



Towards a Land-based Planners' Forum in the Baltic Sea Region

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...

 **Nordregio**

 **VASAB**
VISION & STRATEGIES
AROUND THE BALTIc SEA



EESTI PLANEERIJATE ÜHING
ESTONIAN ASSOCIATION OF SPATIAL PLANNERS



Stockholm
University

ARL

ACADEMY FOR
TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN THE LEIBNIZ ASSOCIATION

Why a Land-based Planners' Forum in the Baltic Sea Region?

Because Baltic Sea Region

Faces Challenges

Climate change,
COVID pandemic,
war against Ukraine,
depopulation,
urbanisation &
urban-rural imbalances,
economic growth,
energy crisis,
connectivity and
new EU policies



Has Strength

Spatial planning has been identified as a valuable mechanism through which an adaptation to various foreseeable as well as unpredictable needs and future scenarios can be facilitated



Could develop a Solution

Aim is to establish a **macro-regional working mechanism (cooperation platform)** – **Planners' Forum for land-based spatial planning** at various governance levels to strengthen the capacity and cooperation of spatial planners



What we did:

**Mapped stakeholders —
spatial planners in seven
Baltic Sea Region countries**

NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS MAPPED BY COUNTRY AND GOVERNANCE LEVEL

	MUNICIPALITIES	PLANNING REGIONS	MINISTRIES	PUBLIC AGENCIES	ASSOCIATIONS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS
FINLAND	20	26	3	7	2
GERMANY	33*	17	6	—	—
ESTONIA	81	—	4	1	4
LATVIA	44	7	1	—	7
LITHUANIA	—	—	1	—	—
POLAND	2812	16	3	3	—
SWEDEN	88**	21	3	4	3

*only covers northern Germany bordering the Baltic Sea

**municipalities with more than 30 000 inhabitants

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What we did:

Conducted survey —
among mapped stakeholders
with main questions:

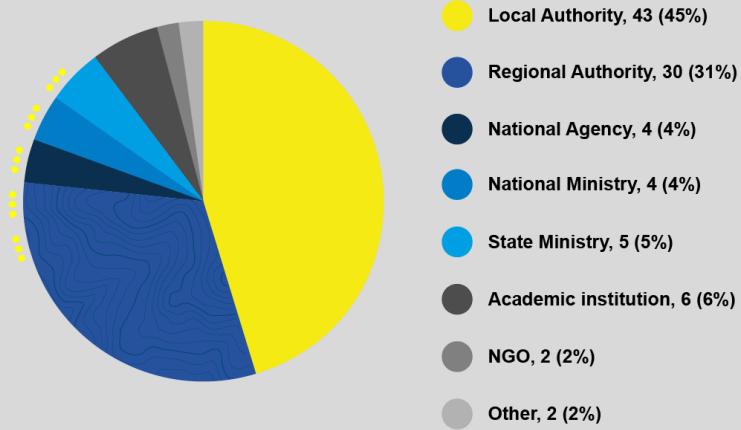
- 1 What spatial planning networks are you part of in the Baltic Sea Region?
- 2 What types of networks would best support your work?
- 3 What topics spark your interest for collaboration and knowledge exchange?
- 4 Which support tools are you interested in discussing?
- 5 What kind of future platform would best support spatial planning?



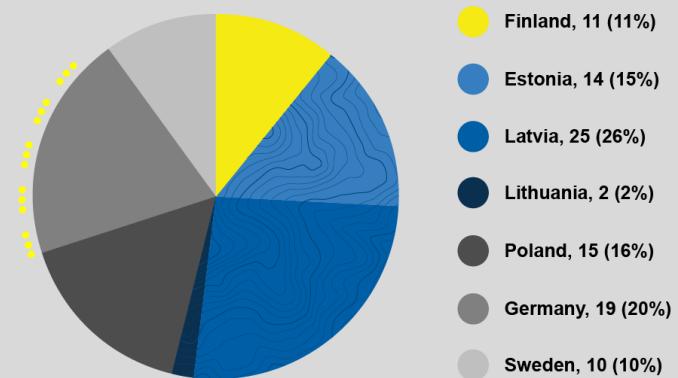
What we did:

Based on survey results prepared
Feasibility study

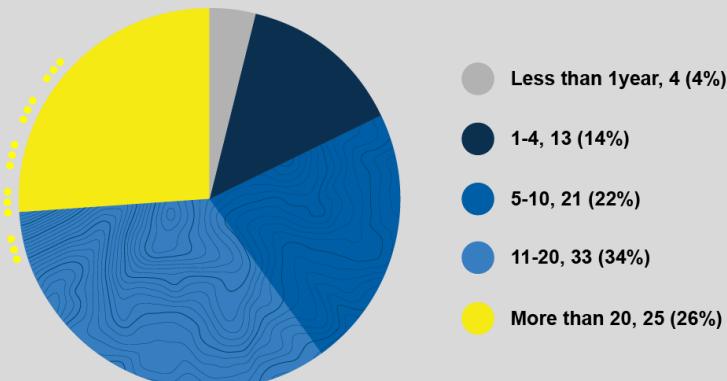
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATIONS OF RESPONDENTS



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF RESPONDENTS



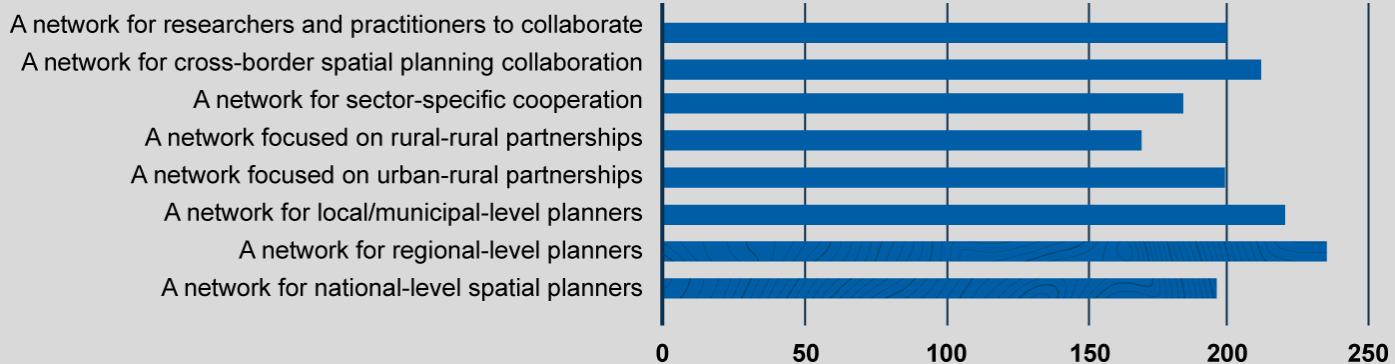
PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS



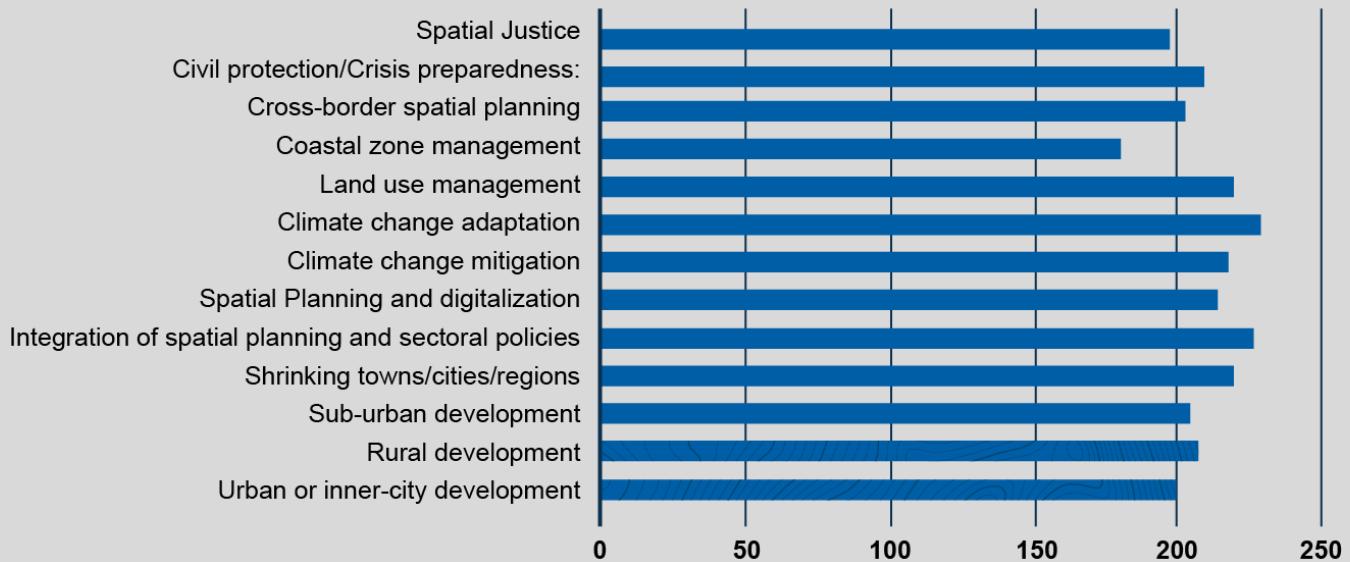
What we did:

Based on survey results prepared
Feasibility study

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN TYPE OF NETWORK



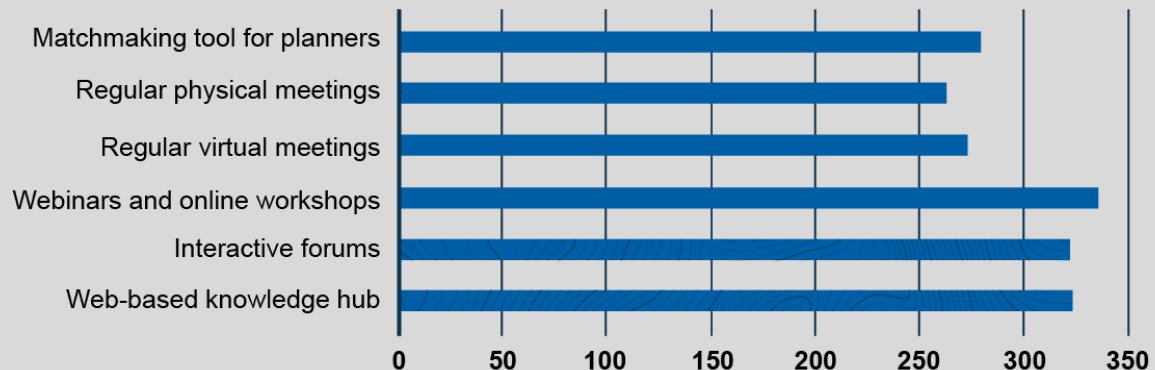
LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THEMES



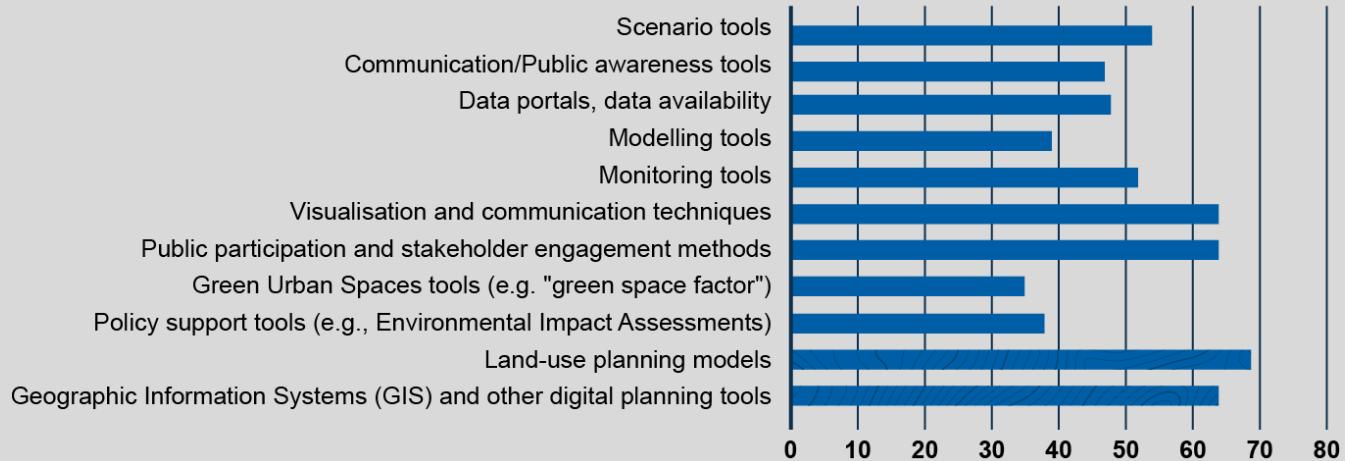
What we did:

Based on survey results prepared
Feasibility study

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN TYPES OF PLATFORM



LEVEL OF INTEREST IN TYPES OF SUPPORT TOOLS



What we did:

Based on survey results prepared

Feasibility study

and made a **Recommendations for the Planners' Forum**

Drawing on both stakeholder mapping and survey results, a phased approach to developing a planners' forum appears better suited to the current reality of limited formal collaboration among local and regional planners.

This approach emphasises simplicity, accessibility and organic growth, beginning with informal connections and trust building and gradually progressing toward more structured cooperation.

What could the Planners' Forum be?

A gradual and practical development path



What could the Planners' Forum be?

A gradual and practical development path

- 1) Start small, low-barrier: Launch a simple network for subnational spatial planners across the Baltic Sea Region to seed a trust-based community of practice—not a new institution.
- 2) Form an informal community: Gather planners via a mailing list/online group/shared space, prioritizing under-represented local/regional actors; no formal commitments—just connect, learn, and compare challenges.
- 3) Host light online exchanges: Run “Planners’ Cafés” and short virtual workshops for matchmaking, peer support, and topic-focused sharing (e.g., climate adaptation, land-use, engagement, digital tools).
- 4) Piggyback on existing events: Gain visibility through side sessions at regional forums (e.g., EUSBSR, VASAB) to meet in person, showcase early outputs, and attract new participants without new event overhead.
- 5) Build a knowledge hub: Create a simple repository of member-shared case studies, templates, webinar recordings, and tools—curating existing know-how rather than producing new content.
- 6) Create lightweight thematic circles: Form small, self-organizing groups around concrete challenges to co-produce practical, short outputs (checklists, problem statements, visuals), led by volunteers/rotating facilitators.
- 7) Scale to cross-border pilots: Support multi-municipality/region experiments and tool tests, aligned with Interreg or similar funding; gradually include academia/private experts as needed while keeping focus on public sector needs.
- 8) Stay open and adaptive: Keep the Forum member-shaped, lightly coordinated, and grounded in day-to-day planning practice—growing step by step through shared experience.

What we did:

Completed Comparison of seven spatial planning systems in the Baltic Sea Region

ESTONIA	FINLAND	GERMANY	LATVIA	LITHUANIA	POLAND	SWEDEN
National Governments (in concert with other national institutions, such as national parliaments, the Head of the State, County or States' governors and/or national public agencies) covering the territory of the entire country.						
15 counties (<i>maakond</i>) that also function as planning regions	15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (<i>Elinkeino-, liikenne- ja ympäristökeskus/ELY-keskus</i>) 18 Regional Councils (<i>Maakunnan liitto</i>), that also function as planning regions	16 States (<i>Länder</i>), thereof three city-states (<i>Stadtstaaten</i>) 104 planning regions administrated by different organisations	Five planning regions		16 Regions (<i>voivodship</i>) that also function as planning regions	21 Regions (<i>regioner</i>) thereof three functions as planning regions
79 municipalities (<i>kohalik omavalitlus</i>), thereof 15 urban municipalities (<i>linn</i>) and 64 rural municipalities (<i>vald</i>)	308 municipalities (<i>Kunta</i>); thereof 16 belong to the autonomous Åland islands	294 rural districts (<i>Landkreise</i>) 107 urban districts (<i>kreisfreie Städte</i>) ca. 11,000 municipalities that belong to a district (<i>kreisangehörige Gemeinden</i>)	42 municipalities, thereof seven local governments of state cities (<i>valstpilsētas</i>) and 35 municipality governments (<i>novadi</i>)	60 municipalities (<i>savivaldybės</i>)	2,479 municipalities (<i>gmina</i>) thereof 302 urban municipalities, 642 urban-rural municipalities and 1533 rural municipalities	290 municipalities (<i>kommuner</i>)

Sub-national and local territories relevant for statutory spatial planning in seven Baltic Sea Region countries

Source: Adapted with the help of the VASAB Committee members and various country profiles from ARL international (here: Martin and Väli 2021; Purkarhofer and Mattila 2023; Münter and Reimer 2021; Akmentiņa 2023; Burinskienė 2022; Mironowicz 2022; Schmitt 2023)

[See full document here](#)

What we did:

Completed Comparison of seven spatial planning systems in the Baltic Sea Region

COUNTRY	LEVEL	LAW-MAKING	POLICY-MAKING	PLAN-MAKING	SUPERVISION
ESTONIA	National	+	+	+	+
	Sub-national				
	Local				
FINLAND	National	+	+	+	
	Sub-national		+	+	+
	Local		+	+	+
GERMANY	National	+	+	+	
	Sub-national	+	+	+	+
	Local		+	+	
LATVIA	National	+	+	+	+
	Sub-national			+	+
	Local		+	+	+
LITHUANIA	National	+	+	+	+
	Sub-national				
	Local		+	+	+
POLAND	National	+	+		
	Sub-national		+	+	+
	Local	+	+	+	
SWEDEN	National	+	+		+
	Sub-national		+	+	
	Local		+	+	

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Distribution of formal competences for spatial planning among the national, sub-national and local policy levels

Source: Categories adapted from Nadin et al. (2018a, 19-26), but reviewed with the help of the VASAB Committee members and various country profiles from ARL international (here: Martin and Väli 2021; Purkarhofer and Mattila 2023; Münter and Reimer 2021; Akmentiņa 2023; Burinskienė 2022; Mironowicz 2022; Schmitt 2023)

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What we did:

Completed Comparison of seven spatial planning systems in the Baltic Sea Region

COUNTRY	SCALE	NAME OF SPATIAL PLANNING INSTRUMENT	VISIONARY	STRATEGIC	FRAMEWORK	REGULATORY
ESTONIA	National	National spatial plan (Üleriigiline planeering)				
	National	County-wide spatial plan (Maakonnalaneering)				
	Local	Comprehensive plan (Uldplaneering)				
	Local	Detailed spatial plan (Detailplaneering)				
FINLAND	National	National land-use guidelines (Valtakunnalliset alueidenkäytötavoitteet)				
	Sub-national	Regional land-use plan (Maakuntakaava)				
	Local	Local master plan (Yleiskaava)				
	Local	Local detailed plan (Asemakaava)				
GERMANY	National	Concepts and Strategies for spatial development (Leitbilder und Handlungsstrategien für die Raumentwicklung)				
	Sub-national	State development plan (Landesraumordnungsplan)				
	Sub-national	Regional plan (Regionalplan)				
	Local	Preparatory land-use plan (Flächennutzungsplan)				
	Local	Binding land-use plan (Bebauungsplan)				
LATVIA	National	National Development Plan of Latvia 2021–2027 (Latvijas Nacionālais attīstības plāns)				
	Sub-national	Sustainable Development Strategy of Planning Region (Plānošanas reģiona ilgtspējīgas attīstības stratēģija)				
	Sub-national	Development Programme of Planning Region (Plānošanas reģiona attīstības programma)				
	Local	Sustainable Development Strategy of Local Government (Pašvaldības ilgtspējīgas attīstības stratēģija)				
	Local	Development Programme of Local Government (Pašvaldības attīstības programma)				
	Local	Spatial Plan of Local Government (Pašvaldības teritorijas plānojums)				
	Local	Local Plan of Local Government (Pašvaldības lokālplānojums)				
LITHUANIA	National	General Plan of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania (Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijos bendaris planas)				
	National	General Plan of parts of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania (Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijos dalies bendaris planas)				
	Local	General plan of the municipal territory (Savivaldybės teritorijos bendaris planas)				
	Local	General plan of part of the municipal territory (Savivaldybės teritorijos dalies bendaris planas)				
	Local	Detailed plan (Detalusis planas)				
POLAND	National	Medium-term country development strategy (Koncepcja rozwoju kraju)				
	Sub-national	Regional spatial development plan (plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego województwa)				
	Local	Study of conditions and direction of spatial development of the municipality (studium uwarunkowań i kierunków zagospodarowania przestrzennego gminy)				
	Local	General spatial development plan (plan ogólny gminy)				
	Local	Local spatial development plan (miejscowy plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego)				
	Local	if a "Local spatial development plan" does not exist, an "Integrated investment plan" (zintegrowany plan inwestycyjny) is required				
SWEDEN	Sub-national	Regional plan (regionplan)				
	Local	Comprehensive municipal plan (översiksplan)				
	Local	Detailed development plan (detaljplan)				

Statutory spatial planning instruments that are integral elements of the formal spatial planning system in the Baltic Sea Region

Source: Categories adapted from Nadin et al. (2018a, 22 but reviewed with the help of the VASAB Committee members and various country profiles from ARL international (here: Martin and Väli 2021; Purkarhofer and Mattila 2023; Münter and Reimer 2021; Akmentina 2023; Burinskienė 2022; Mironowicz 2022; Schmitt 2023)

[See full document here](#)

What we did:

Hosted **online seminar and discussion** —
to validate findings and learn from other
Baltic Sea Region networks & groups

At the seminar, we shared inspiration, exchanged examples and discussed how cross-country cooperation can better support spatial planners in the Baltic Sea Region, including opportunities for a Land-based Planners' Forum.

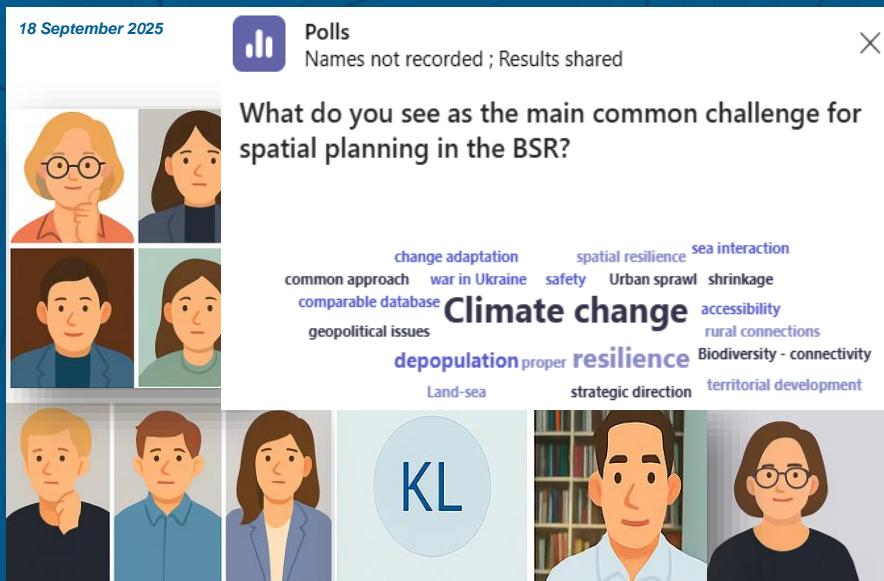
In the discussion we explored:

- ▶ What are the collaboration needs of local and regional planners?
- ▶ What could the region gain from a network of spatial planners?
- ▶ What are VASAB's cooperation needs and interests with local and regional planners?

18 September 2025

 Polls
Names not recorded ; Results shared 

What do you see as the main common challenge for spatial planning in the BSR?



- ▶ What's currently missing — and what role could a new network or cooperation mechanism play?
- ▶ Do we need more inclusive, clearly positioned platforms for transnational exchange, or should we strengthen/adapt existing networks?

What is next? Save the date:



**11-12 February 2026
Tallinn, Estonia**

Face-to-face event:
together with around 40 invited stakeholders and experts, we will jointly elaborate the next steps – test formats, identify key topics, and agree on future cooperation for continuing the Land-based Planners' Forum in the Baltic Sea Region!

Registration by 19 December, 12:00 CET is here!



The **Land-based Planners' Forum project** aims to tackle critical challenges in spatial planning across the Baltic Sea Region, shaped by recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and geopolitical tensions.

Land-based Planners' Forum seeks to create an inclusive network that brings together spatial planners from various governance levels for open dialogue and shared learning. This forum will help planners build capacity, foster collaboration, and promote sustainable growth across urban and rural areas. Additionally, it aims to enhance the coherence of spatial planning in the BSR, aligning with EU and regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and VASAB's Vision 2040.

<https://vasab.org/project/land-based-planners-forum/>

Funded by: Swedish Institute

Project's lifetime: October 2024 – March 2026

Project lead partner: Nordregio

Project partners: VASAB Secretariat, Stockholm University, ARL – Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association, Estonian Association for Spatial Planners



This material was prepared within the framework of the Land-based Planners' Forum project. November 2025. Available [here](#).

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