

**UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES
COMMISSION ON URBAN PLANNING**

**ACTIVITY REPORT
OCTOBER 2009 - DECEMBER 2010**

The Union of Baltic Cities (UBC) Commission on Urban Planning (CUP) started its work in 1999. During the followed years the CUP has built a network of urban planners coming from a large number of cities around the Baltic Sea.

The main activities of the UBC Commission on Urban Planning during the period between September 2009 (after the general Conference in Kristiansand) and December 2010 have concentrated on continuation and strengthening the cooperation within the Commission's network and organising two annual seminars.

The Tampere seminar April 14th – 17th, 2010

The Commission on Urban Planning had its 21st seminar in Tampere, Finland. The seminar theme "Edges of the City Centre and Reuse of Traffic Areas" concentrated on an acute question in many cities, namely increasing the density of city centres and avoiding urban sprawl. Also climate change and sustainability in urban planning were taken into account in the seminar programme, as Mr Oras Tynkkynen, the Finnish Government Climate Policy Specialist, gave a presentation about urban planning in low-carbon societies. The seminar workshops concentrated on two traffic areas: the first workshop on a lake shore area next to a busy highway that needs to be connected to the urban structure and the second workshop on reuse of the former railway cargo station area. The City of Tampere is planning big investments in the form of a tunnel and a new sports and concert arena to improve the areas, and the workshops made their own proposals for increasing the city density in those areas. The former traffic areas and creating new use to them is a common problem in many Baltic cities.

An important part of the seminar has always been the exchanging of experiences between professional urban planners. In Tampere there were 40 seminar participants from Russia, Scandinavian countries, Baltic countries, Poland and Germany. The eruption of the Eyjafjöll volcano in Iceland caused many seminar participants problems in travelling back home, but fortunately everyone got back home almost in time with alternative transportation methods.

The Siauliai seminar October 6th – 9th, 2010

The Commission on Urban Planning had its 22nd seminar and meeting in Siauliai, Lithuania in October 7th-9th. One of the aims of the seminar was to find ways to increase the attractiveness of the city and to discuss how urban planning could help the city to keep its present inhabitants and possibly even increase the number of population.

Siauliai used to be a very important and innovative industrial city where new industrial methods were taken to use as the first place in Lithuania. Siauliai also has the oldest pedestrian street in Lithuania, which is just one example of the up-to-date touch of the local planners. But due to the economical turmoil, there are only a few new investments and unfortunately also the maintenance of the old structures has been rather poor. Partly because of this the CUP seminar concentrated on finding good examples of positive urban development. There were very interesting presentations from Hamburg HafenCity, from Odense and from Umeå, in which cities the local administration's active approach to solving problems has led to fine results despite economical and political difficulties. One of the main conclusions of the presentations was, in fact, that the cities that are active in finding ways to solving their problems are the ones that survive. The global economic changes affect all the cities and they all have more or less difficult political issues, but an active approach to finding ways to carry on new projects is essential – like in all of the three example cities we heard that seeking financing possibilities together with private enterprises and different state or EU programmes has made it possible to carry out very impressive projects.

The seminar workshops concentrated in creating new use for the former Frenkelis leather factory area and for developing the city centre and the surroundings of the pedestrian street. There were lots of useful proposals for renovating old industrial buildings for the use of education, culture, NGOs and for apartments and also for improving the built environment with new parks, pedestrian and biking routes, adding light and creating new places of attraction for different age groups of inhabitants.

The CUP seminar got lots of positive attention from Lithuanian media as there were stories in the local TV channels, in the local newspapers and in the Lithuanian radio.

The CUP Steering Committee

Since April 2008 the members of the CUP Steering Committee are Mr. Lars-Göran Boström from Umeå, Mr. Niels-Peter Mohr from Århus, Mr. Marek Karzynski from Gdynia, Mrs Mara Liepa-Zemesa from Riga and Mrs Sirpa Kallio from Helsinki as the chairperson of the commission. In 2010 the CUP Steering Committee has had 2 preparatory meetings with the seminar host cities' organizations a few months before the seminars and also numerous e-mail and phone meetings of acute issues regarding the administration and planning of the activities of the CUP. The

CUP does not have a secretariat nor a steady organisation in addition of the Steering Committee.

In 2011 there will be changes in the composition of the CUP steering group as Mr Boström will finish working for the City of Umeå.

Coming events in 2011

The Commission on Urban Planning will have its next seminars in Växjö in April 2011 and in Tartu in autumn 2011. The title of the Växjö seminar is "Innovative Districts", as the seminar workshops concentrate in connecting isolated university campus area and a business and industrial area to the city centre. Also, in Växjö there will be discussion about sustainability in construction as Växjö claims to be "The Greenest City in Europe".

The aim of the Commission on Urban Planning is to continue sharing information and experiences of important urban planning issues. With high standard lectures the members of the CUP network have a chance to study different themes in an open-minded atmosphere together with colleagues around the Baltic Sea. In this work both the financial support from the UBC and the seminar host cities is essential.