

POLICY POSITIONS

“Climate Change and Sustainable Development Until 2030”

I. Thirty years of striving towards a sustainable Baltic Sea Region

The Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) has during its whole existence, for 30 years, been focusing on making the Baltic Sea Region more sustainable, attractive and more resilient to challenges in our environment ensuring a good quality of life for its inhabitants – now and for future generations. Environmental protection and sustainable development have been one of the UBC’s key pillars since its foundation. In 1996 the Commission on Environment was established in Turku and has since then taken on the coordination of the network’s environmental and sustainability activities. The first UBC Local Agenda 21 Action programme was adopted at the General Conference 1999 in Stockholm, followed by the UBC Agenda 21 Action Programme – Roadmap for Sustainable Baltic Cities (2004-2009), UBC Sustainable Development Action Programme – Agenda for Sustainable Baltic Cities (2010-2015) to the current UBC Sustainable Development Action programme – Stairways towards Sustainable Baltic Cities (2016-2021), adopted at the General Conference 2015 in Gdynia, Poland. The main goal for the document is to give strategic direction to the realization of our vision of the UBC cities in the future - creating a smart, safe and sustainable Baltic Sea Region. Currently the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission is coordinating the process of renewing the Sustainability Development Action Programme for the period 2022-2030.

II. UBC Vision for Sustainable Baltic Cities

According to the current UBC Sustainable Development Action programme, the overall ambition of the network is:

UBC cities will be climate-smart, providing a good ground for the green economy to grow, while being resource-efficient and sustainable in all their activities as well as protecting the environment and water- bodies in the Baltic Sea Region. They will increasingly be known as global forerunners to create a high-quality living environment for their inhabitants.

UBC’s aim is achieving a low-emission and resource-wise Baltic Sea Region through smart city planning, capacity-building and sharing of best practices. At the same time the network will continue to work for more efficient use of water resources and more efficient water treatment. By working together, using the potential of the member cities and the network, good results can be achieved.

III. Cooperation beyond the Baltic Sea Region

Sustainable Development cannot be created by single actors – and global, massive challenges, like climate change and biodiversity loss affect everyone and need to be tackled in a cooperative and collaborative way. Therefore, these issues are at the core of UBC’s sustainability activities – climate change has severe impact on all levels of urban life and every action a city takes has impact on the climate, in one way or another.

Besides intense cooperation and collaboration within the network and between actors in the Baltic Sea region, UBC is active in taking part in European and international activities and has established well-functioning partnerships throughout the years:

- The strategic cooperation with the world's leading organization on voluntary climate reporting, the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), started in 2015 after the COP 21 meeting in Paris. Since 2017 there is a mutual Memorandum of Understanding and UBC members are actively disclosing their efforts for a transformation to become fossil-fuel free. Last year 7 UBC cities were able to get into the CDP A-list cities. These cities were awarded for their ambitious work and best results in tackling the impacts of climate change.
- In 2010 UBC signed the Covenant of Mayors, a European initiative, which brings together thousands of local governments voluntarily committed to implementing EU climate and energy objectives, as a support organization, actively promoting and activating its members to sign and develop Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs)
- UBC is also a member of Energy Cities, a European organization comprising local & regional authorities, as well as other stakeholders working on sustainable energy issues.
- On the global level, UBC commits to the UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals aiming at mainstreaming their fulfillment through activities in all UBC bodies. UBC also sees a great potential in the European Green Deal - as a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.
- The European Commission enacted a new EU Adaptation Strategy on 24 February 2021. The strategy is a key part of the European Green Deal, and it aims to increase and accelerate the EU's efforts to protect nature, people and livelihoods against the unavoidable impacts of climate change. This new policy gives guidance to EU member states and thus also the local level.

IV. Positions

- Climate-smart leaders are cities that take climate change aspects into consideration in their entire decision making e.g. in urban planning, mobility planning, energy related actions (efficiency, production) and buildings etc. UBC Cities want to take the leadership in becoming climate-smart, decreasing their greenhouse gas emissions and using renewable energy sources efficiently.
- UBC aims to work with partners for increased action and mobilization on climate adaptation. By using its extensive network and partnerships, UBC advocates for climate adaptation and civil protection, establishing good practices that are relevant in the European context.
- The UBC will continue to proactively support the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Only by approaching the challenges connected to the changing climate holistically, can the UBC Member Cities realize a truly sustainable development.
- The cities' civil protection perspective should be mainstreamed into their work on climate change adaptation by also including the perspective of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Thus, the UBC advocates for the harmonized policies and a wider discussion on adaptation and civil protection, while acknowledging the role and strengthening the capacities of local authorities.
- UBC aims to support the Green City Accord - a movement of European mayors committed to making cities cleaner and healthier. It aims to improve the quality of life of all Europeans, and accelerate the implementation of relevant EU environmental laws. By

signing the Accord, cities commit to addressing five areas of environmental management: air, water, nature and biodiversity, circular economy and waste, and noise.

- UBC continuous to support the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, which brings together thousands of local governments voluntarily committed to implementing EU climate and energy objectives. The Covenant of Mayors was launched in 2008 in Europe with the ambition to gather local governments voluntarily committed to achieving and exceeding the EU climate and energy targets. UBC joined as a supporter in 2010 and has since then promoted the initiative actively among its member cities.
- UBC promotes regional strategic partnerships within the EUSBSR in order to build the common voice of the BSR in the European discussion on green agenda and to create a low/emission region.
- UBC strongly supports the European Green Deal by taking its key objectives on its own . agenda particularly in creating effective and efficient mechanisms to further develop green urban economies, climate-smart cities and sustainable urban ecosystems.
- Sustainable development scenarios are strongly dependent upon a substantial shift in societal preferences to high-density, environmentally-friendly city living. Strong planning regulations are required to achieve the targeted residential densities of city areas while protecting and enhancing the green and blue spaces that are needed for climate adaptation, health and wellbeing.