

Baltic Sea Region history: awareness among youth, national syllabi, and education



Introduction:

The Unitas Foundation and the Museum of Occupation of Latvia started the 'Different Nations – Shared Experiences' project to study Baltic Sea Region history awareness and teaching in three studies:

1. Studying students' history awareness,
2. The content of national secondary school history syllabi, and
3. Teachers' approaches to regional history

Findings → Students:

- There is a varying yet rather low level of knowledge of regional history among youth
- Swedish students stand out as they tend to know less about their own and others' history while Latvian students seem to know the most
- There is a positive correlation between visiting and having friends from neighbouring countries that contribute to a stronger sense of regional identity
- As there is a positive correlation between knowledge of the history of neighbouring countries and stronger regional identity, it is important to promote BSR history education at secondary schools
- Students perceive the Baltic Sea, the Middle Ages, Hanseatic League, social media, and equality as connecting factors
- There is less agreement on recent historical events that took place during the Soviet era, thus there is also a need to concentrate on problematic history topics

Findings → Syllabi:

- In Estonia, secondary school history syllabi rather explicitly suggest topics that relate to the Baltic Sea Region
- In the Finnish syllabus there are sporadic links to the region's history: only within two courses is there a mention of neighbouring countries
- In Latvia, while the syllabus has no mention of neighbouring countries, the complimentary teacher plans have several links to BSR history
- The Swedish syllabus has no mention of neighbouring countries

Findings → Teachers:

- Teachers show an interest in teaching BSR history
- Teachers believe that their students are fascinated by BSR history
- The majority of teachers already mention the region during different historical periods
- Teachers show a preference in using new materials on BSR history when offered

Suggestions → Syllabus:

- It is suggested that BSR topics and new materials be linked to the existing syllabi
- A 35-hour optional course is suggested in Estonia
- There need to be teaching materials
- Teachers need to be trained to use BSR history-related materials

Suggestions → New materials:

- Both teachers and students prefer a variety of methods and materials
- Visual material is highly preferred, and interactive methods are also popular
- Computer and internet use is high among all teachers
- Other technical equipment like overheads, computers for students and interactive boards are less accessible for Estonian and Latvian teachers, and teachers from smaller localities
- Traditional text and workbook-based materials should also be created