



UBC e-News

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Editor: Anna Sośnicka anna.sosnicka@ubc.net

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Info

- IX UBC General Conference

On 27-28 September 2007 in Parnu there will be held the IX UBC General Conference.

The main topics to be discussed are:

- climate change - cities' response
- culture as driving force for municipal development
- involvement of youth in democracy and in the life of the society.

The second day of the Conference will be devoted to the UBC internal matters, such as reports, elections, finances and meetings of the UBC Commissions.

More information about the conference can be found at:

<http://www.ubc.net/today/IXth-general.html>

- This week, on 19-20 April two UBC Commissions will held their meetings:
 - Commission on Urban Planning in Vilnius
<http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/19-21-04-2007/index.htm>
 - Commission on Sport in Karlskrona
<http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/19-20-04-2007/index.htm>

From UBC Commissions

- *Commission on Culture*

“European means for cultural cooperation” - the 10th Annual Working Session, Visby, 4 – 5 of May 2007

It is a great pleasure for me to invite you to the 10th Annual Working Session of the

Commission on Culture. This Session is going to be held in Visby on the Swedish island Gotland 4 – 5 May 2007. www.gotland.net

The invited participants are active in the cultural fields in all the countries around the Baltic Sea, of which several are new members of the European Union. The invitation is sent out to the Municipal Cultural Departments and other cultural institutions.

This network is presented in the Catalogue of Cultural Institutions at www.ubc.net The main aim is to stimulate to new cross-border cultural cooperation and to apply for fundings from the EU and other European cultural organisations. Lectures will inform about these possibilities and how to plan projects, to write and send applications. The Session will also give possibilities for cultural managers to meet colleagues in other countries and to preliminary discuss projects that can be of mutual interest for the local cultural life in the Baltic Sea Region and also in other parts of Europe. The Municipality of Gotland is the host for this Session that is arranged in cooperation with the UBC Secretariat and the UBC Commission on Culture. Participants will have to pay their travels, hotel and registration fees and send to me their registrations as soon as possible during this month of March. If the registrations received exceed 60, the arranger reserves the right to make a selection of participants to ensure a representative mix of attendees.

Be welcome to Gotland!

Olov Gibson

Secretary of the Commission on Culture

More info <http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/4-5-05-2007/index.htm>

- *Commission on Sport Grants "Always Active"*

It is the UBC Commission on Sport tradition to award annual grants for the implementation of various sport-related projects. While giving grants, the Commission takes into consideration various priorities being in accordance with topical tendencies. Consequently, the 2007 UBC Commission on Sport grants called "Always Active" will focus on the promotion of physical activity among elderly people. "Always Active" grants are addressed exclusively to UBC member cities. Municipalities are the only entities entitled to take part in grant distribution, and therefore sports clubs, non-profit associations and institutions willing to apply are obliged to submit their application forms by the agency of a municipality. Each UBC member city is allowed to submit only one application. The 2007 grants will be awarded to UBC member cities for sports projects which meet the a/m conditions provided that they are realised in the period June 1 – November 31, 2007. The deadline for sending grant applications is April 30, 2007. Completed application forms should be e-mailed to the UBC Commission on Sport Secretariat at ubcsport@gdynia.pl. For further details regarding 2007 "Always Active" grants please look here:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/2007sportgrant.doc

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the UBC Commission on Sport Secretariat.

Beata Łęgowska

Chairperson of the Commission on Sport

- *Commission on Transportation*

Public transport and mobility management are the key areas of activity of the UBC Commission on Transportation. Wishing to support actions dedicated to promoting sustainable transport, the TransCom has decided to announce a grant competition for

UBC member cities. The Commission on Transportation will award grants for projects aimed at:

- encouraging city inhabitants to use public transport or other alternative modes of transport
- raising awareness of the negative effects of increased use of private cars
- promoting traffic safety rules in order to decrease the number of traffic accidents

"Sustainable Mobility in the City" grants are addressed exclusively to UBC member cities. Municipalities are the only entities entitled to take part in grant distribution, and therefore NGOs and other institutions willing to apply are obliged to submit their application forms by the agency of a municipality. Each UBC member city is allowed to submit only one application. The grants will be awarded to UBC member cities for projects addressing sustainable mobility issues which comply with one or more of the competition priorities and meet the a/m conditions, provided that they are realised in the period June 1 – November 30, 2007.

The deadline for sending grant applications is May 7, 2007. Completed application forms should be sent to the UBC Commission on Transportation Secretariat by e-mail ubctransport@gdynia.pl or fax: +48 58 6218620.

For further details regarding "Sustainable Mobility in the City" grants please see here: <http://www.ubc.net/commissions/transportation/grants.html>

Marcin Wołek

Chairman of the Commission on Transportation

- *Commission on Youth Issues*

Youth conference "UNDER THE SURFACE" I am very pleased to inform you that UBC - Commission on Youth Issues, is now planning for the third youth conference, within the UBC framework, in the Baltic Sea Region - "UNDER THE SURFACE 2007". This conference will take place from 27th

until 29th of September 2007 in Pärnu, Estonia. The conference will be organised within the "Youth" program and the project "Different History - Common Future - youth as a resource in the Baltic Sea Region!" At the moment there is a task force working in order to prepare the conference. Task force consists of representatives of project partners - city of Kalmar (SE) (leading partner), city of Liepaja (LV), city of Kolding (DK), city of Tallinn (EE), UBC Secretariat (located in Gdansk PL) as well as Baltic Sea Secretariat for Youth Affairs (located in Kiel, DE).

Themes / Topics of the conference:

- Young today >> What & How can we learn from young people?
- Youth info society >> How can society and youth workers access and benefit from young peoples virtual world?
- Youth and NGO's >> youth involvement necessary for the social economy?
- Tolerance & intercultural learning >> to learn from history and work towards a more integrated and tolerant region
- EVS (European Voluntary Service) >> a tool for international cooperation and developing cities
- Keeping the door open >> micro-projects for youth

Every workshop is leading us to new possibilities on how to meet the demands of youth living in the Baltic Sea Region (from "Book of Demands" to "Book of Possibilities"). These are just topics that are going to be discussed during the conference. Please feel free to send us your comments or suggestions regarding themes/workshops of the conference.

Participation in the conference will be open for youth and civil servants from all UBC member cities. Look for more information on our web site www.ubc-youth.org.

"UBC Commission on Youth Issues" has created also its own skype account: ubc-coyi. You are very welcome to get in touch with us on skype! Please share your skype contacts

with us so that we can keep in touch via skype regularly.

Charlotte Gustafsson

Chairperson of the Commission on Youth Issues

- *Commission on Tourism*

A working meeting of the Commission of Tourism was held in the city of Palanga on 22-23 March. The meeting was dedicated to summing up the Commission work period and presentation of the projects scheduled for this year. In total, 8 delegates of UBC member cities from 4 countries - Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland participated in the meeting. Among many issues discussed at the meeting, participants presented their home cities, the tourist attractions in them and discussed about the factors deciding about attractiveness of cities. Mr Ryszard Zdrojewski also presented 2 projects - IIIrd edition of Fotosuch & Qiuizfahrt, which had just started on 15 March and the project called "Baltic Sea Region - Perfect Tourism Zone". The result of this project was publishing a catalogue. The minutes from the meeting are at: <http://www.ubc.net/calendar/doc/22-23-03-2007/index.htm>

Ryszard Zdrojewski

Chairman of the Commission on Tourism

- *Commission on Environment*

UBC involvement in the "Spirit of Sevilla"

The fifth European conference of Sustainable Cities and Towns was held in Sevilla, Spain 20 – 25 March. The Sevilla Conference was built upon previous conferences, Aalborg 1994, Turku 1998, Hannover 2000 and the Aalborg +10 Conference in 2004. The UBC Commission on Environment was one of the conference preparation organizations (altogether 14 organizations). The preparation was about planning the theme and structure of the conference, plan and propose key note speakers and workshop sessions for the conference. In practice Björn Grönholm,

Head of Secretariat was participating in the planning of the conference. The specific interest for UBC Commission on Environment was to engage cities and provide information about the sustainable development work carried out by the UBC member cities in the Baltic Sea region. A specific principle was to engage cities and promote the cities and the work they are doing. Approximately 170 persons from the Baltic Sea Region took part in the Sevilla Conference and many of the representatives also were active with presentations (e.g. Kristiansand, Göteborg, Malmö, Kalmar, Växjö, Turku, Helsinki, Tampere, Oulu, Tartu, Riga to mention some). UBC Commission on Environment was actively involved in building the profile of the conference and in-viting e.g. Mr Bo Frank Mayor of Växjö Sweden and Mr Povilas Kuprys Head of Urban Development city of Kaunas as key note speakers to the conference. UBC president Per Boedker Andersen also had a presentation representing Regions and Cities of Europe. In addition UBC was the responsible partner for 5 workshops, involved in sub-plenaries, tool demonstrations and mayors meetings. Strong UBC delegation including altogether 10 persons from Environment, Energy and Transport Commissions were actively present in Sevilla and supporting the UBC member cities as well as other from the Baltic Sea Region. In Sevilla UBC also arranged a so called Baltic Sea Region (BSR) forum, hosted by the President Per Boedker Andersen. The BSR forum was a successful meeting point for the BSR participants in Sevilla with more than 80 participants.

More info about UBC in Sevilla at:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/Sevilla.doc

Björn Grönholm
Head of Secretariat

From member cities

- *City of Kronshtad*

The second international competition of children's and junior art "The favorite holyday of my country" - (greeting card).

Administration of Kronstadt's district of Saint-Petersburg, the department on culture and youth policy of Kronstadt, the state educational institution "Children's art school named after M. Anikushin" are organizing the second international competition of children's and junior art "The favorite holyday of my country" (greeting card). The aims of the competition are:

- to promote strengthening of cultural relations between children's and junior organizations of different countries.
- to develop the knowledge of diversity of cultural forms and value of each of them.
- to develop the skills of children and young people in the field of design and art.

Contact information: Sophia Kuvaikina

e-mail ola@tukrns.gov.spb.ru

More information can be found at:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/Regulations.doc

- *City of Gdynia*

On behalf of Student Archery Club MORŚWIN in Gdynia, the UBC Commission on Sport would like to invite your archers to take part in The First Baltic Cup International Archery Tournament, which is to be held in Gdynia from 22nd to 24th of June 2007. More info is at:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/Archery.doc

Should you have any questions regarding the tournament please contact directly the organisers, i.e. Student Archery Club MORŚWIN. The contact person is Mr. Henryk Szyllberg; e-mail:

info@lucznictwo.org

Please distribute this invitation to archery clubs functioning in your cities.

Partner Search

- *San Sebastian Town Council*

The San Sebastian Town Council is looking for the partner for the project in the 7th framework programme related to clusters. The proposal is related to the transfer of knowledge and to work about the creation of new clusters. They are looking for partners that have an audiovisual or communication clusters. Please contact: Ms Elisabeth Jorge
San Sebastian Town Council
Tel. +34 943 481504
e-mail: elisabeth_jorge@donostia.org
www.donostia.org

- *Social Hansa*

Sustainability in tourism has lately re-emerged as a discussion topic. Not least because of recent studies and publications concerning climate change, the tourism industry has to determine how it can contribute to the sustainable development of our society. Whether a tourism project considers the basic principles of sustainability will increasingly determine the allocation of subsidies and the social acceptance of tourism projects. But how can sustainability in tourism projects be measured? Within the INTERREG III B project 'agora', representatives of economic, environmental and social non-governmental organisations working within the Baltic Sea Region have developed a checklist for assessing the sustainability of tourism projects. The agora Sustainability Check assesses the sustainability of such projects in a concise format and within a manageable timeframe. The Sustainability Check can be used as a guideline for project development as well as an assessment tool for supporting bodies. Authorities, companies and associations who want to address the issue of sustainability proactively will find the Sustainability Check a helpful tool. It will assist them in getting a grip on the elusive term of 'sustainability' in tourism and in anticipating the challenges of

the next few years. Further information about the Sustainability Check itself (in English and German), its development and use can be found on the agora website www.agora-tourism.net (see 'Results/Sustainability Check').

Other conferences

- *EURISY workshop in Tallinn*

Eurisy is organising a workshop on "Efficient Management of Coastal Regions and Cities: Implementation and Use of Space Application-Based Services" to be held on 17 - 18 September 2007 in Tallinn, Estonia. This workshop addresses relevant issues for coastal cities and regions, with the objective of presenting concrete solutions to improving coastal management through knowledge-exchanges between existing users of space applicationbased services. The aim of the workshop is to provide a forum for exchanges of experience and know-how between representatives of coastal zones authorities in Europe, in order to facilitate their access to space-application based tools for managing maritime environments. More information can be found at: <http://www.eurisy.org/>

- *MIDAS Workshop 'Soft Measures Promoting Sustainable Local Transport', 3rd May 2007, Suceava – Romania*

The objective of the European project MIDAS is to encourage transfer to less energy intense modes of transport by optimising the use of soft measures such as information and marketing campaigns, car clubs etc. A range of barriers exist which hinder the successful introduction of soft measures on a scale sufficient to make a lasting impact on travel behaviour and energy consumption. These include the need for different organisations to work together, the lack of awareness amongst stakeholder organisations and the general public about sustainable mobility issues, economic and social barriers and the long

time frame for urban planning. In 6 cities, all the transport actors commit to improving mobility by different means. The main outcomes will be policy recommendations regarding the use of soft measures within city mobility plans and their potential contribution to EU energy objectives; assessments of the MIDAS measures effects on public attitudes to sustainable mobility; reductions in traffic levels, energy consumption and pollution in each city; and transfer of knowledge and experience to decision-makers in other cities, particularly in New Member States.

This first MIDAS workshop aims to inform interested stakeholders on what's been done so far by the 6 MIDAS cities (Aalborg, Bologna, Clermont-Ferrand, Cork, Liverpool and Suceava) and how their experiences can be transferred to other local contexts in order to promote a more sustainable local transport system.

More information can be found at: www.midas-eu.com

- *Spatial Development Forum "Planning Infrastructure for Regional Development", 22 May 2007, Vienna*

Spatial Development Forum "Planning Infrastructure for Regional Development", organised by the Central European Initiative (www.ceinet.org) in the framework of the A-B Landbridge Project will take place in Vienna (Austria) on 22 May 2007. The Spatial Development Forum focuses on the integration between spatial and transport planning as a way to enhance regional development and trans-national cohesion. It represents the occasion to discuss the value of spatial development and ways to improve the accessibility of the territory within and beyond the Adriatic-Baltic region. Representatives from the public and private sector (i.a. transport ministries, regional authorities and logistic hubs) will debate how to improve transport infrastructure as well as the relations between infrastructure and business initiatives. We look forward to

welcoming members from the Union of the Baltic Cities.

Two representatives of UBC can be released from paying the conference fee. The interested persons are requested to contact UBC Secretariat at: info@ubc.net

More information about the conference:

http://www.ubc.net/today/e_News/documents/SDF.pdf

Conferences attended by UBC representatives:

- 5th European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns, Sevilla, Spain - 23 March 2007 (Mr Per Boedker Andersen, President of UBC)
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLARE) (Council of Europe) Spring Session in Strasbourg on the 27th and 28th of March. (Mr Soeren Revsbaek, city of Naestved)
- Executive Bureau of the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, 13th April 2007 (Mr Paweł Żaboklicki, UBC Secretary General, Mr Bjorn Gronholm, Head of the Secretariat of the Commission on Environment)
- Baltic Islands Maritime Issues - Follow-Up of the "Gotland Initiative" on 16-17 April 2007, Bornholm (Mr Maciej Lisicki, city of Gdansk)

UBC Brussels office

The Stockholm Region Brussels Office, hosting the UBC Antenna in Brussels, presents information about the Antenna, as well as the UBC Antenna News at: http://www.stockholmregion.org/websites/stockholm/sd_page/324/3/index.php Partly it's still under construction, but soon there will be also activities and agenda related to UBC Antenna in Brussels.

Danes happiest in EU

Denmark may be chilly but it is the most contented place in Europe while Mediterranean countries are the most miserable according to a new survey. Asked to rate their mood on a scale of one to ten, Scandinavians dominate the happiness league, with Danes averaging 8.3 and Finns 8.1.

Italians, Portuguese and Greeks are all at the bottom of the 'happiness' table. The survey also indicated that, despite warmer summers, the British are becoming more depressed. Their happiness rating has slipped in the two years since the last analysis by the University of Cambridge. "The idea that people are happiest along the banks of the Mediterranean does not appear to be true," said Luisa Corrado, who led the research. Lars Bernhard Jorgensen, head of the Wonderful Copenhagen tourist board, said that the secret of the region's happiness lay in its balance between work and family life, and city and countryside. "We are a small country and there is not a great difference between the top and bottom economically," he said.

Source: EUpolitix

Roads 'good for the environment', says study

Bigger and better roads contribute to cutting pollution by removing bottlenecks, states a report commissioned by the EU Road Federation. The study follows criticism from green groups that investing in roads is contrary to Europe's sustainable development goals. "More investment in road infrastructure is needed to remove bottlenecks, avoid city centres and complete missing links which together cost billions every year in lost fuel and undoubtedly contribute to the transport sector's environmental footprint," said the European Union Road Federation (ERF), in a paper published on 10 April 2007. Citing a study undertaken by an independent Norwegian research organisation, the SINTEF Group, the ERF claims that infrastructure

capacity increases are directly linked to decreases in polluting emissions from motor vehicles. Using a traffic micro-simulation, SINTEF researchers showed, for example, that upgrading narrow, winding roads with modern ones or adding a lane to a congested motorway can yield decreases of up to 38% in CO₂ emissions, 67% in CO emissions and 75% in NO_x emissions, without generating substantially more car trips. "Cases where road authorities and municipalities have deliberately restrained capacity to jugulate demand have been found to be environmentally counterproductive," said the ERF. The study follows calls by green NGOs to curb the growth in road transport in favour of more sustainable transport systems, notably by spending larger chunks of EU money on rail and public transport, which emit three times less carbon dioxide than cars. Magda Stoczkiewicz of the CEE Bankwatch Network said: "The EU should spend less on roads and more on alternatives to cars...Building road infrastructure inflates transport demand just as printing money creates inflation, and already the Czech Republic and Lithuania have more cars per person than rich Denmark." The ten central and eastern European member states are planning to invest more than half of the €50 billion they will receive over the next seven years in EU aid for transport, under structural and cohesion funds, in new roads and motorways, while only 30% will be spent on railways and 10% on public transport. Green NGO Friends of the Earth (FoEE) says that this will "generate more traffic and greenhouse emissions" and has urged the Commission to "take firm steps to prevent seven years and billions of Euro being lost to energy-intensive development". But the ERF says that more money for roads is particularly needed in countries like Poland, where just 3% of roads are to Western standard, thereby resulting in higher emissions from car traffic and in a larger number of accidents on the roads.

Source: EurActiv

New roaming charges could be in place for the summer holiday

EU citizens going on holiday within the bloc this summer could already benefit from lower roaming charges for mobile phones, according to the European Commission. Following a vote in the European Parliament's industry committee in favour of a law regulating roaming fees, a commission spokesperson said it could be possible to secure the new measures "as early as July," adding it was "very good news for European consumers." MEPs in the European Parliament's industry committee on Thursday (12 April) adopted by an overwhelming majority – 45 in favour, three against and one abstention – a report proposing to reduce roaming charges to a maximum of €0.40 a minute for outgoing calls, and €0.15 for incoming calls, plus value-added tax, when using the phone abroad across the union. Under the proposal, charges will apply automatically without consumers having to change contracts and without any fees – something the commission referred to as the "best part" of the MEPs' agreement as it had proved a very controversial element of the legislation. "The result of this vote is a very sound basis for our negotiations with the [EU member states], said Austrian centre-right MEP Paul Ruebig – who wrote the parliament report. Mr Ruebig also said he was confident of a successful wrap-up before the summer break. The full 785 MEPs will vote on the report at their plenary meeting on 10-12 May while EU telecoms ministers will discuss the proposed law when they meet on 7 June. If the ministers adopt the law – France and the UK have expressed reservations in the past on the issue – it will go into effect once it is published in the EU's official journal, something that could be done in a matter of weeks. EU information society commissioner Viviane Reding – responsible for the law and who opened the battle against the telecoms operator in 2006 after years of voluntary measures failed to see prices drop – reportedly opened a bottle of champagne on

hearing the news. The European consumers organisation, BEUC, welcomed the result but called on MEPs to ask for more during next month's plenary vote. "The price caps are still too high and should be readjusted to reflect the real costs. That is what European consumers are expecting from the Parliament in the plenary vote," said the organisation's economic officer Levi Nietvelt. Thursday's vote represents a blow for the industry which had wanted a higher cap of €0.65 to make a call and €0.35 to receive one.

Source: EUobserver

EU seeks stronger energy ties with Black Sea nations

The Commission, on 11 April, presented plans to forge stronger ties with its energy-rich neighbours around the Black Sea and to bring stability to the conflict-ridden region. "We think it is important to put a particular focus on this region," said External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, explaining that with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in January, the EU now has an immediate concern in the area's prosperity, stability and security. The new cooperation initiative will focus on areas like good governance, transport, environment, and, chiefly, energy. The Black Sea region, a major transit route for oil and gas coming to Europe from Russia and Central Asia, is "of strategic importance for EU energy supply security", said the Commission. The aim is to spread the EU's influence in the area, which includes former Soviet Union republics such as Ukraine and Georgia, amid growing unease over Moscow's role in these countries and over its reliability as Europe's main energy supplier. The move follows an agreement last week by Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Romania and the European Commission to start building a new oil pipeline bringing oil from the Black Sea to central Europe by 2012.

Ferrero-Waldner said she planned to forge formal links with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation group (BSEC), which set up a

regional economic pact in 1992. The BSEC already includes three EU nations — Bulgaria, Greece and Romania — as well as Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey. The regional strategy comes in addition to ongoing initiatives, including membership negotiations with Turkey, efforts to negotiate a closer "strategic partnership" with Russia, and existing bilateral trade and aid agreements under the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Ferrero-Waldner also said she hoped that the 'Black Sea Synergy' initiative would "contribute to creating a better climate for the solution of the 'frozen conflicts' in the region".

Source: EurActiv

Brussels says Europeans back anti-alcohol moves

Slightly more Europeans drink alcohol but in less amounts compared to 2003, according to a fresh survey by Eurobarometer, published on 14 March. Europe records the highest alcohol consumption in the world, with three quarters of respondents claiming to have drunk alcohol over the previous year while most Luxemburgers, Italians, Danes and Spaniards drank in the month prior to the survey. Unlike three years ago, more people tend to have one to two, rather than more drinks in one sitting but the so-called binge drinking, defined in this case as five or more drinks - is practised by every fifth European youngster. In terms of national differences, binge drinking is most common in Ireland (34%), Finland (24%), the UK (24%) and Denmark (23%), and least so in Italy (2%), Greece (2%) and Portugal (4%). The survey also shows that most citizens (77%) agree with warnings on bottles for pregnant women and drivers, while 76 percent would like to see alcohol ads targeting young people banned. Moreover, 73 percent of respondents approve of the introduction of a lower alcohol threshold for young and novice drivers and 80

percent think random alcohol testing would help in reducing cases of driving under the influence. The European Commission is interpreting these findings as a sign of support for possible protective steps. "It is evident from this survey that EU citizens support measures crafted to protect specific groups in society, such as pregnant women, drivers and young people from the harmful effects of alcohol abuse and misuse," said EU health commissioner Markos Kyprianou. Brussels forced to take it slowly on alcohol. The survey showing Europeans' attitudes on alcohol comes just months after the EU executive adopted its strategy on how to tackle alcohol-related harm which kills around 195,000 people a year in the EU. Originally, it had planned to suggest more radical steps as found in some EU countries - such as a special tax or compulsory labelling for alcohol products popular among youngsters - as in Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland and Luxembourg. Other examples that Brussels highlighted and considered were special labels to protect pregnant women, imposing a minimum age of 18-years for being served alcohol, or possibly even a common limit for permitted levels of alcohol in the blood stream of drivers and stringent punishment for drivers under the influence. However, following a loud outcry by the alcohol industry, the draft document was watered down with the commission leaving it up to national governments to decide which good examples in the EU to follow, while stating it would consult industry on "responsible" advertising and sale of alcohol.

Source: EUobserver

Top of the IT world

The five Nordic countries all feature in the World Economic Forum's top 10 of investors in new technology as a means of generating economic growth. Denmark has knocked the USA off top spot in The Global Information Technology Report 2006-2007.

This is how the Top 10 looks, with last year's position in brackets. The report covered 122 countries.

1. (3) Denmark
2. (8) Sweden
3. (2) Singapore
4. (5) Finland
5. (9) Switzerland
6. (12) The Netherlands
7. (1) USA
8. (4) Iceland
9. (10) Great Britain
10. (13) Norway

Irene Mia of Global Competitiveness Network praised the Nordic countries for focusing on education, training, innovation and development in the IT field.

Source: Nordic Council

Regions and borders

Reality is the way to change our Nordic maps. More investment is needed in infrastructure. The demands citizens place on public service mean that issues end up between the state and the municipalities. Above it all shines globalisation's sun. The regions must become the basis for development, economic growth and public service. "For this reason regionalisation is on the political agenda in all countries. In Denmark there are already five regions - without power of taxation. Our very own construction", say the Danes proudly, although researcher Siv Sandberg characterises it as a purely Soviet decree from above. In Sweden there is a broad scope of opinions too. The twenty or so county governors are moderately delighted but the excitement amongst the county politicians is not a positive expression of emotions. The development will move forward anyway no matter whether there are six or nine regions in the end. Finland and Norway are still looking for new ways, for example, the goal is to have a larger population base within health care. Finland today has 416 municipalities which work together in 19 regional associations. Norway has the same number of county

councils and 431 municipalities. The region's geographic limitations are still the national borders. The fact that this can be a problem is seen in the cases where a region in reality covers several countries. This is the case in Torneådalén, or in the border stretches between Sweden and Norway, or in the Øresunds region as examples. Many choose to live in one of the countries and work in the other - and suddenly the countries' social security, labour legislation etc. become a game of benefits, obligations, opportunities and impracticalities.

Source: Nordic Council

Young Europeans' language skills under scrutiny

Europeans aged 14-16 years will see their foreign language skills tested in early 2009. The survey, organised by the Commission, is aimed at identifying best practice in language teaching and learning. The Commission adopted, on 13 April 2007, a Communication presenting a framework for a survey that will test foreign-language competences among EU citizens aged 14-16 years. The EU executive is asking for speedy Council approval for its plans. Pilot tests are set to be carried out in Spring 2008, for the first survey to be conducted in early 2009. The first languages to be tested will be English, French, German, Spanish and Italian - the most widely taught EU languages - and the skills measured will include reading, listening and writing. Later on, the Commission plans to develop instruments to cover the fourth skill, speaking. "The purpose of this language indicator is not to rank individual countries," said Education Commissioner Ján Figel'. Instead, the survey is expected to help identify efficient practices and assist policymakers, teachers and learners.

Source: EurActiv