

Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue 2021:

Looking forward, looking back – 30 years of Collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region

My whole life I have lived in Berlin, Germany and appreciated this country for what it is.

One of my cousins moved to Copenhagen, Denmark to study and now she has been living there for 5 years. I visited her two years ago and loved the city and especially the vibe.

My other cousin is currently staying in Stockholm, Sweden to do her master's programme.

This summer my sister went on a road trip with her two best friends. They started in Germany and travelled through Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia while being also close to the Russian border.

I personally am a huge fan of Iceland, always have been and always will be. Last year I was able to travel the whole country together with my father and my sister.

Somehow, I always recognised all these different countries on their own but for a long time I never realised how all of them are connected. Until one day it occurred to me – it's the Baltic Sea! The countries, I have had the privilege to visit myself or at least know people that did, belong to the Baltic Sea Region and at the same time are some of the 11 member states of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

So, in general I have always been interested in the region but only had very few knowledge about the geography, the history, the politics and so on. For example, in my history or geography classes, the Baltic Sea region was never a topic and not discussed at all, which is probably one of the reasons it took me so long to understand and to think it through.

The Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue – I have heard of it for the first time this year and immediately wanted to participate. I told my sister about it, and she was very motivated too! We both thought of it as a great opportunity to learn more about the region while also getting in touch with others.

I listened to the lectures on the three main topics with great interest, was amazed by the speakers and their explanations and loved gaining insight.

What was striking to me, was the presentation of Aline Mayr on regional identity.

When showing us her first slide, she explained what an identity is by giving a brief definition and then she asked: Do you feel the Baltic Sea Region we-feeling?

And I must say this question blew my mind:

How come after all this time I have never considered it? But yes, I definitely feel a connection to the Baltic Sea Region and the other member states! I am not only German and European but also identify with the Baltic Sea Region. There is a strong bond I was never really aware of.

It was a beautiful moment of realisation and took me some time to fully process.

But immediately after, I also understood that there is still a lot of work to do...

Firstly, because just feeling connected does not automatically mean being connected.

And secondly, because I was certain, there are many other people in the same situation, not having discovered this specific connection yet. If it needed me to participate in the Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue and listen to this lecture to realize, the idea of an identity of the Baltic Sea Region must be spread and be more present!

Which is why I was pleased with how Aline continued explaining that since 1922 it is the mission of the CBSS to create this feeling of togetherness and to pave the way for cross-country collaborations. As the three main fields, the CBSS is engaged in, are youth, culture and higher education, it was very helpful and motivating to see the numerous projects and collaborations taking place.

Moreover, I figured the CBSS also stands for values, such as treating all parties equally, banning racism and discrimination. In my opinion, respect and equality are the most important basis for cooperating, which is why I became a big supporter of the mission.

After the lecture, a participant asked about the specific role of the youth, which led to a fruitful discussion. In the end it became very clear, that the youth plays a very important role for our future. We need motivated people working on and supporting collaborations, who learn from their own experiences and at the same time give new input. Involving the youth means a lot of potential – not only short-term but also long-term.

To sum up, I learned so much about the situation in the Baltic Sea Region, several collaborations and the importance of youth.

Now it is my personal goal to keep travelling, getting to know different cultures and finding friends all over the region. I will deepen my bond to the Baltic Sea Region. I am young and want to use this strength by engaging more, raising awareness and spreading the idea of the we-feeling.

Furthermore, I want to promote exchange across the borders and participate in more events to provide input myself and receive inspiration from others. Right now, I am planning to integrate these goals into my every-day life. All in all, I am grateful for what I learned so far and looking forward to learning so much more.

Learning Diary by Josephine Alder