

Speech by UBC President Per Bødker Andersen

at 'Riga Forum', Riga, 24 October 2005

Dear colleagues and friends,

The role of social housing for society is very significant. Yet the provision of social rental housing is very difficult for any municipality in any country around the Baltic Sea Region. The decision making process for creating social housing must be supported by the best comprehensive and well-researched information on the different instruments available for the financing and provision of this important housing sector.

The question of how to build up a social housing stock involves considerations such as financing in a period of budgetary constraints, the use of social housing for promoting social cohesion and inclusion, and the development and application of appropriate legal and institutional instruments. The social housing question is therefore extremely complex.

Due to the enlargement of the European Union and the transformation processes which involve all of Europe, the issues which will be discussed at this Riga Forum are the following:

- The role and evaluation of social housing in society;
- The institutional framework and capacity building;
- The macro-economic framework and social housing finance;
- Social cohesion and social housing design;
- The role of the public-private partnership.

These issues are important not only for Latvia, Riga City and its Region, but cities and regions throughout all of Europe.

At our Riga Forum we have paid more attention to the development of social housing on different levels - international, national, regional, local. Additionally, we have been trying to find co-operation with the private sector in order to develop public-private partnership. This Forum is one of the occasions where these issues can be discussed in depth with professionals and policymakers on a local, regional, national and international level.

I am pleased to say that the international Conference „New City in the Old Wales" in the frame of the earlier organized conferences „Riga Forum" pays attention to these topical questions in many cities.

Economic development is directly connected to housing construction in every country. That is true not only for market housing but also for social rental housing development. The housing sector, including social rental housing is a direct indicator of the economic strength of a community.

As far I know, many municipalities in Latvia and also in other countries are developing housing concepts, programmes and action plans. These programmes include social rental housing development and take into account the economy of each country and municipality, as well as co-operation between private developers and the municipality.

Various definitions are used in the EU countries. There is a need to find a common language and platform for this definition. We are on the way to do it together. Union of the Baltic Cities in framework of the various projects is developing new ideas on social housing.

I congratulate the conference organizers, who prepared a good program, taking into account the actuality and urgency of these issues. I hope that the work of the Conference will be full of innovative ideas. Social housing should be treated as an important tool to prevent social segregation and promote socially cohesive societies. Good luck dealing with these issues.

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