**First** **familiarization meeting of the Local Action Group (ULG)**

**Date**: 2023/10/11, 13:00 – 15:30 h.

**Venue**: Danės str. 17 Klaipėda

**Participants**:

1. Zsolt Séra – URBACT programme expert (Hungary)
2. Deividas Petrolevičius – Chief advisor of Klaipėda city municipality administration.
3. Edita Kučinskienė - Head of the inter-institutional coordination group – coordinator of inter-institutional cooperation.
4. Aistė Valadkienė - Head of the youth and community affairs coordination group - youth affairs coordinator.
5. Agnė Kovalenkaitė - Senior specialist of the youth and community affairs coordination group.
6. Renata Razgienė - Senior specialist of the youth and community affairs coordination group.Birutė Ruškytė – Trainee of the Youth and Community Affairs Coordination Group of Klaipėda City Municipality.
7. Monika Calzonaitė – Educator of the Immanuelis Kant Public Library of Klaipėda City Municipality.
8. Samanta Nardiuževa – Chairwomen of Klaipėda Association of Youth Organizations "Apskritasis stalas".
9. Dainius Šilingas – Head of „Asmenybės ugdymo kultūros centras, VšĮ.
10. Morta Montvydaitė - open youth work specialist from Klaipeda‘s open youth centre.
11. Kristina Rutienė – Head of „Dvasinės pagalbos jaunimui centras“
12. Greta Tautavičiūtė – coordinator at association “Klaipeda Region“

**Objectives of the meeting:**

1. To familiarize the Local Action Group (ULG) with the URBACT program, the purpose of the project.
2. Create conditions for members to get to know each other and share ideas, good practices about youth involvement, tools for youth involvement, etc.
3. To introduce the URBACT expert to the ULG group, to provide an opportunity to get acquainted with the situation in the city of Klaipėda.

**Questions discussed:**

1. *Getting to know the program and the project.*
2. *Impressions of the local action group.*
3. *Tools for youth engagement.*
4. *Necessary environment for youth involvement.*
5. *Reasons young people are not engaging.*
6. *Non-formal education programs.*
7. *Inclusion of national minorities.*

**MINUTES**

*1. Getting to know the program and the project..*

**G. Tautavičiūtė** begins the meeting by introducing why we have gathered here. Briefly presents her role in the project - to moderate ongoing discussions, record information discussed during meetings. Briefly presents the purpose of this group - to create a common integrated action plan for digital youth work. Also, to increase the competencies of youth workers, to know where those young people are and how to reach them.

Before starting the URBACT expert's presentation, she asks how many of the participants in the meeting can freely understand and speak English. It was decided that the meeting will be held in Lithuanian, and A. Kovalenkaitė and other participants will help translate the expert's presentation and later help the expert understand what is being discussed in the Local Action Group (ULG).

**A. Valadkienė** agrees and adds that the involvement of the entire local action group is very much needed and welcomed. We would like this plan to be developed and later implemented together. There is a dersire that we will all have a general interest to implement an action plan. During the project, the aim will be to create a realistic plan that could be implemented using the resources of both the municipality and the entire Local Action Group (ULG).

**Expert Zsolt Séra** presents the URBACT program and project. URBACT is a European Territorial Cooperation program funded by the European Commission. The purpose of the action planning network is to work with specific problems faced by cities - in the case of Klaipėda and the NextGen YouthWork network - we are talking about digital youth work transformation. Each partner city must develop an Integrated Action Plan (IAP), which is jointly developed with the involvement of the Local Action Group (ULG) and stakeholders. General information is presented, how many networks are currently active (30 networks), how many cities are involved in networking and similar projects (252 cities), 57% of cities are newcomers to this program. (Note by G. Tautavičiūtė – Klaipėda is not a newcomer, we already had URBACT projects in the past – Gen-Y-City, Thriving Streets, Global Goals for Cities). A total of 28 countries are currently represented in the URBACT programme.

Partners included in the NextGen YouthWork network - Eindhoven (NL), Aarhus (DK), Cartagena (ES), Iași (RO), Klaipėda (LT), Perugia (IT), Oulu (FI), Tetovo (MK), Veszprém (HU), Viladecans (ES).

The project started in June 2023, but Klaipėda joined only now, but Klaipėda joined only now. Klaipėda has already missed one meeting in Eindhoven.

The entire project budget is 850 thousand euros. A large part of the budget is dedicated to adopting experiences from other countries. The expert strongly recommends that Local Action Group (ULG) members and politicians be brought to ULG meetings in partner countries.

Each partner - including Klaipėda - is expected to create an integrated action plan (IAP) with the Local Action Group (ULG), sharing and adopting good experiences from other countries, testing small-scale activities in the Klaipėda environment.

The integrated action plan must reflect not only measures and activities, but also indicators, responsible parties, and possible sources of funding. It is very important to look at the project in an integrated way - to understand that youth work is not the responsibility of one municipal department - a horizontal approach and the involvement of different departments is required. It is also important to include other interested parties and different levels in the development of an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) (vertical approach) - the project must not be a document for the municipality, but also for all interested parties - so that we all feel responsible for its implementation. The expert also adds that it is very important to look at the project regionally - often young people from other municipalities come to the city – for studies, work and spend their free time in another municipality (e.g. Klaipeda District and Klaipeda)- so we cannot close ourselves and think only about the young people living in the city. It is also necessary to consider the integration of specialists from neighbouring municipalities.

A project timeline is presented. This year is devoted to the formation of a Local Action Group (ULG), for the expert's visit (which is happening now) and the assessment of the initial situation. Next year (2024), the development of an integrated action plan will begin, 4 good practice visits to partner countries are planned. The year 2025 is dedicated to the completion of the integrated action plan, the testing of small-scale actions, 4 good practice visits to partner countries are planned. One of the meetings will also be held in Klaipėda - a more precise visit plan is planned to be made in November, during the visit to the city of Aarhus.

The expert also shares links where to look for the methodologies provided by the URBACT program.

2. *Impressions of the local action group.*

**G. Tautavičiūtė** asks the participants what are the first impressions of the project, does it seem hard? Also asks whether the participants see who would be also interested in joining the project or have ideas what people / organizations would be relevant to invite. E.g. during the presentation of the project the idea to involve police representatives came out. (A. Valadkienė highlighted that they were invited but gave no answer yet).

**E. Kučinskienė** states that it will not be too difficult if the right people are involved. Potential interested parties - Šeimos ir vaiko gerovės centras (Center for Family and Child Welfare), Visuomenės sveikatos biuras (Klaipėda City Public Health Bureau ) - insight: Public Health Bureau are already invited and will participate from November, shopping centres - Akropolis, Big – these shopping centers have an interest in the safety of young people. The Klaipėda Science and Technology Park could also contribute (KSTP) – they connect IT companies. Maybe they would help to create some tools?

**S. Nardiuževa** has a personal contact at the chief police commissariat of Klaipėda county. She promised to invite them personally.

Insight from expert **Z. Séra**– in the case of a Local Action Group (ULG), it can be a vibrant organism. Members may change depending on the situation - some may leave, others may come in – depending on the situation and the questions raised. The topic of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) may also change during the project.

1. *Tools for youth engagement.*

**G. Tautavičiūtė** asks if some virtual, digital tools are already being used to engage young people. Maybe those gathered have experience and know how to reach young people who are spending their time in virtual space?

**S. Nardiuževa** claims that so far none of the tools used have worked.

**K. Rutienė** agrees and says that in order to reach youth, it is necessary to invest a lot in communication, but even with a lot of investment, we cannot be sure that we will reach them.

The following is a discussion about the apps that young people use. The main tools named are Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram. **E. Kučinksienė** emphasizes that young people no longer use Skype, Messenger - we can find them much more often communicating through computer games - Minecraft, Grand Theft Auto, etc. **D. Šilingas** raises the idea, maybe youth could be invited to the Local Action Group (ULG) - they could give us the ideas, how and where to reach them, they could also help youth workers in familiarizing with the tools they are using.

Discussions about how to involve young people, and what Local Action Group (ULG) could offer to young people are being held. It is agreed that youth will not come and share information without benefiting themselves. Proposed tools and programs - Youth Voluntary Service (YVS) - involve young people through the Klaipėda Association of Youth Organizations „Round Table“ and assign them the task of helping the Local Action Group (ULG). Another tool for young people who are applying to universities abroad - Youthpass certificate, which could be used as an apendix to the admission documents.

**D. Šilingas** shares his experience of how his organization managed to reach youth. The center allowed youth to organize the event themselves and communicate about it. Young people are much more involved when they have the freedom to film, edit, and communicate themselves. It is also noticeable that the communication created by the youth themselves is much more effective.

**A. Valadkienė** and **S. Nardiuževa** agrees with D. Šilingas. It seems that we are raising a generation of video creators. A. Valadkienė shares her opinion that training should be organized for youth workers on how to use and reach young people using virtual tools - such as Tik Tok, Instagram, Snapchat, Discord, etc.

**S. Nardiuževa** adds that it is also very important to understand what the algorithms of social networks are, how they work, when to post information so that young people can see. In her experience, social media likes under posts no longer show how many people have seen the information. A post can have few likes, but the spread can be very high. **S. Nardiuževa** and **D. Šilingas** agree that young people know how to communicate much better and sometimes it is good to assign the task of communication to young people.

Expert **Z. Séra** shares an example. The Netherlands organization Garage2020 organizes training for youth workers - how to work with young people, how to create content that appeals to young people, how to use virtual tools, etc. They are currently developing a virtual course that will be available to the public. It is not yet clear if the content will be in English.

Another example – youth workers who integrate into virtual youth groups, watch what is happening in the there, participate in events, monitor information on the Internet. If something is happening in the city – he/she goes to the events, observes what is happening, how it is happening, participates - if something is not happening as it should or there is possible criminal activity – he/she contacts the municipality and advises where attention should be paid. The youth worker does not complain / inform to the institutions who are doing possible crime, his/her function is only to inform the municipality where to pay attention.

1. *Necessary environment for youth involvement.*

The talks about the environment where young people should be invited, where they are gathering and where they could gather, how we can encourage them to participate are being held. A. Valadkienė presents two examples that the expert presented during the meeting in the municipality.

* The city of Eindhoven established a game room in the youth center - where young people are invited to play computer games. Young people gather at the youth center to play together, socialize, and get to know each other. Game tournaments are held. Youth worker can gain their trust, develops relationships, he/she can offer youth other services, opportunities to spend free time, offers career pathways, etc.
* The Danish example is a chat tool where young people can anonymously ask important questions to them and get answers from professional psychologists or just get information on where to ask for help while having one or another problem. The problem is solved when young people do not dare to call but want to get answers to their questions.

**M. Montvydaitė** claims that her experience shows that a competitive environment is very important for young people. They want to be better than others, to compete with each other. This is especially evident in early adolescence.

**D. Šilingas** agrees and has himself thought that a playroom could appear in the AUK center, where young people would gather to play, as well as socialize and learn to communicate with each other. In the newly opened "GG Arena", young people gather to play, but those who do not have much money - shares one computer (usually 3-4 people). They also say that an informal environment, places with weak lights are attract young people. Young people are interested in informal events, an informal environments, where they are invited to relax.

**K. Rutienė** tell how Dvasinės pagalbos jaunimui centras (DPJC) succeeds in working on the streets. Places where young people are gathering are identified (several places - Kar Kar Park, Luize shopping center, a decline in gatherings is already noticeable at the Vasaros Estrada). Gathering times and locations vary depending on the season. DPJC employees inform young people about youth workers, what their functions are, invite them to participate in activities. K. Rutiene notices that there is a lack of funding for the activities.

1. *Reasons young people are not engaging.*

The conversation then turns to the overburdened youth, pressures from school and workplaces. **A. Valadkienė** shares experiences and conversations among students - there are students who spend their entire study year in universities and their dormitories and do not even want to think about any additional activities.

**K. Rutienė** and **M. Montvydaitė** adds that youth activity is low, because almost everyone already has a job while studying, and the economic situation is such that to survive, you have to work. Parents can no longer support students, living is too expensive.

**A. Valadkienė** argues that self-realization now begins later in life, after university or even later, when life is settled. As for families at social risk and their youth - the main need is work and income, their involvement and inclusion is almost impossible.

**S. Nardiuževa’s** experience of working with youth organizations and discussing with schoolchildren shows that it is very difficult to reach schoolchildren as well. Students complain about excessive workloads in schools. After 8 lessons, students spend another 5-6 hours on homework and non-formal education.

**K. Rutienė** adds that young people no longer understand what rest is and do not know how to have a quality rest. A ten-year-old child is no longer available to stay still and just talk, there are to many triggers to concentrate only on the conversation.

Group participants agree that the rhythm of life for everyone (both adults and youth) is too fast and it is difficult to get quality rest.

1. *Non-formal education programs.*

Talks about non-formal education programs in Lithuania and Ireland are held. In Lithuania, funding for non-formal education of children is allocated to providers who have accredited programs in any Lithuanian municipality. In order to ensure children's busyness, spending at least an hour every day in clubs and educational activities, 60 million euros should be allocated next year. Currently, the state budget provides 17 million euros.

**A. Valadkienė** presents the situation in Klaipėda and Lithuania. There are public and private sectors. Private organizations are more interested and offer a wider range of services. Parents of children and youth are motivated to pay additional money (more than the non-formal program provides) in order for their children to receive higher quality and more diverse services**.**

1. *Inclusion of national minorities.*

Expert Z. Séra asks what the situation with national minorities is, whether we reach them and how their integration and inclusion in programs looks like.

**A. Valadkienė** and **A. Kovalenkaitė** introduces the expert with the situation of Ukrainian refugees; a separate school and curriculum for Ukrainians; problems in minority (Russians) schools - not all representatives of national minorities willingly learn Lithuanian - they live in ghettos where Lithuanian is not really needed. If you go to Russian-speaking schools, it is difficult to communicate in Lithuanian, so the involvement of Russian-speaking youth is very limited.

The issue of the war started by Russia is also raised. Pro-Russian-educated youth mock Ukrainians and try to make already difficult situation even more difficult. It is not uncommon for Ukrainians to use Russian as their first language - that is why they choose or their parents choose for them to go to Russian-speaking schools, where the atmosphere is not the safest for them.

**E. Kučinskienė** claims that Ukrainians hardly cause any problems, they are attending various non-formal activities, and willingly learn Lithuanian language. Agrees that the bigger problem is with people of Russian nationality, they don't tend to get actively involved.

The expert says that the situation in Romania is similar when you are talking about Hungarian integration and language skills.

*End of the meeting.*