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REFUGEES – A CHANCE AND A CHALLENGE FOR THE BALTIC CITIES

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BALTIC CITIES BULLETIN



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

First of all, huge thanks to the Union of the Baltic Cities. I have been to many meetings with the UBC, but never to such a fruitful and valuable conference as “The impact of the European Refugees Crisis in the cities of the Baltic Sea Region” held in Rostock on 14–15 March. We did not discuss if or how many refugees we should accept or settle as countries. That we leave to our national governments. Instead, we discussed how we as cities could settle and integrate refugees in the best possible way. And I think that is a very positive way to approach this challenge.

Cities and NGOs from ten different countries participated. My colleagues from Kristiansand and I were happy to take notes and copy others’ ideas.

One of the main points of my speech in Rostock was how important it was for a city and a local government to cooperate with volunteers, with NGOs and churches in these matters. From the public perspective, we can supply the refugees with clothing, food and housing. But it is hard and almost impossible to provide them with friends and social life only through a political decision. We need human beings to interact, to socialize and to be together with the refugees. From that moment on, the pace of the integration process speeds up.

As a political leader in my city, I am happy to see how many initiatives have been taken. The churches have opened up cafeterias, some with a focus on vocational training and others with an idea on socializing people. Another exciting initiative is the so called ‘the buddy system’. This is a new voluntary organization who finds individuals or families who want to meet refugees. They go to the zoo, eat dinner together, show them the city or go for a walk somewhere. And in this way, as often when people meet, friendships are made. It is also valuable to see how different sport clubs are making activities for the refugees.

I hope this is not the last time the UBC addresses this important matter. A future conference could maybe focus on human trafficking or on how to encounter extremism and build resilient communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Jørgen Kristiansen'.

Jørgen Kristiansen
Deputy Mayor of Kristiansand
UBC Executive Board Member

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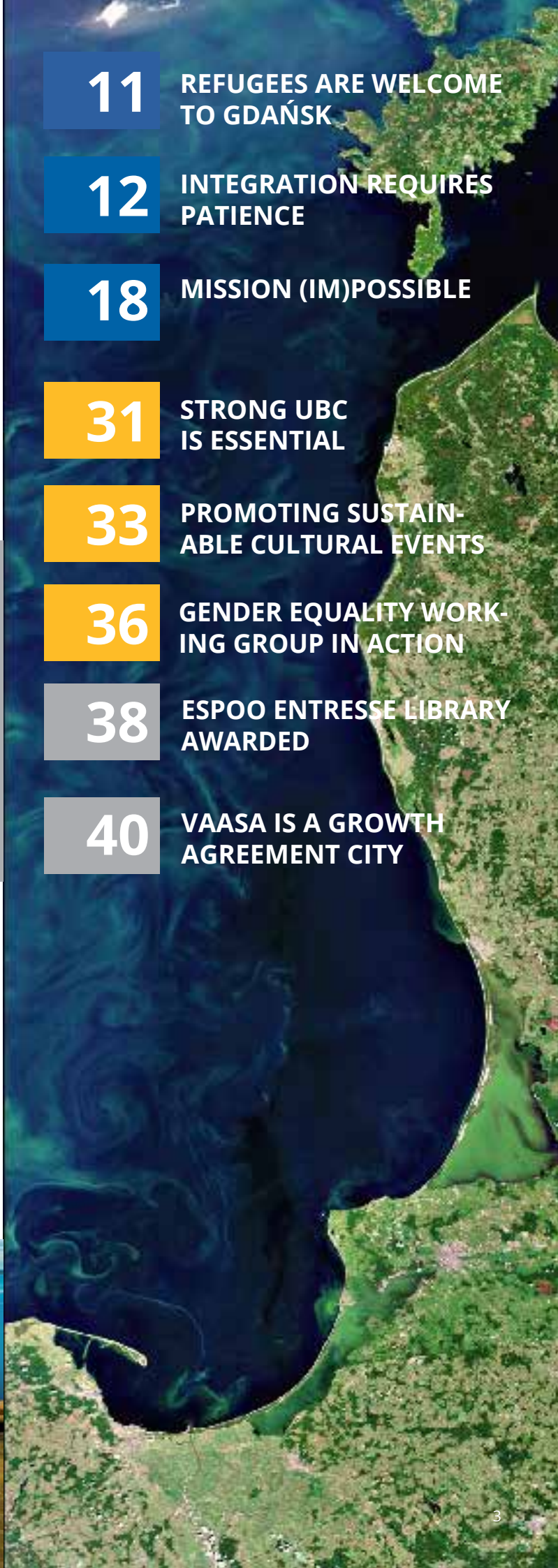
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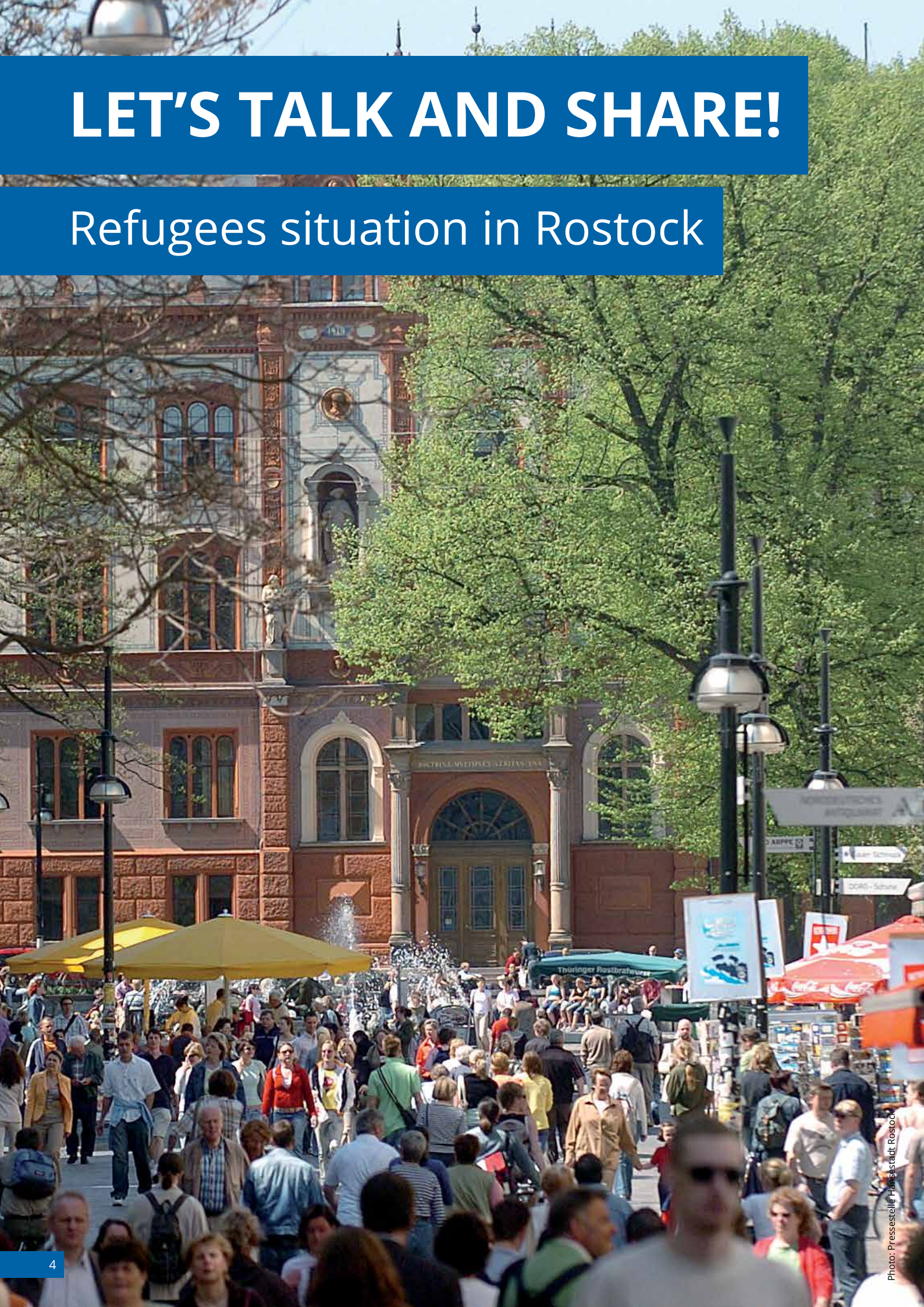
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LET'S TALK AND SHARE!

Refugees situation in Rostock



During 2015 hundreds of thousands of refugees from Middle East and North Africa came to Europe, including the Baltic Sea Region, full of hope to find a new home without war, terror, hunger and diseases. Many Baltic cities had to face completely new challenges accommodating and supporting thousands of persons without being prepared for that.

On 8 September 2015, for the city of Rostock the situation became acute. The day before, the route to Sweden via Denmark was closed. The refugees tried to find their way to the North via Rostock wishing to make the last stage of their journey by ferry. Within just three months more than 35,000 persons passed through our city. For them more than 100,000 overnight stays and 300,000 meals had to be provided. Up to eleven temporary shelters were operated at the same time, including nine gymnasiums. All this happened without making much words. The task was simply coped and solved. Thousands of volunteers faced the work, met the challenge and mastered it. At the end, no one had to sleep in the streets, all of them got something to eat and drink. And if needed, also medical assistance was provided. Precisely, this is the potential of the local authorities: well-kept local networks which can be activated quickly for extraordinary efforts.

Of course, towards the Northern shore of the Baltic Sea we were always looking with ambiguous feelings: on one hand it was clear that other cities might have capacity limits the same as us. On the other hand, it was a relief for Rostock that Swedish cities received so many refugees. So very soon, on the working level informal communication channels started to work informing each other how many refugees were expected, and at what time. The awareness of this challenge led inevitably to mutual understanding which means that here, like in other regions, the cities on the refugees route have to cooperate and coordinate the flow of persons from one place to another – a positive effect of direct international city networking – certainly one of the best experiences of the last months.

For the moment the situation has eased due to considerably less new arrivals. Nevertheless, the challenges are still present but in a different way: now it is about integration, housing, education, social and healthcare.

For the time being Rostock is mainly busy with finding affordable housing for those who decided to stay with us, about 800 persons. Having less than two percent of available flats in the town with rather poor offers in the low-rent sector, we are planning to provide new dorms for the transition period, which might help to remedy the housing problem until new flats will be built. Other issues of integration have to be tackled, as well. They are not new, but now their range is wider. During the very first months we have provided special social care, free language courses, and professional training or school graduations. The entire city is involved, but we hope for support of the state and the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern government. Unfortunately, our federalism which implies that responsibilities are shared between the regional and national levels, often leads to debates about who should pay for which services and/or how much. Sometimes that makes us feel paralyzed.

Despite all difficulties, in Rostock the newcomers are treated as our new neighbours. All of them will be given the opportunity to build a new future. However, we also expect their commitment.

The cities in the Baltic Sea Region do not decide on the European settlement policy and on EU migration rules. But



Let's put in question all we have done so far. Let's verify the course on our compasses. And then let's take a full speed on to the goal of being family-friendly Baltic cities for everybody, connected by the sea of peace and understanding. It is up to us to live this.

they are the ones who can make migration successful. In fact, there is no choice on the local level, but to integrate new neighbours. If the cities do not offer housing, kindergarten, schools, language courses and jobs, people could strand elsewhere, and, integration would not be possible at all. What is more, all measures have to be taken quickly, without any time for debates. The cities are forced to act to avoid more serious problems, even human catastrophies.

Networking, exchange of experiences, the wish to be prepared – these were the driving forces for our invitation to hold the UBC Conference on the Impact of the Refugees Crisis in Cities of the Baltic Sea Region on 14-16 March 2015 in Rostock. For us it was a logical consequence - to talk and to share. It was good to see that we are not alone, and all affected cities work in the same straightforward way as we do. It was important to decide upon a common Resolution making the problems in the cities and the extraordinary achievements visible to everybody, including the high level politics. The cities made their voices heard, which gave us hope that the national governments and international NGOs would take right decisions, having in mind the well-being of their hard-working citizens. It was also very comforting to realize we are working in the same spirit, shoulder to shoulder. That makes us feel stronger and gives certainty that we will succeed.

We, the inhabitants of the Baltic Sea Region, should not be deterred by a new ethnic diversity. We should widen our horizons.

by Steffen Bockhahn, 2nd Vice-Mayor,
Hanseatic City of Rostock



CHOJNICE

AN OPEN CITY

by Radosław Krajewicz | dyrektor@ckchojnice.pl

Chojnice is characterized by its wide cultural openness. For centuries, the Jewish, German, and Polish communities used to live next to one another in the city. This multiculturalism had a significant impact on the development and the current character of the city.

Faced with immigration crisis caused by conflicts in Ukraine and in the Middle East, the city is open to receive refugees longing for normal living conditions.

“Among the refugees, there are English-speaking, well educated people. The most important aspect is their integration with the community. They could take up jobs here. The city is open to receive immigrants, no matter the religion or country they come from,” Arseniusz Finster, the Mayor of Chojnice emphasizes.

The city’s experience with immigrants is positive. Currently, there is a small group of people from different parts of the world, well-integrated with the local community. Some of them settled down in the city more than 20 years ago. The immigrants come from Vietnam, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Mongolia, Armenia, Russia, China, the USA and others. Most of them are businessmen or doctors respected by the community. They take an active part in social and cultural initiatives in the city. Their children attend local schools or universities in bigger cities.

Last year, a numerous group from war-torn Ukraine, came to Chojnice. Most of them have found employment in local industrial facilities actively contributing to the economic development of the city. That is why the City Hall responded

positively to the state authorities’ question whether the city was ready to receive refugees from Syria.

“The city should not bury its head in the sand. Without any doubt, we should help,” says Mayor Arseniusz Finster.

The city’s authorities are ready to take action to fully integrate the immigrants with the local community by helping them with accommodation, and teaching Polish. The city helps further their education and find jobs.

The society of Chojnice is continuing its praiseworthy, historically based tolerance for multiculturalism. Independently from the political situation in the country and in the world, Chojnice offers an atmosphere of openness and approval of political and economic immigration.





WE ARE ON A GOOD WAY!

by Richard Ponsa | intercommunal@stadt-bergen-auf-ruegen.de

Bergen auf Rügen is situated in the South-East of the Baltic Sea. As the city is located close to the Scandinavian border, many refugees use our region as an interim stop. The ones, who stay, about 220 refugees at the moment, are offered collective housing and single apartments. Most of them come from Syria, Ukraine and Afghanistan.

The city offers mentoring for families which means assistance in everyday living. They are also supported by volunteers. Bergen auf Rügen supports refugees by seeking jobs and mediates them into internships.

Several refugees already got their residence permit, some adults work, have internships or job creation plans.

The most important challenge for newcomers is to learn German. Children go to school and are educated in special classes. The church and other institutions offer language courses.

Also, several sport programmes are implemented with local sport clubs and other associations to involve children in the sporting activities. They go for trainings regularly, take part in the tournaments. The city organizes a number of festivals, where citizens and foreigners cook or spend time together. The garden plot association runs a project for refugees on gardening.

To integrate the refugees, they should be brought together with the citizens. They all have to realize that they have similar problems and worries. First, they have to meet and get to know each other. This task is, however, the most difficult to face, because not every citizen is open and ready to communicate with newcomers. But we are on a good way!

In the past there were no problems with radical tendencies. Now, in case of radicalization of the society, the city will have to solve the problem through wide discussions. Each worry or concern should be listened to.

Richard Ponsa: "As a trainee in the town hall of Bergen auf Rügen I visited the facility "NBZ", a community centre for people of all nations. In the facility there is a day nursery located, where German and foreign children learn by playing and get prepared for kindergartens or schools. The communication between the children and their kindergarten despite their languages and religions was very impressive, because they all tried to speak German. The infants get to know other children from other kindergartens in the town and play together on courts or take part in sports festivals. Despite their different cultures and religious orientations, all parents of the children get in contact with each other and participate in different events, like joint cooking or fatigue duties. It was great to see all the kids who shared the same interests and didn't care about their different origins".





by Piotr Wolkowinski
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WE WANT MIGRANTS AND WE CAN COPE

The UBC conference on migration in Rostock, a city which managed to handle a wave of 32 000 migrants at the end of 2015, was a surprise! The cities underlined their capacities to deal with the crisis, basing their actions on the strong bottom up feeling and conviction, that as Europeans, we have a moral obligation to help those fleeing war, insecurity and fear.

The speakers explained what happened in their cities in recent months. The Tsunami wave of migrants in the autumn took them by surprise. The cities coped due to the mobilization of the inhabitants. Trelleborg (S) welcomed many of these migrants and today has to deal with 4 200 children and adolescents. The solidarity shown by the citizens was a surprise to many, but was evidently the underlying common denominator.

The Baltic States and Poland however lived through a wave of fear, obviously linked to the terrorist attacks (Paris/Brussels etc.) and fear of the unknown. Gdańsk showed its level of preparation to deal with existing migrants, and eventual new ones. A film turned on the Macedonian border, showed the sensitivity of the Polish film maker to the fate of the migrants.

On a more personal level, my life has been filled with migration. My grand father was sentenced to 5 years in a Siberian silver mine, due to his participation in an antirusian manifestation in the 19 century. My father, in 1939 was a soldier, who was forced to flee from Poland, when the Soviet Union invaded from the east, after Germany invaded from the west. He was interned in Hungary and then got to Syria, on foot, where the Polish armed forces were organising themselves again. After the war he was demobilized in the UK.

In 1981 I was a journalist in northern France working for a Polish language daily. Many Poles did not wish to return to their country when the State of War was declared. Everyday my sitting room was full of Poles, when I got home from work. They needed everything, papers, homes, work and money. A Solidarity with Solidarność association was created to help the opposition. This was normal.

Today, as a migrant in Poland, my country of origin I think that the feeling of solidarity will win, over the feeling of fear. However we should look at models worked out in Western Europe, where living together generally works, to gain more experience of how in the long term living together works.

KEMI HAS DONE A GOOD JOB

by Marja Kynsijärvi | marja.kynsijarvi@kemi.fi

The city of Kemi is situated by the Bothnia Bay and it is part of the Lapland Region. Kemi is well-known for winter tourism, as well as for its tolerance and multi-cultural nature. During the last 20 years 800 refugees have arrived in Kemi. According to the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centres) the number of refugees is increasing in Lapland and the Lapland municipalities should be aware of and prepare for the situation as good as possible.

Kemi provides newcomers with the same services as it offers to its citizens, e.g. different programmes of implementation to Finnish way of living, get-together events, etc. In the centre of Kemi there is a meeting place called Mikseri that provides general information about the Kemi area and Finland, on opportunities to build long-term relationships or to take part in different kinds of activities, etc. Also, Finnish language courses are organized on many levels - from beginners to advanced. Kemi has done a good job in integrating the newcomers mostly because of the very professional and long experienced personnel and good co-operation with other stakeholders.

Due to the global refugee situation, the municipalities in Finland are forced to seek new and effective models of integration, to solve and minimize the obstacles. Kemi has started a discussion about the co-operation with its neighbour city of Tornio. The core of the issue on co-operation is how to deal with and take care of the newcomers, how to offer services in more effective and long-lasting ways and how to successfully accustom them to the Finnish way of life.





LEARNING

IN ESPOO

Espoo has fostered implementing a solution that accelerates the integration of asylum seekers with the surrounding society while giving new meaning to their lives.

Education and learning have always been important to the Finns. Because of the rough weather, our geographical position and lack of resources we have had to build our success on innovations created with no outside help.

The concepts of lifelong learning, co-creation, and living labs have all been born here.

Learning for migrants

'About Finland' is a service for asylum seekers that delivers reliable information from official sources to mobile phone users. The users have also access to other courses that have a life-changing impact.

'About Finland' service is free, easy to use and applies to all immigrants. Funzi, an Espoo Innovation Garden start-up, develops it, and it contains trustworthy information from official sources.

Though developed initially in Espoo, the About Finland service has big plans. It launched the first entrepreneurial education course in Arabic in November 2015 and after nationwide implementation in Finland, localized versions of the service had been launched in most important EU markets, including Germany.

Funzi — giving access to learning to everyone

Funzi is a unique mobile learning service with initial focus on emerging markets. A group of professionals who wanted

to use their expertise on mobile business and education to create something globally impactful founded this pioneering Espoo start-up in February 2014. Funzi makes learning accessible to everyone — for free.

The minimum viable product version of Funzi was launched in May 2015 and during summer 2015. It has proved to be successful in reaching, keeping, and teaching mobile users in multiple markets.

After success with the first services, the company saw that Funzi could provide a solution to meet the information and knowledge needs among asylum seekers in Europe.

The intent is to enable an easy access to information for newcomers and to ease the integration process. The first course packages, tailored for asylum seekers, contain information on communications, everyday life and the asylum process. They are delivered in multiple languages.

Funzi takes its name from funza, meaning learning in Swahili, and is inspired by Africa — the continent of growth. All Funzi services combine the development of knowledge and new skills with the social component of sharing.

by Aape Pohjavirta | info@funzi.fi
More: www.funzi.fi



Photos: Tero Takalo-Eskola, Terotmedia

A CHANGED IMAGE OF IMMIGRATION

by Satu Heikkinen | satu.heikkinen@jkl.fi

In 2014, Finland had 3,651 immigrants seeking asylum. By the end of 2015, more than 32,000 immigrants seeking asylum had come to Finland. The Finnish Immigration Service processes all applications for asylum. There are roughly 2,000 asylum seekers in Central Finland.

Currently, there are three reception centres in Jyväskylä. Immigrants seeking asylum have mainly come from Iraq or Afghanistan.

Services

Asylum seekers have access to health care services, which the Finnish Immigration Service acquires from a private health care service provider. Public health care covers acute illnesses, children under 18 years of age and pregnant women. Jyväskylä is responsible for maternity and child health clinics and health care services for school children and students, the psycho-social support offered to children under 18, if required, child welfare services. The city offers education preparing every asylum-seeking child from 6 to 17 years of age for preliminary and basic education.

Jyväskylä Immigrant services work with individuals and families who have come to Finland as asylum seekers and have received a residence permit and a place of residence in Jyväskylä.

Heljä Siitari, senior social worker at Immigrant Services of the City of Jyväskylä: "As our customers come from highly heterogeneous backgrounds and educational levels, the need for support varies greatly from everyday guidance to mental support. In every case, Finnish language skills offer

the keys to Finnish society and working life, and the significance of education and language courses cannot be emphasised enough."

In addition, Jyväskylä is home to the Multicultural Centre Gloria, which is an open and international meeting place for immigrants in Jyväskylä.

"Gloria offers multi-professional support for immigrants," says Arja Seppälä, director of Multicultural Centre Gloria. "We help people who have come from different parts of the world and offer peer support and learning possibilities, independent activities and, if required, professional help and support."

Currently, 300 volunteers are working at Gloria. As 60% of these are originally from Finland, immigrants are able to encounter different cultures naturally by meeting the volunteers.



Photo: Tero Takalo-Eskola, Terotmedia



REFUGEES

ARE WELCOME TO GDAŃSK

by Piotr Olech | piotr.olech@gdansk.gda.pl

Photo: Jerzy Pinkas/www.gdansk.pl

Gdańsk as a city of freedom and solidarity is open to welcome refugees. The City's Development Strategy emphasizes the key values such as Openness, Solidarity, Cooperation, Trust, Safety and Equal Opportunities. The principle of Equal Opportunities, in particular, is crucial in the context of migration and integration.

It is of utmost importance to recognize the differences and diversity of the city's residents and to create opportunities for their development. All residents are the future of the city and its potential. Different ethnic, cultural and religious background should be respected and appreciated. All residents share the same rights, duties, as well as the same responsibilities.

Receiving and integrating refugees

To prepare to receive and integrate migrants, including refugees, the City of Gdańsk started working on the Model of Integration of Immigrants - local urban policies on integration and migration.

"We asked the migrants living today in Gdańsk what kind of city they would like to live in," Piotr Kowalczyk, the Deputy Mayor of Gdańsk says. "The model we are going to implement is based on the bottom up approach. It was elaborated by around 80 partners, e.g. city institutions, companies and NGOs, more than 150 people who had been analyzing the most important needs of those looking for a better place to live".

Eight thematic groups were set up: Education, Culture, Housing, Social Care, Work, Violence and Discrimination,

Local Society, and Health. At the same time, numerous services for migrants and refugees, such as language courses, employment and accommodation counselling, legal support, etc. have been implemented. The model is backed by around 100 volunteers.

The integration is a complex process. Both the migrants and the accepting society are responsible for it. The city of Gdańsk regards the integration not as a procedure, but as a process that should be stimulated. The document is not a simple manual, it shows the ways how the city can support the interactions between newcomers and inhabitants.

The city of Gdańsk makes the need of education out and it initiated the series of debates about migrations. The model has been recently presented to the City Council and is now being consulted with the citizens.



Photo: Grzegorz Mehring/www.gdansk.pl

INTEGRATION REQUIRES PATIENCE

by Bernd Hemingway | bernd.hemingway@cbss.org



Migration is a complex subject because it is a horizontal policy area. There is nothing like a single migration policy, it touches social, health, education, security, labour and many more policy fields.

In the following I will bring up some key words, non-exhaustive, but very important from my perspective. Probably the most significant word is indeed **integration**.

To be successful you need at least three important qualities:

- A plan on how to approach it in a comprehensive way,
- A good structure and partners for implementation and,
- Patience as integration takes time; it can't be achieved from today to tomorrow.

What is behind integration?

One of the most important fields of integration is **labour**. Migrants want to work and earn money. While the question of refugee status, existing Diaspora and other reasons play some role, the availability of work is a main decision factor when migrants move.

But how can I integrate into the labour market if I don't speak the language? **Language** is also an important factor for integration and the earlier you start to learn a language the easier it is.

This brings me to the subject of **education**. The recognition of diplomas is important but how can one make use of existing skills in professional field where the refugee cannot bring proof of any formal education. Your diploma is not always the first thing you take when you run away from danger.

But also children's education is a big challenge for many cities. In Malmö, for example, there is an identified need to build 26 new schools.

Also, **early school leaving** is a huge problem. Children from migrant communities are disproportionately exposed to early school leaving, with all the consequences for their social integration. This will be an even bigger challenge now also in light of the growing number of unaccompanied migrant children arriving in Europe.

The **health** sector is not only an important factor, but also indicator for a successful integration.

Research resulted in the surprising fact that migrants' health condition was worse after five years of living in Europe than

at the moment of arrival. In many cases this is a question of missing information, but also a question of cultural differences for which professionals in the health sector need to be prepared.

Security is important for the host societies as they play a very important role in the integration process, but also for the migrants. We have seen xenophobia showing its ugly face when housing for refugees were put on fire or migrants were physically attacked. Violence is also addressed at the city decision-makers considered to be "too migration friendly". **Housing** is of course also a fundamental question to be faced, especially in a long-term perspective.

One of the new challenges is the growing number of **unaccompanied migrant children**. The best interest of the child, not always easy to determine, should be discussed. Also, the demographic factor is important, as the influx of mostly male youth can change the gender ratio in certain communities.

To conclude, let me approach three questions.

Firstly, what are the economic challenges, what are the potentials? We very often underestimate the economic potential of the migration. The Financial Times highlighted in several articles how the current refugee situation has a positive impact on Germany's GDP. We should also not forget the demographic factor of an aging population and a declining work force we are facing. It is therefore advisable to see these positive aspects of migration.

Secondly, civil society actors play an important role in facing all above challenges. In many cases it is possible to mobilize volunteers and resources. We also have the private sector being able to contribute to integrating into the labour market.

Thirdly, capacity building! There is a need to build, what I call, the infrastructure for migration governance in the cities, especially for those, which haven't been exposed to migratory challenges in the past.

There are good programmes on the European level that could be used to fill this gap. But there are also many good practices available and city partnerships exist to learn from each other.

Finally, I propose that UBC and CBSS continue to work together in the field of migration to benefit from our regional approaches to deliver the action where it is needed.

THE RECEPTION PROGRAMME IN NÆSTVED

by Rebbeca Helqvist | rehel@naestved.dk
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When the refugees arrive in Næstved, they are met by a housing placement employee who holds an information meeting and introduces them to their temporary residence, where at the same time, the house rules are reviewed.

Within the first month, the refugees have the following meetings with social workers at the Centre for Labour:

- Introduction to the Danish legislation
- Information on economy
- Individual meeting on jobs and education.

Within 14 days upon arrival, the refugees start taking courses in basic knowledge and within a month they take a Danish language course with lessons three days a week from 8:30 to 13:55.

The course in basic knowledge provides education about the Danish labour market, social and health issues, training in financial management and educational guidance. The course also includes training in topics such as: unemployment insurance, tax, labour unions, legal system, maternity leave, housing, repatriation, equality, democracy, etc. Furthermore, the refugees are trained in the use of online banking, NemID (a common log-in solution for Danish Internet banks, government websites and some other private companies), e-Boks (digital mail service) and Jobnet (the public Job Centre's website for all jobseekers and employers in Denmark).

The purpose of the basic knowledge course is to provide the refugees an insight into Danish society and labour market conditions, and in this way, it will help to improve their abilities to obtain regular employment or training.

Our main focus from day one is to provide the refugees with the knowledge and skills to enter the labour market as soon as possible. Together with a caseworker, a refugee makes an individual plan. The plan contains a short-term plan for a fast entrance into the Danish labour market (usually unskilled) and a long-term plan for education or working within areas of previous experiences.



SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

by Peter Wågglund | peter.wagglund@gavle.se

The Labour Market Unit in Gävle implements and develops integration measures for New Arrivals (NA) such as information about the Swedish society. For those NAs that have a permit of residence and decided to live in Gävle, a special training programme has been designed.

The programme aims to increase the participants' environmental awareness and to improve integration. The training is organized jointly by the municipal departments and companies and managed by the Labour Market Unit. "Living, Safety & Environment" is divided into different areas containing lessons, discussions and study visits. Energy saving, sorting waste and using water economically are included in the introduction programme for the new citizens. Here is a very short overview of the programme.

A study visit in one of Gavlegårdarna's (real estate company) apartments provides information on e.g. how to report problems and how to use the laundry services. The tenants' rights and obligations are discussed there. Together with the rescue services, Gästrike Räddningstjänst, newcomers learn how to keep stairways and emergency exits clear and what to do in case of fire. A study visit at the fire station is also organized. Gästrike Vatten (water company) teaches about how to economize the use of water. When visiting Gävle Energi (energy company) the use of energy is discussed and one of Gävle's heating plants is visited. General information on recycling and how to sort waste is provided by Gästrike Återvinnare (waste management company). At the end of the course, the newcomers are invited to a guided bus tour around the city of Gävle, showing the well-known and important places.

The programme started one year ago. Three rounds have been carried out until now with 250 participants. The feedback has been positive so far. The mix of information, study visits and practical training have been seen as interesting and thrilling. The course consists of eight sessions lasting two hours each. The activities are part of the Swedish Employment Service assignment for establishment of NAs and therefore their attendance is registered.

Gävle finds this programme valuable. It leads to great advantages for environment, safety and mutual understanding between neighbours.



TO BECOME PART OF THE COMMUNITY

by Hashim Gashi | hashim.gashi@kalmar.se

Broad cooperation between different sectors in society is important. One year ago Kalmar took the initiative of the Integration Council. It is a common meeting ground that brings together about 40 different organizations - municipal, state as well as voluntary organizations and associations who want to work with integration. The aim is to establish a positive climate for cooperation and turn good ideas and initiatives into action.

During the first year, over forty different actions have been initiated by the Council. The focus was put on language training and on improving access to social activities, jobs and earning opportunities. A newsletter is issued every two months and gathers all good activities that are done by different organizations. Additionally, the Council has constituted an Integration Award which is given each year to an organization for their efforts in the integration process.

Here are three examples on actions which have been initiated by the Integration Council.

Company visits for newly arrived asylum seekers; the aim has been to match their professional backgrounds with the needs of the companies in the region. With every journey, groups of 50 people paid a visit to 5 companies. Another successful achievement is the local governmental efforts to recruit medical persons from the asylum accommodations. The Council has found about 30 people who have worked in health care before their arrival in Sweden. The occupational groups were both doctors and other health professionals. They started learning Swedish, especially medical Swedish. In the meantime Swedish authorities were working ardently to validate their academic grades. These efforts have been receiving a lot of national attention.

In terms of language training, the municipality is carrying out a large reform. A more individual and "lane" division teaching is in progress. These with university degrees can currently follow studies in the so called "fast lane", business entrepreneurs may more easily get information regarding their area of business while others have the opportunity to develop the languages of the different professions - it is usually combined with internships.

Hashim Gashi: The municipality vision is that everyone who moves to Kalmar should as soon as possible become part of the community. To continue education, work and be active in the voluntary sector are important factors for a successful integration.



EVERYONE CAN BECOME A CITIZEN

Clarence C Andersson | clarence.coulton@robertsfors.org

Like many other places, both in Sweden and in Europe, the autumn of 2015 has left many traces in Robertsfors. The municipality has long been working to accommodate unaccompanied refugee children and other refugees, but the pressure that arose was something that it was not prepared for.

Once the authorities began to inform municipalities about what could be expected, Robertsfors started preparing its own organizations quickly to create the capacity needed to help as many refugees as possible. This meant to find all possible places to house newcomers.

From the very beginning, various associations and organizations have been involved to accommodate as many people as possible, but also to facilitate their integration. For example, various parties, meetings and other social activities were arranged to enable people to mix with and get to know one another. The municipality's role was to support them in their work, but it also started its own projects with the same goal. As integration is a two-way process, the city put a lot of efforts to increase awareness and acceptance in the community for the newcomers.

In our municipality, we believe that everyone can become an important citizen. We want to give them the opportunities they need. For this reason, several projects focused on facilitating the education for newcomers, as well as on increasing their chances to find jobs.

Thanks to the long tradition of working on integration, and thanks to good cooperation with local associations, the city has managed the situation very well so far. But of course there are also difficulties. In particular, the polarization between foreign-born and native-born youth in the municipality was noted, which made the city work even harder to face the situation.

The future will bring many challenges, but together with our residents, associations and other stakeholders, we are confident that Robertsfors municipality will succeed.



Photo: Lernia

FAST TRACK TO EMPLOYMENT

by Eva Hjalmered | eva.hjalmered@oskarshamn.se

New language, new culture and new prerequisites. It takes time to become established in a new country. It usually takes 8-10 years for new arrivals to get a job and really get into the labour market.

A fast track has been established in Oskarshamn, which is a real shortcut for newcomers. The pilot project is a result of the cooperation between the municipality of Oskarshamn, the employment office, the recruitment company Lernia and the truck manufacturer Scania.

Scania needs to employ workers with technical background and competences. Lernia is the employing company, and informs the employment office about specific requirements. The employment office matches suitable candidates who are in their establishment phase in Sweden.

A number of candidates, located in different parts of Sweden, are selected and go through job interviews. Twelve of them are selected to participate in an intense course. They get 'a temporary resident status' in Oskarshamn. After moving to Oskarshamn, they receive individually tailored additional training.

The intense course entails vocational Swedish with a technical orientation and a shorter vocational training. Thereafter the level of knowledge is evaluated and validated to match the profile and demand of Scania to get an extended vocational induction scheme.

The future co-workers are studying at an individual pace due to their language level and their previous work experiences. Three of them have already started working. Five of them are going to start as manning consultants within a couple of weeks. The rest will need some more Swedish education; the plan is to have them start their employment before summer. Some are going to work as welders at the carriage body production, while others will be assembly line workers or truck operators.

This has been done within only seven months, and there is interest to use this model for other trades, too. The care industry might be next.



JOINING HANDS

IN TIMES OF CRISIS

by Christer Carlbäck | johan.ohlsson@karlskrona.se

Photo: Karlskrona kommun

The municipality of Karlskrona, at the south east tip of Sweden, rapidly reorganised and mobilised itself to accommodate refugees in temporary arrival centres. It would, however, never have worked without committed employees acting urgently – and in extraordinary ways.

When the refugee crisis kept on increasing with more unaccompanied minors arriving than ever before, the Municipal Chief Executive, Carl-Martin Lanér, raised the risk management level to the second highest. The situation did not yet call for the setup of a political risk management team, but it did require frequent meetings with administration and key managers.

“We had to extend our cooperation, internally as well as with the immigration and regional authorities. Therefore, we created a group powerful enough to take common responsibility and prepare the reception of the asylum seekers into detail,” says Carl-Martin Lanér and adds: “This was a huge challenge causing strain for our organization, because we must concentrate on our daily work. It worked out well thanks to the support from our employees, retired city workers and volunteers. It also proved we can collaborate efficiently across department borders.”

Taking on the challenge

Several managers paved the way for reorganization. Anette Gladher temporarily left her position as head of social services in order to coordinate the collaboration while Lotta Folkesson left her position within the elderly care to manage the arrival centre created in the camping area of the village of Kristianopel. It was to welcome 120 refugees together with another centre in a former school. Internal recruiting was carefully performed with help from the manning team – without risking any normal operation. “It was great to see the resources we have within our or-

ganisation,” says Lotta Folkesson. “Our employees dared to leave their comfort zones and accept new challenges.”

Broad cooperation

Creating an arrival centre offering a safe haven, lodging and food demands more than one may imagine. Preparations involved city workers from everything from the fire brigade and the fire protection unit through to the property services department. Long-term unemployed trainees helped transporting furniture, the care home kitchen in the village of Jämjö cooked additional food, and the laundry services for the elderly gladly added more fabrics to wash.

Lotta Folkesson summarises the successful cooperation and the overall experience: “It is really exciting to do something good, learn new things and think along new lines.”

Ibrahim Azzam, Hassan Husseinzadeh, Lotta Folkesson, Kebes Awenat, Inga-Lill Eriksson, Anette Held and Leonita Demiri Gullbing in Kristianopel.



Photo: Karlskrona kommun



GOOD PRACTICES IN INTEGRATION

by Anu Kilpinen | anu.kilpinen@kotka.fi

As a seaport and an international town, Kotka has become even more multicultural in the past decade. Statistics show that immigrants are 8,6 % of Kotka's population and there are over 100 nationalities living in the city. Now there are also about 700 asylum seekers in Kotka.

Kotka has been receiving refugees since 1991. The municipality has a long tradition and a great experience in integrating immigrants. During the years, the motivated and professional staffs have formed clear practices in the integration process. Being a small city, Kotka benefits from its size. The authorities can concentrate better on each immigrant and the cooperation between different offices and service providers is easier and more efficient. Everybody knows everybody.

The municipality invested in education and training services to get better results in integration. It organizes language courses for housewives, employees, provides an extra teacher for primary education, gives out study vouchers and provides an opportunity for adult immigrants to complete a primary school.

One of the most important factors in the integration activities in Kotka is a volunteers' support. They, for example, teach Finnish in groups, organised by the municipality and the local parish. The Finnish volunteer teachers are of different occupations, some of them are retired and some are still active.

There are five groups that meet in different locations in Kotka, and each group is divided into several smaller groups, depending on the level of language skills. All are easy to access and the atmosphere is cosy. Grammar is not taught at all. The focus is rather on the everyday spoken language and on teaching basic vocabulary.

For immigrants, these Finnish language groups are more than just the Finnish course. They are places where immigrants can find new friends and meet Finnish people. These teachers are often the first people who immigrants become familiar with. It is important that immigrants feel they are welcome, and these groups make them think more positive about the future.

SEEING THE BENEFITS

by Aldo Iskra | More: www.openskane.se

Skåne has always been a meeting place for people of different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Whenever differences interact, new perspectives and new possibilities are created. Encounters between people inspire growth on both the personal and the societal levels.

When it comes to education, research and innovation, Skåne is among the leading regions in the world. Yet, low employment, integration problems and weak entrepreneurship prevent Skåne from achieving its potential and becoming a competitive region on the global stage.

A crucial prerequisite for Skåne's development is to make the interactions among people of different backgrounds a well-functioning process. The point of departure for Open Skåne is diversity that is a resource best-utilized through the transfer of knowledge, education, conversation and cooperation. The results lead to a stronger social cohesion based on respect for people's differences.

In 2014-2018 Open Skåne has been enabling a process which is open and which can be manifested in various ways. Diverse voices can come to the fore through personal meetings, conversation and dialogues, think-tanks and conferences, cultural and religious festivals, artistic expressions and debates. Its current project on trust-building with regional Muslim leaders and police authorities can by a good example of this process.

With the advent of globalisation, it is clear that the diversity of people's social, cultural and religious affiliations is important in Skåne. The challenges faced by local and regional communities are complex, requiring new ways of thinking and cross-border co-operation. Open Skåne is an attempt to address these challenges, which are crucial for all Skåne inhabitants.

Openness is about the will to grow and develop, as individuals and as a society. Openness involves making oneself vulnerable to criticism and opposition. Dependence on other people is precisely what makes us feel alive. It is this dependence, as well as interaction with others that we have to focus on in order to mature as people. The same applies to how Skåne should develop.





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▲ PROFESSIONAL STAFF – A KEY FOR A SUCCESS

by Diana Stankaitienė & Egle Buivydaitė
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Klaipėda City Social Support Centre (KSSC) have worked with refugees for 8 years from 2002 to 2010, and continues this activity in 2016. 84 persons, 83 of them from Chechnya, and 1 from Armenia, participated in the integration of national enforced integration of foreigners granted asylum application and 4 European Refugee Fund funded projects.

Most of the refugees have been psychologically traumatized, because they experienced the horrors of an unannounced war. Not only material assistance, but also psychological support and sincere communication is most important for them. Social workers, psychologists, Lithuanian language teachers help newcomers integrate into the community. They clarify their individual needs, support with food, clothing, shoes and other items, and settle them in rented apartments owned by the citizens. The city doesn't want to create gated communities.

Klaipėda has a number of NGOs working in the social field, but only the Lithuanian Red Cross Society set up help for immigrants. KSSC performed EDF-funded projects, created an innovative integration tool - the day centre, which provides social and educational services, childcare and psychological counselling. Women from the refugee's community work in a day centre, taking care of children, or teaching Chechen language. For many of them, this is the only chance to earn money and to communicate with others. Adults learn Lithuanian, get acquainted with Lithuanian and Klaipėda region's socio-cultural life and traditions. Children go to kindergartens and schools.

The city has long been home to many nations, but the arrival of refugees is still a lesson to be learned. Creating multicultural fellowship is a difficult task. The biggest challenge is to overcome the fear of different cultures. Today, more than 80 percent of the population are the Lithuanians. In 2006, the politicians adopted a decision of zero quotas for refugees, but now the integration is understood as a necessity. The most multicultural are the universities and colleges, but the migrants also create businesses and jobs in Klaipėda. They run ethnic minority communities; organize various socio-cultural events. But it is not enough. People need to have more opportunities to interact with other cultures. Klaipėda currently integrates 5 of the eastern Ukrainian displaced persons, including 2 kids. Adult men are already working in the port companies, and pay taxes to the city. And yet social workers believe that the integration of newcomers is possible, but people, money and effort of the whole community are necessary.

2015 was a historic year in Sweden. Never before Sweden has received such a large number of asylum seekers in one year – 163,000. The amount doubled in comparison to the refugees influx in 1992 during the Balkan crisis. A dramatic increase began in late summer and October will now go down in history as the month when Sweden received the biggest amount of asylum seekers ever.

In Växjö the amount of asylum seekers has increased significantly from 2014 to 2015. The biggest challenge for the municipality is the large number of unaccompanied minors that have been allocated to Växjö. In the beginning of 2015 we were planning to care for approximately 30, and by the end of 2015 we had taken care of 240 unaccompanied minors, and additionally 80 who Växjö has been responsible for, providing care, housing and food until they are allocated to another municipality. It has been a challenge to find housing and to recruit professional staff. The legislation in Sweden requires staff at all hours and a high degree of documentation.

In Växjö we are proud of our work to integrate unaccompanied minors. We believe that professional staff is a key factor for success, and we do a lot of work to ensure that we can recruit and keep professional staff. Another key factor is our organization. We have staff working with employment and education. This means that the unaccompanied minors easily can get support to integrate into society through work or education.

We are actively working to shorten the period of time from arriving in Sweden until getting the first job. To do this effectively, we are working closely together with the Public Employment Agency. The municipality provides education in Swedish for immigrants and information about the society. We also provide work-training, employment and short courses to achieve competences that are needed on the labour market. This is an area that can be further developed, and the work has already started on a strategic level to improve integration and putting it on top of the municipality's agenda. It is a question about growth!

This is also the case in Europe, we have an uneven allocation of refugees between the European countries. We all need to contribute in this historical situation and it is important that all countries take responsibility!



A WARM WELCOME TO KARLSTAD

by Mia Marklund | mia.marklund@karlstad.se

In 2015, almost 163 000 asylum seekers came to Sweden which is twice as much as the year before.

Many unaccompanied children

Many of these people came to Karlstad and the region of Värmland. At the end of last year, we had 9,000 asylum seekers in Värmland and more than 800 of them were unaccompanied children and youth. The asylum seekers come mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Karlstad has received approx. 230 unaccompanied children and young people - in total 800 persons. This is a big challenge and the municipality, civil society and businesses have joined forces to help these people in all possible ways with housing, furniture, clothes and equipment. The large number of unaccompanied children is especially challenging since they require more staff and family homes.

A political will

There is a strong political will to ensure the best integration and the City Council has agreed on the following guidelines:

- The region should capitalize newcomers' skills and see immigration as a growth factor.
- Karlstad municipality is to ensure an even distribution of the accommodation between different neighbourhoods and schools based on our socio-economic conditions.
- Karlstad municipality shall ensure a good social integration by creating contact areas and meeting places.
- Families with children are to have a permanent and sustainable living.
- Newcomers should be employed as soon as possible.

Sunshine stories

The volunteer organization Refugees Welcome helps refu-

gees in their temporary accommodations and many people contribute both with time, money and materials needed.

To make the integration faster, many refugees are offered lessons in Swedish from volunteers during the long asylum process. Regular Swedish courses are not offered until you have a permit to stay. The decision might take up to two years.

The municipality has made a campaign directed to all citizens with the slogan "A Warm Welcome" promoting openness and inclusion. The website www.varmtvalkommen.se was launched where anyone who would like to meet and get to know a refugee can register.

Internship in local businesses

By mapping the competences and professions among the asylum seekers, the municipality managed to match them with employee seekers. For example, we have two chefs from Syria working in a restaurant in central Karlstad and the employer is happy with the help he gets and they get contacts, language practice and work experience in Sweden.



Vielfalt.

Das Beste gegen Eintfalt.



REFUGEES ARE WELCOME



by Nadine Hoffmann | international@greifswald.de

In 2015, the number of refugees who arrived in the University and Hanseatic City of Greifswald increased to approximately 700. Almost 90 percent of them came from Syria. The others came from Ukraine, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq or Afghanistan. Most of them had been men travelling alone.

When refugees arrive as asylum seekers, the District Vorpommern-Greifswald is responsible to give them accommodation and money for living. When refugees get their residence permit, they have to leave the accommodation paid by the district and have to look for their own flats. Since then, the money for living and the flat will be paid by the Job Centre, which makes a written agreement with a refugee who is obliged to participate in the integration course. There are integration helpers who support refugees with residence permit procedure, finding a flat, opening a bank account or getting health insurance.

The Network Migration Greifswald has been working for 15 years. It unites associations and institutions in Greifswald, working with and for migrants, for instance welfare organizations, youth migration service, educational institutions, housing associations, Job Centre, sports clubs or the administration. During regular meetings, all stakeholders speak about challenges and needs, and try to find solutions. E.g. educational institutions offer special language courses for medical professionals or women. The university offers German language courses for those refugees who want to start or continue their studies.

Many volunteers have been involved in the refugees' admission as an important support for the professional structures. In November 2015, Greifswald got its own full-time commissioner of integration, who now organizes the cooperation between administration, volunteers and the Network Migration Greifswald and supports get-together meetings for people from different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

The administration tries to set up various places for integration in each part of the city. There are intercultural cafés, music groups or football teams. Each refugee gets a "Welcome folder" with useful information and addresses.

The agencies (Job Centre and employment agency) are responsible for integrating people into work. They organize fairs and events for the refugees and entrepreneurs enabling them to mix with and get to know one another.

SŁUPSK AN OPEN CITY

by Magdalena Prusinowska | m.prusinowska@um.slupsk.pl

Słupsk has a very diverse cultural background. Its citizens often stress that: "Most of us have migration experiences" (e.g. due to the influx of people from other regions of Poland to Słupsk after the WWII).

Honouring this diversity Mayor Robert Biedroń, in the face of humanitarian crisis, announced that Słupsk was an open city where refugees were welcome. Preparing for this new challenge the City Hall established the Interdisciplinary Team for Refugee Issues. The Team has been responsible for coordination of issues concerning foreigners in the local community and preparing local migration and integration policies.

Słupsk City Hall reached out to other essential social actors and strengthened cooperation with non-governmental organisations dealing with topics of contemporary migrations, but also intercultural and anti-discriminatory education to start activities aimed at the local community. In 2016 the City Hall accepted invitation from Emic Foundation, Sustainable Development Workshop and Polish Humanitarian Agency and joined a project called "Multitude of voices – integration of refugees in Polish municipalities" (a part of "Citizens for Democracy" Programme financed by the EEA Funds). Thanks to the project, the City Hall will be able to improve competences concerning services not only for refugees, but for foreigners in general, including tourists, foreign workers, as well as for members of national minorities and citizens who deal with their own migration experiences.

The project's aims include:

- analysing local resources and needs concerning refugees and foreigners;
- preparing Local Integration Systems (based on the concept that integration is a two-way process).

The City Hall hopes that participation of many local entities in the project will start an active and fruitful cooperation resulting in creation of local migration and integration policies. The policies will not only help to face contemporary migration challenges - including humanitarian obligations towards refugees - and the issue of Słupsk citizens' migrations, but will also positively influence the city development.



Photo: Beata Pawlicka



ANY SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT

After Lithuania ratified in 1997 the International Convention on Refugees' Status, the first immigrants arrived in Kaunas in 2000 – most of them from Russia (Chechen nationality), Somalia, and Sri Lanka.

They encountered here many difficulties such as the lack of information, living place, work, social and health insurance, intolerance in the society. The national support programmes lasted for short periods, after which people found themselves helpless. According to people working with refugees, the problem in Kaunas evolved not only because of refugees' passive interest in integrating into the society, but also because of the imperfect law database.

The practice of other EU countries working with refugees showed that there have to be day centres established to make refugees' life easier and to integrate them successfully into the society.

In 2004, on the initiative of the Lithuanian Red Cross community, the day centre was established to create a responsible, open and equal dialogue between the refugees and the accepting society. It helped refugees to live independently. The aim of the centre was not only to inform and consult the refugees regarding relevant questions, about the living place, language, culture, medical security, education, unemployment, discrimination problems, but also to create the environment where refugees can gather and talk, support each other, cherish traditions, teach children their national languages, go to local community events or pour out bad feelings, sadness, and anger.

Today in Lithuania, there are around 300 refugees. Most of them are Afghans and Ukrainians. A large part of them lives in Kaunas and surroundings. There are different situations emerging now, as well. People get sick or lose jobs or housing, but thanks to the long lasting cooperation with institutions like Kaunas City Municipality, Kaunas Territorial Labour Exchange, health institutions, universities and others, the employees of Red Cross centre InLt know how to work more effectively.

In line with the common European asylum policy, Lithuania has committed to accept 1105 refugees. There are work groups being organized to discuss emerging challenges and difficulties, and certain strategies have been developed. Seeking to deepen the society's knowledge about refugees, there are special lectures about refugees delivered in schools and universities. The universities are organizing public, intercultural, educational events for the community members.

The Red Cross centre's doors are open not only for refugees who arrived to Lithuania, but also for all citizens – the successful integration of refugees would not be possible without the support of students volunteers from Vytautas Magnus University and Kaunas University of Technology.

by Aistė Gerikaitė-Šukienė | aiste@redcross.lt

NEW STEPS IN PORI



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Photo: Kalle Aaltonen

Each country is getting new labour force, new ideas and views through immigration. At the turn of 2015-2016, there were 2455 foreign citizens living in Pori, representing 101 different countries. Immigration is seen both as an opportunity, as well as a challenge in Pori. The situation today requires new solutions, which can be found through multidisciplinary and multisectoral cooperation.

The City of Pori Integration Programme 2014-2020 has been drawn up because of an excellent co-operation with different actors. The programme is based on immigration strategy, which includes four main objectives. One of them is establishing a help-desk for immigrants. In 2016, Pori and Satakunta Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment renewed their agreement for reception of refugees. The city will receive 15-20 quota refugees and 80-85 asylum seekers this year.

The integration process is a matter of cooperation between different actors. A good example of this is a coordination group for immigration work established by the city. It comprises various authorities, schools, parishes and third sector. Pori is also supporting economically different associations.

There are different ways of doing anti-racism work and helping newcomers, including donations and charity, voluntary organizations' homework clubs (for children) and recreational trips. The key words here are 'participation' and 'doing together'. Best results are achieved when immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers are planning and participating in the activities.

Info Point and Help-Desk MAINE

Pori is also developing new models and methods through EU projects. For example, a help-desk for immigrants has been set up. Services provided by MAINE support immigrants' inte-

gration into the Finnish society. MAINE is located in a neutral, easily accessible place, namely at the Pori Main Library.

MAINE offers to all immigrants free of charge and low-threshold services. The aim is to provide information about services and about the Finnish society to as many immigrants as possible. MAINE gives services in Finnish, Swedish and English. Interpretation services can be used, if needed.

Immigrants can contact MAINE when they need help with completing official forms or when dealing with the authorities. Advisory services on social and health care matters, information on studying, training and recreation activities are also provided. Immigrants' main objective is usually to learn the Finnish language and to get a job. These objectives provide enough challenges to both newcomers themselves and to the society. To support integration, a chairman of the City Council and the City Board have made an announcement in which people were asked to help and support asylum seekers.

Pia Heikkilä is giving free of charge advice and guidance at the help-desk MAINE ▼



Photo: Timo Rantanen



FOR OPENNESS AND TOLERANCE

by Karin Wohlgemuth | karin.wohlgemuth@rostock.de

The musicians of the Expat Philharmonic Orchestra (EPO), mostly refugees or migrants from Syria and other Middle East countries, came together from completely different places in Europe.

Contrabassist Raed Jazbeh was one of them. He came to Bremen in 2013, getting away from the effects of the civil war. It was his idea to gather musicians from his homeland via the social networks. They all came together feeling the commitment to safeguard their cultures outside their home countries. Music helps to connect people, to break down barriers in language, in minds and hearts. So they made their concert debut in Bremen on 22 September 2015.

Very soon Director Julien Salemkour, Soprano Barbara Krieger and Mayor Roland Methling had the idea to invite the EPO to Rostock to perform a charity concert for minor refugees in order to facilitate more leisure activities for them.

Under the motto 'Brotherhood unites all men' (Alle Menschen werden Brüder) the EPO, conducted by Julien Salemkour, presented the 9th Symphony by Ludwig van Beethoven on 29 January 2016 in the overfilled St. Nicholas' Church of Rostock. Invitations were extended to numerous volunteers of the operative refugees aid to thank them for their initiative and engagement.

On the occasion of the UBC Conference on the Impact of the European Refugees Crisis in Cities of the Baltic Sea Region a second charity concert was performed in Rostock on 14 March 2016. As venue the city offered the recently renewed Barocksaal. The orchestra, completed with the sound of Arab instruments, had not only opened the conference, but also the hearts of participants and guests.

EPO visits Rostock on 28 May 2016 again to contribute with its art to symbolical Sea Trip for Peace honouring volunteers, new settlers and dedicated citizens on board the world's fastest sailing vessel, the Russian Sail Training Ship MIR. The seas and the ships should bring people together and never be a death-trap for refugees. The Russian word MIR stand for 'peace' and 'world', and that outlines the message: We are sitting all in the same boat, living in one world - let's live together in peace.

EPO has now registered with an address in our city! Mayor Roland Methling is happy about that: "This orchestra shows how real integration can work; it stands as an example for further initiatives, not only in the field of culture. Together we want to send a signal of a cosmopolitan society".

SPORT CAN HELP



by H.-Georg Lützenkirchen | luetzenkirchen@netcologne.de
More: www.about9.eu

Local authorities and municipalities are bearing special responsibility facing and managing the challenges of the influx of refugees. The communities and local authorities have to guarantee immediate demands, requirements and needs of humanity - by providing accommodation, food and medical care.

Integration process starts here on the local level. Its success depends on the interaction, coordination and cooperation between the compulsory tasks of the local authorities and the commitment of citizens in helping, and as a result ensuring a vibrant civil society. **Sport** is a part of it. Based on its social, cultural and political dimensions sport has to contribute its values and principles (fairness, competition, get people together) to "active networks" in the local area: people and institutions engaged in refugee-policy, volunteers and professionals are networking for a "Culture of Welcome" - which is also part of engagement against right-wing populism.

As a tool of sustained refugee policy, sport can support and assist in the integration process because it provides an immediate offer, a direct approach that can reach the refugees in their temporary accommodation or refugee homes. Sport helps communication and cross cultural experiences. It can be used as a first step in the integration process.

As an applied method in the integration process sport creates low levelled spaces of intercultural learning and experience. In supporting people's social, intercultural and communication skills sport empowers them to participate - these are 'bridges' where people join together creating new neighbourhoods.

Sport activities must be part of a common local strategy: What do we need? What kind of cooperation (e.g. with local sports clubs?) are we going to strengthen?

Such a sport-based sustainable refugee policy requires:

- know-how, which is offered by experts in using sport as an applied method in social, cultural and educational context;
- permanent communication between all active parties;
- coordination of resources and competences in active networks: whom should I approach with my problem, with my intentions, my ideas? Are there any cooperation partners? There are local "coordination offices" to be established.

There are no national solutions for these actual challenges concerning refugee policy. But there are different (national, local) experiences and proposals for solutions. That's why we need a permanent exchange of experiences!



Photo: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

NGOs FOR REFUGEES

by Eero Janson | eero@pagulasabi.ee

In Estonia, the integration support for beneficiaries of international protection is mainly provided by NGOs. The main service provided to them is called a support person service which is a rather unique approach among the EU member states.

Support persons are local people, either paid or volunteers, who are trained to provide individual support and counselling to the newly arrived refugees.

One of their main function is to connect the refugees to other services (including the ones provided by the municipality) and to know which applications have to be submitted to any place and in which order (for example, to get an ID card, to apply for subsistence benefit, to register with the municipality, to register as unemployed, etc). Another function is to provide practical information and advice on living in Estonia: where's the best local supermarket, how to start looking for a job, where to find language courses, etc.

Two NGOs are providing a support person service to the beneficiaries of international protection: Estonian Refugee Council, which is doing it based on volunteer work, and Johannes Mihkelson Centre, which is using EU funding. Both organizations are involved in supporting spontaneous arrivals, as well as arrivals through the relocation and resettlement programmes.

The service shows good results because it provides individualized support to each refugee, rather than pushing all arrivals to a standardized welcoming programme. Nevertheless, this kind of welcoming programme is offered to refugees as well, organized by the state and with the length of one full day. These combined two approaches create an integration system which has a lot of potential to succeed in helping the refugees who arrive in Estonia in coping and rebuilding their lives in a new and safe environment.



Anniina Jokinen
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CITIES AGAINST TRAFFICKING

People are trafficked for many different purposes: for sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced begging and for forced criminality, to name just a few examples. All these forms of exploitation have very specific implications for local communities, cities and municipalities. Local authorities are often the first to come into contact with both victims and traffickers. Several studies show that migrants face increased risk of exploitation and trafficking both during transit, as well as in the destination countries. In the context of current migration situation it is important to enhance the capacity of local actors to ensure proper victim identification and assistance measures.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings has recently launched Guidelines for Municipalities on Stepping up Local Action against Human Trafficking. The guidelines offer concrete measures on what cities could do to map out the local situation and identify populations at risk, including asylum seekers and refugees, and to improve assistance to victims and enhance prevention efforts on the local level. Also, several promising practices are provided to encourage cities to use innovative means to counteract human trafficking at the local level. These include, for example, the Tampere cooperation model and a Latvian project of involving librarians in the work against trafficking.

Local analysis of the trafficking situation is the key action based on which local priorities and all anti-trafficking actions should be set. By assigning clear roles to different actors, it is possible to save resources, target measures and minimise overlaps in the system. The guidelines suggest a model based on which the cities can identify the vulnerable groups at risk to be trafficked, relevant locations where exploitation can take place and actors who can identify victims. Also, indicators of different forms of exploitation are provided, and a detailed assistance scheme to ensure rights-based and victim-centred assistance to trafficked persons.

The Guidelines for Municipalities are available in English, Estonian, Finnish, German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Russian and Swedish at the CBSS website: <http://www.cbss.org/safe-secure-region-projects/>



MAKING IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

by Ingrid Wall | ingrid.wall@trelleborg.se

Photo: Ingrid Wall

One day in September, the ordinary life in the city of Trelleborg drastically changed. Before, 43 000 inhabitants of the southernmost city in Sweden were watching the refugee crisis in continental Europe via TV and other media. Suddenly it was here - during ten weeks the same amount of refugees transferred through Trelleborg. Ten percent of them were minors under the age of 18. They all have become the responsibility of the community of Trelleborg.

“We made the impossible possible,” says Cecilia Lejon, Head of the Labour Market Administration in Trelleborg. “We hadn’t had any plans. We had no solutions. We had to deal with the problems when they turned up. And they did, all the time”...

The port of Trelleborg is the second biggest in Sweden and the largest ferry harbour in the Baltic. By ferry, mainly from Rostock and Travemünde, the asylum seekers came in the morning, midday and evening. Every hour there was a ferry reaching the harbour in Trelleborg, and the authorities didn’t know how many refugees were on board.

The families and adults were transported directly to the neighbouring town of Malmö and the Migration Office there. All the unaccompanied youth stayed in Trelleborg and the community had to take care of their housing, food and security.

“It was a tremendous challenge,” Cecilia Lejon says. “One day 212 youths arrived to our city. During seventeen days, we opened up 17 shelters in an old museum, offices, and industry buildings. We had to seek everywhere”.

There were many logistic problems. How to find 1000 beds? Bed linen? Staff? Every day new issues arose. More than 250

people have been hired within a week to work in the shelters. The church organized help from NGO`s and others.

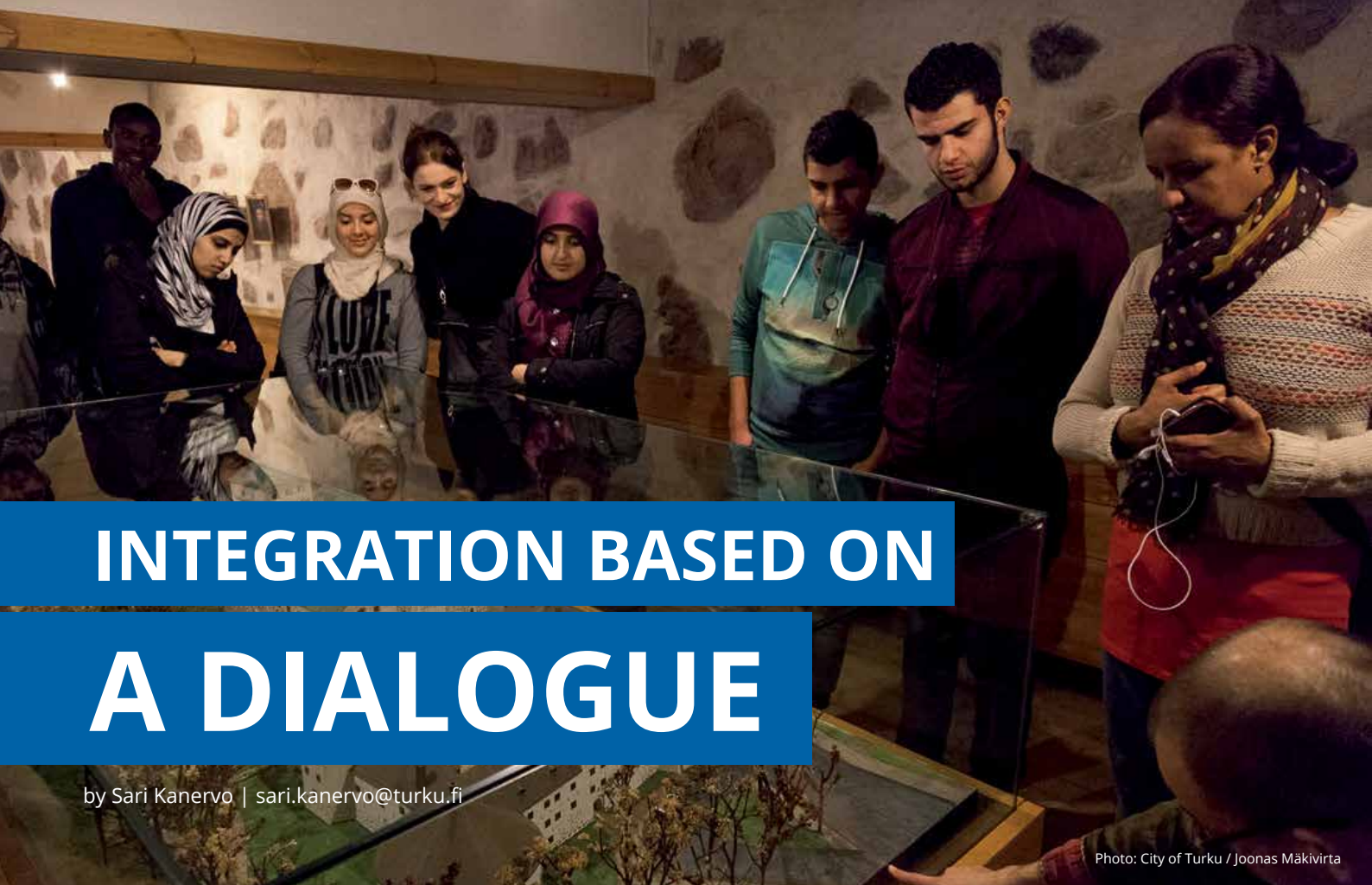
“A huge problem was that the migration authorities had been overwhelmed with asylum seekers and the normal procedures had failed to work. Normally, it would take maximum one week for a youngster to be registered and be transferred to a community for resident stay. But this time, it had taken several weeks. And even if it was difficult sometimes, we had managed,” says Cecilia Lejon, “and we were proud of that. No kid is to sleep outdoors in the park or go to bed hungry”.

In late November, the Swedish government decided to introduce strengthened border controls and very few asylum seekers - comparing to the situation of the last autumn - had found their way to Sweden.

Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and Cecilia Lejon, Head of the Labour Market Administration in Trelleborg.



Photo: Ingrid Wall



INTEGRATION BASED ON A DIALOGUE

by Sari Kanervo | sari.kanervo@turku.fi

Photo: City of Turku / Joonas Mäkivirta

Over a million persons crossed Europe in 2015. Germany received the highest number of asylum applications, but the largest increase in the numbers were recorded in Finland – 32 476 persons arrived as asylum seekers, which was over nine times more than a year before. More than 120 new refugee centres and 60 units for the underaged were established all around Finland. The total costs were 128,7 million Euros.

In Turku there has been one Refugee Centre for years, maintained by the Finnish Red Cross. Last autumn the centre got overcrowded and Turku provided several buildings (old schools, hostel, hospital building) for emergency accommodation to the Red Cross.

The Finnish Immigration Service (Migri), subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, processes and decides on the matters related to immigration and refugee issues. After the positive decision, a newcomer is placed into some of municipalities or move there independently. There is a huge unresolved question - there are approximately 1700 agreed straight accesses to municipalities, but the need is approximately 10 000 - 15 000. In the municipality point of view there are not enough apartments for a big number of newcomers. Another question is how to prevent the migrant centralization in the scattered suburbs, where the city owned apartments are.

When the seeker gets asylum in Turku

The Immigrant Office takes care of the social and health care of refugees for up to three years. The newcomers get the same benefits as unemployed Finns. The costs of the service are compensated to the municipality by the state. The integration legislation defines the basic policies and duties. The TE- Employment Services carries the responsibility for integration of those belonging to the labour force; the municipality takes care of the rest meaning underage, housewives and seniors.

▲ Migrant group in Turku Castle.

Each newcomer gets his/her own integration plan, which is an official agreement made by employment office and/or municipality and migrant him/herself. The plan consists of all the activities, which a person is supposed to attend to integrate – for adults: Finnish language course, social studies, professional courses and work practices. Before attending the normal class of own age, children and youths have preparatory studies for one year. Illiterate and those without or interrupted basic schooling give new kind of challenge to the education sector.

The goal of integration plan and actions is naturally to get an active and working member of the society. The new situation force the administration to develop the integration system – to quicken and intensify schooling, to find the ways to combine language studies and profession learning, and take shortcuts to the general labour market.

Inclusion

The newcomers could be a solution for such problems as the ageing population and the lack of work force. They might bring new skills and breeze to the economic and social life.

Integration is a demanding task for migrants, who cannot do it alone. The readiness to welcome the newcomers should be the basic prerequisite to the whole city and its inhabitants. Although the general atmosphere has been tight after the influx of asylum seekers and a feeling of insecurity among the Finns has grown, there are a lot of positive inputs. Many Finns and migrants living in Finland have contributed as volunteers. The city of Turku established two official bodies – the Diversity Advisory Board and Working Group with Muslim Communities – to have a closer dialogue with all residents.

CITIES IN THE FRONTLINE

by Thomas Jezequel | thomas.jezequel@eurocities.eu



EUROCITIES launched on 4 April a report on how major European cities are managing the reception and integration of refugees.

The report is the result of a survey carried out among **EUROCITIES** members and offers new insights into the situation in 34 different cities in 17 EU member states.

We present information, facts and data on:

- How cities are adapting services to ensure the integration of newcomers,
- How cities are communicating with citizens on the issue,
- How cities work – or do not work - with the regional and national level,
- What kind of support cities receive or need,
- The practical challenges cities face and solutions they identify,
- The impact on the municipal budget.

Cities are on the front line when it comes to receiving and integrating refugees and asylum seekers. They must deal with the urgent challenges presented by the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers, such as providing housing, and access to healthcare and education.

They must also establish the necessary infrastructure to ensure the long term integration of newcomers in our societies, and to maintain social cohesion. Anna Lisa Boni, **EUROCITIES** Secretary General, said:

“City administrations are in a difficult situation: most have no legal competence to care for asylum seekers and refugees, yet they are forced to take charge without the official mandate or budget to do so. Cities are on the front line when it comes to the current refugee situation in Europe, and they deserve the political and financial recognition at European and national level to reflect this.”

With this report, **EUROCITIES** hopes to highlight the challenges city administrations face and the exemplary work and leadership they have shown in the face of this unprecedented situation.

Our aim is to feed this evidence into the current debate on migration and integration at European level and contribute to the partnership on refugee integration currently being developed under the EU Urban Agenda.



by Ivan Kesoretskikh
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RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE

In 2014 Russia faced huge migration flow due to aggravation of the situation in Ukraine. According to the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) data since the beginning of the conflict a number of refugees from Ukraine that entered Russia stands to 2.5 million people. 800 thousand of them applied for an official refugee status, citizenship, temporary shelter or took part in the state programme of voluntary resettlement.

Housing infrastructure includes 455 temporary accommodations, mainly in the private sector - cheap hotels, holiday villages and resorts. Daily state expenses on food and accommodation were set to 20 Euro (converted from RUR) and only intended refugees living in temporary accommodations. Every migrant had to pass free medical examination and receive appropriate documents.

According to the FMS in 2014, the Russian State budget spends more than 50 million Euro (60% food and accommodation, 20% health services, 14% transport, 6% other) on the Ukrainian refugees and temporary migrants. State migration management system also included quotation rules within regions. Percentage distribution ranged from 0.01 to 4% of the total number of refugees.

Russian attitude towards Ukrainian refugees has been positive. It differs from the situation in Europe, where the main influx of refugees is from different cultural backgrounds.

In this case, a concept of comprehensive migration centres in Kaliningrad Region can be implemented. It was developed for labour migrants coming to Kaliningrad from Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan. It stands for creation of one-stop suburban areas, including necessary facilities for reception, inspection, healthcare, accommodation and education in one place. It allows solving several important problems - to ensure the security and to reduce social tensions. An essential element is the labour integration.

Under specified contracts with regional companies, migrants can apply for work. The centres will also provide education on Russian language, history, and law. First elements of such centres already operate in Moscow and in St. Petersburg.



Photo: City of Umeå

OPEN CLIMATE IN UMEÅ

Umeå is a university town with approximately 120 000 inhabitants (of which over 39,000 are students). The largest and fastest growing town in northern Sweden, the city prides itself in being an attractive centre for education, technical and medical research.

Umeå is a town, which enjoys a rich and culturally diverse climate, being famous throughout the country for its music scene, film makers, sports celebrities and food culture. Perhaps this was why it has been awarded the prestige title of European Capital of Culture 2014.

As for the immigrant influx in recent years, Umeå has been receiving an increasing number of refugees. The city provides free language training, society information and integration activities for all newcomers as soon as possible.

In the municipal school where the immigrants receive their language training, there are also numerous discussion groups on themes such as: parenting, gender equality and domestic/honour related violence.

Other exciting projects that have been granted funding include a mother-baby group to prevent isolation of new mothers. And more recently, a project that aims to widen education and future employment of illiterate adults, by offering special tuition and work placements for its participants has been launched. Both projects are an attempt to integrate those newcomers who are most vulnerable in society.

Apart from the municipal initiatives, there are also some private undertakings. The Swedish Church has long had on its agenda caring for vulnerable people in the society. There are also a number of NGOs contributing to the integration process of newcomers in creative ways, such as friend- matching.

▲ A Syrian boy.

At the same time, like in other cities, there are challenges for those who arrive from other cultures.

These are as follows:

- A housing crisis - the number of university students and a growing town, makes it difficult to accommodate all refugees when they arrive.
- Adapting to a harsh climate for many months of the year.
- Cultural barriers - notably adapting to less social interaction.

Swedes tend to be naturally reserved towards one another and that includes newcomers! However, Umeå enjoys an open climate and a strong equal rights movement, which helps create an allowing and welcoming atmosphere for all.

by Josefine Denman | josefin.denman@umea.se



Photo: Henrik Olofsson

The Refugees – a chance for the cities

by Anna Dargiewicz | info@ubc.net

“Cities have become what they are today thanks to all inhabitants no matter from which background they come. All inhabitants contribute to the local well-being” – the Resolution, adopted at the Conference on Impact of the European Refugees Crisis in the Cities of the Baltic Sea Region on 15 March in Rostock, states.

The document is entitled „Refugees – a Challenge and a Chance for the Cities in the Baltic Sea Region“. It refers to the new UBC Strategy that sets UBC’s sights on promoting cities as inclusive, diverse, sustainable, creative, democratic and safe hubs, stimulating active citizenship, gender equality and participatory policy making.

“It is very important not to focus on the problems only, but to see the opportunities and potential the new inhabitants bring to the cities”, Aldo Iskra, Open Skåne, emphasized.

The Resolution calls for more solidarity between the European countries and urges the national governments, the EU and the international community to make efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in the affected countries and welcomes all political steps which might lead to an end of the wars and to stop the massive exodus of people from the conflict areas.

Also, it underlines that integration is not only a task for refugees, but also for the citizens who have to learn new lessons about living together with newcomers. The document points out that the refugees’ integration process is long-lasting and should get continuous attention. The commitment and cooperation of all the involved parties – mi-

grants, inhabitants, local authorities and NGOs, is vital for a successful integration.

The list of recommendations on measures to be taken to welcome newcomers and to achieve their effective integration is attached to the Resolution. According to the UBC cities, education and labour are the basis of any integration.

The Resolution has been translated into the UBC countries languages and is available at www.ubc.net.

The conference participants discussed the measures to be taken to welcome newcomers and to ensure their effective integration.





Rostock hosted the 75th UBC Board meeting

The 75th meeting of UBC Executive Board was held on 16 March 2016 in the City of Rostock, in conjunction with the UBC Conference on Impact of the European Refugees Crisis in Baltic Cities. The summary of the conference on refugees, UBC Strategic Framework 2016–2021 and UBC involvement in the EU Strategy for the BSR were the main topics on the agenda. The Board also discussed the financial matters and decided on the new UBC logo.

Steffen Bockhahn, Deputy Mayor of Rostock, along with other Executive Board members, summed up the Conference as a very successful, discussing the role of municipalities, concentrating on best practices and analyzing the needs, challenges and the chances faced by the cities.

“We need to be open-minded and care for dignity of the refugees,” Bockhahn emphasized. He also called for solidarity within the European Union.

Piotr Grzelak, Deputy Mayor of Gdańsk, stressed that all the compliments expressed by the participants of the conference show the cities which direction UBC should follow.

Strategy Coordinator Mikko Lohikoski, reminded the UBC Strategic Framework 2016–2021 was presented and accepted at the XIII General Conference in Gdynia in October 2015. In November 2015 the paper was sent out to the member cities and commissions for comments and it got a number of valuable responses and proposals, which were incorporated to strengthen the document.

“The Strategy is only successful as long as it is being implemented,” Lohikoski said.

He stressed the importance of questions such as ‘What should we do to continue to be relevant?’, ‘How could we gain new members through the added values?’, ‘What are we, and what do we want to be?’ The exchange of ideas and

experts between cities should be strengthened, and cities should support each other more.

Lohikoski also underlined that UBC should become more involved with EUSBSR and mark its presence and its issues more firmly. At the proposal of our Board last year the member states of the EU and their Baltic Sea ambassadors decided that UBC would be included as a Horizontal Action Capacity coordinator, together with the Swedish Institute and the Baltic Sea NGO Network.

Anna Kotaviita, Communications Manager, introduced the process of UBC logo renewal. The Board decided on the new version of the UBC logo, taking into account the proposals of the Communication Network.

Secretary General Paweł Żaboklicki presented the UBC financial report 2015 and the proposal of the UBC budget 2016. The Board took note of the financial report and approved the budget for 2016.

More: www.ubc.net



New initiatives to support youth employment and well-being

by Matti Mäkelä | matti.makela@turku.fi

UBC Task Force on Youth Employment and Well-Being presented its' final report at the UBC Conference in Gdynia, Poland, in October 2015. The report suggested certain measures that are listed below:

1. 2–4 thematic workshops per year.
2. The UBC should encourage all member cities to arrange, promote and seek funding for study visits and expert visits to help disseminate and implement the best youth guarantee practices of UBC cities.
3. New projects and other forms of joint development between UBC cities.
4. Follow-up survey on the implementation of the Youth Employment and Well-Being Programme in 2017.
5. Decision about the coordination and funding.
6. Focus on finding and trying out opportunities and working towards the desired goals.

The UBC has already started to implement the concrete work plan for 2016 and 2017. First step was a wide dissemination of the UBC Task Force final report 'The Good, The bad and The Next Practices'. A feedback has been extremely positive. The Chair of the Task Force was invited to give a presentation about the best practices at the regional Youth Guarantee kick-off seminar in Extremadura, Spain, in April 2016.

Joint projects, dissemination workshops and Youth Employment and Well-Being Seminar are planned in 2016. One project planning with young refugees as a target group is already under way as part of the Baltic Sea Region flagship project. Suggested themes for the dissemination workshops are young immigrants, youth employment and participation of the young people. Youth Employment and Well-Being Seminar is planned to be arranged during the fall 2016.

2017 will mean continuation of the dissemination workshops, as well as planning and executing the new projects. Also, the follow-up survey on the implementation of the Programme will be executed.



by Mikko Lohikoski
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Strong UBC is essential

The Union of the Baltic Cities was founded 25 years ago. Much has changed in this quarter of the century. Finland, Sweden, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia joined the EU. Cooperation in the region has deepened, although we are not immune to the developments internationally.

How does it all influence the role and work of the regional organizations, and especially the UBC? This was one of the key considerations when preparing our new Strategic Framework for the years 2016–2021. Our conclusion is that an effective, proactive, representative UBC is needed, and even more: essential.

Continued urbanization enhances the role of cities as centres of economic and social development, the engines of growth. Their success and vitality is critical to the overall development of our societies. While this is widely recognized, it is too often neglected when decisions are made. Especially, the interests of medium-sized and small cities are forgotten – and most of the cities in our region, with a few exceptions, belong to this category. The cities have to defend their interests by joint actions.

As the leading network of cities in the BSR, the UBC has a responsibility to ensure, together with other regional stakeholders, that the voice of our region is heard in the European decision making. Cities can support each other and benefit from their experiences. They can jointly initiate and promote smart, sustainable solutions, learn how to do more with less.

Improving effectiveness and visibility

UBC's informal, "hands on, let us do it" attitude to seek practical solutions, makes it easy for the Member Cities and their representatives to create contact with their peers. Working regionally brings synergy and added value. Our track record since 1991 proves this.

How do we promote these goals?

The EU Strategy for the BSR has since 2009 created a most useful framework for regional cooperation. Its effectiveness is enhanced by the efforts to include also non-EU countries, Russia, Belarus, Norway and Iceland in the cooperation. UBC works especially to enhance the role of cities and regions, but also other stakeholders in the Strategy.

To implement the UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2016–2021, a guiding policy document for UBC in promoting smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region, is essential for the UBC and its Commissions. And last but not least, to effectively serve the interests of our member cities and the whole region, the UBC must continue to improve the effectiveness of its work. This calls for goal-oriented actions, strengthening of our thematic Commissions and effective communication.



Youth leisure

On 12-15 April UBC Youthful Cities Commission held its first meeting in 2016, hosted by the former Chair of the Commission, City of Turku, Finland.

Deputy Mayor Jarkko Virtanen held a welcome reception in the city hall for all the participants – 28 young people and officials representing 14 member cities from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Poland.

The topic of the meeting was 'Youth Leisure Time'. It started with a presentation about UBC and the Youthful Cities Commission.

Our guest Matti Mäkelä from UBC Task Force on Youth Employment presented the Well-Being report "The Good, The Bad and The Best Practices".

The cities made presentations about the topic 'Youth Leisure Time' from their point of view. A lot of good ideas about youth leisure time around the Baltic Sea Region were highlighted.

Several interesting project proposals were also presented, by Tatjana Klimenko from the city of Narva, by Magda Leszczyna-Rzucidło from BISER (Baltic Institute for Regional and European Concern) and by Carsten Adamsen from city of Kolding. We expect more future co-operation in the Baltic Sea Region.

During the meeting we discussed the future meetings structure and how to make the member cities more involved in the meetings. The young participants gave us a youth per-

spective, as well. We also discussed the new UBC website and social media. Irene Pendolin, UBC Communications Manager, attended our meeting on the last day and we had the possibility to ask about the website, social media, UBC logo, etc.

The participants had also the opportunity to take part in interesting guided tours to the Museum of History and Contemporary Art and Turku Cathedral.

Another important issue discussed was the Commission's next meetings. The Chair - city of Gävle invited the Commission to a meeting in spring 2017.

In the fall 2017 the Youth Conference in Växjö, Sweden, is planned during the next UBC General Conference.

by Lena Hernandez Modin | lana.hernandez_modin@gavle.se



Photo: FreImages.com/Marcus Österberg

Sustainable cities projects doing well

by Anna Kotaviita | anna.kotaviita@turku.fi

UBC Sustainable Cities Commission held the Advisory Board meeting in Gdańsk on 16–17 March. The meeting focused on the topic of Climate Smart Baltic Cities.

The Commission's latest cross-border projects focus on integrated planning and partnership models, integrated storm water management and urban wastewaters. Recently, the Commission received information that their Horizon 2020 applications were successful.

According to Björn Grönholm, Head of the UBC SCC Secretariat, the last months have been inspiring when it comes to many UBC cities' plans to reduce carbon emissions. This fits in the global agenda, as the implementation of the Paris Declaration – taken at COP21 of the Paris Summit 2015 – puts a lot of pressure also on UBC cities' energy and mobility performance.

“Many UBC cities are already taking actions to become fossil-free or carbon-neutral in the near future. We will do our best in supporting them in this work”, Grönholm states.

The Sustainable Cities Commission's next Advisory Board meeting will take place on 8–9 September in Lahti, Finland.



Promoting sustainable cultural events

A joint meeting of the UBC Commissions on “Cultures of Sustainability in the Baltic cities” will be held in the cities of Słupsk and Ustka (Poland), 15–17 June 2016. Organizers of the joint meeting are UBC Sustainable Cities, Safe Cities and Cultural Cities Commissions.

Organizing large-scale public events, such as festivals and concerts, presents cities often with many challenges. Permits, safety, environmental concerns, just to name a few. The joint meeting presents good solutions to the event management issues and common good practice guidelines for organizing cultural events that are both safe and sustainable!

There is plenty of time booked for networking and discussion. More: <http://www.ubc-sustainable.net/events/cultures-sustainability-baltic-cities>



Open Spaces in Karlstad...

by Ann-Karin Bohl | ann-karin.bohl@karlstad.se

The UBC Inclusive and Healthy Cities Commission meeting was held in Karlstad on 8–10 March to deepen the co-operation and to get to know each other. The attention was put on the practise presented during the study visits.

The seniors' house

In Sundsta manor house there is a community centre for seniors in Karlstad. It is an open meeting place with a lot of opportunities and tailor-made programmes.

Some reflections

The participants were impressed by the full commitment to work of the staff. It was good to see how a vision: Quality of Life 100.000 (Karlstad wants to become a city of 100 000 inhabitants) manifested itself in different fields. The vision gives a common goal, but at the same time a space for various businesses and needs is offered. The value of involving volunteers was very clear.

... and in Trelleborg

by Ingrid Wall | ingrid.wall@trelleborg.se

Five countries are represented at the annual meeting of the Inclusive and Healthy Cities Commission in Trelleborg, 19–20 May.

The delegates come from Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The theme is the same as earlier this year – meeting places. That's why, study visits are arranged in places for young and elderly people. The refugee crisis last autumn has been discussed. Trelleborg alone took care of more than 4 400 unaccompanied youths.



Towards innovative and attractive cities

by Wolfgang Schmidt | wolfgang.schmidt@kiel.de



The BSR is one of the leading growth and trading centers in the world. It comprises 10 countries and more than 100 million inhabitants. The region boasts stable democracies, institutional structures favorable to business, good infrastructure, high levels of education and a shared history of cooperation and trade.

Attractive Cities

Following a broad approach of cities' attractiveness the UBC Smart and Prospering Cities Commission develops strategies and actions targeted at both talents, businesses and visitors. In doing so, both the attraction, development and retention of these target groups are considered. Important elements are therefore talent management, investment promotion and destination marketing.

Innovation Ecosystems

There are different systems aiming to foster innovation in our member cities. Various development agencies largely differ within administration (local, regional, national), mandate, modus operandi, target groups, etc. We consider institutions like agencies, science parks and accelerators.

At the Seminar 'Innovation Ecosystems 2016' in Copenhagen, held on 26-27 May, the participants meet world class experts from Copenhagen Capacity, Copenhagen Science City and Technology Region Aachen and learn about successful strategies on innovation, investment promotion and cross border business settlement. The seminar is targeted at administration experts, entrepreneurs and scientists. Successful strategies and proven measures from the fields

of smart cities are presented, cooperation of business, academia and administration, digitalization, energy, transport and ICT, creative industries and soft landing are also discussed.

The next seminar "Attractive Cities" is planned to be held on 21-22 September 2016 in Hamburg, back-to-back with Fehmarnbelt Days 2016.

The executive seminar on Place Promotion and Talent Management is scheduled. This meeting will also be an excellent opportunity to present the UBC cities' best practices.

The UBC Smart and Prospering Cities Commission offers a reliable network of entrepreneurs, scientists and administration experts from the BSR and beyond. We run seminars and projects on city attractiveness and innovation.





Photo: Söderhamn Aerobilder AB

New Times – New Dynamics

The experience of approaching Söderhamn by car on the E4 or train at the railway station/Travel Centre does not reflect upon the 17th century town or the archipelago only 15 kilometres away. New visitors have problems with orientation and finding the way to the town centre or other local destinations.

The municipality of Söderhamn wants to change this and make it easier and more attractive to walk between the station, the town centre and all the way to the inner archipelago.

“With the help from the UBC planners, we can bring forth new ideas for development, to help us add a new layer to our 400-year-old town. We want to develop these areas, add new qualities and create a more attractive entrance to the town”, says Mayor Sven-Erik Lindestam.

New Times – New Dynamics

The purpose is to create a richer environment and develop an approach passage with a spatial continuance. Another aspect is to promote commuting by public transport, and minimize the impact on our environment.

With the theme ‘New Times – New Dynamics’ Söderhamn aims to change the trend: tough conditions for rural municipalities, decreasing population and focus on large cities.

The demographic change is a big challenge. For more than three decades Söderhamn has been losing its population. The last few years the population as a whole has grown, but soon a third of the population will be +65 years old. To study on university-level young people often move away. It

is hard to keep the young and families with children, in spite of excellent living qualities and regional accessibility.

Söderhamn is one of the Swedish municipalities that welcomes most refugees in relation to its own population. The refugee situation will not automatically increase our population in the long term, but with collaboration it can give positive effects such as an increase in younger population, new job opportunities, and more business.

“At the UBC Planning Cities Seminar in Söderhamn in May we focus on two strategic areas. The Portal of Söderhamn at the motorway and the Travel Centre, and Söderhamn by the Sea which links the inner bay to the town centre”, says Niels Peter Mohr, Chairman of the UBC Planning Cities Commission.

by Karin Olsson | www.soderhamn.se/ubc



Gender Equality Working Group in action

Building strategies for gender mainstreaming in the UBC member cities will be the main topic of the UBC Working Group on Gender Equality meeting that will be held in Gdańsk (Poland) on 22 June 2016.

Despite many positive changes in Europe, the question of gender equality still requires special attention. As women remain a vulnerable group, special measures need to be introduced to ensure their bigger participation in decision making and secure their stronger position on the labour market.

Violence against women, including trafficking, women's health and above all, overcoming gender stereotypes, which prevent women and men from sharing parental and care responsibilities equally, need our special attention. Also, the attention will be paid to the special needs of immigrant women in the Baltic Sea Region.

Also, the role of GE WG and its plans will be discussed.

"We are convinced that this meeting will create space for exchange of knowledge and foster further cooperation among the UBC cities, Hanna Maidell, Senior Adviser, City of Helsinki, says. "All interested representatives of UBC member cities are welcome to join the Working Group".

by Hanna Maidell | hanna.maidell@hel.fi
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Unboxing the Sandbox

by Mikael Olsson | mikael.olsson@si.se

The Baltic Executive Programme: Unboxing the Sandbox is a new leadership programme designed to help organisations unlock the full potential of transnational cooperation. The programme is initiated and funded by the Swedish Institute as part of its work with Horizontal Action Capacity; development and recruitment has taken place together with the Norden Association, the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission and the Secretariat of Union of Baltic Cities.

A result of this cooperation is that more than 15 UBC members are enrolled in the pilot three module programme together with an equal number of representatives from regional bodies in the eight EU-member countries in the Baltic Sea Region. The first module took place in Warsaw (22–24 February), the second in Riga (11–13 April) and the final module will take place in Tallinn (13–14 June).

Many transnational projects proved to have limited durability. They often cease to exist when funding runs out and the project results are seldom integrated into the normal operations of the home organisation.

One explanation is that projects often are developed and managed in relative detachment from their home organisation. In computer security terminology those projects are called "sandboxed" and in practice they work as international satellites of their home organization, the "mother ship".

Based on this assumption of sandboxing, the programme is designed to problematize the current conditions and to find ways and strategies whereby transnational projects can be "unboxed" and the competencies, insights and funding can be strategically used for the long-term benefit.

The focus is on developing the organizational models whereby the potential of the transnational cooperation is realized, without overly stifling the innovative space needed for "start-up" activities and agendas.

The programme targets the local and regional level in the BSR; in particular senior elected officials (politicians) and the head of administrations (administrators), representing the strategic level of "owners", with the position to redesign existing governance structure that has endorsed the "sandboxing" of transnational cooperation.

The programmes are explicitly non-technical in nature, seeking to empower officials and administrators to be more active in the world of projects that is often dominated by project specialists with their own discourse.

by Irene Pendolin
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The UBC's communication evolution continues

One of the central goals of the UBC in recent years has been to energize and streamline its work, also in communications. As a part of this, UBC's Executive Board approved a new logo for the organisation during its meeting in Rostock in March. In addition, new website and a renewed Bulletin have been launched.

The new UBC logo has three formats: main logo, marketing logo and a version of the main logo for the Commissions' use. The main UBC logo features both the full name and the abbreviation of the organisation:



The marketing logo features the Baltic Sea as an additional element. This logo may be used for marketing purposes:



In addition, the Commissions may use a version of the main logo that is specified to their use:



CULTURAL CITIES
COMMISSION

The use of the UBC logos is specified in **UBC's new graphic guidelines** at www.ubc.net.

Please contact Communications Manager before using the logos, especially if you are planning to use the marketing logo.

Send your feedback on the new website

The new UBC website www.ubc.net is now open and constantly developed. We would appreciate feedback from the member cities and Commissions to ensure we have accurate information online and to make the website serve the UBC community even better.

The old UBC website will continue to operate alongside the new one for some time. During 2016, UBC will continue to evolve in communications and sharing our know-how more efficiently, e.g. through the new website, as well as social media.

Connect in UBC Communications Network

In developing the ubc.net, communications specialists in the UBC Communications Network played an important role. The network was established in 2015 to improve communication between UBC and its member cities, to share best practices and tools and to provide a network for consultation and cooperation.

Members of the network are invited to meet approximately once a year; the next meeting is scheduled for autumn 2016. We encourage more member cities to name their representatives to the Network and take part in the activities and benefits it offers!

Do not hesitate to be in touch if you have any questions or require more information on UBC communications and marketing.

CITY NEWS



THE BLUE VISION OF PANEVĖŽYS

Seven Mayors from four Baltic Sea Region countries take the lead to become the very first pioneers in the Baltic Sea City Accelerator Programme.

Panevėžys together with Kalmar, Mariehamn, Słupsk, Vaxholm, Värmdö and Västervik will work over the course of the coming year to develop blue growth opportunities together with a coalition of global experts. Accelerator Programme is supposed for the BSR municipalities seeking to arrange water management systems in a way that the water quality of the Baltic Sea would improve.

Panevėžys has ambition to arrange the city storm water system in a modern way.

"It is not a secret that rain sewage system is technically old fashioned, in case of huge rainfalls certain territories are flooded and this causes discomfort to inhabitants. Besides, when rainwater mixes with sewage water, all this goes to the River Nevėžis, later, to the Baltic Sea. I am sure that by pulling the efforts together, using the knowledge of foreign experts, we shall manage to arrange storm water system in a proper way, to improve the quality for the inhabitants in a considerable way and to solve environmental problems common for the Baltic Sea Region", Rytis Račkauskas, the Mayor of Panevėžys, says.

Strategic partners taking part in the pilot project are as follows: Boston Consulting Group, Ramboll, "General Electrics", Swedish Environmental Research Institute (IVL), Stockholm Environmental Institute, Nordic Investment Bank, Scandinavian Investment group.

by Dalia Gurskiene | dalia.gurskiene@panevezys.lt



ESPOO ENTRESSE LIBRARY AWARDED

Finland's Minister of Education and Culture Sanni Grahn-Laasonen has awarded the Entresse Library in Espoo with the Finland Prize for its exemplary multicultural work. Entresse Library is the first library to gain the prestigious prize, handed out annually for groundbreaking work in the field of culture.

According to the Minister Grahn-Laasonen, "Entresse Library could function as an example to all cultural work in Finland. The library offers personal service, invests in meetings, builds community, and invests in physical and cultural accessibility. The members of the library staff are experts in cultural diversity. The library invests in services for young people and immigrants, who make up a large number of the customers. The library listens to the needs of the local residents in the development of its services. In Entresse Library a customer can find experiences, information, a community, friends and a way to get into the Finnish society and working life, regardless of background."

"Entresse Library would be nothing without our customers. Without the customers' contribution to developing the library, we would not have received this acknowledgement", says Jaana Määttä, Service Manager of Entresse Library.

Since its opening in 2009, Entresse Library has developed into a lively cultural centre. In 2015, over 800 events were arranged. Recently, the library has set up the photography exhibition New Finns, arranged a Finnish language study group for women, Chinese dance groups and computer classes in Russian, as well as events in different languages for children. One fifth of the library's collections are in foreign languages. It has also actively participated in the integration of refugees.

Entresse Library is situated in a shopping centre with good connections. The library hosts one of Espoo City Library's Makerspaces, where residents of all ages can learn and try out new things together, such as coding or 3D printing.

The Music Library includes music equipment, a studio and a stage. The Events Stage welcomes customers to co-create events. In the youth library section, kids can relax, play games and create events together. The staff is there for the teens and interested in their doings.

by Annika Forsten | annika.forsten@espoo.fi
www.helmet.fi/entresselibrary



Photo: Andrius Kundrotas

IMPROVING INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT IN ŠIAULIAI

In the last years Šiauliai has gained a greater growth momentum that made the city competitive and dynamic. The developed city strategy encouraged establishment of new companies, implementation of advanced technologies and modern management. Moreover, the city achieved sustainable pattern of development.

Today, a lot of city activities are focused on implementation of the largest investment projects strengthening the industrial potential and creating favourable investment environment.

Free Economic Zone with the territory of 218 ha provides an excellent opportunity for investors in Šiauliai Region. Free Economic Zone, one of the largest investment projects, funded from the EU Structural, the State and the Municipal Funds, was officially opened in March 2016. Already on the same day, the first investment agreement has been signed.

“This huge investment project is of significant importance not only for the city but also for the region which will increase its competitiveness and contribute to the city and community welfare”, the Mayor of Šiauliai Artūras Visockas said at the opening ceremony.

Šiauliai develops and implements targeted projects, motivates business to invest and appreciates every fresh idea contributing to the city development.

by Audronė Jaugelavičienė | a.jaugelaviciene@siauliai.lt



THE LAND OF FOUR WATERS

Klaipėda District Municipality (administrative centre – Town of Gargždai) is strengthening its position as a water tourism land. This summer it offers a new attraction – regular water route Dreverna-Juodkrante which will connect two exceptionally beautiful Curonian Lagoon settlements. Vessel rental costs will be covered by the municipal budget.

The vessel will shuttle twice a day on weekends from June until August, there will be additional times on Thursdays, and on weekends in July. The vessel will fit up to 50 people together with their bicycles.

The true spirit of an old fishing village can be felt at Dreverna. The modern small vessel harbour can be named as a village's centre of attraction. It is adapted for recreational navigation and has 30 yachts mooring, a slipway and a crane. On the port's pier you will find the unique ancient Curonian boat “Dreverna” – built exactly as the XIX/XX century model.

“The Fish Road” is a unique culinary water tourism route along the shores of the littoral. You will sail through the Curonian Lagoon, the delta of the greatest Lithuanian rivers the Nemunas and the Minija and King's Wilhelm Canal. The route will enchant you by the lagoon's natural beauty and by the fish taste. The cruise participants are treated with smoked fish from the local waters, fish soup “Zuviene”, and famous local cakes.

Lifting to an observation tower – the highest building (15 m.) on the right bank of the lagoon – is also a must for visitors of Dreverna. Svenclele village is a paradise for windsurfing, kites and wakeboarding admirers known not only in Lithuania, but also in foreign countries.

by Eglė Stonké | egle.stonke@klaipedos-r.lt



Photo: Jouko Keto, 2015

VAASA IS A GROWTH AGREEMENT CITY

Vaasa has been chosen to the growth agreement 2016–2018, which is a part of the Finnish government programme. In the growth agreements the state and the cities agree on measures for speeding up the growth in the business life. The goal is to increase business and to activate the workforce. The total appropriation for all the agreement cities is about 15 million euros.

Out of 18, six applications ready for implementation were chosen. This is good for Vaasa.

“We submitted the application as a cooperation between the city, the development companies, the institutes of higher education and the business life and that made it so competitive”, Development Director Susanna Slotte-Kock says. The subject of the application from Vaasa is smart and sustainable energy solutions as the backbone for export.

More: www.vaasa.fi



TOURFILM – RIGA 2016

“When The Villagers Left” (Vietnam) won Grand Prix of the 9th International Tourism Film Festival „Tourfilm – Riga 2016” held in Riga on 30 April 2016. Tourism films presenting tourism products or specific cities, regions, states as tourism destinations were judged in the following categories: cultural tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, commercials and short spots and Latvian tourism product. A new category was created – “Newcomer”, for the countries which take part in the Festival for the first time.

The Festival received more than 350 film entries and 165 films were chosen for the official selection. Films were judged by the professional international jury. Demonstration of the best films and award ceremony took place at the oldest and most beautiful cinema of Riga - “Splendid Palace”. The Festival “Tourfilm Riga” was organized by the Riga City Council.

More: www.tourfilmriga.lv



UBC ESTONIAN CITIES MET IN TARTU

In April, all UBC member cities from Estonia met in Tartu. UBC Vice president Ando Kiviberg gave overview about the Executive Board Meeting in Rostock. Juhan Saharov delivered the presentation about the refugees’ situation that had been presented at the UBC Refugees Conference in Rostock. Also, Tartu informed about its upcoming projects and events. The cities’ representatives had the chance to discuss some ideas on how to increase the collaboration among UBC Estonian member cities.

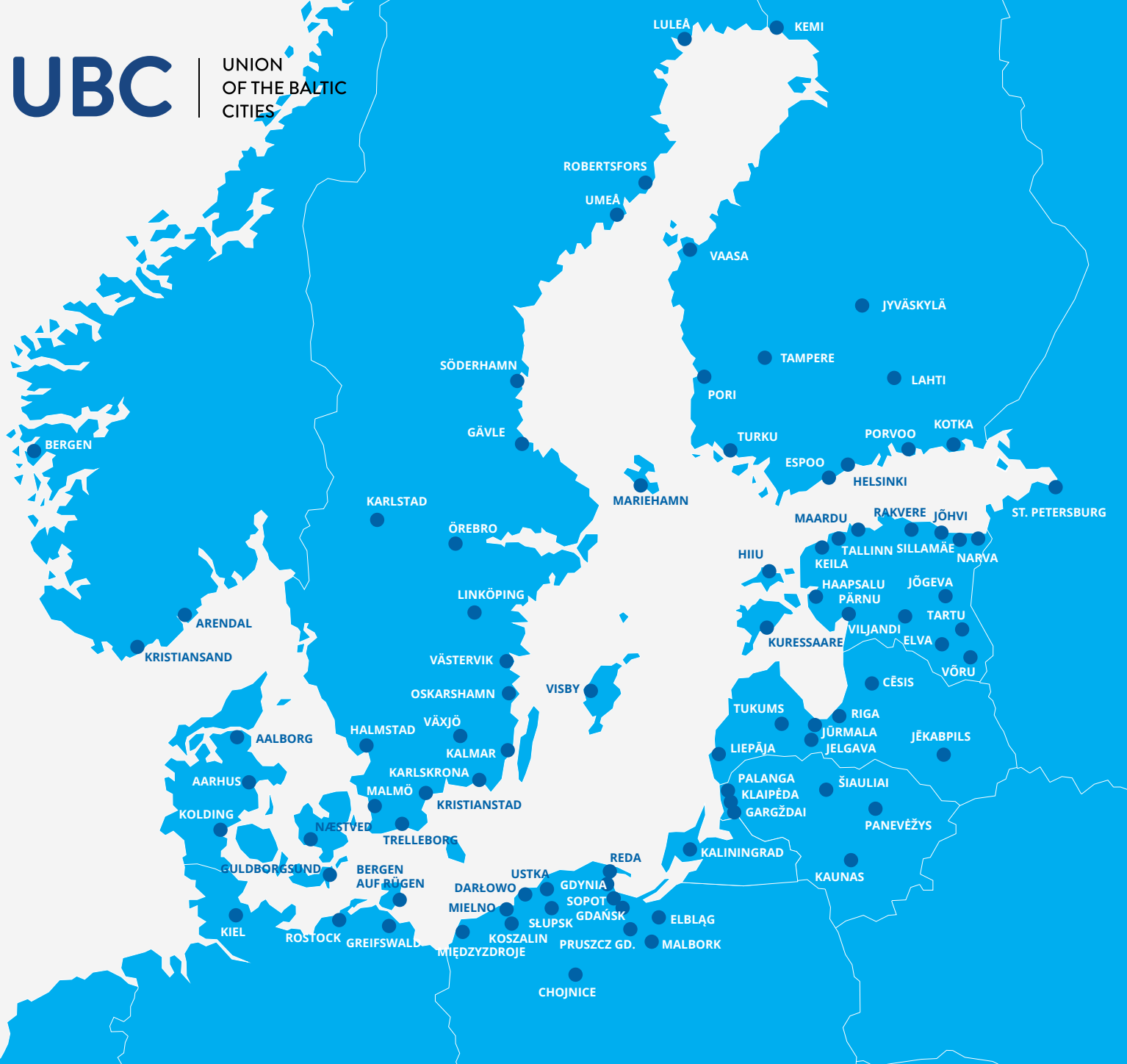
After the fruitful meeting, the participants had a chance to visit a brand new building of the Estonian National Museum, to be opened up in October 2016 and the science centre AHHA.

The next meeting will take place in Haapsalu after next UBC EBM.

More: http://www.ubc.net/member_cities,8.html

UBC

UNION
OF THE BALTIC
CITIES



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UBC – working together to foster sustainable, smart and safe cities

Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region with around 100 members from all ten Baltic Sea countries. Founded in 1991 in Gdańsk, UBC is a voluntary, proactive network mobilizing the shared potential of its member cities for a safe, smart and sustainable Baltic Sea Region. The UBC cooperates with numerous Baltic and European organisations.

The UBC's practical work is carried out through active cooperation of the member cities in seven thematic Commissions: Cultural Cities, Inclusive and Healthy Cities, Planning Cities, Safe Cities, Smart and Prospering Cities, Sustainable Cities, and Youthful Cities. The Commissions coordinate and execute specific projects, activities and events.

In addition to the Commissions, significant work is carried out in the UBC Working Group on Gender Equality and UBC Communications Network.

Any coastal city or any other city interested in the development of the Baltic Sea Region may become a member of the UBC – please contact the UBC Secretariat.

www.ubc.net



Photo: Jerzy Pinkas/www.gdansk.pl

Planning your EVENTS CALENDAR?

Follow www.ubc.net and join the UBC and its Commissions' meetings, seminars and workshops.

A screenshot of the UBC website homepage. It features a 'WELCOME to the UBC website' section with a map of the Baltic Sea region showing member cities. Below the map is a 'NEW AT UBC' section with a navigation bar for 'City Issues & Events', 'UBC Events', 'UBC News', and 'UBC Projects'.

**THE NEW UBC WEBSITE
WWW.UBC.NET IS NOW OPEN!
We would appreciate your feedback!**

A photograph of a large, ornate brick building with a tall spire, likely a historical or administrative building in Słupsk, Poland.

**Three UBC Commissions:
Sustainable Cities, Safe
Cities and Cultural Cities**
meet on 15–17 June 2016 in Słupsk
and Ustka (Poland) to discuss
sustainable
cultural events.

Photo: Beata Pawlicka



**UBC WORKING GROUP ON GENDER
EQUALITY IN ACTION!**
Join the meeting on gender
mainstreaming in Gdańsk, 22 June 2016

A photograph of a modern building with a large 'HAMBURG' sign on its facade, taken from a low angle looking up.

Photo: FreeImages.com / Hans Thouris

“ATTRACTIVE CITIES” SEMINAR
is planned by the UBC Smart and
Prospering Cities on 21–22 September
2016 in Hamburg