UBC | UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES

UBC – The leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region

UBC Strategic Framework 2016–2021

1. What is the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)?

UBC is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Founded in 1991 in Gdansk, it brings into organized, goal-oriented cooperation around a hundred member cities from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. Other cities may become Associated Cities.

The aims of the UBC are, i.a., to:

- Promote cooperation and exchange of experiences between cities in the BSR to advance and deliver sustainable urban solutions and quality of life, and so to bring added value for them;
- Promote cities as drivers for smart, sustainable, green and resource-efficient growth;
- Advance cities as inclusive, diverse, creative, democratic and safe hubs, where active citizenship, gender equality and participatory policy making are promoted;
- Advocate for common interests of cities and their citizens, act on their behalf and further the interests of the BSR.

The UBC and its Member Cities work in close cooperation with other partners and participate actively for the implementation of regional strategies, notably the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region EUSBSR.

2. What are the values of UBC?

- Democratic, proactive and member-driven
- Friendly and welcoming
- Professional
- Reliable
- Goal and future oriented

The UBC actively promotes democratic values, such as gender equality, inclusiveness and participation, as well as policies of multi-level governance, which recognize the key role of cities and their citizens in the economic and social development.

3. Vision for the Baltic Sea Region

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 a high quality living

environment for their inhabitants.

4. How do we contribute to the attainment of this vision?

Synergy and added value by working regionally and across borders

The Baltic Sea Region has since Hanseatic times been a natural area of ex-change and cooperation. It is one of Europe´s distinct macro-regions. This is also recognized through the adoption of EUSBSR, which was the first of EU´s macro-regional strategies, followed by several others. This "being first" was in no way a coincidence – ours is a region with a long history of cooperation.

Today, the Baltic Sea unites, not divides, us. We share common priorities – such as saving the Sea, connecting the region and increasing prosperity. Together, we can develop our region which has the potential of being one of the most dynamic, innovative and competitive growth centers not only in Europe but in the world.

Cooperation across the borders in the Baltic Sea Region is easy and uncomplicated. Short distances, common history, culture and values, in-formed and educated citizens, democratic and functioning societies, local democracy and pragmatic approach to solving problems are among the factors which contribute to this.

The BSR has many international organizations and networks. This is a richness provided they work together for common goals, are "part of the same puzzle".

The UBC can, as a representative regional organization and in close cooperation with other partners – defend and promote the interests of our cities and region, to ensure that our voice is heard and our fair interests are respected in European decision making.

Working regionally and acting together brings added value. The achievements of UBC and its Member Cities since 1991 prove of this.

Effective, proactive, representative UBC is needed

Among many international organizations and networks, UBC is in many ways unique and essential, especially for the following reasons:

- *Promoting exchange of experiences between Member Cities*
UBC creates a low-threshold, easy-to-access and practice-oriented framework for exchange between cities – be they big or small. Any Member City can utilize the vast experience and know-how of other members – free of charge.

- *Initiating and promoting smart, sustainable solutions*
Cities have to do more with less, responding to growing challenges but with lower budgets. This calls for innovative approaches. As the closest public authority to the citizens, they are keenly aware of the needs. UBC and its member cities can seek and promote such solutions and disseminate results, through public-private partnerships with business, academia and civil society.

UBC´s informal "hands on, let-us do it" attitude to seek practical solutions, instead of only describing them, brings practical benefits for Member Cities. The extent of this benefit corresponds with the level of activity of each Member City.

- *Defending the interests of cities and their citizens*
Cities are the key drivers of economic and social development. Their vitality and well-being is of highest importance to our societies. Successful urban policies are central dimensions of national and European policies. However, too often this is neglected. Especially, the interests of medium-sized and small cities

are forgotten – and most of the cities in the BSR belong to this category. Cities have to defend their interests through joint action.

5. How does the UBC work?

UBC is a democratic, representative, proactive and transparent organization of cities in the BSR, based on its Statutes and membership. Its structure and working method is de-centralized and flexible. The priorities of UBC are guided by the interests and needs of Member Cities.

The General Conference, organized every two years, is the highest authority of the UBC. It elects the President, Vice-Presidents and the Executive Board, which lead the UBC between Conferences. They are assisted by a permanent Secretariat. The activities of UBC are financed by membership fees by cities and other contributions, such as project funding, donations etc.

The backbone of UBC`s practical, goal oriented work is done by the Member Cities through thematic UBC Commissions[1]. UBC Commissions are encouraged to seek partnerships with other stakeholders and participate actively in implementing regional development strategies, especially the EUSBSR.

6. With whom do we work?

UBC seeks actively partners, as nobody can achieve results alone. On official European level, UBC continues and develops active working relations with European institutions, especially the Committee of the Regions, Economic and Social Committee, European Parliament, European Commission, as well as the Council of Europe and its bodies.

UBC works closely with key stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region - such as national governments, local authority organizations and organisations such as the,

- Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS)
- HELCOM
- Conference of European Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and its Baltic Sea Commission
- Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation network (BSSSC)
- Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC)
- Baltic Development Forum (BDF)
- Baltic Sea Region NGO Network
- Baltic Sea Region University Network (BSRUN)
- Euroregion Baltic
- Other partners in the EUSBSR and its Action Plan

UBC continues cooperation with relevant other European networks, such as the Conference of European Cross-border and Interregional City Network (CECICN) and its member networks as well as Eurocities. UBC also seeks active contacts with partners in other parts of the world, for the benefit of sharing experiences and seeking mutual benefit with them. Contacts with the United Nations system and other governmental and non-governmental organizations, business and research organizations etc. are promoted, whenever useful.

7. UBC work priorities for the 2016–2021

[1] UBC´s General Conference in Mariehamn 3 October 2013 adapted a resolution on Commissions consolidating process. From 1.1.2015 UBC has seven Commissions: Planning cities, Sustainable cities, Safe cities, Youthful cities, Smart and prospering cities, Cultural cities, Inclusive and healthy cities.

a. Implementation of UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2016–2021 "Stairway towards Sustainable Baltic Cities"

The UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2016–2021 (Annex 1) is the guiding policy document for the whole network of UBC, contributing to the development of smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region.

Its vision for Sustainable UBC cities until 2021 and beyond is:

"UBC cities will be climate-smart, providing a good ground for green economy to grow, while being resource-efficient and sustainable in all their activities as well as protecting the environment and waterbodies in the Baltic Sea Region. They will increasingly be known as global forerunners to create a high quality living environment for their inhabitants."

The UBC Executive Board, Commissions and Secretariat will systematically ensure the implementation of this Action programme and follow its progress.

b. European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and Blue Growth strategies

EUSBSR and its Action Programme are the key framework for UBC in our regional work. They have already proven to be beneficial and value-adding.

As a recognition of our efforts UBC has been nominated by the EU Member States as a Horizontal Action Coordinator (June 2015).

The main challenges of EUSBSR implementation are, from UBC perspective, to apply simple procedures and innovative governance systems to ensure that multi-level governance becomes a reality and that local and regional authorities are given a real role of co-decision when drafting and implementing strategies. Also high-level political decision makers in the BSR and Europe-wide must show clear commitment and assume leading role.

Blue Growth strategies for the BSR are closely linked with the EUSBSR. UBC continues to actively participate in these processes.

UBC stresses also the importance of including all countries of the region – including Norway and the Russia, which are not members of the EU – in regional cooperation, as everyone´s active participation is essential for the attainment of common goals.

c. Towards a new Urban Agenda for Cities

Urbanism is one of the strongest global megatrends. Also European future lies with its cities. They are facing the biggest challenges and have to be empowered to solve them. Cities and urban areas becoming more important as engines of economic growth and employment, as breeding grounds for culture, art and creativity, and as the place for innovation and start-ups.

The UBC will actively participate in the creating of an EU Urban agenda, promoting especially the interests of BSR and of small and medium-sized cities, which form the majority in the UBC and the region.

As a new field of activity UBC shall take an active role in facilitating knowledge exchange and cooperation between UBC cities in issues related to the refugee situation in Europe.

This work necessitates a stronger presence of UBC in Brussels, to ensure effectiveness of our lobby work.

d. Promoting Smart Growth and Digitalization

Cities are key actors in achieving a fresh start for European economy, as creators of jobs and sustainable growth. Linked to the development of a new Urban Agenda, a new mind-set for entrepreneurial spirit must be promoted. Digitalization means a new industrial revolution, changing the world faster than any phenomena since the beginning of the industrialization. It modifies business models, value chains and

networks. Digitalization and innovation go hand in hand, creating great opportunities for cities, business and citizens.

Cities have to be in the forefront of this development – as enablers, users and test platforms. New forms of collaboration are needed to find new solutions and seek new partnerships. UBC, as initiator of the Baltic Sea Forum for Smart Cities (BUF) will continue to actively participate in this development.

e. Stronger, more proactive, goal oriented and member-driven UBC

To service the interests of UBC Member Cities and the region, the successful renewal process of UBC must be systematically continued. This requires speedy implementation in practice of all Conclusions and Proposals of the UBC Task Force on Development and Organization, of the UBC Communications and Marketing Strategy and other strategy papers which have been approved by the Board and the General Conference.

UBC should look forward how to improve its capacity for managing projects and to attract outside funding.

The Executive Board, together with the Commissions and the Secretariat, will constantly evaluate the progress of UBC work and initiate new policies, when needed.

UBC has decided to establish a Working Group on Gender Equality for ensuring gender values as a cross-cutting issue in UBC´s work.

UBC Commissions are called upon to take note, and to integrate above-mentioned policies into their Action Programmes, as relevant.

8. How do we measure our success?

- Participation of Member Cities and partners in UBC activities at all levels;
- Effectiveness of Commissions;
- Satisfaction of Member Cities;
- Number Member Cities;
- Number and quality of partners and their evaluation of our work;
- Familiarity of UBC work within key target groups;
- Effectiveness of UBC communication (external communications such as publications, internet, social media, publicity of UBC events etc. and effective internal communications between UBC bodies);
- Capacity to attract outside funding and support.

In Rakvere, 24 May 2012, the Executive Board decided to adopt the criteria for evaluating the work and effectiveness of the UBC Commissions. The financial support granted to the Commissions depends on the results of such an evaluation.

Annex 1:
UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2016–2021
- Submitted separately (Adopted by the General Conference in Gdynia, 2015)

Annex 2:
Implementation of point 7 e:
“Stronger, more proactive, goal oriented and member-driven UBC”

Tasks for years 2016–2017:

To ensure, that UBC continues its positive renewal process, and that it also in future creates added value for its Member Cities, the Presidium and Executive Board are called upon, in the coming two years, ensure the following:

Effective functioning of UBC structures

- Strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of the work of UBC Commissions;
- Improve cooperation between the Executive Board and the Commissions;
- Make Executive Board work more effective, transparent and goal oriented;
- Improve cooperation between the Secretariat and Commissions;
- Improve expertise in key policy areas and lobbying capacity to promote UBC goals;
- Develop and systematize UBC expert exchange between Member Cities;
- Improve the capacity of UBC and its Commissions to develop projects and initiatives, and to seek external funding for these;
- UBC secretariat shall take a more active role in project development within UBC
- Evaluate and re-define the role and tasks of the Secretariat in the new external circumstances and within the "new UBC" structure to optimally serve the whole organization and its needs. This includes priorization of tasks, defining of competences and responsibilities etc.

Improving UBC communication, visibility and outreach

Based on the UBC Communication and Marketing Strategy, our communication work has been re-structured and developed during recent years. New communication channels have been opened and a major visual and strategical renewal process is under way, including a "face-lift".

However, the stature of communications must change – it must be understood as vital dimension of all work and integrate it internally, externally and across all UBC activities on daily basis.

Among priorities to be ensured:

- Continued implementation of the UBC Communication and Marketing Strategy and the adopted implementation plans;
- Securing continuity of professional Communications work by extending work of dedicated UBC Communications Manager beyond end of 2016 and strengthen the communications capacity within the Secretariat;
- Continued work of UBC Communications Network, consisting of Member City experts;
- Coordination and cooperation with UBC Commissions to ensure that their valuable work is better known;
- Provision of tailored communication services to target groups;
- Fully utilizing the important work carried out within UBC, its Commissions and Task Forces, such as in the field of sustainable development and in promoting Youth employment and Well-being, by promoting widely these results and by organizing events as follow-up;
- Updating of Communications and Marketing Strategy when the results of the renewal process are visible and under evaluation.
- Proactive and energetic approach towards communicating and lobbying on EU-level.

End