



## UBC 2.0

# A Communications and Marketing Strategy for a Modern, Relevant and Trustworthy City Network in the Decade to Come

## Executive Summary

The UBC has the potential to strengthen its position as the leading city network in Northern Europe and a preferred partner in the European context, leveraging its role as a network representing over 100 cities of a region of 10 countries in a world where cities increasingly are becoming key actors and increasingly need to tackle urban challenges, and in an EU that to a growing extent looks for macro-regional solutions to societal challenges.

Effective, modern and smart communications will play a key role in this endeavour, and UBC needs a communication and marketing strategy that helps the organisation to focus its resources, foster an efficient exchange and to make its voice heard in the BSR, Europe and beyond.

The objective of this strategy report is to define the future marketing and communication strategy of the UBC and associated actions in an action plan. It also sets out to define a brand platform for UBC, which is to guide communication, organisational choices and activities.

The overall goals of UBCs communication and marketing are to support internal communication, brand building, lobbying and marketing of the Baltic Sea Region.

## Positioning of “Brand UBC” and the brand platform

The positioning should describe what UBC can offer the world and what the key features are that distinguish it from other, similar organisations. It is argued there are two mega-trends in Europe and the world that influence and create a framework of opportunity for how UBC can position itself. These are:

1. The urban millennium, or urban age. In a rapidly urbanising world, cities are entering the world stage as key political, economic and cultural actors. As one of the largest city networks in Europe, UBC is in a unique position to become a most relevant and respected authority in a world that in the wake of a rapid urbanisation is in strong need of practices and policies that shape the life in the cities and their citizens in the future.
2. The “macro-regionalisation” of Europe. A larger EU has created a push for macro-regions, adding a new layer between the nation-state and the supra-national EU level. The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is the first macro-region for which the EU has developed a specific strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. There is, it is argued, room to position UBC as an important partner in the implementation of the strategy.

A *positioning* in relation to these two mega-trends and policy frameworks could rest on the idea that UBC is one of the most important city networks in Europe, and the most important one in Northern Europe:

***“Union of the Baltic Cities is the leading city network in Northern Europe, working to foster sustainable, smart and safe cities”***

To support this positioning, the UBC brand should in the future aiming at standing for the following core values, representing the UBC *brand platform* and *brand promise*:

- **Reliable** - a strong, visible and trustworthy leader for cities in the BSR and preferred partner for other networks and the EU in issues that relate to the thematic focus areas of UBC.
- **Friendly** - a friendly, transparent and open organisation
- **Professional** - efficient, focused and result-oriented.
- **Future oriented** - modern, proactive and inspirational.

## Messages, channels and activities

UBC's communication would become considerably more resourceful if the organisation would focus efforts. One way of doing this is to identify overall thematic areas that are emphasised in UBCs communication and activities that are in line with UBC's positioning and brand promise. Three possible thematic areas that could guide, for example, the formulation of messages could be:

- "The sustainable city"
- "The smart city"
- "The safe city"

To upgrade the communicative and make it more interactive, dialogue-based and editorial, the choice of channels will play a key role. In general, it is recommended that UBC shift some of its current resource allocation from the use of printed media to complementing the communication with more cost-effective digital and social media. Recommendations also include:

- That the Bulletin is complemented with a *digital newsletter*, featuring three to five topical, edited stories and news pieces and that an *online databases/cloud services* that allows for segmenting of target groups and seamless access to up-to-date contacts is set up.
- That when it comes to *social and interactive channels* that UBC investigates the opportunity to begin utilising blog formats for websites that allows for dialogue and easy updating, Twitter, Facebook and/or LinkedIn, allowing for participatory communication and exponential coverage and YouTube or similar channels, that allows for real-time streaming of content.

Communication and marketing is not only about sending information, but also about activities and events. It is recommended that UBC plan activities that support and reinforce the overall positioning and overall themes. Such activities and events could include:

- Organising an *Urban Forum* where UBC members and experts meet to discuss urban challenges of the future, seeking the communicative effect to establish UBC as a point of reference for urban development.
- Creating the *Baltic Sea Region Urban Award* - to be given to a city or other organisation that has made an outstanding achievement in creating making the life of its citizens better (more sustainable, smart and safe).

## **Audiences: stakeholders, actors and strategic partners**

UBC has three main types of target audiences:

- *Stakeholders* are target groups that have a direct interest (or “stake”) in UBC and its activities, and with whom UBC has an established relationship. These are primarily the member cities’ representatives, but also groups of actors within the cities.
- *Actors* are target audiences whose actions and policies have ramifications for UBC and its members, such as national governments and the European Commission.
- *Strategic Partners* are target groups with whom UBC share clear, mutual interests and with whom UBC should work closely to further those interests, by for example launching joint activities and initiatives. These include other BSR organisations and European city networks.

## **Implementation**

Implementation of the strategy and the action plan should begin as soon as the Executive Board has adopted it. It is recommended that an implementation plan is elaborated that sets out implementation activities, the most important one being workshops where UBC members get the opportunity to learn how the strategy can be translated into concrete practice.

# Strategy report and action plan

## UBC as the key city network in Northern Europe

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) has for two decades played an essential - sometimes unique - role for its member cities. Its key strengths have been its role as a content-intensive platform for exchange of ideas and best practice and for informal networking, and its open and decentralised network structure. It has also played a role as a channel through which the member cities could influence decision makers in national government and the EU institutions. Yet, this role seems not to have been fulfilled as successfully as the internal-exchange role. It is also clear that UBC and its mission and activities are relatively unknown among decision makers in the Baltic Sea Region and its countries and in Europe.

The resources of cities are limited and they have to justify their international activities and membership in networks to their citizens. Cities have to feel that they get “value for money” from their participation. Networks and organisations that are not able to serve their members’ needs, innovate themselves and communicate their value to members and others may lose relevance and face difficulties in sustaining members’ interest.

The UBC has, however, the potential to strengthen its position as the leading network in Northern European and a preferred partner in the European context, representing over 100 cities of a region of 10 countries in a world where cities increasingly are becoming key political and economic actors and that increasingly needs to tackle urban challenges, and in a European Union that to a growing extent look for macro-regional solutions to political, environmental and economic challenges.

Effective, modern and smart communications will play a key role in this endeavour.

## Communication is a key activity for all organisations

The communication and marketing strategy is a precise snapshot of who we are, what we have to say to the world, who we want to influence, and how we will do that – now, and in the future

Every day, communications strategies unfold all around us. Although we may not realise it, the billboards, radio jingles and storefronts, the logos and slogans and advertisements all over the internet, our daily newspapers, the TV are all clever prongs of wider strategies working to distinguish one item or idea from another. In this age of unparalleled choice, communications is all about broadcasting differences and justify existence: here is why our idea – in this great sea of ideas – really matters. Here is what makes our approach and our organisation unique, and here is how our ideas or approach can help you make a decision – whether you are choosing between two pairs of shoes or two policy options.

It is constructive to think of communications in terms of an ongoing process: it is a means of elaborating how we network, participate, and interact with the world. Good communications reflect a two-way dialogue, where we listen (what does our audience want?), design and deliver audience-informed strategies, and then gather feedback to assess our impact. Every organisation requires a dynamic communications strategy. While the private sector invests enormous resources every year in communications – on broadcasting their difference – the public and non-profit sectors tend to perceive communications as an optional or fringe activity, and certainly not central to the work (e.g. the policy advocacy or project management) itself. Communications are typically out-sourced or designated to junior staff working with small budgets and little idea of what, in the larger sense, the organisation is trying to achieve.

Clearly, the stature of communications must change: if organisations want to broadcast their difference, legitimise their existence and influence decisions, they must learn how to integrate communications from top to bottom internally, externally and across all their activities. Organisations need to see communications as a tool that is not only helpful or required but absolutely essential to achieving core goals.

Many organisations also need to adapt to a changing communication and media landscape, where digital and social media play a larger role. At the same time, new media and channels offer potential exponential benefits for outreach and impact for organisations that cannot spend millions on buying media – allowing them to “out-smart” rather than “out-spend” competitors for target groups’ “mind-share”.

All this is no less true for the UBC, which in essence is a truly “communication-intensive” organisation. As stated in article 1. of the UBC’s statutes “the Union’s aim is to promote and strengthen cooperation and exchange of experience among the cities in the Baltic Sea Region, to advocate for common interests of the local authorities in the region, and to act on behalf of the cities and local authorities in common matters towards regional, national, European and international bodies, as well as achieving sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region with full respect to European principles of local and regional self-governance and subsidiarity.

In order to achieve these aims, UBC needs a communication and marketing strategy that helps the organisation to focus its resources, foster an efficient exchange and make its voice heard in the BSR, Europe and beyond.

## Objective of strategy

Against the background of the overall mission and aims of the UBC, the objective of this strategy report is to define and describe the future marketing and communication strategy of the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) and associated actions in an action plan (goals, target groups, main stakeholders, messages to be communicated and channels to be used etc.).

It also sets out to define a brand platform for UBC – that is what UBC wants to stand for in eyes of target audiences, which will guide communication, organisational choices and activities.

## Process of strategy work

The communications and marketing strategy has been elaborated based on a multitude of sources. A first analysis phase, based on around 20 interviews with experts within and outside the UBC network, desk research and a survey, sent to more than 600 people in the UBC network (of which about 20 % responded), established an understanding of where UBC is today in terms of image and communications. In the next “process phase”, workshops were organised at the UBC general conference that helped churn out how UBC wants to be seen in the future and how it wants to work with communication and marketing. Inclusiveness and establishing a sense of ownership of the strategy and the future UBC brand among UBC members have been guiding principles throughout the process.

Marketing and branding consultancy Tendensor, based in Kalmar and Stockholm in Sweden, has been hired to assist in carrying out the strategy process.

## Goals of communication

The overall goals of UBCs communication and marketing are:

- **Internal communication:** Support the internal exchange and diffusion of ideas, inspiration and best practice within the UBC network of cities.
- **Brand building:** Establish UBC as a credible, future-oriented and relevant, leading Baltic Sea Region network, and a preferred partner in thematic issues that relate to e.g. urban development and city planning, sustainable cities, competitiveness of cities, social cohesiveness and integration etc.
- **Lobbying:** Help the UBC member cities to further their policy-advocacy goals vis-à-vis national government and the EU by leveraging its role as a major northern European network of more than 100 member cities.
- **Marketing the BSR:** Promote and market the Baltic Sea Region as a dynamic, competitive, prosperous and safe region.

## Guiding principles of the UBC communication and marketing

Here principles of modern and effective communication are described, that ought to characterise UBC’s communication in the future.

- *Interactivity and dialogue*
  - The best and most efficient communication is based on interactivity and the principle of two-way dialogue and participatory communication, which promote stakeholder engagement, learning and creation of new ideas. Today, however, the UBC communication is characterised

as being essentially about one-way communication. Social media, portals and databases can help further the aim to communicate in a more dialogue-based and interactive way.

- This mode of communication is characterised by:
  - In today's communication landscape, more people than ever have the inspiration, tools and platforms to be "senders" themselves.
  - Everyone can act on, discuss and comment news, reports and articles.
  - Presence in social media.
  - An informal and open atmosphere.
- It will have several organisational consequences:
  - The ability to involve internal and external stakeholders will be central (communicative activity should be an objectivity).
  - Personification - anonymous people cannot manage a good dialogue.
  - Engaging topics and an understanding among UBC members of challenges and problems helps.
  - Planned interaction in physical meetings - that is to design meetings, workshops and conferences in a way that maximises interaction and dialogue between participants.
  - Staff and leadership (Secretariat and Executive Board members) should be accessible and prioritise communication.
- *Real-time (or at least fast)*
  - The more timely communication is, the more impact it is likely to have. Easily accessible and up-to-date contact information and send lists and digital and social media play a key role for realising real-time communication. Streaming of moving content (for example interviews with UBC and other representatives) is another way to create more real-time communication experiences.
  - Characteristics:
    - The possibility to follow events and activities in distance.
    - Short time span between event and editorial news piece.
  - Organisational consequences:
    - A shift from traditional channels and media to digital media.
    - The use of video amplifies the sense of presence.
    - Media that bridges distance used as complement to traditional correspondence.
    - Editorial capacity is a precondition for real time communication
- *Editorial capacity*
  - It is clear that UBC would benefit considerably if it would strengthen its editorial capacity. What is meant here is the capacity to not only be a node and network for dissemination of unprocessed information, but also a network that process information and news and present cohesive, refined and forceful messages and stories that relate to UBC's mission and a few strategically chosen themes.

- Editorial communication is characterised by:
  - The capacity to portray events and news to create understanding, dialogue and learning.
  - A proactive communication team.
  - The capacity to process news and present editorial productions in different media.
- Organisational consequences:
  - Investments into editorial competency is needed.
  - The communication team needs a network of writers and "reporters", representing the Commissions.
  - A clearer - and by the network commonly accepted - brand and communication strategy will help focus and prioritise when choosing news, articles etc.
- *Accessibility – databases and "cloud services"*
  - Fast and seamless access to up-to-date information is key for effective communication. Centralised databases or a "cloud" for both contacts and policy/project content is essential in order for a decentralised network organisation to communicate in a coherent and coordinate manner, and to unlock the potential and enthusiasm of a network's main asset – its members.
  - Characteristics:
    - Usability of information and services for members is key.
    - User-friendly search functions and structure that enable communication.
    - Openness and transparency
  - Organisational consequences:
    - Investments (small-scale, lots can be achieved with free-of-charge share ware)
    - Ability to develop communication services with members' needs as starting point
- *Focus and prioritisation*
  - UBC is active in a broad array of policy areas. Admittedly, these are all essential for the member cities and Commissions have in most cases been initiated by a member or a group of members. However, effective communication rests on the principle that organisations need to focus activities and communications in order to "get through" to their audiences. One way to focus and prioritise is to work with a few chosen themes in the communication (elaborated on below).
  - Characteristics:
    - The UBC brand and positioning is used as a intuitive steering tool in everything the organisation says and does.
    - The ability to in all circumstances be able to express UBC's mission and role.
    - Clear focus areas that set the direction for the editorial work.
  - Organisational consequences:
    - Implementation of strategy based on the brand platform and values as a basis.
    - Good planning of resources and manpower to maximise effect.

- *Segmenting of audiences*
  - A segment is a sub-set of a target market made up of people or organisations with one or more characteristics that cause them to demand similar information/services based on the characteristics of the information/service. Segmentation could be supported with a database in which contacts are “tagged” according to different thematical or functional interests.
  - Characteristics:
    - Communication and services tailored to target groups.
    - The possibility to choose how to receive information and communication.
    - The individual member ought to be able to influence its profile with regard to communication.
  - Organisational consequences:
    - Focus on both individual and organisation
    - Segments based on interest and behaviour rather than geography and/or organisational affinity.
    - Capacity and technology to give members freedom of choice in choosing forms of information access and form of interaction.

## **Positioning of “Brand UBC”**

What makes UBC a unique organisation? What can UBC offer the world? What are the key strengths and core values that distinguish it from other, similar organisations?

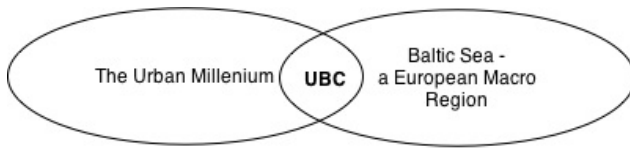
Let us begin with the world around UBC. There are two mega-trends in Europe and the world that influence and create a framework of opportunity for how UBC can position itself. These are the rapid urbanisation and the role of cities and sub-national entities, on the one hand, and the regionalisation of Europe, on the other hand.

- The urban millennium, or urban age, has arrived. In a rapidly urbanising world, cities are entering the world stage as key political, economic and cultural actors. Complex urban systems are responding to the pressures of growth, change and globalisation – and there is a strong need to shape new thinking and practice on how to make cities fairer, more competitive, safer and more sustainable for the next generation of urban dwellers, who will make up some 70 per cent of the global population by 2050.
- One of the largest city networks in the world and the second largest in Europe, UBC is in a unique position to become a most-relevant and respected authority in a world that in the wake of a rapid urbanisation is in strong need of practices and policies that shape the life in the cities and their citizens in the future.
- Hence, there is an opportunity to position UBC as a relevant, trustworthy international actor and preferred partner in the “urban millennium”.
- Secondly, we now witness a “macro-regionalisation” of Europe: a larger European Union has created a push for macro-regions within Europe, i.e. countries with geographical proximity facing the same challenges that cooperate, adding a new layer between the nation-state and the supra-national European level. The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is the first macro-region for which the EU has developed a specific strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). In addition, the EU 2020 growth strategy of the EU, focusing on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, offers a framework for positioning the UBC and its role in the world.
- Thus, there is room to position UBC as an important partner in the implementation of the EUSBSR, especially in the chosen thematic priority areas of UBC.



- Figure 1. visualises this positioning.

Figure 1.



All in all, a positioning in relation to these two mega-trends and policy frameworks could rest on the idea that UBC is one of the most important city networks in Europe, and the most important one in Northern Europe.

Positioning of the UBC Brand:

*"Union of the Baltic Cities is the leading city network in Northern Europe, working to foster sustainable, smart and safe cities"*

To support this positioning, the UBC brand should in the future strive to stand for the following four core values:

<p><b><i>Reliable</i></b></p> <p>A strong, visible and trustworthy leader for cities in the BSR and preferred partner for other networks and the EU in issues that relate to the thematic focus areas of UBC.</p>	<p><b><i>Friendly</i></b></p> <p>A friendly, transparent and open organisation that is easy to approach and comprehend.</p>
<p><b><i>Professional</i></b></p> <p>Efficient, focused and result-oriented, delivering on promises in relation to all stakeholders.</p>	<p><b><i>Future oriented</i></b></p> <p>Modern, proactive and inspirational – understanding news trends and challenges facing cities, and including the youth.</p>

## Messages

The message is a formulation of an idea. As stated, UBC’s communication would become considerably more resourceful if the organisation would prioritise and focus efforts. One way of doing this is to create two or three overall thematic areas that are emphasised in UBCs communication and that permeate communication and marketing activities. These should be in line with UBC’s positioning and brand vision, and the major European policies and mega trends described above. Thus, the messages can with slight variation be used to all target audiences.

Three possible thematic areas could evolve around:

- **"The sustainable city"** (can also be adapted to be used for the BSR as a whole: e.g. "the BSR as a green region")

- **“The smart city”<sup>1</sup>** (can also be adapted to be used for the BSR as a whole: e.g. “the BSR as a smart region”)
- **“The safe city”**

The messages that support each thematic area should revolve around UBC as an organisation and its mission and activities, as well as the BSR as a region. If we take the first overall theme as an illustration and break it down into sub-themes and messages, it could look like this:

Examples of overall messages:

- “Being close to the citizens, the cities will be key actors in the future, and the BSR cities are central players in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the BSR (or other EU policies)” (to EU institutions)
- “In a globalising world, regional cooperation between cities makes us all stronger and better equipped to deal with future challenges” (to members and potential members)
- “In a Europe where macro-regions play a growing role, cooperation in the BSR to achieve common goals is essential” (to other BSR networks/organisations)

Examples of messages linked to the three, suggested themes:

- Sustainable/smart/safe cities:
  - “We know sustainable/smart/safe urban development in cities and we have a network of experts in our 100 member cities. We help you to form and implement policies” (to EU institutions)
  - “We will work with you to reach our joint policy goals” (other BSR networks)
  - “If you need expertise, inspiration or share experiences, we help you find it among our 100 members” (to member cities and perhaps prospective members)

## Channels and activities

The channel is both the medium that you use to transmit your information and the reaction or understanding that you expect to achieve in those who receive the message.

To upgrade its communicative capacity and make it more interactive, dialogue-based and editorial, the choice of channels will play a key role. In general, it is here recommended that UBC shifts some of its current resource allocation from the use of printed media, conventional websites and emailing to complementing the communication with digital and social media. Recommendations include:

- It is recommended that most of UBC’s printed publications - such as the Bulletin, Events Calendar and Reports from the General Conference - are published in a digital format rather than printed in the future, in order to reallocate resources to other, more cost-effective means of communication.
- It is also recommended that the relevance of the different UBC publications will be evaluated in the light of the UBC Strategy 2010-2015, this Communication and Marketing Strategy and the future needs of the member cities.
- It is recommended that the Bulletin is complemented with a bi-monthly (or monthly if it is deemed that there is available capacity) *digital newsletter*, featuring three to five topical, edited stories and news pieces. This is perhaps a reason to send one newsletter version to members, containing more informa-

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<sup>1</sup> In the EU’s EU2020 definition, “smart growth” includes policy areas such as education, research/innovation and digital society. As an urban development term, mainly used in North America, the focus of the smart city concept is on the role of ICT infrastructure, but much focus is also on the role of human capital/education, social and relational capital and environmental interest as important drivers of urban growth. It is here suggested that UBC work out an own definition of the smart city in an UBC context, along the lines of: **S**ocial capital, **M**obility, **A**ccessibility, **R**esearch & Innovation and **T**echnology, envisioning the parameters that are important in order to forge smart cities.

tion about internal affairs of UBC, and one to external stakeholders, addressing topics of more general interest?

- An online *databases/cloud services* that allows for segmenting of target groups, and seamless access to up-to-date contacts should be set up.
- When it comes to *social and interactive channels*, it is recommended that UBC investigates the opportunity to begin utilising some of the following ones:
  - *Blog format for websites* that allows for dialogue and easy updating. The possibility for members to update the website themselves should be discussed to increase interactivity and stakeholder engagement. To begin with, one person in each Commission can get basic training to become a "super-user" and get access to the website.
  - *Twitter, Facebook and/or LinkedIn*, allowing for participate communication, dialogue and exponential (viral) coverage of events, news and knowledge,
  - *YouTube and similar channels* that allows for real-time streaming of content (such as speeches and interviews) and
  - *Digital solutions for interactive online meetings*, such as Adobe Connect or similar online services.

Communication and marketing is not only about sending information through different media, but also about activities and events. It is recommended that UBC plans activities that support and reinforce the overall positioning and overall themes and messages. Such activities and events could include:

- Organise an bi-annual *Urban Forum* where UBC members, experts as well as people working with city development issues in other organisations meet to discuss urban challenges of the future. Here the results of the Commissions' work and the link between this work and the thematic issues can be made visible to stakeholders, actors and strategic partners (see audiences elaborated on below)
  - The communicative effect of such a forum is to establish UBC as a point of reference for urban development.
- *Organise an event or "hearing"*, possibly with the EU institutions or other partners, on the implementation of the EU Strategy of the BSR from a city point of view or other relevant themes.
  - The communicative effect of such an award can be to position UBC as an authority and point of reference in relation to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the BSR or other relevant EU policies.
- Create the *Baltic Sea Region City/Urban Award*- to be given to a city or other organisation that has made an outstanding achievement in creating making the life of its citizens better (more sustainable, smart and safe). Admittedly, awards are popular vehicles for communication and creating recognition, and already a few Baltic Sea Region Awards exist (e.g. the BSR award, the BSR innovation award and the BSR Water Award), but none of these are dedicated to cities and their particular challenges specifically.
  - The communicative effect of such an award can be to position UBC as a focal point for issues pertaining sustainable, smart and safe cities, as well as help to boost pride and self-esteem internally in the network (which publicity and ceremonial events tend to do).

## **Audiences – stakeholders, actors and strategic partners**

UBC has three main types of target audiences:

- *Stakeholders* are target groups that have a direct interest (or "stake") in UBC and its activities, and with whom UBC has an established relationship. These are primarily the member cities' representatives, but also groups of actors within the cities such as NGOs, companies, science parks, cluster organisations and chambers of commerce, youth associations and schools, sport clubs, tourism associations etc.

- The main stakeholders of UBC depend on activity and commission, but in general, the following, more general ones, can be pinned down:
  - Elected politicians
  - Civil servants
  - Youth groups
- Suggested/possible communication and other activities to target the stakeholders include:
  - Webpage, newsletters (internal version?), social media, Bulletin, databases/cloud, Urban Forum, Urban Award.
- *Actors* are target audiences whose actions and policies have ramifications for UBC and its members, such as national governments and the European Commission.
  - The following are the main actor groups, to whom UBC should prioritise its communication and marketing:
    - EU: European Commission (especially DG Regio, in charge of EUSBSR and territorial co-operation, but also those working with thematic focus areas of UBC), European Parliament (maybe especially the Baltic Intergroup of MEPs) and the Committee of the Regions.
    - National government officials, especially those in ministries and government authorities that work with the thematic focus areas of UBC.
  - Suggested/possible communication and other activities to target the stakeholders include:
    - Webpage, newsletter (external version?), social media, Bulletin?, Urban Forum, Urban Award, Hearing.
- *Strategic Partners* are target groups with whom UBC shares clear, mutual interests and with whom UBC should work closely to further those interests, by for example launching joint activities and communication initiatives.
  - The following are the main potential strategic partners:
    - Baltic Sea Region organisations and networks, such as Baltic Metropolises, Baltic Development Forum, BSSSC and/or CBSS.
    - European city networks, as decided on by the Executive Board.
    - Special-interest organisations working with the prioritised thematic areas of UBC
  - Suggested/possible communication and other activities to target the stakeholders include:
    - Webpage, newsletter (external version?), social media, Bulletin?, Urban Forum, Urban Award.

## Resources and organisational requirements

Here only a brief overview of resources and organisational requirements will be made as these components need to be elaborated in an implementation plan at a later stage. Generally, the following aspects would need to be considered in the implementation phase:

- Organise Commission work around the three overall focus themes - which ought to be a strategic decision taken by the Executive Board.

- The UBC secretariat and its communication team are enablers of communication - paving the way for engagement of the whole network making all members to co-creators and senders of communication.
- Need to acquire strategic communication competence, making sure that communication can be strategically supportive of all UBC activities and to a larger extent interactive, editorial, real-time and focused.
- Matrix communication organisation based on function and themes: to be able to implement the suggested changes, a facilitating requirement is that an organisational structure that can support the structure and flows of communication is set up.
  - One the hand, UBC members and Commission will have their ordinary, functional responsibilities, and on the other hand, they should "tag" their communication in accordance with the three strategic themes.
- Each Commission appoint one person in charge of communication reporting stories that relate to both activities and the three overall themes (this could be the same as the website super-user capacity).
- Members appoint one communication person being nodes in the network and responsible for communicating within the network as well as seeing to that contact information etc is up-to-date in databases.

## **Implementation, evaluation and follow up**

Implementation of the strategy and the action plan should begin as soon as the Executive Board has adopted it. It is recommended that an implementation plan is elaborated that sets out implementation activities, the most important one being workshops where UBC members, maybe especially the commissions, get the opportunity to learn how the strategy can be translated into concrete practice and where the "communication capacity" person can get basic training in using communication tools. It is suggested that the implementation run over a period of 1-2 years.

It is also recommended that a "mid-term" evaluation of the strategy implementation is done one year after the strategy was adopted, and that a follow-up of the strategy work is carried out two year after it was adopted. The follow up should be carried out by conducting a survey similar to the one Tendensor carried out in the analysis phase of the strategy work (in September 2011) to see if the attitudes towards UBC's communication and marketing have changed after the strategy implementation began, having as overall objective to fine-tune and refine the strategy work

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Main results of workshops on UBC's future communication and marketing strategy ("Process phase")**

#### **About the workshops**

At the UBC General Conference in Liepāja, two process workshops on UBC's communication and marketing were held. Strategy process consultants from Tendensor AB led the seminars.

The purpose of the workshops was to form the main input to the operationalisation of the marketing and communication strategy in terms of the wanted, future position, brand image and "unique selling points" of UBC, and to create a common understanding of the strategic direction of the UBC network in terms of marketing/communication. The results of the workshops will together with the analysis results from the project (survey, interviews, desk research) constitute the main input to the final strategy and action plan.

One seminar was held on 4 October, which had around 15 participants, and one was held on 6 October, which had around 25 participants.

Please note that the material below is an aggregate of the discussions, but that is to a large extent still is “raw material” that will be refined, streamlined and assessed against the analysis result in the final part of the strategy process. The new strategy will be presented beginning of 2012.

The participants in the workshops were asked to discuss the following questions in groups of 4-5 persons:

1. What is the future role of UBC?
2. How do you want UBC to be perceived in the future?
3. What should be the main target groups of UBC in the future?
4. How can the communication and marketing of UBC be improved – internally and externally?

## **Main results**

### **1. What is the future role of UBC?**

- Networking
- Bridge of knowledge and experience (benchmarking, real cooperation within municipalities)
- Facilitation of exchange of good practices and mutual learning
- Strong network/platform where members share common vision and common ideas (“inspiration”)
- Benchmarking
- Cooperation bridging 107 cities
- Network of resources (tools, methods, data, skilled staff members (e.g. UBC EnvCom))
- Strong position on sustainable management
- In service trainer of staff and politicians
- Lobbying based on trends
- Representation in Brussels, “UBC operates as an ambassador of the member cities at the EU and European levels”
- A common strong and respected voice in BSR and Brussels
- Connecting people and furthering ideas and projects, free consulting and expertise
- Implementation of UBC strategies among the members, monitor implementation
- Initiate common campaigns and actions in ad-hoc situation
- Leading role in campaigns and political decisions
- An organisation that find and develop innovative methods for communication on all levels (political, administrative)
- Cooperation with other BSR organisations to create a “BSR Brand” – UBC as leader

## **2. How do you want UBC to be perceived in the future?**

- Effective, with a more concrete decision making process
- Strong, respected, to be seen as an important player in the BSR, as a leader for cities in BSR
- UBC as a strong brand
- Friendship organisation (“Strong and friendly”)
- A good tool for municipal organisations (result-oriented)
- Efficient – “not the big player” – clear goals
- The commissions as the KEY players
- “As a little Hansa - XXI Hansa”
- Modern
- Inspirational
- Proactive
- Open-minded
- Transparent (“Walk the talk”, values, content first)
- Attractive to its members
- Professional and trustworthy representative of its members
- Active
  - Participation
  - Membership

## **3. What should be the main target groups of UBC in the future?**

- Member cities (decision-makers/politicians, civil servants, specialist, local organisations/NGOs in member cities, esp. schools and youth organisations)
- Internally: commissions
- Authorities / decision makers (national/EU)
- EU commission (esp. DG Regio and Interreg)
- Sister organisations / networks in Europe
- Citizens
- Other BSR organisations / networks
- Job creators / investors
- Other organisations according to topic in question

- Youth/exchange
- Citizens

#### **4. How can the communication and marketing of UBC be improved – internally and externally?**

- Constant update of information / database
- Implementation of new technologies. Proper selection of contact persons (includes language skills).
- Friendly website (useful, easy to access)
- More efficient use of UBC home page (reports from commissions etc.)
- New UBC logo
- “Be more modern in communication”
- Shared database for interested staff persons
- Commitment from politicians
- Easy overview of commissions work, clear content
- Visibility information materials = flags, guidelines
- Basic services – explain what you get out of UBC as a service against member fee?
- Use social media in addition to traditional, e.g. Facebook etc.
- More commitment of the contact persons
- Link to the UBC website on the city’s main webpage (NB! not allowed by all cities according to some people at seminars)
- Regular exchange between commissions
- Use ambassadors for external communication, member cities as ambassadors for UBC in their city/administration
- Easy-to-use contact database where member cities can update data themselves = up to date contact information
- Better use of media for external communication
- Speed dating
- Expert exchange
- Involve chamber of commerce – supplement as new actor
- Best practice database
- Writing articles, reports in the local and regional media
- Creating a pan-Baltic media space
- Creating a media budget and marketing UBC through major news agencies (reports!)



## APPENDIX 2

### How UBC and its current communication is seen today - the results of the analysis phase

The analysis phase consisted of three main components: 1.) about 20 interviews with "experts" in national government, other BSR organisations, other city networks and the EU institutions as well as with people actively working with UBC (in Commissions, Secretariat and Executive Board), 2.) a survey, answered by 108 people (and sent to approx. 600) and desk research (review of webpage, publications, strategy documents etc.). This phase took place between June and October 2011.

#### Result of expert interviews

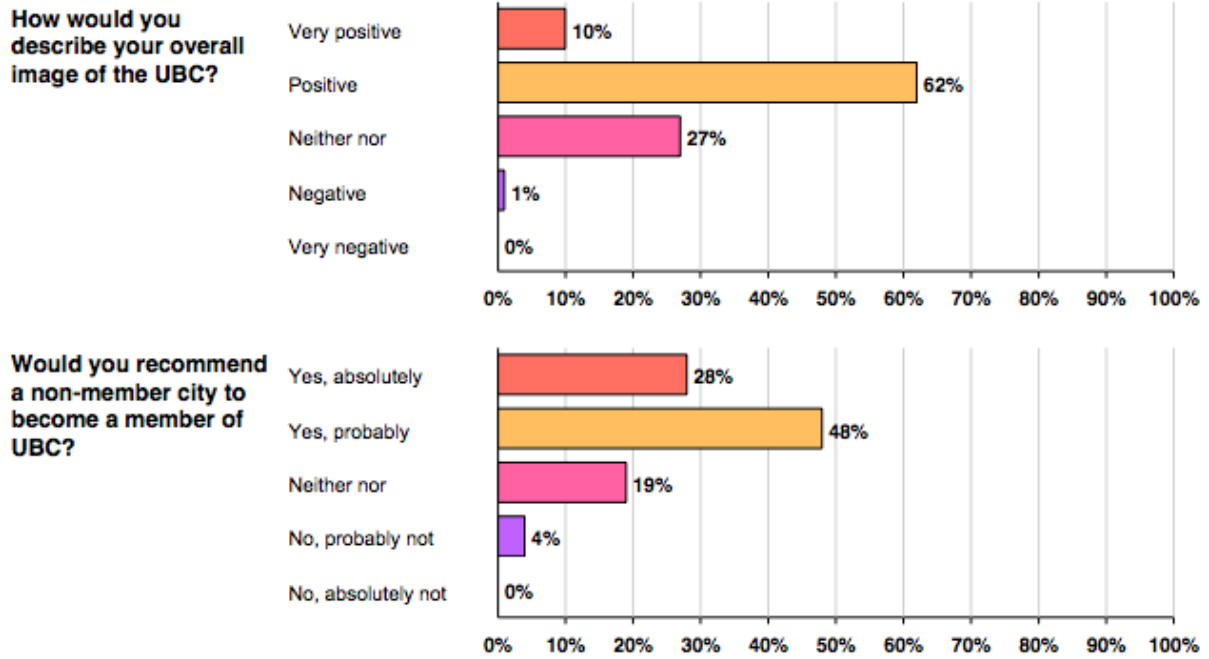
The interviews resulted in the following overall picture:

- Generally, the member cities and the respondents of the interviews are satisfied with UBC communication, but, at the same time, see room for improvement and a more up-to-date, modern communication.
- It also became clear that the network has a communication infrastructure that efficiently distributes largely unprocessed information about activities in the network and Commissions in a one-way manner, whereas communication of processed, edited material and interactive, two-way communication is less frequent.
- The internal "experts" are less satisfied with UBC communication, see more room for improvement and are enthusiastic about change.
- External stakeholders know very little about UBC and its mission and activities. The Commission work is generally unknown, and if they know something about it, it is usually about environmental work. It is argued that this makes it challenging to attract attention and influence external actors' policies.
- The analysis phase confirmed that there is a strong backing for the creation of new communication and marketing strategy

#### Result of survey

An analysis of the current state of UBC's overall image renders the result that UBC enjoys a relatively healthy, positive image among its members. For example, when asked about the overall image of UBC, 62 % of respondents say that it is positive and 10 % very positive, whereas 27 % say that it is neither nor positive and only 1 % say that it is negative. Seventy-six % of members would recommend a non-member city to become member, 19 % say neither nor and only four % would not do it.

Figure 1.



When asked about what UBC describes today, 69 % claim that UBC is about networking, 42 % about exchange and only 12 % about lobbying (multiple choices possible), confirming that picture described above that UBC seem to have lived up more to its “internal” exchange and networking role more than its outward-looking lobbying role. It is in this context worth noting that during the workshops held at the General Conference, some members also questioned whether UBC should focus on lobbying at all and called for a “back to basics” approach and focus on what it does best, i.e. networking and exchange.

The words that best describe UBC are, according to survey respondents (multiple choices possible) were: “Friendly” (52 %), “Open” (40 %), and only 6 % say “closed”), “Competent” (28 %), “Informal” (26 %), “Professional” (25 %), “Old-fashioned” (17 %), “Fragmented” (16 %). Positive words such as “Visionary” (13 %), “Modern” (11 %), “Transparent” (10 %, interestingly, as “Open” is so highly valued)) received lower scores. See figure 2. for all associations.

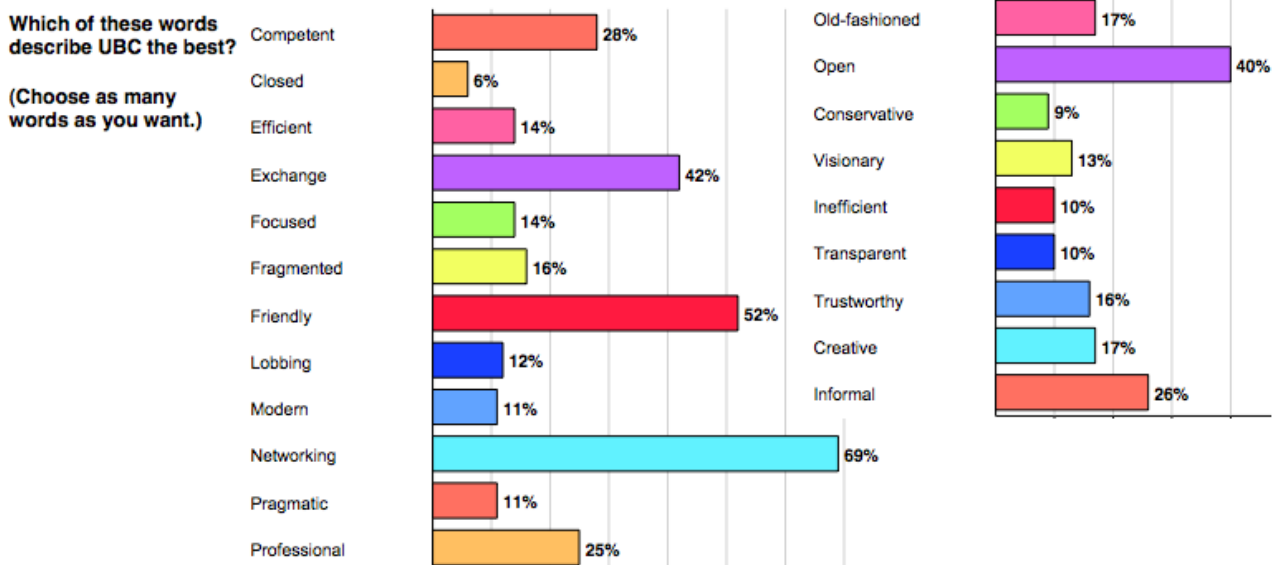


Figure 2.

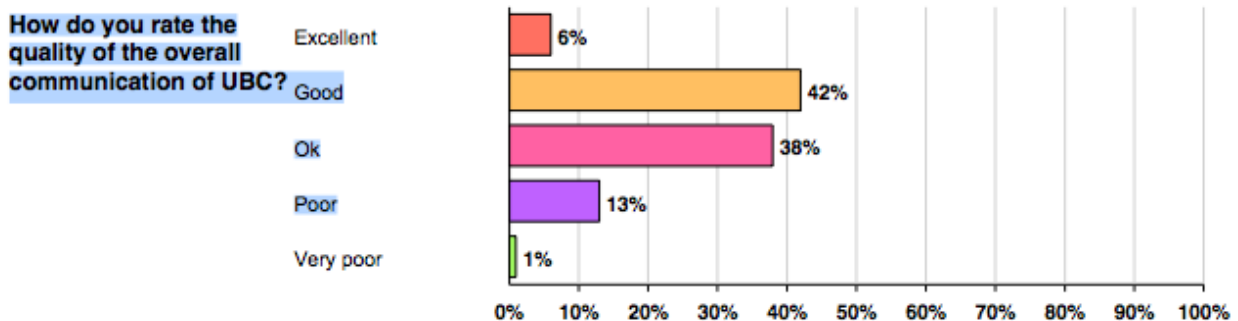
In the open-ended question about associations, a mixed picture emerged. The following sentences summarise the general tendencies in this material:

- "Friendship, interesting to know more about how different cities is working, great possibilities for UBC within Europe"
- "Exchange of experience, best practise, learning by doing"
- "Active international networking, dedication to important issues, sincere desire to make a difference"
- "Innovative and committed environmental team, strong regional player, weak central organisation lacking ambition"
- "Network of over 100 member cities"
- "Not a very outgoing organisation."
- "Working together, good projects"
- "Strong environmental engagement, active commission work, weak governing"
- "Giving youth a voice in BSR"

In sum, it is clear that exchange, networking and friendship are strong associations. The only thematical association that emerged somewhat strongly is environmental work. Less positive qualities that are associated with the organisation are that it is not that outgoing (in contrast with the strong association with "Open" above) and proactive organisation and that the governance is seen as weak. Youth is mentioned several times, and which can be said to be a somewhat unique feature of UBC compared to other BSR networks.

When asked about how the quality of UBC's communication is rated, a quite positive result emerges.

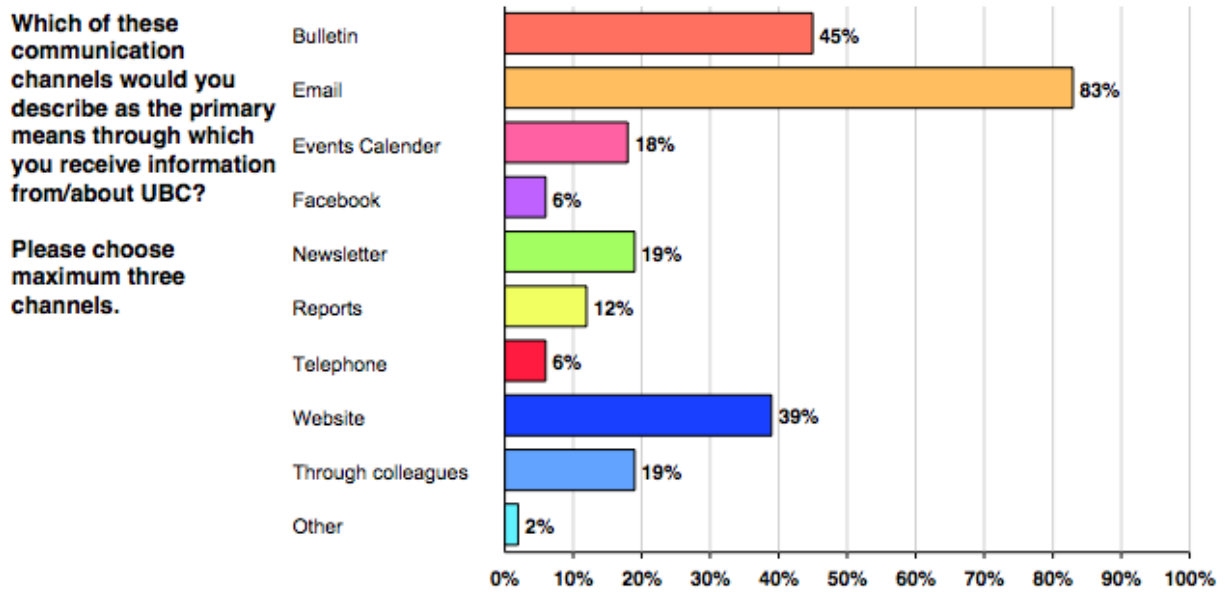
Figure 3.



That 80 % value the communication as either "Ok" or "Good" should be seen as a satisfying result, but it is slightly worrying that more people say that the communication is "Poor" or "Very poor" (14 %) than "Excellent" (6 %).

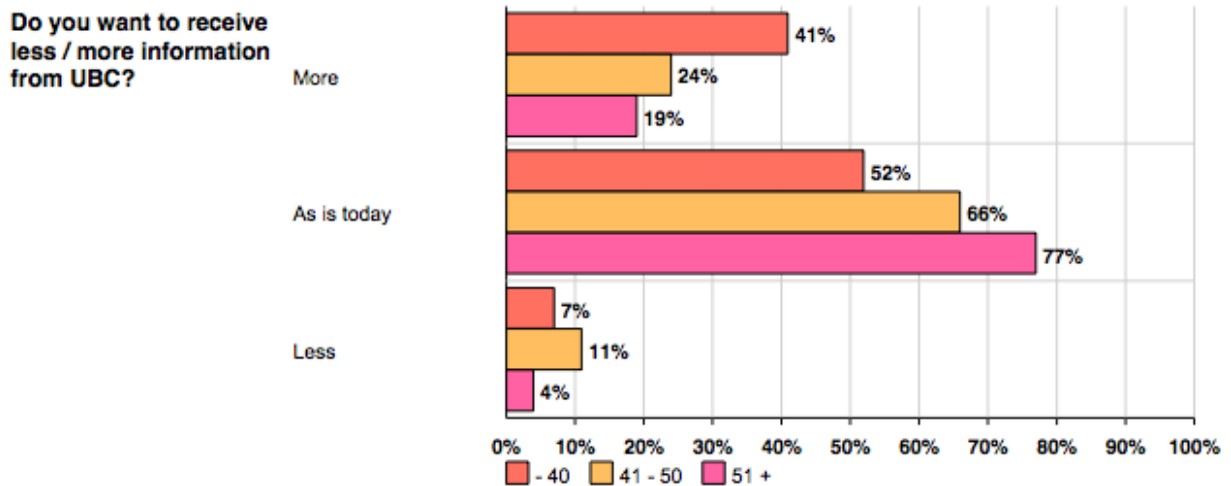
When respondents are asked about the primary means through which they receive information about UBC, 83 % mention email, 45 % the Bulletin, 39 % the website, 19 % newsletters and 19 % through colleagues (Figure 4.).

Figure 4.



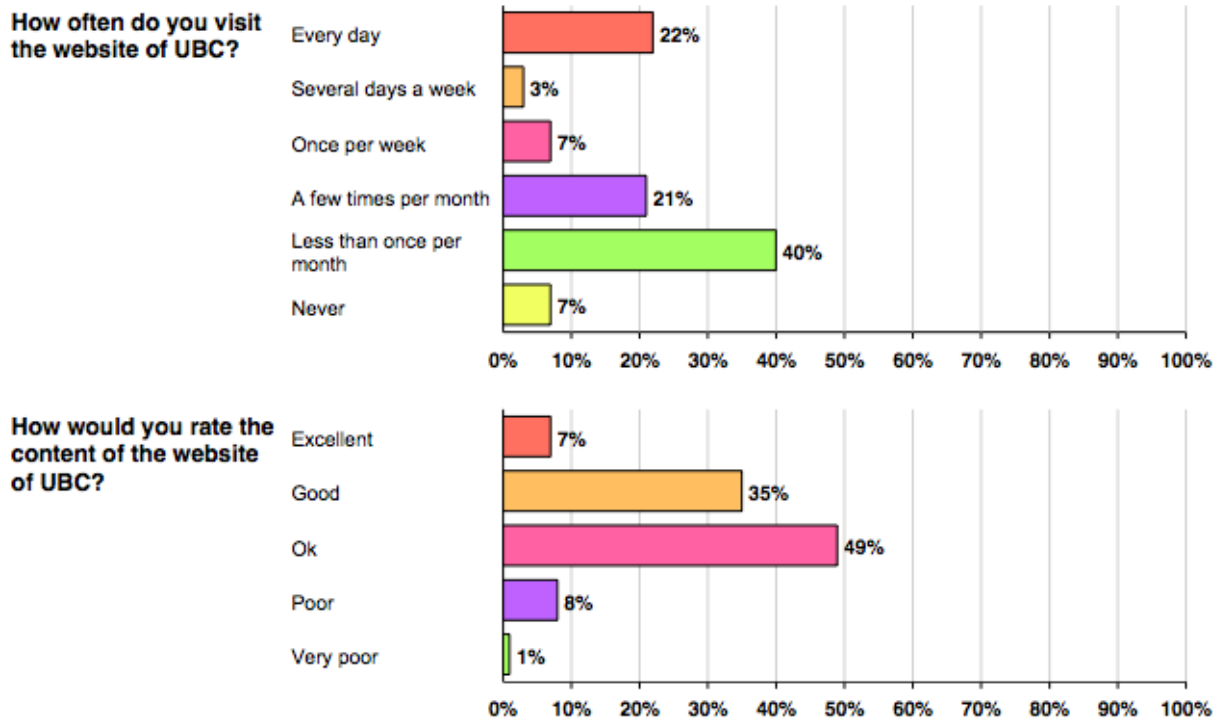
When asked about the intensity of communication, it was clear that respondents generally are happy within things as they are today (65 %), whereas a significant group of 28 % want to receive more information than today. Broken down into age groups, it is clear that the younger age groups (<40 years) want to receive more information than the older ones. See figure 5. for a detailed picture.

Figure 5.



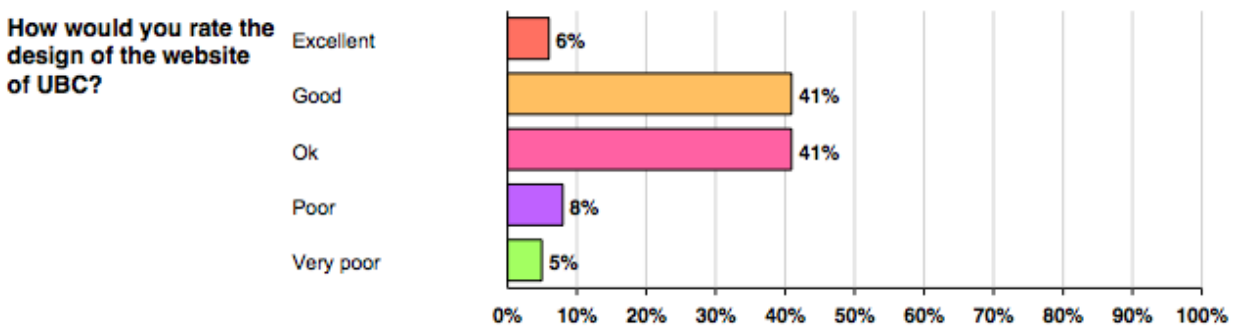
If we look at different channels, it seems as if most of them are seen as satisfying as it is today. When asked about the website's design and content, this picture emerges.

Figure 6.



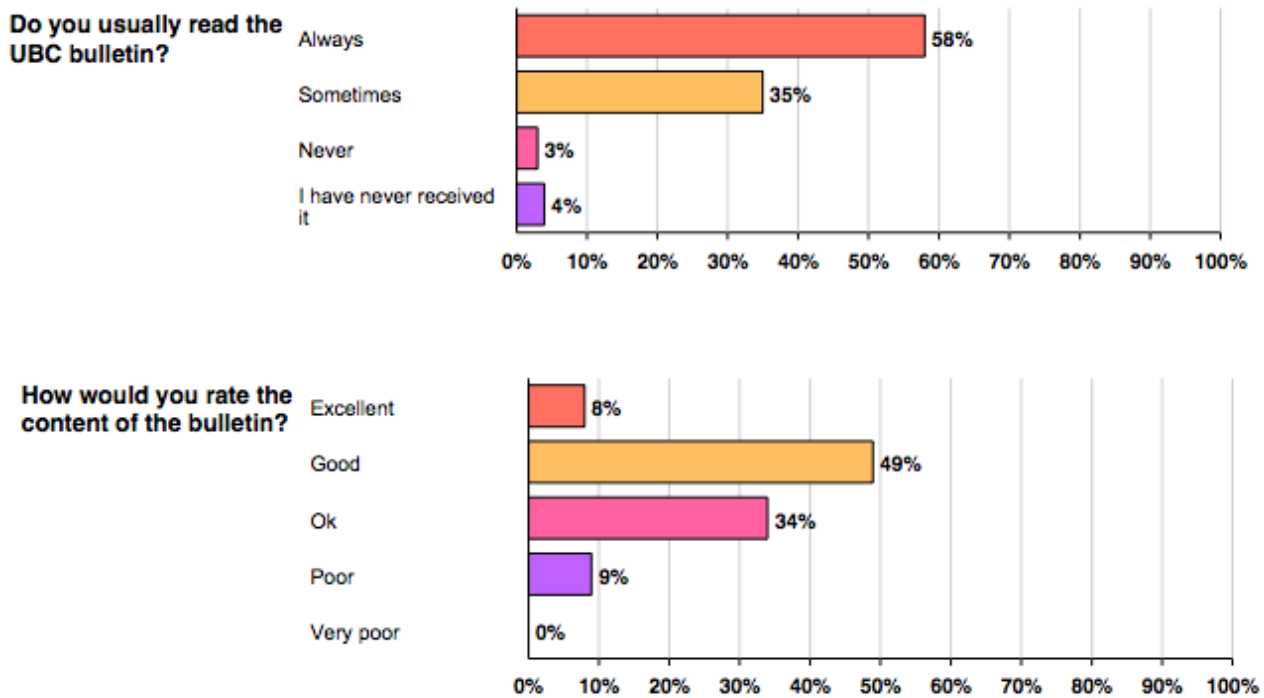
As for usage, it is clear that it is used very frequently, every day, by one group, and not frequent at all by the largest group; 40 % visit it less than once per month. The absolute majority rate the content as either "Ok" or "Good". As for design, it seems as if users are not as happy, even though the overall sentiment is not alarming. However, a quite large proportion, 13 %, sees it as "Poor" or "Very poor".

Figure 7.



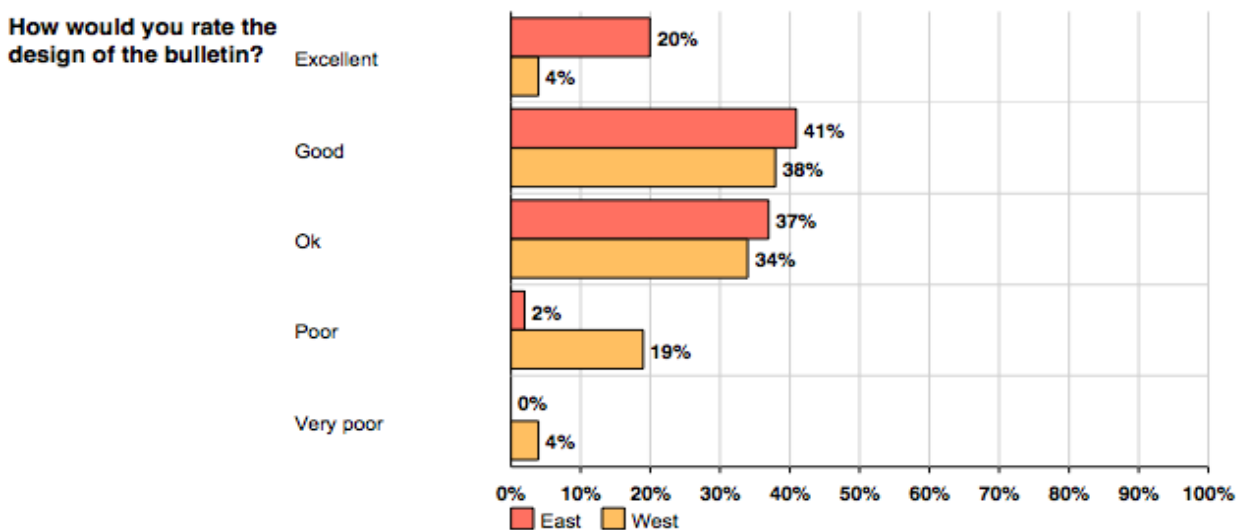
When it comes to the Bulletin, it is clear that quite many read it: 58 % say that they always read it. Also the content receives satisfying scores.

Figure 8.



As for design of the Bulletin, a significant picture could be detected by cross-running replies with country and looking for variances, where the most significant difference were to be found when countries were grouped as being east or west. With differences of up to 21 % between those who rate the design as "Poor" or "Very Poor", this co-variation needs to be seen as significant.

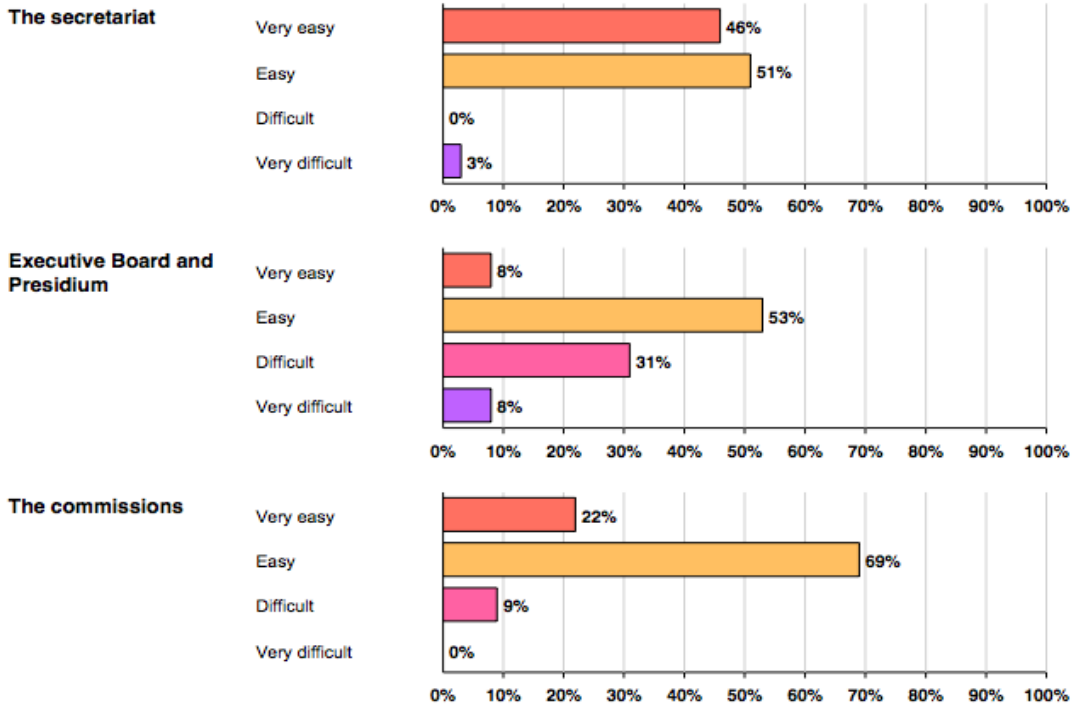
Figure 9.



When asked about how easy it is to get in touch with the different parts of the organisation, a mixed picture can be seen, where the secretariat is seen as very accessible, 97 % rate it as "Easy" or "Very easy" to get in touch with it. As for Commissions, they are, perhaps naturally given the decentralised structure of the UBC, seen as less ac-

cessible. The Executive Board and Presidium is seen as even less accessible, even though the figure 61 % for "Easy" or "Very Easy" should be seen as satisfying (Figure 10).

Figure 10.



As for target groups of UBC today, the network sees the member cities as the most important ones, followed by the EU institutions, other BSR organisations, citizens in the BSR and national governments (Figure 11).

Figure 11.

