



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



LAND-BASED PLANNERS' FORUM



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This informative material was prepared within the framework of the Land-based Planners' Forum project. November 2025. Updated March 2026 Available [here](#).



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

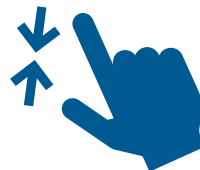
**municipalities with more than 30 000 inhabitants



What we did:

Conducted survey —
among mapped stakeholders
with main questions:

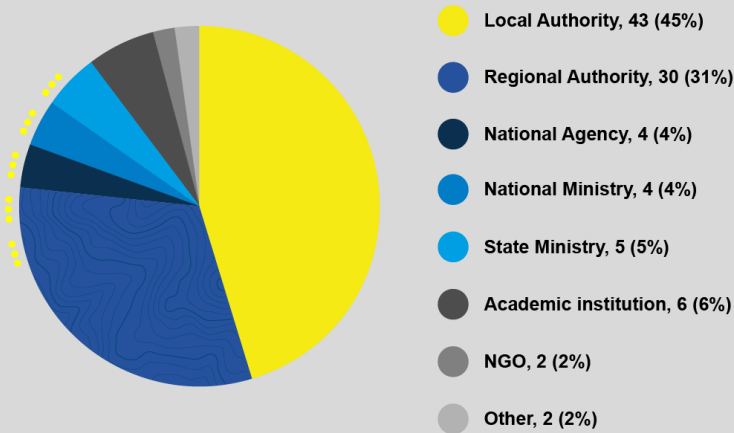
- 1 What spatial planning networks are you part of in the Baltic Sea Region?
- 2 What types of networks would best support your work?
- 3 What topics spark your interest for collaboration and knowledge exchange?
- 4 Which support tools are you interested in discussing?
- 5 What kind of future platform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



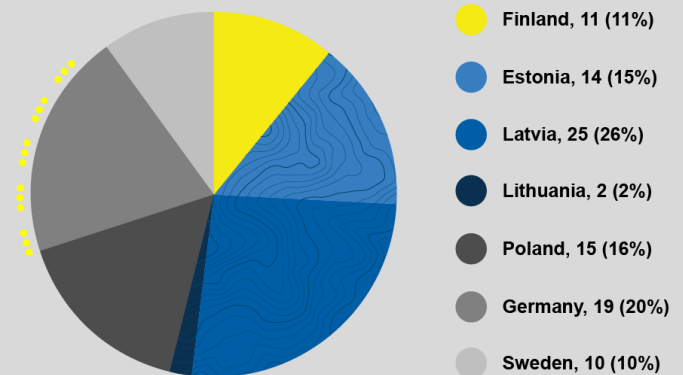
What we did:

Based on survey results prepared
Feasibility study

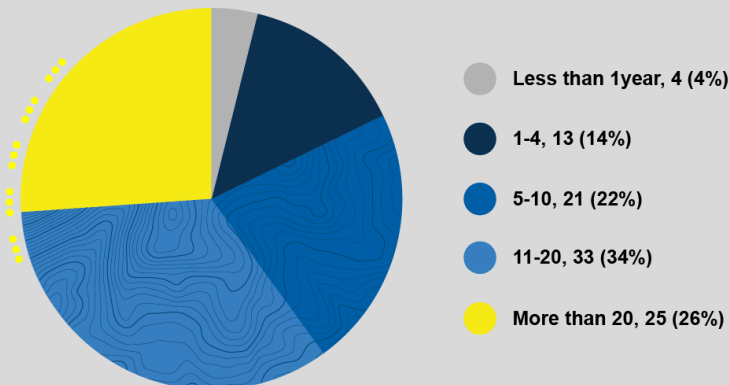
ORGANISATIONAL AFFILIATIONS OF RESPONDENTS



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF RESPONDENTS



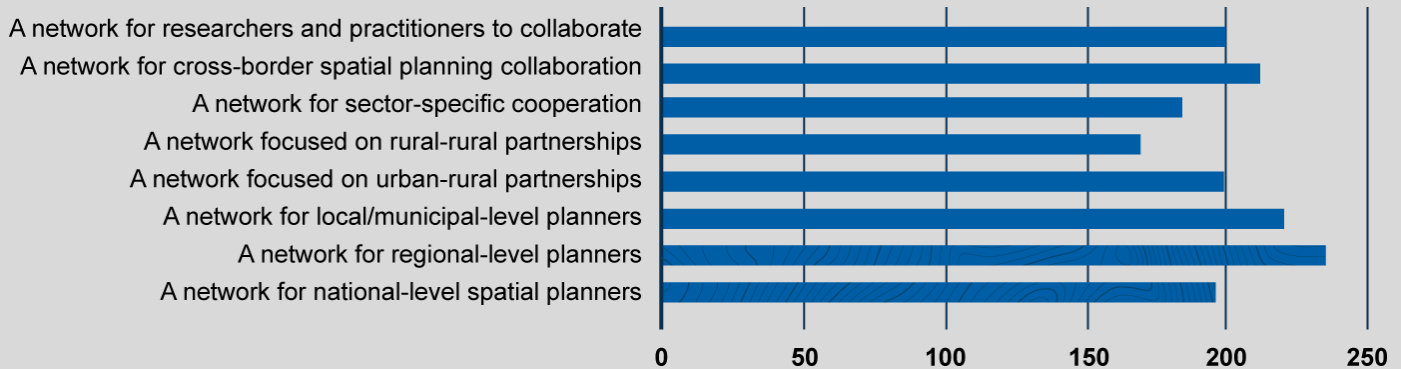
PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS



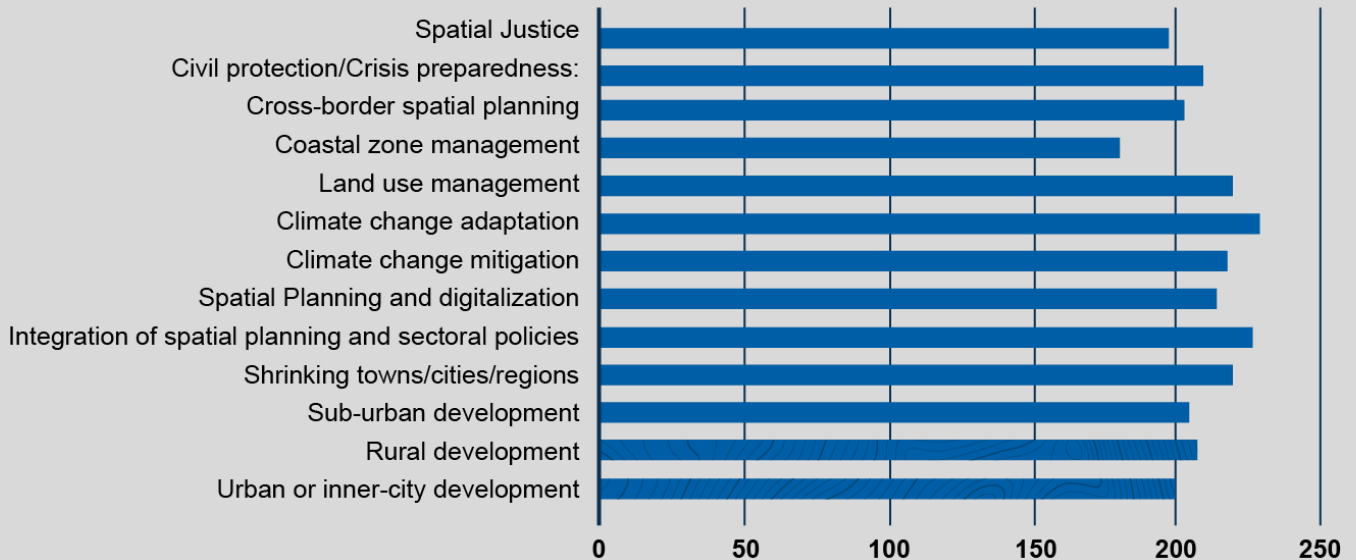
What we did:

Based on survey results prepared
Feasibility study

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN TYPE OF NETWORK



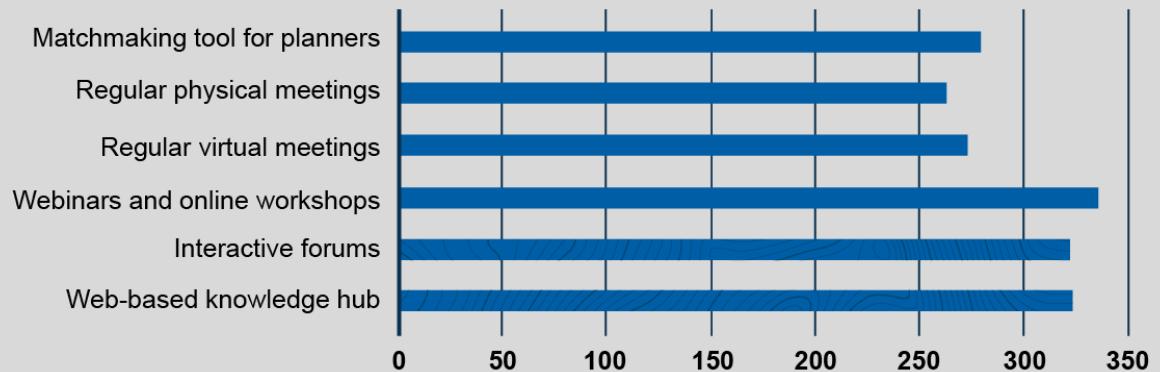
LEVEL OF INTEREST IN THEMES



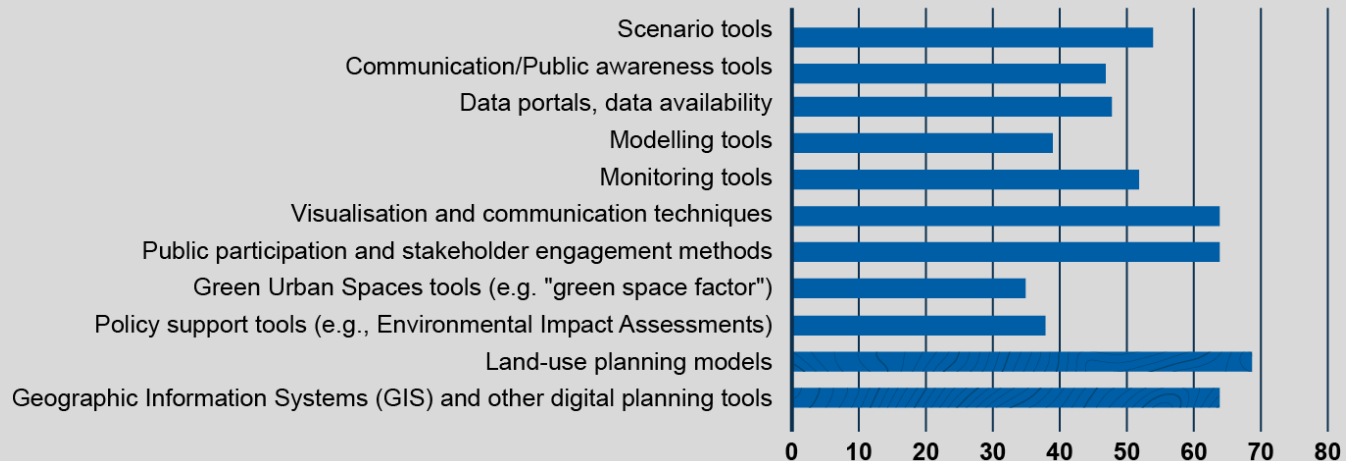
What we did:

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	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 omavalitsus</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>valstpiisētas</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; Purkarthofer 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	SCALE	NAME OF SPATIAL PLANNING INSTRUMENT	VISIONARY	STRATEGIC	FRAMEWORK	REGULATORY
ESTONIA	National	National spatial plan (Üleriigiline planeering)				
	National	County-wide spatial plan (Maakonnaplaneering)				
	Local	Comprehensive plan (Uldplaneering)				
	Local	Detailed spatial plan (Detailplaneering)				
FINLAND	National	National land-use guidelines (Valtakunnalliset alueidenkäyttövaihtoheet)				
	Sub-national	Regional land-use plan (Maakuntakaava)				
	Local	Local master plan (Yleiskaava)				
GERMANY	Local	Local detailed plan (Asemakaava)				
	National	Concepts and Strategies for spatial development (Leitbilder und Handlungsstrategien für die Raumentwicklung)				
	Sub-national	State development plan (Landesraumordnungsplan)				
	Sub-national	Regional plan (Regionalplan)				
LATVIA	Local	Preparatory land-use plan (Flächennutzungsplan)				
	Local	Binding land-use plan (Bebauungsplan)				
	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)				
LITHUANIA	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)				
	Local	Detailed Plan of Local Government (Detālplānojums)				
POLAND	National	General Plan of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania (Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijos bendrasis planas)				
	National	General Plan of parts of the territory of the Republic of Lithuania (Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijos dalies bendrasis planas)				
	Local	General plan of the municipal territory (Savivaldybės teritorijos bendrasis planas)				
	Local	General plan of part of the municipal territory (Savivaldybės teritorijos dalies bendrasis planas)				
SWEDEN	Local	Detailed plan (Detalusis planas)				
	National	Country Development Concept 2050 (Konceptcja rozwoju kraju 2050)				
	National	Medium-term national development strategy 2035 (Strategia Rozwoju Polski do 2035 r.)				
	Sub-national	Regional spatial development plan (plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego województwa)				
	Local	Study of conditions and direction of spatial development of the municipality (stadium uwarunkowań i kierunków zagospodarowania przestrzennego gminy)				
	Local	General spatial development plan (plan ogólny gminy)				
ESTONIA	Local	Local spatial development plan (miejscowy plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego) or Integrated investment plan" (zintegrowany plan inwestycyjny)				
	Sub-national	Regional plan (regionplan)				
	Local	Comprehensive municipal plan (översiktsplan)				
ESTONIA	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; Purkarthofer and Mattila 2023; Münter and Reimer 2021; Akmentiņa 2023; Burinskienė 2022; Mironowicz 2022; Schmitt 2023)

See full document [here](#)

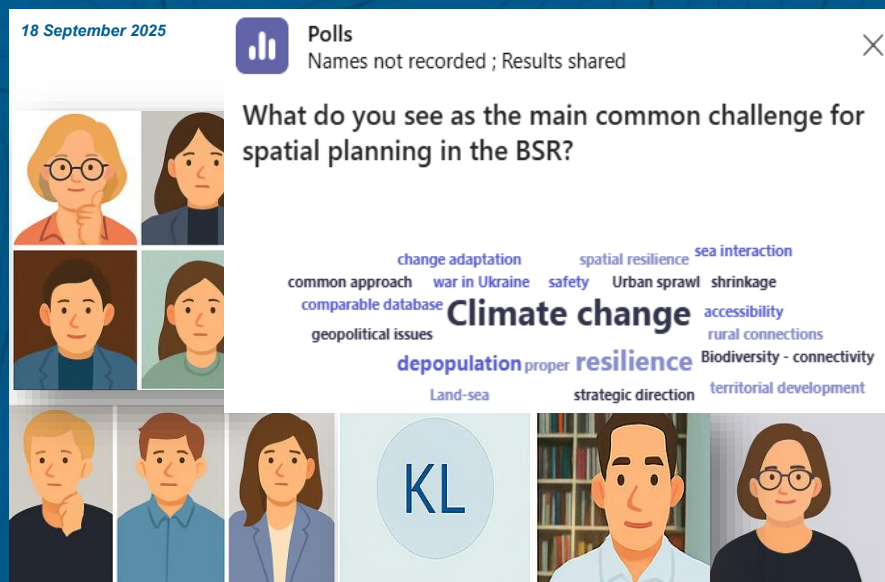
What we did:

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?
- ▶ 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 we did:

On 11–12 February 2026 in Tallinn, Estonia, the **launch conference of the Land-based Planners' Forum** brought together **45 spatial planning practitioners, researchers, and institutional representatives** from across the Baltic Sea Region to reflect on the future of cooperation among spatial planners.

Over two days, participants engaged in interactive sessions and structured discussions:





The first day focused on key issues shaping planning practice across the region, including:

- climate change adaptation and mitigation,
- socio-economic and demographic change,
- urban resilience, future risks and foresight,
- evolving needs in planning expertise,
- cross-border spatial planning and macro-regional cooperation, and
- the planning and management of complex territories such as coastal areas, shrinking communities, urban heritage neighbourhoods, and renewable energy sites, all of which require cooperation with local communities and multiple stakeholders.



On the second day, participants turned to the future development of the Land-based Planners' Forum itself, exploring possible formats for collaboration and sharing expectations for its role and function.

Stakeholders expressed strong support for developing the Forum as a flexible, practice-oriented cooperation platform for planners across the Baltic Sea Region.

They highlighted the **need for practical knowledge exchange based on real cases, lessons learned, and collaborative problem-solving** rather than presentation-based formats.

Participants also stressed the value of lightweight and accessible activities, such as short online sessions, informal meetups, and half-day workshops, which are better suited to planners' limited time and workload constraints.

At the same time, they emphasised the **importance of strengthening professional networking and building a lasting community of practice** through targeted communication tools such as mailing lists, newsletters, and online networking spaces. There was also clear support for thematic collaboration in small groups focused on specific planning challenges and producing practical outputs such as tools, checklists, and short guidance materials.

Overall, participants agreed that the Forum should start with simple, useful exchange formats and gradually develop into a stronger long-term cooperation mechanism.

What is next?

At the end of February 2026, the VASAB Committee decided to continue the Land-based Planners' Forum. This marks an important step forward, and the VASAB Secretariat, together with project partners and stakeholders, will work on the next steps to bring some of the Forum's formats forward in the near future.

We look forward to continued cooperation, inspiring exchanges, and joint initiatives that strengthen the spatial planning community and contribute to a vibrant, resilient, and well-connected Baltic Sea Region.



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/>

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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



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