

# Global Goals 2020: International SDG Research Symposium



## Conference Paper “Baltic 2030: Glocalised Sustainable Development Goals”

**Zane Šime**  
Research Intern,  
United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional  
Integration Studies<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Youth initiatives supported by the Council of the Baltic Sea States should contribute to the growing body of literature on youth engagement in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. ReGeneration 2030 and the Baltic Sea Youth Platform are presented to highlight future avenues for the development of these initiatives and what research approaches would help to acquire a more structured insight not only about the hypothetical potential of these initiatives but also the delivered value-added. These findings would help the United Nations to keep apace with the mindsets of younger generations which are underrepresented among the organisation’s staff. Likewise, youth deserves to be heard due to the socio-economic challenges it faces not only in the Global South but also in the Global North.

**Keywords:** Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goals, Baltic 2030 Action Plan, youth

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## Introduction

There is no better timing to discuss the Baltic 2030 Action Plan of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) than 2020. It is an outstanding year due to the following three reasons. Firstly, it marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations (UN). A special year for reflections on the progress achieved in building a more peaceful and equitable world and challenges that lie ahead in preserving the attained progress.

Secondly, the Bornholm Declaration adopted during a recent high-level meeting hosted by the CBSS Danish Presidency 2019-2020 reconfirms the vital role of the initiatives pursued along the lines of the Agenda 2030. Likewise, the CBSS agreed on “the need to foster active and meaningful youth participation and representation in institutions and decision-making processes in the region” (CBSS, 2020). This conference paper offers some suggestion on how to translate this guidance into tangible activities.

Thirdly, 2020 is the year when strong-worded assessments, such as the following ones, are published to warn about the fast-paced transformations pushing humanity closer to certain critical turning points:

*“The world’s future hangs on delivering a quality of governance not seen since the end of the Second World War; it is a race against time to do so again before another such global reckoning.” Ben Majekodunmi (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 23)*

*“Although it is too early to tell, it may be that we are on the cusp of a new turning point which will either demonstrate the vitality and legitimacy of our international institutions or lead to a breakdown and total structural reform of the current system.” (O’Malley, 2020, 6)*

This conference paper is prepared without fully endorsing the quoted assessments. Instead, the concerns raised by experts specialising in the international governance and the UN are noted as a broader context in which the Agenda 2030 related developments and multilateralism should be viewed.

Quality of governance and tailored solutions to context-specific challenges are no strangers to the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). This outstanding geographic area is known for its constant quest to increase prosperity and sustainability. Such efforts are pursued with due consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the so-called ‘north star’ (Bruna, Fox, Lynch, & Torres, 2019, 80) or ‘shared compass’ (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, 115) of humanity’s future.

The Baltic 2030 Action Plan, the youth movement ReGeneration 2030 and the Baltic Sea Youth Platform are well known among the BSR circles. However, they deserve wider attention among those keen on exploring the diversity of solutions implemented to support the advancement of the Agenda 2030. While many people across the world know the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, they might be less familiar with some routine multilateral activities which are tailored for young thinkers and change agents to meet their peers and reflect on what concerted

actions should be developed to build a sustainable future. If “Greta Thunberg may be just the avatar that we need” (Upton, 2020, 3), then the CBSS supported youth initiatives prove that many young people across the BSR are willing not only to explore climate activism but also work on their ideas in a structured manner in close interaction with their peers from the neighbouring areas.

The importance of such a promising development should not be underestimated, especially in the context of certain older generations of European academic circles that are going down the road of “Anthropocene-induced grief” (Parry & Poland, 2019, 333). While the foundations of their concerns are not contested, this conference paper is presented from a position that the action-driven youth, constructively-oriented emerging leaders and hard-working optimists will be the ones who will help the world in making the Herculean leap towards a more sustainable future. This paper is one of the attempts to continue the discussion on the UN leadership commenced by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation’s “The Art of Leadership in the United Nations: Framing What’s Blue”. It aspires to bring the spirit of the report “onwards” (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 115). Likewise, the conference paper aims at shedding light on one of the directions where the UN should look for inspiring examples “outwards” (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 115). Namely, the UN and its goals are benefiting from a considerable pool of aspiring change agents and committed experts working well beyond the traditional office spaces of the UN staff.

This conference paper is tailored as a brief overview of the recently commenced CBSS supported youth initiatives which are aligned with the goals enshrined in the Agenda 2030. It is a contribution to the growing body of empirical insights on the engagement of youth in the SDGs’ affiliated initiatives (S. Smith, 2020; Solís, Mccusker, Menkiti, Cowan, & Blevins, 2018), as well as sustainability studies. The first part of the paper provides a brief overview of the CBSS Baltic 2030 Action Plan. The second part elaborates on the CBSS youth initiatives. Based on the existing body of literature and political guidance, the third part explains how these CBSS affiliated initiatives help to address the challenges related to the implementation of SDGs and specific issues faced by the youth. Afterwards, the expected long-term implications of the CBSS youth initiatives are presented. The subsequent section touches upon the debate on decarbonising academia and how this symposium can contribute to crafting solutions to the issue. The concluding part summarises the main findings and presents some suggestions for consideration for future research directions and CBSS activities.

### **Baltic 2030 Action Plan**

The BSR in many respects is a frontrunner. It is an area which shows what is possible and in what post-modern, post-Westphalian, post-national forms such breakthroughs are practically tested and steered. However, just having an internal clarity about these processes would restrain the BSR to an inward-looking

approach. That is something that should be avoided. Therefore, bringing lessons learned to the wider audiences located outside of the BSR is of vital importance to keep the macro-region not simply as an inspiring pioneering example but also an intellectual space which maintains a considerable interactiveness with other parts of the world.

To name some examples which back the appraisals just stated, the BSR was an area where the pioneering macro-regional strategy of the European Union (EU) was launched in 2009. However, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is not the only exceptional governance solution agreed and implemented in the BSR.

The Baltic 2030 Action Plan “Realizing the Vision” was adopted during the 25<sup>th</sup>-anniversary high-level meeting or the CBSS Reykjavík Ministerial held in 2017. It sets the foundations of the Agenda 2030 transnational implementation in the BSR (Šime, 2017, 22-23). The Baltic 2030 Action Plan places environmental issues into a broader context. The importance of the plan is captured by the current evaluation that “[n]o country is yet convincingly able to meet a set of basic human needs at a globally sustainable level of resource use” (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, 21). This assessment is echoed also in the analysis published by the Think Tank of the European Parliament (Larek & Pichon, 2019, 3; Pichon, 2019, 7). Therefore, in the European and especially in the Northern European context it makes sense to pool forces. The strong multilateralist spirit characterising the BSR confirms that the ‘wicked challenges’ (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, 112) require concerted multilateral efforts.

Another valuable dimension of the Baltic 2030 Action Plan is its contribution to a more coordinated cross-sectoral approach to the implementation of SDGs. Some UN member states “administer their public policy sectors, such as health, energy, agriculture and education, through sectoral ministries and agencies, while others do not - leading to a lack of joint agendas and coordination often resulting in inefficient or even contradictory policy actions within states and among them.” (Huber-Heim, 2019, 9) The CBSS Baltic 2030 Action Plan addresses this national level shortfall by bundling the most challenging SDGs (12, 13, 14, 15) together with other less problematic ones (CBSS Secretariat, 2017, 12; Huber-Heim, 2019, 10-11). Such a transnational configuration holds the potential to generate new solutions to resolve the persisting challenges without treating the issue areas in an isolated manner.

This paper is written with a full appreciation of the importance that the monitoring plays in achieving progress towards the targets captured by the SDGs. The monitoring capacity is not a matter of huge concern in the BSR. “Baltic 2030: Bumps on the Road” report is a vivid example that there is sufficient data and expertise in the analytical techniques of various dimensions of the Agenda 2030 (Beyersdorff & Lanthén, 2018). In a domain-specific context, further examination of specific nuances relevant to the innovation potential, green and clean technologies captured by the SDGs is mirrored by the findings drawn during the Baltic TRAM project (Šime, 2019). Baltic TRAM was funded by the Interreg (Vb) Baltic Sea Region Programme

of the EU.<sup>2</sup> However, this project is just one of the examples which are aligned with the Baltic 2030 Action Plan.

From a global perspective and despite macro-regionally identified East-West divides in research and innovation performance (Šime, 2020, 8), what resonates across the BSR is the saliency of the issue on how to advance further. “Governance must respond not only to those left behind, in the words of Agenda 2030, but also to those who are *ahead* and who fear that the advance of others comes at their expense.” (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 24) Thus, the CBSS coordinated Agenda 2030 affiliated initiatives are a good example how an intergovernmental organisation is implementing tailored actions to universally applicable milestones (Hustad, 2019, 34) and engage “those statistically *‘ahead’*” (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 24). It is done with full recognition of the earlier expert acknowledgement that developed countries and even the globally leading Scandinavian trio – Denmark, Sweden and Finland – have a fair share of homework to do within their territories to meet the global ambitions captured by the SDGs (Bruna, Fox, Lynch, & Torres, 2019, 81; Meijers & Moonen, 2019, 24).

The Baltic 2030 Action Plan serves as an additional enabler for ‘localising the SDGs’ with special attention paid to the BSR particularities (Koopman, 2019, 2020). It is fully compatible with other SDGs’ frameworks implemented in the multi-level governance’s constellation. Germany’s Sustainable Development Strategy is one of the examples implemented on the national level.

Last but not least, the Baltic 2030 Action Plan is a promising roadmap for building Agenda 2030-oriented multi-stakeholder partnerships and keeping their efforts aligned with the SDGs. Huber-Heim (2019, 9) rightly explains that “[t]he SDGs serve states, companies, educational institutions and civil society as a compass, with the help of which a fair, clean and good world for all is to be strived for globally.” SDGs are important as an educational and learning-by-doing tool that introduces a wide array of audiences to the most pressing contemporary challenges. The earlier mentioned Baltic TRAM project and the CBSS supported youth initiatives discussed in the subsequent sections are three examples demonstrating how the Baltic 2030 Action Plan fulfils this potential of the SDGs.

### **The Youth of the Baltic Sea Region and Sustainable Developments Goals**

ReGeneration 2030 is a movement led by teenagers and young adults in the Nordic and Baltic Sea regions putting in motion the Agenda 2030. The first ReGeneration 2030 summit took place in the summer of 2018 in Mariehamn, Åland (CBSS Secretariat, 2020b). The ReGeneration 2030 youth movement was launched to

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<sup>2</sup> Besides the earlier mentioned 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN indicated in the introduction; Baltic TRAM introduces the reader of this conference paper to another celebratory occasion of 2020. It is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Interreg. It is a grouping of EU programmes that forms the second pillar of the Cohesion Policy (Interreg, 2020, 4).

ensure that the next generations of opinion leaders and managers working across the BSR would be well-versed in SDGs and their relevance to the BSR-specific context.

To paraphrase the well-known saying about giving a man a fishing rod instead of a fish, the ReGeneration 2030 is an educational outreach initiative which allows the participants to immerse themselves in the SDGs. ReGeneration 2030 ensures that the future change-makers of the BSR will be well equipped to discuss their efforts in a manner which would be easily understandable to their peers in other parts of the world. Filtering BSR-specific issues through the SDGs' lens has given aspiring talents not only solid extra-curricular learning opportunities but also familiarity with analytical tools which are compatible with the terms and structures guiding the global debates.

Bearing in mind that the youth in the BSR is not spared from the challenges of entering in the job market (Picatoste, Pérez-Ortiz, & Ruesga-Benito, 2018, 1032; Šime, 2018, 25), the ReGeneration 2030 movement should be noted as an opportunity not only to expand a youngster's expertise on the SDGs. Participation in ReGeneration serves as a concrete example to the potential employer of an individual commitment and interest in working with sustainability matters. Thus, ReGeneration 2030 can serve as one of the mitigators of the youth labour market outsidersness (Šime, 2018, 24).

Baltic Sea Youth Platform is a very recent example of the CBSS supported youth initiatives. It is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU. Major preparations for the launch of the Baltic Sea Youth Platform took place in 2019 (CBSS Secretariat, 2020a). Representatives of the ReGeneration 2030 movement were among the participants in the preparatory work towards the launch of the Baltic Sea Youth Platform. It is designed as a horizontal initiative and a nodal point that facilitates interaction between various actors actively engaged in youth affairs.

All in all, bearing in mind the earlier acknowledgement that “[t]here is no one-size-fits-all solution for achieving sustainable societal development” (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, 28), the BSR solutions should not be considered as a blueprint for other regions to replicate. Instead, an outline of the BSR solutions contributes to the growing body of literature on the diversity of modes adopted for the SDGs governance and implementation in various parts of the world.

### **CBSS Youth Initiatives in a Broader United Nations Context**

*“Youth must hold the UN accountable  
and demand an audience that listens to them.”  
Vendela Romedahl Stjernkvist & Savvy Brar  
(Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 89)*

The importance of constant listening to the youth voices should not be underestimated, especially bearing in mind that the UN “is *‘getting old’*, with an average age of 47 and with young staff and national staff constituting two staff categories that spend the least time with the organisation” (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 99). Such demographic pattern is noteworthy. It highlights what mindsets and formative decades prevail among the decision-makers and international administrators.

“An aging UN may make it more challenging to connect with the world’s youth and claim representativeness and inclusiveness while in fact populations in many parts of the world are getting younger” (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 107). Namely, certain parts of the world are facing youth bulges (Niemenmaa, 2019, 42; Ricci, Sessa, & Weber, 2017, 17). Discussions revolve around the potentials of a demographic dividend (Gaub, 2019, 46). In contrast, many parts of the BSR are experiencing an increase in the older generation (Niemenmaa, 2019, 42). That does not mean that the young Northern Europeans are less deserving of the policy-makers’ attention. Citizens of all ages can play a significant role in strengthening the ‘positive accountability’ to keep the Agenda 2030 high on the political agenda (Koopman, 2019, 22). Moreover, in the European context, the importance is based on the high risks of precariousness faced by the youth. Namely, “[e]very third young person in Europe, under the age of 24, is at risk of social exclusion or poverty.” (Meijers & Moonen, 2019, 101) These troubling trends clarify that the SDGs are no longer simply conceptually departing from the North-South divide of the Millennium Development Goals. The contemporary socio-economic realities clearly show that the SDGs are of high relevance to the BSR as an integral part of Europe and a wider area of the Global North.

On a more promising note, the youth of the BSR is raised by some of the world’s best education systems. Estonia’s leading position in Europe in the PISA rankings serves as a good example. Furthermore, many young talents are developed throughout the higher education cycles via internationally renowned academic systems with some of its excelling institutions named in the subsequent paragraphs. ReGeneration 2030 should be seen as an opportunity for the ambitious changemakers to join forces with like-minded peers and use their acquired knowledge to develop effective solutions that would allow addressing the remaining gaps in the SDGs implementation. Following the earlier recognition that the Agenda 2030 requires a change of mindset (Larek & Pichon, 2019, 3), small scale actions designed to stimulate hands-on and a learning-by-doing exploration of the Agenda 2030 offers each of the implementers an opportunity to identify certain takeaways associated with the sustainable development. Learning-by-doing embodies the true spirit of the World’s Largest Lesson.

An exceptional feature of the CBSS supported youth initiatives is the facilitated two-way interaction between the CBSS representatives, engaged experts and young people. Thus, it is a mutual learning process which echoes some of the efforts pursued by the UN staff members who maintain a close dialogue with the youth and

learn from their perceptions and judgement of the processes taking place across the world (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 28).

The CBSS strives to inform broader audiences about the activities and conclusions reached by youngsters. The Manifesto produced during the first ReGeneration 2030 summit was circulated among the CBSS experts and representatives. Besides, it is freely accessible online to all interested parties. Likewise, a wider awareness about the ReGeneration 2030 activities was promoted during other encounters with the young people living across the BSR. The visit of the participants of the Rotary International Summer Camp to the CBSS Secretariat, Russian student visit to the CBSS Secretariat on the Occasion of the World Science Day for Peace and Development 2018, as well as classroom discussions with high-school students during the “Back to School” annual campaign organised in Latvia ahead of the Europe Day celebrations are three illustrative examples (CBSS Secretariat, 2018a, 2018b, 2019).

The ReGeneration 2030 Manifesto proves that the youth of the BSR sees each individual as a change-maker. It calls “upon all actors within governance, business, education, research and civil society to promote and implement sustainable consumption and production behaviours” (ReGeneration 2030, 2018). ReGeneration 2030 has chosen to prioritise an area which has caught attention among international research circles. It is framed as the “well-recognized detrimental relationship between the standard of living and the ecological footprint” (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, 2). The ReGeneration 2030 perspective is shared also among the experts working at the EU institutions: “SDGs belong to our society as a whole and call on everyone’s responsibility to implement them” (Pesce-Monteiro, 2019, 93). It is worth adding that the shared responsibility and the needed ‘action by all’ is identified in the earlier scholarly examinations of the EU stance towards Agenda 2030 (Hustad, 2019, 33). Thus, the international community and the EU, in particular, can rest assured that if the motivation and vision of the BSR youngsters will be supported and nurtured during the coming years, then the overarching aspirations and efforts aligned with the Agenda 2030 will benefit from supportive implementers working across Northern Europe. Thanks to the CBSS support these youngsters will be well-versed in the networked collaboration and work mode characterising the complex institutional landscape, decision-making and pool of actors engaged in the routine work of the EU (Kingah, Schmidt, & Yong, 2016, 6).

### **Springboards, Not End Goals**

To fulfil their long-term goal, ReGeneration 2030 and the Baltic Sea Youth Platform should serve as springboards for the youngsters and young adults in their exploratory process of the international transition towards sustainability. These CBSS supported initiatives will reach their full potential if they will be able to channel the earlier expressed commitment of the youth into tangible actions and

career paths in the domains structured along the lines of the cutting edge thinking on sustainable development. Thus, ReGeneration 2030 and the Baltic Sea Youth Platform should build multiple informative and mentoring ties with the SDGs competence centres located in the BSR.

The ReGeneration 2030 movement with its focus on rendering the consumption patterns more sustainable and orientation towards circular economy mirrors the international aspirations captured by the annual announcement of the World Overshoot Day. It is a campaign which calculates the ecological footprint of specific countries, as well as the specific day of each year when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services within that year surpasses Earth's regenerative capacities (Smith, Mobjörk, Krampe, & Eklöv, 2019, 7). This international awareness-raising campaign is mentioned as one of the potential thematic avenues where ReGeneration 2030 can look for like-minded activists.

The engagement in annual campaigns, as a form of regular follow-up to the expressed commitments, should not be neglected. Nevertheless, continuous engagement in such awareness-raising occasions would not suffice to channel the youth enthusiasm towards more profound long-term developments. As the earlier experience of such CBSS supported projects as Baltic TRAM demonstrates, engagement in the European Sustainable Development Week is suitable for promoting familiarity with multilateral initiatives and their achieved progress (Šime, 2018a, 5). However, a substantial honing of talents and skills relevant to the SDGs require a more solid institutional involvement and professional experience.

BSR houses an impressive infrastructure, institutional memory and expertise on the UN affairs and the Agenda 2030. The UN City is a cluster of UN-affiliated offices located in Copenhagen. Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is based in Uppsala. Since 2017 Bonn hosts the annual SDG Global Festival of Action powered by the UN SDG Action Campaign and supported by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and the German Federal Foreign Office.

Universities are important hubs of the Agenda 2030 expertise. Since 2019 a group of Swedish universities<sup>3</sup> organise the annual conference "Rethinking Higher Education Inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals". Because sustainability studies have been prominently featured in the SDGs analysis and Future Earth named as an example (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, 121), it should be also added that the Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies (LUCSUS) and Stockholm Resilience Centre at Stockholm University (Sweden) are members of the Earth System Governance. It is a global research alliance of Future Earth. Looking beyond the Swedish active involvement, the University of Bergen should be pointed out. Its strategic initiative "SDG Bergen" combines the Agenda 2030 with a science diplomacy approach. Since 2018 the initiative is discussed during the annual "SDG Conference Bergen".

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<sup>3</sup> Namely, the Chalmers University of Technology, the University of Gothenburg, the Karolinska Institute and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

The list goes on and on. Earlier mentioned examples prove that the BSR is receptive to the international recommendations to steer the transformation towards sustainability with a focus on the universities as spaces well-suited for increased 'science-society-policy interaction' (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, 122-123). This thick layer of the UN presence, intellectual dedication to the Agenda 2030 and multiple SDGs-themed initiatives provide a strong argument to claim that the BSR is one of the best places on earth where to learn about the UN leadership as an art and immerse oneself into the history and quality of what is *'blue'* (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020, 9; Gram-Skjoldager, 2019). Stronger ties between the ReGeneration 2030 movement, the Baltic Sea Youth Platform and some of the previously mentioned hubs of expertise could play an important role in facilitating an individual transition from a youth activist to a promising academic or professional who provides a substantial contribution to the worldwide efforts.

Awareness among the younger generations about these hubs of expertise and diverse career opportunities affiliated with the SDGs should be further promoted during the ReGeneration 2030 summits by inviting experts from these and other notable institutions to share insights about their work and issues they attempt to resolve to reach progress in the Agenda 2030 implementation. The CBSS engagement in the event already demonstrates one intergovernmental institution which specialises in the Agenda 2030 related topics. However, besides the CBSS Secretariat, its managed projects, which assemble multi-stakeholder partnerships, and line ministries assembled by the CBSS Expert Group on Sustainable Development, as well as the Committee of Senior Officials as a forum of representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the European External Action Service, there are plenty more academic and professional paths that remain to be discovered by the younger generations to inspire future leading change-makers. Ideally, the CBSS supported youth initiatives should result in individual goal setting well beyond the 2030 time frame, namely, gravitating closer to sustainability as a life-long commitment and mission.

Overall, these are highlights of the potential of the CBSS supported youth initiatives. A more in-depth examination via mixed-method research designs, which would incorporate quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, would offer more evidence about the impact of ReGeneration 2030 and the Baltic Sea Youth Platform on the educational choices, career plans and paths taken by the participants. An evaluation of the impact of these initiatives would be helpful for future modelling of youth initiatives.

### **Decarbonising Academia**

Since this conference paper touches upon the role of academic and higher education sectors, it should not rest immune to the exceptional format in which the paper is presented. The transition of the Global Goals 2020 symposium from a

geographically situated gathering in Utrecht, a city renowned for its strong commitment to the SDGs (Abramavičius, 2019, 20), to an online meeting, touches upon the earlier raised issues of decarbonising academia (Higham & Font, 2020). The Global Goals 2020 symposium should serve as a valuable resource of lessons learnt how an online encounter has transformed the carbon footprint of this gathering. It is of relevance not only to the organisers and participants of the symposium. It resonates among wider circles of experts who are aware of the 'flight-shame' (*flygskam* – in Swedish) raised by Greta Thunberg and reflect on how to safeguard meaningful forms of intellectual interaction while striving towards causing least harm to the environment.

It holds a potential to provide to the Baltic 2030 Action Plan's affiliated circles some fresh ideas on how to strike the most optimal balance between strengthening profound interactions and avoiding unnecessary environmental damage. Discussions on the carbon footprint associated with the traditional practices of international gatherings is not questioned. However, the most optimal solution should incorporate not only environmental considerations but also maintain the quality of intellectual interactions. In-person meetings are known for their profound and lasting impact on building closer international collaborative ties.

Remarks on decarbonising academia should be treated as a sign of the outward-looking receptiveness among the research circles of the BSR. Potential good practices emanating from other parts of Europe are of great interest in the context of the overall aspirations to find the most optimal ways how to walk the talk amidst the exceptional circumstances and their implications on the future international interactions.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Consideration**

The growing body of research on youth initiatives affiliated to the SDGs sheds light on specific actions taken to transform the Agenda 2030 from a vision into reality. Estimations of the potential which remains to be unravelled by the youth initiatives, such as this conference paper, should be treated as the starting point. Next phase should be a more thorough analysis based on mixed-method research design with quantitative and qualitative components. It should be tailored to explore the views and assessments expressed by engaged youngsters. The findings of such a research project would provide a more solid basis for further policy-making considerations on impactful support measures.

The importance of such research projects should not be underestimated due to the following two reasons. Firstly, the UN is staffed by mindsets of older generations, which might be pre-occupied with a different set of priorities than the young people aged 18 – 30. Secondly, the European youth is exposed to alarming risks of social exclusion and poverty that need to be properly addressed.

Since the BSR houses a wealth of institutions specialising in the Agenda 2030, there are plenty of promising career paths that the participants of the ReGeneration 2030

and the Baltic Sea Youth Platform might be able to pursue in the future. Both CBSS supported initiatives should strive to broaden the awareness of young people about the wealth of these opportunities. One way how to achieve that would be to invite the representatives of some of the earlier mentioned organisations and institutions to present the intricacies of their daily work and what training and professional experience they have obtained to acquire such a fulfilling job oriented towards the betterment of the whole humanity. High-level visions, such as the CBSS Bornholm Declaration, are important for putting in motion wider sweeping developments. Nevertheless, personal stories of devoted experts provide much more clarity about the practical steps that might lead some of the young talents towards an academic engagement with sustainability sciences or a professional path in the administration and steering of sustainable development. The ReGeneration 2030 Manifesto is the best example that many young people across the BSR are highly motivated to explore the wealth of individual growth paths offered by numerous institutions working along the lines of the Agenda 2030. They are ready to act as change agents.

Such geographical dispersion of expertise and active engagement is of importance not solely in terms of the mere convenience of the vicinity to the homes of youngsters. It shows that the true spirit of the UN inhabits not only several iconic buildings located in New York and Geneva. Against the backdrop of the exceptional circumstances and recently experienced travel restrictions, which bear an imprint on the form of the Global Goals 2020 symposium, it becomes even more important to stress that the UN spirit has a solid footprint in Utrecht and many cities across the BSR. These hubs offer plenty of opportunities for devoted individuals to work towards making the Agenda 2030 a reality.

In the context of earlier calls for decarbonising academia, Global Goals 2020 should be considered as a potential source of lessons learnt how to convene more environmentally conscious intellectual encounters that would not sacrifice the value of in-person interactions.

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