



Chapter 5

**Development of the
Baltic Interstate and
Non-Governmental
Institutions and Their Role
in the Building of Regional
Consciousness**

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Introduction

The main aims of the chapter are to discuss international organisations in world politics, regional co-operation in Europe, the development of the Baltic interstate and non-governmental institutions, and their role in the building of regional consciousness. The main problematic issues are such aspects as interstate relations in the Baltic Sea Region in regards to enhancing interstate and non-governmental co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region, civil society potential for regional consciousness building, regional identity projects, civic activism, culture diplomacy, youth projects, digitisation, civil society potential and regional integration.

Regional Organisations in Europe: Baltic Perspective

Regional organisations are an important subset of international organisations. They aim to help address regional issues pertinent to a particular group of subjects and entities. Important domains thereby are economic, ecological, social, cultural, and civic. International organisations have traditionally been very active in Europe due to strong civil society traditions in the region. In particular, the Council of Europe (CoE) is one of the most renowned regional organisations with broad membership encompassing 47 member states. It has a special structure within its framework, the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) for organisations with participatory status with the CoE. One of the main current challenges of CoE is to strengthen civil society and develop participatory democracy on a pan-European basis (Council of Europe, 2021).

Regional Diversity

While looking further at the Baltic Sea Region of Europe, it is worthwhile to note that it is comprised of a number of subregions influencing the area's specific features. While defining a region, one considers not only geographic proximity but also economic, political, and cultural connections. The region is comprised of countries with various cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, a history of governance, and types of political regimes.

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Thereby one needs to consider that there are various theoretical approaches to Baltic regional studies, as outlined in Chapter 1 Lars Rydén (in Maciejewski, 2002) holds that the Baltic Sea drainage basin includes wholly or partly the territory of 14 countries altogether with some 85 million inhabitants. According to the Baltic Development Forum (2018) approach, the region consists of 11 nations and over 100 million dwellers. Per EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (2021), this area includes 12 countries and about 85 million residents. For this publication, it is suggested to follow the definition of Rydén (in Maciejewski, 2002) including 14 countries. One can distinguish such partly overlapping subregions or clusters within the Baltic region, as Nordic and Eastern European. Usually, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland are considered Nordic countries. Important subregional organisations in this regard are the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers. It is worthwhile noting that Nordic countries have been at the core of regional co-operation growth in the Baltic Sea area. The Baltic States are Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. These three countries are characterised by strong cultural, economic, and political ties. After the USSR's disintegration, these three Baltic states gravitated to the North European vector of Baltic co-operation. In particular, Sleivyte (2008) notes that the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), since gaining their independence in the 1990s, have been rethinking their place on the regional and global levels. The subregion of Eastern European states includes Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, and the western part of the Russian Federation.

On the political level, one can distinguish the so-called Western and post-Soviet states in the region, depending on the start of their Baltic integration, in particular, within the framework of the European Union. The region consists of a founding member of the European Union, fairly new EU members and non-member states. Sweden, Finland, Germany, Denmark, and Norway are characterised as states with strong traditions of Western democracy and well-developed democratic institutions. These countries are EU members, except for Norway.

Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovak Republic started their integration into Western European structures in the 1980-1990s after breaking away from the Soviet sphere of influence, just like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania did prior to disintegration of the USSR. There is a growing co-operation between the Baltic (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Nordic and Eastern European states within the region. Skilling (2018) holds that there has been strong income convergence of the Baltic States and Poland, accompanied by a continuing strong performance by the Nordic economies. This level of co-operation is impressive in comparison, for example, with other subregions of the European Union. Economic and social collaboration gradually leads to joint political projects, and such co-operation brings the countries of the area closer in institutional terms step by step.

The situation in such Eastern European post-Soviet states, as Ukraine, Belarus and Russia is currently unstable. Since the start of the unprovoked Russian aggression in February 2022, Ukraine has been fighting for its sovereignty and democratic values, whilst in the Russian Federation, democracy development is further declining and authoritarian traditions are prevailing. The deterioration of democratic institutions is also noted in Belarus. In particular, the results of Presidential elections 2020 were not recognised by the EU states and the majority of European states. Thus, the countries of the region have various political regimes – from well-developed Western democracy to authoritarian rule.

Growing Regional Co-operation. Ecological Development as a Core of Regional Co-operation

The Baltic region countries have been engaged in various co-operation projects throughout centuries. Karlsson (2004) notes that the peoples of the Baltic Sea Region have a long and changing history of transnational relations (Risse-Kappen, 1995a: 3, as cited in Karlsson, 2004). Therefore, regional co-operation has become a considerable factor of economic and social growth.

Tomenendal and Raffer (2017) hold that regional agglomerations of related organisations and businesses are supposed to have positive effects on the regional economy in terms of growth and innovation. The principles of co-operation are based on common development strategies on governmental, regional and local levels, involving participation of think tanks, infrastructure projects and businesses (Palmowski, 2021).

Interstate relations in the Baltic region are characterised by sufficiently high level of co-operation. Palmowski (2021) notes that the sea and inland hinterland of Baltic Europe form a unique macro-regional unit. Close co-operation ties, high level of mutual trust stemming from neighbourhood relations and similar cultural values contribute to the region's economic convergence, emergence of joint business and social projects.

The Baltic region is characterised by a diversity and complexity of subregional relations in the framework of other European organisations. Thereby the dimensions of co-operation are, first of all, socioeconomic and cultural rather than political and security ones. Moreover, ecological development and environment protection have been at the core of regional co-operation in the Baltic area. The idea behind such co-operation is that an insufficient number of mutual initiatives may result in a lack of co-operation among people of the Baltic region countries, which will affect such sectors as health, security and ecology (Environmental Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region (2018). A significant progress was noted in the Baltic Sea Region from 1990 to 2014 with regard to environmental co-operation advancement (Environmental Co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region (2018).

Despite certain economic and geopolitical challenges affecting co-operation among the Baltic Sea countries, it is advisable to continue developing projects of common social interest, such as environment protection, marine safety, ecology research and fighting pollution, which can potentially bridge ideological gaps between governments.

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Co-operation with the EU

The Baltic region countries have a long and dynamic history of economic and diplomatic connections. Strong collaboration and competition relations are an inherent attribute of the region from the beginning of its civilisation formation (Palmowski, 2021). One of the most important regional organisations related to the Baltic Sea area is the European Union. The EU attaches great importance to the development of the Baltic region within the general European framework. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is aimed at establishing co-operation between EU institutions, national government, Baltic area organisations and civil society networks in order to promote funding opportunities, streamline community project development and thus contribute to the prosperity of the Baltic Sea Region.

Co-operation prospects in the Baltic Sea Region appear to be impressive. Since 2004, the Baltic Sea has become an internal sea of the EU, and it has enhanced co-operation of the countries in the area (Palmowski, 2021). At the same time, it should be noted that there are certain specific features pertinent to European co-operation in this regard. For instance, Sweden and Denmark from the Nordic subregion are EU members, however they are not in Eurozone. Norway is not an EU member state, yet it signed the Schengen Agreement. Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation from the broadly defined Baltic region are not EU members. Various dimensions of relations with the EU contribute to the region's diversity and provide opportunities for further growth. In 2009 the Baltic Sea Region collaboration framework was further enhanced with the start of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, which potentially can bring the region to leadership positions on the international arena (Baltic Development Forum, 2018).

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Touching upon the geopolitical perspective, it was expected to involve the Russian partners to a greater extent in the Strategy implementation and, in general, contribute to international collaboration in the Baltic region. To this end, non-EU members Iceland, Norway, Russia and Belarus were welcomed to co-operate on areas of common regional interests. For instance, one can mention the initiative the Northern Dimension (ND).

This unites the EU, the Russian Federation, Norway and Iceland since 1999. Yet, the further deterioration of democracy standards in Russia and Belarus, in particular, the Russian aggression against Ukraine make co-operation with these countries particularly problematic. Overall, as to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region implementation, according to the European Commission report, the key result is that it gathered stakeholders from different states, spheres and levels (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 2021). Further results include the improvement of water quality, business development stimulation and educational projects' growth, for instance, the Baltic Training Programme (EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, 2021). The EU-funded Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme is aimed at supporting innovative and climate-neutral initiatives in the Baltic Sea area (About Interreg Baltic Sea Region). Among ecological co-operation initiatives between EU- and non-EU states one can note the first loan provided from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to Vodokanal St. Petersburg (Russia) for the restoration of wastewater treatment plants, as the construction of a wastewater treatment plant in Kaliningrad in 2017 (Environmental Cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region (2018).

At the same time, the generally quick co-operation growth pace has been challenged by certain setbacks such as differences in the level of economic development between the long-standing and new EU members, differences in approaches of political elites and national protectionism trends. Besides, regarding future forecasts, one can note a changing labour landscape related to technological advancements and a wide usage of automation and artificial intelligence projects that affect labour and trade markets.

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Skilling (2018) notes that the Baltic State region growth is facing a series of risks – from protectionism, to a weaponisation of international commerce, to geopolitical risk. In a similar vein, Druzhinin and Prokopyev (2018) note that the difference between the eastern and western countries of the area remains considerable, based on a study on how the EU-inspired common economic space impacted the economies of the Baltic States during 1995-2015. Among positive co-operation trends in the area Skilling (2018) notes the eight country-strong statement on Eurozone reform – signed by six of the Baltic states. It is further recommended to strengthen integration within the region, while at the same time deepening connections between Europe and Asia (including the Arctic Route project) (Skilling, 2018). Thus, the Baltic states and subregions demonstrate significant capacity for further interstate co-operation supported by the EU.

Gradual Shaping Up of Regional Identity

Regional consciousness and identity building are important concepts for European politics. Regional identity is a kind of spatial identity on a certain scale defined as the meso-level, located between the national and local levels (Pohl, 2001). Thereby there are two conflicting approaches to defining regional identity – one is focused on a topographical view of culture and politics, while the other is focused not on territorially bounded regions, but on networks stretched through and beyond regions (Tomaney, 2020). Thereby regionalism is seen as being founded on ancient or ethnocultural understandings (Tomaney, 2020). Regions are particularly important in the EU where both the Union shaping up and the 'Europe of regions' are specific manifestations of the re-considering of state spaces and assignment of new meanings to territory (Paasi, 2009). Also, regional identity has been determined in the EU's cohesion policy as a vital element for regional development (Paasi, 2009).

The concept of regional identity shaping up in the Baltic Sea area is a subject of further discussion. Processes of region building and identity formation in the Baltic Sea are closely connected (Schäfer, 2005).

Policy-makers who construct the identity of the Baltic Sea Region through their discourses also construct the region as a whole, thereby the identity of the region is determined as the sum of characteristics that define its individuality (Schäfer, 2005). The most prominent characteristics of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) are its post-modern qualities, symbolised by the metaphor of Olympic rings Europe, its inclusiveness and its overlapping networks (Schäfer, 2005). Other characteristics are defined as a common history, Europeaness and economic success (Schäfer, 2005). Thereby each of the three aforementioned characteristics can be a dividing factor between the BSR countries and Russia due to historical perceptions and economic conditions (Schäfer, 2005).

The Baltic region has been demonstrating an impressive economic and political growth over the past decades. Balsiger and VanDeveer (2018) state that regional agreements increasingly point to some sort of ecoterritoriality, state actors are increasingly complemented by nonstate or substate actors, and the scope shifts beyond purely environmental issues to encompass broader notions of sustainable development. Sologub (2015) arrives at a conclusion that the region construction process is being continued, and it involves a wide range of actors: NGOs, local and regional authorities, scientific organisations, higher education institutions, business structures and international organisations. It can be underscored that regional perspective is vital for boosting intergovernmental co-operation in the entire Baltic area. Co-operation among various types of stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region is being promoted, and it is highly important to focus on aspects that unite the countries of the area and promote a synergistic effect of its development and further growth.

Efforts are being made to enhance political co-operation in the region. Among concerning trends one can note rise of right-wing populism and nationalism in the Baltic region states. Similar trends can be traced not only in post-Soviet countries of the region, but also in well-developed Western democracies.

Danielson et al. (2018) note that anti-EU-scepticism has led to democratic backsliding in Poland, Germany, the Nordic and Baltic countries. The authors discuss the concept of 'Europe of different speeds' and its different interpretations by various member states and subregions of the EU. According to the authors' viewpoint, the Russian Federation has been conducting an unfriendly policy, ignoring international duties and demonstrating a lack of progress in economic development (Danielson et al., 2018). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 aggravated political and security context of the region.

The potential of further interstate co-operation is being actively explored. Vasilieva and Kosov (2017), particularly, suggest turning to legacy of Hanseatic traditions and studying its value for current Baltic region development. The authors note that recent economic and trade co-operation in the region has been complicated by geopolitical confrontations between Russia and Western counterparts (Vasilieva and Kosov, 2017). One of the key solutions to the problem can be using the potential of information society and innovative growth (Vasilieva and Kosov, 2017). Khoma and Kokoriev (2021) analyse the relation between democracy and the principle of tolerance in the Baltic countries and the authors arrive at a conclusion that the countries encounter similar challenges of enhancing the principle of tolerance and countering intolerance. Vorotnikov (2017) studied the relations of the Scandinavian-Baltic region states (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden) and Ukraine in political and economic sectors. Divergent stances regarding the Russia-Ukraine war continue being the most important stumbling block in the relations between Russia and the states of the area (Vorotnikov, 2017). Overall, current events in Ukraine and Belarus challenged the political status quo of the region. It is necessary to continue furthering diplomatic efforts in order to promote political stability in the area.

Regional initiatives are very important for building confidence and mutual trust. These initiatives can bring closer various subregions of the Baltic Sea area such as Nordic, Baltic and Eastern European closer together.

In particular, regional identity shaping up is one of priority areas listed by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021), while policy areas of Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation include cohesion policy, culture and regional identity (Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, 2021). Perhaps, it can be a bit premature to talk about a fully shaped Baltic regional identity, however co-operation is ongoing and keeps growing vibrantly.

Interstate Institutions in the Baltic Sea Region: Specific Features and Cases

Among important interstate organisations of the region one can note associations dealing at parliamentary, executive and municipal levels. There are organisations focusing on environmental, cultural and social issues of common regional interests. Some of the specific features of interstate bodies' co-operation are as follows, soft model of institutionalisation, growing parliamentary and intergovernmental co-operation, growing co-operation at municipal and sub-regional levels as well as a focus on a range of social and economic issues.

It should be noted that the most prominent interstate Baltic regional organisations are referred to as 'co-operation', 'political forum', 'political network', 'platform' etc. For instance, the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is defined as an "intergovernmental political forum", Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) as "intergovernmental multilateral co-operation", Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC) as "political network", the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference as "forum for political dialogue", Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) as "regional platform for environmental policy making", Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) as "leading network of cities". These definitions testify to a soft model of institutionalisation focusing on economic and social rather than political and security ones. As noted, political union represents the most advanced form of international integration (Levels of Economic Integration) with respective "hard power" mechanisms, whereas "soft

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planning” practices are defined as reaching beyond administrative borders and seeking synergies between actors across territorial boundaries through informal or semi-formal governance networks (Faludi, 2013; Stead, 2014; Purkarthofer, 2016, as cited in Mattila and Heinilä, 2022). The concept of soft, informal and networked planning and governance originally emerged in the 1990s – based largely on Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality – and provided a normative model for restoring the legitimacy of new planning and governance practices (Mattila and Heinilä, 2022).

Even in the broader framework of the European Union, the concept of ‘soft-core’ Europe is currently being discussed. A soft-core EU is made up of the overlapping participation of different clusters of member-states in the EU’s many policy communities – all administered by a single set of EU institutions, all with voice across communities but with a vote only in those areas in which they participate (Schmidt, 2019). Current debates over the future of Europe divide based around what kind of differentiation would work best: multi-speed, hard core or what is named a soft-core Europe (Schmidt, 2019). The Baltic region states currently have different economic, social and political characteristics, therefore they are rather focusing on initial steps of institutionalisation.

One should note a significant growth in parliamentary and intergovernmental co-operation among representatives of legislative and executive bodies of the Baltic region states. There is co-operation amongst relevant ministries from the Baltic Sea countries. There are initiatives which connect parliamentarians, decentralised authorities, ministries dealing with spatial and infrastructural development, as well as national heritage protection in the Baltic Sea area.

There is ongoing collaboration at the municipal level between Baltic area cities. The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) is an organisation which represents a network of cities from the Baltic Sea area. In the 2020 Overview Local Government in the Nordic and Baltic Countries, five out of eight countries have had significant

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consolidation at the municipal level in recent years (SKL International, 2021). And the BSSSC consists of regional authorities from the Baltic Sea littoral states - Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Norway (Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, 2021).

Collaboration in the Baltic Sea Region is developing on a range of social, ecological and economic aspects. CBSS aims to address issues related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Palermo Protocol and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and translate them into regional actions on the ground (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). HELCOM is aimed at enhancing co-operation in the ecological sector among Baltic Sea states. The Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation (BSSSC) is focused on aspects such as maritime policy, energy and climate, transport and infrastructure, as well as culture and regional identity (Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council, 2021).

One of the most renowned organisations which played a leading role regarding integration in the Baltic Sea Region is the **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)**. The CBSS organises at the intergovernmental level in order to enhance co-operation in the region. The CBSS was founded in 1992 when the system of international relations cardinally changed after the disintegration of the USSR. One of the organisation's goals was to establish co-operation ties among various countries pertinent within the Baltic Sea area and provide a smooth transition to a new international order. The CBSS is the leading organisation regards to the environmental protection dimension. The first Baltic Sea States Summit took place in 1996 in Sweden, and the Agenda 21 initiative announced there was set up by the Ministers of Environment (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). The organisation remains highly relevant in the 21st c. and today its focus is on social policies, sustainable development, research and human rights.

The organisation enjoys the EU support. The CBSS consists of 11 member states (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden), as well as the EU Commission. Russia's participation was suspended due to its illegal war against Ukraine. The Council's work is centred on three priorities: regional identity, prosperous region; and security (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). These three goals guide the organisation's development in the 21st c. The Prosperous Region goal includes projects aimed at strengthening economic development initiatives in the member states which are oriented towards the growth and well-being of communities. The Safe and Secure Region goal involves a peaceful development of the region and the protection of the population from risks and emergencies. The Regional Identity dimension gives attention to culture, history and national heritage preservation of particular regions in order to celebrate diversity and jointly shape up the multifaceted Baltic regional identity.

Regarding the Security dimension, some of the important initiatives of the organisation are projects on anti-trafficking, child protection and civil security. Regarding the Prosperous Region dimension, the organisation's projects are aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. Thereby a special focus is placed on green energy development and relevant project implementation with the goal of protecting the environment and ensuring the well-being of communities. Priority areas in this regard are labour co-operation, science collaboration, sustainable development, climate dialogue and sustainable maritime economy (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021). As to the Regional Identity dimension, top priorities at the moment are culture, higher education and youth development and respective projects aimed at establishing long-term co-operation among various generation groups from member states, promoting tolerance, understanding and building trust. The organisation is active in the culture sector development. Two specialised structures, *Ars Baltica* and the Baltic Region Heritage Committee focus on cultural co-operation and regional heritage protection (Council of the Baltic Sea States, 2021).

The organisation makes considerable efforts to promote regional consciousness shaping up. In 2021-2022 Norway holds presidency of the Council.

The **Baltic Region Heritage Committee (BRHC)** was founded in 1998. The member states are Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany and Norway. Russia was suspended from participation in BRHC work due to its unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. It consists of representatives responsible for cultural heritage protection and promotion in the respective member states. The members represent the national bodies in charge of cultural heritage preservation (Baltic Region Heritage Committee, 2021). The organisation is aimed at promoting cultural heritage preservation and its use as a vital resource for the Baltic region integration.

Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB) is also related to the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) network. The organisation's participants are national representatives of relevant ministries and regional-level political leadership (VASAB, 2021). The BalticRIM project took place between 2018-2020, in co-operation with a range of other organisations, including BSSSC, VASAB, HELCOM and Finnish Divers' Association. The goal was to further heritage protection initiatives and efficient tourism development, in line with the EU Blue Growth initiative which is aimed at marine sector protection (Baltic Region Heritage Committee, 2021).

The **Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)** was created in 1991. It consists of representatives of 11 national and regional parliaments of the Baltic Sea Region countries, as well as five parliamentary organisations. The member states are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Sweden. Russia stopped its participation in BSPC activities in May 2022. The organisation helps to establish efficient connections between elective political bodies, executive authorities and civil society groups in the region. Besides, it serves as an important communication platform for parliaments of the EU and non-EU member states.



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The BSPC includes a range of other vibrant organisations in the Baltic Sea area, in particular, the CBSS, BSSSC, the Baltic Sea Labour Network (BSLN), HELCOM, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea States (The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, 2021). A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea States and the BSPC which is an important step of growing European co-operation. The BSPC promotes the common identity shaping up of the Baltic Sea Region (The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, 2021). The BSPC has working groups on topics such as climate change and biodiversity, migration and integration, sustainable tourism and civil security (The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, 2021).

The Nordic Council was created in 1952. It is one of the oldest organisations in the region. First of all, it is focused on interparliamentary co-operation. Its member countries are Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands. Activity areas of the organisation encompass legislation and justice, digitisation, projects for persons with special needs, environmental protection, social and youth projects, energy and sustainable development, gender equality, culture and language, education and research. Some of the current initiatives include Nordic Day 2022, COP26: Choosing Green, International Branding of the Nordic Region, the Nordic Gender Effect at Work, Nordic Food Policy Lab and the Competencies of the Future (The Nordic Council, 2022). In particular, the Nordic Council sees education and training as key competencies of the future and invests in efforts helping people to develop necessary respective skills to cope with the complex future challenges.

The Nordic Council of Ministers represents a structure for intergovernmental collaboration in the Nordic region. Its goal is to maximise the synergistic effects of individual contributions of the organisation's member states. The organisation's vision is that the Nordic region will turn into the most integrated and sustainable region globally by 2030 (The Nordic Council of Ministers, 2022).

Therefore, current Council efforts are directed towards achieving this goal.

The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) was founded in 1991. The member cities are located in Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Poland. Russia's cities are not listed on the organisation website any more. And the Ukrainian city of Vilnyansk is included as an associated member city. The union's work is aimed at establishing fruitful co-operation between the member cities and further develop their growth. The organisation is focused on such sectors as social development, cultural heritage promotion, youth support, health protection, innovation and technology advancements. The UBC works actively on the implementation of regional strategies, in particular, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) (The Union of Baltic Cities, 2021).

The UBC implements a wide range of projects such as Baltic Sea Cultural Cities and Regions, Needs-based Education and Studies in Societal Security (NEEDS), UMBRELLA 2.0 (enhancing transnational co-operation), Baltic Sea Youth Platform (BSYP), ReSit - Situational Picture of Volunteerism for Societal Resilience and Sport for Values (The Union of Baltic Cities, 2021).

The main focus of the **Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC)** is collaboration between regional authorities of the Baltic states. BSSSC members are Sweden, Latvia, Norway, Finland, Germany, Estonia, Poland, Denmark and Lithuania. In addition, the organisation has close co-operation ties with the EU and seeks to coordinate national and European policy interests in the Baltic area (The Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation, 2021). The BSSSC featured the project by the European Youth Forum selecting Klaipda as European Youth Capital for 2021, which was the first time that a Nordic and Baltic city received such recognition (The Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation, 2021).

One more important organisation described in Chapter 1 is the **Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – (Helsinki Commission (HELCOM))** founded in 1974.

This organisation is specifically designated to deal with ecological issues. The organisation's members are Denmark, the EU, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden and Russia. Co-operation among member states is very active at the ministerial level. The Contracting Parties are represented by Heads of Delegation (HOD) (Helsinki Commission, 2021). HELCOM manages such initiatives as Baltic Data Flows project, HELCOM BLUES (biodiversity and effective regional measures for the Baltic Sea), BSR WATER (continuous cross-sectoral co-operation and knowledge transfer in water management), Capacity4MSP platform (strengthening capacity of maritime spatial planning) (Helsinki Commission, 2021). HELCOM activities are aimed at safeguarding the Baltic Sea marine environment, in particular, one of the important recent programmes was the Baltic Sea Action Plan which is designed to restore good ecological conditions of the Baltic Sea environment by 2021 (Baltic Sea Organisations).

When looking at the Baltic Sea Region as a whole, especially close co-operation should be noted among the three states usually denoted as, namely, Baltic countries - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania collaborate very fruitfully, in particular, under the framework of the **Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM)**. BCM was founded in 1994. The member states are Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It became an important milestone for trilateral co-operation, in view of addressing post-Soviet development challenges and planning further European integration steps. The council is very active in the realm of culture sector development (architecture, performing arts, library, museum and information science, theatre and film production etc.). One should note vital projects such as Baltic Museology Summer School, International Folk Festival Baltica, Baltic Seminar of National Libraries and Baltic Film Days (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).

The **Baltic Assembly (BA)** was founded in 1991. The member states are Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. The organisation is aimed at promoting parliamentary co-operation among the three countries.



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The Baltic Assembly helps to establish co-operation among respective national parliaments and executive authorities and also advises on important political matters. Since 2011 the Baltic Innovation Prize has been awarded under the auspices of the organisation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2021; Baltic Assembly, 2021).

Thus, one can note considerable potential for collaboration and important enhancing co-operation among intergovernmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region. There are certain challenges such as differences in levels of economic growth and divergent political stances of the Baltic countries on certain matters. Yet, overall, the interstate co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region appears to be fruitful and promising.

Non-governmental Institutions in the Baltic Sea Region: Specific Features and Cases

Non-governmental institutions play an important role in bringing people of the Baltic Sea Region closer. Some of the specific features of non-governmental co-operation are as follows, strong civil society potential for regional consciousness building, focus on science and technology projects; social, economic and labour protection projects; culture diplomacy, as well as education and youth initiatives. Non-governmental institutions' (NGI) activities include, among other, social, environmental, advocacy and human rights issues. They aim at promoting social or political change on a broad or local scale. NGI are critical for promoting citizen activities, developing conscious society and building communities. They are helpful in defining group identity based on different determinants, e.g. regional identity.

Baltic region countries have strong civil society traditions. Götz and Hackmann (2019) note the synergetic effects resulting from the collaboration of governments and voluntary associations, which increase the civic engagement for society, with regard to a hybrid theory approach.

The Baltic region consists of societies that have different experiences with their respective neighbours, including the exercise of power by occupational states, yet the political culture of committed individuals may be considered one of the main determining factors for inner constitution of citizenship which is at the core of civil society development (Götz & Hackmann 2019).

Civil society has a considerable potential for regional consciousness building in the region. The Baltic Sea Region offers exceptionally rich material for the discussion of civil society, because it experienced the demolition of communist regimes, welfare state crises, and the move from a centralist stance to the networks-oriented one (Götz & Hackmann, 2019). Thereby the civil society potential can be effectively used in order to balance out relations and establish a beneficial dialogue between political leadership and the countries' grass root communities.

Non-governmental co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region is developing dynamically. There are important economic, scientific and technological projects. In particular, the Baltic states are well-known for their innovative projects and considerable digitisation progress. The countries of the region welcome the growth of numerous startups that promote economic development, create jobs, improve business climate and contribute to the prosperity of the population. In particular, Estonia and Finland are famous for technological advances in digitisation and e-governance development sector, while Denmark is known for innovative social and community projects, for example, the cutting-edge Aarhus Public Library. Alongside such corporations as Nokia, Ericsson and Skype, the region has a multitude of small and medium firms that create jobs for the labour market and attract investment (Baltic Sea Region: A Global Digital Test Hub, 2017).

There is an ongoing dialogue between different stakeholders in the area focused on furthering vital technological and developmental projects. It is worthwhile mentioning the project Connecting Digital Start-up Ecosystems in Nordic Cities launched in 2017.

The idea was to select three cities in the region and establish connections among them in order to promote experience exchange regarding work with startup communities. The cities were Aarhus (Denmark), Gothenburg (Sweden) and Turku (Finland) and the project was supported by Baltic Development Forum. The main activity in the project was a workshop to discuss how these cities work with start-uppers and promote beneficial idea exchange (Connecting Digital Start-up Ecosystems in Nordic Cities, 2017). At the same time Wernberg and Andersson (2017) note that even though Baltic countries are tech leaders, none of them is leading in all automation sectors, which presents opportunities for learning from neighbouring countries. The digitisation and information technology sector is definitely one of the realms in which cross-sectoral co-operation among the Baltic region states can be especially fruitful. In this regard one can also note such an organisation as the Baltic Development Forum (BDF) which was set up as a research centre and communication hub for the Baltic area residents.

Civil society organisations lay the foundation for further mutually beneficial social and economic co-operation in the region. Co-operation among non-governmental organisations, especially cross-border projects serves as an important catalyst for deepening co-operation and building regional consciousness in the Baltic Sea area. Vasilieva and Kosov (2017) hold that Baltic cities are involved in co-operation projects encouraging the enhancement of interstate ties and the development of community networks. At the same time the process of interstate and intercultural exchanges is not always unproblematic. Particularly, there is an issue relating to high-skilled worker migration in the region. Kirch (2018) further explores the topic of European migration, per the study findings, high levels of migration of skilled workers had a negative impact on innovative potential in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. In this regard one can mention such labour protection organisations as the Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF), Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN), Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS) and Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA).

There is a strong focus on cultural and public diplomacy, educational and environmental projects in the region. Co-operation in the education sector continues to grow. Vasilieva and Kosov (2017) note that an important case is the Baltic Universities Partnership which is aimed at promoting sustainability in the region. Murashova and Loginova (2017) look at the level of interest of Baltic Sea area researchers in interacting on scientific projects in University–industry sector. Universities and industries growing interest in common projects (Butcher & Jeffren, 2005, in Murashova & Loginova, 2017) has led to a significant increase in co-operation and the number of scientific publications has doubled in 2010–2014 (Murashova and Loginova, 2017). While enhancing further co-operation in the region, focus should be on developing networks among civil society groups, labour unions, educational institutions and cultural associations. In this context one can mention such initiatives and organisations as Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture, Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund, The Baltic University Programme (BUP), Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC) and Baltic Culture Fund.

The **Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF)** was created in 2011 stemming from the Baltic Sea Labour Network (BSLN) activities, which testifies to the importance of community networks enhancement in the region. Member states are Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Latvia, Poland, and Lithuania. Russia is not included in the list of the organisation members any more. The main idea of the forum is to promote experience exchange among labour market participants in the Baltic area. The priorities are labour mobility, demographic challenges, lifelong learning, inclusivity and youth employment (Baltic Sea Labour Forum, 2021). For instance, BSLF implements the Baltic Sea Labour Forum for Sustainable Working Life (BSLF-SWL) project to improve work conditions and lifelong learning for an elderly labour force in order to promote active ageing and employability (Baltic Sea Labour Forum, 2021).

The **Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN)** was founded in 1999.

Participant states are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Poland and Norway. Russia is not included in the list of the organisation members any more. It consists of 11 million union members. BASTUN is an organisation for information and experience exchange among members of trade unions from the Baltic Sea Region, as well as for protecting their interests. BASTUN co-operates with CBSS and BSPC which testifies to effective intergovernmental and community co-operation in the area. The organisation aims at exerting political and societal impact, implements joint initiatives and places urgent Baltic region-related topics on the agenda of the trade union network (Baltic Sea Trade Union Network, 2021). BASTUN events were featured on the YouTube channel Nordisk TV (Baltic Sea Trade Union Network, 2021).

The Nordic subregion is an important neighbouring area for the Baltic region, therefore it is vital to mention organisations such as the **Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS)** whose main goal is to represent the interests of trade union members and promote co-operation among the unions of the Nordic countries. It was founded in 1972. The Council includes 15 organisations and thus represents over 8.5 million trade union members from such countries as Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Denmark (including Faroe Islands and Greenland). The Council promotes co-operation on areas of common interest via knowledge exchange and advocacy efforts (Council of Nordic Trade Unions, 2021). NFS in co-operation with the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) implements The Road Towards a Carbon-Free Society project. NFS engages in dialogue with respective governments, Nordic Council of Ministers and the EU (Council of Nordic Trade Unions, 2021).

The Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA) was founded in 1992 in Germany to promote causes significant for business development in the Baltic Sea Region. The organisation includes 51 Chambers of Commerce from Germany, Denmark, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Finland, Russia, Sweden, and Poland.

The Chamber includes almost half a million (over 400,000 firms) from various market fields of Northern European countries (Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association, 2021).

The Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture. The initiative promotes co-operation between Nordic and Baltic subregions in the culture sector and culture diplomacy. It was founded in 2009. The Nordic subregion is represented by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Baltic subregion by Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The programme supports individual artists, culture organisations and networks. The programme provides funding for mobility of individuals, organisations and groups (Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture, 2019). The Programme holds such events as an online Nordic Language Café, nordiSKulptur 3, Movie Night, discussions and seminars, for instance, a Sustainable Fashion Panel, as well as Climate Action at the Nordic COP26 Hub in Helsinki (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021).

Following up on the topic of Nordic and Baltic subregions' collaboration, it is important to note co-operation between Sweden and Lithuania under **Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund**. The Fund's work is aimed at enhancing co-operation between these neighbouring countries. The organisation was founded fairly recently in 2018. It promotes projects strengthening bilateral co-operation, especially youth initiatives stimulating creativity, co-operation, mutual trust and social growth. Special focus is placed on network building among the young generation representatives (Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund, 2021). The Cooperation Fund awards travel grants, media grants (for articles that present new sides of Sweden/Lithuania) and project grants (joint development in Lithuania and Sweden, co-operation between young people) (Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund, 2021).

Regarding the Nordic region, it is further important to note the **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)**. It was founded in 2010 involving Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation and the European Union.

The EU, Norway and Iceland suspended until further notice all activities of the organisation involving Russia. The organisation welcomes creative projects aimed at culture development and research promotion in the region with the ultimate goal of enhancing co-operation between the Northern region partners. The Partnership welcomes collaboration in the creative industry sector, promoting experience exchanges and streamlining innovation policies in the partnership states (Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, 2021). Other interesting projects are a Bootcamp for Creative Entrepreneurs, Cross Innovation Workshop for Creatives and the Art of Staying Healthy (Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, 2021). EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) and NDPC received a grant from the European Commission for the Support to the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture project (Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, 2021).

Besides, strong co-operation relations should be noted among the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, particularly, in the realm of culture development. The **Baltic Culture Fund** was set up in 2018. The main idea is to promote culture development and international co-operation among the three Baltic states, and to this end, joint projects and events are held under the auspices of the organisation. It provides grants for culture project development. The Fund promotes projects in the sphere of literature, arts, theatre, performances, architecture and archives management encouraging cross-cultural initiatives. The Fund especially supports cultural events outside the Baltic countries, such as concerts, festivals, performances with a Baltic focus, as well as events promoting internationalisation of culture (The Baltic Culture Fund, 2021).

Coalition Clean Baltic unites environmental NGOs from the Baltic Sea area with the goal of improving the Baltic Sea environment (Coalition Clean Baltic, 2022). One can also mention such organisations focused on environment protection, for example, the Latvian Environment Protection Club, Estonian Green Movement, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, Friends of the Baltic, Lithuanian Fund For Nature and Latvian Green Movement.

These organisations work to preserve the environment of the Baltic Sea area and promote ecological awareness among the local people.

The **Baltic Development Forum (BDF)** was created in 1998. It was an important research centre and communication platform for the Baltic Sea Region community aimed at strengthening co-operation ties among politicians, businessmen, educators and community activists. The idea was to coordinate regional policies, facilitate and streamline decision-making processes and create competitive advantages for the region actors. The BDF was set up in order to serve as the Baltic region development platform which united counterparts from politics, business, academia and media (Baltic Development Forum, 2021).

Unfortunately, the Forum Secretariat stopped functioning in 2018, yet the organisation has made a significant contribution to the development of the Baltic region during 20 years of its operation. Thus, one can note important economic, social, digital, educational and environmental projects and considerable growing co-operation between non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region which helps to shape up and solidify regional identity. BDF centres its work around four key areas - providing platforms, generating knowledge, facilitating dialogue and managing projects (ICT and digital economy, water and blue growth, energy, regional promotion) (Baltic Development Forum, 2021).

The **Baltic University Programme (BUP)** is an initiative encompassing approximately 100 universities from 10 Baltic Sea Region states. It was launched in 1991. The Programme's mission was to promote co-operation among countries of the post-Soviet space and their Western vis-à-vis, first of all, centred on environment protection issues of common significance. The goal was to promote mutual understanding and co-operation among the Western European countries related to the Baltic Sea area, as well as the new democracies and nations in transition. Co-operation with higher educational establishments from Russia and Belarus was suspended after the full-scale



QR-code to the website www.balticuniv.uu.se

“Co-operation with higher educational establishments from Russia and Belarus was suspended after the full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine in February 2022.”

Russian invasion into Ukraine in February 2022. The BUP Coordinating Secretariat is located at Uppsala University. The Programme is based on the idea that academia plays a key role in society growth and that higher educational institutions can promote effective international co-operation. The education of the young generation, a focus on life-long learning, and by conducting relevant research, the BUP contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals as indicated by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (The Baltic University Programme, 2021). Within the framework of the Programme there are numerous educational and cultural activities, such as seminars, workshops, tours, exhibits and conferences. There is such an institutional body as the Students' Parliament representing students from the BUP participating universities in order to contribute to the Programme rollout and management.



QR-code to the website www.balticuniv.uu.se/about-us/themes

The Programme's activities are centred around key themes in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Climate Change, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Societies, Sustainable Water Resources, Urban-Rural Development, Sustainable Mobility and Tourism, Circular Economy, Education for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Food Systems (The Baltic University Programme, 2021). The goal is to promote safe, healthy, clean and democratic environments by means of joint projects and an internationalisation of education. An interesting dimension in this regard is sustainable mobility. In view of current migration trends and global increases in transportation means, it is important to consider environmental protection and raise awareness about reasonable and smart uses of transportation and energy resources. A focus is placed on cycling, walking and usage of public transportation. Another vital dimension in this regard is circular economy. The essence of circular economy is that a product is made recyclable and appropriate for secondary and modified usage. There is significant progress at the local level in the Baltic Sea area in this regard, however circular economy projects need to be further promoted and expanded.

One more important dimension is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It is necessary to promote the ideas of healthy lifestyle, climate change, responsible usage of available resources and curbing overconsumption. These initiatives help to incorporate such important topics into educational projects and curricula in order to shape up new sustainable development thinking in young generations.

In 2021 the BUP celebrated its 30th anniversary. In order to commemorate this important milestone, a series of thematic online seminars (Space Bridges 2.0) was planned. The second initiative in this regard was to collect a book of BUP stories and share people's memories, successes and reflections by means of storytelling.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that interstate and non-governmental institutions play a considerable role in building regional consciousness in the Baltic Sea area. The process of regional consciousness building has been dynamically advancing thus far in economic, social, cultural, ecological and educational dimensions. There are important regional identity development projects among the countries and subregions of the Baltic area. These projects help to establish understanding and build mutual trust among the countries. One can note successful co-operation and considerable potential for further growth among governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region. There are certain challenges such as different levels of economic development of various Baltic countries, as well as lack of understanding on certain political issues. Yet, overall, co-operation prospects appear to be highly promising. Besides, one can witness vital growing co-operation among non-governmental organisations in the Baltic Sea Region.

Multidimensionality and intensity of regional co-operation in the Baltic Sea area is being further discussed. It is still questionable if the extent of co-operation initiatives translates into actual regional consciousness and identity. The process of region conceptualisation is based on a division of labour, which emphasises the power of regional

”It is still questionable if the extent of co-operation initiatives translates into actual regional consciousness and identity.”

elites in the institutionalisation processes, yet it is the people of the Baltic Sea Region who have to adopt common features for a Baltic identity to come into being (Paasi, 2009). Through continued exploration of Baltic Sea Region background, culture and identity, the people of the Baltic countries can build a deeper understanding for each other and a more resilient region (Regional Identity, CBSS, 2023). Yet, presently, one can hardly see convincing signs of the Baltic identity shaping intensification. In particular, Russian aggressive foreign policy poses a serious threat to the security of the Baltic Sea area.

Nevertheless, collaboration in the region continues. As noted by the Council of the Baltic Sea States representatives, “the water connects us, but culture unites us”. Through highlighting shared culture, Baltic countries can strengthen the Baltic Sea Region identity, and in the long-term, and bolster co-operation (Regional Identity, CBSS, 2023). It is premature to speak of a well-shaped Baltic regional identity, yet there are important co-operation projects and initiatives in the area. Further perspectives for development can be related to digitisation, economic integration, co-operation on environmental protection projects, cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges.

“Further perspectives for development can be related to digitisation, economic integration, co-operation on environmental protection projects, cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges.”

Governmental Organisations				
Name	Year of foundation	Member states	Specialisation	Current status
Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)	1992	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden), EU Commission. Russia’s participation was suspended	Intergovernmental, political, environmental, social policies, sustainable development, research and human rights, culture sector, regional identity, prosperous region; and security	Active

Baltic Region Heritage Committee (BRHC)	1998	Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Norway. Russia was suspended	Promoting cultural heritage preservation and its use as a vital resource for the Baltic region integration	Active
Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB)	1992	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden), EU Commission. Russia's participation was suspended	Heritage protection initiatives, efficient tourism development, marine sector protection	Active
The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)	1991	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden. Russia stopped its participation in BSPC activities in May 2022	Establishing efficient connections between elective political bodies, executive authorities and civil society groups in the region; communication platform for parliaments of the EU and non-EU member states	Active
The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC)	1991	Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Ukraine. Russia's cities are not listed on the organisation website any more	cooperation between the member cities, social development, cultural heritage promotion, youth support, health protection, innovation and technology advancements	Active

The Nordic Council	1952	Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands	Interparliamentary cooperation, legislation and justice, digitisation, projects for persons with special needs, environmental protection, social and youth projects, energy and sustainable development, gender equality, culture and language, education and research	Active
Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC)	1993	Sweden, Latvia, Norway, Finland, Germany, Estonia, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania	Collaboration between regional authorities of the Baltic states, coordination of national and European policy interests in the Baltic area	Active
Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – (Helsinki Commission (HELCOM))	1974	Denmark, the EU, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Russia	Ecological issues, environment protection	Active
Baltic Council of Ministers (BCM)	1994	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	Trilateral cooperation in political, social and cultural sectors	Active
Baltic Assembly (BA)	1991	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	Promoting parliamentary cooperation	Active

Non-governmental Organisations				
Name	Year of foundation	Member states	Specialisation	Current status
The Baltic Sea Labour Forum (BSLF)	2011	Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania	Labour mobility, demographic challenges, lifelong learning, inclusivity and youth employment	Active
The Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BAS-TUN)	1999	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Germany, Poland, Norway	Information and experience exchange among members of trade unions from the BSR	Active
Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS)	1972	15 organisations and over 8.5 million trade union members from Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Denmark (including Faroe Islands and Greenland)	Representing interests of trade union members and promoting cooperation among the unions of the Nordic countries	Active
The Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce Association (BCCA)	1992	51 Chambers of Commerce from Germany, Denmark, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Finland, Russia, Sweden, Poland	Business development in the Baltic Sea Region	Semi-active
The Baltic Development Forum (BDF)	1998	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Russia's Northwestern region including Kaliningrad	Four key areas - providing platforms, generating knowledge, facilitating dialogue and managing projects (ICT and digital economy, water and blue growth, energy, regional promotion)	Inactive since 2018

Sweden-Lithuania Cooperation Fund	2018	Sweden, Lithuania	Strengthening bilateral cooperation, especially youth initiatives stimulating creativity, cooperation, mutual trust and social growth	Active
Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture (NDPC)	2010	Originally - Iceland, Norway, Russia, the EU. Later the EU, Norway and Iceland suspended until further notice all activities of the organisation involving Russia	Creative projects aimed at culture development and research promotion in the region with the ultimate goal of enhancing cooperation between the Northern region partners	Active
Baltic Culture Fund	2018	Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia	Culture development and international cooperation among the three Baltic states	Active
Nordic-Baltic Mobility Programme for Culture	2009	Nordic Council of Ministers and Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia	Support of individual artists, culture organisations and networks, funding for mobility of individuals, organisations and groups	Active
The Baltic University Programme (BUP)	1991	90 universities from Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine (cooperation with Russia and Belarus was suspended after the full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine)	Key themes in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals	Active

Questions for a discussion

1. What is the role of international organizations for regional cooperation?
2. What are the characteristics of interstate relations in the Baltic Sea Region?
3. What are the important regional identity development projects in the Baltic area?
4. How do cooperation projects help to establish understanding and mutual trust among the countries of the Baltic region?
5. What are the cases of successful cooperation projects in the Baltic area?

Additional task

Group project: Develop biking tour/marathon across the countries of the Baltic area aimed at promoting an environmental cause (Make Baltic Clean!)

1. Define your audience and outreach mechanisms.
2. Plan the biking tour/marathon route. Please include places of cultural value, meetings with activists, local government, municipalities, volunteers, youth groups, librarians, artists in order to promote the cause.
3. Plan the project monitoring and assessment.

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