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Youth policy in the Baltic Sea Region – a case study of Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Polish youth participation in the BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy

Polityka młodzieżowa w Regionie Morza Bałtyckiego na przykładzie partycypacji młodzieży z Litwy, Łotwy, Estonii i Polski w Młodzieżowej Grupie Roboczej BSSSC

Abstract: Youth policy, understood as youth activity and policy for youth, has been developing in the Baltic Sea region for many years. It takes place on many levels of Baltic cooperation; therefore, this article uses the theory of multi-level governance for the analysis. There are some differences in youth policy between the communities of the Baltic Sea Region countries. This article aims to analyse the participation of young people from the regions of Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Estonia in the BSR youth policy, based on the example of the Youth Working Group of the “Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation”. The main part of the article is an analysis of interviews with youth coordinators of “Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation” from selected countries. During the study, 5 interviews were conducted, and, thanks to these interviews, the author has made interesting observations on the differences in involvement of young people from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland. They indicated, inter alia, disproportional access to participation in the work of the Youth Working Group “Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation” between Estonia and Poland, and Lithuania and Latvia. The results clearly show that young people from Polish regions have the greatest opportunities to shape youth policy in the Baltic Sea Region.

Keywords: Youth Policy, BSSSC, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Estonia, Youth cooperation, Baltic Sea Region

Streszczenie: Polityka młodzieżowa, rozumiana jako aktywność młodzieży i na rzecz młodzieży, w regionie Morza Bałtyckiego rozwija się od wielu lat. Odbyna się ona na wielu poziomach współpracy bałtyckiej, dlatego też w ar-

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tykule do analizy użyto teorii wielopoziomowego zarządzania. Istnieją pewne różnice w polityce młodzieżowej między regionami państwami Regionu Morza Bałtyckiego. Artykuł miał na celu analizę uczestnictwa młodzieży z regionów Litwy, Łotwy, Polski i Estonii w polityce młodzieżowej RMB, na przykładzie Młodzieżowej Grupy Roboczej organizacji „Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation”. Zasadniczą częścią artykułu jest analiza wywiadów z koordynatorami młodzieżowymi „Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation” z wybranych krajów. W trakcie badania przeprowadzono 5 wywiadów, dzięki tym wywiadam autor poczynił interesujące obserwacje na temat różnic w zaangażowaniu młodzieży z Litwy, Łotwy, Estonii i Polski. Wskazały m.in. dysproporcje w dostępie do uczestniczenia w pracach Młodzieżowej Grupy Roboczej „Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation” pomiędzy Estonią i Polską, a Litwą i Łotwą. Wyniki wyraźnie wskazały, iż młodzież z polskich regionów ma największe możliwości dotyczące kształtowania polityki młodzieżowej w Regionie Morza Bałtyckiego.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka młodzieżowa, Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation, Litwa, Łotwa, Estonia, Polska, współpraca młodzieżowa, Region Morza Bałtyckiego

Introduction

The Baltic Sea Region became a region of intense cooperation in the 1990s in connection with the end of the Cold War. This cooperation is carried out by many organizations and in many areas. One of the most important areas of cooperation is youth policy. The following analysis is devoted to the youth policies conducted within the framework of the pan-Baltic cooperation network, which is the Baltic Sea Region Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC), between 2005 and 2019. Particular attention was paid to the regions of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland, the countries that joined the EU in 2004, and their involvement in youth policies.

The author of the article took up this subject due to her interests in youth policy conducted in the Baltic Sea Region and many years of observation. The selection of the countries that joined the EU in the same year for the analysis is important due to the changes that took place in this region after the 2004 enlargement, a time of deepened regional integration.

The article aims to analyse the differences in the activity of young people from the regions of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland in the field of youth policy at the BSSSC. The simultaneous accession of the selected countries to the EU at the same time made it possible to assume for the study that the Europeanization processes began in the selected countries at a similar time. For the purposes of the study, it was adopted as a research hypothesis that there are fundamental

differences between individual countries in the involvement in youth policy in the BSSSC.

The following research questions were asked in this analysis. Firstly, is the youth from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland as active in the BSSSC as youth from other Baltic states? Secondly, is there any political involvement in the area of Baltic youth policy in these countries? The answers to these questions will help to achieve the main goal of the article.

To check the indicated hypothesis, an analysis of archival documents of the BSSSC (resolutions, newsletters, reports) was carried out, and interviews were conducted with all persons who acted as coordinators of youth cooperation in the BSSSC from the beginning of its establishment, as well as with youth carers – representatives of Latvia and Estonia who were involved in youth cooperation within the BSSSC. The considerations started in this article will be developed in the future with analyses based on youth surveys, thanks to which identifying the problems and barriers to better youth policy will be more complete. Therefore, this study should be treated as the first part and introduction to further in-depth analyses, both by the author and other researchers.

The article is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the legal and theoretical foundations of international cooperation by local and regional entities. The second part is devoted to the development of the concept of youth policy in the BSSSC. The third part contains the results of a study on the cooperation between regions from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in the field of youth policy in the BSSSC.

The author of this article is convinced that a look at youth policy in the Baltic Sea Region from Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Polish perspectives will be an interesting supplement to the research conducted in this field thus far.

1. Regional and local cooperation in Baltic Sea Region 1. – theoretical approach

A basic element of this study's analysis is to demonstrate the basics of interregional policy by regions and local communities. The cooperation of regional actors in BSR is based on international conventions and internal documents of the European Union. The international in-

struments governing the interregional relations of European regions consist of the European Framework Convention on the Transfrontier Cooperation between the Territorial Communities or Authorities (the Madrid Convention); the European Charter of the local government (local) of October 15th, 1985; the European Charter of Border Regions and the Cross-Border with is dated for 1995; the European Charter of the Regional Self-Government; and the Additional Protocol to the European Framework Convention on the Cross-Border Cooperation between Territorial Authorities and Communities of 1998. The internal acts include the Annexed Community Charter for Regionalization and macro-regional strategies¹. The above documents have also become the basis for cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region and allowed for the development of non-states cooperation.

The Multi-Level Governance (MLG) theory has supported the processes in BSR from the very beginning and has been present in the research discourse for many years². The focus on countries in building the European Union³ has led to research into MLG. The concept of including entities from many levels of governance (subnational, national, and supranational) in the process of creating policy⁴ gave rise to the creation of a macro-regional approach.

The MLG theory also appears in documents concerning the governance of the European Union⁵. Such interpretation of the theory of multi-level management, with its practical application, is undoubtedly a research challenge. Researchers⁶ are already dealing with the critical analysis of this theoretical model. In Poland, J. Ruskowski⁷ devotes a great deal of attention to the issue. Thanks to EU macro-re-

- 1 M. Szulc, *The Regional Cooperation in Europe. From the Madrid Convention to the Macro-Regional Approach*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego ACTA POLITICA" 2015, vol. 31, pp. 45-58.
- 2 See more: *Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi level Governance*, L. Hooghe (ed.), Oxford 1996; L. Hooghe, G. Marks, *Multi-level Governance and European Integration*, Lanham, 2001; L. Hooghe, G. Marks, K. Blank, *European Integration since the 80: State-Centric v. Multi-level Governance*, "Journal of Common of Market Studies" 1996, vol. 34, no. 3.
- 3 L. Hooghe, G. Marks, K. Blank, op. cit., p. 342.
- 4 L. Hooghe, G. Marks, K. Blank, op. cit., p. 2.
- 5 European Commission, European Governance – white paper, COM (2001) 428, 2001.
- 6 K. Tomaszewski, *Unia Europejska w poszukiwaniu skutecznego mechanizmu zarządzania. Analiza krytyczna modelu teoretycznego multi-level governance*, Toruń 2013.
- 7 E.g. J. Ruskowski, *Ponadnarodowość w systemie politycznym Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 262-278.

gions, the subject of multi-level governance in the EU is still topical, and its analysis has entered the next level of research and methodological advancement.

MLG theory⁸ proposes that the construction of multi-level governance in the European Union is an appropriate one. J. Ruskowski points out that apart from conventional levels (subnational, national, intergovernmental, transnational), MLG recognizes also more ambiguous levels (e.g. subnational-super-national or national-super-national). During the analysis of the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) creation process, this multi-level character of the macro-regional approach is particularly visible, and MLG gains a practical dimension in this process⁹.

When analysing the application of MLG in a BSR, research by S. Gänzle, who often draws attention to the importance of entities from different levels of management, cannot be omitted¹⁰. In one of his articles¹¹, he considers whether the level of Baltic cooperation is increased by multi-level governance. In his article, he states that the use of MLG in a macro-regional approach creates a new qualities, such as new scales of intervention, new actor constellations, and variable geometries of governance. The author of this article agrees with Gänzle's thesis¹². Gänzle points out that BSR cooperation supported by the MLG allows both institutional and non-institutional actors to achieve common political objectives.

J. Scott has drawn attention to the growing share of political cooperation across country divisions. He emphasizes that most entities involved in cross-border cooperation are at a sub-national level. They are

8 J. Ruskowski, *Teorie specjalistyczne w studiach europejskich* [in:] *Teorie w studiach europejskich*, J. Ruskowski, L. Wojnicz (eds.), Szczecin–Warszawa 2012, p. 36.

9 See more broadly: M. Szulc, *Współpraca subregionalna w regionie Morza Bałtyckiego na przykładzie Konferencji Współpracy Subregionalnej państw Morza Bałtyckiego*, "Gdańskie Studia Międzynarodowe" 2014, vol. 12, no. 1-2, pp. 122-135.

10 S. Gänzle, 'Experimental Union' and Baltic Sea Cooperation: the case of the European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), "Regional Studies, Regional Science" 2018, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 339, doi: 10.1080/21681376.2018.1532315.

11 S. Gänzle, *The European Union's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR): improving multilevel governance in Baltic Sea cooperation?*, "Journal of Baltic Studies" 2017, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 407-420, doi: 10.1080/01629778.2017.1305205.

12 More broadly: M. Szulc, *Polityka Unii Europejskiej wobec Regionu Morza Bałtyckiego. Podejście makroregionalne i wielopoziomowe*, Toruń 2019.

representatives of regions, cities, local communities, political organizations, as well as non-state actors, including interest groups, NGOs, and business associations¹³. In the Baltic Sea Region, cooperation on many levels has been observed for many years. Both national and international structures, as well as subnational actors, participate in the development of the BSR¹⁴.

Original areas of cooperation in the BSR included a common work for the environment and economic development. The need to balance these two fields influenced the shape of the BSR's sustainable development¹⁵. J. Scott mentions the areas of cooperation of various forums in the BSR: security, economic, and environmental issues¹⁶. Youth policy in the framework of interregional cooperation in the BSR developed gradually alongside these main topics related to the development of the Baltic Sea Region.

The development of youth policy can also explain an interesting theoretical supplement in Paul Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework. What is most important for this research is that a subsystem consists of actors from a variety of public and private organizations who are actively concerned with a policy problem or issue¹⁷. Other important elements of this theory are the beliefs of these actors/participants in the policy-making process and policy change. What is important in this theory and what was already observable in the BSR is that actors try to involve as many of their beliefs as possible in the policy-making process¹⁸. T. Czapiewski, in his research on ACF theory, points out that most of the research on the ACF is based on U.S. energy and environmental policies; however, he notes that in the EU some issues, such as environmental protection, require the involvement of actors from different levels due to the importance and interrelation of

13 J. Scott, *Cross-border Governance in the Baltic Sea Region*, "Regional & Federal Studies" 2002, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 135-153, doi: 10.1080/714004777.

14 K. Kern, T. Löffelsend, *Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region. Governance beyond the nation state*, "Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability" 2004, vol. 9, no. 5, p. 453, doi: 10.1080/1354983042000255351.

15 K. Kern, *Governance for Sustainable Development in the Baltic Sea Region*, "Journal of Baltic Studies" 2011, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 21-35, doi: 10.1080/01629778.2011.538517.

16 J. Scott, op. cit., pp. 135-153.

17 P.A. Sabatier, *The Advocacy Coalition Framework: revisions and relevance for Europe*, "Journal of European Public Policy" 1998, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 98-130.

18 M. Szulc, *Współpraca subregionalna...*

the different levels¹⁹. The above researchers point to the role of different actors in policy-making. Valman, using the ACF theory, decided to investigate the changing process of environmental policy change in the BSR. In her study, she shows that the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) was caused by a general shift in beliefs among all involved actors rather than by competing beliefs or changed actor behaviour²⁰. Are we, in their case, dealing with the development of beliefs among youth? M. Valman's research shows that ACF theory offers many opportunities for research on policy development in the BSR. The fact that youth in BSSSC are such a committed group of actors is in its slogan: "Nothing about us without us". The motto of youth cooperation within the BSSSC proves that it is a group of actors focused on the problem of youth activity in the BSR.

2. Youth Policy in BSSSC – based on documents and resolutions

Before consideration of youth policy, attention should be paid first of all to the definition of the concept of youth. Researchers sometimes define adolescents in slightly different ways. One definition is that youth is a period of transition during which children and adolescents gradually come to be recognized as adults. Falling between childhood and adulthood, it is a period of semi-dependency during which young people try to achieve personal autonomy while still remaining dependent on their parents or the state.²¹ This definition should be deepened by specifying the age of people who fall under the category of youth. In a narrower scope, youth is defined as a social group between 15 and 25-29 years of age²², but according to broader definitions, youth is the

19 T. Czapiewski, *The Advocacy Coalition Framework after a Quarter of a Century. Explaining the Policy Process*, "Athenaeum" 2013, no. 40, p. 58.

20 M. Valman, *Beliefs and behavior in International Policy Making: Explanations to longitudinal changes in the Governance of the Baltic Sea*, "Maritime Studies" 2016, vol. 15, no. 1.

21 The Commonwealth, *Global Youth Development Index and Report*, 2016, <http://cmydiprod.uk-south.cloudapp.azure.com/sites/default/files/2016-10/2016%20Global%20Youth%20Development%20Index%20and%20Report.pdf>, p. 7 [15.04.2021].

22 A. Chodubski, *Młodzież jako przedmiot i podmiot życia publicznego* [in:] *Polityka młodzieżowa Unii Europejskiej*, M. Boryń, B. Duraj, S. Mrozowska, Toruń 2014, p. 12.

age group between 13 and 30 years of age²³. In the case of EU youth policy, people of different ages are also included in the definition of youth. The Solidarity Corps program involves young people between 18 and 30 years of age²⁴, and youth exchanges under the Erasmus plus project involve young people aged 13-30²⁵. Therefore, when discussing issues related to young people, the author of this article adopted the broadest definition in terms of the age range, i.e. 13-30.

In one document, a European Commission white paper, “A new impetus for European youth”²⁶, the most important activity in the youth field is to better involve young people in decisions that concern them. This document found that “young Europeans have a lot to say; after all, these are precisely the people who are primarily affected by economic change, demographic imbalance, globalization or cultural diversity. We are expecting them to create new forms of social relations, different ways of expressing solidarity or of coping with differences and finding enrichment in them, while new uncertainties appear”²⁷. Such thinking about young people is also consistent with the opinions of world researchers, who also analyse the situation outside the European Union. D. Woodman and J. Wyn argue that “These policies aimed to: (a) increase levels of education to provide human capital for emerging industries, and (b) deregulate labour markets to enable national economies to be globally competitive”. They also suggest that youth “transitions” in policy have paralleled economic developments, becoming a ubiquitous term in youth and education policy. P. Pośpieszna and A. Galus indicate that youth participation

23 M. Sińczuch, *Polityka młodzieżowa jako odrębny obszar działania Unii Europejskiej* [in:] *Polityka młodzieżowa*, G. Zielińska (ed.), “Studia BAS” 2009, vol. 2, no. 18, p. 147.

24 Solidarity Corp, https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_pl [15.04.2021].

25 Erasmus +, https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/individuals/young-people/youth-exchanges_pl [15.04.2021].

26 Other relevant documents concerning youth policy in the European Union are also the “Revised European Charter for Young People’s Participation in Local and Regional Life (2003)”, which emphasizes that “active participation of young people in decisions and projects at local and regional level is essential if we want to build more democratic, more solidarity and more prosperous societies,” and the European Youth Pact (2005), specifying activities related to improving the quality of life of young people and enabling them to use their potential.

27 European Commission, European Commission white paper – A new impetus for European youth, COM/2001/0681 final.

plays a special role in building a civil society, and thus in the process of democratization of society²⁸.

The Baltic Sea Region since the end of the Cold War has developed into one of the most dynamic areas in Europe²⁹. There are a lot of examples of sub-national cooperation in BSR. One of them is the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation.

The Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) is a political network of regional authorities below the national level. This network was established to improve collaboration within the BSR, to represent the interests of the sub-regions towards national as well as European and international organizations³⁰. The BSSSC is an essential element of the BSR cooperation network. The main issues raised during the organization's work are maritime policy, youth policy, energy and climate, the Northern Dimension, cohesion policy, transport and infrastructure, and EUSBSR³¹.

The topic of youth policy first appeared during the work of the BSSSC³² in 1994³³. The idea of involving young people in the work of the BSSSC appeared in 2000. At that time, differences were noticed between the inclusion of young people in the consultation processes between individual BSR countries, in particular between the EU countries, and Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Estonia³⁴. In 2002, the topic of youth and youth policy became an important area of the organization's work. That year, youth participated in the BSSSC main conference for the first time. It was a significant change in dealing with

28 P. Pospieszna, A. Galus, *Promoting active youth: evidence from Polish NGO's civic education programme in Eastern Europe*, "Journal of International Relations and Development" 2018, doi:10.1057/541268-018-0134-4.

29 K. Kern, op. cit., pp. 21-35.

30 I. Kapaciauskaite, *Environmental governance in the Baltic Sea Region and the role of non-governmental actors*, "Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences" 2011, vol. 14, pp. 90-100.

31 M. Szulc, *Współpraca subregionalna...*

32 Youth policy in the BSSSC can be discussed against the backdrop of youth policy conducted in the Baltic Sea Region. An interesting example of youth participation can be that of the South Baltic Parliamentary Forum, which was extensively covered in the 2009 report on the "The Step towards Democracy" project. An interesting analysis on youth policy in the Baltic Sea Region is also presented in the article *Civic participation of young people in the South Baltic region. The example of Lithuania, Poland and Sweden* (2020). These are interesting items; nevertheless, the author in this article tried to present the perspective of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland narrowed down to the youth policy conducted under the BSSSC.

33 BSSSC Resolution, 1994, www.bsssc.com [15.04.2021].

34 Interview nr 1 with Anna Golec, first BSSSC youth coordinator.

youth issues, as the youth were involved in the work of the organization. Through this activity, Youth was allowed to express her opinion on the current problems of the BSR and co-decide about the future of youth policy in the BSSSC. Between 2002 and 2004, many different youth seminars were organized. The BSSSC Ad hoc Working Group on Youth Policy³⁵ was established in March 2004.

The analysis of the resolution³⁶ of this organization shows that youth policy is undoubtedly an important area of work of the BSSSC. The word “Youth” was used most often in conference resolutions in 1996 (as many as 42 times) when the workshop devoted to youth policy was discussed. The number of uses of the word Youth in resolutions is not, however, a value directly proportional to the BSSSC’s activity in the field of youth policy. Although currently young people in the BSSSC are more and more active, they have many separate meetings³⁷, and the place devoted to them in resolutions is not always appropriate for this activity.

In 2005, a resolution welcomed the BSSSC Youth Network and committed to supporting its work. The document stated that BSSSC “acknowledges the youth point of views and their participation in the work of BSSSC and will support the opportunities for young people to meet and exchange experiences”³⁸. From that year, youth representatives were included in the BSSSC Board as full members of the body³⁹.

In 2014, when describing WGYF, it was noted that “BSSSC shall have a Youth Network consisting of at least one representative from each of the BSR countries. The Youth Network shall convene at least twice a year – one of them being in connection with the annual conference. The Youth Network shall elect two members to the Board for a two-year period at the time. The Youth Network can take part in all the work of the BSSSC”⁴⁰.

The functioning and representativeness of youth in WGYF is determined, inter alia, by youth delegation to the BSSSC Board. Based

35 Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation, www.bsssc.com [15.04.2021].

36 Resolutions of BSSSC from 1994 till 2019.

37 Interview nr 2 with Małgorzata Ludwiczek, BSSSC youth coordinator 2005-2019.

38 BSSSC Resolution 2005, www.bsssc.com [15.04.2021].

39 Interview nr 2 with Małgorzata Ludwiczek, BSSSC youth coordinator 2005-2019.

40 Terms of Reference, 2014, www.bsssc.com [15.04.2021].

on interviews with BSSSC youth policy coordinators, interviews with youth members of the BSSSC Board, and analysis of BSSSC documents and brochures, it was established that the BSSSC Board was composed of the following persons:

1.	Venla Hatakka	2019-2021	Finland
2.	Agnes Lusti	2018-2020	Norway
3.	Martin Rümmelein	2017-2019	Germany
4.	Timo Nikolaisen	2016-2018	Norway
5.	Kari Lie	2015-2017	Norway
6.	Nelliija Karpusenkova	2015-2016	Latvia
7.	Hanna Kivimäki	2013-2015	Finland
8.	Kevin Kiraga	2012-2014	Poland
9.	Vladimir Svet	2011-2013	Estonia
10.	Ingrid Klemp	2010-2012	Norway
11.	Paweł Grządko	2009-2011	Poland
12.	Gerd Tarand	2007-2010	Estonia
13.	Alexandra Ehlers	2007-2009	Germany
14.	Laase Lehre	2005-2007	Norway

These data indicate that since the beginning of the presence of young people in the BSSSC, the Board was represented by a total of 14 young people. The longest, 3 years, who served his term was Gerd Tarand of Estonia (3 years). In 15 years in the BSSSC, Board attendance included five people from Norway, two people from Estonia, two from Poland, two from Finland, two from Germany, and one from Latvia. Absent in the Council were members from Denmark, Sweden, and Latvia. This is due to the fact that a person who wants to be a member of the youth council must have the financial support of their region.

3. Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Polish Youth in BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy – methodology, research and results

Research on the activity of young people from Polish, Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian regions in the BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy was based on qualitative interviews with people who coordinated youth cooperation in the BSSSC over the years (Anna Golec, Małgorzata Ludwiczek, Christopher Lucht) and two regional coor-

dinators (Rita Merza – Latvia, Tiiu Kadak – Estonia). In-person and telephone interviews were conducted between July and September 2020 and took the form of a casual conversation in which the researcher responded to the information provided by the respondents.

As it was noted earlier, interviews with the BSSSC coordinators from various periods did not allow the selection of any person who coordinated the participation of young people from Lithuanian regions in BSSSC meetings. It is also problematic to determine on what basis a given person can be called a regional coordinator. For the Youth Cooperation in BSSSC coordinator, this is strictly defined, but this is much more difficult to define in the case of regional coordination, especially if there are no units responsible for youth in the regions cooperating with the BSSSC (as is the case in West Pomerania). During the analysis, it was assumed that such people may be figures who were contact persons for the Youth Coordinator and who looked after a youth from the given regions. The adoption of such assumptions made it possible to select two coordinators: Rita Merza from Latvia and Kiiu Kadak from Estonia. It is worth noting that the third person who could be included in this group is Małgorzata Ludwiczek from West Pomerania. Due to the fact that for 14 years she was the coordinator of the entire BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy, she was asked questions about the activity of West Pomerania in the BSSSC.

As indicated by the data collected in the previous chapter, Polish, Estonian, and Latvian regions had their youth representatives on the BSSSC Board. Lithuania has never had a representative. This may be related to the fact that Lithuania has so far lacked a regional youth coordinator. This situation shows how important it is to support regional youth cooperation.

The first coordinator of youth cooperation was Anna Golec from the Pomeranian Voivodeship, who pointed out that the beginnings of youth policy in the BSSSC date back to 2000-2005. The longest role of the coordinator was performed by Małgorzata Ludwiczek (2005-2019) from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Christopher Lucht from Brandenburg has been in office since 2019. The scope of duties of the WGYP coordinator is specified in an internal document called Rules and Procedure for BSSSC Youth Coordinator of 3 December 2018. According to the document, “the youth coordinator has coordinated the BSSSC youth network and co-organized two youth events every

year. The working group has also given oral reports and information in the Board meetings”.

Coordinators were asked about their beginnings in youth policy in the BSSSC, about the involvement of young people from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland compared to other BSR countries, and about the involvement of politicians from countries that joined the EU in 2004.

The beginning of work on youth policy in the BSSSC covers a different period for each of the coordinators. Anna Golec, who was the coordinator creating youth policy in the BSSSC, reports that the idea of youth policy was born during the Gdańsk presidency of the BSSSC in 2000. It was noticed then that in the Scandinavian and German regions, there were Youth Parliaments who functioned completely differently than through cooperation of youth with politicians in Poland. In Scandinavia, young people were included in the consultation processes. Young people could take part in trials, and their voice was important in the discussion and in making decisions. The BSSSC youth policy was to support the process of creating a real dialogue in Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian regions concentrated in the BSSSC, and to include German and Scandinavian youth on the next level of decision-making and consultation. Małgorzata Ludwiczek, a coordinator who developed and stabilized youth policy in the BSSSC, began coordinating youth policy by managing a unit dealing with youth policy in West Pomerania. Christopher Lucht has been the coordinator since 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that his duties are not the same as those specified in the documentation for the coordinator.

The coordinators agreed that there were significant differences between the countries that joined the EU in 2004. Christopher Lucht said that Poland, next to Norway, is one of the most active countries when it comes to involvement in youth policy. Anna Golec, recalling her activity in the BSSSC, noted that when it comes to the Pribaltics countries, Estonia stood out from the very beginning because, in her opinion, digitization in Estonia is much higher than in other countries. These opinions coincide with the involvement of young people from Poland and Estonia on the BSSSC Board. A. Golec also noticed that from the very beginning of the cooperation the share of youth from Pribaltica was much lower than the share of youth from Poland.

The longest-serving WGYF coordinator was M. Ludwiczek from West Pomerania; therefore, her observations turned out to be the most valuable in the conducted analysis. By identifying difficulties in the involvement of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, she indicated that maintaining cooperation with regions from these countries is difficult over the long term. Firstly, because young people grow up resulting in a lack of continuity, as in the case of issues related to transportation or tourism. The second factor that has been identified is changes in administrative structures, during which the topic of youth policy is omitted and reassigned to a specific person in terms of competencies. An example of such a situation are the changes in the administrative structure of Lithuania in 2009, which resulted in the removal of the regional level, which was active in the BSSSC.

The example of Estonia-Tallinn shows how important the role of the regional coordinator is. For many years, Tiiu Kadak was the person responsible for interregional cooperation in the BSSSC. As a result, Estonia was active, and thanks to its support, young people from Estonia could become a youth representative on the BSSSC Board.

The activity of young people from Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland can be most easily observed when analysing the number of people from regions from these countries in the youth network in the BSSSC Board. The data from the previous chapter show that young people from Poland and Estonia are very active, and that those from Latvia are weaker, and the weakest are from Lithuania. Rita Merza stated that during her collaboration with the BSSSC, few young people from Latvia and the other Baltic States attended the meetings. She also noticed that there were differences in this activity between Poland and the Baltic states. She stated that Poland was more interested and active. When diagnosing the problems of low involvement of Latvian youth in the BSSSC, she pointed out that some expected that everything would be organized for them (travels, plans). She decided that it was related to a lack of experience and independence. While analysing the situation of young people from Estonia, Tiiu Kadak stated that there have been no difficulties on the Estonian side. Participation of young people in BSSSC activities has always been funded by the sponsoring organization (Tallinn City Government), and the young people have not had to bear any costs. Since 2007, the youth network has included two youth representatives as plenipotentiaries of the

BSSSC board. The representative of Estonia was elected to the Management Board for the first time in 2007 and for the second time in 2009. Board meetings were held four times a year, during which the costs of participation were also covered so that the young people did not have to bear the costs themselves. The statements of Rita Merz, Tiiu Kadak, and information obtained from Małgorzata Ludwiczek showed a fundamental difference between Latvia and Poland or Estonia. In the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship, the regional unit, the Secretariat for Youth of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship organizes flights and the trip, and in Tallinn the sending unit, i.e. Tallinn City Government, is also responsible for this. This difference is significant in the availability of trips for young people from these countries. Due to the lack of regional coordination, participation of young people from Lithuania may become even more difficult. Besides, the great independence that people from Lithuania or Latvia had to show in order to participate makes it practically impossible for them to be on the BSSSC Board.

An important issue in the analysis of youth policy is cooperation with regional and local authorities and parliaments. R. Merza noted that in Latvia there is no involvement of politicians in supporting youth participation in the BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy. M. Ludwiczek stated that the involvement of politicians is more of not disturbing than supporting. She also noted that for political involvement to be possible, there should be cooperation from many sides. Youth in cooperation should propose to politicians specific solutions that possible to implement. A. Golec, speaking about political commitment, stated that the Scandinavian countries had a completely different culture of cooperation with young people than the Baltic states or Poland. There is a partnership there, and we talked about building the partnership. We have traditions concerning political youth. And the Youth Council and the youth party are completely different. According to her, we have not had experience in building youth councils in Poland, and we are probably learning it to this day. We have a completely different model of cooperation. Tiiu Kadak noted that the members of the Estonian Youth Council and the Tallinn Youth Council from Estonia participated in the activities of the BSSSC youth network. Tallinn Youth Council is a group of young people working at Tallinn Council. After each of the network's youth events, the young people

introduced their activities to politicians. The sponsoring organization (Tallinn City Government) also found resources for participation of young people in the network.

Conclusion

The Baltic Sea Region has been a region of extensive cooperation regarding its development for many years. Initially, the attention of regional actors focused on issues related to the development and ecology of the macroregion. Over the years, new issues have emerged as environmental issues. One of them is youth policy.

Multilateral cooperation in the BSR is possible based on a multi-level approach, thanks to which it is possible to involve many entities from different levels of government. Thanks to MLG, we can consider youth policy at the macro-regional (in the BSR), regional, and local levels and that cooperation with young people from other regions and local communities and the activity of young people in organizations such as the BSSSC is possible. The theory of ACF P. Sabatier is also the theory supporting the explanation of the foundations of cooperation within the framework of youth policy. When examining youth policy in the BSR, we can observe that the intensity and quality of this policy depend on the commitment and the so-called beliefs of the actors of this policy. The study showed that the more involved the actors, whether youth, politicians, or youth workers, the higher the quality of youth policy in the BSR by individual regions.

In this article, attention was paid to the development of youth policy in the pan-Baltic body of the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation. The choice of the case study was not accidental. Youth policy has been an important issue in the BSSSC almost since its inception. Another element selected for the analysis, youth policy conducted by entities from specific countries that joined the EU as the last of the BSR, provided interesting results of the analysis. The accession of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland to the EU was a challenge for the Europeanization processes in the Baltic Sea Region. It created a number of new opportunities but was also a big challenge. Connecting the common interests of countries such as Germany or Sweden with countries such as Lithuania or Latvia was a very difficult task.

The interviews conducted with people responsible for youth policy in the BSSSC showed that Poland and Estonia found themselves in the best spot in the new reality of interregional cooperation in the field of youth policy, i.e. countries bordering the countries that have been in the European Union for longer (Germany, Finland). The Secretariat for Youth in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, created in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, undoubtedly stands out from the rest of the BSR countries that joined the EU in 2004. Despite the passage of many years since Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia joined the BSSSC, there are still visible disproportions between the indicated countries. Lithuania and Latvia are still much less active than Poland and Estonia. In the opinion of people involved in the cooperation, this situation is not expected to change soon.

The low involvement of Lithuania and Latvia is an extremely worrying phenomenon because it may indicate deficiencies in the macro-regional and European integration of Lithuanian and Latvian entities and the failure by these entities to take advantage of all the opportunities offered by joining the EU. It is also disturbing that the people involved in youth policy in the BSSSC do not indicate any possibilities to improve this situation. Currently, there are no active actions that could change this situation.

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Interviews

Interview nr 1 with Anna Golec , first BSSSC youth coordinator.

Interview nr 2 with Małgorzata Ludwiczek, BSSSC youth coordinator 2005-2019.

Interview nr 3 with Christopher Lucht, BSSSC youth coordinator 2019-present.

Interview nr 4 with Rita Merza, youth coordinator from Latvia.

Interview nr 5 with Tiiu Kadak, youth coordinator from Estonia.

Issues discussed during the interviews

Beginning of participation of young people from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy.

Differences in the involvement of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland in BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy.

Involvement and support of regional authorities for youth participation in BSSSC Working Group on Youth Policy.

Youth cooperation with local/regional authorities in the discussed countries.