

Proposal for the Establishment of the Youth Board of the Union of the Baltic Cities

Background paper for Initial Discussions

During the General Assembly at the XVII UBC General Conference in Palanga (October 2023) the idea to set up a permanent youth representation structure within UBC governance system was voiced for the first time. The structure would provide young people's perspective on organisation's agenda and promote more active involvement of young people into addressing the challenges of the region.

For purpose of simplification of the concept, the structure was called UBC Youth Board (and this name will also be used further on in the paper). UBC Youthful Cities Commission took the liberty to develop the UBC Youth Board's concept further and presents its findings and conclusions in this paper.

Set up of youth representation structures within public bodies, intergovernmental and international organisations has been a **developing trend** over the last several decades, starting with local youth councils that are in place in the majority of municipalities around the Baltic Sea and finishing with Council of Europe's ground-breaking co-management system¹.

Establishment of platforms for young people to share their ideas and raise their concerns fits well within the goal of the European Youth Strategy² – to foster youth participation in democratic life. The strategy, among other priorities, specifically urges to:

- encourage and equip young people with the necessary resources to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change inspired by EU values and a European identity,
- improve policy decisions with regard to their impact on young people across all sectors, notably employment, education, health and social inclusion.

Also, the framework of European Youth Goals has a strong focus on youth representation and participation. These issues are specifically brought into spotlight by Goal # 9 – Space and participation for all³.

What is more, position No 2.5. in the UBC policy paper “Social Cohesion in Cities - beyond 2020” states that “UBC promotes the development of space and opportunities for youth political participation that ensure representation and considering of young people's voice during the decision-making process”.

In order to proceed with development of the concept of UBC Youth Board, the following **questions should be answered**:

¹ [Co-management - Youth \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/t/e/youth/Co-management_Youth.pdf)

² [EUR-Lex - C:2018:456:FULL - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/456/full/en)

³ [Youth Goal 9 - Youth Goals \(youth-goals.eu\)](https://youth-goals.eu/)

- What is the profile of young people represented in the Youth Board (age, education level, affiliation with youth structures / organisations)?
- How are members of Youth Board nominated & elected (open call or quota per city and country; delegation or election, etc.)?
- How can regional and other balances be ensured in the composition of Youth Board?
- What is the mandate of the Youth Board (agenda, opportunities for making their positions on the issues relevant to UBC, level of involvement in the decision making process, etc.)?
- What is the (formal) relationship between Youth Board and the UBC Executive Board, Presidium?
- How does Youth Board operate (number of members, regularity and format of meetings, etc.)?
- What is the support structure for the Youth Board (designated staff member in the Secretariat, Youthful Cities Commission or city-provided support to their delegated representatives)?

Even though **UBC sister organisations** (BSSSC, CBSS, Euroregion Baltic) in the region have institutionalised youth involvement in their operations, each of the organisations have developed their own format for youth participation.

Council of the Baltic Sea States has developed a format called Baltic Sea Region Youth Forum⁴ (BSRYF) that can be accessed by any youth organisation or youth council in the region (and even youth groups). The aim of the initiative is to create a forum for young people to address challenges in the Baltic Sea Region, make decision makers notice relevant issues, enhance trust in policy making processes and suggest possible solutions or innovative projects.

To become a simple member of BSRYF, one just needs to register. It opens opportunities to join events, taskforces and working groups. However, there's an internal election procedure for the positions in the BSRYF Committee of Youth Representatives (consists of 10 to 20 people (16 – 30 years old) reelected on annual basis; acts as a legislative body of the BSRYF). All registered members of the forum are eligible to vote in the Committee's elections. Administrative support is provided by a designated staff member within CBSS team.

Baltic Sea states Sub-Regional Cooperation (BSSSC) has a more agile framework for youth participation⁵. The organisation has a designated BSSSC Youth Coordinator and Regional Youth Contact Persons (staff of the regions who are members of the network) whose competence is to reach out to the active young people in the region and involve them in the activities of the BSSSC.

BSSSC Youth Network consists of youth representatives (1 – 3 persons) of all BSR regions (16 – 25 years old). The Network meets at least twice a year before the Spring Youth Event and Autumn Youth Event followed by the BSSSC Annual Conference. The youth leaders of the Network are the two Youth Board Members elected by the youth for a two-year period in transparent elections during the Autumn Youth Event.

⁴ [BSRYF – Baltic Sea Youth \(cbss.org\)](http://bsryf.org)

⁵ [Youth | BSSSC](http://youth.bsssc.org)

UBC Youthful Cities Commission during its meeting in Gdansk this March had a dedicated session on the development of UBC Youth Board concept. Civil servants, youth workers and young people from municipal youth councils were part of the meeting.

During the meeting the participants couldn't agree on a specific model of UBC Youth Board. However, the following concerns and opportunities were identified as those that need to be looked into in more detail:

- Purpose. The role of the Youth Board and its operational model, once agreed upon, should be clearly defined in the legal documents of the UBC and respected by all structures of the organisation in order to avoid tokenism and provide a real impact.
- Operations. One of the most ambitious formats Youth Board could undertake would be to act as a joint reference point for the Executive Board, Presidium and Commissions on youth-related points of their agenda. Youth Board could also undertake its own initiatives that aim at vocalising problems of young people in the cities and searching for joint solutions.
- Structure. Even though following the Executive Board's election / appointment model, when selecting participants for UBC Youth Board, would be the easiest path to follow, it might be quite discriminative for young people who come from cities not active in youth field within UBC.
- Age. The age of young people that cities work with on daily basis and involve in participatory structures varies, largely because of the countries' legal definitions of "youth". However, for UBC Youth Board the bottom limit could be 14-16, whereas the upper limit could be 24 – 30 years.
- Alternatives. It should be mentioned that alternatives to having a joint Youth Board were also discussed. Having youth representation procedure in every Commission was among the voiced ones.

In order to have a legal basis for its further work on the development of UBC Youth Board's Concept, **Youthful Cities Commission kindly asks the Executive Board:**

- To have a formal decision on whether Youthful Cities Commission is authorised to develop concrete proposal (i.e. scenarios / models for establishment and operations of UBC Youth Board);
- To have a discussion on expectations and needs of the political management of the UBC in regard to (establishment of) UBC Youth Board.

In case of positive decision of the Executive Board on the authorisation of the YCC, the Commission will undertake a series of discussions with commissions, member cities and youth councils of the cities to develop a model that fits needs of the majority of the stakeholders.

We expect the final proposal (together with supporting documents) to be ready in spring 2025, so that it can be voted for during the XVIII UBC General Conference.

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