

UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES STRATEGY 2010-2015

CITIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS BALTIC SEA REGION

Based on the evaluation of UBC's past achievements since its establishment in 1991 and on the challenges arising from the profound changes taking place in the Baltic Sea Region and internationally, the representatives of the UBC member cities, gathered at the X General Conference in the City of Kristiansand, have adopted the following Strategy of UBC for the years 2010 – 2015:

Vision – The Baltic Sea Region by 2015

We want to see a dynamic, prosperous, democratic and stable European Baltic Sea Region in a successful and sustainable economic, political, social, environmental and cultural development process, moving towards closer cooperation and integration.

The BSR has been able to overcome the adverse effects of the global financial and economic crisis, and is regaining its role as one of the fast growing and prospering regions in Europe.

Deterioration of the state of the Baltic Sea has been halted and a gradual recovery process has been started, thanks to concerted and practical actions of all stakeholders, supported by a strong public opinion. Threats of major ecological catastrophes, such as of oil tanker accidents, have been greatly reduced through close international cooperation.

The region and its cities have taken an active lead in responding to the challenges of climate change. They are committed to sustainable development and implement practical steps as outlined in the UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2010 - 2015.

The development of BSR cities is based on the principles of the rule of law, democracy and active citizens' participation. New methods – including those offered by electronic communication – are developed to strengthen democracy and to increase inhabitants' possibilities to influence decision-making.

The cities are guided by the strategic objectives of prosperity, sustainability, inclusiveness and creativity. They strive to achieve a high quality of life for their inhabitants.

The BSR cities respond to growing diversity of their population by promoting tolerance and equal opportunities for all, by tackling causes of social exclusion and countering all forms of discrimination.

Contacts across borders and the Baltic Sea are increasing in all walks of life, enhanced by an effective infrastructure at sea, in ports, on land and by electronic means. Remaining barriers hindering cooperation between countries, cities, businesses, organisations and individuals are being diminished and removed, while threats such as organised crime, trafficking etc. are countered through decisive joint action.

The integration of the North-Western parts of the Russian Federation in BSR cooperation is advancing, to the benefit of the whole region. Saint Petersburg, the biggest metropolis around the Baltic Sea, is regaining its natural role as integral part of the region.

The BSR, its countries and peoples have recognised the need to know each others better, through increased cultural contacts, education, joint events, growing travel within the region etc. The cities are taking a lead in this process.

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its Action Programme has become a natural part of the regions development. Its implementation is an evolving process in which cities and other regional stakeholders are central and recognised partners. The BSR and its specific features as well as specific needs are better known and taken into consideration by the European institutions, as a result of coordinated and systematic communication activities, lobbying and personal contacts with decision-makers.

As a result of these developments, the Baltic Sea Region is better able to utilise its great development potential and resources, is learning to work together and speak with one voice. This promotes development of a common identity needed to raise its role and profile in Europe and internationally, and to attract outside resources – both human and financial.

Mission of the UBC:

Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is the representative and recognised regional organisation of cities in the Baltic Sea Region. It provides an open and goal-oriented platform for mutual cooperation and exchange.

UBC is working, through active networking, and based on the principle of sustainable urban development, to:

- support its member cities in their development to achieve a high quality of life for their inhabitants;
- promote the Baltic Sea Region as a dynamic, competitive and prosperous region;
- further the interests of the Baltic Sea Region and its cities in national and European decision-making.

Based on the mission, the UBC wants to be

- a platform and meeting place for exchange of ideas, contacts and experiences between the member cities and other partners;
- a source for inspiration, increased awareness, dialogue, networking and benchmarking;
- a framework for the members to formulate joint positions on key issues, to facilitate, carry out and disseminate cooperation projects and other activities that are of interests to the cities;
- a strong voice on regional and European affairs affecting its members, promoting cities involvement in policy-making and implementation;
- a respected and recognised partner in the Baltic Sea Region cooperation, promoting the interests of the cities and our region as a whole together with other organisations and authorities;

How we work

UBC is a voluntary, proactive and representative organisation of cities in the Baltic Sea Region. It is a permanent structure based on statutes, membership as well as duties and rights based on them. UBC brings together more than 100 cities in ten countries around the Baltic Sea.

The UBC method of work is based on active networking, which provides numerous platforms for meetings between politicians, officials and specialists from cities.

The highest decision-making organ of UBC is the biennial **General Conference** of the delegates of the member cities and which is hosted by different member cities. In addition to its statutory role, the General Conference is an important platform for city representatives to meet.

Between General Conferences, the policy work is carried out by the **Executive Board**, which consists of one city from each BSR country. The Board, convened by the **President of UBC** about three times a year, approves its budget and is responsible for the implementation of UBC Plan of Action, including guidance of the activities by various UBC Commissions. The UBC Executive Board and its **Presidium**,

with a President and three Vice-Presidents elected in their personal capacity, are the executive organs of UBC.

The main practical work is carried out by the thematic **UBC Commissions**. They consist of representatives of member cities and formulate their plans of actions and priorities independently, within the over-all UBC Strategy and priorities of the annual Plan of Action. The Commissions report to the Executive Board and their representatives participate regularly in Board meetings.

The decentralised structure of UBC is coordinated on day-to-day basis by the **UBC Secretariat**, led by the UBC General Secretary.

In addition, some Commissions have established their own Secretariats to prepare and run practical activities and projects. These Secretariats are based in various member cities.

Key tasks for UBC development 2010 - 2015

1. UBC as key partner in promoting the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The European Commission has adopted its proposal for the Baltic Sea Strategy and an accompanying Action Plan. The Action Plan identifies 15 priority areas and a number of horizontal actions. Some 80 flagship projects have been named for the implementation of the strategy and Action Plan. The selection of the priority areas and flagships coincide with the priorities and activities of the UBC.

The EU Strategy provides primarily a framework for working together, based on openness and wider partnerships without new budget provisions. Stakeholders and their interaction make it or break it. The progress depends on political commitment and resources which the stakeholders are going to invest in its implementation. The Commission notes that through the Cohesion policy instruments some 50 billion euros have been made available to the Region.

The strategy is a huge challenge and opportunity for the BSR. UBC and its member cities want to be active participants in the governance structure of the Strategy as well as in implementation of its Action plan and relevant flagship projects. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is our key framework for the coming years.

However, in order to take full use of the new framework, we have renewed and streamlined structures and working methods of the UBC. The Baltic Sea Strategy should be seen as a major influencing factor when reforming the UBC. Influencing the implementation of the strategy should become a major focus area of the UBC. In particular the reform of the budgetary framework of the Union for period beginning in 2014 should become the main target of activities.

The UBC as a network of over a hundred member cities and an extended network of twin cities offers as such a highly relevant and competent instrument of implementation for the strategy. The UBC has potential to become a major stakeholder in the process. It has stressed in its opinions to the European Commission the importance of issues of governance. The UBC can offer an effective platform for the implementation. It fits very well in to the ideas of the Commission of a strategy that is open and interactive.

2. Strengthening member city participation in UBC activities

From the beginning, the first and foremost task of the UBC has been to provide concrete support and advice for the member cities in their practical, day-to-day work. In times of strained economic and human resources, it is ever more important to be relevant for member cities and their needs.

The content and working methods of the statutory organs of UBC must be developed to promote member city participation.

Special attention shall be paid to involve more elected political decision makers of cities in UBC activities. A new political platform of the local authorities, the Baltic Sea Urban Forum, shall be organised every second year, alternating with the General Conference and hosted by different member cities. These meetings will be developed into interesting forums where local authority political decision makers and their relevant partners can meet each others and debate topical issues. The first BSR Urban Forum will be organised in 2010.

UBC member cities differ in size, resources and orientation. Accordingly, the UBC shall strive to meet the different and diverse needs of all of its member cities.

In order to serve effectively all of them, it is important to know better their needs and priorities. Especially timely is to ensure, that also bigger BSR cities are convinced that UBC membership brings added value for them and that they continue as members.

An important benefit of the UBC membership – serving both smaller and bigger cities – is the exchange of best practice experiences in various fields. In order to take fuller use of this, a more systematic data collection and marketing of these experiences and of city experts with special knowledge should be organised within the UBC.

UBC shall conduct, in 2010 and in 2014, surveys of member city views and their proposals on how to develop the organisation and its activities.

Success measured by:

- participation of member cities in commissions, projects and other UBC activities
- participation of political decision-makers in Urban Forum and other UBC events
- technical analysis based on annual reports (prepared by General Secretariat) and two specific questionnaires to member cities (in 2010 and 2014).

3. Increasing UBC membership and partnerships

UBC has more than tripled its membership since 1991, but there is still great potential to gain new member cities.

A systematic plan for membership recruitment will be prepared for 2010, including relevant information materials able to convince cities of the benefits of membership and participation. This will be linked to the creation of new UBC Communication and Marketing strategy (see point 9).

Likewise, guidelines for creating partnerships with companies and other interested partners shall be formulated to engage them in UBC activities.

Success measured by:

- number of member cities, including number of major cities.
- number of partnerships and amount of outside sponsorship funding

4. Energizing and streamlining UBC Commission work, optimising use of resources

Most of UBC work is carried out in thematic Commissions, whose scope, methods and outreach greatly differ. Some UBC Commissions have a fine track record of systematic activities, successful projects and capacity to mobilise outside resources, while some others are acting as internal consultants and peer group advisers to member cities, just to mention some different, but successful approaches.

On the other hand, some Commissions have been less successful in planning of their work, which is reflected in modest participation of member cities, limited effectiveness and ability to attract few, if any, outside resources.

In order to energize UBC Commission work and optimize the use of resources, the Executive Board shall formulate common criteria for evaluation of the work of various Commissions. The amount of financial support to Commissions will be based on this evaluation.

The Board will also encourage Commissions to forge closer cooperation with each others and recommends, that they seek ways and means to establish a limited number (3-6) effective Commission Secretariats to serve them. With UBC and host city contributions, as well as outside funding, these Secretariats can help Commissions to improve their activities, effectiveness, and thus relevance to member cities.

Success measured by:

- number of cities participating in work of various Commissions
- amount of annual contributions by member cities
- amount of outside project funding
- number of paid staff in Commission secretariats

5. Promoting expert exchanges between member cities

Member cities of UBC offer a rich wealth of best practices and interesting solutions in all sectors of city work. By introducing colleagues from different member cities to each others and by organising a platform for a more systematic exchange programme between cities could be a very practical and tangible contribution of UBC to the cooperation and cohesion of the BSR.

Therefore, the Executive Board, in close cooperation with the Commissions, shall work out a plan for expert exchange programme between UBC member cities and create a system for its implementation, either by internal UBC mechanism or by outsourcing it to some other organisation.

Success measured by:

- preparation and adoption of the plan, including mechanism for financing and implementation
- number of cities joining programme,
- number exchanges per year

6. Enhancing UBC policy formulation and lobbying capacity

Formulation of integrated development strategies – such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – and UBC's emerging role as the spokesman of the BSR cities open possibilities for us to get the voice of BSR local authorities heard. However, this requires greater policy formulation capacity and more effective lobbying especially at national, regional and European levels.

Much of these responsibilities fall on the shoulders of thematic UBC Commissions and their Secretariats, which must work more proactively and develop expertise and professionalism in formulation of clear and concise policy statements and action proposals.

The same applies to the level of UBC Executive Board and General Secretariat, which are responsible for UBC policy statements in strategic or cross - sectoral issues. As member cities possess a wealth of expert resources in various fields, it is important to mobilise them in preparation of UBC position papers.

Policy positions are effective only if brought at the right time to the attention of relevant decision makers. The UBC voice is still too weak at national government, regional and European levels, especially in the higher echelons of power. Therefore, UBC must get its voice better heard in places where it counts. As part of this, it must re-evaluate effectiveness of its lobbying in Brussels.

Success measured by:

- number of UBC policy papers on relevant topics and response to them
- effectiveness of UBC lobbying at national and European levels
- exposure of relevant decision makers to UBC and its positions

7. Systematic cooperation with partners in BSR, on European level and internationally

The Baltic Sea Region has an abundance of organisations representing various actors and interest groups. Sometimes their mandates and fields of action are overlapping, creating waste of resources or even confusion. Therefore, it is important to achieve better structures and methods of cooperation within the region and vis-à-vis other actors.

UBC Executive Board should review the existing situation in the Baltic Sea Region and Europe, and identify key partner organisations and networks, with which it should work out concrete plans of joint action and sign protocols of cooperation. This would ensure a more systematic, goal-oriented and long-term cooperation. UBC shall actively build regional alliances to promote implementation of the goals of its own strategy, the EU Strategy and interests of the region. Key partners include, in addition to local and regional authorities and other BSR structures, also businesses, universities and non-governmental civic organisations, all of which play important role in the future of our region.

The Baltic Sea Region has potential to become one of the most interesting and attractive macro-regions in Europe and internationally. However, much remains to be done to achieve this goal. The region has to strengthen its mutual cohesion, common identity and capacity to address outside world with a common message. UBC shall participate with other interested partners in the work to deepen common identity and understanding of the region in various fields, including culture, education and communication.

Success measured by:

- analysis of existing situation, identification of key partner organisations
- working out concrete joint plans
- signing of protocols of cooperation and their implementation

8. Raising public profile and visibility of UBC in the BSR

Despite its successful activities since 1991, UBC is still relatively little known both among cities, decision makers, and especially among the general public. This calls for more action to raise the profile and visibility of our organisation and its achievements. UBC needs a clearer and stronger brand, including a marketing slogan.

A new Communication and Marketing strategy will be prepared and brought to the Executive Board for discussion and adoption. It shall define evaluate current practices, define target audiences internally and externally and take into account possibilities offered by internet and the new electronic media, cooperation with member cities and other partners, possible high-profile events and initiatives, joint initiatives with other organisations etc.

Success measured by:

- preparation and adoption of the UBC Communication and Marketing strategy
- visits to UBC web sites
- visibility in member cities media outlets, including print media and internet pages
- media visibility

9. Monitoring on Strategy Implementation

In order to secure effective implementation of this UBC Strategy, the Executive Board is requested regularly to monitor and evaluate measures taken to implement it as well as to take necessary actions.

This will be done in close cooperation with the UBC Commissions, based on their regular, more systematic reports. The Executive Board is requested to create a systematic and credible method to follow implementation of the UBC strategy (e.g. details of reporting system, division of responsibilities among Presidium/Board members, possible nomination of a Strategy Coordinator etc).

As part of this process to create a credible method for Strategy implementation, the Executive Board will discuss how to allocate responsibilities internally and whether to nominate a Strategy Coordinator to report on it.

Annual reports of the UBC shall, as a rule, include as key dimension an evaluation on the progress of Strategy implementation.

10. Invitation to joint action!

The Baltic Sea Region is again at cross-roads. The world-wide economic crisis has hit the region hardly. On the other hand, the region still possesses all the vital resources and capabilities to make it an international success story. The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and its Action Plan, which is the first macro-regional development plan of its kind in Europe, has created a common framework for action.

In order to ensure that these plans are implemented in the benefit of citizens around our common Sea, all countries – including Russia and Norway – as well as all stakeholders must be involved in its further development and implementation.

The Union of Baltic Cities, as recognised voice of the cities in the Baltic Sea Region, is taking up the challenge and commits itself to the implementation of these strategic plans. UBC invites all cities and other partners to participate in joint activities

UBC expresses its readiness to build regional alliances and its keen interest to seek cooperation with cities and all other relevant actors in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond to work jointly for the implementation of these goals.

Our common goal is a sustainable and prosperous Baltic Sea Region. Let us make it a reality – by joint action!

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