

# **Study visit and project development activity between Balkan and Baltic countries**

Latvia Estonia, 04-10.06.2013



**REPORT**

## General information

Study visit and project development activity between Balkan and Baltic countries was organised by the SALTO South East Europe Resource Centre in cooperation with the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme.

Hereby as the cooperation between Baltic and Balkan regions under the A.3.1. sub programme is relatively modest compared with other EU neighbouring countries, the Baltic National Agencies of the YiA programme decided in collaboration to boost the cooperation with South-East Europe. Present activity was focusing to the possibilities of Youth Exchanges (as there two possibilities under the A31 sub programme – youth exchanges and training and networking), as this could be the easiest step into to Youth in Action programme.

The **aim** of the activity was to establish sustainable partnerships between the South East European and Baltic regions in order to develop Youth in Action projects, in particular Youth Exchanges.

## Objectives

- To explore the youth work realities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and discover similarities and differences of youth work among the participating countries
- To explore quality aspects in Youth Exchanges under the Youth in Action 3.1 subaction: Cooperation with the Neighbouring Partner Countries of the European Union
- To develop Youth Exchange project ideas and concrete action plans

## Participants

Altogether 18 participants participated in this activity (one of them was sent away from the training on the 5-th day due to the disagreement with the team).

Madlina	Puka	Albania	Center for Research Cooperation and Development
Merima	Polimac	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Association "Aarhus center in B&H"
Sanel	Maric	Bosnia and Herzegovina	U.G. Orhideja
Elma	Šerak	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Association Youth Volunteers
Sidik	Lepić	Bosnia and Herzegovina	proMENTE Social Research
Jekaterina	Markus	Estonia	MTÜ Avatud Vabariik, NGO Open Republic
Galina	Kushanova	Estonia	International Youth Association EstYES
Natalja	Mahnova	Estonia	Career Centre VitaTiim
Alban	Kryeziu	Kosovo	NGO Zana
Inese	Shubevica	Latvia	NGO Youth leaders coalition
Elza	Vildaus	Latvia	Dobele Youth council
Artis	Dubkevičs	Latvia	Cesis Youth Council
Agnese	Janeka	Latvia	Cesis Youth Council
Ieva	Cilite	Latvia	Talsu Children and Youth Center
Sigita	Tomaša	Latvia	Nac man lidzi/Come with me
Kristijan	Nikodinovski	Macedonia, FYOR	creACTIVE
Sandra	Kostadinova	Macedonia, FYOR	Youth Can
Lina	Mockaityte	Lithuania	Public Institution "Project Academy"

## Team of organizers and trainers

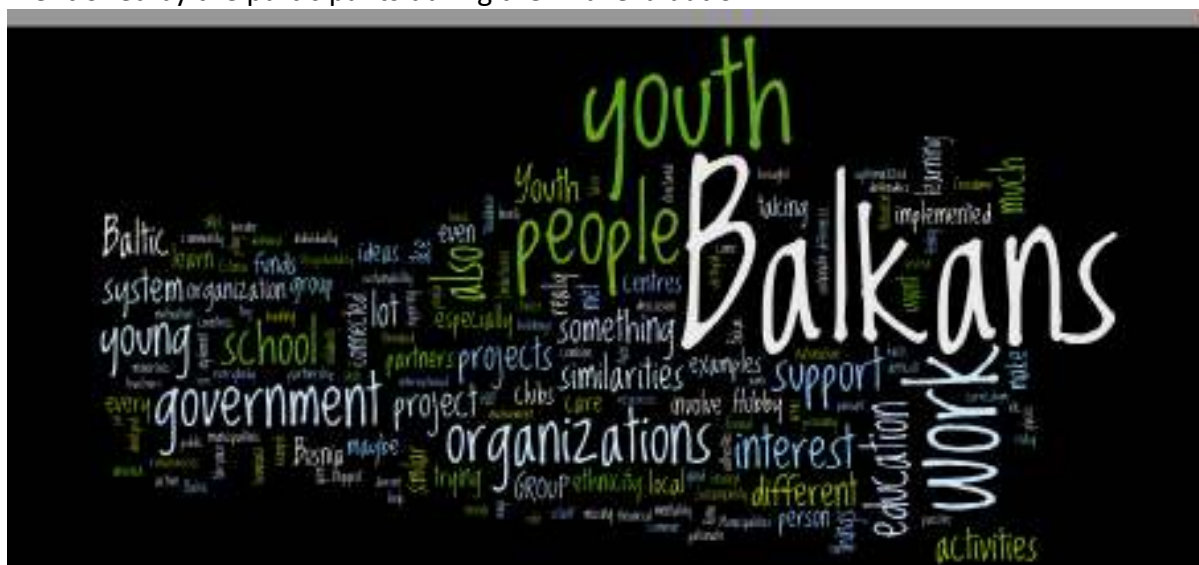
The team present at the activity was composed of a representative from SALTO SEE RC – Maija Lehto, a representative from Estonian NA – Kaja Ainsalu and two trainers/facilitators – Domagoj Kovacic (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Ieva Grundsteine (Latvia).

## Venue

The venues of the activity were hotel „Days Hotel” in Riga and hotel „Kubija” in Voru. The hotels had all the necessary facilities (individual rooms, training room, restaurant and SPA center).

## Outcomes

The illustration below reflects the keywords that participants associate with this study visit. They were mentioned by the participants during the final evaluation.



The outcomes of this activity could be summed up in 3 main areas related to the 3 main objectives of this activity.

### A. STUDY VISITS

During the activity the participants had the chance to discover 12 organizations – 7 in Latvia and 5 Estonia. All the diverse organizations represented youth field. The visited organizations were (detailed description of organizations in Annex):

#### LATVIA

- 1.) Youth Centre Kanieris
- 2.) Humana Latvia
- 3.) Room of Fulfilled Dreams
- 4.) RED
- 5.) Cesis Children and Youth Center
- 6.) Cesis youth Council
- 7.) Red Cross Youth organization – Cesis Unit

## ESTONIA

- 8.) Võru Open youth Center
- 9.) Võru City Center High School
- 10.) Estonian Defence League, Youth Sector
- 11.) Säanna Culture Manor
- 12.) Rõuge Youth Club

### **PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS AFTER VISIT TO THE YOUTH CENTRE IN RIGA**

"Everything is organized so well, the centre is giving the platform and many local youth organizations can have activities there. The centre is also providing common funding while local government is providing space. In the Balkans there are no many (if any) such examples."

"Social entrepreneurship projects are also interesting example (again, not many of such examples in the Balkans)."

"Latvian organization Humana has very interesting approach and from something simple they are doing great work."

"It looked like it is easier to work in Baltic than in Balkans, but it is just our impression, maybe we are wrong."

### **PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS AFTER STUDY VISITS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE (LATVIA and ESTONIA)**

"The biggest discovery was INTEREST/HOBBY education – there is no such thing in Balkans (it was there during the period of former Yugoslavia, but not anymore). In Baltic it is something very basic and common and it is supported by government and local authorities. Formal education in Balkans is not in line with labour market, interest and hobby education can contribute and help people to learn what they want to learn."

"In Baltic there is lot of support from different levels of government, especially from local level. It seems that every person counts, especially in small places. Communities are taking care of their youth and it is different than in Balkans where everybody tries to do something for themselves and government not providing any funds."

"Youth work at school (extra curriculum) is structured and systemized, almost every school has person responsible for it. In Balkans there is no category of youth work, system doesn't not recognized it and there is no profession „youth worker“. In Baltic, there are staff taking care and overcome bridge between young people and organizations. In Balkans it is quite difficult for non-formal education to enter the schools, there is also too much work for teachers in Balkans and there are no staff that work on NFE in schools."

"Main similarities between the region is that all young people have similar needs, all young people want to do something, some activities, there is enthusiasm, motivation, attitude towards youth work. In both areas there are groups of very passionate people supporting young people. Youth have same interests; most of youth organizations in both regions have same aims. In both regions organizations try to be more and more active in international projects. Organizations are involving young people in activities, planning and decision making."

“Sustainability of organizations is common problem – where to secure adequate FUNDS as organizations do not have many own resources. Some organization managed to develop self - sustainability (example of Sänna) while in Balkans there are not many examples like that. In Balkans organization tends to seek funds individually and they are missing networking. In Balkans, unlike Baltic, there is no much support from local authorities.”

#### **PARTICIPANTS’ CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY VISITS (“What we would like to take home...”)**

- Responsibility of the individual for all
- Motivation and positive ideas, to come back and implement some projects, not to stay passive
- Freedom of interest
- Open network of partners, we also have those that we visited in our projects. We can spread out the information and involve other partners
- Make some project try to involve different people from different backgrounds so they can see how it is to work together
- Very good examples (for example Totaldobze - how public spaces and old factories can be reused), we have such resources in Balkans, but they are not used. Before the war we (in Balkan) had lot of youth clubs and buildings which are not functional or even destroyed
- Discipline that we saw in Estonia, maybe it is not connected with the project but is connected with mentality of the people that we work with
- Hobby interest system could be brought and implemented in Balkans, especially as it existed before

### **B. QUALITY IN YOUTH EXCHANGES**

Despite limited time available for providing participants with the chance to get to know better the „Youth in Action” programme and especially youth exchanges, we managed to introduce the participants with the basic information about the programme and from various points of view (practitioners, trainers and NA representative) to explain what are the most crucial things when it comes to quality of youth exchanges.

To discuss the quality in youth exchanges, we had a special focus on understanding of what a good quality non-formal learning process means, how to involve young people in creating and implementing the youth exchanges and how to formulate objectives for the youth exchange projects. Many real-life stories were shared.

### **C. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

Despite the biggest challenge regarding the group - expulsion of one of the participants on the day when partnerships had to be created, the team managed to keep the group spirit high and despite this sudden incident to keep the trust. Participants showed high commitment to „bring home” concrete project ideas on youth exchanges.

Altogether **4 youth exchange ideas** were developed during the activity. Some of them were elaborated more in detail, some less, but, in any case all project ideas got the target group, objectives, learning opportunities defined as well as draft programme drafted. Some organizations that will be applying for the project still need „green light” from the decision-makers of the organizations, but from what they have been saying, the

organizations would support them. As there is only one deadline left in YiA, the projects will be submitted for 1-st October 2013 deadline in Estonian and Latvian NAs and implemented in summer 2014.

- 1.) Youth exchange on career development, interests and skills of young people (Estonia, Latvia, [EU country], Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo) to be applied 01.10.2013 to Estonian NA by Vitatiim NGO and implemented in June 2014 in Estonia
- 2.) Youth exchange on youth entrepreneurship for youth with fewer opportunities from rural areas (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia and Macedonia) to be applied 01.10.2013 to Latvian NA by Cesis Youth Council and implemented in July 2014 in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- 3.) Youth exchange for active members of NGOs on how to use effectively social media, networking and public campaigns for youth empowerment (Latvia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia) to be applied 01.10.2013 by Open Republic to Estonian NA and implemented in July 2014.
- 4.) Youth exchange on diversity „Learning to be together”(Latvia, Lithuania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia) to be applied 01.10.2013 to Latvian NA by „Nac man lidzi” NGO and implemented in summer 2014.

### Quatations from the evaluation forms

“I liked visits to the local organizations a lot. The highlits were Totaldobze, Sänna and Rõuge Youth Club.”

“I have started to think how important is to create connections and ties with young people on a permanent base and I saw concrete example of it in Rõuge.”

“I feel confident for our future youth exchange project as we have concrete project idea and plan for the next steps. There is no doubts we are going to implement the project.”

“The team provided good support especially during study visits by asking "smart" questions to the representatives of the organizations and during working on the youth exchange programme by giving specific recommendations and comments.”

“I gained new partners (contacts), new project ideas and better social skills.”

“I was very satisfied with the level of exchange among the participants and youth workers.”

“I managed to initiate and take part in a youth exchange project and actually I feel quite confident about it.”

“For me it was completely new experience that included lot of information and new action in totally new level.”

“I learnt structure of project planning and what is Youth in Action and its main goals.”

“I am very satisfied with contacts with youth workers in Baltik and Balkan countries. I would like to have more time to share more experiences.”

“I learnt how to prepare youth exchange project and how to share experiences.”

“The team was very positive and helping a lot during each step of the project preparation.”

“We have to work hard to achieve something!”

“Thank you for fulfilling all my expectations!”

“Congratulations for Kaja for logistic/technical preparation. I liked the way it was prepared and organized and I cannot think of anything I was dissatisfied with.”

“I received even more than expected. The quality level was high and it was very good learning experience.”

“I saw that involvement of local government can have great impact on youth and youth centres and the outcomes can have a deep impact on the structure of society in general.”

“I gained feeling that everyone is important, sense of devotion to common goal and enthusiasm of people involved in youth work.”

“I missed more contacts and talks with young people that are using opportunities from youth work and to hear what they actually think about it. Maybe to focus more on the methods and channels between youth workers and youngsters.”

“I learnt that we usually face with similar issues and we have similar goals although Baltic and Balkan are not so close to each other.”

“I would like to say thank you and please keep watching follow up phase.”

“I gained the idea and importance of hobby education, the idea of social entrepreneurship and that it is possible and necessary to do what you love.”

“I learnt the importance of involving participants/young people in the all levels of youth exchange, the importance of having smart objectives and the meaning of intercultural and European dimension.”

“The team provided accurate and useful information about all topics of the study visit. It was also great that we had the chance to ask and get advices from the NA representative.”

## **Recommendations for future activities**

Besides the team faced a crisis situation with one of the participants the activity was implemented with good quality with many concrete outcomes both on the level of discovering many good youth work practices in Latvia and Estonia, building better understanding between Balkan and Baltic countries, comprehension on what it means quality in youth exchange projects as well as because several concrete youth exchange project ideas were developed during this activity.

Compared to study visit in Bosnia and Herzegovina a favourable aspect was a better balanced group (Balkan and Baltic) and focus of the study visit on youth sector.

Due to the fact that for both of the activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Latvia and Estonia the organisers had problems with finding participants with suitable profile the team suggest not to continue the

cooperation with the same format. The team is not yet sure what the problem with the activity idea is – are the both regions not enough attractive for each other or may be the combination of study visit with concrete expectations to develop youth exchange idea does not work or may be also the way we presented information in the call for partners was not appealing enough.

Basing on the experience from activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is worth paying more attention to providing support to participants after the end of training – to assure that worked out youth exchange ideas do not remain just as an ideas, but are really implemented (from the first activity from Bosnia-Herzegovina only 1 project was submitted from 8 youth exchange ideas).





## Implemented programme of the study visit to Latvia and Estonia

Time / day	Arrival day 4 <sup>th</sup> June	Day 1 5 <sup>th</sup> June	Day 2 6 <sup>th</sup> June	Day 3 7 <sup>th</sup> June	Day 4 8 <sup>th</sup> June	Day 5 9 <sup>th</sup> June	Departure day 10 <sup>th</sup> June
	Arrival of participants to Riga (please be in the hotel by <b>16:00</b> )  16:00 Coffee break	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
09.30 – 11:30		Ice-breaking  Team building	Reflection on study visit	<b>10.00</b> Võru Youth Centre (visit), including information about youth situation in Estonia	Reflection on study visits	Cross-checking the situation and continuation of work on project ideas	<b>At 8.00</b> departure of participants from Võru to Riga ( <i>ca</i> 3,5 hours)
11:30 – 12:00		Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	
12:00 – 13:30		Participants professional background  Sharing national realities and organizational presentations	“Youth in Action” and youth exchange “starter”	Presentations: Defence League or Võru Kesklinna High School	Quality aspects of youth exchanges	Work on projects	
13:30 – 15:00		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch nearby	Lunch	Lunch	
15:00 – 16:30		<b>At 14.30</b> departure to Riga Youth Space Kanieris and meeting with representatives of Riga Youth Space	<b>At 14.30</b> departure from Riga to Cesis – <i>ca</i> 1,5 hours	Departure to Sänna Culture Manor and afterwards to Rõuge Youth Club	Quality aspects of youth exchanges	Presentations of project ideas  Action plans and networking	
16.30 – 17.00		Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	
17:00 – 19:00		Introduction of the study visit  Getting to know each other	Cesis Children and Youth Centre, Cesis Youth Council and Red Cross youth Group in Cesis	<b>Around 17</b> departure back to Võru  Free time	Open space of ideas and partnership (match-making)	Summing up  Evaluation	
19:00 – 20:00		Dinner	Dinner in Riga center	Dinner and Estonian dances	Dinner	Dinner	
20:00		Integration evening			Intercultural Evening	Farewell evening	

