



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



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## Introduction

The Unitas Foundation with the Museum of Occupation of Latvia started the project 'Different Nations – Shared Experiences (DNSE)' in 2010. Cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region is an aim mandated by both the EU Commission's Regional Policy and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). However, as past events have divided the Baltic Sea Region, many misrepresentations remain. The project aim was therefore to research how widely Baltic Sea Region history is taught in schools in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden. This was done in three stages: studying the awareness of the students, the content of national syllabi, and teachers' approaches to regional history.

The first goal of the research was to determine levels of awareness, knowledge and understanding of neighbours among the youth of Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Sweden. We aimed to map existing attitudes as well as measure and compare the knowledge of neighbours in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) to generate input for educational materials and outreach activities. Secondly, as perceptions of other countries are often created by formal education (Stradling 2003: 25-26), the history syllabi of these countries were analysed to identify the importance of BSR history in each syllabus. Thirdly, questionnaires for teachers were created, so it would become apparent how teachers in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden approach the history of the region in their lessons, and also their teaching habits and opportunities in case BSR history materials are developed in future.

## Main Findings

### 1<sup>st</sup> Study: Students' associations with the region

Firstly, we investigated what secondary school students in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden value and associate in connection with the BSR. Secondly, we asked how they see the quality of life in the four countries; thirdly we inquired about opinions on two different historical periods (Medieval and the Soviet eras); fourthly we assessed how close or separate they feel (using the 'street' measure). Finally their identifications and factors contributing to regional identifications (knowledge, personal relationships and visits) were studied.

### Values & associations

There were shared values amongst the youth living in the BSR. One-fourth of the young people participating in our survey referred to nature and sea when asked about the associations with the BSR. Many mentioned pollution, boats and fishing, especially youth from Finland and Sweden. Altogether 89.1% of the youth in the BSR agreed with the statement about shared responsibility for the BSR, while only 4.6% of youth disagreed. It shows that **young people are very conscious about common issues in the region that have to be solved together**. Other associations that youth in four countries mostly agree with are that the people of the region spend a lot of time on Facebook, MSN, Skype, and computer games; that equality is important for people from the region; and that the Hanseatic League has united the region.

Youth disagree the most about the following factors: the level of welfare is more or less the same in the BSR; bad transport opportunities between the Baltic Sea Region countries keep them from communicating with other people in this region; people in the region eat similar food; security and crime levels are more or less the same in the region. Thus, in short the general welfare level is considered different while nature, the use of social media and the appreciation of equality unites the people of this region. The full list (from the most agreed upon to the least agreed upon) can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** To what extent do you agree with these statements? The average score for each option by all respondents.

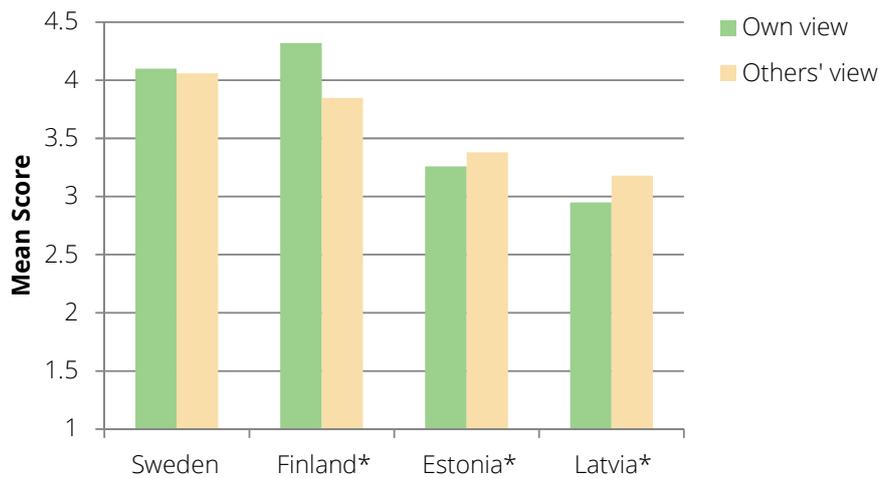
	Estonia	Finland	Latvia	Sweden	Mean
Shared responsibility for BSR	3.49	3.57	3.64	3.44	3.54
All in BSR are spending lot of time on social media	3.49	3.24	3.23	3.09	3.29
Equality is important in all BSR countries	3.20	3.21	3.23	3.07	3.19
Hanseatic League unites BSR	3.36	3.15	3.18	2.82	3.18
I will make friends from BSR in future	3.32	2.83	3.23	2.73	3.10
After collapse of USSR BSR is getting closer	3.12	3.06	3.00	2.86	3.03
Experience with USSR makes us different	3.10	3.05	2.83	2.98	2.99
Youth dress the same	2.81	2.74	3.02	2.71	2.83
BSR will be more similar over time	2.94	2.83	2.63	2.88	2.82
Children read similar books	2.75	2.81	2.74	2.94	2.80
Youth watch same movies	2.78	2.83	2.76	2.86	2.80
Legends from Viking era unite BSR countries	2.79	2.72	2.81	2.62	2.75
Relations with Russia in past unites BSR	2.74	2.67	2.83	2.45	2.70
Religion is different in BSR	2.73	2.73	2.59	2.70	2.69
Swedish power period unites BSR	2.68	2.62	2.59	2.80	2.66
Level of education is similar in BSR	2.76	2.43	2.74	2.54	2.64
Life tied to nature more in BRS than elsewhere	2.54	2.51	2.59	2.49	2.54
NATO creates gap in BSR	2.41	2.66	2.35	2.64	2.48
Traditional holidays are same	2.69	2.55	2.05	2.50	2.44
BSR has same approach to economic crisis	2.48	2.59	2.25	2.46	2.43
Level of well-being in BSR is same	2.36	2.55	2.22	2.34	2.37
Security and crime levels are same in BSR	2.46	2.25	2.37	2.32	2.37
People eat similar food	2.35	2.28	2.40	2.37	2.35
Bad transport means bad communication	1.89	2.23	1.80	2.20	1.99

Note. Scale 1 to 4. 1 meaning completely disagree and 4 completely agree.

### Opinions on how good life in the region is

The students were also inquired about how good they thought life in their country and in the three neighbouring countries is. The results show that the **best life in others' opinion is in Sweden, in their own group opinion in Finland**. Life is considered by both themselves and others to be least good in Latvia, although the mean estimations in case of others' views is above the arithmetic average (3,0). **In case of evaluating the goodness of life in Sweden, the opinion of students from other countries and the opinion of Swedish students overlap**. In case of Finland, Finnish students value the various aspects of life in Finland more than the students in other countries. **In case of Estonia and Latvia the situation is vice versa: local students are more critical than students in other countries**. As shown in the previous analysis, this is mainly due to the more critical opinions of ethnic Russians living in Estonia and Latvia. In this analysis the groups (Estonian and Russian-Estonians in case of Estonia, and Latvians and Russian-Latvians in case of Latvia) were merged. The detailed results are in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Own and others' (from three other participating countries) views of how good (democratic, wealthy, peaceful, in general good) life is in four countries.



Note. \*Statistically significant differences between own and other' views. The scale was from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). For better visibility the chart is based on a scale of 1 to 4.5.

### Perceptions of different historical periods (the Middle Ages, and the Soviet era)

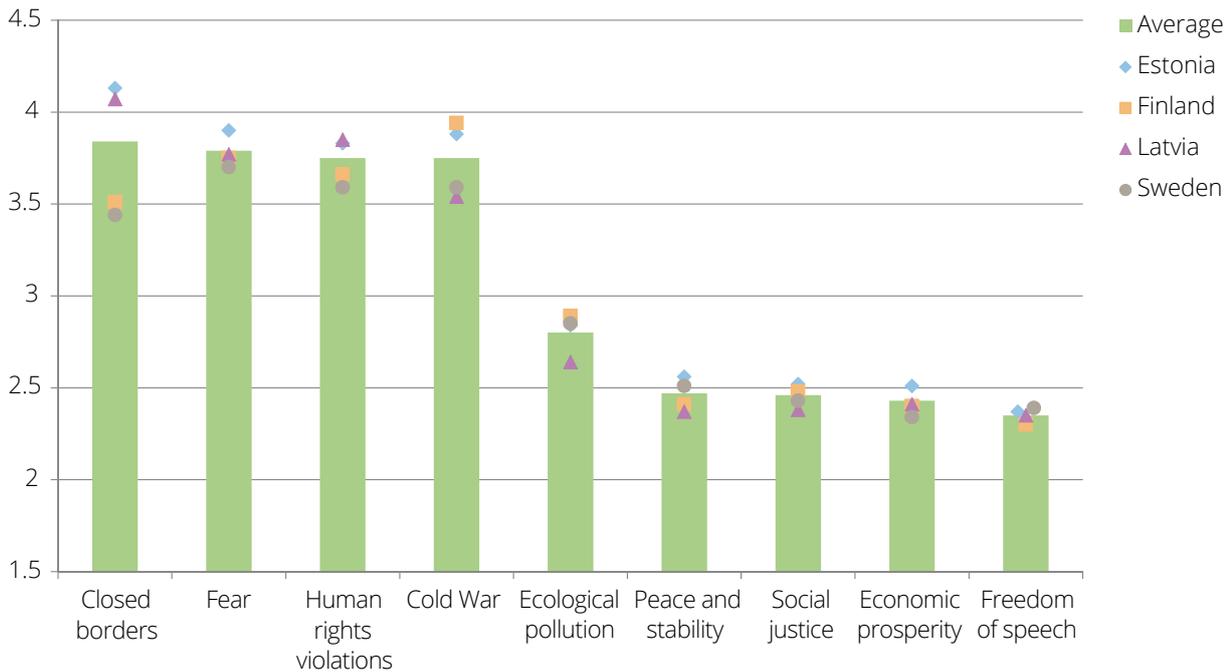
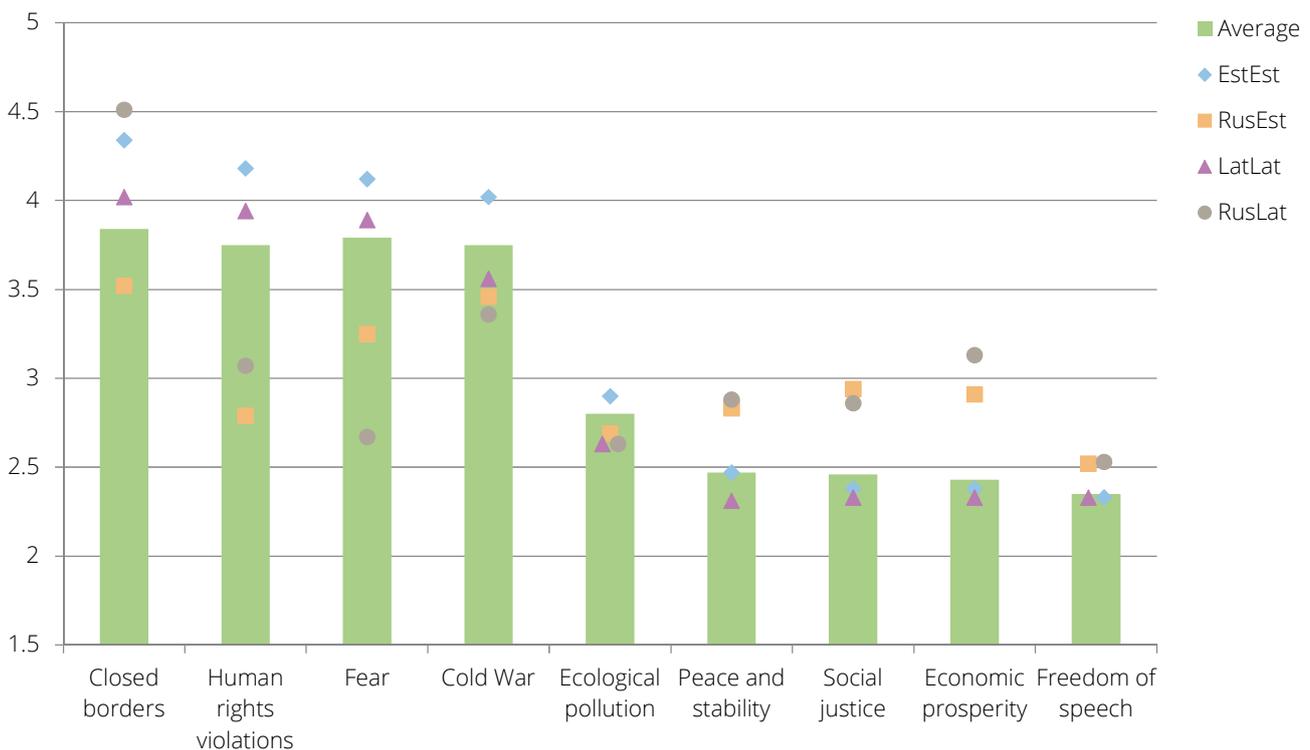
When views on historical events were inquired about, we arrived at a conclusion that the opinions on recent history events (the opinions on the USSR) vary much more than opinions on what the Medieval era represents. The Medieval era is seen as a dark and restless age but also it represents beautiful architecture. It is not considered as an era of glory nor does it represent good trade relations. The full results are displayed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** What do you associate with the Medieval period?



Note. The scores vary from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). For better visibility the chart is based on a scale of 1,5 to 4.

There was a distinctive difference between how the USSR is perceived, especially among students in Estonia and Latvia where the students answering in the majority language (Estonian and Latvian, respectively) had significantly more negative associations with the USSR than their peers who answered in Russian. The first group associates the USSR much more with closed borders, fear, human rights violations while the second group agrees more to the statements that the USSR represented economic prosperity, social justice and peace and stability. Finnish and Swedish respondents score in the middle thus they are less divided on this question. Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate the opinions on the Soviet times.

**Figure 3.** What do you associate with the Soviet period?**Figure 4.** What do you associate with the Soviet period?

Note. Mean scores for Estonia's and Latvia's language groups (1-5). For better visibility the chart is based on a scale of 1,5 to 5.

Certain associations do not necessarily mean that students have a similarly good or poor understanding of the period; however, **the fact that the students from all four countries have relatively similar associations regarding the Middle Ages can be used as a common ground for international collaboration (e.g. exchange projects) to foster mutual understanding and cohesion in future.** On the other hand, **the fact that associations with the USSR differ to such an extent can be explained as a sign of a very different understanding and perhaps even knowledge of the history of the period.** In that case common educational activities, tools and international youth exchanges involving all groups are suggested.

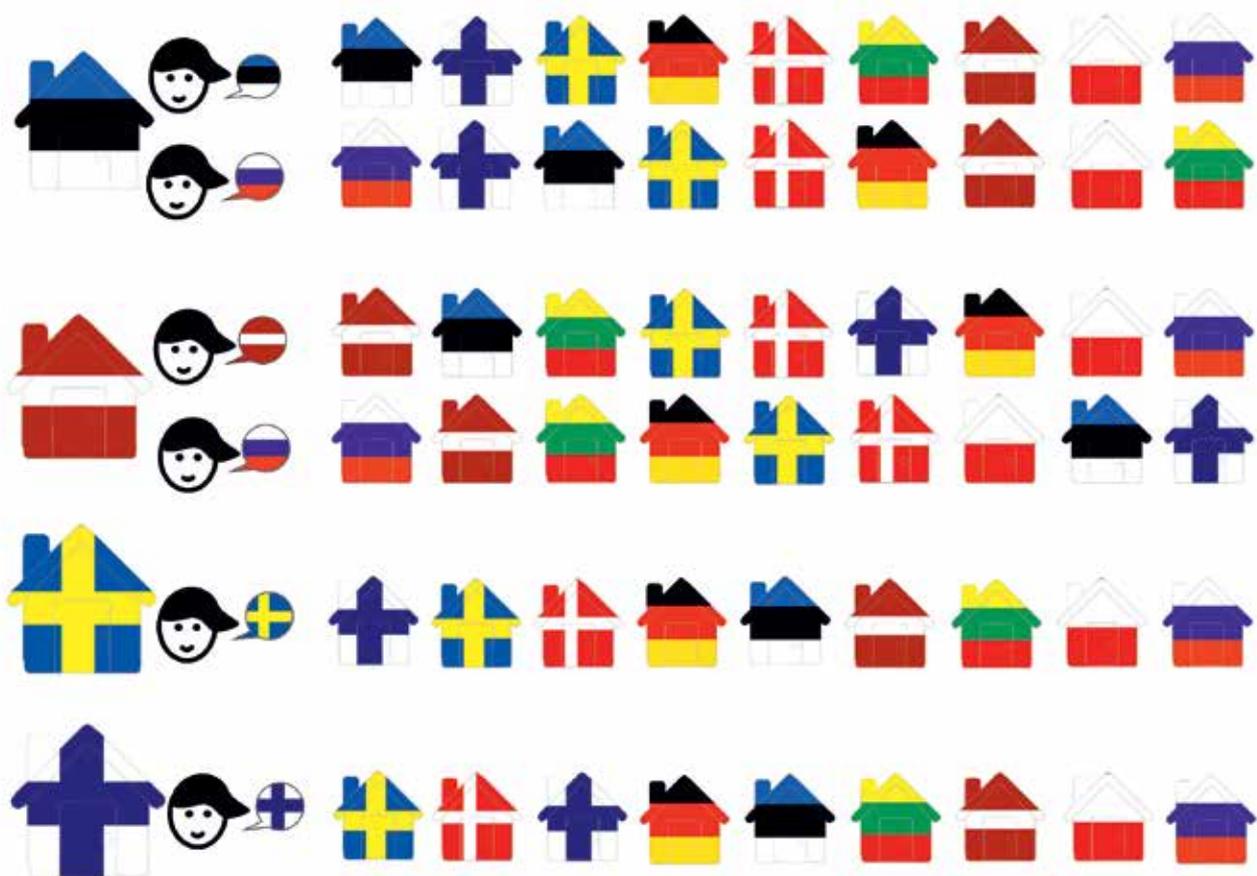
### How close or separate youth in the region feel

For an estimate on how the neighbouring nations are regarded by students, we used a socio-metric measure “Street” in which the respondents are asked to choose a house for 9 families from different nations on the Street.

**The respondents** are to imagine that the following families are planning to move into their neighbourhood: an Estonian family, a Danish family, a Finnish family, a German family, Latvian family, a Lithuanian family, a Polish family, a Russian family, and a Swedish family. **Aside from their nationality no information about the families is given. Students are said that as they have been living on the street for a very long time, then they can choose where these families will be placed to live on that street.** They are also instructed that if they cannot decide or find it impossible to place the families in houses knowing only their nationality, one can place several families in one house or all the families in the same house.

Altogether 58 students refused to do the task and 83 students put all families into the same house. About half of the students who either refused or decided to put all families into the same house were from Sweden. The rest divided quite equally between three other countries. The analysis for Estonia and Latvia was performed separately for ethnic Estonians and Russians as their attitudes varied significantly. The same approach was not followed for Finland or Sweden as the answers of the majority and minority groups did not significantly differ. Figure 5 illustrates the results.

**Figure 5.** The results of the socio-metric measure Street across six groups.



*Note.* The results are shown separately for six groups: EstEst – Estonian students studying in Estonian language schools; RusEst – Estonian students studying in schools where the language of tuition is both Estonian and Russian; LatLat – Latvian students studying in Latvian language schools; LatRus – Latvian students studying in schools where the language of tuition is both Latvian and Russian; Swe – Swedish students; Fin – Finnish students. The place of the respective sign of the nation shows how far on average the particular group placed the family from the given nation.

- **On average most positive views were expressed about Swedish and Finnish families**, followed shortly by Estonian families. **The most distant neighbours were Russian and Polish families.**
- **All groups saw the families from their own nation as the closest**, placing them on average 1,8-1,9 houses apart from their own house.
- Russian Latvians and Russian Estonians had the most positive views about Russian families. In case of Russian Latvians the difference between Russian and Latvian families was small. In case of Russian Estonians, the scores refer to greater tension between and/or separation from local majority group Estonians.
- The most preferred neighbours for Estonian students were Estonians, Finns and Swedes.
- The most preferred neighbours for Russian-Estonian students were Russians, Finns and Estonians.
- The most preferred neighbours for Finnish students were Finns, Swedes, Danes and Germans.
- The most preferred neighbours for Latvian students were Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians.
- The most preferred neighbours for Russian Latvian students were Russians, Latvians and Danes.
- The most preferred neighbours for Swedish students were Swedes, Danes and Finns.

## Identifications

In order to analyse and compare the identity<sup>1</sup> of young people across the four countries, they were asked to rate the relevance of 19 groups (in Table 3 below) and categories for themselves and the validity of the same categories for four nations (Estonians, Finns, Latvians and Swedes). The identification categories started with wider groups like 'world citizen' and ended with 'student of my class'. The rating scale ranged from -1 (I oppose myself to this group) to 3 (I belong to the group and belonging to the group is very important to me). In between values being 0 (the group is no valid for me), 1 (I belong to the group but belonging to the group is not important to me), and 2 (I belong to the group and belonging to the group is important to me). Below we analyse the data by the percentage of respondents in each group who considered a particular category either important or very important (rated 2 or 3). The most and least important identifications are in Table 2 while the whole list and relevance for students can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 2.** Three most important and three least important identifications

	Most important identification	II most important identification	III most important identification	III least important	II least important	Least important
<b>EstEst</b>	Citizen	Student	European	E-European	Conservative	Ex-Soviet
	83.2	77	68.6	11.3	10.1	3.6
<b>RusEst</b>	Student	European	Regional	Conservative	Scandinavian	W-European
	60.4	52.6	42.9	11.3	10.5	8.2
<b>Fin</b>	Citizen	Nordic	Student	Conservative	E-European	Ex-Soviet
	80.0	67.2	53.5	7.5	6	3.7
<b>LatLat</b>	Citizen	Student	Baltic	Ex-Soviet	Finno-Ugric	Scandinavian
	91.6	83.6	73.7	8.7	7.4	5.1

<sup>1</sup> For reasons of clarity we differentiate between identity and identifications. Identity is defined following Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1981: 225) as "that part of individuals' self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". Identification is usually measured only as a fact of defining oneself as a group member. In the current study we define identity as a combination of different identifications by measuring in addition to knowledge also the value (importance) of the membership.

	Most important identification	II most important identification	III most important identification	III least important	II least important	Least important
<b>RusLat</b>	Student 83.6	Regional 72.4	Citizen 61.9	Finno-Ugric 14	W-European 7	Scandinavian 2.3
<b>Swe</b>	Citizen 42.5	Student 40.5	Scandinavian 35.6	Ex-Soviet 4	Baltic 3.5	Finno-Ugric 3.5
<b>Altogether</b>	Citizen 71.4	Student 63.1	Regional 53.3	E-European 10.5	Conservative 9.4	Ex-Soviet 6.1

Note. % of students who considered this identification important or very important for themselves

Table 2 demonstrates that the most preferred identifications for 4 groups is the citizen of their respective country while student follows closely. For Russian speaking respondents student is the most important identification. It appears that regional identifications are also rather relevant by being the third most important identification for all groups (be it Scandinavian, European or person living at the Baltic Sea – regional). The least preferred identifications are ex-Soviet, Eastern European and conservative.

**Table 3.** Identifications and the per cent of students who considered particular identification important or very important across 4 countries and 6 groups

Identification (abbreviation)	Average mean score	Mean scores across groups (n)					
		EstEst (389)	EstRus (134)	Fin (421)	LatLat (390)	LatRus (43)	Swe (404)
Citizen of [the country of the respondent] National	71.4	83.2	41.8	80.0	91.6	61.9	42.5
Student of my school/class	63.1	77.0	60.4	53.5	83.6	62.8	40.5
Inhabitant of my region (Regional)	53.3	64.4	42.9	51.7	72.4	62.8	28.0
Citizen of European Union(s)	52.7	68.6	52.6	49.0	65.9	58.1	27.9
World citizen(s) – Global	43.4	51.4	38.1	42.5	50.3	44.2	31.7
Nordic	40.5	53.5	12.7	67.2	22.0	18.6	30.9
Member of some society or movement	38.1	39.2	21.2	34.8	56.8	25.6	29.3
Person living at the Baltic Sea	37.3	43.8	41.8	27.7	66.2	52.4	9.7
Baltic	34.4	52.8	33.1	8.0	73.7	51.2	3.5
Member of my ethnic group	30.9	29.1	24.1	26.7	55.4	35.7	14.9
Northern European(s)	28.3	37.0	15.0	47.0	16.9	25.6	17.1
Person with liberal views	27.1	28.4	20.3	31.3	30.2	23.3	21.5
Scandinavian(s)	22.6	17.8	10.5	37.7	5.1	2.3	35.6
Finno-Ugric	20.7	38.4	13.4	36.9	7.4	14.0	3.5

Identification (abbreviation)	Average mean score	Mean scores across groups (n)					
		EstEst (389)	EstRus (134)	Fin (421)	LatLat (390)	LatRus (43)	Swe (404)
Person belonging to several cultures – multicultural	19.7	29.9	19.5	14.5	21.1	37.2	11.9
Western European(s)	13.5	15.0	8.2	17.7	11.8	7.0	11.9
Eastern European(s)	10.5	11.3	22.4	6.0	15.6	14.0	5.0
Person with conservative views	9.4	10.1	11.3	7.5	12.3	19.0	6.2
(Ex-)Soviet person	6.1	3.6	14.9	3.7	8.7	20.9	4.0
Altogether	27.2	33.1	22.4	28.6	32.5	28.1	16.5

- The average across all groups and identifications was very close to the arithmetic average – 0.89. In percentages – 27.2% of students across all groups considered the given categories important or very important. However, the groups varied considerably: **EstEst and LatLat groups identified on average more strongly with all groups**, followed by Finnish and Russian-Latvians. Swedish students valued the given categories clearly less than others.
- For young people in 4 countries three **most important identifications were locally oriented: being ‘citizen of [the country of the respondent]’, ‘student of my school/class’ and ‘inhabitant of my region’**. The first most relevant supranational identification varies across countries being **European in Estonia, Nordic in Finland, Baltic in Latvia and Scandinavian in Sweden**.
- **National identification is the most valued identification for all majority groups**, only minority groups – EstRus and LatRus value it slightly less. **EstRus is in this respect especially vulnerable** group, having lowest national identification. Their Estonian citizen-identification is lower than European-citizen and regional identification and equal to Baltic Sea region identification.
- It is interesting to note that being **‘person living at the Baltic Sea’** is valued quite highly, similarly to being **‘Nordic’ or ‘Baltic’**. When Latvians, and Russians living in Latvia and Estonia consider the first more important, then Estonians, Finns and Swedes rate ‘Nordic’ identification more highly. These two are the most valued when compared to other supranational-regional identifications. Young people identify less with being Northern-European and Baltic, even little less with Scandinavian and least with Western or Eastern European.
- Comparing different identity-levels (global, European, national, ethnic, and regional) with each other, the results show that young people value national identification the highest, then follow local-regional, European, and global identifications. Surprisingly **low importance is given to ethnic identification**.
- Least important or even opposing identifications differ more across groups. The identifications that young people in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden see on average as not **valid for them are ‘(Ex-)Soviet person’, ‘person with conservative views’, and ‘Eastern European’**. Ex-Soviet is the least valued by Finns and Estonians. Scandinavia seems to be far away from both Latvian groups as well as Russian-Estonians who with Russian-Latvians also devalue Western European identification.

### **Predicting common identity**

Following the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1964; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006) we tested whether students who have more friends among other groups, who have visited other countries more often, and who have better knowledge of these countries, also have stronger Baltic-Nordic regional identifications. As the study was neither experimental nor longitudinal, the relationships between these variables cannot be interpreted as causal. However, there is proof from theory and numerous earlier studies (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, 1998; Gaudet and Clément, 2005) that more contact and especially friendship (Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Vonofakou, 2008) with out-group members lead to more positive attitudes and stronger respective identity.

Knowledge about neighbouring countries, friends from neighbouring countries and visits to neighbouring countries were all used to predict whether they contribute to a stronger regional identity (Nordic, Baltic, Northern European, and person living at the Baltic Sea). It is perhaps interesting to note that Swedish students seem to know less about their own and others' history while Latvian students have the best knowledge of historical facts about their country and neighbouring countries. Among students from all countries the correlations between knowing neighbours' history and the strength of identifying oneself as a Nordic person, Northern European and person living at the Baltic Sea were positive and statistically significant. There was only one exception: the correlation to Baltic Sea identification was positive but statistically not significant among Latvian students.

We also analysed whether having friends in neighbouring countries is related to the same four regional identifications: Nordic, Baltic, Northern European, and person living at the Baltic Sea. **The relevance of four regional identifications among students having versus not having friends in neighbouring countries is as a rule higher.** Analysing four countries altogether there is a statistically significant difference in case of all four identifications. Students who have a friend at least in one country identify themselves stronger with being Nordic, Baltic, Northern European and person living at the Baltic Sea.

Although there are more visits to neighbouring countries than friends in these countries, still every fourth student has never visited any of the three neighbouring countries. **The relevance of four regional identifications among students having visited neighbouring countries is as a rule higher compared to students who have not visited any of the three countries.** Analysing four countries altogether there is a statistically significant difference in case of all four identifications. Students who have visited at least one country identify themselves more strongly with being Nordic, Baltic, Northern European and person living at the Baltic Sea. History knowledge and visiting experience had the strongest effect on regional identification. Therefore increasing students' knowledge can contribute to stronger regional identity and from that perspective promoting BSR history has a positive influence.

In conclusion, there is a varying level of knowledge among youth. However, Swedish students tend to know less about their own and others' history while Latvian students seem to know the most. There is a positive correlation between knowledge of history of neighbouring countries and having stronger regional identity among students from all the four countries. There is also a correlation between visiting and having friends from those countries that contribute to stronger sense of regional identity. In order to encourage regional cohesion, it is important to educate the students about the regional history. There is already some common ground: the students in all four countries are concerned about the Baltic Sea and see it as their common responsibility. They also perceive the Middle Ages, Hanseatic League, social media, and equality as connecting factors. There is less agreement on recent history events that took place during the Soviet era, thus there is also a need to talk about the problematic topics.

## 2nd Study: Secondary school history syllabi

Secondary level school history syllabi are important on two levels. Firstly, they provide an opportunity to encourage distinctive identity. Secondly, the syllabus supports building certain students' skills, values and knowledge. The purpose of this section is to address how Baltic Sea Region (BSR) history is represented topics (events and people in neighbouring countries) and student skills wise in the national secondary school history syllabi, and to suggest ways to increase region history topics at schools.

### The content of secondary school history syllabi

In Estonia and Finland, the syllabi offer compulsory and optional courses. In Latvia, only one course obligatory to all high school is offered whereas in Sweden, a variety of different courses is offered and the schools can decide based on the school profile which one they teach, and students can choose one to their liking. See the list of history courses in the four countries in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Titles of official history courses in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden

Estonia
<b>Compulsory courses</b>
General History <sup>1</sup>
Estonian History I <sup>2</sup>
Estonian History II <sup>3</sup>
Contemporary History I – Estonia and the world in the first half of the twentieth century
Contemporary History II – Estonia and the world in the second half of the twentieth century
Contemporary History III – Principal features of progress in the twentieth century: Estonia and the world
<b>Optional courses</b>
World History: Civilisations outside Europe
History of European Countries and the United States of America
Finland
<b>Compulsory courses</b>
Man, the environment and culture (HI1)
European man (HI2)
International relations (HI3)
Turning points in Finnish history (HI4)
<b>Optional courses</b>
Finland from prehistoric times to autonomy (HI5)
Meeting of cultures (cultures outside Europe) (HI6)
Latvia
Compulsory course: History of Latvia and the World

## Sweden

History 1a<sup>14</sup>

History 1a<sup>25</sup>

History 1b<sup>6</sup>

History 2a<sup>7</sup>

History 2b<sup>8</sup> Cultural History

History 3<sup>9</sup>

### Notes.

<sup>1</sup> World history

<sup>2</sup> until the turn of the 17th century;

<sup>3</sup> until the end of the 19th century;

<sup>4</sup> common in all vocational programs and technical degree, see Appendix A;

<sup>5</sup> common in all vocational programs and technical degree (continuation of 1a1 and mostly optional)

<sup>6</sup> common to EK, ES, HU, NA and SA, or as a single course instead of 1a1 and 1a2, see Appendix A;

<sup>7</sup> common in university preparatory courses, mostly optional (read after 1a2 or 1b);

<sup>8</sup> common to ES and HU, see Appendix A;

<sup>9</sup> common in university preparatory courses for HU, EK, ES, NA, SA (optional after 2a or 2b).

The purpose of including BSR history as a topic in the syllabi or as a separate topic in national, regional or contemporary history courses would be to educate youth so they know more about their neighbours and therefore feel closer to each other. As a region aiming for further economic, environmental, cultural and political cooperation, then having educated and aware youth will in the future contribute to better communication and mutual understanding. Therefore, BSR history topics that explain the similarities, differences and links in the region would greatly contribute to tackle stereotypical thinking and prejudice in the whole region. In our view, education is the key to forming one's perceptions, and therefore BSR history courses could greatly benefit the whole region.

In relation to cohesion, it is desirable that the syllabi in the four countries would address the topic of regional history. There are obvious links between the countries that have influenced the overall development in the region. It is important and possible to stress common BSR history in all the syllabi and develop students' skills by having them analyse events in the region, which should lead to an understanding of the differences and similarities within the region.

Estonia stands out as its high school history syllabi and supporting documents rather explicitly mention and suggest topics that relate to the Baltic Sea Region. The specificity level suggests that the topic of neighbouring countries is relevant in the Estonian syllabus. In the Finnish curriculum there are sporadic links to the region's history and the curriculum resembles the Estonian one in terms of set-up where the focus is on topics. Both mention student skills and study outcomes but Latvia and especially Sweden have focussed on student skills in more detail. In Latvia, while the syllabus has no mention of neighbouring countries, the complimentary teacher plans have several links to BSR history and therefore if used the teacher plans suggest involvement with regional history.

### Reasons and suggestions to further education on the region's history

From the standpoint of greater cohesion, these gaps could be over-come by new teaching materials focusing on BSR history. The approaches differ country-wise. Estonia and Finland have listed BSR topics in their current curricula. Therefore, an option to structure the BSR topic better would be by adding BSR topics to the current courses.

**In Estonia:**

- In Estonia, Estonian history and Contemporary history courses provide options to concentrate on the region's history.
- In Estonia, an optional 35-hour BSR course seems reasonable, because secondary schools need to offer 11 elective courses, and if there is one with already existing materials and possible course plans, it would unburden schools from creating special optional courses.

**In Finland:**

- In the Finnish case it is possible to draw regional connections in courses Hi3 and Hi5. One of them concentrates on international relations and therefore could use topics from BSR relations, and the other is a course on Finnish national history that also mentions links to neighbouring countries.
- In Finland promotion of materials, training could lead to an optional BSR history course in some schools. It is quite common that if there is both teacher and student interest in a certain history topic, it is added as an optional course at schools.

Latvia and Sweden have a more general history syllabus. The stress is on student competencies and topics are broad. It would be disproportionate to alter the two syllabi in terms of specifying concrete topics to be taught. The history curriculum in Sweden is composed of several voluntary and compulsory courses and modifying those with the aim of adding BSR topics would be senseless and unachievable due to the amount of time and vast effort needed for re-writing the syllabus consisting of six different courses.

**In Latvia:**

- Adding specific BSR topics to a rather general syllabus would be a difficult task. Therefore, the option is to approach the teachers to use BSR related material in their classes. Broad topics in the two curricula present several previously mentioned options to talk about BSR history and bring regional examples for illustration and comprehension.
- Developing student skills through the inter-linked and varied BSR history could be done by encouraging teachers with BSR history materials, methods and also training to concentrate on the topic. Raising awareness among teachers about new interactive and engaging BSR-related teaching materials is the first step towards establishing BSR history as a theme in history courses.
- In Latvia, the enforcement of the two existing teacher plans and the creation of a new one focusing on the region supplemented by materials and training would lead to greater depth in teaching regional history.

**In Sweden:**

- The solution would be to introduce BSR topics to teachers through materials and training so that the examples they use in history classes would be more regional.
- In Sweden, the cooperation with teachers' associations, book publishers in combination with teaching materials and training could encourage more focus on the region.

Therefore, the changes require more cooperation. Lobbying in relevant education institutions in the respective countries would furthermore enforce teaching BSR history. However, at this moment the alteration of the syllabi seems difficult as all the countries have during the past couple of years already changed their syllabi. Thus efforts to raise awareness among teachers, schools, book publishers, teachers' associations to increase interest and knowledge on this topic would be the first step.

### 3rd Study: Teachers' approach to teaching history

The main aims of this research were to establish what methods and materials teachers prefer and use; the availability of technical equipment; how teachers approach Baltic Sea Region (BSR) history. As a result, when in the future teaching materials on BSR history are developed, teacher preferences and opportunities can be taken into account.

#### Teaching aims

First we asked the teachers on which aims they concentrate when teaching history. We asked them to rate different aims from the most important to the least important. Altogether there were nine options. From Table 5 the overall results in order of importance regarding learning aims can be seen.

**Table 5.** To which extent do you concentrate on the following aims of learning in teaching history?

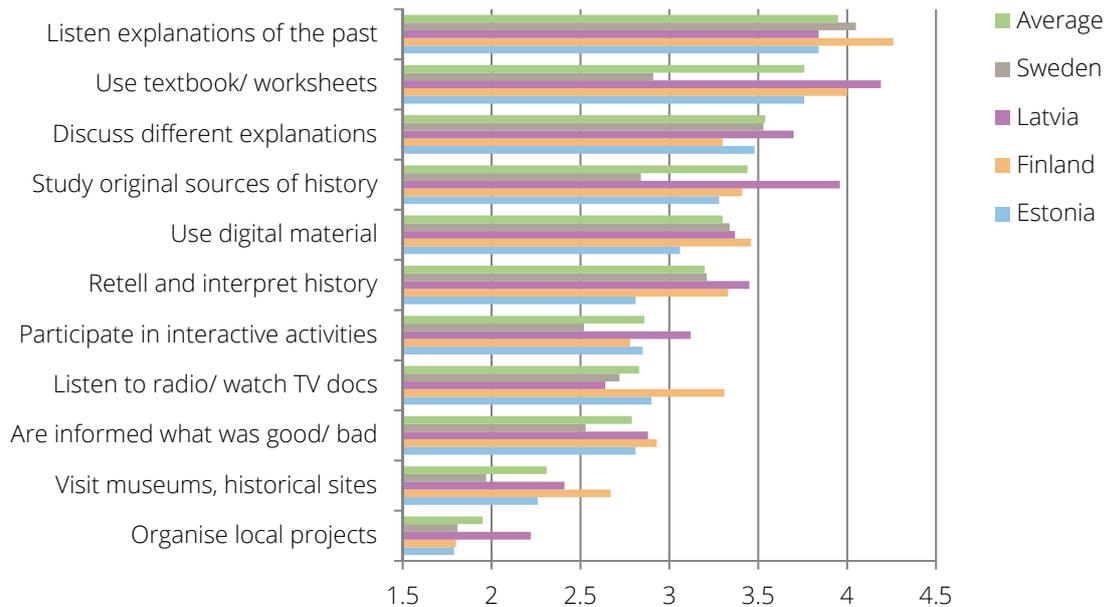
Rank	To which extent do you concentrate on the following aims of learning in teaching history? (Rank from most important to least important)	Mean Rank
1	I want my students to acquire knowledge about the main facts and general understanding of history	4.01
2	I want them to use history to explain the situation in the world today and to find out the tendencies of change	4.26
3	I want them to imagine what it felt like in the past taking different viewpoints into account	4.85
4	I want them to acknowledge the traditions, characteristics, values and narrative of our nation and society	5.00
5	I want them to understand the behaviour of past persons by reconstructing the special situations and contemporary thoughts of the period when they lived (empathy)	5.08
6	I want them to judge historical events according to the standards of human and civil rights	5.10
7-8	I want them to be fascinated and have fun dealing with history	5.34
7-8	I want them to internalise basic democratic values	5.34
9	I want them to value the preservation of historical remains and old buildings	6.03

**The most important goal overall is that students acquire knowledge about the main facts and have a general understanding of history.** It was considered the most important in Estonia, Finland and Sweden, while according to Latvian secondary school history teachers the most important aim is for students to use history to explain the situation in the world today and find out the tendencies of change. To add, teachers want students to imagine what it felt like in the past taking different viewpoints into account.

**The least important aim is for students to value the preservation of relics and old buildings.** This was the case according to all teacher groups. In general, it can be said that the answers are rather similar among all teachers. Other less important aims were internalising basic democratic values and be fascinated and have fun when dealing with history.

#### Activities in class

In order to assess how teachers carry out their lessons, they were asked how often certain activities happen in their lessons. The differences in this case are more obvious than in the question about the importance of learning aims. **'The students listen to my explanations about the past' has the highest frequency (3.94)** within potential class activities. Using textbooks and workbooks is the second most frequent activity while discussing different explanations of the past ranks third. **The least frequent activity is 'the students organise local projects' (M= 1.95).** The complete results by country can be seen below in Figure 6.

**Figure 6.** During the past year, how often has the following happened? The students...

Note. The teachers rated the options from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). For clarity, the figure uses a scale of 1,5 to 4,5.

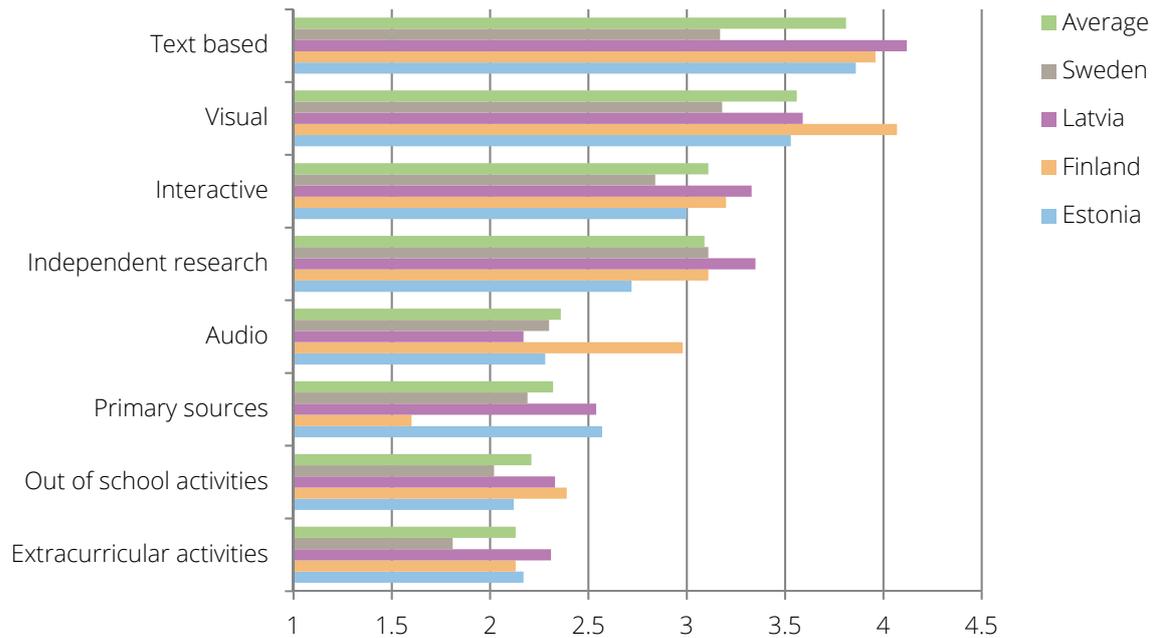
What stands out is that in five cases the Swedish teachers give the least prominence to the activities while Finnish and Latvian teachers seem to concentrate more on the variety of activities. All in all, teachers use activities that are easier to organise therefore activities that require more time or other resources are less popular (visiting museums, organising local projects). It is also unpopular to inform students what was right or wrong.

### Preference and use of different materials

In order to assess what kind of materials and methods teachers use and prefer, we asked them to rate them. Visual materials are preferred to text-based materials but are used less than text. Interactive methods are also popular. Teachers would prefer out of school activities much more than they actually use them.

**Generally all the methods and materials are more preferred than used (with the exception of text-based materials).**

Teachers prefer and use visual, text-based, interactive and research activities the most while audio material, primary sources, out-of school and extra-curricular activities are used much less. The detailed results are displayed in Figure 7.

**Figure 7.** What kind of materials and methods for teaching do you use?

Note. The teachers answered from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). For clarity, the figure uses a scale of 1-4,5.

All methods and materials are preferred more than they are used, except text-based. Latvian and Finnish teachers seem to be more inclined to use these types of materials however the differences are not big. From the answers it is apparent that teachers would like more visual material than they have and would like to use it even more than text-based materials. There is also high preference for interactive methods.

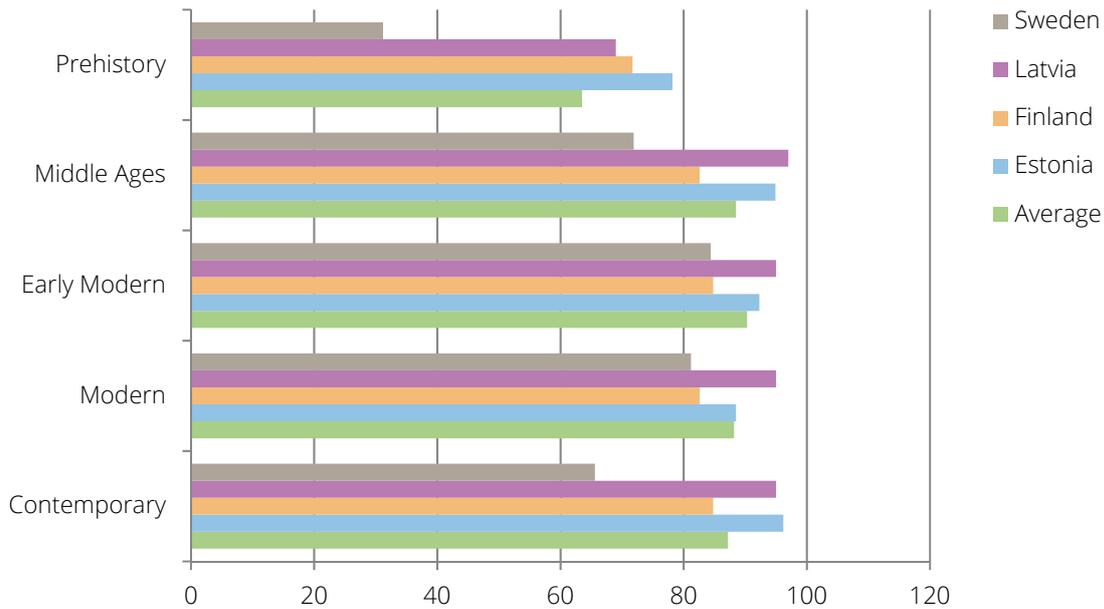
### Access to equipment and resources

Finnish teachers have the most frequent access to technical equipment and use computer for different teaching activities often. Swedish teachers also have a good access to technical equipment but tend to use computer for class activities less. Estonian teachers have less access to technical equipment but still use the computer more frequently than Swedish and Latvian teachers for different activities (preparing lessons, grading and reporting homework, teaching a class, communicating with students). Latvian teachers are in terms of equipment and computer use the least privileged. Furthermore, teachers from smaller localities tend to have less access to different technical equipment. Therefore, when new materials are developed different approaches should be used so that activities requiring technical equipment and also more traditional textbook and workbook-based approaches are included.

In addition to a differing level of access to technical equipment, teachers from all four countries lack funds for study visits. Other resources like basic materials are generally available while additional materials seem to be more of a problem for Latvian and Estonian teachers. The teachers seem to have equally good access to a library (except Latvian teachers). Instructions to use materials, technical equipment and basic materials are not a big concern for teachers.

### Teachers' approach to BSR history

Figure 8 illustrates that **BSR is talked about in relation to all periods. However, in relation to Prehistoric times, BSR is less mentioned. Also, Swedish teachers seem to talk less about BSR within all periods except perhaps the Early Modern times.** This can be explained by the Swedish Empire's dominance during that time.

**Figure 8.** Mark the periods where you talk about BSR history in your classes

Note. The figure represents the percentage of teachers dealing with BSR topics within the suggested historical periods.

The period where BSR is mentioned the most is Early Modern Era (the Swedish power period). Middle Ages, Modern and Contemporary history follow closely (all with above 88% of teachers talking about the region). Teachers are slightly less likely to mention BSR during Prehistory (63.5% teachers claim they mention the region).

In general, it seems that the majority of teachers talk about BSR in their classes when addressing different historical periods. This is a bit less so with Swedish teachers who also express less interest in new BSR history materials. However, over 90% of the respondents are interested in using new BSR related materials. Thus it can be said that teachers do talk about the region's history though maybe not in a clearly structured way; and that they are interested in the topic and new materials. They also believe that students are interested in BSR history and as student interest ranks on top of the list of what factors teachers consider when choosing a method and material, it can be concluded that there is potential for promoting the BSR history topics at secondary schools in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, and Sweden.

## Conclusion

The aim of the study was to find out how widely Baltic Sea Region history is taught at schools in Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Sweden. This was done in three stages: studying the awareness of the students, the content of national syllabi, and teachers' approach to regional history.

The findings suggest that there is a varying level of knowledge among youth. However, 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 knowledge of history of neighbouring countries and identifying more strongly with the Baltic Sea Region among students from all the four countries. There is also a correlation between visiting and having friends from those countries that contribute to stronger sense of regional identity. Therefore, in order to encourage regional cohesion through political, economic and cultural cooperation, it seems important to educate the students about the regional history as well. There is already some common ground: the students in all four countries are concerned for the Baltic Sea

and see it as their common responsibility. They also perceive the Middle Ages, Hanseatic League, social media, and equality as connecting factors. There is less agreement on recent history events that took place during the Soviet era, thus there is also a need to concentrate on talking about these problematic topics.

The secondary school history syllabi differ significantly in the four countries. In Estonia, the secondary school history syllabi and supporting documents rather explicitly mention and suggest topics that relate to the Baltic Sea Region. This suggests that the topic is relevant in the history courses. 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 and therefore if used the teacher plans suggest involvement with regional history. The Swedish syllabus has no mention of neighbouring countries and the topics are rather general (dictatorship, democracy, migration, etc.). Thus, besides Estonia, there is little structured mention of BSR. Consequently it is suggested that BSR topics and new materials be tied into the existing syllabi as all of them offer opportunities to talk about the region. For more structured BSR history studies, a 35-hour optional course is suggested in Estonia, however, there need to be teaching materials and preferably teachers need to be trained. With the development of new BSR history-related materials, training is important for teachers from all the four countries: their interest and awareness of regional links could be awakened and they would be more prone to add BSR topics into their lessons.

The teachers answered that they are interested in BSR history and suggested that their students are, too. The majority already talk about the region during different historical periods (the most when Early Modern history is mentioned and less so when Prehistory is touched upon). Teachers would also use new materials on BSR history when offered. Therefore, there is a market for BSR history materials.

When developing new materials, one needs to keep in mind that both teachers and students prefer a variety of methods and materials. Visual material is highly preferred, and interactive methods are also popular. The teachers seem to be using different technical equipment quite frequently. Computer and internet use is high among all teachers; however, other technical equipment like overheads, computers for students and interactive boards are less accessible for Estonian and Latvian teachers and teachers from smaller localities, thus also traditional text and workbook-based materials should be used. Nevertheless, different activities should be included to keep the interest both of teachers and students.

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