

# “The most inclusive and sustainable city network for Your city or municipality”

## UBC Strategy 2022-2030

### UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES (UBC)

UBC is a network of cities and municipalities in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Founded in 1991 in Gdansk, Poland to revitalize and enhance the integration and cooperation between cities and municipalities after the end of the cold war. UBC grew into a goal-oriented cooperation platform with member cities from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden.

### OUR VISION

- We are the **leading network** for cities and municipalities in the Baltic Sea Region.
- We provide an **inclusive and dynamic platform** for the cities to work collaboratively towards a sustainable, safe, resilient, and inclusive Baltic Sea Region.
- We cooperate for the Baltic Sea. Preservation of biodiversity, reduction of pollution and restoration of the water quality in the Baltic Sea are our common goals.
- We are a network where the resilience of our member cities is enhanced by sharing, learning and collaboration on a low threshold.
- Our priorities and work are based on the needs and interests of **our members** – we are open and receptive to ideas for improvement, initiatives, and actions.
- We look for concrete **cooperation** with other networks and organizations in Europe and beyond and take a stronger role in achieving regional cohesion to develop a common direction for the future.
- The Baltic Sea Region is known as a dynamic, innovative, and attractive global growth center, where success is based on smart, green, resource-efficient, and sustainable economic and social development. The region and its cities are increasingly recognized as global forerunner in creating high-quality living environment for their inhabitants and we want to have an active role in further developing our region.

### OUR MISSION

To **support our member cities** within our network and beyond to **improve their capacity** to achieve goal-oriented results, impact regional policymaking, and build their overall resilience towards becoming more sustainable.

To provide dynamic and flexible means to cooperate through our thematic commissions and working groups – a concrete and open space for member cities to connect and share experiences, to develop, and test new solutions, and to share their results with the rest of the network.

To **create a joint voice** for cities, regardless of size, in the region as different perspectives of the cities are a richness, where common goals and solutions can be found. To connect our member cities with the rest of Europe and beyond, through advocacy in Brussels and active networking with relevant stakeholders and organizations.

## OUR MEMBER CITIES

Our member cities are the heart and the motor of the network. We actively encourage and support them by showing the benefits of transnational cooperation on a practical level.

Member cities can take up a variety of roles based on their preferences and needs to get involved in the network work example, by joining the structures of the UBC:

- Executive Board,
- Commissions,
- Task forces, working groups and ad hoc groups

Member cities are also encouraged to start initiatives on different thematical areas – this proactive approach helps to speed up the policymaking processes and provide fast action where it is needed - as the challenges the cities are experiencing are continuously becoming more complex. Joint action and joint solutions will take the region forward.

## OUR GOAL AND AMBITIONS

### ***The network exists for our member cities***

Our main ambition is to provide our member cities with opportunities, tools, and methods to get involved into different ways of cooperation and show them the benefits of being part of the UBC. We actively promote democratic values, gender equality, inclusiveness, and participation to provide an open and transparent platform for cooperation for all member cities.

### ***A network that supports***

We also aim to be a supportive organization to our members that is approachable and solution oriented. No other city network in the world understands better the challenges and appreciates the solutions rising for the Baltic Sea Region than the UBC. The characteristics of the geographical area of where our member cities are based, our joint history and cultural connections put the UBC into a unique and valuable position to be a catalyst for change and a creator of dialogues between the member cities and other stakeholders.

### ***Sustainable growing organization***

Our ambition and key principle are also to be a sustainable growing organization when it come to member cities, services, projects and be a reliable cooperation partner in different forums. The UBC should attract

metropole cities-, mid-sized and small cities in the Baltic Sea Region with a common interest to develop the region and it's cities together. UBC therefore want to be involved and support development projects in the Baltic Sea Region and Europe.

### ***One City Voice***

The cities are diverse in the Baltic Sea Region, therefore as a city network we need to consider the needs of both small and big cities. UBC aims to support and collaborate to the fulfilment of the European and EU missions, which act as commitments to finding solutions to some of the greatest challenges (e.g., adapting to climate change) facing our world today – no matter the size of the city. To do that, we as the city network act as an enabler and facilitator of dialogues between the big and small cities and help them find the common ground – the One City Voice.

### ***UBC unites forces with other organizations***

We aim to establish a solid basis for policy dialogues with other organizations and institutions such as the EU Commission, ministries, the academia, and other stakeholders. Taking an active role in the policy framework development processes in the Baltic Sea Region and Europe ensures we can best communicate our member cities' needs and interests and the act as their representative.

### ***Showcasing our member cities***

UBC strives to strengthen member cities' role as role models and forerunners and to lead the way in sharing knowledge and best practices, promoting sustainability education and learning in all levels of society and to foster an open, inclusive, and participatory approach in its activities. On a concrete level UBC will support and encourage member cities to strive for common goals and take concrete measures to achieve these goals.

## **OUR WORK**

We work and cooperate closely with our partners in the Baltic Sea Region, in Europe and beyond – only together we can make a change.

The core activity of UBC is to network and build partnerships – with member cities, internally with UBC bodies, as well as external partners and stakeholders. Common efforts are needed in the region and beyond, to ensure a sustainable and good future for all. UBC processes and activities are transparent and open to interested partners. UBC offers a variety of possibilities to join the efforts of making the Baltic Sea Region cities economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable. Therefore, UBC will work in the thematical fields of resilient, smart, green, resource-efficient, and sustainable development for a transition to a clean economy and stronger economic, cultural and social development.

### ***Internal cooperation in the UBC***

Due to the hardships and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, UBC has begun to work in a more flexible and dynamic way – utilizing the digital tools and innovative means of communication and working together when physical meetings and travelling have not been an option. Transparency, participatory processes, flexibility, goal orientation and inclusion are key for building resilience for both the city network as well as for its member cities.

UBC's work is currently organized in thematic commissions, working groups and task forces – even though each operates in its own way and with own methods, we have one thing in common – cooperation, networking and exchange of experiences is at the core of all our activities.

<https://ubc.net/commissions>

### ***Areas of cooperation***

#### **Culture**

UBC recognizes the essential role of culture as an enabler of urban development. Cities use the local cultural resources to boost economic and social growth. Culture and creativity inspire and enhance the local resilience. UBC promotes and develops tools for the cultural field to enhance professionalization. It creates strategic partnerships with national and international bodies dealing with policy making in the cultural field. It wants to be a voice for culture on the local level.

#### **Inclusiveness, integration and health**

UBC advances cities in their way to become inclusive, diverse, and creative hubs, where active citizenship, gender equality and participatory policy making are promoted. Social affairs, including long-term unemployment, health promotion, migration, and integration are on agenda.

#### **Safety**

A sense of safety is one of the most important needs for any human being. UBC supports development of security services, better safety standards and procedures for all Baltic Sea Region citizens.

#### **Smart development**

UBC believe smart development in connection with responsiveness are a way to improve the quality of life. Competition is growing and challenges have become more diversified. Technology, digitalization, and innovations are still important, but to be competitive and resilient, the cities of the future have to be open, attentive and resident-oriented. Local and regional cooperation and collective actions are key for future success.

#### **Sustainability / Environment and climate change**

UBC promotes cooperation and exchange of experiences between cities in the BSR to advance and deliver sustainable urban solutions, and to bring added- value for the cities, region and Europe. UBC supports cities as drivers for smart, sustainable, green and resource-efficient growth. It develops projects within sustainable urban mobility, and water management. It promotes innovative solutions to save the Baltic Sea. Building climate resilient cities and preparing for the consequences of climate change are of great importance for cities in the Baltic Sea Region.

#### **Sustainable urban planning**

Challenges of the future are now to be included in the vision of a city that offers a comfortable, functional and friendly space to live in. The urban planning issues of today and tomorrow refer to open public spaces, green areas, gentrification, and other.

#### **Youth involvement and well-being**

The youth should have genuine possibilities to affect their lives in the communities and be important partners in policy making. The UBC works towards the youth involvement and participation, enables knowledge transfer amongst various networks and organisations, supports youth projects and initiatives.

Youth employment, preventing early school leaving and developing new support methods for vulnerable groups of students/youth are important part of this work.

### ***External cooperation***

UBC strives to be an active and reliable network and cooperation partner on a Baltic Sea Region, European and global level. UBC will be actively involved and promote its member cities in European initiatives. UBC will showcase member cities and provide them with good examples from other cities in Europe. UBC actively follows relevant policy developments on regional, European, and global level to bring them to the local level of the member cities, building a bridge from the local level to other levels of governance.

UBC's work is based on knowledge-based development of an organization and a well-established network of stakeholders and external partnerships. UBC has built up long-lasting partnerships with many organizations and actors in the region, both in Europe and globally, and aim at intensifying those as well as exploring possible, new useful partnerships.

### ***Baltic Sea Region cooperation***

In the **Baltic Sea Region**, the guiding process is the **EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)**, where UBC actively contributes to its implementation. The New Action Plan of the EUSBSR macro-regional strategy for boosting resilience and recovery in the Baltic Sea Region mainstreams climate change and cooperation with neighboring non-EU countries as essential elements into all their 14 policy areas. UBC actively liaises with these strategy policy areas coordinators as well as communication partners providing the basis for cooperation and partnership.

We work closely with other key stakeholders such as:

- Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
- Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)
- Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB)
- Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation network (BSSSC)
- Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)
- Conference of European Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)
- Nordic Council of Ministers
- Baltic Sea Region NGO Network
- University Networks

With some actors UBC actively collaborates in projects and activities, with others the partnerships are built more on a strategic policy level. At the core is continuous and regular exchange and communication, to shape our region together.

### ***European cooperation***

UBC aims at *bridging its network* member cities with the cities in the rest **of the Europe**, through a variety of activities. Our city network is also a respected partner also on European level, both in projects as well as on policy level. UBC actively cooperates with the European Commission and European city networks like Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), EUROCITIES, Energy Cities and Polis, among others. UBC is an active support partner for the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy Europe as well as for the Green City

Accord, and among other initiatives supports the implementation of overarching EU policies, e.g., the EU Missions, the EU Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus.

UBC has an official representation of the network through the Brussels Antenna and aims at networking and liaison with European representations of cities and regions in our network as well as with European institutions, especially

- the Committee of the Regions
- Economic and Social Committee
- European Parliament, European Commission
- Council of Europe and its bodies
- City representative offices in Brussels

### ***Global cooperation***

On a global level, UBC is actively implementing the **UN Agenda 2030** through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are considered in every commission in their work and a growing number of UBC member cities have engaged in bringing the SDGs into their city strategies and plans. Many UBC cities are also forerunners internationally by having joined the global movement of working with the 2030 Agenda and reviewing the progress of the SDGs on a local level through a Voluntary Local Review process. UBC encourages its member cities to join the movement and report on the progress of the UN 2030 Agenda.

In 2017, UBC started a strategic cooperation with the world's leading organization on voluntary climate reporting, CDP, and several UBC member cities have shown climate leadership by disclosing their climate related data through CDP and thus contributing to a more sustainable future of the region. UBC is promoting the initiative and campaigns each year to include more member cities to join the disclosure efforts. The Memorandum of Understanding with CDP is renewed every two years based on mutual negotiations and discussions.

Furthermore, through some active UBC cities, UBC has contacts in the Global South and elsewhere in the world, for the benefit of sharing our experiences and seeking mutual benefit with the global partners.

## **EVALUATION OF PROGRESS**

The UBC Strategy should be evaluated by the UBC Executive board in front of the UBC General Conference 2025.

All documents accepted by the General Assembly, the UBC Executive board and the Presidium should be in line with the UBC Strategy.