

# MEA DISSEMINATION SEMINARS

During a project lasting one and half years, the Commission on Environment has prepared a model for municipal environmental auditing (MEA) in Baltic cities. The last stage of the project was the dissemination phase, in which the results of the project as well as the manual for municipal environmental auditing were presented to interested UBC member cities.

The first dissemination seminar was held in April in Tallinn and the others in Panevėžys, Riga, Kaliningrad and Gdynia at the end of September and the beginning of October.

A wide group of environmental specialists from the cities participated in the seminars, in addition to representatives from the ministries of



the environment, universities and other environmental organizations. Altogether 25 cities and 170 people took part in these five seminars. Both the MEA model and the possibilities of using it in

the countries were discussed. Most participating cities expressed their interest in the model, and many began considering its use in their cities.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### UNION OF THE BALTIC CITIES AT A CROSS-ROAD?

**Union of the Baltic Cities is a fast growing Baltic Sea Network, and far the largest of the organisations with registered membership fee paying members. 80 cities are members of UBC. The size and the composition of the union, small and big cities working together, mean that there is a lot of potential in the organisation. Do we use the potential?**

Referring to the statutes of the Union of the Baltic Cities the network was initiated with the purpose of developing cooperation and exchange between the members, the cities in the Baltic Sea Region. There is no doubt that UBC has succeeded in fulfilling this purpose taking into account the activities of the 8 commissions and the many co-operation projects.

#### **UBC in a European Context**

Is that enough or do we want more

from the UBC? The question is whether we, the members cities, want UBC also to develop into a professional political interest organisation taking care of the Baltic cities interests towards national and international organisations, not least the European Union.

#### **The Future of UBC on the Agenda**

In Copenhagen we think that this question is becoming more and more urgent. It is time to open the discussion and to strengthen the use of basic democratic involvement in the UBC work if we want to be able to develop the organisation and, at the same time, to continue to attract new members and to hold on to the old members. The UBC Bulletin, which we all appreciate, should be one of the forums for debate and information about Baltic Sea policy development.

#### **The UBC General Assembly in Gdańsk**

Most of the UBC member cities were present during the interesting and valuable UBC-conference in Gdańsk one month ago. Concerning the general assembly itself many of us were very confused and wondering what was going on. The reason is that there was no information, no involvement and no debate. When we do not receive information no new ideas and suggestions will be put forward from the member cities. The board did not seek involvement and did not present a proper strategy paper. Pleasant speeches and praise are nice but not enough.

#### **UBC, a European Lobby Organisation?**

On October 28, 1997, during the BSSSC conference in Gdańsk, the

president of the UBC stressed that “In the near future we (UBC) must enhance our ties with the European Union.” Copenhagen supports this statement. But it takes more than a visit to the EU Commission in Brussels to achieve this goal. The competition between organisations is hard, time and resources are limited. Each organisation that wants to be recognised must have an aim and be prepared, must have an overall policy and a strategy to present. It is a “give and take” situation and UBC must be constructive and make clear what we can offer to the European development.

### **A Baltic Cities Policy?**

If we shall succeed on the EU level the board will have to deal with policy issues and strategy questions. The policy makers of the UBC will need to be supported by a strong, experienced and professional political advisory body linked to the president.

### **Welcome to the New Board**

This is a main issue to discuss for the UBC member cities and a main issue for

the new board to decide on. Copenhagen fully supports the development of UBC into a professional and recognised Baltic Sea organisation, which looks after the interests of the Baltic cities towards the European Union.

*Jane Wiis*  
Head of International Affairs  
Copenhagen

## COMMENT

*The UBC is in a rapid and accelerating development. The demands on UBC have also changed during the years UBC has existed. In the first years there was a great need for contacts after many years of isolation. Also, the cities were overwhelmed with acute problems to be solved. The main issues were of very practical nature.*

*Since the beginning, much efforts have been put into making the UBC an efficiently working organisation with a good internal structure and devoted and engaged member cities. We have also been succesful in creating unity without destructive competition.*

*One of the many engaged cities is Copenhagen, which has shown great interest in the UBC and have given valuable contributions in connections with many activities. The initiative Copenhagen is taking by opening a debate on the political role of the UBC is very welcome. Most UBC member cities in former socialist countries now have passed the first, acute phase and are now seeking a feasible orientation to the strategic development. In this respect, the political role of the UBC will be more enhanced.*

*Several initiatives have been taken*

*or are planned to be taken to enhance the political discussion in the UBC. In general, to be efficient the discussions on strategic issues should be prepared and carried out in smaller groups. The Board Meeting procedures have been changed in order to facilitate strategic discussions in the board. In the UBC Board meeting in Aalborg at the end of November a first draft document outlining UBC policies will be discussed. Also, I think that it would be useful to nominate some devoted cities outside the Board to participate in a working group for the policy making.*

*Much efforts must also be put into shaping an EU policy. Of course, one visit to Brussels is not enough. Hopefully Copenhagen can continue to give valuable contribution in the process. We must influence EU issues in many different ways.*

*Other forums to discuss UBC in political sense are the national meetings, which we encourage to be held at least once a year in each country with UBC members. The Board Member cities are responsible for these meetings in their respective countries. The national meetings carried out so far have been very successful.*

*The UBC Bulletin should also be used for an open and free debate.*

*To have policy discussions at the plenary session in the General Conference is not very efficient. Instead they should place in the working groups and at the Commission meetings. But we must have a lively and continuing discussion all the time. We cannot wait for a policy discussion every two year during the General Conferences.*

*Anders Engström*  
*President of the UBC*

