

OPENING SPEECH

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In the Baltic Sea Region, some 50 million people live in cities larger than 50.000 inhabitants and the urban population to date exceeds 80% of the total population. This population creates heavy environmental burden both in its immediate living environments as well as in a larger area.

Sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region requires joint work on environmental, economic and social aspects. In this work the cities around the Baltic Sea have a very important task in supporting, encouraging and co-operating with citizens, local enterprises, research institutions and other local actors. To be credible it is also necessary that the cities fulfil their own duties in a sustainable way. However, to work for sustainable development and for implementation of Agenda 21 are huge tasks which no city can do on its own. Therefore, it is important to co-operate, exchange experiences and compare different methods through benchmarking with other cities.

The aim of Union of the Baltic Cities has from the beginning been to be a meeting place for cities in the Baltic Sea Region, to carry out activities together and to be a tool to express the views, problems and political aims of cities. Many activities have been taking place since the foundation in 1991 and cities are exchanging experiences in the environmental field. Today almost all member cities of Union of the Baltic Cities have adopted their own sustainable development programmes.

Building especially on the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002, the UBC is now committing to a new Agenda 21 Action Programme 2004-2009 - Roadmap for Sustainable Baltic Cities. We will work on five sustainable development themes:

1. Good governance and sustainable urban management
2. Sustainable use of energy and resources
3. Good living environment and nature protection
4. Sustainable economy and transport
5. Social integration and health

For each of these themes UBC will implement a considerable amount of activities in close partnership with our cities, research institutions, companies, authorities and other stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region.

To end with a quotation taken from the visions of Union of the Baltic Cities:

...We want our citizens to live in secure cities with viable local economies, just, peaceful and tolerant communities, and eco-efficiency, united by a clean Baltic Sea.