

UBC Policy Positions

“Resilient Cities - beyond 2020”

I. Introduction: Challenges & Trends

“Post Covid-19 times - need for more resilience”

During times of uncertainty, such as those we are living through now, *resilience* is crucial for overcoming challenges and quickly adapting to the current situation. New city services are needed in order to address especially health matters and support citizens in dealing with a challenging reality. As collaboration and knowledge sharing are the strongest tools to fight the COVID-19 crisis, communication has taken a digital tone and shifted almost completely towards virtual spaces. However, local organisations are struggling to remain in service to their targets, as evidently security, health, planning, and financing are experiencing the most extreme effects. Furthermore, the numbers of disadvantaged citizens, those temporarily unemployed and people experiencing both physical and mental health issues, among whom youth are particularly vulnerable, are increasing rapidly. All of this points to an undeniable necessity to provide better exchanges between cities in dealing with the new reality. Moreover, appropriate spatial planning and spatial development is becoming crucial for increasing cities’ capacities for resilience measured by their effective governance, economy, society and environment. The UBC’s role in supporting and facilitating the exchange of experiences and dissemination of knowledge in this matter needs to be strengthened. It is more than needed to search for possibilities of practical activities to encourage member cities to be more active within the UBC network. It can be said that the corona pandemic has made the central challenges for cities, regions and countries visible like in a burning glass. The modern city is globally connected and internationally dependent. In a complex and uncertain world, cities have now more than ever the responsibility to ensure the protection of people, to offer regional identity and to enable the societal and economic transformation to a knowledge driven society.

“European Context 2021-27”

Resilience is on top of the European priority list for 2021-27, as the EU is set to promote Europe’s recovery, leveraged by the climate and digital transitions. Furthermore, resilience is embedded in virtually all of EU’s major policies, as evident from the New Cohesion policy framework, its cornerstones being *Regional development investments*, *Smarter Europe* (innovation, digitisation, economic transformation) a *Greener, carbon free Europe* and a more *Connected Europe* (with strategic transport and digital networks). From a regional perspective, the role of the European Strategy for Baltic Sea Region should be stressed, as it is to act as a beacon to the countries bordering the Baltic Sea in the quest for resilience in years to come.

“Main trends & challenges by Member Cities (April 2020)”

Considering the current challenges, in order to contribute to ensuring effective cities' preparedness and crisis response, some of the main external trends that UBC should address are: digitalisation and cyber-security as well as emergency and crisis response capacities (adaptability to changes). Along these lines, priority should be given to the support of health systems in tackling health issues. Furthermore, focus should be put on climate change and threats to environmental sustainability (how to ensure sustainable future/Green Deal) SDG 2030, and, accordingly, to the future of the Baltic Sea and industries related to the Baltic Sea, and the region's ecological, but also economic and social problems. In addition, issues to be addressed are Challenges to democracy; European values, EU Innovation and Regional Strategies as well as the Migrations. Finally, UBC is to target and follow up on the equally important questions of social cohesion, (youth) unemployment, ageing of population, citizens' engagement and rural development.

Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is a leading Baltic Sea region city network, established in 1991, being successfully involved in the integration and development of the Baltic Sea Region. During 2021 UBC updated the strategic plan answering the needs of the UBC member cities and this policy paper fully responds to views of Member Cities.

II. Positions

The positions in this policy paper reflects on four different aspects in building resilient cities (City planning, New corporations, funding and new services). Those positions reflect on basic advocacy stands towards the EU, Regional and National stakeholders and contribute to clear understanding of the UBC work in the European context.

I. New City Planning

- 1.1. UBC works on empowering cities to prepare and adapt their policies and services in becoming modern, resilient cities;
- 1.2. UBC stands for innovative and solution-oriented city policies that empower citizens, their engagement and resilience of cities, especially in the post-covid period;
- 1.3. UBC works and promotes a common position between the cities in BSR in order to have stronger say in the policy dialogues and debates on resilience;

II. New Partnerships

- 2.1. UBC stands for common goals and priorities for stakeholders in the BSR in order to create innovative initiatives and empowers the cities in increasing their resilience in the future;
- 2.2. UBC proactively supports the implementation of the EUSBSR as a key strategy for the UBC to build the cities' capacity for resilience and provide practical know-how;

2.3. UBC stands for greater involvement of cities in decision-making processes at the EU level focusing on regional, cohesive, innovative and other policies through the activities of its EU Antenna office;

2.4. UBC builds alliances with similar networks and strategic partnerships in order to promote capacity building and assistance to cities in development of policy and grass-root solutions for greater resilience in the 21st century;

III. Funding

3.1. UBC and its member cities are engaged with its full capacity with the EUSBSR in order to promote the key role of cities in building resilient societies;

3.2. UBC stands for one voice of cities under our umbrella within the BSR as a way to build stronger commitment, projects, funding and join initiatives in the promotion of resilient approaches;

3.3. UBC stands for cross-sectorial and cross-border cooperation between cities and other stakeholders in the European context in finding most effective approaches in building the capacity of cities towards its resilient mechanisms;

3.4. UBC promotes more opportunities and practical funding mechanisms for the cities at the EU level as the cities have proven to be key players in building sustainable, inclusive and smart communities across the continent.

IV. Innovative, new city services

4.1. UBC stands for and promotes transformation of cities to knowledge driven communities in order to better protect, empower and serve its citizens, especially in post-corona times.

4.2. UBC supports Member Cities' work on sustainable growth, innovation und digitalization. The ability to innovate is an essential feature of the BSR. The possibilities of digitalization can be used for the increasing professionalization of internal and external communication and innovative services of the cities.

4.3. UBC as the biggest association of cities in the BSR supports sustainable growth as a precondition of the successful resilience in the Member Cities;

4.4. UBC promotes joint work between cities on resilience including exchange of good practices, learning from each other, and working on common challenges in order to increase the recognition of cities as key players for the practical implementation of measures. The success factors of the resilient city must be systematically identified and documented with best practice examples from the Member Cities in BSR.