

The Union of Baltic Cities: a successful example of regional cooperation



The “Union of the Baltic Cities”, founded in 1991 in Gdansk, is a constantly growing regional cooperation organisation, and a policy actor, which now counts 106 Member Cities in all ten countries surrounding the Baltic Sea (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden), as well as the cities of Grodno and Slonim, in Belarus, which have the status of observers.

According to the Statute of the “Union”, its overall, global aim is to promote and strengthen cooperation and exchange of experiences among the cities in the Baltic Sea, to act for common interests of the local authorities in the

region, be a spokesman for its Members in the common issues, and support and foster the achievement of a sustainable democratic, economic, social and environmental development.

UBC Commissions and activities

In fact, as Wolfgang Schmidt (Chairman of the Commission for Business Cooperation of the UBC) suggests, globalisation leads to an inevitable competition between Countries and regions, thereby making the visibility of the regions on world markets an absolute priority, and, as a consequence, rendering regional cooperation of paramount importance. Today, the UBC has twelve different commissions on: business cooperation, culture, education, energy, environment, gender equality, health and social affairs, sport, tourism, transportation, urban planning and youth issues, and a number of successful projects already completed in a variety of issues. For example, the Commission on Environment has been one of the most active during recent years, **becoming** a partner of many projects, and, among the others, of the BaltCICA project (Climate Change: Impacts, Costs and Adaptation in the Baltic Sea Region), that prepares regions and municipalities to cope with a changing climate, focusing on the most imminent problems that climate change is likely to cause in the Baltic Sea Region, and calling for cooperation and integrated approaches.

Another successful project has been the development of a Good Practice Database, created to answer the need of local authorities to find practical examples, experiences and inspiration of what other cities and municipalities have done, and how they have succeeded to speed up sustainable development in their area, a database that has now reached more than 500 good practices in English, and 400 in Russian. At the tenth UBC General Conference, held in Kristiansand in September 2009, the new “UBC Strategy 2010-2015” was adopted, with the vision of a *“dynamic, prosperous, democratic and stable European Baltic Sea Region, in a successful and sustainable economic, social, political, environmental and cultural development process, moving towards closer cooperation and integration”*.

UBC Commission strategy 2010-2015

A particular attention was devoted to the links between the UBC and the “European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region”: the latter was adopted in June 2009, and aims at coordinating action by Member States, regions, the European Union, pan-baltic organisations, financing institutions and non-governmental bodies, to promote a more balanced development of the Region, and make this part of Europe more environmentally sustainable, more prosperous, more accessible and attractive, and, finally, safer and more secure. The UBC has the potential to become a major stakeholder in the process, and wants to be an active participant in the governance of the Strategy itself, offering an effective platform for its implementation, and even influencing it.

Cooperative efforts with partner in the Baltic sea region

The “EU Strategy” is therefore the key framework for the years to come, but obviously UBC's tasks do not revolve exclusively around it. Other objectives include increasing UBC membership and partnership (UBC has more than tripled its membership from 1991, but there is still potential to include new Member cities – and in fact, according to article 3 of the Statute, any coastal city of the Baltic Sea and its gulfs, as well as any other city interested in the development of the Baltic Sea region may become a Member city of the Union); promoting expert exchanges between Member cities, by organizing a platform for a more systematic exchange programme; enhancing lobbying capacity, to get the voice of local authorities of the Baltic Sea Region heard; and promoting a systematic cooperation with partners in the Baltic Sea Region, at the European level and internationally.

Regarding this last point, UBC is already maintaining a series of cooperative efforts with many organisations of this type (for example the Baltic Development Forum, the Baltic Sea States Subregional Cooperation, the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Town, the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, and, in the Mediterranean area, Arco Latino), and means to continue, and further develop these collaborations. Besides, the Union has the intention to establish connections with other organisations, and systematically contact them. To name just a few, common objectives could be pursued together with the “Union pour la Méditerranée” in the field of environment, energy, trade, and construction of trans-national roads; a particularly fruitful cooperation to promote a common eco-political interest in Europe could be carried out with “Medcities”; the “Assembly of European Regions” would prove to be an important forum for the discussion of many issues that also the UBC covers in its activities, therefore membership would definitely be an advantage, as it would provide the Union with the possibility of having a say in their most important topics; also, the similarities between the Union and the “Baltic Metropolises Network (BaltMet)” aims and activities should be coordinated and used actively in cooperation. Lastly, raising public profiles and visibility of UBC is a priority, as well, because, despite its successful activities since 1991, the Union is still little known, especially among the general public.

UBC EVENTS CALENDAR

61st meeting of the UBC executive board, 1st June 2011, Karlstad, Sweden.

XI UBC General conference, 4th-10th October 2011, Liepāja, Latvia.

5th UBC Youth Conference, 4th-10th October 2011, Liepāja, Latvia.

MEDITERRANEAN REGIONS AND MUNICIPALITIES ASSOCIATIONS

Mediterranean Commission of the UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments),

<http://www.commed-cglu.org/spip.php?page=sommaire&lang=en>

COPPEM, Standing Committee for the Euro Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities, <http://www.coppem.org/default.asp?p=1>

IMC CPMR, Inter-Mediterranean Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, <http://www.medregions.com/index.php?act=,,,,,en>

ARCO LATINO, <http://www.arcolatino.org/index.php?lng=2>

ARLEM, Euro Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly, http://www.ccre.org/news_detail_en.htm?ID=1766

MEDCITIES, <http://www.medcities.org/>



INTERVIEW WITH WOLFGANG SCHMIDT

Wolfgang Schmidt, Chairman of the Commission for Business Cooperation. Union of the Baltic Cities, August 2010

Is regionalization a process well developed in the Northern Europe area, or are the States currently playing the main role in the designing of policies?

Still, states are the most important bodies in creating policies. The national policies are more and more influenced by EU guidelines and strategies. For example, the Baltic Sea Region is the only macro region in the EU, an own strategy was defined for.

Globalisation leads to an ongoing competition between countries and regions. This forces the need to make regions visible on world markets, to do an effective lobbying and to look for European Fundings. Therefore, regional cooperation is an absolute need.

Are there relevant experiences of common or joint actions?

You can find common actions and projects in all fields of interest (business, social, environment etc.). We are mainly involved in questions of “International location marketing”, “Development and Managing of Science & Technology Parks” and “International transfer of knowledge”.

Is the culture of the Mediterranean basin area (historical roots, cultural and natural heritage, etc.) seen as a common point of origin, or is Europe identified like a developed space instead of less developed countries?

The Med Basin area is an interesting macro region with great potential in the future. The USP should be defined and communicated internationally.