

COMMISSION ON URBAN PLANNING

ACTIVITY REPORT OCTOBER 2007 – SEPTEMBER 2009

The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) Commission on Urban Planning (CUP) started its work in 1999. During the followed years the CUP has built a network of urban planners coming from a large number of cities around the Baltic Sea.

The main activities of the UBC Commission on Urban Planning (CUP) during the period between September 2007 and September 2009 have concentrated on continuation and strengthening the cooperation within the Commission's network and organising two annual seminars.

COMMISSION ON URBAN PLANNING SEMINARS 2007-2009

The Kotka Seminar October 3rd-6th, 2007

The Commission on Urban Planning had a seminar and annual meeting in Kotka between October 3rd and 6th, 2007. The seminar theme was City Identity and the theme was approached from different points of view by lectures by researchers from the Helsinki University of Technology. The lectures were about city identity building and branding and about cities inhabitants' experiences of good urban life. Again it was stated that a city's image and atmosphere is made by its inhabitants while planners' and administration's task is to create opportunities for urban life and culture.

The seminar participants had a chance to get acquainted with City of Kotka as a maritime city with rich culture of forestry, paper mills, harbour life and international connections. An impressive experience was a visit to Sunila paper mill and housing area designed by famous architect Alvar Aalto in the 1930's. Kotka was also seen as a city of parks and green nature, where the presence of the sea can be felt everywhere.

The seminar workshops had two themes, one about developing the original Kotka Port to the Harbour of Culture, and another about developing a suburban area Karhula and its neighbouring commercial area Jumalniemi. Four different workgroups worked intensively with these questions producing good proposals for future planning. Our hosts, the city planners of Kotka, were happy with the results of the workshops and said they got plenty of good new ideas for future development of their strategically important planning projects. The seminar participants especially appreciated the excellent organisation of the seminar and hospitality of the host city Kotka.

The annual meeting of the CUP focused on future activities of the Commission. The Commission aimed to apply for financing for a project about Sustainable and Attractive Cities and was seeking interested cities to become project partners.

The Aarhus seminar April 23rd – 26th, 2008

The seminar theme in Aarhus was Future City Life. The theme was connected to the current overall theme of the CUP, namely "Sustainable and Attractive Cities" and an ongoing discussion of the development of ideals and visions for sustainable and attractive cities as an overall theme, with a special focus on how to create good living environments.

During the seminar there were interesting lectures by Danish urban planners and architects. Also, the seminar participants had a chance to get to know current urban development projects of Aarhus during a good and educational sightseeing around the city. One of the projects we learned about is the ongoing relocation of the industrial harbour to a new location and the transformation of the former harbour area into a new urban quarter with housing, educational institutions and other city functions. Very interesting was also the city's effort to transform one of the country's largest social housing estates Gellerup from a problematic "ghetto" to an attractive modern neighbourhood with lots to offer its' own multi-cultural inhabitants as well as the citizens from other parts of Aarhus.

During the seminar there were workshops about current urban planning problems in Aarhus, in the former freight railway station area "Godsbanen" and in the Midtkraft, a part of the industrial harbour area which used to house the power plant of Aarhus but now hosts many film and modern media companies.

The Turku seminar October 24th-27th, 2008

The Turku seminar combined urban planning and culture under the theme "Cultural Planning – Urban DNA". Turku will be the European Capital of Culture in 2011 together with Tallinn, and the seminar participants were told how the city is preparing itself for this big task.

The Turku seminar was the 10th Anniversary seminar of the Commission on Urban Planning. The first seminar was in Malmo in October 1998 during a heavy storm, but this time even the sunny and warm autumn weather highlighted the seminar. Also the seminar workshops were a little different than usually. They consisted of getting to know the city with excursions and of analysing the different features of our host town. Turku was seen as a city of contrasts: old and new, low and high, urban and close to nature. The conclusion of the workshops was that these contrasts could be the city's strong points also for the Cultural Capital project, and the attractiveness of the city could be emphasised with rather small tricks: removing cars from the market square in the city centre, increasing the recreational use of the river Aura and using the old university town's "sleeping resource", namely students, to bring new urban life to the city.

The Gdansk seminar April 2nd- 4th, 2009

The Gdansk seminar theme "Baltic Towers – Contribution to the City and the Community" is a burning question around the Baltic Sea Region, as many cities are trying to find their identity and at the same time find ways to accommodate future growth and avoid further urban sprawl. One possibility is efficient and dense development and redevelopment in the inner city. High rise buildings may be a solution, but a complex one, as they also evoke difficult questions about transformation of landscape, design, safety, transport and car parking as well as physical, social, economic and environmental impacts. A demand for high rise buildings is also connected to global

economy – the higher the stock exchange rates are, the stronger is the demand on high rise buildings.

In this seminar the Commission on Urban Planning tried a new method of approaching the theme by sending a questionnaire to the members of the UBC network, and although the number of answers was limited, the answers were interesting. It is clear that high rise buildings are a “hot” issue in many bigger cities, but the approach to the question varies a lot from eagerness to carefulness.

During the seminar there were once again very interesting presentations about high rise buildings, how they fit in their environment and how different are the policies of urban planning in the Baltic Cities. We saw and heard controversial examples from Aarhus, Rostock, Malmö, Gdynia, Riga, Tallinn and Helsinki. On the first day also local inhabitants expressed their thoughts about high rise buildings with opinions alike every city with high rise plans.

Like the Commission on Urban Planning seminars always, also in Gdansk an essential part of the seminar was workshops about a concrete plan to build high rise buildings in Wrzeszcz, a vivid but somewhat confusing commercial centre close to the centre of Gdansk. The Gdansk Development Agency got many new ideas and perspectives to continue its work on developing this area from the workshops’ results.

The Linköping seminar September 9th -12th, 2009

The Linköping seminar was already the 20th seminar of the Commission on Urban Planning. The seminar theme was Sustainable Urban Growth, a subject that is of great importance to all urban planners everywhere. It involved social, economic and environmental aspects. The seminar theme was reflected in the lectures and in the workshops. The Linköping City Planning Department had invited to the seminar several interesting lecturers who are experts in the field of sustainable development. There were presentations about sustainable green cities and on sustainable transport systems. The seminar programme included examples of sustainable urban planning in practice, namely Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm and Viikki in Helsinki. Also, Linköping planners described their work aimed at making the city more compact and densely built. It was also interesting to get to know how new development areas are being planned to get optimal effect from rapid and frequent public transport routes, and how cycling is promoted in these new areas in Linköping.

Both the seminar workshops concentrated on the question of how Linköping can be built more densely and compact in a sustainable and attractive way. One of the workshops created a vision of how to link up the present city centre on the west side of the river Stångån with a new area for city centre extension on the east side of the river. The other workshop posed the question of how to physically connect the University to a housing district which is isolated from the University and from the rest of the city. The annual meeting theme was the coming UBC General Conference and the commission’s contribution to the question of how to make the Baltic Sea region more attractive and accessible.

Other CUP Projects in 2007-2009

Visual Cities was a project run by Mr Lars-Goran Boström from Umeå, Sweden. The project aimed to find new methods of presenting urban plans to the public by using 3D-visualizing computer programmes and the internet. There were approx. 10 partner cities in the project. The Visual Cities Project enabled urban planners around the Baltic Sea Region - and possibly even further - to present their ideas in an easy-to-understand way and wake conversation with city inhabitants.

The Steering Committee of the Commission on Urban Planning worked hard during winter 2007 - 2008 for applying financing for the Visual Cities and the Sustainable and Attractive Cities projects. The different URBACT programmes were studied and an application for URBACT was written, but due to rules about leading partners and participating cities of the URBACT programme, the URBACT application failed. Also, new Interreg BSR financing programmes were studied, and finally in spring 2008 the Commission on Urban Planning formed a project application to the Interreg BSR combining the Visual Cities and the Sustainable and Attractive Cities working packages. The main goals in the Visual Cities Project were to create methods and strategies for sustainable management of 3D GIS data, visualization of the planning process and creating a planning platform, giving sustainable and attractive BSR cities good quality of life. Unfortunately also the Interreg application failed.

Changes in the CUP Steering Committee

Some changes in the CUP Steering Committee were announced in the Aarhus seminar in April 2008. Guido Princis from Riga, Jonas Jakaitis from Vilnius and Gunilla Kronvall from Malmö resigned from the membership of the Steering Committee due to getting ahead on their careers. Instead, Mrs Mara Liepa-Zemesa from Riga joined the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee of the Commission on Urban Planning has altogether 5 members: Mrs Mara Liepa-Zemesa from Riga, Mr Marek Karzynski from Gdynia, Mr Niels-Peter Mohr from Aarhus, Mr Lars-Goran Boström from Umea and Mrs Sirpa Kallio from Helsinki as the chairman of the Commission. During the report season the CUP Steering Committee has had meetings planning the coming seminars in Aarhus, Gdansk and Linköping and a number of telephone meetings.

ACTION PLAN 2010-2011

Seminars in 2010

The Commission on Urban Planning will have its next seminar and annual meeting in Tampere, Finland, in April 2010. In Tampere the seminar theme is connected to the development of old industrial areas in the inner city. The aim of the Commission on Urban Planning is to continue sharing information and experiences of important urban planning issues. With high standard lectures the members of the CUP network have a chance to study different themes in an open-minded atmosphere together with colleagues around the Baltic Sea.

“Sustainable and Attractive Baltic Cities”

In the coming years, the goal of the Commission will be to increase the capability for us as urban planners to find ways and methods that can promote a development towards sustainable cities and also at the same time to develop them as attractive cities. The goal is approached from different aspects:

- Create attractive cities and regions through sustainability.
- Define the elements of sustainability in the context of urban planning. (Economical, Ecological and Social sustainability)
- Develop the ways urban planners are working with sustainability in urban planning.
- Evaluate the situation of today for the partner cities and find out what is needed in that specific city to be “sustainable and attractive”

It seems that there still is not enough knowledge among the UBC planners what “sustainable development” really is, and there is a wide spread in the opinions of what it could be. The Commission on Urban Planning will therefore keep on with the task of increasing the knowledge level and the professional skills among the UBC CUP group within the field of sustainable urban development. The methods to be used are combinations of following elements of activities:

- Lectures on “burning questions of today” from well qualified persons – “the best ones”
- Presentations of “Best practice examples” in the field of sustainable urban development.
- Workshops, dealing with qualified planning situations.
- The lectures and examples will deal with all three dimensions of sustainability: Economy, Ecology and Social factors.

Possible future seminar themes

- Democratic planning processes for sustainable city development
- Using new tools for Visualisation, like Google Earth or/and Microsoft Virtual as examples of modern tools for public participation
- How to put the citizens in focus – “Europe for Citizens”
- How to create attractiveness through sustainability
- What are the elements (factors) of attractiveness for a city
- Quality of life – what requirements for that can be made possible by urban planning, and how
- Social aspects on urban planning
 - Integration
 - Segregation
 - Safety and security in public space – and in other parts of the society
- Making new attractive sustainable areas out of brown field areas
- Sustainability as a way to attractiveness and competitiveness for cities
- The effects on/from climate change
- Economic sustainability in city (urban) planning - how will that influence planning results and processes.

It is possible for the Commission to also have additional partners of other kind than only the UBC cities. These could be Universities, national institutions, other European cities etc. It is important that

the partners in future projects are actively participating because of joint interests, not only because they are members of a certain organisation, like UBC.

Among the CUP cities a clear interest to continue the cooperation and also to develop it further has been expressed. New partners to the cooperation are also of interest and welcome.

Sirpa Kallio
Chairperson of the Commission
City of Helsinki