



## ACTIVITY REPORT

### PLANNING CITIES COMMISSION

NOVEMBER 2019 –OCTOBER 2021

#### 1. General description

##### Chairmanship

The Members of the Steering Committee:

Paulina Szewczyk from Gdynia (Chairperson), Christian Hegardt from Visby (Vice Chairperson), Mara Liepa-Zemesa from Riga, Tomas Strömberg from Umeå, Björn Grönholm from Turku.

Tomas Strömberg passed away during this year after many years of dedicated work for City of Umeå and the Planning Cities Commission.

##### Secretariat

City of Gdynia, City Planning Office, Tadeusza Wendy 7/9, 81-341 Gdynia, Poland

##### Aims & goals

The Planning Cities Commission is a network of professional planners around the Baltic Sea Region.

The Planning Cities Commission wants to:

- keep the Baltic Sea Region cities on the map of Europe and the world by supporting local planners' professional skills and sharing knowledge,
- support city servants in their work of building better cities, increase awareness of urban planning, architecture and construction,
- improve quality of life in cities in the Baltic Sea Region,
- improve economic development in cities by initiating dialogue between city residents, private (commercial & industrial) and public sectors,
- improve sustainable development in the Baltic Sea cities.

#### 2. Meetings/seminars/conferences

1. „Liveable city Combining history and contemporary life in urban space” was planned to be held in **Turku, Finland, 24-27 May 2020** in cooperation with Sustainable Cities Commission and the city of Turku. The Seminar was postponed due to the pandemic situation.

2. **„The impact of coronavirus on the city planning. Experiences of the Baltic Cities”**, was held **19 November 2020** using Zoom tele-conference platform.

Over 40 participants took part.

The Covid pandemic has affected our lives and added a new unexpected layer of challenges for the cities around the Baltic Sea. The Commission that usually had been working very practically, had to now limit its work to the online discussion.

The main questions posed to the city planners included:



- Did the pandemic situation of coronavirus change the sense of place? Do we have to reimagine our cities? Can city planning enhance communities that are both healthy and connected?
- What has become more important in our planning considerations? Is there anything that has become less important?
- Do we have to re-evaluate the core principles of the city planning? Or, on the contrary, are we convinced that they are still actual?

### Outcomes

**Alessandra Galletti, Director of Design Practice at Project for Public Spaces, New York**, shared her presentation on the importance of public spaces in the time of pandemic. In her opinion people realized how important public space is nowadays. The US examples of using the streets during pandemic prove that, though distancing is a need, still social interaction is important. “Public space is fundamental for democracy”, Galletti concluded.

Participants paid attention on the question of integration of people from different backgrounds. How to make the public space inclusive and accessible for all?

**Sebuliba Mercy Stephen, Regional Programmes Officer, LVRLAC**, presented a different perspective of how pandemic influenced the municipalities in his region. Though negative consequences of isolation seemed obvious, a positive impact was noted, too. The pandemic mobilized local authorities to carry out activities that would have faced resentment if it was not due to the lockdown like redesigning and reconstructing some streets in Kampala into less car oriented.

In the second part of the meeting the cities planners presented their thoughts and reflections how COVID-19 pandemic has influenced urban planning and construction, and also how it changed the habits of citizens.

**Sirpa Kalio, Helsinki**, focused on how people’s behaviours during pandemic influenced the city space, layout of the shops, and public transportation. Professional life moved online mostly, so demand for high-tech solutions is natural.

**Representatives of Rostock, Andreas Schubert and Dürten Schölens**, delivered a story about BUGA 2025, a re-development plan of the city area on the Warnow river that included e.g. new public spaces and green areas.

Experiences of the **city of Umeå** were shared by **Tomas Strömberg**. The cities should work on diversity of solutions to be resilient towards such challenges as pandemic. Digital strategies and fast Internet should also be prioritized. He underlined the biggest social problems now were loneliness, mental health and exclusion. The most obvious consequences of pandemic are: increase of e-commerce, remote working, moving out from the city.

**Christian Hegardt, Region Gotland**, focused on question how to keep city centre still attractive, resilient and sustainable. Gotland, being up to now a living area for commuter workers and a holiday destination, became a place where inhabitants of large metropolitan areas decided to move in.

**Henrik Pedersen** shared the experiences of the **city of Aarhus**. He told about daily work in the municipality in the situation that many colleagues work from home, hold on-line meetings and face gathering restrictions. He noted that the pandemic hadn’t caused any physical changes in the space but influenced the structure of the retail and the situation on the real estate market causing that commercial spaces rental decreased and summer houses are bought very willingly.

**Paulina Szewczyk, Chairperson of PCC**, presented the **CLIMATic** Gdynia City Centre project. It is aimed at reduction in the intensity of carbon dioxide emission and improvement of living environment by



increasing the urban greenery, convincing inhabitants to change their transport habits and making mobility sustainable, accessible to more people and integrated for higher overall efficiency. Paulina Szewczyk pointed out that the pandemic, however, made many people work from home and use private cars instead of sustainable public transportation. It will be a challenge to reverse this trend in the future.

Most of the participants of the virtual meeting agreed that the Covid pandemic situation highlighted some problems that must be resolved but in general they were on the right track. Many of them also indicated the need of reviewing and proposing new strategies for city planning in their cities when the pandemic ended.

Many thanks to UBC Sustainable Cities Commission for the technical support.

3. Virtual Meeting **“UBC Planning Cities Commission welcomes new UBC Member Cities”** was held on **19 April 2021**, using Zoom tele-conference platform.

Nearly 40 participants took part.

The UBC Planning Cities Commission cannot work normally and organise its seminars in-person, like it has been done for more than 20 years in the 30 years of UBC’s history. We had to develop our resilience. The need of togetherness pushed the UBC Planning Cities Commission to adjust to current situation and meet virtually. As we are very happy to welcome new UBC Member Cities - Haapsalu, Hamburg, Rokiškis, Valmiera, the meeting programme included presentations of **current projects and urban challenges in the city of Hamburg, the city of Rokiškis and the city of Valmiera.**

#### Outcomes

**Tobias Goevert**, Head of Department of Regional and Urban Development in the city of **Hamburg** gave an overview on the relevant topics of urban development. He presented the concepts, mission statements and guidelines that had been developed. The main topics were housing, the city centre, “Magistralen”, inner development and the strategy of “City in New Areas”.

**Zanda Lapsa**, Head of City Planning Section, Main Architect of the city of Valmiera, introduced the city and highlighted general key issues - housing, mobility with the focus on pedestrians and cyclists, and questions about how to become greener, environmentally friendly and sustainable.

**Andrius Burnickas** Director of Rokiškis District Municipality Administration delivered a presentation „Towards sustainability: adapting public and green spaces to the needs of community, modernization of recreational infrastructure and landscaping“.

Many thanks to UBC Sustainable Cities Commission for the technical support.

4. The Seminar **“Rostock NW 2035+. How to make 5 absolutely solid satellite towns even better”** to be held in-person **26<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> September 2021 in the city of Rostock**. The streaming of the main points of the program will be available.

External UBC experts’ recommendations are needed for an integrated and complex development strategy for Rostock’s large concrete prefabricated housing estates. Rostock asks to shed light on requirements of future generations of residents for the 5 large housing estates, built in concrete slab construction in Rostock North West.

Over 30 participants have already registered.



### 3. Projects

The Planning Cities Commission don't make projects besides the workshops/seminars.

### 4. Cooperation with other organisations

The chairperson of the Commission had the lecture about Cultural Planning in the UBC Member Cities, at the **Baltic Urban Cultural Planning Conference 2020**, Breakout session 1 in Block 1: Is active citizenship prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive development? A Baltic City Perspective organised by Danish Cultural Institute and Pomorskie Voivodeship.

The chairperson together with the head of secretariat of Sustainable Cities Commission Björn Grönholm took part in the **NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS Conversation 4: Connections - activating networks, building a movement organised by HafenCity University - New European Bauhaus iGroup**, 15th of June 2021 and gave the lecture about UBC Member Cities' New European Bauhaus perspective.

The chairperson of the Commission will give a lecture "Post-pandemic urban planning. Experiences of the Baltic Cities" at the **15th international Crisis Management Conference** to be held in Rostock 27<sup>th</sup>-29th September 2021.

### 5. Communications

The Planning Cities Commission doesn't have a communication officer. From time to time the chairperson writes articles to Baltic Cities Bulletin, different magazines about our work. We had UBC Planning Cities Commission edition of Baltic Cities Bulletin in the Spring 2020.

### 6. Other activities

The Commission is engaged to the preparations to the **30th UBC Anniversary at UBC General Conference 2021**.

Chairperson of the commission took part in the meetings of the **Working Group Resilient UBC Cities, UBC Strategy Task Force**, and in the process of creating **UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2022-2030**.

### 7. Action plan 2021-2023

The Commission will continue to organize Seminars together with different host cities around the Baltic Sea. One Seminar will be organized in person and at least one virtually, per year.

At the moment, we are in dialog with the city of Kiel and the Smart and Prospering Cities Commission to organize the joint Seminar. We do not give up the possibility of organizing the Seminar also in the city of Turku and the city of Parnu before 2023.

Paulina Szewczyk, Chairperson of Planning Cities Commission, September 15th, 2021