

## UBC STRATEGY

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### **I. Introduction**

1. Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) was established in 1991 immediately after the collapse of the Iron Curtain in Europe and was the first wide-open forum for the local authorities in the Baltic region. The original purpose was co-operation and exchange of experiences.

2. Since its creation, the UBC faced a number of political changes in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and in Europe. Also, UBC experienced a dynamic growth from 32 founding cities to 86 member cities in early 1999. The city population is around 84 million, while the whole Region has the population around 100 million, of which half are the EU citizens.

3. Nowadays the BSR has become the area of intensive cross-level co-operation, enjoying peaceful and democratic co-existence of its nations, where varied interests meet. The cities in the BSR are the main actors where practical co-operation in the area takes place. Traditionally, they have been and still are the centres of cultural achievement, of diversity, of creativity and vectors of economic development.

4. In the Baltic Sea Region, co-operation is an important tradition. Multi-level numerous networks representing different interests have been established. E.g. Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) represents co-operation at the national level; other organisations represent regional level. In addition to these, there are numerous organisations and networks that represent various interests in the Baltic Sea Region. This spirit of co-operation is a valuable asset for a stable political, economical, peaceful and sustainable development in our region.

5. The UBC role is to promote and strengthen co-operation and exchange of experience among the cities in the Baltic Sea Region, to take care of common interests of the local authorities in the region, and to act on behalf of the cities and local authorities in common matters towards regional, national, European and international bodies.

6. Local democracy and local self-government must always be seen as important developments while developing UBC strategies. Democratisation of life, changing political environment, as well as new challenges for the cities in this context evoked the need to develop cohesive Strategy for the Union of the Baltic Cities, which would contribute to the “sustainable development of the Baltic cities and the Region in Europe”.

7. Thus, following the Visby Baltic Sea States Summit’s Declaration of 1996 and Baltic Sea Region Initiative of the European Commission, Kalmar Programmes and Northern Dimension, and in

accordance with them, the UBC wishes to contribute to promoting the Baltic Sea Region as the region where "co-operation, democracy and market economy prevail".

## **II. The Cities in the Baltic Sea Region**

8. Different approaches to define what a Baltic Sea Region city is are possible. First, in sensu stricto, the Baltic Sea Region city is located only in the sub-regions adjacent to the Baltic Sea. In sensu largo, the Baltic Sea Region city is located in the sub-regions and states which are not located directly on the sea but who are traditionally, economically and culturally connected with the region. Not going into detailed scientific and political delimitation, UBC welcomes as its new members the cities interested in contributing into development of the BSR and mutual co-operation, regardless of their size. It is believed that membership in the UBC will be beneficial both to large and small cities alike.

9. The cities constituting the UBC are located in the Baltic Sea Region. The cities vary in size, population, as well in their roles as European, regional and local centres. However, they always play a significant or major role in their respective regions and can have impact on the regional policies.

10. The Baltic Sea Region cities stem from the common culture, history, and maritime heritage. The Baltic cities can be characterised by great potential for multilateral development, tremendous dynamism and motivation displayed to co-operate within the Region.

11. The Baltic Sea Region cities are located in the European Union, in the nations seeking membership of the European Union and in countries that are not seeking EU membership.

12. The Baltic Sea Region cities are of crucial importance to regional, national and international economies. All have a huge potential in terms of human resources, production, trade and heritage. They face the challenge of adapting themselves continuously to rapid changes in economic sectors and in other fields.

13. Despite the apparent political, economic and social disparities, the cities form a partnership, involving their respective communities, which effects in co-operation rather than competition. Measures to secure security and well-being of citizens, sustainable development, primary education, social care, infrastructure, physical planning are the major link between local governments and the foundation for co-operation.

14. The main aim of the cities is to secure well-being of their citizens and to secure the sustainable development for the benefit of the coming generations. City operations cover a vast spectrum of activities to accomplish this, from technical, educational, social and other areas to planning for the future both strategically, as well as spatially. Among the city staff there are numerous experts in many fields. The UBC offers a forum for co-operation in all these fields.

## **III. Urban Environment and Challenges**

15. The Baltic Sea Region cities provide a "living space" to their inhabitants. Therefore, the quality of life and sustainable development carry a crucial meaning for the cities. Unemployment, social security, environmental protection, economic development, security, transportation, communications, energy, education and culture are basic factors in local development and of common interest. In particular, the Central and East European cities (CEE) have special needs in terms of: strategic planning, information policy and public participation, human resources, infrastructure, revitalisation of residential areas, housing, reconvertng industrial sites, architectural heritage and environment.

16. A modern city's challenges revolve around the ultimate aim to improve the living standards and quality of life of the local population. However, the basic condition for the cities to fulfil their

obligations and tasks is appropriate autonomy, with full respect to democratic procedures enabling a wide citizen participation in the decision-making process.

#### **IV. Common Goals**

17. The Baltic Sea Region cities have a common goal to achieve a sustainable development of the whole region, providing possibilities of economic growth with full respect to the environment and principles of social justice, namely the right to work, health protection and education.

18. Internationalisation of life and common interests makes the cities mobilise their actual resources to become partners and to take steps to enhance regional integration. Within the integrating Europe, the Baltic Region forms an important and viable unit, with centuries-long traditions in economic and cultural exchange.

19. The future of the European Union and the Baltic Sea Region rests on the ability to give a strong local and regional voice. Cities, as Pillars of European integration, with their identities and significance in the Baltic Sea Region will contribute to forging the links through neighbourhood, trade, culture and creating common history. Thus, UBC arranging and deepening ties and co-operation between the cities will achieve the goal of voicing common regional matters.

20. UBC further recognises the importance for European stability of ever-closer links between the BSR and the European Union.

21. The cities will seek to safeguard and promote their interests within the Region towards national and international organisations, and especially towards the EU. It is then in the common interest of the UBC and these organisations to strengthen competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region towards other European and world regions. Competitiveness and growth of the BSR is beneficial to all the region's actors together and individually.

22. The Baltic Sea Region cities seek to reinforce the image of the UBC and the BSR in the European Union. There is a European dimension to the future of cities, which are affected by the policies and legislation passed by the EU.

23. European integration has brought new dimension and development conditions for the member states and their local communities over the last 40 years. Their achievements are enormous. However, they also bring with them new problems and new challenges that the cities must meet. The UBC wishes to be conceived as the cities' gateway to the EU and to pave the way for a better future for its citizens.

24. One common interest of the Baltic cities is to foster communication ties and to develop respective networks with other actors. Next, preservation of ecosystems of the Baltic Sea and taking advantage of the tourist and cultural attractiveness of the Region is among common interests.

25. It is important to strengthen the feeling of regional commonwealth, i.e. through cooperation in the field of scientific research and upbringing of the next generation. Sustainable regional development will be achieved in close collaboration with the BSR actors and the EU.

26. The fundamental condition for cities development is their belonging to the common, uniform system rooted in shared European values and providing common European opportunities. UBC member cities wish to promote the decision process in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

27. UBC wants to be perceived as a professional and political organisation with clear vision towards the future, respecting differences among and sometimes various interests of its members.

28. In the eve of the XXI century, UBC as an active representation in the Baltic Sea Region seeks recognition as a strong political city organisation wishing to contribute to its democratic, secure, just and well-off citizen-friendly environment. Striving for common and regional interests and within the common European system, the network of the cities wishes to be recognised by the European Community as an active partner in the BSR.

29. UBC wishes to establish good working relations, as well as develop joint projects through co-ordinated efforts of the interested organisations, and if possible create common platform of mutual understanding in the Region by the establishment of a framework allowing for comprehensive exchange of opinions and experiences.

30. In particular, one should observe and join the process of developing the EU' s Urban Agenda in order to establish propose position of cities in the EU. UBC wishes to be involved in the process of generating projects under the Structural and Cohesion and other funds.

31. To achieve this, UBC must have regular working contacts with the Baltic Sea states' representatives to the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the Committee of the Regions. The possibility of using national, regional and major cities' offices to represent the UBC' s interests in Brussels should be also considered. It is believed that this regional contact and dialogue with these institutions on issues related to European regional and urban policy will contribute to the well-being of the whole region.

32. It should be seen to, however, that the UBC Policies fit with the cities' own policies relating to employment, education, crime, housing, public health, environmental protection and sustainable development, etc.

33. The UBC as an organisation wants to be widely known and well recognised as the city network around the Baltic Sea. Therefore, it will develop its own public relations programme and implement it by the information, experience and know-how exchanges. International networks and co-operation between towns encourage not only the exchange of experiences in local and regional management techniques but also form the basis of new programmes. These networks are particularly important in the new context of closer ties with towns and cities of Central and Eastern Europe.

34. In the nearest future UBC should offer its member cities a quality consulting, assistance and lobbying. Here lobbying of three kinds is meant: lobbying of common regional interests, creating positive image of the organisation, and a network of contacts among Baltic Sea Region organisations.

35. Projects launched by the UBC and its member cities will serve primarily to exchange experience and information of relevance to the member cities of the UBC and on the other hand will help promote the UBC network.

36. Projects shall provide detailed assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the cities, as well as priority areas for actions, being in agreement with the UBC' s priorities. Among these are: EU enlargement, environmental (Local Agenda 21), and social issues such as crime prevention and citizens' security. Beside these, equality between men and women and young people issues remain in the sphere of UBC' s concerns and prospective actions. UBC will accordingly encourage its Commissions to introduce these priorities into their Action Plans, and will support their implementation.

37. UBC will see to the fact that national authorities consider local / regional authorities as partners in protecting the common environment in the Baltic Region and encourage them to build networks in this effect.

38. The UBC develops its activities, particularly in the form of the stimulation and co-ordination of collaboration and twinning between the cities within the Baltic Sea Region. Creation of alliances around precise aims will help making use of intelligent synergy with states and intergovernmental international organisations.