

UBC Policy Positions

“Social Cohesion in Cities - beyond 2020”

1. Introduction

“Post Covid-19 times”

The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic is marked by detrimental effects deeply affecting all pores and aspects of society, most markedly employment prospects, social security, health and safety, as well as certain groups such as youth as a particularly vulnerable one. The crisis has raised new challenges, bringing a number of problematic issues to the surface, some of which are an increased number of disadvantaged citizens, new temporary unemployment, health issues, communication, and psychological environment. The problem with equal accessibility to information related to health for everyone paired with the lack of regional analyses emphasize a pressing need for evidence-based policies as well as the need to provide better exchanges between cities. Even though the digital shift has eased communication and opened new virtual spaces to be explored, many local organizations are faced with a multitude of challenges to survive and serve. Nevertheless, one of the main challenges remains addressing vulnerable communities and strengthening inclusion initiatives putting into the spotlight the unemployed, youth, families with small children as well as rural areas.

“European Context 2021-27”

A glance at the European policies and priorities for 2021-27 reveals a New Cohesion policy framework with one of its 5 priorities (where the EU is best placed to deliver) being *a more Social Europe*, delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare. In addition, the European Strategy for Baltic Sea Region, as the first macro-regional strategy in Europe, now more than ever stands out as a solid bridge between the countries bordering the Baltic Sea, one of its three main pillars being connecting the region.

“Main trends & challenges by UBC Member Cities (April 2020) and “social cohesion”

With respect to the increased efforts for reinforced social cohesion emerging in the post-Covid19 world, among the main external trends that UBC should address are: IT and digitalisation, and cyber-security, Emergency and crisis response capacities (as it is essential to be prepared for changes); and Health issues (all aspects). Furthermore, the future of the Baltic Sea and industries related to the Baltic Sea will be put in focus, especially with a view to ecological, economic and social problems. European values, EU Innovation and Regional Strategies as well as Challenges to democracy, Migrations and other impediments to Social cohesion will be on top of the list. This also involves issues such as (youth) unemployment, ageing of population and citizens' engagement. Finally, one of the trends to be addressed will be preventing urban sprawl – urbanisation on the rural areas adjacent to the city.

2. Positions

The positions in the policy paper reflect on four different aspects in building cohesive cities (vulnerable groups, youth, education, culture). These positions reflect on basic advocacy stands towards the EU, regional and national stakeholders and contribute to a clearer understanding of the UBC work in the European context.

Vulnerable Groups:

1.1. UBC stands for cohesive policies contributing to social inclusion of vulnerable groups¹ regardless of their belief, color of the skin or sexual orientation. For those who are in need UBC should show solidarity through inclusive city policies such as involvement in democratic processes, access to employment, etc;

1.2. UBC stands against populism, radicalisation and nationalism and promotes living in a stable, safe and democratic Europe;

1.3. UBC stands for respect of human rights in dealing with the integration of immigrants, and refugees;

1.4. UBC calls for greater cooperation between EU, regional and national stakeholders to increase the access to mainstream services and opportunities to vulnerable groups acknowledging the key role cities play in this process;

1.5. UBC supports the targeted approaches in addressing the needs of each specific vulnerable group and encourages the use of new technologies and innovative solutions;

Youth:

2.1. UBC promotes and supports raising awareness about mental health issues of young people, reducing stigma and provision of direct support to any young person with mental health problems;

2.2. UBC works on provision of modern youth work and youth counselling services in the cities that take full advantage of digital technologies and are available regardless of young people's geographical location;

2.3. UBC supports special support measures to empower young people at risk (in particular, NEET young people);

¹ Vulnerable groups - definition: "Groups that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population" http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/vulnerable_groups_en.htm

2.4. UBC supports and stands for the development of youth employment initiatives specifically addressing first-time job seekers and long-term unemployed young people;

2.5. UBC promotes the development of space and opportunities for youth political participation that ensure representation and considering of young people's voice during the decision-making process.

Education:

3.1. UBC promotes basic skills education initiatives (reading and writing, math, IT) as a tool for greater employability and social cohesion. UBC also encourages the cooperation and exchange of good practices in the European and regional context on this subject;

3.2. UBC promotes the cities' engagement in BSR in increasing the attractiveness of the VET education amongst the young people as an important aspect in a balanced employment market and social cohesion. UBC also encourages cities to look for innovative curricula and teaching approaches.

3.3. UBC works with its members in promotion and enhancement of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) in order to address the need for future skills needed for development of European societies.

Culture:

4.1. UBC supports and strengthens the cooperation between the BSR cities in the field of art, culture projects and diplomacy, creative industries and city policies, in order to use culture as a tool to promote diversity and social cohesion in a European context.

4.2. UBC advocates for a greater recognition of Member Cities' role in shaping common BSR identity through culture and the promotion of socially cohesive policies in the manner of cross-sectoral cooperation from grass-root to policy level.

4.3. UBC stands for European solution and exchange of good practices between BSR and other European regions in the field of culture and creativity in order to promote open, inclusive in democratic processes and initiatives and build bridges between citizens.