

COMMISSION ON URBAN PLANNING

ACTIVITY REPORT NOVEMBER 2003 – AUGUST 2005

The main activities of the UBC Commission on Urban Planning and Public Design during the period have taken place within the ABC project.

ABC – Alliance of Baltic Cities – is a project run by the UBC Commission on Urban Planning and Design. The project started March 2003 and lasts for three years. The project engages 27 UBC cities from 7 countries in the Baltic Sea Region. The project is supported by BSR Interreg IIIB. The Polish partners achieved financial support from EU PHARE fund, but not the partners from Estonia and Latvia. This caused some financial difficulties, but the commission have never the less managed to run the project as originally planned. Lead part is the City of Malmö, with architect Lars Brattberg as project leader.

The project engages city planners and architects working in municipalities and local regions. The main activity in the project is two international seminars per year. The participants work three or four days at every seminar with these main issues:

- Learning the local circumstances in the host city and country, as well as the planning legislation in that country
- Lectures on some burning planning questions of today
- Work shops on how to solve local city planning problems,
- Dealing in the work shops with local applications of one of three specific common planning items (two seminars per item):
 - developed urban management,
 - cities as regional engines,
 - renewal of city districts.

The project aims to result in:

- Networking and exchange of best practice between colleagues in UBC cities,
- Examples/proposals on how to deal with city planning problems of today and tomorrow,
- Small Scale Investment proposals.

Seminars have been held in Kolding and Vaasa in 2003, in Liepaja and Viljandi in 2004 and in Gdynia 2005. The last seminar will be held in Malmö in October 2005. From each seminar a report is produced and presented at the next seminar.

The preparation of the seminars and the production of seminar reports is organized to the responsibility for three Work Packages (WP), with together some 20 persons from 14 cities in 7 countries. The following cities have been involved:

WP 1: Helsinki (chair), Kolding, Riga, Viljandi.

WP 2: Umeå (chair), Vaasa, Gdynia, Tartu, and Jurmala.

WP 3: Malmö (chair), Liepaja, Rostock, Nyköping F and Pärnu.

The seminars have been as follows:

Kolding seminar, April 2003

The basic theme was Developed Urban Management, City Renewal and Development towards sustainability. There were 39 participants from more than 26 cities and the seminar report was presented in October 2003.

Vaasa seminar, October 2003

The main theme was Cities as Regional Engines - Urban design and regional development. There were 46 participants from 22 cities and the seminar report was presented in April 2004, at the next seminar in Liepaja.

Liepaja seminar, April 2004

The main theme was Renewal of City Districts. Reuse of coastal and central residential areas towards sustainability. There were over 50 participants from 24 cities. The seminar report was presented at the next seminar in Viljandi.

Viljandi seminar, September 2004

The main theme was Culture and Nature meets the Built Environment. The seminar started in Tallinn with a short study-tour, looking at the urban structure of Tallinn. In Viljandi information was presented about the city and the Estonian planning system. In three workshops proposals were worked out for solutions and small scale investments on three themes: Connecting the historical town with the town centre, Development of lakeside area of Viljandi and Wooden ecological housing. Some best practice examples were also given from Porvoo and Helsinki. The seminar group also visited the city of Tartu, studying the renewal of wooden house areas.

The last day, back in Tallinn, the seminar was summed up. The seminar group also gave feedback on the ABC-project so far, and discussed the future of the ABC-method of working in cooperation between professional colleagues.

The seminar had over 40 participants, from about 25 cities. The seminar report was presented by the WP1 group at the Gdynia seminar in April 2005.

The 5th seminar of the ABC-project, Gdynia, April 2005

The main theme was "Cities as regional engines - Improving the city core". 45 city planners from 27 cities in 8 countries participated.

After welcoming from the mayor of Gdynia, Mr Wojciech Szczurek and from the UBC secretariat by Mr Pawel Zaboklicki the seminar focused on Gdynia and the Tri-city region Gdynia-Sopot-Gdansk. Deputy mayor Marek Stepa informed about the Gdynia city development and its role in the Pomeranian region. Professor Maria Jolanta Soltysik gave a historical view of Gdynia architecture. Mr Feliks Pankau, from the Pomorskie Voivodship, gave an overview of the Polish planning system. Consultant architect Jacek Dominiak spoke about analysis of measures of architectural building-elements. Marek Karzynski, head of Gdynia city planning department, took the seminar group to a very interesting excursion through the Gdynia city and its surroundings.

The seminar held three workshops. One group studied how to redevelop a harbour area close to the city centre and a waterfront area between the pier and the city centre. Another group worked with how to improve and revitalise a number of inner city housing quarters. The third group worked with how to make best use of a green corridor near the City Hall and how to combine the needs for more office space and parking with qualities of the green area. The proposals from the workshops were presented in plenum and to representatives from Gdynia city.

The seminar also held an excursion to Hel, a spectacular long and narrow peninsula outside of Gdynia, as well as short visits to Sopot and Gdansk.

The responsible WP2 group have produced a seminar report that will be presented at the next seminar in Malmö in October 2005.

Other activities of the Commission

The leads of the Commission have, besides of meetings at the seminars, had a number of telephone meetings during the period. There have also been a meeting in Malmö 1.9 – 3.9 2004 for evaluation of the results and economy in the ABC-project after half of the project period.

The Commission has begun to investigate the possibilities to continue and develop the ABC project after 2005. The new project aims to develop the educational parts of the seminars and to create a Baltic Academy of City Planning. The method of work within the ABC-project has been found successful and the value of the established network is well worth taking care of. Funding of the new project is going to be applied for from

the Interreg IIIB program. Two representatives from the Commission attended Interreg IIIB partner search meeting in Vilnius in May 2005. Almost 30 cities from 8 BSR countries have stated interest of participating in the new project and the application documents are being outlined. Deadline for an application is September 23rd 2005.

The lead of the Commission held, together with the WP leaders, a meeting in Copenhagen in June 2005 to discuss the future activities of the Commission and to make preparations for the Interreg IIIB application.

There are also ongoing activities with preparations for the seminar in Malmö in October 2005.

ACTION PLAN 2006–2007

The Commission on Urban Planning and Public Design plans at first hand to go further on the way of working that has shown good results during the last two years.

The aim is to develop the established active network of planners from UBC cities and use this network to enable urban planners to broaden their competence and knowledge. The Commission will focus on today's most important questions for the future of our cities, as well as on necessary new working methods for urban planning.

The cities of Europe are playing increasingly economic roles in their regions. The cities are also increasingly important for sustainable regional development and growth, as well as for the surrounding rural areas. In this process of transition the work of city architects and planners is essential. They make important development factors understood and taken into action, which increases the qualities and attraction of the city and of city living. This work has to be done during a period of decreasing public economy. Development of partnerships and new working methods between private and public participants in the cities will become necessary.

This is the background for a planned project called A Baltic Academy of City Planning. It is a free-standing development of the ABC Project.

The project will focus on four themes:

- City - Region: The city as the distinguished growth engine in its functional region
- Revitalizing qualities in urban life, socially sustainable city development
- PPP: Partnership between city planners, land owners, economists and other stakeholders
- Urban planning as a tool to enhance democratic qualities. Preparing to establish a permanent institution - The Baltic Academy of City Planners

The project will try to create a forum - an Academy - where young or less experienced city architects and planners can learn to handle and solve problems together, and in exchange of experience, with elderly colleagues. The project will:

- Use seminars with workshops as a way of completing the basic education of planners and to further develop the cities own expertise competence.
- Invite experts from other cities within the EU, from universities and research institutions and from the private sector to hold lectures and to participate in workshops.
- Work on actual problems in seminar host cities.

The main objective is to further develop the professional skills and experiences of planners from the partner cities. The method of work also produces proposals for solutions to local issues for the benefit of the host cities. The principle structure of each seminar is divided into two parts: First there are highly qualified lectures by invited experts on the themes of the seminar. Second there are learning and exchange of

experience by practical work with local problem/city areas. The seminars will also include presentations of the work shop results to the local representatives and a general discussion over the results.

The number of partner cities will be about 25-30 cities. As of today 28 partners has stated interest of participating. All cities will belong to a “work package” (WP). There will be four WPs, each of them responsible for arranging one of the four seminars.

To achieve this first hand action plan of the Commission, a substantial additional financial support is necessary. The Commission therefore will apply for funding from the Interreg IIIB program, in Priority 3: “Transnational and bilateral institution and capacity building in the Baltic Sea Region”.

If necessary financial support is not granted, from Interreg IIIB or other sources, the ambitions of the Commission must be reduced. This action plan then must be revised.

Lars-Göran Boström
Chief planner, City of Umeå
UBC Commission of Urban Planning