



UNGDOMSSTYRELSEN
www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se

So far and yet so near

Young people building networks across the seas

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (Ungdomsstyrelsen)

is a governmental authority working within four activity fields:

We allocate public funds and work with method development within *young peoples' Leisure and associative activities*, as well as within *International Youth Exchanges*.

We support the development of *Local youth policies* and follow-up the *National youth policy*.

Contents

3	Preface	22	Young people an asset in the Barents region <i>Column: Birgitta Nilsson</i>
4	Introduction		
6	Lost among the expectations <i>Column: John Hultén</i>	24	36 girls
8	The journalists	26	Ten days in Poland
10	Around the Baltic Sea	28	African dance among the pine trees
12	Face to face	30	Making a real difference <i>Column: Åsa Olsson</i>
14	The journey that never ends <i>Column: Tori Carlsson</i>	32	Language as a springboard
16	Mines, eagles – and the Sami	34	Influence – a fluid concept
18	Environmental exchange with Russia	36	Important events
20	Just like a film	38	Ideas for your project...
		42	Plans of action

©The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs 2003

editors Roger Johansson/Ingrid Bohlin • *translation* JNG Writing Group AB • *text* Timothy Hebb
graphic design/cover picture Christián Serrano • *printer* Kristianstads Boktryckeri AB
distribution Ungdomsstyrelsen, Ringvägen 100, PO Box 17801, 118 94 Stockholm, Sweden
tfn +46 8-462 53 50 • *fax* +46 8-644 88 13 • *e-mail* info@ungdomsstyrelsen.se • *website* www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se

Preface

Young people – a force for the development of networks

In *So far and yet so near* we present 11 projects that all have one thing in common – they are projects for young people in the Barents and Baltic region. They have also all received support from the Swedish State Inheritance Fund's programme *Youth Co-operation in the Barents and Baltic Region*. The projects differ from each other in several ways. They have different themes and different types of organisation and association are involved, but they can all provide inspiration for future projects.

The brochure also contains four personal reflections on what it is like to work internationally in the region and why it is so important to do so. The authors have worked in various types of organisation and at different levels, i.e. locally, regionally and nationally, for several years. Their reflections give us an insight into what a joint region can mean for people in these areas.

All of the youth projects that have received support from the Barents and Baltic programme are building bridges across national borders. These are bridges of greater understanding and togetherness and they are forming an extensive network of contacts between individuals and associations.

We hope that this booklet will inspire you to develop your own international youth projects in the Barents and Baltic region. We also hope that it will arouse your curiosity about the cultures and peoples who are often perceived as being so far away from, yet so close to, our region so that everyone can become a part of the growing network.

Roger Johansson
Executive Officer
The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs

Introduction

Background

The Barents and Baltic region consists of 11 countries: Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Poland and Germany. There has been trade and co-operation between the people of these countries for many centuries. The intensity of these contacts has, however, varied over the years.

During the 18th century, the overriding aim of the different nation states was to gain the upper-hand at the expense of neighbouring states by acquiring control of important ports and trade routes. In the 20th century, co-operation between many of the states was hindered by ideological differences. Irrespective of the point in time, however, co-operation in the region has primarily involved state authorities or companies.

The last ten years have seen a dramatic change. Co-operation no longer takes place only between governments, for

example through foreign ministries, or between companies. Players such as municipalities, youth organisations and youth recreation centres, as well as labour market programmes, have developed networks and contacts as a means of exchanging experience on how members of other societies view democracy, influence, racism and their daily lives. The aim of co-operation these days is to develop a joint region based on curiosity about the culture, traditions and everyday life of the neighbouring countries.

This has led to a major shift in our attitudes to each other. It is no longer a question of gaining the upper-hand, but of realising that both parties can benefit and develop from co-operation.

Government support for youth work

The Swedish government believes that it is important to give young people the opportunity to develop contacts in the Barents and Baltic region. Apart from participation in the various EU support

programmes that cover the states in the region, the government has allocated special national funds to increase contacts between young people in the region.

Youth work in the Barents and Baltic region

The government has set up a special programme, which is managed by the National Board for Youth Affairs, for co-operation in the youth field. The government initiated this programme through the Swedish State Inheritance Fund in connection with the Baltic Sea Ministers Conference in Visby in 1998. The programme will run until 31 December 2003. A total of SEK 19 million has been granted to support development in the region by encouraging international co-operation between youth organisations.

From 1998 until the end of November 2002, a total of 244 project applications were received and 145 were awarded grants. Youth exchange projects are the most common type of project in the programme. It is possible, however, to run other types of project, for example training courses for voluntary youth workers and international seminars for social workers, or the development of joint web sites on which various issues can be discussed and voted on.

Priority should be given to projects concerning:

- exchange schemes for young people and youth workers,
- joint training courses for, and activities designed to provide contacts between, young people and youth workers,
- the development of schemes for the exchange of information and experience, especially over the Internet and through local and regional support centres,
- the documentation, translation and distribution of information material.

Projects that cover at least three countries and projects that have a base in the Barents region are given special priority. Projects that involve young members of the indigenous peoples* in the Barents region are particularly encouraged. Only non-profit youth associations in Sweden may submit project applications to the National Board for Youth Affairs.

*The indigenous peoples of the Barents region are: the Sami, the Komi, the Vepsi and the Nenetsi.

Column

Text: John Hultén, Project Manager, The Baltic Institute

Lost among our expectations

I recently visited a city in Greece. Before the trip, I envisaged a landscape marked by white houses with vine-covered walls, bright sunshine and clear-blue water. The reality was a large city marked by traffic chaos, broken pavements and worn and dirty concrete buildings – even the sun was conspicuously absent.

The city hardly matched my expectations. It struck me that it more closely matched the general image of a city in Russia or Lithuania. Greece is supposed to offer heat, vivid colour and cheerful bartenders, while Eastern Europe is all grey concrete and grumpy babushkas. The grey and dull image of Eastern Europe that is etched in the minds of many Swedes means that a youth camp in Portugal or a term's study in Canada hold a lot more attraction than a visit to Kaliningrad or studies at a university in Riga. It is easy to get lost among our expectations.

Meetings undermine our prejudices

I believe that prejudices and preconceived notions are very natural. We try to impose order on a chaotic world by simplifying and generalising. Problems arise, of course, when our generalisations are based on ignorance rather

than on knowledge, and when they lead to perceptions of the world around us that are solely positive or solely negative. The schools play an important role as forums in which we can acquire more knowledge, but we need more than schoolbooks if we are to understand something as subtle as cultural differences, we need to learn by actually meeting people from other cultures. At the Baltic Institute, we work to create such meetings between young people.



www.balticinstitute.se

We do this by arranging exchange weeks, grants for studies abroad and Internet forums.

Recently, we arranged an exchange week for 40 young people from 10 countries in the Baltic region. Afterwards, a German girl said: "Before the meeting, I just saw it as a chance to get off school for a week and I didn't expect it to break down any prejudices, but it really worked!" I am convinced that she is right, youth exchanges do actually work and this is why they are an important means of increasing understanding between people. In the Baltic region, such an understanding is a precondition for co-operation in the future on important issues like economic development, political stability and solutions to environmental problems.

Youth networks are popular

During the two years that I have worked with youth co-operation in the Baltic region, I have tried to get an overview of the networks that exist and the sorts of project that are being run. At first, it seemed that there were an endless number. The fact that, for some reason, all the networks and projects have similar names added to the confusion: BYA, BYS, BYF, BSYP, BYC and BSYP are some examples.

Eventually, however, I realised that there were not as many as I first thought, although there were still quite a few. I usually simplify things by dividing these networks and projects into two main categories: those that relate to voluntary organisations and those that

relate to schools. Another division can be made between those that concern multilateral exchanges that cover all, or at least many, of the countries in the region, and those that concern only bilateral exchanges.

All in all, therefore, there is a lot of activity, and it is encouraging that so many organisations have a genuine interest in running projects for young people. A German researcher noted recently that youth networks are the most common type of network among voluntary associations in the region. Youth exchanges are also common among the municipalities. Almost 200 of Sweden's 289 municipalities have one or more twin towns in Central and Eastern Europe, and youth exchanges are a common element of such twin-town relationships.

Many young people have thus been able to take part in exchanges in the Baltic region since the end of the Cold War. In order to combat the prejudices that we still have, however, even more must be given the opportunity to take part.

BYA – Baltic Youth Assembly

BYS – Baltic Youth Symposium

BYF – Baltic Youth Forum

BSYP – Baltic Sea Youth Project

BYC – Baltic Youth Conference

BSYP – Baltic Sea Youth Festival



The journalits

An e-mailing list was the prelude to an international seminar for students around the Baltic Sea and an opportunity for them to really get to know each other. "We planned the structure of the seminar together with the foreign students," says Maria Staf, a member of the Swedish planning group.

The meeting between students of journalism from Sweden, Russia and other Baltic countries took place over three days at the beginning of August 2002. Some 34 delegates, most of whom were around 22 years of age, gathered at the anthroposophists' course centre just outside Järna in Sweden.

The Swedish participants were no strangers to the others. They had already travelled around and met the students from the Barents and Baltic region as part of another project. Many of the participants had also read each other's comments on the e-mailing list *Baltic Journalist*, which formed the basis for this exchange.

"This means that there was really no need to break the ice, but it would also have been possible to conduct the exchange without the personal contacts that had already been established," Maria says.

Similarities and differences

The participants presented themselves to each other in small groups of five.

"The introduction consisted of presenting yourself in a playful way to the large group by way of the small group," Maria says.

The issues that were then discussed involved everyone and related, among other things, to the populist stereotypes that the different countries have of each other. For example that "Swedes are cold" and "Russians are hot-tempered". Following the screening of a documentary about the homeless in Tartu in Estonia, a spontaneous discussion on the ethics of journalism began.

"Matti Kark, who made the film, is a member of the network. He was asked how he got the people in the film to take part. He had simply spoken to them, and had not paid them anything. Two Lithuanian students then said that it was common to pay interviewees for their participation. It turned out that that some of the students were against the idea of giving gifts for interviews, while others thought that "there is nothing wrong with it, it helps to speed things up," Maria says.

"It was a very interesting discussion, and

definitely not one-way. The different nationalities questioned each other just as much. There was an even relationship between the parties to the discussion," Maria explains.

The most rewarding thing about the meeting, according to Maria, was that a group of people gathered together from countries that "we Swedes have a rather strange view of."

"It was also fun to see how people made contacts across national borders. Hopefully, these contacts will endure and really pay off."

A good mix at the dinner table

What then, are the potential rewards that these contacts may provide in the future?

"Well, people will be able to exchange experiences, tip each other off about ideas for articles and borrow a bed for the night if they are visiting each other's countries to work," answers Maria, who is studying journalism at the Södertörn University College.

Maria feels that one lesson to be learned from the meeting is that it would have been better to avoid having people divide into national and language groups at the dinner table. She also feels that the

programme should have been planned more carefully.

"We didn't have enough time. We could have done with thinking things through a little more."

In order to encourage the frequent use of the e-mailing list, the participants have decided not to put any limits on the level of the mails sent.

"People should be able to write whatever they want, and this makes it easier to keep the mails coming. On the list at the moment you can read everything from simple greetings to mails about the confidence of the Lithuanian public in the media."

She hopes that the network will endure.

"It would be great to extend it to other countries, but we mustn't do this too quickly as there is a risk that things would then become too unstructured."

A report has been compiled on the reactions of the participants, whether the meeting lived up to expectations, what was good and what was bad and so on.

"The most positive thing in this case is that the participants were most dissatisfied with the fact that the food was vegetarian. If this is all they had to complain about, I think that we can be very pleased with what we achieved," Maria says.

Project data

Swedish organisation: Baltic Journalists in co-operation with Studieförbundet (The Study Promotion Association) in Huddinge-Botkyrka

Project name: Baltic Journalists Summer Conference

Project manager: Maria Staf

Theme: The project aimed to develop a network of journalists from Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden. Over the course of three days, they exchanged knowledge and experience about their respective countries.

E-mail: mariastaf@spray.se



Around the Baltic Sea

“Several new European countries are about to become members of the EU. We wanted to give them the opportunity to meet some of those who already have experience of Europe,” says Jesper Magnusson, Chief Co-ordinator of a Baltic network called The Baltic Sea Federalists (BSF).

Young European Federalists in Sweden, which is the organisation responsible for the project, is independent in political and religious terms. The BSF network also includes sister organisations in Finland, Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Germany, Denmark and Norway.

The aim of the network is to help the various organisations plan new activities and, by working together, become more effective in their efforts to promote a more democratic and united Europe. Through JEF (Jeunes Européens Fédéralistes), its parent organisation at the European level, Young European Federalists in Sweden has the opportunity to influence the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Growing network

It was in September 2001 that Jesper and a young man from Germany got the idea of forming a network for the Baltic region. The network has now grown and the collaborating organisations together have

over 7 000 members. These are contacted by means of three different e-mailing lists and the network’s own magazine.

“We can now meet and listen to each other’s views on Europe. Some of the countries have already come a long way, while others are on the threshold,” says Jesper, who first became interested in EU issues in 1992 and then played an active role in the campaign preceding the referendum on membership two years later.

So far there have been eight meetings. How many people attend a meeting depends on the nature of the meeting concerned. Five to ten delegates usually attend the less intensive meetings. Larger meetings – that is meetings that include seminars and discussions of the network and policy – may be attended by between 30 and 70 delegates.

The network publishes a magazine that Jesper is responsible for. The discussions conducted in the forum of this magazine, and the themes raised there, often determine the issues discussed at the next meeting.

"The issue currently under production focuses on racism and xenophobia, which seem to be widespread in the Baltic region," Jesper says.

"At the summer camp held in Latvia last year, it became apparent that there are racist tendencies in some of the countries. This is worrying, so we are now discussing the problem of integration in the Baltic region."

Jesper feels that it is positive that the network allows for an objective discussion on this difficult subject.

A lot of know-how in the network

The three e-mailing lists guarantee the communication that is required to keep the network afloat. The first constitutes a virtual editorial council for the magazine, and generates a lot of discussions. The second covers some 40 participants who decide on meetings, activities and the issues that should be discussed. The third is purely a channel for providing information to the members.

"But, if we never met face to face the network would collapse," Jesper says.

At the moment, the network is very loosely organised, there are no rules and regulations as yet. The commitment and enthusiasm of the members is still sufficient to keep the network thriving.

Jesper is also proud of the fact that so many knowledgeable people have become involved.

"There is a good spread. There are several political scientists who are specialists on different aspects of the EU. If we need to learn more about a specific aspect, then the person who knows most about the area concerned can teach the rest of us," he says. Jesper himself is about to present his doctoral thesis in microbiology.

So what's next? In early 2003, the network will run a campaign aimed at the upper-secondary schools. This will include seminars and debates on current EU issues.

"We are also producing joint arguments and joint campaign material for the approaching EU referendums in the Baltic region," says Jesper.

Project data

Swedish organisation: Young European Federalists

Collaborating organisations: Europaeisk ungdom (JEF), Denmark; Mosavahe, Estonia, JEF-Fin, Finland; Lietuvos Jaunieji Europos Federalisai, Latvia; Klubs "Maja" – jaunatne vienotai Eiropai, Lithuania; Europeisk Ungdom (JEF), Norway; JEF-PL, Poland; Molodye Rossisyskkiye Federalisty Russia; Russia; JEF-Schleswig Holstein

Project name: Co-operation in the Barents and Baltic Region

Project manager: Jesper Magnusson

Theme: The development of a network and of co-operation between EU-federalist youth organisations in the Barents and Baltic region.

E-mail: jesper.magnusson@mikrob.slu.se

Website: www.ungaeuropeer.org

Face to face



Building a network over the Internet alone is difficult. It is only when people meet in real life that they can form a deeper bond.

"We quickly became good friends when we finally met," says Monika Laurinaviciute, one of the approximately 20 moderators on the E-parliament website for young people around the Baltic Sea.

The aim of meeting face to face in Karlskrona for the first three-day meeting in August 2001 was clear – to plan the creation of the E-parliament web forum.

At the time of writing (November 2002), the website has 350 registered members. Some 30 to 50 of these are, according to Monika, very active in terms of contributing to the discussion and voting.

Active members

"The subjects under discussion just now range from whether advertising should be regulated or not to the hostage tragedy in Moscow. The members themselves can vote on the issues that are being debated. We moderators are there to check that no insulting or

offensive comments slip in," says Monika, who comes from Klaipeda, a harbour town in Lithuania.

Many countries are involved: Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. The 20 or so young people who are acting as moderators are between the ages of 17 to 25. Most of them are around 18.

The E-parliament website, which was launched in February 2002, is intended to provide a forum in which young people can discuss important issues and vote on them. Members are now also approaching politicians in order to promote the views that have crystallised on the website.

"In the spring of 2003, we aim to be more active at the local level, but we are

already visiting schools, libraries and other public forums to present our activities.”

Meetings determine the activities

Monika says that their work (members are required to put in two to three hours work per week) has already resulted in more members. Monika herself tries to do something every day. Moderators work in pairs over a three-week period. This week, Monika and her partner are responsible for the proposals on the site. Next week, they will have to make sure that the discussions are running smoothly, and in their final week they will be in charge of the voting.

The moderators have not only met in Karlskrona, but also for several days in Nida (Lithuania) in May 2002 and in Sopot (Poland) in September. Each of the meetings has had a theme. In Karlskrona, as mentioned above, it was the basis for a web forum that was discussed, as well as the technical aspects. This was where the moderators got to know each other. At the two following meetings

they evaluated the website and discussed its future.

”We try to improve something at each meeting,” Monika says. ”We are now writing articles for national newspapers in order to reach more young people.”

Monika tells us about her impressions of the first meeting. She feels that there was one very clear cultural difference between her compatriots and the Swedish participants.

”Young people in Sweden discuss things more than we do. I think debate is good, it is democratic.”

She has also discovered that, linguistically at least, Finns can understand Estonians, Lithuanians can understand Latvians, and Swedes can understand Danes – but the language used on the website is English.

When Monika is asked why she speaks such good English she answers that it is thanks to the E-parliament.

Project data

Swedish organisation: The Baltic Institute

Project name: E-parliament.net

Project manager: John Hultén

Theme: A website that young people can use to introduce and discuss various issues. Once an issue has been discussed, a vote is held in which all the participants can take part.

E-mail: jh@balticinstitute.se

Website: www.eparliament.net

Column

Text: Tori Carlsson, A-net, Ånäset

The journey that never ends

A website for youth exchanges provided the opportunity – we took the chance, jumped on the bandwagon and are still among the passengers. Over the course of the journey we have met a lot of interesting people in the Baltic countries and in Russia.

We found a good collaborator in Russia, and we experienced a lot of exciting situations there as their reality is so different to ours.

Among other things, we saw how proud the Russians are of their culture and their schools. They took us on a tour of a school and showed us their classrooms. Our Swedish youngsters thought that the classrooms were drab and in need of renovation, but the Russians themselves were so proud. An armed guard patrolled the school throughout the day, which our youngsters found very hard to understand – why is it necessary to guard a school? Who would go there unless they had to?

We were also allowed to sit in on a music lesson. The instruments were home made and looked rather strange, but everyone played and sang. It was obvious that they were having fun. Later, when we saw a folk-dance exhibition, we were envious of their ability.

Then it was our turn to take the stage. The pupils and teachers at the school formed an audience and bombarded us


with questions about Sweden and our culture. Then they wanted us to sing and dance for them. Help! After a moment of panic, we eventually remembered a song and dance that we usually perform during our midsummer celebrations.

Why do we know so little about our own traditions? Thank you for giving us the chance to increase our awareness of our own culture!

Different but the same

We Swedes are rather spoiled and a bit fussy about what we eat. We have come a long way towards understanding another culture and a different lifestyle when we can smile and say: "This soup is very good!" even though there are fish eyes and fish heads floating around in it. We have understood that our hosts are really offering us the best they have.

Comparing the way of life, interests and faith in the future in different countries is important. The Baltic countries and Russia have the same type of sparsely-populated, rural areas that we have here – so while we can help them with new ideas we can also learn



from them. Democracy and equality between men and women are areas in which Swedish youngsters excel and where they have something positive to share. These countries have succeeded in preserving their old traditions, something that we are not very good at in Sweden. Our youngsters have learnt from their attitude and now appreciate their own situation more.

”It is important to see the similarities, not just the differences.”

Everyone in Ånäset has been inspired

Not many people, of course, travel all the way from the Continent to northern Norrland and Ånäset. The Municipality of Robertsfors is small – the population is approximately 7 000. This is why we feel it is particularly important to give our young people the opportunity to broaden their horizons and to see that, even though we think we are different, we are basically very alike - it is just the cover that is diffe-

rent.

The motivation and the reward is to see how much our youngsters progress from hardly daring to say a word to standing in front of an audience and daring to speak about what they have done – in English! Or when the teachers from the school wonder what has happened when Margit, who is otherwise so quiet and shy, gets to her feet in the classroom for the first time to express an opinion.

The entire community has become involved, and no one now raises an eyebrow when someone speaks another language, we happily reply with a few phrases in English.

Our association is growing all the time. One of the basic ideas behind our activities is to help young people to grow by giving them greater responsibility and new experience. Our young leaders have a lot of new ideas for the future, so there is no doubt that the journey will continue.

Foto: Emma Bohlin





Mines, eagles – and the Sami

In the mining town of Apatity in the southern part of the Kola Peninsula, the focus is on issues affecting young Sami people.

“I hope that the exchange for future youth leaders will begin before Christmas 2002,” says Kurt Vanneböck, President of the Norrbotten branch of Unga Örnar (“The Young Eagles”, the Swedish section of the International Falcon Movement), and one of the initiators of the exchange with Russia.

This will be the first meeting for young people from four different countries, and the exchange will run over a period of four days.

It was last winter that Kurt and several other youth leaders met a large number of young people in Apatity and began to think about an exchange.

“The Sami culture has recently started to make a comeback in Apatity. During the Soviet era, the Sami were expected to blend in. They were Russified and discriminated,” says Kurt.

The people who will attend the meeting are between 17 and 25 years of age. Five are from Sweden, five from Norway and five from Finland, while 10 of them are from Russia. Some of them are Sami.

Create a network

Kurt is hoping that it will be possible to start up a Russian equivalent of the Swedish labour movement’s organisation for children and young people, Unga Örnar.

“Perhaps we will be able to share our knowledge of how a democratic association works, for example about how to run meetings and how to give everyone the opportunity to influence the group. These young people will play a decisive role in Russia in 10 years time.”

For the Nordic participants, the exchange will provide an opportunity to learn more about Russian culture.

“Our societies work differently even though we all surf on the Internet,” as Kurt expresses it.

Co-operation on the issue of Sami culture is one step along the way to greater understanding.

"I want to establish a lasting network, and I want exchanges between the countries to become natural. We are already setting up an e-mailing list."

The participants have been recruited in different ways. In Sweden they come from Unga Örnar in Norrbotten, in Russia they come from an environmental organisation in the Kola Peninsula.

"In Apatity, these young people will get to know one another, talk about their experience and examine their cultural differences and similarities," Kurt says. The participants from the various countries will therefore be divided into smaller groups.

The groups will learn more about the Sami in Russia from the woman who heads the museum in Apatity. She has also written several books on the Russian Sami.

"When we presented our ideas she became very interested, so she will be involved as a support on the Russian side. We will of course also visit the museum

in Apatity which has a large Sami section," Kurt says.

Can go wrong

Kurt is full of confidence, he sees no major threats on the horizon.

"It will be exciting to see how successful we will be in coping with language problems. Not everyone speaks English, so we will have interpreters with us."

In the next breath he adds:

"Still, you have to take into account that something can always go wrong, transportation for example."

Kurt knows - he has worked with youth camps before.

"The next step may be to arrange a camp for Sami youth in Samiland in Norway or Sweden.

A similar meeting to the one at Apatity is being planned for Kiruna in 2003. If it can be arranged during the summer holidays, this meeting will last for a week.

Kurt's dream is to sow the seeds of a lasting network that will then live its own life.

Project data

Swedish organisation: Unga Örnar Norrbotten

Collaborating organisations: Framfylkingen, Norway; Nuorten Kotkaienen Keskusliitto, Finland; Ekonord, Russia

Project name: The Sami Culture in the Barents Region Today

Project manager: Kurt Vannebäck

Theme: Forming a youth network in the Barents region to increase knowledge about, and to strengthen, the Sami culture of today.

E-mail: info@norrbotten.ungaornar.se

Website: www.norrbotten.ungaornar.se



Environmental exchange with Russia

Sweden has built up a strong environmental movement over several decades.

In Russia, this process is just beginning.

”People there feel that it is impossible to influence large companies,” says Alexei Usov, one of the four leaders of the Barents Green Community environmental exchange programme.

The programme’s first meeting took place outside Archangel in Russia in October 2002, when 12 young people from Sweden and Russia, all between the ages of 18 and 20, gathered over the course of 10 days. The aim of the exchange was, as expressed in the project application, to allow young people to “acquire new environmental and management skills”. Representatives from Russia and Finland, which are also part of the Barents Green Community, will meet at the same location in the near future to conduct a similar exchange.

Almost immediately, Alexei noticed major differences in Swedish and Russian attitudes to what can be achieved by means of environmental work.

”The Russians laughed when we said it was possible to influence authorities and companies to work for a better environment,” Alexei says.

”Some of the young people from Russia said that if you don’t want to have large industrial plants in your neighbourhood then you should move to the countryside.”

Consumer power

The Russians also felt that it was up to individuals to solve ecological problems

themselves, for example by purifying drinking water in the home and not at the factory.

As the exchange progressed, however, the young Russian participants became more and more convinced that it could be possible to influence authorities and companies.

”They hadn’t considered the fact that consumers have the power to influence production by deciding what and where to buy,” says Alexei, who otherwise works as a teacher of Russian, English, and French, as well as running computer network courses, at the Swedish-Finnish Folk High School in Haparanda.

The Swedish participants were either from Alexei’s school or young people from Norrland with an interest in the environment. The Russians were members of Terra Incognita, an environmental organisation in the Archangel region.

The meeting acted mainly as a forum for the exchange of experience. Everyone took part in group-dynamic exercises in order to get to know each other and listen to each other’s views. There were also cultural evenings, which Alexei feels were very rewarding. In effect, therefore, this was purely a youth exchange between the countries.

"The participants gained insights into how people in the two countries think and solve problems. In Russia, there are far fewer State funds that associations can apply to for money. It is more common there for associations to offer courses to the public or to apply for grants from private funds."

Manual for environmental work

The participants were divided into four mixed groups (4–5 people in each) that discussed various issues and then reported back to the others. There were several sessions each day.

They discussed, for example, the best way to inform young people in schools and associations, and they also learned how to discover environmental pollution.

At the moment, the leaders and the participants are compiling a manual based on the results of the project. This will present proposals on how to run effective environmental work in Russia, and on how to involve and reach out to people.

The manual will be printed and published on the Internet.

"The manual constitutes the framework that is needed to run environmental work," says Alexei. He hopes that the participants will now start up their own projects.

Does he have any regrets? Well, he wishes that the preparatory meeting that was held for a few young people and leaders from each of the countries in the middle of 2001 had been slightly different.

"We should have talked more to each other about the aim and the structure of the exchange in Archangel. The participants would then have been able to pass on this information to their friends. Another tip is to provide more information about the programme in advance," says Alexei.

The web site that was launched in December 2001 has not worked very well. Too few of the Russians have access to the Internet, and many of the Swedes said that they do not have time to read and send submissions.

Project data

Swedish organisation: Swedish-Finnish Folk High School

Collaborating organisations: Youth Ecological Movement "Terra Incognita", Russia; Institute of Ecological Problems of the North, Russia; Institute of Humanities in Murmansk, Russia

Project name: Barents Green Community

Project manager: Alexei Usov

Theme: The aim of the project was to develop contacts between environmental groups in the Barents region and to exchange knowledge, approaches and experience in the environmental field.

E-mail: alexei.usov@svefi.net

Website: www.bgc.svefi.net



Just like a film

In three days time, early on Saturday morning, they will meet in Jakobsberg, just outside Stockholm. From there, seven expectant girls from Sweden will travel to Vilnius to meet and discuss with an equal number of Lithuanian girls.

Dark-haired Sara Makhoul and blonde Josefin Eriksson are two of the Swedish participants. They both come from Jakobsberg and are 16 years old.

Sara and Josefin are looking forward to the exchange.

"It will be fun to experience a different environment and to see with my own eyes how people live in Lithuania," Josefin says.

The girls mention that they have seen Lukas Moodysson's heartrending film "Lilja 4-ever" about a young girl from the former Soviet Union who is lured to Sweden and then forced to work as a prostitute.

"The image in my head is that it is dirty and that there are prostitutes there, but our interpreter says it's a lot like Sweden," Josefin says.

Hard to unite

We meet the girls at the Social Services office in Jakobsberg. This is where Ingela Oskarsson, who is in charge of the Swedish group, works as a youth social worker.

Ingela, together with Dalia Stakėnaitė from Lithuania, lies behind the project. She has a clear idea of what she wants to achieve with the exchange:

"I hope that the girls will learn more about themselves and about others – that they will gain a greater understanding of the situation of girls in other countries. I also hope that they will realise just how well off they are in Sweden," Ingela says.

She hopes that the girls will confront themselves and see themselves as others see them. They will therefore talk about their attitudes to things like school, family

and drugs. The participants themselves have chosen the issues that they will discuss.

The Swedish group consists of two sub-groups. One is mainly made up of girls that the Social Services have come into contact with in the course of their field-work. The members of the other sub-group, in which two of the three girls have an immigrant background (Josefin's and Sara's group), spend more time studying than hanging around the centre of Jakobsberg at night.

"It has been hard to unite these two Swedish groups to form one group. If I were to do this again I would start with just one group from the beginning," Ingela says.

Spend time on planning

The girls have been consulted about a long of things, but Ingela feels that one thing could have been done differently.

"The girls should probably have been involved in the planning earlier. I am pleased with the co-operation with Lithuania though. We have e-mailed each other and Dalia has discussed the exchange with her girls and got their backing."

Josefin and Sara, however, feel that they have really been involved in the planning.

"The leaders wrote the schedule and asked what we thought. We changed one thing. Instead of two days in the countryside there will only be one," Josefin says with satisfaction.

Ingela also believes that it is important to devote sufficient time to the preparations and to think through what you really want to achieve with your trip and the entire exchange.

Personally, she feels that it will be interesting to see how the Lithuanian social workers work. She suspects that the decision-making process is quicker and simpler for her colleagues in Lithuania.

An older girl (21) will accompany the group as an interpreter, so Ingela does not believe that there will be any major language problems.

"I am curious about whether the trip will really give the girls something meaningful or whether it will just be a fun thing for them," she says.

She also wants the Swedish evaluation to be comparable to the evaluation conducted in Lithuania, as this will make it possible to analyse the results effectively.

When the Swedes return to Jakobsberg, one of Ingela's colleagues will interview the participants about their impressions, experiences and what they have got out of meeting the Lithuanian girls.

Project data

Swedish organisation: Fältverksamhetsenheten (Social Services Youth Unit), Järfälla

Collaborating organisation: All Saints Parish, Lithuania

Project name: Girls Group Trip to Lithuania

Project manager: Ingela Oskarsson

Theme: Three groups of girls, two Swedish and one Lithuanian, will discover each other's culture and discuss values relating to school, drugs and life in general.

E-mail: ingela.oskarsson@jarfalla.se

Column

Text: Birgitta Nilsson, County Administrative board of the County of Västerbotten

Young people an asset in the Barents region

Young people (like me ...) seldom have ingrained opinions or preconceived notions, I thought. We don't always rigidly follow the lines laid down by the State, by the schools or by a company. We are freethinkers, and act accordingly. Maybe if we were to gather together young people from the entire Barents region something good would come out of it – something for the future!

I first came into contact with the Barents region while I was working for the Norden Association in Umeå. I was supposed to arrange a meeting for young people from the northern parts of Sweden, Finland and Norway. It struck me that I could perhaps also invite Russian participants to see if we could collaborate. During the preparations I came to realise that there already was regional co-operation between the northern parts of these countries under the Barents scheme. But what was this all about? Why was there co-operation across this huge geographical area when not all of the countries involved even shared a common border? I had a lot of questions and ideas spinning around in my head.

BRYF is formed

After a while, I learned how co-operation between public structures in the Barents region works, and I discovered that there was no scope for the views or ideas of young people. I saw this as yet another good reason for bringing young people together and trying to influence the established system for co-operation.

After a number of meetings and conferences at which young people from various organisations met and discussed

a wide range of issues, BRYF – the Barents Regional Youth Forum – was formed. This was a network that was open to everyone, a flat organisation with contacts in each of the countries, and a forum for co-operation that was based on free will and individual commitment. BRYF aimed to make the voice of young people heard and to improve the opportunities for young people to meet and work together in joint projects across national borders.

I was eventually taken up by the established system, and I now work for the County Administrative Board of the County of Västerbotten. Many of the other enthusiasts got jobs and moved, as



www.barents.no/konferense

is the case when you get older, but the established system for co-operation in the Barents region has adopted the concept of renewal and has realised that it is important to create the opportunities and conditions that young people need.

New action programme

A regional action programme for youth issues, The Barents Regional Youth Programme, was adopted in 2002 by BEAR (Barents Euro-Arctic Region), an organisation for co-operation in the region.

We hope that we can realise this programme with the help of a group of people from the participating countries that can follow it up. The aim is to facilitate exchanges of various kinds by providing information on the opportunities that exist and by influencing decision-makers. But, it is also a question of getting the points of view of young people on the issues that concern co-ope-

ration in the Barents region as a whole, such as the environment, business, industry and culture.

The most dynamic situation is created by having a mixture of young and older people – by combining new ideas and experiences. BRYF no longer exists as an active network, but it could easily become alive again!

In the autumn, a youth co-ordinator will begin working in Murmansk, but will be responsible for the entire Barents region. This is a joint initiative from the member countries of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, which is currently chaired by Anna Lindh. In Västerbotten, we are co-operating with the Russian Republic of Karelia, but also with the northern counties that form part of the Barents region. We try to make the most of any youth initiatives that arise.





36 girls

In the Girlpower project, four groups of girls from Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Latvia meet in order to exchange experience and grow.

"The aim is to improve their self-confidence and I think things are working really well so far," says Matilda Stefansson, a 19-year old who is working as one of the youth leaders for the exchange.

To date, the 36 girls, who are between 14 and 17 years old, have met twice. Two meetings remain. The first meeting was held over the course of eight days in March 2002 in Ånäset in Västerbotten, a community with a population of 800. The second eight-day meeting took place in August in Aluksne in Latvia.

The idea of bringing together girls from the Baltic region was born at a contact meeting in October 2001. The six leaders, three of whom are Swedish, then met in January 2002 and planned the first meeting in Sweden.

Same objectives

Matilda emphasises how important it is for all the leaders to meet to make sure that they can really work together.

"Everyone has different opinions concerning what a youth exchange is really about, so it is important to talk things through and make sure that everyone has the same objectives," says Matilda, who is a member of the A-net youth forum.

A-net is an NGO that focuses on international work with young people, mainly in the form of youth exchanges like the one in the Girlpower project.

"It is also important to discuss things with the girls throughout the process so that they feel involved," Matilda says. In this project, for example, the girls have been asked about their expectations and what they want to achieve.

"Apart from improving the girls' self-confidence, the aim is that they should develop and grow stronger through the meeting with other cultures. This has already been a clear result of the first two meetings, and it is most noticeable among the girls who were shy to start with. They have begun to take initiatives, while others have learnt to be more considerate," Matilda says.

She believes that this is largely due to the fact that only girls are involved. Matilda tells us that one of the girls said: "The best thing about it being just girls is that everyone can get the same amount

of attention – if there had been boys in the group, many of the girls wouldn't have dared to talk as much.”

Matilda has herself participated in similar exchanges before. She says that one of the things you learn is the ability to stand up in front of others and express an opinion.

Does she wish that anything had been done differently? Well, she wishes that the Internet forum for the creation of a network worked better.

”It is not really up and running, but we're working on it. It's really important to be able to contact each other over the Internet between meetings.”

Similar thoughts

It was equally important that the Swedish girls got to know each other before the first meeting took place.

So, what have you discovered so far?

”The girls themselves think that they are very alike even though they come from different cultures. They are the same age and have similar thoughts and ideas. All of the countries celebrate midsummer, but in different ways,” Matilda says.

There were a lot of activities and discussions during the first meeting. The girls

began with an adventure course that contained activities where they had to involve everyone and co-operate. There was also a make-up activity, and an actor was invited to talk to the girls about body language.

”Games that weld the group together are also important,” Matilda says. ”I like games that involve everyone in the group, not those where the focus is on individuals. This is particularly important at the beginning when everyone is a little uncertain.”

Language can of course be a problem for some people, but Matilda stresses that words are not the only means of communication.

If all goes according to plan, the final exchange meeting will take place in Finland in the summer of 2003. The material produced so far will be compiled and the girls will also produce a small magazine together.

”I hope that they will try to stay in touch and that they will become friends for life so that the ties between the countries grow and become strong.”

Project data

Swedish organisation: A-net, Ånäset, Municipality of Robertsfors.

Collaborating organisations: Humanities Polytechnic/Torneå Unit, Finland; Rouge Youth Center, Estonia; STILI, Latvia.

Project name: Girlpower

Project manager: Matilda Stefansson

Theme: Four groups of girls from Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Latvia meet to discuss what life is like for young girls in the respective countries and to produce a magazine together.

E-mail: anet@youthforum.nu

Website: www.youthforum.nu



Ten days i Poland

No one knew what the result would be when nine young people from Sweden, ten from Poland and ten from Norway lived together and spent ten days experiencing Poland in August 2002.

It all began in the *Democracy and Anti-Racism Project* in Alingsås. This is where the Swedish participants, four girls and five boys between the ages of 15 and 17, come from. They did not have a lot of experience of other cultures, even though several of them have an immigrant background.

"Planning the trip to Poland with the youngsters was fantastic," Lena Eriksson says, one of the people behind the project.

Planning turned out to be an important part of the project.

"When we decided to travel to Poland it was natural to focus on Auschwitz and World War II," says Lena Eriksson, who previously worked as a youth recreation

leader but now works as a municipal administrator. "The discussions with the international group would then be based on these two themes."

Painful visit

"We had a lot of trouble putting the Swedish group together," Lena says.

Before leaving for Poland, the Swedish leaders had to discuss concepts such as respect with the participants. Do we earn respect by frightening others or by showing mutual consideration?

Lena believes that the young people were changed by their trip to Poland.

"It seems as though we have helped to open their minds to another way of thinking, and as though they no longer

see adults as a threat but more as fellow human beings.”

She tells us that one of the things that contributed to this was the visit to Auschwitz, where they saw a film about the concentration camp and the life of the Polish Jews before the war.

”A really moving moment was when a Swedish boy with a Romany background lit a candle at the wall there. It was so clear what a painful experience that was for him.”

Provoking a reaction

The young people discussed things together and made posters containing drawings, collages, thoughts and poems that were then presented to all the others. They also interviewed people in the town of Myslacovicés and asked questions about xenophobia.

The discussions dealt a lot with prejudices. All of the young people claimed that they were not prejudiced, but the leaders refused to simply accept this and deliberately tried to provoke a reaction.

”This led instead to a discussion about how prejudices can change and about how we can establish whether we have prejudices or not,” Lena says.

The contact between the young people was good. They sat in mixed groups even at mealtimes. This was a deliberate choice by the leaders and applied in all areas.

”I know that there are a lot of SMS and e-mail messages going back and forth between the different national groups even now,” Lena says.

When asked if she has any tips for others who may be planning similar exchanges, Lena says that the group should travel by train – if possible. This gives the leaders and the young participants the chance to get to know each other. In this case, some of the girls were also from another youth recreation centre in Alingsås. The train trip between Sweden and Poland took 24 hours.

The adult leaders are also still in contact with each other over the Internet.

”We are planning a 10-day network meeting.”

Memories of the trip to Poland have been compiled in a booklet in which the young people express their feelings in various ways.

Project data

Swedish organisation: Noltorps fritidsgård (youth centre), *Villan och de 30 lärjungarna*

Collaborating organisations: Lilleström Youth Centre, Norway; Klub Europejski, Poland

Project name: Consequences of World War II

Project manager: Lena Eriksson

Theme: To study and discuss anti-racism today and in the past. The young people took part in study visits, discussions groups and value exercises.

E-mail: lena.eriksson@alingsas.se



African dance among the pine trees

In the deepest reaches of the forest, the participants broke the ice with some African dances and followed this up later with Estonian folkdances. The participants were 30 very different young people from Tallinn, Copenhagen and Malmö who met under the auspices of the Future Visions project in order to get to know each other.

“Despite their differences, they became good friends,” say Jessica Hultzén, one of the initiators of the project.

The aim of Future Visions was to give young people tools, in the form of know-how, to run their own projects. Several knowledgeable lecturers were invited to speak to the participants about how to plan projects, write project applications and apply for funds.

The ten Swedish participants were young people with immigrant backgrounds living in the urban district councils of Södra Innerstaden and Rosengård in Malmö. Jessica describes these areas as being “marked by high unemployment and major social problems, but with a lot of positive power and energy.” Ten of the participants came from Tallinn and ten from Copenhagen.

Meetings in the forest

“Initially, the young people from Estonia were regarded as being “a bit wet” by some of the youngsters from Sweden and Denmark. They arrived looking very well-groomed every morning and wore shirts and ties. The Estonian participants who are selected to take part in such exchanges

are often model students. The Swedes, on the other hand, thought that the Danish participants were even worse than themselves,” Jessica says.

She tells us about one evening in Denmark.

“When we were at a youth centre one evening in Denmark, the Swedes reacted strongly to the fact that some of the Danish participants were drinking beer and smoking hash. This led to a discussion of the different attitudes to drugs in the different countries.”

The young people met twice, the first time for four days in Osby in Sweden and then for another four days in Sorø in Denmark. It was no accident that the meetings were arranged in forest locations – this meant that no one could slip away into town.

The differences between the three national groups made it important to break the ice. The leaders chose to do this in a slightly unusual way.

“We got them to do some African dances. To start with, only two of them

wanted, or dared, to dance, but after a while everyone joined in. Then they made up a camp fire and danced around that.”

A few days later, everyone danced some Estonian folk dances.

Jessica tells us how special this was.

”It was a fantastic feeling to see everyone dancing. This really put everyone on equal terms. No one thought anymore about what languages the others spoke or what countries they came from.”

No respect for adults

”Despite their differences, all the young people became good friends,” says Jessica. There was even love in the air. A Danish boy who wants to be a UFO expert and an Estonian girl who is interested in the theatre became a couple.

It was only during some of the exercises and discussions that the group quarrelled. For example, we had an intercultural exercise in which people had to choose who they would prefer to travel with in a crowded train compartment. They had to choose between different extremes.”

Jessica tells us about the exercise.

”An Estonian girl, for example, refused to sit next to a man with AIDS. A Danish boy became very indignant and upset and

pointed out that HIV cannot be transmitted via the air. He also said that several of his friends were HIV carriers.”

The young people chose project groups in line with their interests. There were a total of seven groups, and every group contained members from each of the different countries. The project ideas that resulted from this work covered areas such as supernatural phenomena, a touring street theatre and lonely people.

Jessica also speaks about what she learned about her professional role in Sweden:

”It became very obvious just how lax things are in Sweden. Young people often have no respect for adults here.”

However, she also thinks it was difficult to work with the leader from Estonia. Her English was very weak, while the young people from Estonia spoke good English.

”This led to a lot of misunderstandings and it took a lot of time to sort them out.”

Project data

Swedish organisation: Södra Innerstaden and Rosengård Urban District Councils, Malmö

Collaborating organisations: Indre Østebro, Copenhagen, Denmark; Youth Board of Tallin, Estonia.

Project name: Future Visions – MCT

Project manager: Jessica Hultzén

Theme: The aim of the project was to develop, test and evaluate methods that can help young people to acquire greater access to resources and tools so that they become active at local, regional or European level.

Column

Text: Åsa Olsson, LSU and Project Manager for the Baltic Sea Youth Project

Making a real difference

It is very easy to assume that youth organisations are in general an important channel for exerting influence on youth policy, and that if you are active in a youth organisation you can influence how decisions are made. In the Baltic region, however, there are several countries in which the governments do not take youth organisations seriously and where young people are not seen as a resource but as a problem.

Different views

It is often the case that governments do not understand the role of youth organisations, or choose not listen to them, and that such organisations are allocated no, or very limited resources. This is something that I, and many others with me, have criticised at various meetings and conferences. When we criticise this, however, it is easy to forget that many youth organisations in

the Baltic region often do not have the same breadth as those in the Nordic countries, and that they are often very small. In some cases, organisations consist of just a few people who do not differentiate between the organisation's objectives and their own. In many countries, organisations are very different in character from the popular movements that we are so familiar with in the Nordic countries.



Organisation the important thing

I, along with many others, believe that there is a positive and important impact on society when people join together in organisations. I do not think it matters too much what people do in these organisations as long as they enjoy themselves and support basic human rights. This positive attitude to organisations is not common in many other parts of Europe. Democracy takes another form there, and youth organisations have relatively little influence.

Sometimes, I think that we put too much faith in the importance of the civil society. We believe that young people will be able to exert more influence on their situation by working in a youth organisation, but I am not sure that this is the case. I think that it is important that we co-operate in the Baltic region, but not necessarily on the basis of a Swedish popular movement perspective as there are no equivalents to such movements in most other countries.

Long-term work

I also feel that we should think about why we co-operate and what results we expect to achieve. Exchanges and meetings are of course always interesting and rewarding on a personal level, but if we wish to promote the organisation of young people in, for example, the Baltic States, Russia and Poland, then we must strive to change not only the attitudes of those who govern these countries, but also of the young people themselves. Changing peoples' attitudes is a long process and I think this means that long-term projects are required to make a real difference. I would therefore like to see the creation of more opportunities for starting up long-term co-operation projects between youth organisations so that there is time to discuss values and processes that can lead to changes in attitudes.

Foto: Emma Bohlin





Language as a springboard

Sweden, Latvia and Estonia have many similarities, but also many differences.

"The aim of our project is to compare the opportunities that young people have to exert influence in the different countries," says Ove Strand, co-ordinator of the Strängnäs Youth Council (Strängnäs Ungdomsråd).

Eighteen young people of upper-secondary school age will meet for a week in Strängnäs in November 2002. Seven are from Sweden, six from Latvia and five from Estonia.

Ove – one of the four leaders – normally works with youth democracy in the schools of Strängnäs. He has realised that language can be a problem.

"So, we have contacted interpreters in good time. We have also had various documents, programmes and so on, translated. This is something I can recommend."

The presentation of Strängnäs, for example, will be translated into Latvian and Estonian.

Democracy is not self-evident

During the meeting in Strängnäs, the participants will, according to the project application, "focus on the living conditions of young people and the way that

adults view and treat young people in the different countries."

Ove thinks that one dimension of the exchange will be particularly interesting.

"The local press is saying that the Swedish youngsters will be teaching the others what democracy is all about. I see it instead as a chance for all these young people to meet and realise that democracy is something really important, and for the Swedish youngsters to realise that they should not take democracy for granted. For the Latvians and Estonians democracy is something new, something they do not take for granted."

The Latvian and Estonian groups come from Kandava and Saku respectively. Both of these towns are already twin towns with Strängnäs. Ove hopes that the visitors will not be too bothered by the difference in standard between their countries and Sweden.

Initially it was a little "tricky" – that is Ove's expression – to compile all the papers needed for the exchange application. The Swedish group therefore travelled to Kandava in February 2002 to lend a hand. In the case of Saku, however, things have been resolved by contacting each other by e-mail.

"The participants in the Swedish group know each other very well," Ove says. "They have met about 10 times since the autumn of 2001."

Different methods

The Youth Council in Strängnäs was set up in the autumn of 2000. In Kandava, the first Youth Parliament has just been founded, while Saku has employed its first youth social worker.

"In Kandava, they are planning the fixtures and fittings for their first youth recreation centre, so they will be visiting some centres Strängnäs," Ove says.

The project will probably be documented in the form of the young peoples' diaries, the planned film and a final summary report.

"We have asked the Latvians and Estonians to start filming already, so that we

will be able to show how differently, or similarly, we work."

Already during the meeting in Kandava, Ove noticed signs of differences in the approach to working with young people.

"We got the feeling that there is a wider gap between young people and adults there, but maybe this is just a preconceived notion. Perhaps they have a very equally-balanced relationship."

Even though they have not all met yet, Ove has two important lessons to share. The first is that it is important to include the experience and views of the young people from the start, the second is that it is vital to have a very clear timetable.

It is hoped that the young people from the three countries will inspire each other to participate actively in making the decisions that affect them. Exchanges will thus probably take place in Saku in the spring of 2003 and in Kandava during the autumn.

"The aim of this exchange is that the Swedes should feel a greater degree of respect and reverence for what they have and for working with democracy," Ove says.

Project data

Swedish organisation: Strängnäs Youth Council

Collaborating organisations: Jaunatnes padome, Lithuania; Saku Huvikeskus, Estonia

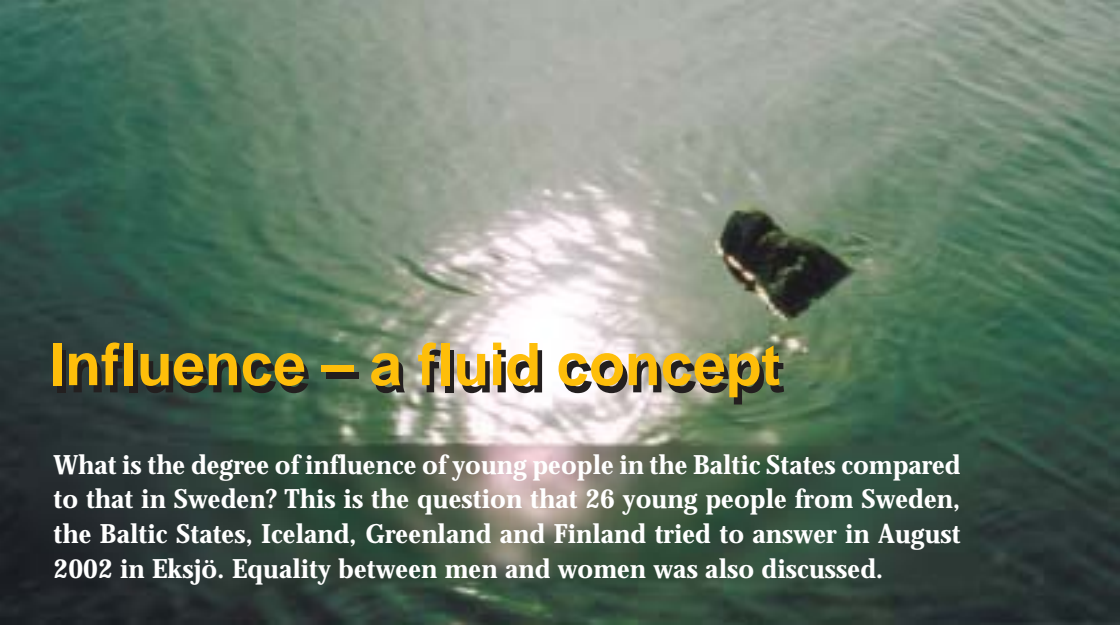
Project name: Young Influence – Young Democracy

Project manager: Helena Edvinsson

Theme: Exchange of experience between young people active in youth councils from Strängnäs, Kandava and Saku with the aim of developing opportunities for young people to exert influence in the respective towns.

E-mail: helena.edvinsson@strangnas.se

Website: www.ungdomsradet.strangnas.se



Influence – a fluid concept

What is the degree of influence of young people in the Baltic States compared to that in Sweden? This is the question that 26 young people from Sweden, the Baltic States, Iceland, Greenland and Finland tried to answer in August 2002 in Eksjö. Equality between men and women was also discussed.

"It turned out that there are major differences in the degree of influence of young people in the different countries," says Majlis Blomqvist, the initiator of the project.

She works for Fritidsforum - the Swedish National Association of Youth Clubs and Neighbourhood Centres. The Association arranges youth recreation leader courses for young people, including courses with a special focus on girls and IT.

"The young people we met from the Baltic States didn't feel that they had any influence at school, and they weren't as independent in relation to their parents as the young Swedes."

Satisfied with the results

Majlis therefore feels that the greatest reward from the project is that the Baltic leaders have said how enterprising their young people have become following the exchange.

"Their youngsters now take the initiative and propose different activities that they want to pursue, like girls' projects, discus-

sion groups and so on. I am really pleased about this.

The Baltic leaders will now continue by working with the issues of racism and diversity. The aim of course is that the young people who participated will become involved as young leaders in the future."

Majlis tells us about the structure of the exchange. The method used during the discussions in Eksjö has been developed by the Association. It is called "Democracy for the Expressive" and consists of various co-operation exercises.

"The participants learn to look to the entire group and to support each other to achieve results. No one takes command and they ask each other about how to proceed."

She led the project together with three 20 year-old Swedish leaders. An adult leader from Iceland and one from Estonia also participated.

The leaders met for a weekend in Stockholm in April 2002 to talk things through. It was here that they decided that the

theme of the exchange would be youth democracy.

"We discussed, among other things, whether it is possible to transfer the Swedish approach to working with young people in the Baltic States. We concluded that they should take the bits that fit. At first though, we all talked about how we work in our respective home countries."

In the Baltic States it is usually NGOs and the Church that run activities for young people.

Intermediate meeting a good idea

If there is one thing that Majlis wishes had been done differently, it is that the planning period should have been longer. Nevertheless, it was long enough to establish contact with the leaders from the other countries.

She would have liked to have an intermediate meeting with all the leaders. This could have been planned in more detail, and could perhaps have contained some interesting lectures.

"Three phases would have been better. Still, it's always possible to call or send e-mails."

The entire programme was carefully presented when the young people arrived at Eksjö. This gave them the chance to influence what would take place and to present their own ideas.

"The evaluation went well," Majlis says. "Everyone was divided into five groups and each group wrote a diary every day. These texts are included in the material that was compiled."

The young people were also given the opportunity to say what they were pleased or displeased with every day. This was a good way of checking that everyone was following along.

Majlis has another tip:

"Let the evaluation discussions be general. It is easier to talk when you can base what you say on your own feelings."

Project data

Swedish organisation: Fritidsforum – the Swedish National Association of Youth Clubs and Neighbourhood Centres

Collaborating organisation: UFN – Ungdom och Fritid i Norden (Youth and Leisure in the Nordic Region), an organisation for co-operation between associations from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden.

Project name: Democracy with Young People

Project manager: Majlis Blomqvist

Theme: The aim was to discuss how young people exert influence in the respective countries and to compare how they view democracy.

E-mail: majlis.blomqvist@fritidsforum.se

Website: www.fritidsforum.se

Important events

Co-operation in the youth field: The Baltic Region

1996 – Baltic Sea States Summit in Visby – the heads of state of the various countries declared that the development of contacts and networks between young people in the region is of the highest priority.

1998 – Baltic Sea Ministers Conference in Visby – ministers responsible for youth issues, together with state authorities and youth organisations of different kinds, discussed a *joint plan* on youth issues.

The aims of this *joint plan* were to improve the living conditions of young people and to develop their opportunities by:

- supporting the development of a regional identity and an understanding of our common cultural heritage, while also taking into account the cultural diversity of the region,
- supporting the active participation of young people in the development of the democratic and civil society.

In practice, these aims were to be achieved by:

- youth exchanges between associations,
- the exchange of experience between officials in the youth field,
- setting up a secretariat for young people in the Baltic region, the Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth.*

*The task of the Secretariat is to follow the development of the action plan adopted in Visby and to act as a resource for the players in the area.

Web site: www.balticsea-youth.org

Next step:

2002 – Baltic Sea Youth Minister Conference, "Youth in the knowledge society" – delegates, youth ministers, officials and representatives of youth organisations in 11 countries continued to build on the foundations laid in Visby in 1998.

The conference participants reaffirmed their support for the Visby plan and agreed that co-operation in the youth field should work towards achieving a transparent and democratic knowledge society. They particularly underlined the importance of informal and lifelong learning in the effort to create a common region.

Co-operation in the youth field: The Barents Region

The Barents region comprises the counties around the Polar Circle in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. The organi-

sation for co-operation between these counties is called BEAR (Barents Euro-Arctic Region) and was founded in 1999.

First Conference of Ministers

1999 – Conference of Ministers in Rovaniemi – youth ministers, national youth commissioners, officials in the field and the national offices for the EU programme *Youth for Europe* met to discuss how co-operation in the Barents region could be developed.

A number of objectives were adopted. These stated that the countries should, among other things:

- strive to strengthen youth work at all levels in the region,
 - pay special attention to the opportunities of indigenous peoples,
 - investigate the specific conditions that have an impact on childhood and adolescence in the region,
 - take young people into account when developing legislation and regulations.
-

Second Conference of Ministers

2001 – Conference of Ministers in Tromsø – the aim was to adopt a youth programme.

Important principles in the adopted programme:

- young people have a special role in the strengthening of the civil society and in the development of democracy,
- young people are an important resource for the development of the region,
- the inclusion of the Russian parts of the region is of particular importance in order to achieve co-operation on equal terms.

To achieve these principles the countries should support:

- youth exchanges between local associations and groups,
- co-operation between scientists and researchers on youth issues,
- marginalised groups in order to give them the opportunity to participate in this international co-operation,
- studies of the possibility of opening a secretariat for the Barents region*.

*The Secretariat opened in January 2003. Its tasks are to inform and support youth activities in the region. For more information, please contact the Secretariat by e-mail at: byco@russslandia.ru

Ideas for your project ...

All of the examples in *So far and yet so near* demonstrate the range of opportunities that exist in the Swedish State Inheritance Fund's programme *Youth Co-operation in the Barents and Baltic Region*. But, there are still a wide variety of other projects and themes that you can develop and fund with this programme.

A lot of good tips on how to plan a youth project have been collected from the people interviewed and from previous projects. Here are some of them:

Before the project starts ...

Involve the young people in the entire process

The aim of youth projects is to focus on and strengthen young people. It is therefore important to make the most of their resources throughout the process - from developing a project idea to writing the application and planning the project.

Find collaborating organisations

There are several ways of finding an association or youth group to collaborate with. Perhaps someone you know has contacts in another country. Most municipalities have one or more twin towns that your organisation can co-operate with.

The National Board for Youth Affairs also arranges contact meetings at which youth leaders and social workers from different countries meet to get to know each other and discuss ideas for joint projects.

Take time to discuss things properly with those you have chosen to collaborate with. Who are the young people they work with, what are their interests and what do they hope to achieve by co-operating internationally?

Theme for the project

The project must have a concrete theme and objective. It may be a good idea to base this on something that is currently of direct interest to the young people in your organisation. In this way, you can get an international slant on the issues that you are working with in your association.

Preparations before the trip

The activities start at home

Arrange theme evenings when the group can watch films and eat food from the country you are going to have an exchange with. Let the young people prepare presentations on the theme of the project, this is an excellent way of making the exchange more successful. Read everything you can find about the country concerned!

Preparatory meeting

It is very useful if the youth leaders, and possibly one of the young people from the respective groups, can meet before the start of the exchange. Use this meeting to go through the programme and discuss your expectations and fears. Try to visit the different places that will be included in the trip, for example conference centres, the sites of any study visits and the places where you will sleep.

Intercultural meetings and expectations

Discuss with the group what their expectations of the youth exchange are. Think particularly about what it means to meet a new culture in practice: different attitudes to food, alcohol, time body language and how people speak to each other, as well as the role of youth leaders

in the countries taking part. This is especially important for young people who have not participated in international activities before and who are not used to intercultural meetings.

Food and sleep

Youth projects are usually very intensive and demanding for the participants during the days over which an exchange takes place. It is therefore important that basic needs such as food and a place to sleep are properly provided for. Discuss what sort of food you will eat with the members of your group and the collaborating organisation, and check that all the participants know where and how they should sleep.

Risk assessment

Review the programme and think carefully about any items that may involve risk. Remember that the group leader is ultimately responsible for what happens and that he or she should therefore be prepared for all eventualities. In some cases it may also be important to meet the parents of the participants and discuss the programme.

During the project

Break the ice

Prepare exercises for the first few days that are designed to get the group to mix. The easiest way to do this is to arrange games of various kinds. This will help the participants to quickly learn each other's names, as well as a little about the person behind the name.

Methods in the programme

There are a range of methods for achieving the aims of the various programme sessions. Lectures, study visits and workshops are perhaps the first alternatives that spring to mind. Other exciting methods include exercises on values, role plays, games and co-operation exercises in which the participants perform tasks together.*

*Tips concerning literature on methods can be found on the joint web site of the Council of Europe and the European Commission. **Website:** www.training-youth.net

Things never turn out as you intended

It does not matter how much preparation is put into a project, things always happen that mean you will have to make new decisions on the spot. Think through various alternatives in advance so that you will not be taken by surprise.

Examples of unplanned events include buses coming late, study visits being cancelled and lecturers falling ill. In these situations, it is a good idea to have a prepared activity or exercise in reserve.

The people behind the tourist facade

One of the ideas behind international youth projects is to give young people the chance to experience what each other's everyday lives are really like and to discover the people behind the tourist facade. These are also the aspects of the projects that the young people appreciate most. Think very carefully, therefore, before you include purely tourist visits in the programme.

Mix the groups

Encourage the participants to get to know each other and to discuss things even outside the programme. Arrange the seating at mealtimes, for example, so that you avoid having the participants divide up into national groups. Make the young people responsible for social activities in the evenings.

Time for reflection

Meeting new cultures and new people, and participating in a programme that is designed to challenge and arouse discussion, can put pressure on the participants. Set aside time, therefore, for the participants to rest and reflect on their impressions. This can be done by asking the participants to keep a diary, or by having the various groups meet for a while every day so that they can speak their own language and ease the pressure a little.

Follow-up

Make the most of the enthusiasm generated

For most of the participants, meeting young people from other countries and cultures will be something entirely new and exciting that will give rise to new thoughts and ideas. As a leader, it may be useful to consider in advance how to make the most of this enthusiasm after the project. Remember to check with the young people what it is they want to follow up.

Let the participants relate their experience

Let the participants arrange information meetings at which they can relate their feelings and experience to other young people and interested parties.

International dimension in the local work

Your international project will have given you new contacts, new knowledge, a new understanding and a new way of looking at things. Incorporate this international dimension into your everyday work. You now have valuable knowledge that you can share with local politicians, officials, other young people and associations.

Maintain contact with the collaborating organisations and other participants

New networks have been created between youth associations and young people in the region. When international projects come to an end, it can be difficult to keep the contacts established alive. Good methods for doing this include having a joint website or an e-mailing list.

Documentation

Do not forget that your project and your experiences are unique and may be valuable to others, both within your organisation and in other organisations. By all means document this knowledge and experience by describing in some way everything from the original idea, the preparations made and the implementation of the project to the follow-up.

Plans of action

Baltic Sea Youth Minister Conference in Visby, 5–6 June 1998

The Ministers responsible for Youth Affairs in the Baltic Sea Region met in Visby 5–6 June together with representatives of national youth councils and representatives from the European Commission, the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe, the Youth for Europe National Agencies and different regional bodies, in order to discuss Baltic Sea Co-operation in the Youth Field. The participants in the conference committed themselves to further develop co-operation, based on equal partnership among all actors, and have concluded the following:

Objectives

The aim is to develop among young people a common regional identity and understanding of our common cultural heritage, while respecting the cultural diversity of the region, for improvement of young people's living conditions and development of their potential. The aim is also to promote an active participation of young people in the development of democratic and pluralistic civic societies in the States of the Baltic Sea Region. These aims will be reached by strengthening Baltic Sea co-operation in the youth field, both in terms of increased youth mobility and youth participation within the region and in terms of increased contacts between youth policy structures in the Baltic Sea Region.

Priorities

Without excluding co-operation in other areas, the priority areas for youth cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region are:

- Baltic Sea Co-operation in the Youth Field in a European context, encouraging cooperation with other sub-regional areas of Europe and the expansion of the youth cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region to cover the Northern Europe as a whole,
- The role of youth participation and nongovernmental youth organisations in the development of a democratic and tolerant society in general and the civil society in particular, including minority groups and give special attention to co-operation with disadvantaged and marginalized young people,
- Enhancement of young people's employability through non-formal education, the promotion of life long learning and the improvement of young people's international competence,

- Youth policy contribution to sectoral policies where Baltic Sea co-operation exists, particularly in the environmental field.

Baltic Sea Youth Minister Conference in Vilnius, 6–9 June 2002

The conference brought together the Ministers responsible for Youth Affairs in the Baltic Sea States as well as representatives from the National Youth Councils, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the National Agencies of the EU YOUTH Programme and other partners in the Baltic Sea Region.

Objectives

The Second Baltic Sea Youth Minister Conference reconfirms the objectives of the Visby Plan of Action and emphasises that an overall aim is to promote the idea of developing a transparent and democratic knowledge-based society with a focus on the Baltic Sea Region within the European context. A knowledge-driven approach to youth policy is necessary. In this context the recognition of the concepts of non-formal education and life-long learning is important. This process needs sustainable participation with appropriate measures for example through co-management. Baltic Sea co-operation between all actors involved in the work to meet the challenges and benefit from the opportunities offered by the knowledge society (youth policy actors, young people, politicians and civil servants) should be promoted further, while putting forward the need to reflect on achievements and to maintain a visionary approach for the further development of a common regional identity among young people. This while bearing in mind the need to define a common interest based on mutual understanding and a common cultural heritage. These aims can only be achieved through close co-operation across the Baltic Sea Region in the field of youth policies, side by side with the promotion of active citizenship, youth mobility, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue using a cross border approach.

Priorities

Bearing in mind the close links between the challenges facing civil society as a whole and the situation of young people, it is important to ensure a cross-sectoral approach to the development of policies related to youth. Active participation in decision-making processes can only follow from knowledge of such processes. This

participation represents the added value of building up knowledge based youth policies. In addition, to ensure access to active participation by all different societal groups, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue must be promoted. Within the framework of the Baltic Sea Region this will help to foster common regional identity. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned objectives and not restricting or restraining initiatives for youth co-operation in other fields, the priorities for co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region agreed upon by the Second Baltic Sea Youth Ministers Conference are the following:

- To develop knowledge-based youth policies
- To promote concepts of non-formal education and lifelong learning
- To encourage close co-operation between the governmental and non-governmental actors in the field of youth policy, for example in promoting the concepts of e-learning and e-community, and in removing barriers for youth networking, while developing the knowledge based Baltic Sea Region. In this framework attention should be drawn to provision of relevant information for young people.
- To promote a cross-sectoral approach to youth policies taking in consideration co-management and co-decision making. Support active youth participation in the civil society and in democratic processes in general.
- To secure the integration of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are not able to match the demands of the knowledge society.
- To provide young people with the incentive and possibility to develop the Baltic Sea Region identity through fostering intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and removing barriers to youth mobility, while maintaining co-operation with other sub-regional areas of Europe.
- To strengthen the co-operation between the Baltic Sea States in the youth field, both in terms of a closer intergovernmental co-operation between all the states and encouraging the co-operation between non-governmental organisations and various youth groups in the region.

Barents Regional Conference on Youth Policy in Tromsø, 14–16 may 2001

The ministers responsible for youth policy and their representatives from Denmark, Finland, Russia, Sweden and Norway, all of them member states of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, together with representatives of the Norwegian Sami Parliament, the Barents Regional

Council and the Council of Europe, met in Tromsø, Norway, on 14-16 May 2001, to discuss a plan of action to promote increased cooperation in the youth field in the Barents Region. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the Barents Regional Youth Forum and of national youth councils.

The Conference has decided on the following Plan of Action.

Principles

The Plan of Action is based on the following principles:

- Young people should play an important role in strengthening civil society and in the development of democracy in the Barents Region.
- Young people are an important resource in the development of the region.
- Improvement in the living conditions of the people in the region, especially children and youth, is essential for the development of the Barents Region.
- Focus on the situation of indigenous peoples in the region, particularly children and youth, is essential for sustainable development in the Barents Region.
- Focus on the situation in the Russian parts of the region is essential in order to ensure cooperation on an equal basis in the Barents Region.

Priorities

In implementing the principles of the plan of action, the ministers will adhere to the following priorities:

- Development of exchanges and contact between local youth groups and associations based on multilateral cooperation.
- Development of a variety of local youth initiatives and projects based on the interests of the young people themselves.
- Development of special measures directed towards marginalized youth groups.
- Development of the Barents Regional Youth Forum.
- Development of the cooperation between youth researchers in the region and research projects related to the situation and living conditions of young people.
- Development of improving the cooperation between youth workers and youth leaders in the region.
- Development of information to young people and cooperation between youth information structures.

So far and yet so near...

...shows that the ongoing project activities are contributing to the emergence of a greater sense of togetherness and community in the Barents and Baltic region. All of the projects, large or small, that are run in Sweden together with other actors from the region are forming an expanding network. In this network of individuals and organisations, curiosity and a spirit of community are the great motivators and driving forces.



UNGDOMSSTYRELSEN
www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se



Arvfondsdelegationen