

UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2016-2021

Stairway towards Sustainable Baltic Cities

UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2016-2021 implements UBC Strategy and guides the whole network of the UBC towards development of a smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region. The programme gives a strategic direction to which Sustainable Development topics we work with towards our vision for the UBC cities in the future. Creating a smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region is a common and cross-sector effort.

UBC Sustainability Action programme 2016-2021 – Stairway towards Sustainable Baltic Cities is adopted as an annex to UBC Strategy by the XIII UBC General Conference in October 2015 in Gdynia, Poland.

I. Our vision for Sustainable UBC cities until 2021 and beyond

“UBC cities will be climate-smart, providing a good ground for green economy to grow, while being resource-efficient and sustainable in all their activities as well as protecting the environment and waterbodies in the Baltic Sea Region. They will increasingly be known as global forerunners when it comes to creating inclusive, diverse, democratic, gender equal, high quality living environment for their inhabitants.”

The Union of the Baltic Cities continuously recognises its responsibility for making our future a sustainable one and is committed to undertake all the efforts that this requires. We have already taken many steps together and we will continue to dedicate our work with our member cities to continuously improve our capacity and practices all around the Baltic Sea Region and build societies with a high quality of life. Many UBC cities are already forerunners in different fields of sustainability. UBC aims to support them on their way further to the top as well as guides other cities on the stairway of their sustainable development.

Challenges and developments in the BSR and Europe and the world

A common goal for people around the world is to improve their lives and living conditions for themselves and their children: we need to have secure jobs, sufficient supply of food and water, safe housing and a livable environment. Governments want to secure economic growth, ensure safety and security, create jobs and reduce poverty. Businesses want to expand and grow and make more profit.

At the same time we know that local political decisions are needed in cities to tackle many large scale challenges: combat and deal with **climate change**, improving the state of **the Baltic Sea**, vicious **environmental problems** in many parts of the world and making energy production and energy distribution more sustainable. The big challenge is to support the transformation from traditional to modern, **clean and smart technologies**.

All these challenges are global, but they get especially tangible on the local level. The guiding question is: **How do we respond to those challenges?**

We live in a highly urbanized world and have to make our cities smart in order to lead a good life.

Cities are the **key actors in making a change**: with smart city planning, smart use of resources including the human resources of their inhabitants, the use of new technology and new ways of working and co-operation this can be possible!

It can be done by protecting the urban environment, water bodies and water supplies and planning for sustainable mobility. Cities are aiming more and more at being carbon and nutrient neutral establish the principle of circular economy and industrial symbiosis to ensure a smart and sustainable development in their urban area.

We are also aware of the many social and cultural challenges facing us, and aim to work diligently towards tackling social exclusion. UBC wants to support its member cities on the way to become smart and sustainable in all possible ways.

Cooperation and liaison – our “Open house” approach

The UBC wants to be “*an open house*” for sustainable urban development. All members as well as external partners and stakeholders are welcomed to join in our effort of making Baltic Cities sustainable. At the same time, we are strongly contributing to Baltic Sea regional, European and Global partnerships and co-operation processes to advance sustainable development. Our conviction is that an “Open House”- approach is critical for bringing a long-term change for sustainability. In applying it we are implementing principles of good governance to our own work.

The UBC works in close cooperation with the **Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS)** and the **Secretariat of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)**, **VASAB** and the **Nordic Council of Ministers, Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)** and the **Covenant of Mayors** in sustainability related questions. On the regional level our work is also strongly influenced by the **EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea**, which has been a guiding document for years. The UBC also works closely with different EU institutions to contribute to the implementation of **EU 2020 goals, the EU Climate and Energy Package, the EU Mobility Package** and various **EU policies and directives**.

And as we all need to look beyond our own local, regional and national borders, UBC also takes its global responsibility, following global policy developments towards sustainable development: Globally the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”** explicitly goal 11 **Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**, decided by the UN General Assembly 25 September 2015 are guiding our work.

The UN SDGs are marking a paradigm shift- from sustainable development being an “extra topic” to finally being a central issue in everything the UN does – and this hopefully also bounces back to nations, regions and cities.

II. Our topics

Green Urban economies

A leader in green urban economy is a city that provides favourable, green and efficient infrastructure and a suitable place for green and clean tech businesses. The city integrates sustainability aspects in all its own business activities, incl. e.g. green procurement and energy efficient buildings. This results in a higher quality of life for inhabitants, incl. job creation, welfare and a clean living environment.

The Green and Clean Tech Business is one of the fastest growing business sectors globally. The “Green sector” is already a big employer within several sub sectors like waste and water management, air emission monitoring and energy efficiency, port management and maritime industry. Municipalities and cities have an important role in fulfilling the **EU 2020 targets, the EU 2030 framework for energy and cli-**

mate change and have a clear role for enabling **green growth**. Cities can strengthen sustainable growth through a range of policy instruments like pricing, urban planning, regulations, public procurement and information, but as important are strong institutional fundamentals including city leadership, effective governance and Private Public Partnerships.

Connected to growth, the concept of **circular economy** becomes more and more important: waste needs to be looked at as a resource and all resources need to be managed more efficiently through their whole lifecycle. More resource efficiency, better eco-design, waste prevention and reuse processes will bring savings to businesses (and cities), reduce greenhouse gas emissions and also bring new growth and job opportunities.

Also the concepts of **industrial symbiosis** and **share economy** are more and more important for cities to get acquainted with and to integrate into their plans and activities. Through encouraging the recycling of resources between businesses and promoting an increased collaboration and sharing of services and goods, cities will move closer to achieving their goal of being smart and sustainable.

Our goal:

To make the UBC cities global green economy leaders which provides good opportunities for innovative green and clean tech businesses and enable resource efficient economic activities

To support UBC cities on the way to a circular economy

To make UBC cities sustainable in their own economic activities

Our objectives:

- to arrange trainings and exchange of experience in circular economy related processes
- to link and connect UBC cities to global forums for smart city developments
- to facilitate development projects on circular economy, urban clean tech and smart city focus

Climate-smart Baltic Cities

Climate-smart leaders are cities that take climate change aspects into consideration in their entire decision making e.g. in urban planning, mobility planning, energy related actions (efficiency, production) and buildings etc.

UBC Cities want to take the leadership in becoming climate-smart, decreasing their greenhouse gas emissions and using renewable energy sources efficiently.

UBC cities are key actors when it comes to combat climate change in the region. They are the actors to implement smart climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies and integrate them into their everyday actions. The change in the global climate brings many new challenges for the local level and cities need to strive towards creating attractive, livable environments for their citizens. Investing in sustainable and renewable local energy production brings the potential of energy independence as well as new business opportunities in the city and the region. Sustainable urban mobility solutions and services is already becoming a key element in building attractive cities.

Many UBC Cities are already forerunners in climate work, having set ambitious goals for cutting greenhouse gases and becoming CO2 neutral cities between 2040 and 2050. We aim to support the UBC cities in reaching and taking responsibility for their targets and aligning them with the EU goals.

UBC is a signatory of the Covenant of Mayors and has established a Baltic Sea Region Covenant Club.

Our goal

To keep the UBC cities climate change leaders in Europe and globally

To initiate and implement climate smart urban development (incl. climate smart-sustainable districts mobility models, energy efficient transport – building-planning)

Our objectives:

- *to strengthen the cooperation with the Covenant of Mayors and support signatory member cities in the planning and implementation of SEAPs*
- *to increase the number of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, SUMP's in the region*
- *to establish internal working groups on sustainable mobility, sustainable energy use, and climate adaptation*

Sustainable Urban ecosystems and Natural Resources

Attractive and prosperous UBC cities have clean and safe environments and they use all resources efficiently. Nature has a valuable role for inhabitants and the general **attractiveness** of urban areas. Every city needs to have well-functioning green areas, a sound environment, highlight noise reduction and develop good ecosystem services. We strive for better **urban planning** that will be based on the **Integrated Management approach**, planning parks, urban forests and recreational areas both to increase the well-being for the inhabitants and to increase **biodiversity in the urban area**. Especially the **integrated urban planning** of urban brownfields is an essential issue for UBC cities that are constantly growing and becoming denser. This topic also connects to the challenge of **decreasing hazardous substances**, both in soil and in water bodies.

Our goal

*To make UBC cities leaders in resource efficiency, sustainable urban planning and biodiversity
To have UBC cities that decrease hazardous substances in soil and water bodies as well as keep and strengthen a rich biodiversity*

Our objectives:

- *to increase the capacity in integrated management approach for cities on urban planning topics*
- *to increase the common understanding on ecosystem services*
- *to follow the policy process on hazardous substances and support the UBC cities in good management of hazardous substances*

Baltic Sea and its catchment area

The Baltic Sea is a connecting element for all of us, the core of the region. At the same time the sea is one of the most polluted water bodies of the world and a very vulnerable ecosystem. The Baltic Sea has a multifunctional role for the whole region; a transport route, a source for fish and seafood, leisure and wellbeing, tourism and also a source for water. Many UBC member cities are located close to the shore or are otherwise closely connected to the sea and its inland water bodies.

Due to alarming state of the Baltic Sea, **improved water management** has become an important goal for the countries around the Baltic Sea. Smart planning in water issues in cities will help inhabitants and businesses to enjoy clear waters. Many UBC cities are forerunners and have taken the leadership in protection of the regional waters and the Baltic Sea by implementing voluntary actions for example in treatment of municipal wastewater. Leader cities will see the potential of the concept "from waste to recourse" when dealing with for example sludge and manure. **Integrated water management** can be one the solution for the challenges caused by climate change. In addition, it helps to battle the water pollution. **Integrated Storm Water management** and **Coastal area management** are main topics for many of the UBC member cities working with the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive. Blue growth is a key area of interest for the Baltic Sea region much due to the above mentioned reasons. Many UBC cities have big ports and are specialized in high quality shipbuilding.

Our goal
To make UBC cities leaders in integrated water management
To improve the ecological state of the Baltic Sea

Our objectives:

- *to launch a Baltic Smart Water hub*
- *to facilitate capacity building for water management and support knowledge based communities*
- *increase UBC cities capacity for integrated water management*

III Our work

Partnerships for knowledge-based development

UBC is a network organisation with seven thematic commissions. The Sustainability Action Programme 2015-2020 is a strategic document for the whole organisation, concretized by the commissions' yearly action plans. The implementation of the UBC Sustainability Action Programme is led by the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission and is reported to the UBC Executive Board and General Conference.

This Sustainability Action programme will be implemented through

- **project development and implementation** on relevant sustainability related topics together with UBC member cities and other UBC Commissions
- **support for UBC cities** through training and capacity building with **tools and methods** developed by the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission and our partners
- **benchmarking and updating the sustainability progress among UBC member cities via surveys and good practice databases**
- **networking** with you, the member cities through **regular commission meetings** and specific **conferences and seminars and thematic working groups**
- **exchange of good practices and information** by providing a learning environment that fosters on sustainability related issues through the network
- **representation of the UBC member cities** in sustainability matters on e.g. the EU level

Every UBC Commission has its own ways of working towards our objectives; however, networking and partnership-based cooperation is at the core of all our activities. Our work towards a smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region is based on a well-developed and utilised network of stakeholders, also outside of the organisation, as we also aim to provide a testing ground for corporations. We have built up long-lasting partnerships with many organisations and actors in the region and are hoping to increase cooperation also with other organisations by following other developments very carefully.

IV Our outlook on the future

A network is nothing without active members. With this Sustainability Action Programme 2016 - 2021 we want to prepare the ground for the next 5 years of fruitful cooperation, first of all with our member cities but also to take an active role in the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals decided in UN General Assembly end of September 2015. UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2016 - 2021 wants to encourage you to *become more active, to be leaders in sustainability and take the chance to make a change*. For your inhabitants. For your city. For the region. For the world.

And we are here to support you!