

Communications and marketing in the UBC Strategy 2015–2017

Report to the UBC Executive Board in Stockholm, 10 November 2016
UBC Communications Manager Irene Pendolin
irene.pendolin@ubc.net / +358 40 848 6242

1. POSITIONING OF “BRAND UBC” IN 2015–2016

Based on the UBC Communication and Marketing Strategy, our communication work has been re-structured and developed during recent years. New communication channels have been opened and a major visual and strategical renewal process is under way, including a “face-lift”. (UBC Strategy 2016–2020, Annex 2.)

- 1.1. **UBC’s face-lift is complete** and the **new UBC logo** has been launched both in web and print applications. There are two versions of the logo: the main logo and in addition a marketing logo, see: <http://ubc.net/commissions/ubc-communications-network/materials>

The **new UBC website** www.ubc.net was opened in June 2016, and the feedback has been extremely positive: commissions and member cities see the new website as modern, fresh, easy to access and to use and also visually attractive – a good calling card for the UBC. The old website is still available at www.former.ubc.net but no new information is updated there. It will continue to exist most likely until end of 2016. The possibility for commissions – maybe even member cities – to update the website should be discussed to increase activity and stakeholder engagement.

Proposal:

- Monitor the use of UBC’s visual look (e.g. logos) in commissions, gather additional feedback of the communications and marketing renewal as well as future needs of the commissions and, if needed, provide further assistance for the commissions in communications and marketing.
- Recommended organising a joint meeting/workshop of the commissions (including commissions’ communications officers) to discuss and learn about how to get commissions’ messages across on the new website and social media as well as learn how to update the site – one person in each commission could get basic training and be permissible to update the commission’s pages. It is recommended that this person is the commission’s communications officer.
- Note: UBC’s Communications and Marketing Strategy emphasizes the importance of arranging workshops for UBC members and commissions so that they will “get the opportunity to learn how the strategy can be translated into concrete practice”.

- 1.2. **The Baltic Cities Bulletin** has also been renewed according to the new visual look of the UBC. Other applications are currently (in October 2016) in their final stages: new **general brochure**, new **PowerPoint** templates and **roll-ups**. These will be applied for the first time in the EUSBSR Forum in Stockholm in November.

Proposal:

- Recommended that the Baltic Cities Bulletin is developed further both visually and content-wise to answer to the requirements of the UBC brand and strategy so that the Bulletin will contain more visual and editorial content around a specific theme in

each issue, including guest authors from EU institutions etc., as well as showcase the achievements of the commissions and member cities. Recommended cutting down on the general stories of the cities. Recommended that the issues' themes be connected to UBC's strategical goals.

- It is also recommended that the Bulletin is in the future published in a **digital format** rather than printed. Moving to e-Bulletin would be cost-effective, environmental-friendly and modern way of communicating UBC's messages. The e-Bulletin would be promoted through UBC's digital newsletter (newsletter template is at the moment in process).
- Note: UBC's Communications and Marketing Strategy calls for a shift from traditional channels and media to digital media and is supported by the results from UBC's Communications Seminar (organized in Turku in 2015).

1.3. In **social media** we have continued to be more systematic and visual in our updating and the results have been good. In the future we should work even more to improve the synergy within the whole organisation. Being visible and active in the social media is part of UBC's branding process and requires the effort of the whole organisation: commissions, member cities, all persons connected to the UBC.

Proposal:

- Recommended organising a joint meeting/workshop of the commissions (including commissions' Communications Officers) to discuss improving synergy and cooperation.
- Recommended that all commissions open a Facebook account and apply the new UBC commission logo as the profile picture. In addition, recommended the commissions share each other's (commissions', cities') posts, cooperate more closely with each other and the UBC Secretariat and keep each other up to date about what is happening in all parts of the UBC organisation.
- Establishing Twitter and LinkedIn accounts for the UBC and making an implementation plan for them.

1.4. **UBC's brand and messages** have become more clear and recognisable due to the new UBC website as well as other renewed applications, e.g. the new general brochure, roll-up, PowerPoint template:

Working together to foster sustainable, smart and safe cities – Boosting cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region – Leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region

Proposal:

- **Core brand messages should be used throughout the UBC organisation: “Sustainable Cities”, “Smart Cities” and “Safe Cities”.** This doesn't mean that the commissions cannot have their own, more targeted messages. Instead it is about using these main messages as a basis for all UBC's messages – they can with slight variations be used to all target audiences, as demonstrated in UBC's Communications and Marketing Strategy (p. 10).
- All commissions' work can, in principle, be organised around these three focus themes – **this is a strategic decision which should be taken by the Executive Board.** Then all commissions could in the future “tag” their communication in accordance with the three strategic themes. UBC's core values and themes should be portrayed e.g. in the results the commissions achieve and communicate.
- Sustainable Cities Commission has their own communications specialist who can help in these processes – all the other commissions can always ask for consultation and help from UBC's communications manager.
- Recommended organising a joint meeting/workshop of the commissions (including commissions' communications officers) to discuss how to implement the UBC brand (including visual aspects, social media etc.) and UBC's core brand messages.

2. IMPROVING OUR MESSAGES, APPLICATIONS AND METHODS IN 2016–2017

When launching a new visual look and applications – including website – for an organisation, it is a continuing development process where we assess the needs of the member cities and commissions together with them and operate according to the discussions, ideas and feedback we receive. Therefore we are not yet “ready” – the development work continues.

- 2.1. We are continuing to **develop the new website** according to the feedback we receive (ideas, comments, bugs etc.) as well as transfer relevant information from the old website to the new and save the contents of www.former.ubc.net before it ceases to exist.

Proposal:

- Not all information from the old site is transferred to the new one, only the relevant contents. Information on the old website will be copied for storage as reference of the past work done and UBC’s history.

- 2.2. **UBC newsletter template** will be ready by the end of the year – newsletter system could be operational from the beginning of 2017. UBC Communications Manager is currently looking into the different possibilities as well as possible costs.

Proposal:

- UBC Communications Manager will continue to look into the newsletter issues as well as the possibility of transferring to e-Bulletin, supported by a digital newsletter (as discussed previously).

- 2.3. Methods – improving the ways we work together

However, the stature of communications must change – it must be understood as vital dimension of all work and integrate it internally, externally and across all UBC activities on daily basis. [...] Coordination and cooperation with UBC Commissions to ensure that their valuable work is better known. (Among priorities to be ensured, UBC Strategy 2016–2020, Annex 2.)

In this we yet have work to do. We need to cooperate more closely, share information and keep each other up to date about what is happening in all parts of the UBC organisation. **Intranet** is one possibility in improving this as well as organising **joint meetings of the commissions** (as discussed previously). Very basic Intranet is included in the current contract with the design agency KMG. In addition, the **Commissions’ representatives and the Secretariat could benefit from meeting together** once a year to discuss operational matters.

Proposal:

- Starting the planning of the possible intranet for the UBC, evaluation of needs and possible extra costs accordingly.
- Recommended organising a joint meeting/workshop of the commissions (including commissions’ communications officers) to discuss the needs and ideas concerning the intranet as well as other ways of communicating more efficiently with each other.
- Recommended that a meeting of the commissions’ representatives and UBC Secretariat is organised e.g. every autumn to discuss the work, events and dates that will be carried out the next year.

Another aspect is developing the functions of UBC’s **Communications Network**.

Continued work of UBC Communications Network, consisting of Member City experts (Among priorities to be ensured, UBC Strategy 2016–2020, Annex 2).

The network consists at the moment of 37 cities’ communications representatives and UBC commissions’ communications officers. We aim to offer the members a valuable professional network and attract more cities to nominate their representatives. In order to achieve this, we need to provide

them added value. This is also connected to the number of UBC member cities which has been declining (at the moment 86). We should aim to intercept this course and attract new member cities as well as make sure that we provide value to the current members – why is it worthwhile for a city to become and remain a member of the UBC?

Proposal:

- During spring 2017 a seminar/workshop for the Communications Network could be organised in conjunction with the UBC Board meeting in February/March. One of the topics could be serving the current members and attracting new ones. Simultaneously or even jointly, the meeting/workshop of the commissions (as discussed earlier) could be arranged. This doesn't imply that all meetings should be face-to-face – but to establish new ways of cooperating and working, meetings are in order.

2.4. Communications services

Provision of tailored communication services to target groups (Among priorities to be ensured, UBC Strategy 2016–2020, Annex 2).

The new UBC **website** (and social media) offers an arena where the member cities and commissions can showcase their know-how – this opportunity needs to be marketed and used more. The renewed UBC applications such as PowerPoints are part of the **tools** we can provide – “UBC in a nutshell” etc. Furthermore, UBC's Communications Manager is always available for **consultation** in matters of communications and marketing. UBC “**boost campaigns**” in the member cities could be organised to make UBC's know-how and services more known to the member cities and encouraging them to get involved as well as act as UBC ambassadors.

Proposal:

- Brainstorm boost campaigns and other possible needs the member cities and commissions might have in the seminar/workshop in February/March (as discussed previously).

2.5. Showing our work and know-how – brand building and lobbying

Fully utilizing the important work carried out within UBC, its Commissions and Task Forces, such as in the field of sustainable development and in promoting Youth employment and Well-being, by promoting widely these results and by organizing events as follow-up. [...] Proactive and energetic approach towards communicating and lobbying on EU-level. (Among priorities to be ensured, UBC Strategy 2016–2020, Annex 2.)

This is a task to be done **together with representatives of UBC bodies**: Secretariat, Presidium, heads of Commissions, task forces and working groups, members of UBC Communications Network. The Urban Forum and the BSR Urban Award have previously been raised as possible means/arenas – Urban Forum would be one way of making the Commissions' work visible to a larger audience. The Forum could be arranged in conjunction with the General Conference – more resource-efficient and more visibility.

Proposal:

- Events or hearings with EU institutions could be arranged, e.g. on the implementation of the EUSBSR from a city point of view or other themes. All in all, **cooperation with EU institutions and lobbying needs to be coordinated by the Executive Board.**
- Suggested that Executive Board mandates a working group to come up with suggestions on how to proceed – WG members should include Secretary General and Communications Manager.
- Suggested that UBC Executive Board chooses a Board member to monitor the implementation of UBC Communications Strategy and communicational issues.

In addition, a **plan for media activity** should be created, as well as **media lists** for the Baltic Sea Region. UBC needs to start **proactive media work** and inform the BSR media about our aims and

especially our results – what we have accomplished. This should also be taken into consideration when planning the next UBC General Conference in Växjö – it would benefit the UBC to get more media attention.

Proposal:

- UBC Communications Manager will allocate her resources to develop UBC's media work as described above. Communications around the General Conference will be planned together with the Strategy Task Force.

2.6. Looking into the future

Updating of Communications and Marketing Strategy when the results of the renewal process are visible and under evaluation (Among priorities to be ensured, UBC Strategy 2016–2020, Annex 2).

The renewal process is still active, thus evaluations and updates have not yet been made except for the feedback we have asked after the launching of the website.

Proposal:

- Evaluations and updates on the strategy should be done in 2017 and 2018.

Securing continuity of professional Communications work by extending work of dedicated UBC Communications Manager beyond end of 2016 and strengthen the communications capacity within the Secretariat (Among priorities to be ensured, UBC Strategy 2016–2020, Annex 2).

At the moment, the contract of UBC's Communications Manager has been extended until the end of June 2017. However, work yet to be done in communications and marketing will extend beyond that date into the UBC's future. Communications should be, as said in the UBC's Strategy, "understood as vital dimension of all work" and therefore it should be integrated "internally, externally and across all UBC activities on daily basis".

Proposal: Continue to develop UBC's communications and marketing beyond June 2017 by extending the work of UBC Communications Manager and by strengthening the Secretariat's and the UBC's overall communications capacities.