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BALTIC CITIES BULLETIN

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CREATING HEALTHY URBAN ENVIRONMENTS IN BALTIC SEA CITIES

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BALTIC CITIES BULLETIN



Dear UBC Friends,

In spite of all the challenges and uncertainties we are facing today, the cities of the Baltic Sea Region continue to develop focusing on economic prosperity, resilience, energy security, safety, green innovation, integration of culture and tourism, sustainability, social cohesion and overall health.

Through environmentally responsible spatial planning, sustainable and impressive realizations of buildings or land development, co-created meeting places for people and initiatives full of creativity it is possible to affect one's quality of life and most importantly – one's health. Cities in

the Baltic region are leading the way in caring for the wellbeing of their residents and are exemplary in this.

This edition of the bulletin is dedicated to sharing the value that our member cities create and will create in the near future. This is the driving force of investment and knowledge that we need to share between the UBC members and other cities in Europe and the world.

The UBC members present good practices, case studies, innovations in design/construction, examples of multifunctional design buildings, creative ideas for regeneration of postindustrial areas and implementation of modern urban solutions who share a common interest in shaping a healthy environment in its many aspects.

It is very encouraging and building up that we have common mindset and values, and that we can build our strength on cooperation and knowledge. One of the goals stated in EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is strengthening territorial cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region through land-based spatial planning. Through our work, undoubtedly the UBC ensures a joint framework to follow up spatial development trends and challenges, to build a territorial cohesion perspective.

With Baltic Sea greetings,

Mantas Jurgutis
President of UBC

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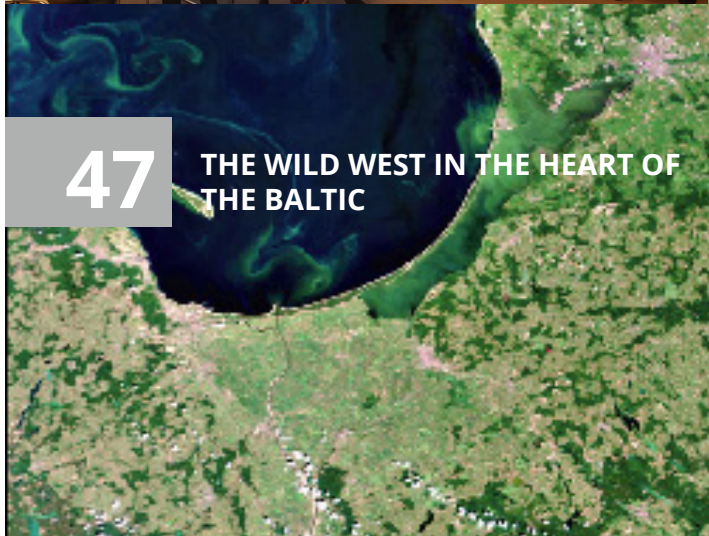
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THE WILD WEST IN THE HEART OF THE BALTIC



CREATING HEALTHY URBAN ENVIRONMENTS IN BALTIC SEA CITIES



by Paulina Szewczyk | p.szewczyk@bpp.gdynia.pl

photo by Przemysław Kozłowski/gdynia.pl

Our region is constantly growing through sustainable investments, while ensuring better living conditions for our citizens. At the same time Europe, including the Baltic Sea Cities, are facing a lot of challenges. The impacts of climate change, demographic changes, uncertainty concerning the global economy and safety issues require integrated considerations also in spatial planning processes in cities.

As the UBC Planning Cities Commission promotes interaction and cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region in the field of urban planning and construction, the cities were invited to send their stories on the planning issues with the main focus on "Creating healthy urban environments in Baltic Sea cities." At this point, I would like to thank you all for sharing their experiences, good practices, case studies, creative ideas. Learning from each other is the essence of the UBC Planning Cities Commission work.

We can all agree, however, that it all comes down to physical, mental, and social health. Both urban planning and architecture need to be environmentally responsible in creating healthy conditions for living, working, entertaining, learning, relaxing, integrating and moving. After all, in a healthy environment people have an opportunity to be well, too.

The human scale compact city to reduce demand for mobility and avoid urban sprawl

Compact cities with mixed-use developments and human scale have the potential to create more sociable, equitable

and economically strong urban environments. Developing post-industrial brownfield sites into part of the cities makes the existing infrastructure usable again. Close proximities to all basic services and to the city centre make sustainable mobility possible and convenient. The environmental advantages of such a solution have been used in a pilot project for the holistic revitalization of the inner city of Rostock "WarnowQuartier" and a realization of new urban quarter called WATERFRONT in the heart of Gdynia, located in the post-industrial area of the port. Kalmar is also prioritizing central areas in planning processes in their sustainable urban transformation having the New European Bauhaus behind it.

Providing healthy environments through green spaces and water

Greenery and water in cities are the key elements to adapt to climate changes and make the living conditions good for all. In Gdańsk, such spaces have been included in the strategy and in the city's overall vision to ensure the continuous system within the whole city. Vaasa and Malmö found their ways to achieve the 3:30:300 principle aiming to ensure that every resident can see at least 3 trees, the canopy cover in the residential area is at least 30%, and it is guaranteed that there is a green area within 300 metres. Espoo tells about the city's ambitious aim to achieve a state of no net loss of biodiversity by 2035. Greenery and surface water management facilities make the public space attractive and encourage people of all ages to spend time actively. Museipark – a multifunctional pond in Mariehamn is an example of successful urban landscape project that combines stormwater treatment with recreation. Examples from Jelgava and

Tartu also show innovative solutions and initiatives that build cities' resilience and help in creating a healthy environment.

Promoting sustainable mobility

In Umea, a ring road around the city was completed. It is going to have a considerable influence on reducing the air pollution in the city centre by limiting usage of private vehicles. It also gives an opportunity for the existing inner-city streets to become greener, quieter, and more targeted at pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport. The recent redevelopment in Kołobrzeg has resulted in city boasting the longest seafront promenade that besides being a walking path along the sea, accommodates also a wide range of other activities which promote health and well-being.

New life of old buildings

Transforming existing buildings by giving them new functions helps in mitigating the climate changes by reducing the carbon footprint from construction. The example from Kristiansand shows that this can also have amazing effects in terms of architecture. An industrial relic – the grain silo was adaptively reused into Kunstsilo that enriched the cultural landscape of the city. By combining functions and redesigning the existing buildings, new cultural functions found their places in a former exhibition centre, an old school and library buildings in Jyväskylä.

Sports, recreation buildings and facilities

Recreation and sport are extremely important for both physical and mental health. Buildings and facilities that attract interest in sport and enable its practice may play additional important roles for the city, especially when they are environmentally friendly. In the article from Kemi you will read about a new multi-purpose hall, "Kemi arena", where ecological wooden construction was used as the city is committed to low-carbon solutions. In Visby the new central bathhouse is projected to both promote public health and swimming proficiency, and to revitalize the city centre. The project of the development of the Kilia sports facilities in Kiel will strengthen the sense of community and improve the quality of life by becoming also an inviting meeting place for people in the district.

Healthcare buildings, facilities and initiatives

Newly built Residential Care Centre (COM) is Rumia's response to the challenges of an ageing population. While the city of Växjö through municipal investments and initiatives creates physical and social environment to promote the health of children and youth.

Roles and challenges for public space in building resilient and healthy societies

Public spaces are crucial in enhancing the health of its users, but still social health must not be forgotten, after all, public spaces are where society is formed, and which fortunately and increasingly are created by society. The participatory process in Elva aims to improve the quality of the space within the 1980s housing estate in the Nooruse district. Riga is engaging youth in the processes of creating a new life of old places. The inclusive way of planning seems to be the win-win situation for the future of the city. Kotka held a participatory process of bringing a simple yet monumental market square back to life through creative planning and a lot of communication between particular stakeholders. The importance of well-thought-out public space were also recognized in Chernivtsi reconstruction

of Vyshyvanka Day Square. Valmiera continues to develop inclusive spaces that enhance both social cohesion and environmental resilience through transforming a former asphalt heat island into a visually inspiring, inclusive, and ecologically responsive public space.

The beneficial role of culture

It is expected that projected M. K. Čiurlionis Concert Hall in Kaunas, accompanied by a renovated riverbank, a new marina, and public spaces, will foster international cooperation and economic development and will improve the quality of life for the city's residents in many aspects. The Cultural Centre in Gavle has already become a central meeting place for culture and learning and what sets it apart is its energy-efficiency, the use of long lifespan materials, and flexibility in utilization. History and culture create a healthy city in Pruszcz Gdański, please read about experiencing Faktoria Kultury in the sense of enjoying the simplicity of good company in a very cultural setting.

Building a resilience for crisis situation

UBC and the Baltic Sea Region are preparing for risks caused by an increasing number of hazards. Kramatorsk is actively working on improving the urban infrastructure and educational institutions to ensure safety which lies in the absolute foundation of health. A priority both for Turku and Kamianets-Podilskyi is to focus on the well-being of the inhabitants and their security. An inhabitant-friendly approach includes, among others, sustainable urban design, renewable energy solutions, community-focused initiatives and building the cities' resilience.

The articles in this edition of the Bulletin show that the cities do not cease in their efforts to ensure sustainability, resilience, security, and affordability, both in spatial planning and building design, and they undoubtedly do it with success. We really hope you will enjoy reading Baltic Cities Bulletin and you will learn good examples of how to make your city's healthy environment.



NEW ROLES AND CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC SPACE IN KOTKA

by Lilian Pallas | lilian.pallas@kotka.fi
photo: Kotka Municipality

City of Kotka is an old coastal city comprised of several islands, with the main city centre on Kotkansaari island. The secondary city centre in Karhula has a small but highly active market square, which brings together locals several times a week. Unfortunately, the larger market square on Kotkansaari has not experienced similar success in creating a lively public space. To tackle this problem, city planners have worked on community building by identifying several key issues, fostered cooperation and communication between various stakeholders, and iterated several market square plans over the years.

Kotkansaari market square has its history in the early 19th century and functions more like a large open space than a cosy environment to invite people to come hang out. Especially during the summer, people will rather spend more time in one of the gorgeous award-winning parks in the city or by the beach than at the market square. Secondly, to preserve the history of the market square, the city avoids building any permanent structures on it and focuses on keeping the plans temporary, changeable, and light. Lastly, while there are small café owners operating on the square, they have struggled to cooperate with each other and sharing resources.

Creative solution

City planners recognised during the planning process that a larger shared terrace with all the different small cafes and restaurants operating around it would improve the community feeling and attract more customers. Second step was to gather the local business association and local businesses

together to talk through previous grievances and investigate their interest in having a shared terrace. The process required various meetings and iterations of the plan to satisfy everyone's interests but in summer 2023, the first shared terrace took place with two café businesses sharing it. In 2024, the shared terrace with a green carpet was larger and had four cafes and restaurants participating in it.

New meeting spot

The market square was also lively with various activities from a light festival and small concerts to international food festival and screening of Euro 2024 football games. In 2025, the shared terrace will be even bigger, and six businesses are expected to share it.

While it might be challenging to activate and improve social integration in city with ageing and declining population, this example illustrates that city planning and active business owners together can bring a simple yet monumental market square back to life – it might just take some time, creative planning and a lot of communication.



by Paulina Bone | paulina.bone@gdansk.gda.pl
photos by Jarosław Zulewski and Paulina Bone



Gdańsk has been recognized for its innovative strategies to enhance the quality of life for its residents. Guided by the updated document Gdańsk 2030 Plus Strategy (Strategia Rozwoju Gdańska), the city is transforming its urban development to create healthier environments through the integration of blue-green infrastructure (BGI), climate resilience initiatives, and sustainable development practices. These efforts aim to address not only environmental challenges but also social well-being, ensuring that Gdańsk remains an attractive and sustainable place to visit, live and work.

Gdańsk's vision includes the development of a comprehensive network of interconnected green spaces and water systems, which improve air quality, reduce urban heat, and mitigate potential flood risks. The city's blue-green infrastructure enhances biodiversity and creates multifunctional spaces that combine nature with urban life.

This vision offers numerous benefits: providing residents with access to green spaces for recreation, improving physical and mental health, and fostering a stronger connection with nature. This approach is fully aligned with nature-based solutions, which prioritize ecological balance while addressing urban challenges ([Strategia Rozwoju Gdańska](#)).

Addressing climate challenges

In adapting to climate change, Gdańsk has introduced a range of innovative solutions. Increasing green coverage in spaces across the city, implementing retention basins and rain gardens, and creating natural flood management systems, have helped the city to better face extreme weather events, such as heavy rainfall. One of the city's key initiatives involves integrating areas along the Wisła and Motława rivers, transforming them into vibrant and attractive public spaces that combine water management with opportunities for social interaction and recreation ([Gdańska Polityka Wodna](#)).

Close proximity to green areas

Equitable access to green spaces is another crucial element of Gdańsk's strategy (Programy Rozwoju 2030). The city wants to ensure that every resident lives within walking distance of a park or recreational area, promoting environmental justice and improving overall health and well-being. This inclusive approach reduces social inequalities and enhances the daily lives of residents.

Gdańsk serves as a model city for others aiming to build healthier, more sustainable urban environments. Through collaboration and social participation, Gdańsk continues to explore innovative solutions and share best practices, demonstrating how sustainable development can create resilient cities prepared for future challenges ([Programy Rozwoju 2030](#), [Strategia Rozwoju Gdańska](#)).

REVITALIZING NOORUSE DISTRICT: A SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE URBAN TRANSFORMATION

VAASA ADOPTING THE 3-30-300 PRINCIPLE

by Päivi Korkealaakso | paivi.korkealaakso@vaasa.fi
photo by Adobestock/Canopycover

According to the 3-30-300 principle, each residence should have a view of three trees, the residential area's canopy cover should be at least 30%, and the nearest green space should be no more than 300 metres away.

This principle, developed by the Nature-Based Solutions Institute, has now also been tested in relation to the green spaces system of Vaasa's Master Plan 2040.

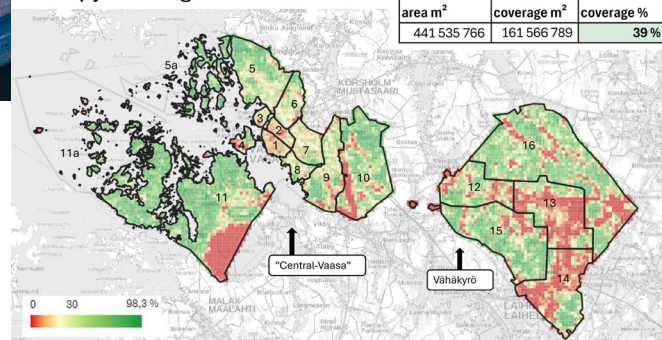
Geographic data has been used to map areas that meet the principle's criteria and those that require further measures. Generally, the requirements are met in older residential areas. Vaasa has previously had accessibility requirements related to green areas, and this underlying principle has guided land use in the right direction. However, in new and densifying areas, achieving the goals of the 3-30-300 principle does not occur automatically and requires guidance through planning regulations.

Advantages of the new solution

Maintaining and supplementing green environments of various scales helps combat increasing sun exposure, facilitates stormwater management, improves the attractiveness of the different areas, creates a better microclimate, positively impacts well-being, reduces stress, and enhances biodiversity opportunities.

In densifying cities, infill development often targets the edges of green spaces, pushing local greenery further away. Efficiency requirements necessitate structural solutions, such as parking, and large trees become scarce in deck-structured blocks. As these issues accumulate with each project, we move further away from achieving the goals of the 3-30-300 principle.

Canopy coverage of Vaasa



Therefore, it is important to consider the 3-30-300 requirements at various planning levels. At the master plan level, larger contiguous green areas should be preserved, and their accessibility should be improved to ensure a reasonable distance from residences to nature. Smaller block or local parks are also important spaces in the urban environment. These can include extensions of residential yards, green oases, and local spaces that foster community. At the detailed planning level, it is crucial to ensure that there is space for large trees on the plots and in the immediate surroundings of new and densifying areas.

Street greenery also plays a significant role in densely built areas. Instead of large, continuous asphalt surfaces, it is important to divide street space with green elements of various scales. Often, such developments also enhance the safety of those moving through the street area.

The 3-30-300 tool is a simplified, mathematical method for identifying areas in need of greenery and targeting development measures where they are most needed. The principle is complemented by the Biodiversity Program currently being developed in Vaasa, the updated green spaces system, and the green efficiency method. These additions will enhance the tool with key elements that promote biodiversity, improve the sustainability of urban nature, and reduce species loss.



Elva Municipality is participating in the international Horizon Europe drOp project, which focuses on improving and empowering areas with outdated buildings and courtyards, low social cohesion, and limited innovation in three key dimensions: social, physical, and economic, while also considering digital empowerment.

The project's goal is to transform the Nooruse Street apartment building area in Elva into a smart and highly inclusive urban area. The outdated living environment no longer meets the fundamental principles of modern high-quality urban space or the vision of the European New Bauhaus, which emphasizes aesthetics, sustainability, and inclusivity. The issues of apartment buildings constructed in the late 1980s are not limited to energy efficiency and poor aesthetics but also include inadequate accessibility for all social groups. The courtyards between the buildings are in a state of disrepair and do not support the creation and maintenance of social cohesion among residents. As a result, individualism increases, and the sense of community deteriorates.

The action plan was agreed upon in three focus areas: promoting social community development, improving the quality of the physical living environment, and creating economic opportunities. In practice, the activities within these focus areas are interconnected and create mutual preconditions for success. The key factor in implementing the action plan is co-creation between the local government and residents, facilitated and empowered by the presence of digital solutions.

by Jaanika Saar | jaanika.saar@elva.ee
photos by Jaanika Saar

The key to social community development is establishing an active resident group, fostering a sense of belonging, raising awareness, and building a partnership with the local government.

Roadmap towards the Nooruse neighbourhood of the future

The first step in improving the quality of the physical living environment will be to develop a thematic spatial plan in collaboration with residents and stakeholders, which will serve as a foundation for further actions. The municipality will also encourage residents to seek external funding by introducing opportunities such as participatory budgeting and support programs like LEADER.

Since the area is located near Elva city centre, where services are easily accessible, the revitalization of economic activities in the Nooruse district is expected to follow the principles of sustainable development. For example, apartment building basements could be repurposed into repair workshops or community spaces, while shared courtyard areas could host pop-up shops for handicrafts or barter exchanges during community events.

The key to the entire process is engaging residents and stakeholders and establishing a partnership with the local government. By 2035 Nooruse neighbourhood will have transformed into a residential area with high-quality public space, featuring renovated buildings, an active community with engaged leaders, and strong cooperation with the local government.

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR VISBY: THE NEW CENTRAL BATHHOUSE PROJECT



by Frida Brunner | frida.brunner@gotland.se
photos by Gotland Municipality

Visby is set to welcome a new, modern bathhouse, replacing the outdated Solbergabadet, to promote public health and swimming proficiency. Designed for the whole of Gotland with a diverse audience, the facility is expected to be completed in autumn 2027, providing a modern public bathhouse for both residents and visitors.

After evaluating four possible locations, the regional council decided to build the new bathhouse adjacent to present Solbergabadet. This central placement in Östercentrum ensures accessibility for the entire island, integrating sustainable transport options such as public transit, cycling paths, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. It is also located in the regions' city centre, visible from the heritage of Visby medieval city.

The new bathhouse is designed to fit within the existing urban landscape, respecting the surrounding architecture and cultural heritage while creating new public spaces. The zoning plan from 1975 allows for public-use buildings, including a bathhouse, and the design strategically utilizes the site's elevation changes to accommodate high-ceilinged spaces like diving pools while maintaining harmony with nearby structures, while having low impact on the cultural heritage.

The project aligns with environmental and social sustainability goals, ensuring efficient land use and reducing reliance on private vehicles. The facility's proximity to the bus station and extensive cycling infrastructure minimizes car dependency, while its location fosters a safe, active, and well-populated urban environment. By repurposing

existing infrastructure, the bathhouse contributes to a more sustainable and resource-efficient city.

Improvement and synergy in the city centre

Beyond its recreational function, the bathhouse plays a crucial role in revitalizing Visby's city centre. The development ensures the continued attractiveness of Visby's central areas, integrating seamlessly with its surroundings while strengthening its role as a social and cultural hub. From an urban planning perspective, the bathhouse is a strategic investment in the city's sustainable future, enhancing accessibility, fostering a vibrant city life, and maintaining the site as a public asset.

The new and old bathhouses will now be neighbours. Currently, the municipality is considering redesigning the old bathhouse into a cultural centre for youth. This transformation could create a dynamic synergy between sports, recreation, and cultural activities, fostering a youth-centred hub in the area. It will be interesting to observe how these new uses and the focus on younger generations will shape the development and utilization of this space in the future.



CREATING A NEW LIFE FOR OLD PLACES IN MINECRAFT TOGETHER WITH YOUTH

by Anda Bergmane | anda.bergmane@riga.lv
photo by Adobe Stock



Riga city is participating in an Erasmus+ project MC-YOU celebrating youth involvement in developing and redesigning sustainable and resilient public places in a Minecraft environment.

Dedicated to more than 100 pupils in teams and about a dozen educators bringing their development proposals of 8 public locations, the MC-YOU aims to improve youth participation in and ownership of the city and improve skills and abilities in urban topics and Minecraft Education. By the end of the active visioning of the locations, pupils' teams will also participate in a competition for the best solutions, and the first "Children and Youth Participation conference" will be organized, highlighting good and important examples of youth participation and decision-making in Riga and elsewhere.

Youth engagement

"Within this project, we want to cement the feeling that the city is both interested in youth's ideas and needs, and they also have all rights to express and develop them," says Mārtiņš Engelis, a project expert from Riga City Council City Development Department.

"In such projects, children are most often mere or decorative consultants that "have fun with Minecraft". To improve that within the framework of MC-YOU, at first, we have mainly selected public places in Riga that need a second breath and a new vision for the future. Second, school teams are not considered consultants anymore – we want them to be regarded as co-designers and architects of that future!

However, to do the visioning right, the project teaches that this youth-city partnership is also based on various external conditions, such as listening to others, e.g., resident needs, taking into account the principles of sustainable and resilient cities (better materials, more environmentally friendly, accessibility, and climate-resilient solutions, etc.), or following important urban development guidelines (e.g., UNESCO protection, or respecting crucial underground communications).

Cooperation that works

MC-YOU has involved many city professionals, activists, and politicians to help navigate the many challenging fields that are unknown or too obscure in terms of urban life and development. During the project, we organized six "dates with the city" or Agoras (project term), where representatives from planning, landscaping, heritage, circularity, community work, activism, and other fields created a dialogue with youth and introduced them to interesting and relevant facts about inclusive and realistic place development in Riga.

As a result, school teams have produced detailed and future-ready visions for place redevelopment that are more difficult for municipalities to refuse. Children can "get their foot in the door" for the urban development they want and need. Plus, every child grows up to be more sentient—a healthy observer and participant capable of noticing rights and wrongs within the city's development and management.

NATURE-WISE ESPOO

by Hanna Eskelinen | hanna.eskelinen@espoo.fi
photos by Elias Metsämaa and Suomen Ilmakuva Oy, Espoo Municipality



The Nature-wise Espoo roadmap outlines how Finland's second-largest city can better protect and enhance biodiversity. It also defines Espoo's biodiversity preservation goals, and the actions needed to achieve them.

Espoo is committed to taking care of nature as the city grows. This requires new ways of thinking, innovative approaches, and strong cooperation – what we call nature wisdom. Espoo is often described as Finland in a nutshell. The city is characterised by vast natural areas, including seashores, an archipelago, wilderness in nature reserves, and the waterways of the lake highlands. At the same time, Espoo is known as a hub of expertise, home to international company headquarters and high-tech businesses.

Espoo aims to achieve a state of no net loss of biodiversity by 2035. One of the key goals of the Nature-wise Espoo roadmap is to establish a highly functional and coherent ecological network by 2035. The term “ecological network” refers to key nature areas and their interconnecting green corridors, which enable plant and animal species to move and spread.

Large contiguous areas create an ecological network

Nature reserves in Espoo currently cover up to 11 per cent of the city's land area, and the percentage will increase this year. In February 2025, the Espoo City Board decided to

promote the establishment of new nature reserves. These areas have been identified as ecologically valuable in the Espoo Biodiversity Action Plan.

The new nature reserves represent the best bog environments in Espoo. Additionally, a nearly 80-hectare forest will be protected. This area is home to several endangered biotopes, including forested wetlands, pine mires and conifer forests. It also connects existing smaller nature reserves, strengthening the ecological network. Espoo also encourages private landowners to protect nature.

Nature-wise Espoo develops through cooperation

Espoo residents value their local nature and recreational opportunities, but promoting biodiversity in a growing city presents challenges. To address these challenges, the City of Espoo has invited the entire community – residents, associations, businesses, and landowners – to participate. Residents can support biodiversity by engaging in community efforts. Valuable natural areas can also be found in home gardens and courtyards. For instance, garden meadows serve as vital oases of biodiversity.

The Nature-wise Espoo roadmap was approved by the Espoo City Board in February 2025. This long-term strategic vision aims to strengthen the ecological network, improve the state of natural biotopes and species, and safeguard abundant urban green spaces ensuring a sustainable future for Espoo's nature. More information: [Espoo set ambitious goals – Nature-wise Espoo roadmap aims for 2035 | City of Espoo](#)

LONGER LIFE, GREATER NEEDS



by Anna Borys | a.borys@um.rumia.pl
photo by Rumia Municipality

The development of medicine is causing more Poles to reach an advanced age. As a result, social needs in the areas of day care and 24-hour care for people with disabilities continue to increase. This is compounded by the high expectations regarding the quality of assistance provided and systemic solutions. All of this means that the government and local authorities must take preventive and mitigating the effects of disability actions. How is Rumia coping with this?

A unique place on the “social map of Rumia” is the Care and Residential Center (CRC) run by the city. The facility was created with the needs of adult Rumia residents with significant or moderate disabilities in mind, and its main goal is to improve the quality of life for the residents and their families.

The facility includes a dining room, a workshop room, a quiet room, a psychologist's office, single and double rooms, as well as staff rooms. Along the COM, a road system has been constructed, and the surrounding area has been developed. The total value of the investment is over 5 million PLN, and the city managed to secure funding of 2.8 million PLN for this purpose.

Means of support

CRC offers support in the form of daytime stays and the option of permanent residence, providing residents with appropriate conditions for living and rehabilitation. Despite significant expenses related to maintaining qualified staff and the facility, no fees are charged to the residents.

The first group of participants at CRC was welcomed in mid-March 2024. Since then, the lives of the residents have changed dramatically for the better. Their families and caregivers also felt the improvement, as they can finally relax, gain distance from various matters, attend to daily responsibilities, or continue their professional work.

Addressing various needs

“Our disabled residents have found the right place for themselves, their second home. The first few months were key: we got to know each other, adapted the work to the individual needs of the residents, which was a huge challenge because these are adults with various physical, intellectual, sensory, and mental disabilities. However, from the very beginning, all our participants craved contact with others, so we are extremely happy that people who were very closed off have made great progress. Today, they are happy to participate in local social life,” says Anna Halman, president of the Social Cooperative “Linia-Zagórska Struga,” which operates the CRC.

The key to success is providing the residents with opportunities for development and ultimately achieving some level of independence. Therefore, they participate in integration workshops or therapeutic and rehabilitation activities using art and contact with nature. “The Rumia CRC can be an inspiration for similar initiatives. The popularization of such institutions can contribute to increasing social awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and encourage actions aimed at improving their situation,” concludes Anna Halman.

KAUNAS' NEW LANDMARK ON THE BANKS OF THE NEMUNAS RIVER



by Lina Duobaite | lina.duobaite@kaunas.lt
photo by Kaunas Municipality

Kaunas Fulfills the Dreams of Classical Music Lovers: M. K. Čiurlionis Concert Hall to Rise on the Banks of the Nemunas River.

Following the opening of the new Science and Innovation Museum "Science Island" in 2024 and the construction of two new bridges over the Nemunas River, another remarkable project will take shape on the left bank of the river - the M. K. Čiurlionis Concert Hall. This centre is expected to drive economic growth and serve as a model of sustainability and innovation for the Baltic region.

Preparing for Construction

"Kaunas has seen a surge of new infrastructure projects in recent years: the new football stadium, an Olympic-standard swimming pool with SPA facilities, the „Science Island“ innovation and development centre, and a new orthopaedics and traumatology hospital are already operating. Additionally, two new bridges are under construction, 12 parks have been renovated, and new schools, kindergartens, and two more swimming pools are being built. The athletics arena has also been completed.

Until now, art enthusiasts and classical music lovers have pointed out that our city needs a dedicated venue for classical concerts. This year, we are ready to begin construction on such a venue. It is symbolic that this project will commence as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Lithuania's most distinguished artist and composer, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis," said Kaunas Mayor Visvaldas Matijošaitis. Kaunas will soon announce a tender for construction works, based on the technical design prepared by Paleko Archstudija in collaboration with Baltic Engineers, a company within the Be Live group. The international architectural competition for this project attracted 119 architectural teams from

36 countries. The total estimated cost of construction is approximately €92 million.

A Unique Cultural Landmark

Located near the new pedestrian bridge under construction connecting the Nemunas Island and Žemoji Freda, the concert hall will be accompanied by a renovated riverbank, a new marina, and public spaces. Spanning more than 4 hectares, the A++ energy-efficient, glass-encased structure will stand 25 metres tall and cover nearly 23,000 square metres. An underground parking facility will be available, with additional parking spaces planned near the building.

The centre will feature two performance halls. The Main Hall will accommodate approximately 1,500 spectators and will be designed for classical music concerts, operettas, and other performances requiring natural acoustics. The second space—a multifunctional hall with views of the Nemunas River—will have up to 700 seats and will be suitable for concerts, conferences, exhibitions, and other local and international events.

According to the project's authors, the M. K. Čiurlionis Concert Hall will blend seamlessly into the landscape of the left bank of the Nemunas River, harmonising with the surrounding urban development and the revitalised Nemunas Island park. The transparent, undulating facade will reflect the shimmering water of the river, while offering stunning panoramic views of Kaunas Old Town and the flowing Nemunas river. This venue is set to become an international hub for culture and the arts, a model of sustainability and innovation. It is expected to enhance Kaunas' reputation, foster international cooperation and economic development, and improve the quality of life for the city's residents.

A NEW WATERFRONT IN GDYNIA



by Paulina Szewczyk | p.szewczyk@bpp.gdynia.pl
photos by Magdalena Śliżewska/gdynia.pl



A completely new development quarter has been realized in the heart of Gdynia, in the place of the former shoreline which had existed before the city was founded and where, for decades, was an unused area of the port, one might say - forgotten for many years.

As soon as the port's boundaries were changed, the vision for integrating the area between Jana Pawła II Avenue, Waszyngtona, and Hryniewieckiego Streets into the city was elaborated. The development concept, which set the directions for the whole area, was drawn up by the ARC-ML team from Berlin in consultation with Gehl Architects from Copenhagen who took into account both the site context and the scale of the neighbouring development. Cultural and tourism services with accompanying service functions, offices and a limited residential function were to fill the complex that had a uniform height, consistent with the dimensions of the Downtown quarters.

The spatial framework of future development, as finally established, has been incorporated and adjusted to the details of the scope of the local development plan. Due to the importance of the location, the provisions of the plan included a condition for the selection of development and land development projects through architectural and urban planning competitions.

Accelerating the change

The first stage of the investment, realized in 2015 by the owner of the land Vastint Poland was the result of a competition held in 2011. It consisted of two service buildings – the completed Marriott by Courtyard hotel and the PKO BP bank office building (the winning work by the FORT studio).

The second phase of the development was the result of an architectural and urban planning competition held in 2016. The competition involved the rest of the quarter and comprised a complex of mixed-used buildings. The competition was won by JEMS Architekci. Public spaces and landscaping that highlights the individual functional zones of the future development became, among others, the most important elements of the concept.

A part of the second phase – the WATERFRONT II was opened in November 2024 and has already been awarded. It includes offices and housing, services and an open green space. The complex harmoniously combines modern architecture with the natural richness of local flora and fauna. The greenery between the residential and office buildings was designed so that the edge of the vegetation marks the former shoreline. In the publicly accessible spaces between the buildings, mature oak trees have been preserved.

The WATERFRONT II area is undoubtedly one of the most prestigious and important locations in Gdynia and will certainly liven up this part of the city. At the same time, it will provide space for living, working, relaxing or just spending time in an inspiring way in the close proximity to the sea.

CULTURAL PROJECTS IN JYVÄSKYLÄ



by Janne Viitamies | janne.viitamies@jyvaskyla.fi
photo by Jenna Oksanen and Gary Littler

The City of Jyväskylä aims to be a pioneer of cultural spaces and cultural environments. The City of Jyväskylä has initiated several cultural building projects in order to bring activities together under one roof and reshape spaces for the purposes of culture. The merging of various cultural locations is intended to contribute to the revitalisation of the city centre.

The City of Jyväskylä has been dreaming of a new concert hall for a long time. However, in a resource-wise solution, instead of a constructing new building, the 1200-seat seminar hall of the Pavilionki Fair and Event Centre was renovated into a modern concert hall. The renovation of the concert hall started in the spring of 2023 and the new concert hall called Encore, one of the largest in Finland, opened in early 2024. At the same time, the Jyväskylä Sinfonia orchestra moved in to join Pavilionki's extensive repertoire of concert and entertainment programme. The concert hall's acoustics were designed by internationally renowned hall acoustics experts Eckhard Kahle and Henrik Möller.

Old school building put to new use

The old Lyceum school, built in 1902 and a listed building, will be refurbished and adapted to accommodate the Jyväskylä Adult Education Centre and the City of Jyväskylä School of Visual Arts.

In addition, a new cultural building is proposed to be built in the same block, to house the Main Library, the Jyväskylä Art Museum, the Craft Museum of Finland, and possibly other institutions as well. The current premises of the Main Library, the Jyväskylä Art Museum and the Craft Museum of Finland will all need renovations in the near future.

A private creative economy centre in the former library building

When the library moves to new shared premises with the museums, the existing library building, which has significant cultural and architectural value, will neither be left empty nor demolished. The house is planned to be transformed into a centre for the creative economy. This creative economy centre, called "The Tin Drum", will provide facilities for a wide range of activities, including knowledge-based businesses, events, as well as cafés and restaurants. The name "The Tin Drum" was originally the title of the 1978 architectural plan for the library building and refers, of course, to the novel by Günter Grass.

The development of the creative economy centre incorporates the sharing economy perspective, supported by the Good Cities project (2024-2028) funded by Interreg Europe. The search for an entrepreneurial owner of the creative economy centre is currently underway for autumn 2025.



FAKTORIA PARK IN PRUSZCZ GDAŃSKI - A MERGE OF HISTORY AND CULTURE



by Janina Wilkos-Gad | wilkos@pruszcz-gdanski.pl
photo by Pruszcz Gdański Municipality

There are places where time slows down, and the past meets the present in a way that feels natural, even necessary. The Faktoria Cultural Park in Pruszcz Gdański is exactly such a place – a vibrant urban space where history, nature and culture come together to create an environment designed for healthy, active, and social living.

Located just 10 km from Gdańsk, this multifunctional park is built around the unique setting of the Faktoria Handlowa – a reconstructed trading settlement from the Roman period. Throughout the year, this historical village attracts history lovers of all ages with its immersive exhibitions, craft workshops, and live demonstrations of ancient skills. But it is summer that truly brings the Faktoria to life. Every weekend, the settlement transforms into a stage for historical reenactments, traditional craft fairs and interactive educational events. Here, history is not confined to the past – it becomes an experience, shared and celebrated by the local community and visitors alike.

Right next door, the park's modern recreational zone adds to the vibrancy of the area. A skatepark, trampoline park, basketball and football courts, and a popular playground make it a favourite gathering place for families, teenagers, and sports enthusiasts. Just beyond the ponds, a dedicated fire pit area invites people to spend long evenings together, enjoying the simplicity of good company.

And when the sun sets, culture takes the lead. From the first Friday of July to the last Sunday of August, the park's amphitheatre hosts Faktoria Kultury – a beloved summer festival that has become one of the most important cultural events in the region. Friday nights belong to music lovers, with open-air concerts featuring top artists from both the Polish and international music scenes. Saturdays are reserved for the exceptional actors of Gdańsk's Wybrzeże Theatre, who bring

their acclaimed productions to Pruszcz Gdański's very own summer stage, drawing crowds eager for outstanding theatre and eagerly awaited premieres. Sundays slow the tempo, but only just – as the weekend closes with charming, high-quality performances for children, ensuring that even the youngest audience members feel part of the cultural heartbeat of the city.

While summer belongs to history and music, this past winter proved that even colder months can bring new life to the park. At the turn of 2024 and 2025, Faktoria became the extraordinary setting for LUMINA PARK – a unique, time-limited light and sound installation that transformed the area into a glowing journey through time and imagination. Over a 1.5-kilometre route, visitors wandered among more than 200 luminous and interactive installations, travelling from antiquity to the Middle Ages, from pirate legends to visions of space exploration and artificial intelligence. The event was met with enthusiastic acclaim, surprising and delighting guests with its creative use of the park's natural landscape and revealing yet another way in which Faktoria can inspire, even on the darkest winter nights.

A place that addresses residents' needs

Faktoria is more than a park. It is a living example of how thoughtful urban planning can create spaces that not only preserve heritage but actively improve quality of life. By blending history with modern recreation, and everyday relaxation with world-class culture, Pruszcz Gdański has built a place where people come to move, learn, play and simply be together. In a time when cities everywhere are searching for ways to become healthier, more resilient, and better connected, Faktoria shows what can happen when we invest in places that are made for people.

AGNES CULTURAL CENTER - GÄVLE'S NEW MEETING PLACE



by Ulrik Lundeberg | ulrik.lundeberg@gavle.se
photos by Gävle Municipality

Agnes Cultural Center (Agnes Kulturhus in Swedish) is centrally located in Gävle, neighbouring Slottstorget, Gavleån, Gamla Gefle, the Town Hall, and the Castle. Agnes Cultural Center respects its surroundings through its varying heights, capturing the lower wooden houses of Gamla Gefle and the higher, more modern buildings of Slottstorget.

Agnes Cultural Center is a central meeting place for culture and learning and is certified according to Miljöbyggnad level silver, a Swedish environmental certification. This certification confirms our commitment to environmental issues and consideration for those who will use the building. We have set specific requirements for energy use, indoor environment, and materials. This means, among other things, that the building is energy-efficient, the electricity and heat used are produced from renewable sources, and higher standards have been set for sound, light, indoor climate, and the content of the materials used.

- It is a flexible building, easy to remodel internally as needs change.
- We have chosen rustic materials in the building, which have a long lifespan.
- There are wooden floors in large parts of the building.
- The ceilings are made of wood wool.
- The roof has 124 solar panels. They produce as much energy as the cultural centre consumes in seven months of the year.
- The sedum plant mat on the roof helps manage rainwater and dampen noise.
- There are large plantings on the roof terrace. The plants can improve the city's climate by purifying the air and regulating temperature.

Having a sustainable building means that rooms can change over time and that high-quality materials are used in construction, interior design, and furnishing. Durable materials that develop a patina over time have been prioritized. The materials are largely natural and free of toxins.

The Cultural Center was opened in December 2024 and has since its opening been extremely well-visited and appreciated by both young and old in Gävle.



KOŁOBRZEG - THE GREEN TREASURE OF THE BALTIC



by Paulina Żupaniec | p.zupaniec@um.kolobrzeg.pl
photos by Kołobrzeg Municipality

Poland's largest spa resort – Kołobrzeg – has maintained its position as a top destination for years. It is no surprise, given that over 60% of the city's area is covered in green spaces.

Visitors can enjoy some of the cleanest bathing waters in the country, wide beaches with soft, white sand, and natural resources such as brine, mineral waters, and peat deposits. Year after year, Kołobrzeg becomes even more attractive thanks to well-thought-out investments in urban space. Numerous parks with fountains and flower-filled squares create a picturesque setting.

The recent redevelopment of Nadmorska Avenue has given the city an even more distinguished character. As a result, Kołobrzeg now boasts the longest seaside promenade in Poland. The Promenade of Sea Whispers, as it has been named, stretches for nearly 4 km – from the port, through scenic beachfront areas, all the way to the coastal park, which is lined with comfortable hotels, sanatoriums, and resorts equipped with modern treatment facilities and wellness zones.

This space is designed for both relaxing strolls and active recreation. In addition to the wide walking path, there is a cycling route, outdoor gyms, playgrounds, fountains, and numerous resting spots – from wooden benches to tennis courts. The surrounding greenery enhances relaxation and fosters a connection with nature, creating a harmonious environment for residents and visitors alike.

A place like no other

Strolling along the Promenade of Sea Whispers, one can reach the Eastern Eco-Park, also known as the Salt Marsh –

a unique natural area that serves as a true oasis of tranquility and biodiversity. This area, also known as Solne Bagno (Salty Marsh), stretches from the city's borders all the way to the airport in Podczele, between the road to Koszalin and the Baltic coastline. This unique nature reserve features a picturesque cycling and walking trail, forming part of the International Coastal Route.

The views are spectacular! On one side, dunes, beaches, and the sea; on the other, saline peat bogs and unique ecosystems. Some parts of the trail are paved, while wooden footbridges have been built in more challenging areas, blending seamlessly into the natural landscape. Along the way, you will find plenty of spots to rest and admire the breathtaking scenery.

A paradise for bird and nature lovers

Every morning, this world awakens in a symphony of colours and bird songs. Nearly 200 bird species have been recorded in the Eastern Ecopark! It is a true haven for bird-watchers, photographers, and anyone looking to escape everyday life and immerse themselves in nature's beauty. Do not miss the chance to explore this extraordinary natural space. Take a deep breath, listen to the birds sing, and allow yourself a moment of pure wonder.



SAFE EDUCATIONAL SPACE - KRAMATORSK AND PORI COOPERATION



by Vadym Gridasov | vadym.gridasov@gmail.com
photos by Kramatorsk Municipality

Kramatorsk is one of the leading cities in Donetsk region and now it is actively working on improving the urban infrastructure and educational institutions in order to ensure the safety of citizens and all participants of the educational process. With the aim of cooperation and use the best practices, the heads of city departments from various fields of activity visited cities in Finland to get acquainted with effective models of security and reconstruction.

The city of Kramatorsk has recently gained the experience of the Finnish partners in providing the safety of citizens in particular by installing shelters in the city and implementing innovations in design and reconstruction of educational institutions. Taking into account the Finnish experience our local project was created to reconstruct Kramatorsk Secondary School No. 23 which was destroyed after the air shelling.

One of the key initiatives is the construction of the simplest shelters in educational institutions to provide the safety of all participants. When constructing them, the Finnish practices for arranging safe spaces for children and staff were implemented. Such shelters provide the necessary protection during emergencies and create comfortable conditions even during a prolonged air raid alarm. It gives a possibility to cover the safety needs in combination with a network of public shelters located in different districts of Kramatorsk.

The Finnish partners also shared their experience in preparing citizens for extreme situations. Special seminars and trainings were organized in Kramatorsk and the residents were taught how to provide first aid and use the rules of evacuation and survival in difficult conditions. Such activities

significantly increase people's awareness and preparedness for possible danger.

Active cooperation for mutual benefit

The cooperation of Kramatorsk with the Finnish partners not only contributes to the development of urban infrastructure and increasing security but also strengthens international relations. The successful implementation of joint projects demonstrates significant results which can be achieved thanks to mutual efforts and support.

Kramatorsk can be an example for other Ukrainian cities in the field of using the best international experience which helps to provide safe and comfortable environment for all residents. The implementation of the Finnish practices in the field of security proves that international partnership can be a guarantee of sustainable development of a city and gives people a sense of security and confidence in the future.



MULTIFUNCTIONAL POND IN MARIEHAMN



by Johanna Hagström | Johanna.Hagstrom@mariehamn.ax
photos by Mariehamn Municipality

The Museipark pond in Mariehamn is a successful example of an urban landscape project that combines stormwater treatment and recreation. Completed in 2024, the project revitalized a previously underutilized space, providing a range of ecosystem services (services we get for free from nature, such as purification of water, pollination and mental well-being). The pond, about 2 hectares in size, was dug into a former lawn adjacent to a city park within the Natura 2000 network.

The primary purpose of the project is stormwater treatment. The catchment area covers approximately 85 hectares, including city center areas, residential neighborhoods and woodland. As the city center in particular has a high proportion of hardened surfaces, such as busy roads and parking lots, the stormwater is polluted with microplastics and heavy metals, in addition to the usual nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) that the recipient is sensitive to.

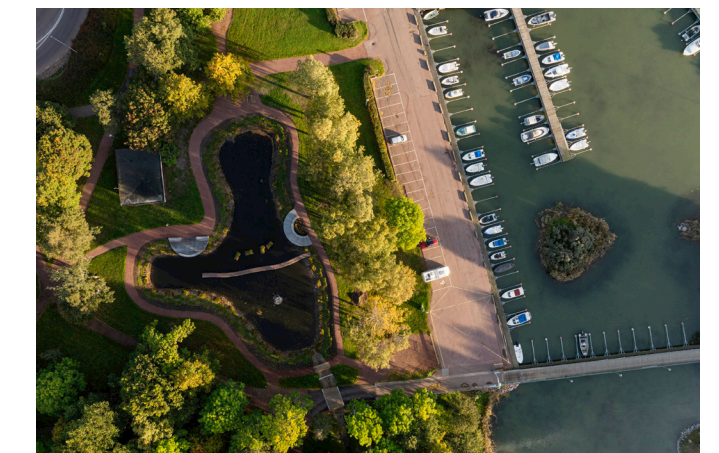
The stormwater discharge goes into the bay of Slemmern near one of the city's most popular swimming spots, another reason to clean the water. As the water turnover in the bay is limited, it is particularly important to treat polluted stormwater. Floating wetlands in the pond further contribute to stormwater treatment by filtering water through the wetland root curtain, which absorbs nutrients from the water.

Using nature capabilities

Plants contribute to the purification of the water in the pond, including those growing along the embankments and those in the floating wetlands. To promote biodiversity, we considered it important to use native plant species. We selected plants based on their hardiness in the pond

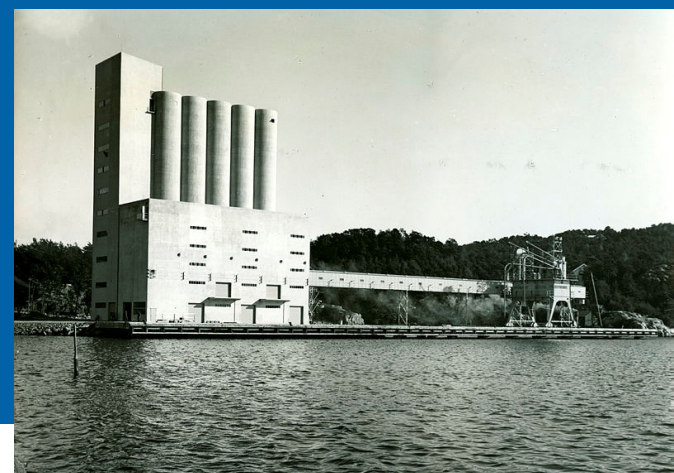
environment and how they would favor pollination through flowering. The habitat we created along the banks of the pond is a wet meadow, with different plant species placed at varying water depths depending on their moisture and drought resistance.

As the pond is located in the city center, the recreational value is also of great importance in the project. Our ambition was that the pond would create added value for the people of Mariehamn. Two jetties were built for seating by the water and a picnic table was placed to the north of the pond. An artwork, Peace of Art by Birgitta Muhr, was placed in the southern part of the pond; during the dark hours, the artwork is illuminated in different colors from beneath the water surface creating a vivid and lively illumination picture. The project cost was approximately 250 000 € and is partly financed by the Baltic Sea Fund of Ålandsbanken.



KRISTIANSAND - FROM GRAIN SILO TO KUNSTSILO

by Øyvind Laderud | Øyvind.Laderud@kristiansand.kommune.no
photos by Alan Williams and Statsarkivet / Agderbilder.no



Kunstsilo is an award-winning, former grain silo on Odderøya in Kristiansand, Norway, that has been transformed into one of Northern Europe's most innovative power-houses for art and cultural experiences.

In 1935, during the economic hardships of the Great Depression, Kristiansand, embarked on an ambitious architectural project: the construction of a grain silo. Designed by architects Arne Korsmo and Sverre Aasland, the functionalist structure stood as a testament to modernist design, with its clean lines and geometric form making it one of the city's earliest examples of this architectural style.

Fast forward to the 21st century, and this industrial landmark was poised for a remarkable transformation. In 2015, art collector and philanthropist Nicolai Tangen made an extraordinary donation to his hometown Kristiansand - his private collection of Nordic modernist art. This unexpected gift sparked an idea: Could the grain silo, built during the same era as many of the artworks in the collection, be reimagined as a home for these works? By 2016, a competition was launched to redesign the silo into a contemporary art museum. The winning proposal, crafted by Mestres Wåge Architectes, Mendoza Partida,

and BAX Studio, balanced historical preservation with modern innovation.

Renovation began in 2019, meticulously maintaining the original concrete structure and its 30 cylindrical grain silos. These silos now form the heart of the museum, creating a dramatic entrance hall where natural light filters through, offering visitors a distinctive spatial experience. A glass-covered bar and event space were added atop the museum, providing breathtaking panoramic views of Kristiansand's coastline and blending old industrial charm with contemporary elegance.

New function in the original form

Now aptly named Kunstsilo ("Art Silo"), the museum officially opened its doors in May 2024, with The Tangen Collection at its core. Containing about 6500 works, this world-class collection is one of the largest assemblages of Nordic modernism from 1910 to 1990 and offers a rich and diverse perspective on art from the Nordic countries.

The transformation of the grain silo into Kunstsilo is a remarkable example of adaptive reuse, breathing new life into an industrial relic while enriching Kristiansand's cultural landscape. This project not only preserves a key part of the city's architectural heritage but also establishes a vibrant hub for arts and culture, drawing visitors from around the world and firmly placing Kristiansand on the international art scene. Kunstsilo's innovative design and cultural significance have garnered widespread acclaim. In 2024, Time Magazine named Kunstsilo one of the "World's Greatest Places". Likewise, The New York Times included Kunstsilo in its prestigious "52 Places to Go in 2025" list, cementing its reputation as a global cultural destination.



WARNOWQUARTIER IN ROSTOCK

by Andrea Basedow | andrea.basedow@rostock.de
photos by Rostocker Gesellschaft für Stadterneuerung, Stadtentwicklung und Wohnungsbau mbH (RGS)
and Staab Architekten GmbH, Berlin

The "WarnowQuartier" a pilot project for the holistic revitalisation of inner-city areas – a new urban area in the City of Rostock that connects multiple areas and strengthens social cohesion.

Right on the riverside of the River Warnow the new "WarnowQuartier", an innovative and sustainable urban district, is being created. It will be a place, where people can live and work in the centre of the city. It will provide a new place to live for up to 2,000 people in addition to 1,000 jobs. In 2019, the City of Rostock was selected by the German Parliament as one of only seven model municipalities in Germany to develop the district.

What do we want to achieve with the neighbourhood?

The aim is to create an integrative urban quarter for all generations that strengthens the sense of neighbourhood and togetherness and prevents segregation by creating high-quality, differentiated public spaces. The "WarnowQuartier" will be a low-car neighbourhood designed to meet the needs of pedestrians and cyclists, encouraging greater use of public transport. This will help us to achieve our goal of a city of short distances.

We want to create a modern, green neighbourhood that is designed with the climate in mind. To do this, we are looking for modern building ideas for the different areas. Each plot will have its own concept, which will be judged by a jury to see if it meets the set quality criteria and is given a prize.

In addition to quite commercial and residential space, a multi-generational house and a production workshop for the Rostock Theatre will also be set up in the district. The federal government is funding these projects with a total amount of around 25 million euros. The city is receiving a further 7.5

million euros in funding from the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

A roadmap to success

The development of the entire area will take around ten years. First of all, the public utilities, water, wastewater, heating, electricity, paths, squares, roads and public open spaces and playgrounds will be built by 2028, while the two subsidised construction projects – the theatre workshops and the multi-generational house – will be built parallel by 2028/2029. The best architectural concepts for these two projects were already selected in a competition.

In spring 2025, a broad online participation process was launched to get ideas on how to design the playgrounds and meeting places in the area. We are hoping for many good ideas from the people of Rostock and a high level of participation in the creation of public spaces.

In a few years, the "WarnowQuartier" will be a new urban neighbourhood that meets the demand for inner-city housing and commercial space. People of all generations from all parts of Rostock are invited to enjoy, relax, be active and creative in the area.



RESILIENT URBAN FORESTRY IN MALMÖ



by Bodil Olsson | bodil.olsson@malmo.se
photo by Edit Stormwalther

European cities, including Malmö, face challenges from urban densification and shrinking green spaces, when prioritizing infrastructure over ecological resilience. This article explores Malmö's strategies to address these issues through urban forestry, focusing on practical solutions for sustainable urban environments.

Malmö's industrial growth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reshaped its urban landscape, leading to densely built neighborhoods with minimal green spaces. The city's focus on industrial and residential efficiency resulted in fragmented green infrastructure and a reliance on monoculture tree planting, making it vulnerable to ecological disruptions. The Dutch Elm Disease outbreak in the 1980s, which devastated 25% of Malmö's street trees, highlighted the fragility of its urban forest.

Reshaping the Urban Forest

In response to the elm disease crisis, Malmö created a detailed tree inventory database to monitor tree health and manage risks. This initiative laid the foundation for a strategic shift towards species diversity and resilience. By documenting species composition and tree placement, Malmö identified imbalances and vulnerabilities in its urban forest, leading to targeted planting strategies.

Malmö adopted the rule 10-20-30 devised by Research Geneticist at the US National Arboretum Dr. Frank Santamour, which limits the dominance of individual species, genera, and families to reduce ecological vulnerabilities. This framework guided the city's efforts to diversify its tree population, integrating native and site-adapted species to enhance resilience. Today no individual species exceed 10 percent.

Using data from tree inventories, Malmö aligned its planting strategies with environmental constraints and urban planning goals. Species were chosen based on their tolerance for urban conditions, ensuring their survival in challenging environments. Innovative planting techniques, such as structural soils and rainwater harvesting systems, were introduced to improve tree health.

Malmö's urban forestry efforts include a cross-departmental Tree Group, which coordinates citywide urban forestry efforts and the "Grönare Möllan" which addresses canopy coverage deficits in one of Malmö's densest neighborhoods. These initiatives demonstrate Malmö's commitment to integrate trees into urban planning and address specific environmental challenges.

Green outlook

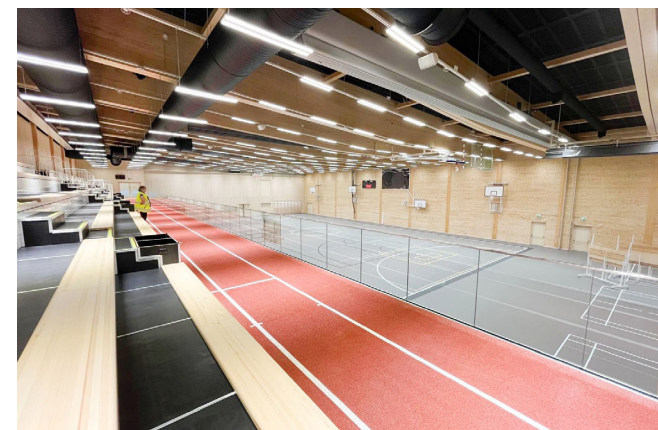
In 2023, Malmö adopted the 3:30:300 principle, aiming to ensure every resident can see at least three trees from their home, achieve 30% tree canopy coverage in neighborhoods, and guarantee all residents live within 300 meters of a green space. This principle reflects Malmö's focus on equitable access to greenery and addressing disparities in green infrastructure.

Malmö's integration of green infrastructure into urban planning demonstrates a methodical approach to addressing environmental and social challenges. By prioritizing species diversity, resilience, and equitable access to green spaces, Malmö aims to improve the quality of life for its residents and serve as a model for other cities striving for sustainable urban environments.

THE NEW WOODEN-STRUCTURED ARENA IN KEMI



by Jukka Vilen | jukka.vilen@kemi.fi
photos by Kemi Municipality



A new multi-purpose hall, Kemi Arena, was completed next to the swimming hall in the Sauvosaaren sports park in Kemi.

The wooden-structured multi-purpose arena is located in a prominent area of Sauvosaari, right next to Kemi's inner harbor. The building's frame is made of massive, laminated timber, the external wall structure is CLT (cross-laminated timber), and wood has also been used for the facade. The City of Kemi is committed to low-carbon solutions and sustainable development, making ecological wooden construction a natural choice for building materials. The total area of Kemi Arena is approximately 6,000 square meters.

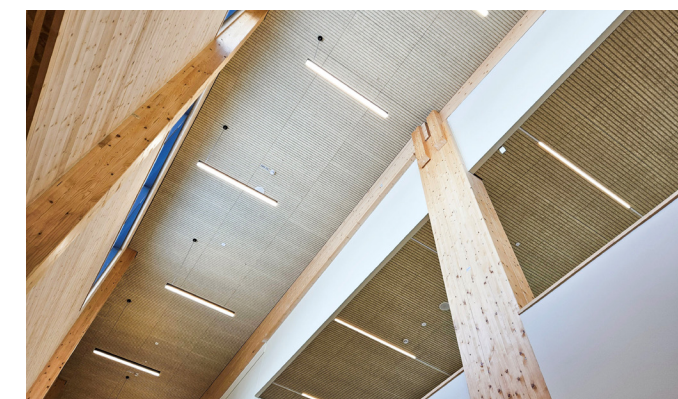
Multifunction facility

Kemi Arena provides space for various indoor sports, including a bowling alley, tennis courts, a combat sports hall, and a mirror hall with views of the sports park. The main

hall, "Areenasali," covering over 1,800 m², is designed for futsal, basketball, volleyball, and floorball at the top league level. The wrestling hall can also be used as a dance studio, with additional opportunities for fitness boxing and strength training with gym equipment. The arena also includes a 50-meter-long, three-lane sprint track.

Bowlers have access to 12 lanes, and spectators can follow bowling competitions either behind the lanes or on TV screens in the arena's café. In addition to bowling, table tennis, and tennis, Kemi Arena offers space for many other sports, from rhythmic gymnastics to combat and ball games. The telescopic stands on the arena's balcony can accommodate 470 spectators, and when the foldable floor-level stands are included, the total number of seats exceeds 600.

Kemi Arena also serves as a venue for trade fairs and cultural events. The arena was officially opened in August 2024.



A TREE FOR EVERY CHILD - TALLINN'S COMMITMENT



by Kerttu Märtin | Kerttu.Martin@tallinnlv.ee
photos by Tallinn Strategic Management Centre

Tallinn has launched a project combining local identity with sustainable development and nature-oriented perspective.

In an increasingly urbanized world, trees play a vital role in creating healthier, more resilient cities. They help mitigate climate change by cooling urban heat islands, managing heavy rainfall, and preserving biodiversity. Green spaces also have a well-documented positive impact on our well-being, often in ways we don't consciously recognize. Moreover, investing in greenery is not just an expense - it's a long-term investment in the future. Trees are the oldest living elements of urban landscapes - some of Tallinn's oldest trees, still standing today, date back to the 18th century.

For Estonians, a forest nation at heart, trees hold deep emotional and cultural significance. For centuries, families have planted trees to mark life's most meaningful milestones - graduations, marriages, and the birth of a child.

Implementing cultural heritage into the city strategy

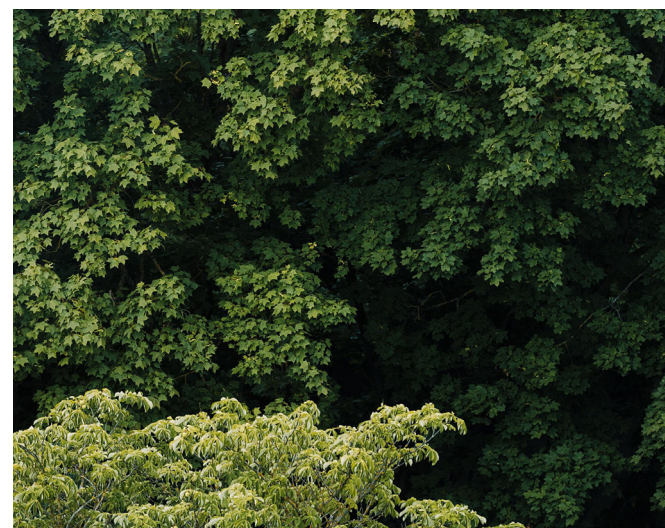
Starting in 2025, this tradition will become part of Tallinn's greening strategy. For every child born in our city, we will plant a tree, strengthening both our natural environment and our community ties, the latter being especially important in our present fastly changing World.

Raising trees and raising children share many similarities: both require a nurturing environment, proper care, and time to grow strong, bringing joy to future generations. However, planting trees in an urban setting is a complex challenge, requiring careful consideration of factors like traffic, pollution, or underground infrastructure. Planting trees for every newborn is an initiative that goes

beyond just planting trees. It also emphasizes environmental education, helping people understand the importance of trees and teaching them how to plant and care for them.

Each tree planted through this project will be marked both in urban spaces and on an online map, symbolically connecting young Tallinners to their birthplace. This visibility will also help ensure the trees receive special public protection.

We also encourage private property owners to join us in celebrating a child's birth by planting a tree and adding it to our shared map. Together, we are cultivating a greener, more sustainable future for Tallinn.



UMEÅ'S ROAD TRAFFIC TRANSFORMATION



by Thomas Lundgren | thomas.lundgren@umea.se
photos by Umeå Municipality



In 2024, a ring road around Umeå city was completed. This also marked the start of a transformation of the previous European roads through the city, turning traffic routes into city streets, and the development of new city blocks in central locations.

"The ring road and the transformation it enables are an important part of developing Umeå into a modern, healthy and sustainable large city. While we are connecting the parts of the city and making room for thousands of new homes and businesses, residents and visitors will have cleaner air to breathe," says Janet Ågren, the municipal councilor responsible for overall planning.

Umeå has long struggled with extensive traffic in the city center. This has led to exceeding the environmental quality standards for air quality (nitrogen dioxide), which has limited the possibilities to develop the central city with new homes and businesses.

For this reason, a ring road around the city has been built to move the regional and internal through traffic away from the city center.

This has enabled a new direction for the former European routes and connecting land:

- The roads will be transformed from traffic routes into city streets with more space for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport.
- Land previously used for traffic facilities and extensively

used industrial land can now be used for new mixed-use urban blocks with housing and businesses.

Measures taken to prevent future problems

Even before the completion of the ring road, the air quality in central Umeå has improved, and the conditions for meeting the environmental quality standard will improve even further as traffic through the city center is redirected to the ring road.

However, in the long term, the challenge will be to prevent air quality from deteriorating again as the urban area grows from its current 100,000 residents to nearly 150,000 by 2050, according to the municipality's goals. This means that many more transports of people and goods will need to take place on the city's streets.

An increased share of electric vehicles improves the prospects for meeting the nitrogen dioxide standards. However, there is a risk that the particle standards will be exceeded as traffic increases since particle levels are linked to traffic volumes. In addition, congestion on the city's streets is increasing.

To deal with this, car traffic must be restricted on streets where the environmental quality standard is at risk of being exceeded. The distribution of means of transport throughout Umeå also needs to be changed. The proportion of journeys made by car needs to be decreased and replaced by foot, bicycle or public transport. "It is exciting to see how the city is now being transformed", says Janet Ågren and adds: "We will take the lessons we now learn with us into the creation of the future Umeå".

JELGAVA - GREEN CITY

by Karīna Lukaševiča | Karina.Lukasevica@jelgava.lv
photo by Jelgava Municipality



Jelgava, the fourth largest city in Latvia with a 760-year history, has been implementing innovative solutions to become a sustainable and environmentally friendly city for living, working and leisure.

Jelgava has become a model for how cities in the Baltic Sea region can successfully develop, while maintaining ecological balance. More than 80 wild horses in the heart of Jelgava city, electric buses, and LED lighting solutions are just a part of the city's achievements in creating a green, healthy and sustainable environment. These initiatives demonstrate that modern technology and nature conservation can go hand in hand, shaping a city, where people live in harmony with their surroundings.

Energy-efficient LED lighting

One of the key elements of Jelgava's sustainable urban environment is its modern LED lighting system. Through targeted streetlight replacement projects, the city has reduced energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. Several improvements have been made, including the reconstruction of the street, park, and square lighting, the establishment of a street lighting simulation site with an informational stand, and the replacement of outdated sodium lamps with 5,269 energy-efficient LED luminaires.

New lights are equipped with controllers and a remote management system, allowing for more efficient lighting control. Data shows that the actual results after implementation have exceeded initial expectations, leading to greater-than-anticipated energy savings. Jelgava has launched a new project that will ensure 80% of the city's lighting is energy efficient.

Eco-friendly electric buses

Jelgava's public transport system has undergone significant changes, with the introduction of four electric buses - an important step toward a cleaner and quieter urban environment. These buses provide environmentally friendly transportation by producing zero emissions and significantly reducing air pollution. Buses are both eco-friendly and cost-effective, contributing to Jelgava's goal of becoming a carbon dioxide-free city by 2030. The green transition must continue, as evidenced by the cost difference in transportation expenses and the amount of diesel fuel saved by using electric buses. Jelgava city is also friendly to electric vehicles, with the number of charging stations and electric cars growing rapidly.

Wild horses in the heart of the city

In the center of Jelgava, on the Lielupe floodplain meadows, lies a unique European nature reserve, where over 80 wild horses graze freely. These animals help maintain the natural ecosystem and promote biodiversity, attracting eco-tourists and nature lovers. Jelgava stands as proof that urban development and nature conservation can coexist harmoniously.



VÄXJÖ MUNICIPALITY - PEP INITIATIVE

by Helena Larm | Helena.Larm@vaxjo.se
photo by Lina Alriksson



Växjö Municipality has become part of Generation Pep's network as a "Pep Municipality," a commitment that means the municipality will actively mobilize to promote the health of children and young people.

Since 2024, Växjö has been part of this important work and collaborates with Generation Pep to create conditions that ensure all children and young people in the municipality have the opportunity and desire to live an active and healthy life.

The Pep Municipal initiative focuses on implementing a systematic approach to children's and young people's eating habits and physical activity. It is a long-term effort aimed at changing and improving the structures that currently affect the health of children and young people. Växjö Municipality is determined to actively work on these issues and has already taken important steps in creating a sustainable and effective health strategy.

Together with Generation Pep, Växjö Municipality gains access to the latest research, tips, and support from experts in the field, as well as the opportunity to participate in exchanges of experience between different municipalities.

Implementing a holistic approach

The Pep Municipal initiative is based on seven key themes, grounded in ISPAH's eight investments to promote physical activity - an internationally recognized standard that is scientifically based and proven effective. These investments aim to create a physical and social environment where children and young people have the best possible conditions to move, eat healthily, and thrive both physically and mentally.

To ensure structured and sustainable work, Växjö Municipality has established five cross-sectoral working groups focused on preschool, school, urban planning, health care, sports and recreation. These groups are tasked with ensuring a cohesive strategy to promote children's and young people's health.

The 'Health Ladder'

Within Växjö Municipality's schools, a strategy called "Hälsostegen" (The Health Ladder) has been developed. The goal of Hälsostegen is to provide all students with equal opportunities to develop good physical and mental health. The strategy also aims to contribute to increased security, improved focus, and a better learning environment for all students. Hälsostegen is a concrete example of how Växjö Municipality is working to create sustainable and positive effects on the health of children and young people both in and outside of school.

Växjö Municipality is committed to challenging and changing the structures that currently affect children's and young people's health. By being a Pep Municipality, Växjö is taking an important step towards long-term promotion of a healthy and active lifestyle for all its young residents.



SPORT AND ACTIVE RECREATION PARK MEŽS IN VALMIERA

by Māra Grinberga-Šilaua | mara.grinberga-silaua@valmierasnovads.lv
photo by Valmiera Municipality



Valmiera county, located in northern Latvia, is known for its rich natural landscapes, vibrant cultural heritage, and strong sense of community. Surrounded by forests and the Gauja River, the region actively promotes sustainable urban development while preserving its natural beauty. With a growing focus on active lifestyles and public well-being, Valmiera continues to develop inclusive spaces that enhance both social cohesion and environmental resilience.

THE FOREST sports and active recreation park integrates aesthetics with social and environmental well-being, transforming a former asphalt heat island into a visually inspiring, inclusive, and ecologically responsive public space. The park offers diverse areas for movement, play, and relaxation, with facilities like a skating park, pump track, streetball court, and outdoor exercise elements. The seasonal landscape of native trees and plants enhances sensory experiences with changing colors, textures, and natural shade.

Designed with community input, THE FOREST fosters a sense of belonging and social interaction, inviting spontaneous encounters and collective activities, from action sports to family gatherings. Seating and gathering spaces support both active and passive recreation, uniting diverse groups. A key aesthetic strategy was the integration of built and natural elements. The park's green infrastructure – tree clusters and a rain garden – reduces heat, absorbs CO₂, and provides shaded areas. Eco-friendly materials like pine bark mulch minimize environmental impact while complementing the natural aesthetic. Cohesive architectural elements ensure visual harmony throughout the park. The initiative reflects the needs and lifestyles of young people, providing a safe, modern urban space where they feel included and valued.

THE FOREST park tackles global challenges related to climate change, urbanization, public health, and social inclusion by providing scalable, community-driven solutions at the local level.

Addressed issues are as follows:

- The project transforms a former asphalt heat island into a green, biodiverse space, mitigating urban overheating.
 - Tree planting, rain gardens, and eco-friendly materials reduce CO₂ emissions, enhance air quality, and improve urban resilience.
 - Sustainable drainage solutions prevent excessive runoff and reduce flood risks, making the park climate-adaptive.
 - THE FOREST addresses the global rise in physical inactivity, a key factor in non-communicable diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular issues, and mental health disorders.
 - The multi-functional park design, including a skatepark, pump track, and outdoor fitness zone, promotes active lifestyles for all age groups.
 - The participatory budgeting process led to the initiative of a planned expansion of outdoor fitness equipment, ensuring accessible year-round exercise opportunities.
 - The initiative empowers local residents, making them active contributors to urban development.
 - By incorporating co-creation workshops and participatory decision-making, THE FOREST promotes inclusive governance that strengthens civic engagement.
 - Multi-generational design ensures that the park is a shared space for youth, families, and elderly residents, fostering social cohesion and intergenerational exchange.
- By integrating sustainability, public health, and social inclusion, THE FOREST provides a replicable model for cities worldwide, offering local solutions to global urban challenges.



KAMIANETS PODILSKYI - RESIDENTS AT THE SPOTLIGHT

by Yulija Verstivska | investmd@kam-pod.gov.ua
photo by Kamianets Podilskyi Municipality

Kamianets Podilskyi takes initiatives in various fields towards a more sustainable, efficient and resident-friendly city. Despite obstacles resulting from the current situation the municipality aims to improve the standard of living of its residents.

Housing and Communal Services

As of January 1, 2024, the housing stock of the Kamianets-Podilskyi City Territorial Community consisted of 790 multi-apartment residential buildings.

There were certain issues that needed to be addressed:

- Unsatisfactory technical condition of housing facilities; high level of wear and tear of engineering communications;
 - Physically outdated equipment and technology in housing and communal services enterprises;
 - Deterioration of public amenities, including street and road networks.
- To carry out capital repairs, reconstruction, and modernization of the housing stock, a number of programs have been implemented in the city to support residents in performing these works, namely:
- The Program for Supporting Capital Repairs of the Housing Stock of Kamianets-Podilskyi for 2023-2027 and
 - The "Warm Home" Program.

Renevabe energy: Cogeneration

The city has received four cogeneration units free of charge through the USAID project. The first two units are already operational. The benefits of generating our own energy for the community are substantial:

- Meeting Long-Standing Needs: We are fulfilling a long-

term need by providing hot water to residential buildings during the non-heating season at a significantly lower cost than using a boiler.

- Enhancing Energy Security: We strengthen the community's energy security by ensuring backup power for hospitals and critical infrastructure during blackouts.
- Utilizing Self-Generated Energy: The generated energy can be used for city needs, such as street lighting.
- Budget Savings and Revenue Generation: We reduce budget expenses for maintaining the enterprise and create the potential to earn income from selling electricity.

The consumers gain year-round hot water at a price twice as low as using a boiler. Furthermore, continuous hot water supply will be maintained even when there is no electricity in the building. Last but not least by switching away from boilers, residents contribute to energy conservation, helping to counteract the enemy's plans.

Architecture and city design code

In 2019, the city council initiated an open architectural competition. Among nine projects, the jury awarded first prize to the Kyiv-based bureau Quader.

From classic and post-Soviet buildings to modern design: fragments of cobblestone remain in the center of the street, while the rest is covered with light-gray and dark-gray paving. A bike path winds along the street, and a significant portion of the space is occupied by market stalls. As noted by a reader of Khmarochos, there is already a grocery market literally across the road. The project is in the implementation phase, and we hope to bring it to life after the war.

KIEL: MULTI-FUNCTIONAL USE OF SPACES

by Cathrin Truckenbrodt | Cathrin.Truckenbrodt@kiel.de
photo by Siller Landschafts-Architektur, Jakob Siller



Over the past few years, the City of Kiel has fundamentally renovated the historic sports facility „Kilia-Sportanlage“ and turned it into a modern, multifunctional sports venue.

Originally designed solely for soccer, the facility can now also host league matches and major events at the highest sporting level for football and baseball. However, the facility not only serves as venue for various types of sports, but shall also function as a popular meeting place in the neighbourhood and event venue in the near future. This project has set a new standard for the development of sports facilities in Kiel and the region and promotes the strong sporting identity within the city.

Smart design

In order to accommodate the sports of soccer and baseball, a new artificial turf pitch for soccer was created in the first construction phase. In a second construction phase last year, a combined baseball and grass pitch with state-of-the-art watering technology was built. Both sports areas have LED floodlighting so that training and league matches can be played all year round. This cross-sport use is an important step towards a more sustainable use of space. Due to the lack of space and the growing demands on resource conservation, it is becoming increasingly relevant for sports to share the available space. For example, the soccer pitch, which is used for seasonal matches from September to May, is used by footballers for league play in the summer months.

The responsible architect's office „Siller Landschafts-Architektur aus Kiel“ developed a venue which is not only

designed as a training center, but also as a venue for top-class league matches and events. It has one of the oldest wooden grandstands in Germany (built in 1919) and a newer scaffolding grandstand, which together offer space for over 1,400 spectators. The capacity is needed as the football team plays in the 1st Bundesliga and the baseball team in the 2nd Bundesliga. The soccer club is Kiel's best soccer team after the Bundesliga club Holstein Kiel.

Meeting place for the community

There are already concrete plans to develop the club house and functional buildings into an inviting meeting place for people in within the district.

The development of the Kilia sports facility is a role-model of how cities can reconcile the needs of modern sport with the requirements of sustainability and space optimisation. The multifunctional use of the sports areas not only promotes sport itself, but also strengthens the social and economic importance of sport in Kiel. The project shows how sports facilities can also function as cultural and social meeting places that strengthen the sense of community and improve the quality of life in the long term.



KIEL

A RENEWED URBAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

by Björn Grönholm | bjorn.gronholm@turku.fi
photo by Turku Municipality



Urbanization continues to shape the landscape globally and in Europe including the Baltic Sea region. Many Baltic Sea cities have been forerunners in sustainability for many years and are now even more driving to become global leaders in sustainability. Several of our cities are annually present on the global arena when discussing solutions for a more sustainable future.

The Baltic Sea Region is undergoing significant growth, spurred by sustainable investments and rapidly developing economies. On the same time, we are facing a lot of challenges, from geopolitical tensions to uncertainty with the global economy. These influence directly on the development of regional and urban development, on spatial planning, investments and even single buildings or public areas. Despite these challenges, Baltic Sea cities are committed to implementing investment plans while ensuring sustainability, resilience, security, and affordability in both spatial planning and building design.

New agenda?

The global challenges are setting new standards in urban development. As our priority is to focus on well-being of our inhabitants, we also investigate sustainable, efficient and innovative solutions. The lifecycle of urban investments is usually long, more than 50 – 100 years and our challenges are to come up with solutions that are adjustable for multiple use during the lifecycle. Urban development is under pressure as the needs of business areas and residential areas is changing even faster. Circular economy goals are on the agenda through several global policy documents and the constructions sector is following the market needs and demands. The New Urban Bauhaus has been on the Eu-

ropean Commission agenda during the last years and will shape the urban development for the next years too. Important is to remember that we already have a lot of good practices and solutions are identified. Many UBC members present good practices, case studies, innovations in design and construction, examples of multifunctional design buildings, creative ideas for regeneration of abandoned areas and implementation of modern urban solutions. Our cities are planning and running Innovative renewable energy and transport solutions in reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change. New urban greenery models influencing on human health by providing areas for relaxation and recreation are developed and new models for public spaces focusing on social integration and safety have been piloted in our cities.

Flexible approach addressing current needs

Building a secure and inhabitant-friendly Baltic Sea Region involves a multifaceted approach that includes sustainable urban design, renewable energy solutions, and community-focused initiatives. By integrating these elements into spatial planning and building design, the cities in the Baltic Sea Region can ensure sustainability, resilience, security, and affordability for all its inhabitants.

Young people in UBC member cities are encouraged to contribute to urban trends by providing their perspectives through articles and other forms of expression. Several cities are running projects including young people, students and the civic society in urban development. Including youth, listening to their opinions is valuable in shaping the future of safe and sustainable urban development in the region.

A MIXED-USE DISTRICT IN KALMAR

by David Einarsson | david.einarsson@kalmar.se
photos by Kalmar Municipality



Recently, Kalmar applied to the New European Bauhaus, Local initiatives, with the project SURE-Kalmar (Sustainable Urban Regeneration and Engagement in Kalmar). The goal was to initiate a design dialogue with stakeholders in a centrally located area with potential to transform into a new sustainable district in Kalmar. The application was approved as one of 20 EU projects recognized for their potential to exemplify sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion.

How cities can develop while minimizing climate impact is a pressing issue. Kalmar has experienced a population increase of approximately 10,000 people over the past decade. Given its geographical situation, the growth of Kalmar is complex, to the south and east lies the coast, which faces flood risks, while to the west there are valuable farmland and cultural landscapes. This has resulted in lengthwise expansion and increased demand for transportation and parking.

Using untapped potential

To foster sustainable lifestyles like cycling and walking, planning should prioritize central areas. Our project site, Gamla industriområdet (the old industrial area), is despite its name a fully active business district with over 200 companies, 100 hectares, located just 1-2 kilometers from Kalmar's city center. However, the area lacks housing and green spaces, making it ideal for sustainable urban transformation. Since the municipality owns almost no properties in this area, cooperation between private property owners, businesses, and local stakeholders is essential. The dialogue process involved NEB community experts and included eight stages, with three major workshops and a special session with the

youth council to gather their visions. The discussions centered on Kalmar's growth ambitions and local stakeholders' needs and dreams.

The opportunity for development is evident. The long-term vision is to create a mixed-use district that fosters a life close to workplaces, housing, parks, and meeting places. By integrating green-blue infrastructure and reusing existing buildings, we can reduce climate emissions.

To present our work, Kalmar municipality participated as an exhibitor at the New European Bauhaus festival in Brussels in spring 2024. Visitors from around the world attended, and among 60 exhibitors, Kalmar showcased its dialogue process, a 3D model, VR visions of the future, and a film showing the area from a cyclist's perspective.

As a continuation of the NEB work, Kalmar is developing a foresight method through ShiftSweden, a national program supported by Vinnova. The project now has a more in-depth focus, conceptualizing the future of Gamla industriområdet through ongoing workshops.

Follow www.kalmar.se/sure-kalmar for more information about our work.



MODERN PUBLIC SPACES IN CHERNIVTSI



by Larysa Kovryk-Tokar | businesscity.cv@gmail.com
photo by Chernivtsi Municipality

Modern public spaces play a crucial role in urban development, providing a comfortable environment for both residents and visitors. They serve as meeting points, cultural hubs, and recreational areas. In Chernivtsi, a European city with a rich history and architectural heritage from the Austro-Hungarian era, there is a deep understanding of the importance of well-thought-out public spaces that preserve the city's spirit while meeting contemporary needs.

A prime example of this seamless blend of tradition and innovation is the Vyshyvanka Day Square, recently renovated on Chernivtsi's Soborna Square. The reconstruction was funded by benefactors, highlighting the significance of community initiatives in preserving and enhancing urban spaces.

One of the defining features of this renewed space is its unique lighting. Throughout the square, lanterns adorned with embroidery patterns from each Ukrainian region illuminate the area. QR codes on the poles provide visitors with insights into the symbolism and characteristics of traditional embroidery from different parts of Ukraine. This not only enhances the visual appeal of the square but also serves as an educational tool, transforming it into a cultural enlightenment space.

Looking to the future remembering about the past

In addition to its aesthetic and cultural elements, the square boasts modern infrastructure, including a children's playground, new benches, bike lanes, and bicycle parking. Notably, the renovation retained the historical layout of the pathways dating back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire,

while adapting them to the needs of contemporary urban life. This is a great example of how historic locations can be revitalized to remain relevant and comfortable for today's citizens.

At the heart of the square stands a prominent embroidery-inspired installation, which is part of the space leading to a future monument dedicated to the renowned Ukrainian composer Volodymyr Ivasyuk. Additional landscaping, including trees, shrubs, and flowers, enhances the area, making it even more inviting and vibrant.

Chernivtsi is a city that seamlessly integrates European heritage with modern urban development. The restoration of public spaces, considering both historical context and community needs, is a vital step toward sustainable and harmonious growth. Vyshyvanka Day Square exemplifies how public spaces can unite history, culture, and modernity, enriching the city with new opportunities.

Background information:
World Vyshyvanka Day is celebrated annually on the third Thursday of May. The holiday originated in Chernivtsi in 2006. Within a few years, this local initiative expanded into a worldwide celebration.

XVIII UBC General Conference 2025 Słupsk/Dolina Charlotty

by Jakub Rybicki | jakub.rybicki@ubc.net
photos by Słupsk Municipality and Dolina Charlotty

Welcome to the XVIII UBC General Conference 2025 “Reinforcing UBC Member Cities’ Role in EU Policymaking and Participation in EU Funded Projects” that will be held on 4-7 November 2025 in Słupsk/Dolina Charlotty, Poland. As the European Union embarks on a new financial programming period, cities are uniquely positioned to influence and benefit from EU policies. This conference will focus on strengthening the role of cities in the EU, ensuring their priorities influence policy and funding decisions.

The agenda will address navigating new EU financial frameworks, enhancing advocacy, maximizing funding opportunities, building policy engagement capacities, fostering inter-city cooperation, and maintaining urban issues on the EU agenda.

Over 200 city representatives as well as EU officials, policymakers, and stakeholders from the Baltic Sea region and beyond, will foster dialogue and collaborations essential for urban influence in EU affairs.

Main topics to be addressed:

- EU Financial Frameworks: Challenges and opportunities of the new EU budgetary period
- Urban Priorities in EU Policies: Strategies to keep city-centric challenges and solutions at the forefront of policy discussions
- Advocacy and Lobby: Workshops to boost advocacy skills and/or efforts in influencing EU policies that concerns cities
- EU Funding Strategies: Sessions on tapping into EU funds, showcasing successful projects
- Advancing climate action through regional collaboration in the context of the European Green Deal
- Supporting Ukraine’s reconstruction and fostering regional stability

Our Conference will be also a forum for debates, sharing knowledge and experiences in many other vital topics, such as: green deal, decarbonization, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and youth involvement.

The General Assembly will be held on the 6th of November 2025. The agenda includes i.a. elections of the President, Vice-Presidents and the Executive Board for the next two-year period.

More information: <https://ubc.net/event/xviii-ubc-general-conference-in-slupsk-dolina-charlotty/>



Bridging Culture and Safety: UBC Culture and Safe Cities Commissions Meeting in Espoo



by Habib Mohamud | habib.mohamud@espoo.fi

photo by Sofiia Yakovlyshyna



and also a civil protection shelter—provided a hands-on perspective on repurposing spaces for cultural use. The afternoon featured commission meetings, while those not attending had the option to visit the Helinä Rautavaara Ethnographic Museum, an interactive cultural experience. Day two focused on best practices, with presentations from Gdańsk, Lahti, Riga, and Rakvere, sharing city-led strategies on public event security. Espoo’s Cultural Unit’s Planner outlined the city’s approach to co-creating safer spaces, emphasizing community-led implementation strategies. Workshops at GLO Hotel, facilitated by experts from the City of Espoo, sparked discussions on safety across various event settings, including indoor, outdoor, and online environments.

The evening concluded with an optional cultural program featuring the Will Funk For Food: A Fistful of Funk concert at Selloali, offering a vibrant way to experience Espoo’s cultural scene.

Exploring Helsinki’s Cultural Hubs

On the final day, attendees visited Helsinki’s Suvilahti cultural center, a former industrial site transformed into a thriving creative hub. At Tiivistämö, a presentation outlined Helsinki’s strategies for ensuring public safety at major events. The gathering concluded with reflections from commission chairs Tiina Kasvi and Kaspars Varpins, underscoring key takeaways and future collaboration opportunities.

This forum of cultural and safety experts provided a platform for cities to exchange knowledge and strengthen ties, ensuring that urban spaces remain vibrant, inclusive, and secure for all.

The UBC Cultural Cities and Safe Cities Commissions held a joint meeting in Espoo (March 19–21, 2025). The meeting offered an in-depth exploration of cultural engagement, event security and urban safety. Hosted by the City of Espoo, the gathering brought together experts and city representatives to exchange best practices and innovative approaches to fostering inclusive and secure public spaces.

A Dynamic and inspirational program

The meeting began in Espoo with a welcome lunch and an opening session at Kannusali concert hall. Attendees gained insights into the Secure Kids project presented by Kaspar Varpins. The project highlighted the role of youth in public safety. After the presentation Jussi Hietala from, The City of Espoo introduced its event strategy, emphasizing resident participation in cultural programming.

A guided study visit of Kannusali—a unique concert hall

Learning Cities Commission: Getting Stronger with Cooperation



by Matti Mäkelä | matti.makela@turku.fi
photo by Learning Cities Commission

One of the main goals of the Learning Cities Commission's activity plan for this year is to strengthen cooperation with other Commissions and main actors in the field of education.

The year started with an online partner search event for Erasmus+ programme projects, which Learning Cities Commission and Youthful Cities Commission organized jointly. The event brought together teachers, civil servants, youth workers and active youth.

"Education and youth affairs are so closely connected that there's a natural need and genuine will for close cooperation between these two Commissions," says Dmitrijs Zverevs, Chairperson of the Youthful Cities Commission. "Moreover, YCC is planning to support implementation of LCC's workshop during the next UBC General Conference. I believe there is even more space for cooperation in the future, especially in making young people's voices heard better in the education systems around the BSR."

Fruitful cooperation with BSR Policy Area Education

LCC also has a long tradition of cooperation with the European Union Strategy for Baltic Sea Region Policy Area Education. Strengthening this cooperation with new activities was also on the agenda of the LCC's meeting and study visit in Hamburg in early April. Policy Area Education coordinator Merle Andraschko from Hamburg says that the collaboration between the LCC and the PA Education has proven very fruitful in recent years: "There are key areas of synergy, particularly in addressing early school leaving and the reintegration of NEETs. Cities play a vital role in these efforts. Thanks to

the strong partnership between the UBC Learning Cities Commission and PA Education, key stakeholders are effectively engaged in advancing the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region."

One excellent example of cooperation is work that the LCC has done together with the PA Education's Flagship project School to Work. As a result of this cooperation, two parties have arranged joint conferences, workshops, and webinars, and, moreover, started new projects and disseminated the best practices.

Project manager Gunnar Anderzon points out that a collaboration between S2W and LCC provides added value for both parties: "Collaboration between two transnational networks within the Baltic Sea in the education sector brings immense value by fostering the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and innovative teaching methods across borders. By working together, these networks create opportunities for mutual learning, enhanced academic quality, and increased access to diverse educational resources. This collaborative promotes cultural understanding and enriches the collective understanding of what challenges we are up against."

Resilient Cities - Stronger and Connected Europe



by Aleksandra Markianova | Aleksandra.Markianova@rostock.de
photos by Joachim Klock and Antje Sommer



In 2025, the Safe Cities Commission, together with international partners, will organise important meetings on urban resilience.

The "Connecting Resilient Cities" project, a collaboration between the Union of the Baltic Cities and the International City Network for Crisis Management, is strengthening European crisis preparedness. Supported by the EU CERV Programme, the project encourages cities to share expertise and develop joint strategies. We have already held successful workshops in Vienna, addressing energy shortages and in Liepāja on topic of effective stakeholder communication during crises. Now, we are preparing for two significant events in 2025.

You are welcome to join us in Ljubljana from May 13 to 15, 2025, at the City Castle. During the conference, we will explore prevention and mitigation through urban planning and policy development. We will also discuss response and recovery, including the establishment and management of emergency and temporary shelters, and permanent re-housing.

If you are interested, you still may register here <https://forms.gle/ZUwQega5AKqWexhXA>

International Crisis Management Conference

Later this year, from September 10 to 12, 2025, the City of Rostock will host the project's final event. Participants will experience Germany's nationwide Warning Day, gaining insights into digital and analogue crisis communication between authorities and citizens. We will discuss essential crisis knowledge for residents to ensure swift responses to crises from their side.

A highlight of the Rostock event will be a boat trip from the Rostock City Harbour to the Baltic Sea. This scenic journey will provide a platform to discuss the unique challenges faced by Baltic Sea municipalities and potential collaborative solutions. If you want to join the Rostock event, keep an eye out, registration opens in June 2025. Come join us and make our cities resilient together!



Planning Cities Commission: “New Life of Old Places” seminar

by Paulina Szewczyk | p.szewczyk@bpp.gdynia.pl
photo by ©LiveRiga



Between 30 September and 3 October 2025, the UBC Planning Cities Commission and the city of Riga will hold the Seminar, under the working title “New Life of Old Places”.

In the spotlight this time there will be the Central Market located in the node point of Historical Riga - next to the Old Town (Vecrīga), International Bus Terminal, Central Railway Station and the River Daugava, all part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Unique potential of the area

The market is the largest one in Europe, 10 hectares in size with 30,000 square meters of covered space, and the main structures of five pavilions initially served as old Zeppelin (military airship) hangars. Over the past two decades, the Riga Central Market has faced challenges due to the rising popularity of shopping malls, leading to a decline in both visitors and tenants. To adapt to these changes, a new concept plan has been developed by the Riga Central Market to make the area more attractive.

Now the synergy between the Riga Central Market and the rest of the city needs to be enhanced. The Riga City Municipality, especially the City Development Department of Riga City Council, needs to be given a helping hand from the colleagues from the UBC Planning Cities Commission member cities to gain a fresh perspective.

Addressing common challenges

All of us, in the other cities in the Baltic Sea region, are dealing with similar challenges of transforming historical sites and finding new functions for them. Together, we can achieve better results.

The participants of the seminar will have an opportunity to listen to UNESCO World Heritage Site expert for the Historic Centre of Vienna, who will give an inspiring lecture

on Vienna's heritage preservation and management experiences, its success stories, development synergies and challenges.

The social anthropologist Kārlis Lakševics will give a presentation about the Central Market as a socio-ecological node, with the focus on evaluating the reconstruction of various other markets in Riga and the changes in attendance and perception of the market caused by them.

Bearing in mind the broader context of the challenges of the Baltic cities, the participants will have a unique occasion to learn about reducing the impacts of climate change in the city by using nature-based solutions, safeguarding biological diversity, improving the governance of the green infrastructure. Riga is currently developing its first Urban Greening Plan and will be happy to share experiences on several related aspects.

Please mark the dates of the Seminar in your calendar and start to plan your trip now!

We will inform you as soon as the registration starts.

Looking forward to meeting you in Riga!



Safe Cities Commission: projects update

by Kaspars Vārpiņš | kaspars.varpins@liepaja.lv
photos by Safe Cities Commission



In UBC Safe Cities Commission, we are committed to enhance the safety and resilience of our communities. The Commission is active in various projects.

PA Secure Kids

The European Commission's DG Justice co-funded PA Secure Kids project concluded in February 2025. The project was a vital initiative aimed at empowering children to actively participate in disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities. Recognizing the unique perspectives and contributions that children can offer, this project focused on developing sustainable and inclusive mechanisms for their involvement. By equipping children and relevant stakeholders with the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence, PA Secure Kids ensured that young voices were integral to decision-making processes related to safety and resilience. This initiative also emphasized the importance of inclusive crisis communication, addressing children's specific needs and concerns. The project team is very satisfied with the outcome of the project with real usable tools and experiences, such as Guide for including children, Crisis communication with children tool and other excellent materials have been developed not only in English, but in other BSR country languages and are freely available at <https://cbss.org/securekids/>

Connecting Resilient Cities

EU CERV co-funded project “Connecting Resilient Cities” is at its midway with an international effort to establish robust communication channels and foster the exchange of best practices in crisis management. This project brings together key players in the field - the International City Network for Crisis Management (ICNCM) and the Union of the Baltic

Cities (UBC). By creating this collaborative partnership, the project enhances cooperation among cities in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. The focus is on improving security services, developing better safety procedures, and ensuring that cities are well-prepared to handle crises. This initiative is crucial for building resilient urban environments capable of adapting to various challenges. The project had already two of four conferences (in Vienna and in Liepāja) and in year 2025 there are two upcoming conferences – Ljubljana (May 13-15) and Rostock (September 10-12) that will be combined with the UBC Safe Cities Commission meeting. More information on the project and conferences is [available at https://resilient-cities.eu/](https://resilient-cities.eu/)

Razom

The Swedish Institute funded project “Razom” (Planting the seeds for cultivating resilience and cooperation in the BSR and Ukraine) that is carried out by Swedish Defence University, Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat and Lviv State University of Life Safety has involved two representatives from UBC Safe Cities Commission to share their expertise during the project run. The project will start its first part of the Intensive study programme (ISP) during the last week of March. In total 36 young professionals from Ukraine and BSR cities have been accepted to participate in the online ISP's that will take place in 5 online sessions to learn regarding Society and security, Crisis diagnosis and management, and Resilience. Afterwards the students will be selected to participate in the second ISP that will take place as a summer university week in Poland to gain even deeper knowledge of societal security.

These projects highlight our commitment to fostering safe and resilient communities across the Baltic Sea Region and beyond. By staying informed and involved, we can continue to make a positive impact and build a stronger, more resilient future together.

Stay safe and secure!

Strengthening Democratic Resilience: Smart and Prospering Cities Commission



by Wolfgang Schmidt | Wolfgang.Schmidt@kiel.de
photo by Sabine Gerchow, Landeshauptstadt Kiel

The Smart and Prospering Cities Commission (SPCC) of the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is committed to fostering democratic resilience and urban innovation across the Baltic Sea Region. Against the backdrop of rising global challenges, our 2025 Action Plan focuses on strengthening civic engagement and collaboration through two key events.

Democracy Festivals: Inspiration for Resilience

Our first initiative takes inspiration from the thriving democracy festivals in Northern Europe. Events like Arendalsuka in Norway, Folkemødet in Denmark, and Frihamnsdagarna in Sweden have demonstrated the power of open, inclusive dialogue. We aim to bring this spirit to the Baltic Sea Region by hosting a session at the Fehmarnbelt Days 2025 in Lübeck. This event will explore how democracy festivals can reinforce civic engagement, foster cross-sector cooperation, and enhance resilience in liberal democracies.

Participants will engage with experts, policymakers, and activists in a thought-provoking panel discussion on whether such festivals can be scaled beyond Scandinavia to strengthen democratic engagement on a global level. This initiative is co-organized with the STRING Megaregion, which connects cities and regions across four Northern European countries.

Resilient Cities: Unlocking the Power of City-University Collaboration

Recognizing the vital role of knowledge exchange in urban development, our second initiative highlights the potential of partnerships between cities and universities. In autumn 2025, we will host an online event to explore how academic institutions, and municipal governments can work together to tackle challenges such as climate change, social inclusion, and sustainable development.

The event will showcase successful collaborations that have driven innovation and resilience, including insights from the SEA-EU European University of the Seas alliance. A panel discussion will bring together urban leaders, researchers, and civil society representatives to discuss how these partnerships can be further strengthened.

A Call for Collaboration

By engaging city administrations, academia, and civil society, UBC SPCC's 2025 initiatives seek to build stronger, more resilient communities. We invite all UBC members to participate and contribute to shaping the future of our cities.

For more information, please contact:

Wolfgang Schmidt (Chairman, Kiel, Germany – wolfgang.schmidt@kiel.de)

Christian Lausten Sørensen (Vice Chairman, Aarhus, Denmark – cls@aarhus.dk)

Climate Actions in the Projects of the Sustainable Cities Commission



by Mariia Andreeva | mariia.andreeva@turku.fi
photos by Hamburg University of Applied Sciences

From pilots in cities to recommendations for the whole region! UBC Sustainable Cities Commission is steering climate actions in its core directions to reduce plastic pollution, develop urban mobility, launch climate budgets, and ensure toxic-free water cycle – all with transnational projects.

Projects bring additional resources to the city wishing to advance its climate actions, and it's not only finances. An international consortium of experts from diverse professional background is equally vital, allowing the space to bounce ideas, explore creative directions, and solve the seemingly unsolvable challenges. All project activities happen within these mixed organisational families – and so things become possible.

One important milestone was reached this spring: in the EMPEREST project, led by our Commission, the project partner HELCOM issued the methodological recommendations for monitoring and assessment of PFAS in the aquatic environment. In this ambitious document, based on the massive amount of data collected under the EMPEREST umbrella, HELCOM – the intergovernmental organisation caring for the Baltic Sea environment – highlighted recent trends for the 'forever chemicals' found all around our region.

PFAS and other organic micropollutants are disruptive to health, and among their pathways to the Baltic Sea one is microplastics. In some way, it's all connected: by reducing the plastic littering on the streets, less plastic degrades into microparticles thus reducing the load of micropollutants later at the wastewater treatment

stage. Now, how to reduce the littering in the first place?

Public campaigning always works, but it's equally important to address this issue from the strategic level. In the BALTIPLAST project, the step-by-step guidelines to develop strategic and legal frameworks to reduce plastic pollution were developed and recently piloted by several UBC cities: Helsinki, Tallinn, Valmiera and Kaunas.

Turning to another consortium, in the SUMP for BSR project 6 cities are piloting various measures to increase the share of active mobility and collect data on it. The local pilots feed into the development of the monitoring and evaluation framework for Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning (SUMP) that will be an easy-to-use guideline to setting up sound local processes. SUMP for BSR will also organise a series of open trainings on SUMP topics, beginning in early 2026.

The comprehensive training programme also awaits cities in the Climate-4-CAST project: it focuses on climate budgets and is tailored to sustainability, climate, and financial departments of city administrations. UBC SCC will launch it in October 2025, stay tuned!

Discover our projects' tools and join events: <https://www.ubc-sustainable.net>

Decarbomile Project: Innovative Urban Mobility and Sustainability



by Igor Jojkic | igor.jojkic@gmail.com
photo by Sustainable Cities Commission

The Decarbomile project is a pioneering initiative aimed at enhancing urban mobility and promoting sustainability across cities in Europe. Through the application of new technologies and the redesign of urban spaces, the Decarbomile project seeks to create a replicable model of sustainable urban mobility that can be adapted to various urban environments.

As urban areas continue to grow, the need for efficient and sustainable transportation and logistics solutions becomes increasingly critical. The Decarbomile project responds to this need by focusing on innovations that not only improve the functionality of urban logistics but also contribute to the environmental goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing the quality of urban life.

Logroño - Spain

Logroño represents in DECARBOMILE the Southern European context, with its 150.211 inhabitants, which correspond to 80% of the population living around 1km from the city centre. The distribution of goods in Logroño is based on retail distribution, which uses the most urban roads in the municipality, and on wholesale distribution, which uses the main access roads to the industrial areas of the municipality. In the heart of Logroño there is a historic centre that constitutes an important tourist and commercial focus. It concentrates a large number of shops, tapas bars and restaurants, and is also crossed by the Camino de Santiago, which means that pedestrians are constantly on the streets. This district has access control systems for cars and lorries, reinforced by traffic cameras, and with access restrictions during specific times of the day. In Logroño, the transformation of an old Triporteurs hub into

a modern logistics center marks a significant milestone. The city has introduced new cargo bikes equipped with the latest Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) trackers and sensors, enhancing the efficiency of data gathering and delivery route optimization. A notable innovation is the TricyLift from Fleximodal, which further supports sustainable delivery processes. By redeveloping its infrastructure to integrate these advanced technologies, Logroño has positioned itself as a leader in sustainable urban logistics solutions.

Upcoming Workshop at the UBC General Conference

A parallel workshop during the upcoming UBC General Conference, scheduled for November 4-7, 2025, in Słupsk/Dolina Charlotty, Poland, will be devoted to the Decarbomile project. This workshop aims to further explore and discuss the innovative urban mobility and sustainability approaches presented by Logroño, Nantes, Hamburg, and Istanbul. Participants will assess the potential for replicating these use cases within other UBC member cities, exploring adaptability to local contexts and infrastructure. The session will serve as a platform for exchanging ideas and best practices, potentially leading to wider application of these sustainable solutions across the Baltic region. The UBC's involvement in this project underscores its commitment to pioneering urban development strategies that are both effective and sustainable. The forthcoming conference workshop will be a key step in broadening the impact of these initiatives, fostering a collaborative network of cities dedicated to sustainable development.

For more information, please visit: <https://decarbomile.eu>

Finalisation of the PITCH project



by Anna Sośnicka | anna.sosnicka@ubc.net
photo by Anna Sośnicka

The main aim of the recently finished PITCH project was a better integration of migrant women with the local society. The PITCH model for gender-sensitive integration strategies based on Personalized, participatory, local, and multi-stakeholder approach was prepared and pilot tested in 7 countries.

The Model is replicable and adjustable to local conditions. Close cooperation with the local authorities helps align the program with municipal needs. Mapping the demographic profile of the local migrant communities, establishing connections with local stakeholders: local language teachers, NGOs, adult education centers, entities working in a field of integration, different service providers, etc. – who will contribute to the process are important steps before starting the process.

The Model consists of 5 Phases:

- I. Participants' profiling: identifying each participant's profile, specific needs, wishes and obstacles for successful integration is held during 10 Cozy Corners, gatherings in neutral places, in an informal atmosphere, with childcare, snacks and coffee offered.
- II. Development of activities organized in 3 types of clusters, in which women participated
 - Upskilling – training of: Language skills, Digital skills (e.g. creating bank or social media accounts), Employment related skills (e.g. writing a cv) Entrepreneurial skills: writing a business plan, Study visit to business incubators.
 - Awareness rising/career guidance - promoting active citizenship, offering career support and guidance - talent discovery, skills analysis and career path design.
 - Social activities - encouraging socialization through activities

such as social cafes and neighborhood walks, fostering connections with the local community. Each of the clusters contains different paths allowing for different combinations to fit the individual needs of migrant women.

III. Design and implementation of personalized roadmaps to integration

Based on profiling questionnaires filled in by migrant women during Cozy Corners and the offer of the Activity Clusters, the Personalized Roadmaps for Integration for each woman are created. The roadmaps match individual needs of the migrant women with the most relevant activities from the Activity Clusters.

IV. Evaluation, crucial for making timely adjustments and ensuring that the needs of migrant women are effectively met.

V. Sustainability and mainstreaming

UBC input

UBC prepared a White Paper, a document introducing the main integration challenges, the PITCH Model and its 5 phases, the challenges encountered and the successes achieved, recommendations on how to use and adapt the PITCH Model to the local context. UBC organized two Regional Webinars where the PITCH Model and the White Paper were presented, and the project partners from Sweden, Lithuania and Spain shared their experiences from the implementation of the Model in their countries. UBC was also a co-organizer of the Final Conference, held on 5 December in Brussels where i.a. UBC representative took part as a speaker in the panel devoted to the Future of the PITCH, and PITCH graduates across Europe shared their experiences from the project.

MC-YOU project: description of main activities in 2025



by Jakub Rybicki | jakub.rybicki@ubc.net
photo by Adobe Stock

The project aims to empower young people to take an active role in designing and creating the cities of the future by leveraging the creative and educational potential of Minecraft. It also raises awareness among young people about the importance of sustainability and modernity in urban planning and development.

What sets this project apart is the intention to engage young people and a desire to utilize their energy and potential to tackle real life challenges. It is built on the proven power of Minecraft that most teenagers in Europe know and enjoy. By using familiar game and gamification method youngsters can use their skills for the benefit of the communities they live in.

This year the project's agenda is filled with activities that will show the tangible effects of the participants' efforts. The MC Teams consisting of young people with the support of practitioners and policymakers will organize public Agoras. They will be used as a space for the Young multipliers to hold public hearings with citizens presenting the aspects of resilient cities and use the Minecraft in the process. During the Agoras, young people will have a chance to present their vision and get opinions from all citizens interested. Having presented the ideas at the Agoras, the MC Multipliers will hold consultations with the citizens using the dedicated MC Metre.

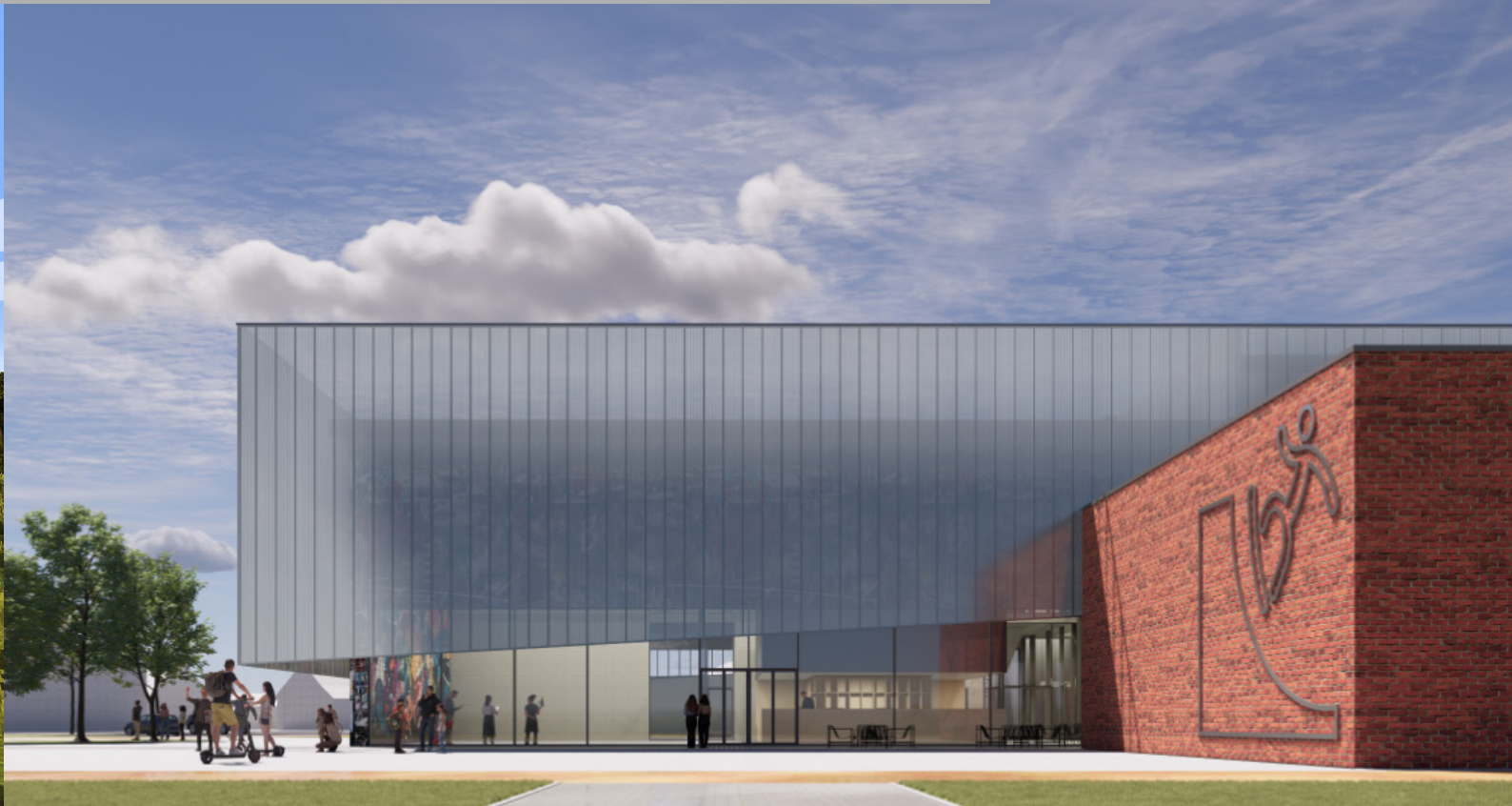
Once the piloting cycle of the MC-YOU project is done, the piloting partners, together with the MC teams, will organize a public hearing and celebratory event in which the MC teams will introduce their developed ideas and the participants will vote for the winning initiative in each

city, which will then be awarded the MC-YOU Award (1 project per piloting city). The events are expected to attract young people, youth practitioners, policymakers, and local residents.

Following the award ceremony, the piloting partners will organize a session in each city where young people will get a chance to advocate for their ideas, using Minecraft for developing resilience in cities by enhancing sustainability performances. The winning teams will have a meeting at the partner city hall with the mayor and members of the administration and related departments (youth, urban planning, sustainability) in order to advocate for a policy adjustment, which will result in a set of policy adjustments that will be presented during the sustainability events and will be the basis for the "Policy Toolkit".

Representatives of the winning teams will be invited to present their winning idea at the Sustainability Conference in Brussels. Apart from this main event there will be also: the Cities Workshop in Poland, 3 National Conferences, Innovative Youth Participatory Model on Local Level Event in Italy and New Trends in Youth Participation Summit in Germany. The aim of these conferences is to facilitate the exchange of practices and experiences for future MC-YOU initiatives as well as cooperation outside of the EU and experiences that will serve as good practices and/or lessons learned. The project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU and will be jointly implemented by 8 partners: Network partners Out of the Box (Belgium) - leader, UBC (Poland), Piloting cities (Faro, Riga, Sandanski), Youth stakeholder partners YEPP (Germany/Europe), CESIE (Italy) and quality assurance partner LINK DMT (Italy).

CITY NEWS



NEW EXTREME SPORTS CENTRE IN KAUNAS

Kaunas is set to construct a cutting-edge 4,600-square-metre extreme sports complex designed for skateboarders, BMX riders, scooter and climbing enthusiasts. Planned for Aleksotas district, at 29A S. Darius and S. Girėnas Street, the state-of-the-art indoor facility for extreme sports will be one of the largest of its kind in the Baltic region. The centre will accommodate up to 250 people at a time. Construction is expected to begin in early 2026, with an estimated investment of €12.5 million.

"Young people in Kaunas have long demonstrated that extreme sports are more than just a hobby – for many, it's a serious passion and even a professional pursuit. Our city already offers skate tracks in parks and designated areas for skateboards, scooters, and BMX bikes at Vienybės Square. This highlights the growing demand for facilities that support both active lifestyles and competitive sports—regardless of the season or weather. Kaunas is ready to take the next step by building one of the largest indoor extreme sports parks in the Baltics. It will become a major hub for young athletes, professionals, and visitors from across Lithuania and abroad," said Kaunas Vice Mayor Mantas Jurgutis.

Planned for Aleksotas district, in S. Darius and S. Girėnas Street, the state-of-the-art extreme sports centre will be designed by 414skateparks, a renowned British company with a strong international reputation for building high-quality sports facilities. The two-storey A++ energy-efficient complex will feature

dedicated spaces for skateboarding, inline skating, BMX riding, scooters, and other urban sports like climbing, parkour, and even modern pentathlon. The 4,600-square-metre facility is expected to accommodate around 250 children and young people at a time. All indoor and outdoor areas will be designed to be fully accessible to people with disabilities, making it inclusive for all members of the community.

An estimated €12.5 million will be invested in key sports infrastructure, including ramps, climbing walls, safe landing zones, trampoline areas, modern pentathlon equipment, and other essential facilities.

The centre will feature a dedicated climbing sports sector, highlighted by an 18-metre-high climbing wall. Additional outdoor features will include a reduced OCR (obstacle course racing) track, an outdoor velotrack, and various other elements designed for community use. In addition to sports, the center will also house cafés, shops, and workshop spaces, creating a vibrant hub for athletes and visitors alike.

The design process is already underway, with public consultation procedures successfully completed. The technical design and building permit documents are expected to be finalized by the third quarter of 2025. If everything proceeds as planned, construction is expected to begin in early 2026.

Once completed, this state-of-the-art sports centre will be one of the largest of its kind in the Baltic States, offering amateurs, professionals, and extreme sports enthusiasts new opportunities to train, compete, and push their limits.

by: Lina Duobaitė | lina.duobaite@kaunas.lt



WE MAKE THE TRANSITION IN GDYNIA

In Autumn 2024, Gdynia hosted the Gdynia Transition Arena, part of the We Make Transition! project to address urban environmental challenges. Organized by Gdynia City Hall in collaboration with the Baltic Institute for Regional Affairs (BISER), the event gathered local stakeholders to co-create sustainable solutions for the city.

A Collaborative Process

Around 50 participants, including city officials, business owners, NGOs, and activists, joined in three workshops focused on sustainability. The event was structured around three workshops that allowed participants to dive deep into the issues facing Gdynia. The first workshop divided the group into three teams: Greenery, Zero Waste, and Mapping Sustainable Initiatives, and two of the following meetings focused on those fields. During the last workshop, the participants developed concrete pilot projects, which were then voted on.

Key Challenges Identified

Several issues were highlighted, including poorly connected green spaces, lack of public awareness about parks, inadequate waste management, and overreliance on single-use utensils. Additionally, participants noted the need for a central platform to connect residents with sustainable services.

Systemic barriers, such as unclear regulations and limited coordination among stakeholders, were also discussed. Engaging local communities in decision-making emerged as crucial for long-term sustainability.

Results and Future Plans

One key outcome was selecting a pilot project to reduce single-use items by creating a shared dishware depot for public events. This initiative aims to reduce waste by allowing event organizers to rent reusable dishes and utensils. The project will be tested in 2025. Beyond pilot projects, the Transition Arena helped strengthen local networks by fostering collaboration among city officials, businesses, and residents. This participatory process has increased community engagement and built momentum for future sustainability initiatives.

A Model for Future Cities

The success of Gdynia's Transition Arena serves as a model for other cities to address urban sustainability challenges through collaboration and innovation. As Gdynia continues its sustainability journey, the lessons learned will guide future efforts to become a greener, more resilient city. The Gdynia Transition Arena marks an exciting first step towards a sustainable and environmentally conscious future.

by: Marta Jarosińska | marta.jarosinska@gdynia.pl

THE WILD WEST IN THE HEART OF THE BALTIC

Behind us is the most exciting event of this winter season—the 22nd International Walrus Plunge in Mielno, the largest event of its kind in Poland, Europe, and quite possibly the world! Mielno is the global capital of winter swimming, where the warmth of friendship can heat even the coldest waves. As per tradition, the second weekend of February marked the 22nd edition of the Plunge, with this year's theme centred around the Wild West. As a result, our town was filled with cowboys, arriving on horseback or on foot, with colourful hats adorning the entire town. In cowboy culture, the hat is a symbol of respect, and in Mielno, it was a sign of joy, energy, and new records being set.

The four-day celebration was packed with entertainment, catering to both seasoned winter swimmers and newcomers eager to experience their first icy dip. This year, participants had the chance to ride a zipline or an incredibly long slide straight into the Baltic Sea, compete in sports events, dance to live music at the Grand Walrus Ball, and unwind in hot tubs and saunas.

Key Highlights:

- 8,132 participants took part in the final plunge during the 22nd edition of the event.
- Approximately 350 people ensured the safety of the event on land, on the beach, and in the sea. This team included paramedics, doctors, security staff, lifeguards, divers, police officers, municipal guards, border guards, firefighters, and

- volunteers.
- Krystyna Galara, aged 98, became the oldest participant of the Plunge. She is a regular winter swimmer at the "Zdrowe Morsy Dębowa" club in Kędzierzyn-Koźle.
- The Editor-in-Chief of "Bezpieczna Woda" magazine awarded a special individual prize to lifeguard coordinator Wojciech Reperowicz and extended heartfelt thanks to the West Pomeranian WOPR and WOPR Płock for their outstanding efforts in securing the event.
- All event information was accessible via a dedicated app - "MroźnaAppka."

Mayor of Mielno, Adam Czycz, summarized the event: "Each Plunge is not only a celebration of people with exceptional resilience to the cold but also an opportunity to build connections and celebrate together. This year, I especially want to highlight the importance of supporting local entrepreneurs, who, with passion and dedication, create unforgettable experiences, attractions, and products for visitors. Mielno is a place where tradition meets modernity, and local businesses - from small restaurants to multi-generational guesthouses - are an integral part of our success.

That is why I sincerely thank the winter swimmers for discovering the charm of our small Baltic town and for embracing the offerings of our local businesses. At the same time, our entrepreneurs deserve great applause for the heart and soul they put into their work. Thank you, winter swimmers and "seals," for being part of our community. I hope that Mielno will always be a place you long to return to."

by: Julia Różańska | j.rozanska@gmina.mielno.pl



DARŁOWO – A CITY FULL OF EVENTS IN 2025

Darłowo is a Baltic city that attracts tourists every year not only with its beautiful beaches and rich history, but also with unique cultural events. The year 2025 will be special for Darłowo - the city is celebrating the 80th anniversary of Polish Darłowo, and on this occasion, events commemorating this anniversary will be held throughout the year. The calendar will also include festivals and events that have been building Darłowo's reputation as a place with strong cultural and artistic traditions for years.

Days of Darłowo - tradition and entertainment

Days of Darłowo is one of the most important holidays in the city calendar. It is a time of concerts, outdoor events, exhibitions and festivals that integrate residents and attract tourists. In the jubilee year of the 80th anniversary of Polish Darłowo, the event program will be even more extensive and will refer to the history of the city.

International King Eric of Pomerania Award

One of the most prestigious events in Darłowo is the International King Eric of Pomerania Award, awarded to people who have made outstanding contributions to the idea of European integration and international cooperation. Previous winners include Jerzy Buzek, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Romano Prodi. The award ceremony takes place in the unique setting of the Pomeranian Dukes' Castle,

highlighting the historical heritage of the city.

Media and Art Festival – a center for debates and meetings

Darłowo hosts the Media and Art Festival, which attracts famous journalists, people of culture and politics every year. Discussions, panels and meetings with creators make this event one of the most important intellectual festivals in Poland.

Scandinavian Film Festival – northern cinema in Darłowo

Referring to the city's Scandinavian roots, the Scandinavian Film Festival presents films from Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland, bringing viewers closer to the cinematography of the north. This is an opportunity to watch award-winning productions and get to know the unique style of Scandinavian cinema.

Reggaenwalde Festival – music, rhythm, energy

In the summer, Darłowo turns into a reggae music center thanks to the Reggaenwalde Festival. Every year, the event attracts lovers of positive vibrations and performances by artists from Poland and abroad.

The year 2025 in Darłowo will be full of events of a diverse nature – from concerts and film festivals to prestigious galas and historical ceremonies. Thanks to this, the city will once again confirm its position as an important cultural center on the map of Pomerania.

by: Mariusz Chruściel | m.chrusciel@darlowo.pl

WOMEN'S ERA – PARTNER SEARCH

Era Kobiet (Women's Era), an association dedicated to promoting gender equality, is interested in establishing a long-term partnership for the period 2025-2030. During this time, we plan to apply for various funding opportunities to sustain and expand our initiatives. We believe that collaborating with your organization could bring valuable perspectives and strengthen our efforts in advancing gender equality. It would be wonderful to explore potential ways to work together.

Our primary mission is to advocate for equal rights for women and men through various initiatives, including organizing Women's Congresses and Civic Cafés. We actively bring these events to smaller towns, ensuring that educational opportunities on gender equality reach communities that often lack access to such resources. Our key educational initiatives and campaigns include:

1. We run the West Pomeranian Women's Rights Center, providing free legal, psychological, and civic counseling, as well as support in combating domestic violence. This center operates in part of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and includes a 24/7 crisis hotline.
2. Through the Women's Network, we implement campaigns focused on preventing violence, advocating for women's rights, and promoting human rights.
3. A significant part of our work includes publishing informational materials related to our counseling services, as well as campaigns addressing exclusion and discrimination based on gender, age, race, and religion.

Our initiatives respond to the needs of all individuals who value human rights—including women's rights and animal rights—which is why we engage in a variety of areas. Members of our association include local councilors from Koszalin, Polanów, and Gryfino, and we are actively involved in various NGO councils, monitoring committees, and nationwide organizations.

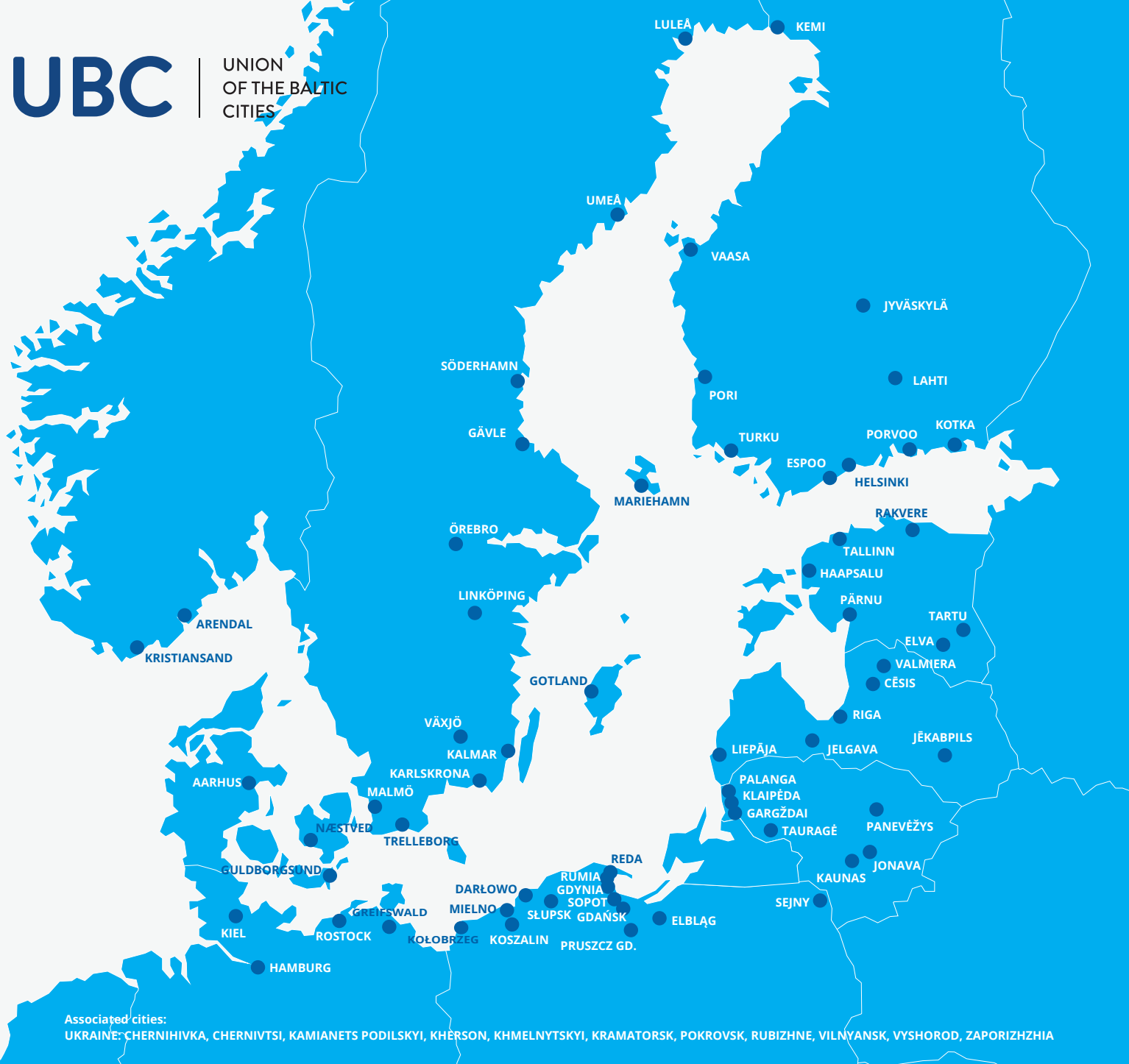
Koszalin, where our organization is based, is a city in northwestern Poland, located near the Baltic Sea. It is the second-largest city in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship and serves as an important cultural, academic, and economic center in the region. Koszalin is known for its strong local community engagement, as well as its dynamic development in education and social initiatives. The region is characterized by its coastal proximity, beautiful natural landscapes, and a mix of urban and rural areas, which influences the diverse social needs we address in our work.

We would like to inform you that there will be another edition of our Erasmus+ project proposal in October under Key Action 2 (Cooperation among organizations and institutions). You can find more details about the program here: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/pl/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2>.

Please let us know if you would be interested in discussing this further.

For any inquiries, feel free to contact:
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UBC – working together to foster sustainable, smart and safe cities

Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region with the members from nine Baltic Sea countries. Founded in 1991 in Gdańsk, UBC is a voluntary, proactive network mobilizing the shared potential of its member cities for a safe, smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region. The UBC cooperates with numerous Baltic and European organisations.

The UBC's practical work is carried out through active cooperation of the member cities in eight thematic Commissions: Cultural Cities, Inclusive and Healthy Cities, Learning Cities, Planning Cities, Safe Cities, Smart and Prospering Cities, Sustainable Cities, and Youthful Cities. The Commissions coordinate and execute specific projects, activities and events.

Any coastal city or any other city interested in the development of the Baltic Sea Region may become a member of the UBC – please contact the UBC Secretariat.

www.ubc.net

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