

Young people from different countries of the Baltic Sea region meet at the course for young ecologists

Talsu Vēstis

Written by: Monta Megija Učeniece

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For more than 30 years, the Coalition Clean Baltic program "Our Common Baltic" (OCB) has been offering experience and knowledge to young environmental activists from across the Baltic Sea region. 20 young people from different countries of the region met for environmental course at Dzintarkrasts sports and recreation complex, Roja parish coast.

The course started in 1990s as a training program and has attracted more than 300 participants over the years, providing important knowledge about the Baltic Sea and its coastline, and educating young leaders who would address the ecological problems of the Baltic Sea in the future. As Catherine Stauffer, youth coordinator for the Coalition Clean Baltic explains, the idea of the course is to bring together active, knowledgeable young people from different countries around the Baltic Sea, create connections, start new youth projects and gradually change the status of the sea ecosystem for the better.

Every year the OCB course is hosted by one of the Baltic Sea countries: in 2023 by Poland, in 2024 by Denmark, and this year we are on the Latvian coast. The 2025 course participants represent Germany, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. Young people already have experience in coastal protection projects. They are motivated to learn from each other, analyse the coastal problems finding similarities and local specifics. This multicountry view is crucial as we all share the same Baltic Sea, says the coordinator.

Course for young ecologists

The 2025 course is dedicated to climate change and its influence on the Baltic Sea coastline. Over the course week, participants learn about the climate change impact on the Latvian coastline, visit sites where coastal erosion is evident, meet local

scientists, NGO representatives and officials.

The course is designed as a combination of seminars, discussions and site visits with a practical part on the coast (waste collection, coastal monitoring using biological research methods).

One of the course experts, Marko Reinikainen, PhD in Biology, Managing Director of the Air Pollution and Climate Secretariat (AirClim) in Sweden, says that the Baltic Sea is the lifeblood of our lives. "We cannot view its environmental status as a separate issue. The Baltic Sea is connected to inland waters and our everyday choices," says the expert. "Here at the OCB course, one can learn not only from Latvia's experience, but from different the countries surrounding the Baltic. Participants share their experience and look at how it can be implemented in each country. It is very important for young people to make this exercise, because it broadens the horizons and gives a helicopter view on climate change in the BS region."

It is important not to "overheat" the coast

Together with Jānis Lapinskis, PhD in Geology, Assistant Professor at the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Latvia, participants explored the coast and discussed how it is "overheated" on a daily basis due to intensive recreation, car traffic, and poorly planned infrastructure. Showing examples of coastal erosion intensified by extreme storms and rising water levels the expert stressed that when nature is already under pressure, every unconsidered step leaves a strong mark.

At the end of the course, the young people presented short media posts and reels that they have created with support of social media expert Mila Kavaliova. The knowledge acquired during the course gave the participants motivation and ideas of small projects to implement in their communities — ranging from public awareness campaigns to specific nature restoration activities.