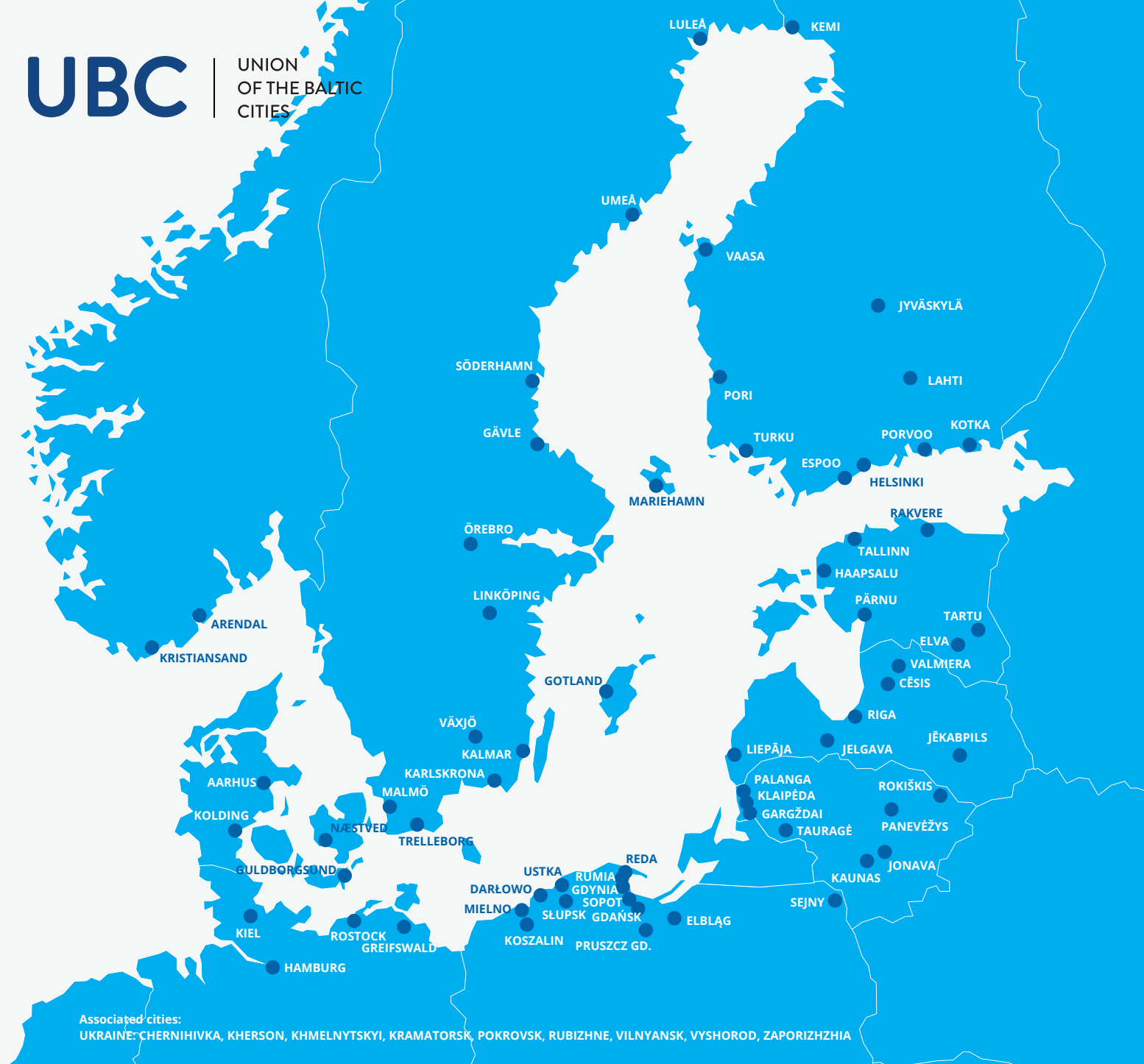
signed to make them more environmentally friendly and comfortable for residents. These changes are not just cosmetic but aim to mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing heat islands and improving air quality. More green areas, parks, and natural spaces will be created to encourage biodiversity and provide more recreational spaces for residents.

Councilor Dzielińska explained the need for these changes: “Reda has to adapt to the new environmental challenges we are facing. By enhancing our green spaces and improving water retention, we are not only making the city more pleasant to live in but also preparing for the future effects of climate change.”

These local initiatives are a reflection of the European Union’s broader green and blue urban policy, which aims to promote cities that are both environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient. By aligning with this policy, Reda is positioning itself as a forward-thinking city that prioritizes the well-being of its residents and the environment. The “Green Leader” program will provide Reda’s leadership with the knowledge, tools, and networks necessary to turn their ambitious ideas into tangible outcomes. Over the course of the program, the team will continue to refine their strategy, incorporating lessons learned from other participating cities and drawing on the expertise of sustainability professionals.

Reda’s involvement in the “Green Leader” initiative marks a significant step in its evolution as a modern city with a strong commitment to environmental stewardship. By focusing on green spaces, water retention, and urban renewal, Reda is set to become a model of sustainable development in Poland.

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UBC – working together to foster sustainable, smart and safe cities

Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region with the members from nine Baltic Sea countries. Founded in 1991 in Gdańsk, UBC is a voluntary, proactive network mobilizing the shared potential of its member cities for a safe, smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region. The UBC cooperates with numerous Baltic and European organisations.

The UBC's practical work is carried out through active cooperation of the member cities in eight thematic Commissions: Cultural Cities, Inclusive and Healthy Cities, Learning Cities, Planning Cities, Safe Cities, Smart and Prospering Cities, Sustainable Cities, and Youthful Cities. The Commissions coordinate and execute specific projects, activities and events.

Any coastal city or any other city interested in the development of the Baltic Sea Region may become a member of the UBC – please contact the UBC Secretariat.

www.ubc.net

