

UBC

UNION
OF THE BALTIC
CITIES

SUSTAINABLE CITIES
COMMISSION

Annual report **2023**

UBC Sustainable Cities Commission
Published February 2024



Table of Contents

Our work	4
Editorial	4
UBC SCC Advisory Board 2021–2023	5
Communication activities.....	6
UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2030	6
Water-smart cities	7
Energy-smart cities	7
Resource-efficient cities	8
Biodiverse cities	8
Mobility-smart cities.....	8
Policy & Advocacy	9
EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.....	9
Council of the Baltic Sea States	10
HELCOM – Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission	10
Green City Accord.....	11
EU Missions.....	11
Cooperation with CDP	13
Mobility actions.....	14
Energy actions	16
Climate actions.....	17
Water actions	19
Resource efficiency actions.....	20
Biodiversity actions	21
Sustainable Cities Commission events	22
UBC Planning & Sustainable Cities Commissions meeting on 13–15 September 2023 in Turku, Finland	22
14th Annual Forum of EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region on 4-5 October 2023 in Riga, Latvia	23
XVII UBC General Conference on 24-26 October 2023 in Palanga, Lithuania.....	24
UBC TALKS webinar series in 2023.....	25
Projects running in 2023	26
EMPEREST	26
BALTIPLAST.....	26
SUMPs for BSR	27

Climate-4-CAST	27
Urban Biodiversity Parks	28
ZeroPfas II	28
NonHazCity 3.....	28
ChemClimCircle	29
Change(K)now!.....	29
Highlights from the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 2023	30
Umeå’s Climate roadmap 2030 – A pathway to follow.....	30
“We need to reach the finish line together” – the mayor of Espoo invites to join the climate cooperation	32
Smart traffic lights in Liepāja in line with UN SDGs	33
Linnaniemi – Turku’s first art district combines culture and sustainability	35
Innovative collaborations accelerate Malmö’s journey to climate neutrality.....	36
New sustainable energy solutions tested in Turku.....	38
Kemi – City of Snowman	39

Our work

Editorial

2023 was a year of new openings, increased connections, and interesting events! From the intensive exchange with our member cities and strategic partners at numerous events to co-creation of new partnerships and preparation of successful project applications, these moments defined the past 12 months of the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission.

The start of the year marked active development of new project applications and resulted in a positive funding decision from the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme on three new projects directly contributing to the strategic objectives of the UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2030: SUMP for BSR, Climate-4-CAST and Change(K)Now! These projects focus on overcoming of existing barriers to sustainable urban mobility planning (SUMP for BSR), smart climate budgeting (Climate-4-CAST) and circularity in food supply systems (Change(K)Now!). Our ongoing and new projects help cities to accelerate their green transition and efforts to achieve ambitious climate goals.

This year also proved that local authorities play essential role when it comes to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and UBC member cities, as in previous years, have consistently disclosed their climate actions to CDP global platform. On the following pages you will find more insights in the results of the 2023 UBC-CDP disclosure, and our warmest congratulations go to the cities of Malmö and Turku for being granted the highest score (A) for their climate transparency and leadership by CDP!

At UBC SCC, we are constantly stemming to create flywheels for actions and engage our member cities in important discussions at regional fora. This year featured inspiring discussions at our major UBC events: UBC General Conference in Palanga, UBC Sustainable and Planning Cities Commission meeting in Turku, and EUSBSR Annual Forum in Riga, which we are happy to share with you in the further reading.

Warm greetings,
UBC Sustainable Cities Commission team

Photo by Miranda Sundholm.



Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainable Cities Commission

UBC is the leading network of cities in the Baltic Sea Region, mobilising the shared potential of its member cities to tackle challenges related to social, economic and environmental development. Established back in 1991, today the network includes over 70 cities and municipalities, including Ukrainian cities.

Sustainable Cities Commission is one of the UBC Commissions, supporting the development of clean, resilient, and attractive urban environments. UBC cities are already increasingly recognized as global forerunners in climate-smart development, and together we work towards green, resource-efficient and sustainable future.

UBC SCC Advisory Board 2021–2023

UBC SCC has an established Advisory Board, which supports the Commission's activities and enables strengthening the cooperation with UBC member cities. The UBC SCC Advisory Board consists of 13 experts from member cities including three Co-Chairpersons.

Co-Chairs

Risto Veivo	Turku	Finland
Per-Arne Nilsson	Malmö	Sweden
Dagmara Nagórka-Kmiecik	Gdańsk	Poland

Advisory Board members

Andres Jaadla	Rakvere	Estonia
Jaanus Tamm	Tartu	Estonia
Elina Ojala	Lahti	Finland
Olli-Pekka Mäki	Turku	Finland
Stephan Braun	Greifswald	Germany
Dace Liepniece	Liepāja	Latvia
Gunita Osite	Jelgava	Latvia
Guntars Ruskuls	Riga	Latvia
Ola Nord	Malmö	Sweden
Ann Häger	Malmö	Sweden

The role of the Advisory Board members is to support the UBC Sustainable Cities Commission and the Secretariat in its activities by bringing national and topical expertise. In 2023, the Advisory Board held three online meetings (13 February, 22 May, 14 December), in addition to the offline meeting in Turku on 13 September 2023.

Communication activities

Significant part of the UBC SCC activities relates to communications: we support our member cities by promoting their excellence in the region, as well as create communication occasions for cities to exchange their experiences.

Social media representation is an important tool for UBC SCC to spread the information in the region as well as keep own stakeholders informed about the recent developments and new cooperation opportunities. Due to the active involvement and various campaigns, in 2023 the audience in UBC SCC channels steadily grew, reaching:

- Facebook: 900 followers
- Instagram: 368 followers
- X/Twitter: 1318 followers
- Youtube: 93 subscribers
- LinkedIn account (joint with UBC Secretariat): 743 followers

UBC SCC regularly sends **newsletters** to its contacts of ca. 320 recipients. In 2023, 21 newsletters were delivered inviting stakeholders to events, sharing calls for exchange, or informing about new content developments.

3 times a year, UBC SCC prepares a **Sustainable Cities Bulletin** with a comprehensive and versatile sustainability-related content and often involving cities' contributions collected through the special calls for stories – targeted or open, based on each Bulletin topic. In 2023, the Sustainable Cities Bulletins were published on 13 April, 14 June and 9 November; each edition was delivered to ca. 320 recipients. Several UBC member cities contributed to the SC Bulletin with their news on local approaches to sustainability and climate neutrality and we are happy to include them in this document – you can find them in the last chapter of the report!

UBC Sustainability Action Programme 2030

The Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainability Action Programme 2022–2030 was developed over several rounds of co-creation workshops, discussions and consultations with the UBC member cities as well as network's key stakeholders, with active collaboration across all UBC bodies. The document was approved at the XVI UBC General Conference on 29 October 2021. The document outlines 5 topics selected as core themes for the local cooperation in sustainability:

water, mobility, resource efficiency, biodiversity, and energy, listing actions that should be taken to achieve a better and greener future in the cities. In 2023, UBC Sustainable Cities Commission addressed all the core topics through different strategically selected activities.



Water-smart cities

In 2023, UBC SCC continued the cooperation on the most pressing water sector challenge: elimination of hazardous substances. The flagship activity of the Secretariat water-related work has been the **EMPEREST (Eliminating Micro-Pollutants from Effluents for Reuse Strategies) project** led by UBC SCC in cooperation with HELCOM. Launched in January 2023, EMPEREST addresses the comprehensive subject of PFAS and other organic micropollutants and seeks solutions for eliminating them from wastewater. The EMPEREST activities will help cities become more water-smart through the development and exchange of best practices and innovations concerning the reduction of hazardous substances in water and the protection of the ecological health of the receiving water bodies.

Mainstreamed through EMPEREST, a wide arrange of cooperations was established by UBC SCC to expand the science-based dialogue connecting it with the regional policies. Thus, UBC SCC joined the transnational projects **NonHazCity 3, ChemClimCircle, Change(K)now!** with an associated organisation status, in addition to being a partner of the **Zero PFAS II** project – the most prominent discussion and networking platform targeting the challenge of PFAS. More about these and other projects in the [chapter “Projects running in 2023”!](#)

UBC SCC also continued the work on the [Baltic Smart Water Hub](#) portal developed to support cities with knowledge and practices on innovative and smart water management. The Water Hub, launched within two projects led by UBC SCC (IWAMA project and BSR WATER platform; Interreg BSR Programme 2014–2020), is a space for sharing expertise and examples of successful technical developments. In 2023, UBC SCC organised a meeting with international experts of the Water Hub to plan further cooperation in the coming years.



Energy-smart cities

Addressing energy as a measure to support cities’ paths towards climate neutrality, UBC SCC joined the **project Climate-4-CAST (A Climate Action decision Support Tool to accelerate cities’ progress towards climate neutrality)**. The project develops a decision support tool for cities to visualise carbon emission scenarios, and prepare cost-benefit analysis of the measures’ performance against city goals.

UBC SCC joined many high-level discussions in support of climate neutrality, including the **14th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region** and the **XVII UBC General Conference in Palanga** (October 2023). More on this is [in the respective chapter of the report](#).



Resource-efficient cities

To address resource efficiency through the waste management measures, UBC SCC joined the **project BALTIPLAST (Baltic Approaches to Handling Plastic Pollution under a Circular Economy Context)** focusing on reducing plastic in production and consumption. This project started in January 2023, targeting local authorities, businesses and citizens. As a partner and Work Package leader, UBC SCC supports the transfer of project results.

This topic was also explored in the **UBC TALKS webinar** (November 2023), discussing how local authorities can address plastic pollution through strategies and action plans.



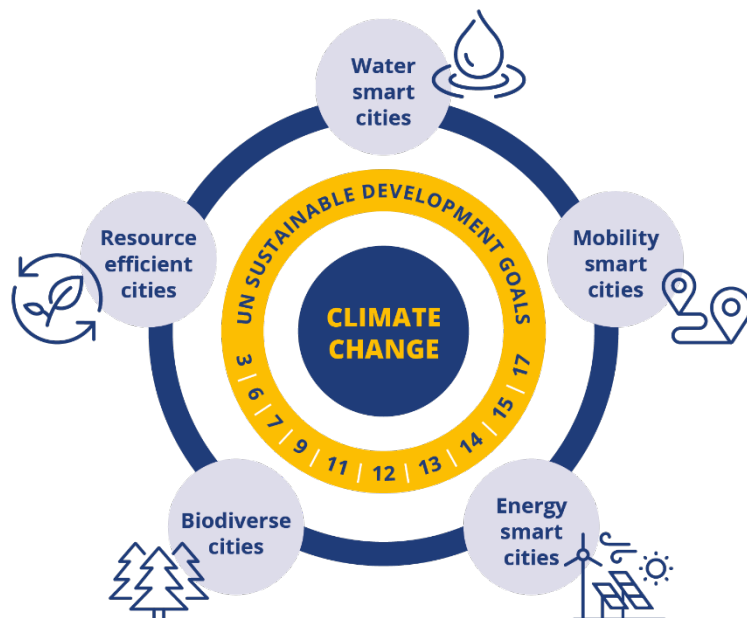
Biodiverse cities

In 2023, the topic of biodiversity was increasingly prominent among the city trends. Addressing it, UBC SCC organised an **online discussion** about urban greening plans with member cities (June 2023). UBC SCC also joined the **project Urban Biodiversity Parks (Urban Biodiversity Parks as co-creative platforms for enhancing biodiversity, learning and community involvement in urban ecological regeneration)** funded by the European Urban Initiative in 2023, and its activities will start in March 2024.



Mobility-smart cities

November 2023 marked the start of a new project led by UBC SCC: **SUMPs for BSR (Enhancing effective Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning for supporting active mobility in BSR cities)**, which supports cities shifting their planning practices towards people-centered sustainable urban mobility planning focusing on active mobility modes to fight the climate crisis. The project aims to increase the uptake of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) as a strategic tool for sustainable mobility planning by developing tools and offering extensive capacity building for local authorities, especially in small and mid-sized BSR cities.



Policy & Advocacy

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) is the first macro-regional Strategy in Europe, it provides coordinated approach, synergy and more effective use of funds in joint achievement of regional objectives: save the sea, connect the region and increase prosperity. Since its establishment, the Strategy was an important policy framework for UBC SCC and we have been actively supporting its implementation through several EUSBSR Policy Areas, e.g. PA Nutri, PA Hazards, PA Innovation, PA Bioeconomy and PA Transport.

In March, UBC SCC invited EUSBSR Baltic Sea Strategy Point to the **UBC TALKS webinar** to discuss the role of local authorities in the macroregional cooperation.

Since 2022, one of the priorities of the Strategy is contributing to the recovery of Ukraine. In 2023, UBC SCC have been involved in several **events targeted at Ukrainian stakeholders**. In May the UBC SCC provided a **presentation at the PA Nutri seminar “Fostering sustainable cooperation between the BSR countries and Ukraine”** for Ukrainian and Baltic Sea Region authorities on wastewater treatment standards and legal frames in the EU. The presentation introduced practical solutions available on the Baltic Smart Water Hub portal and activities of the ongoing project EMPEREST focused on advanced treatment of wastewater. In October, we have joined the **workshop “Strengthening and developing cooperation with Ukraine to empower sustainable rebuilding”** and the PA Nutri roundtable discussion on wastewater sector at the EUSBSR Annual Forum in Riga.

Experiences from the BSR, especially about subjects related to saving the sea, would be valuable for the sustainable rebuilding of Ukraine. A part of Ukraine around the city of Lviv belongs to the catchment area of the Baltic Sea through the Vistula River, which makes collaboration very relevant in such areas as wastewater treatment, nutrient inputs, hazardous substances and bioeconomy. Ukraine was also encouraged to participate as an observer in Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) working group meetings. This participation would enable Ukraine to follow closely the progress in the Baltic Sea Region and potentially identify efficient cooperation partners for projects that could contribute to Ukraine's reconstruction. Moreover, networks of cities can act as entry points in getting know-how and best practices in smart and sustainable water management.

Council of the Baltic Sea States

In 2023, cooperation between UBC SCC and Council of the Baltic Sea States focused on the preparation of a **new project proposal** focusing on local response and preparedness to climate change (ClimaResponse).

In March, UBC SCC participated in the **CliMaLoc handbook dissemination webinar** organised in the framework of the project “Climate Mainstreaming Locally in the Baltic Sea Region” funded by the Swedish Institute and the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) long-term priority Sustainable and Prosperous Region. The webinar introduced the CliMaLoc Handbook providing a 10-step approach for the local governments to prepare and plan climate adaptation strategies in the Baltic Sea region.

In April, UBC SCC delegation participated in the ClimaResponse project development workshop organised by CBSS Secretariat in Stockholm. Project proposal is build on the successful results of CASCADE and CliMaLoc projects addressing increased preparedness to negative consequences of climate change in municipalities.

In March, UBC SCC invited CBSS to the **UBC TALKS webinar** to discuss the role of local authorities in the macroregional cooperation and most pressing topics for future regional development.

In October, both organisations participated in preparations of the **workshop “Driving collaborative decarbonization and climate adaptation in the Baltic Sea Region”** at the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region Annual Forum in Riga. Panel discussion addressed important questions of public-private collaboration for climate neutrality, role of stakeholders in green transition and decarbonisation of energy, transport and housing systems as well as strengthening climate adaptation capacities in the region.

HELCOM – Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

In May 2020, the UBC SCC extended the official observer status at the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM), an intergovernmental organisation and regional platform for environmental policy making established to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution. The observer status allows UBC SCC to actively follow HELCOM work and process, plan common activities and projects as well as share the local position with HELCOM and its Contracting Parties on national level.

The UBC member cities have committed to strengthen the implementation of the **HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP)** and relevant recommendations by 2030. To support the implementation of BSAP and its relevant goals (‘Baltic Sea unaffected by hazardous substances and litter’) and subsequent commitments, in 2023 the UBC SCC together with HELCOM developed the **project EMPEREST** focusing on elimination of hazardous

substances, and specifically emerging pollutants (PFAS) from the wastewater stream. The project implementation funded by the Interreg BSR Programme started in January 2023.

In March, UBC SCC invited HELCOM to the **UBC TALKS webinar** to discuss the role of local authorities in the macroregional cooperation and highlight local actions for a healthy Baltic Sea.

On 9 March 2023, UBC SCC attended an online **Baltic Stakeholder Conference** – “Think outside the box: implementing HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan”. The aim of the Conference was to yield ideas from stakeholders around the Baltic Sea and beyond to accelerate the BSAP implementation and find solutions for both long-standing and emerging challenges as well as to share examples to inspire others. The Conference was hosted by Latvia and the UBC SCC Secretariat provided a **presentation “Multiplying smart water management: how the cities have spearheaded action”** in the session discussing local level actions for clean Baltic Sea.

Green City Accord

UBC SCC joined the Green City Accord (GCA) – European Union initiative to make cities greener, cleaner and healthier – and signed official Supporters’ statement in May 2021. By signing the Accord, cities commit to addressing five areas of environmental management: air, water, nature and biodiversity, circular economy and waste, and noise. Within the scope of cooperation, the UBC SCC is supporting cities in joining the GCA movement through awareness raising and communication campaigns, capacity-building activities, funding and expert advice on issues related to water quality and efficiency, urban biodiversity, air and noise pollution reduction as well as advanced circular economy measures.

In 2023, UBC SCC supported promotion of the **GCA Technical workshops** through its communication channels and participated as a speaker in one of the workshops focusing on the area of water management **“Advancing local action on water management under the Green City Accord”**. The workshop discussed best practices related to wastewater and stormwater management, hence UBC SCC presentation highlighted the Baltic Smart Water Hub portal as a source of inspiration to other regions and introduced solutions from international water projects (EMPEREST, BSR WATER, IWAMA, NOAH).

EU Missions

In 2022, the EU Commission launched several Missions to bring concrete solutions to some of the greatest challenges our societies are facing. The missions equipped with ambitious goals will bring concrete results by 2030. UBC SCC is closely following three missions:

1. Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities
2. Adaptation to Climate Change
3. Restore our Oceans and Waters

EU Cities Mission

In 2023, UBC SCC continued to support the EU Cities Mission and 12 UBC members participating in it. The Secretariat organised a **workshop “EU Cities Mission as a source of inspiration and expertise for cities towards climate-neutrality”** within the programme of the XVII UBC General Conference in Palanga (October 2023). Particular attention was brought to the session by the **Mission Manager Patrick Child**, European Commission, joining as a keynote speaker at the session to highlight the ground for cooperation and outline the role of UBC as a supporter of the Mission.

"Local level is absolutely fundamental in reaching climate neutrality. Cities are in the frontline of the green and digital transition,"
— Patrick Child, Deputy Director-General at DG Environment

The workshop also hosted **Anna Huttunen**, representative of the **NetZeroCities project**, the supporting platform for the Cities Mission. The cooperation with the NetZeroCities continued throughout 2023, as UBC SCC exchanged with this project and disseminated information about it to the UBC member cities.

EU Mission Ocean

The EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters" aims to protect and restore the health of our ocean and waters through research and innovation, citizen engagement and blue investments. In 2023, the UBC SCC-led **EMPEREST project was successfully approved as an action under the Mission Charter**.

Submitted actions are focusing on the ongoing development of the cost-efficient technologies to eliminate organic micropollutants such as PFAS and pharmaceuticals from the wastewater and strengthening regional monitoring of PFAS substances in the aquatic environment.

Cooperation with CDP

CDP-ICLEI Track¹ serves as a unified platform for cities to report their climate and environment-related data, actions, plans and goals. The cooperation between UBC and CDP² started in 2016 and continues to evolve. Close partnership made it possible for UBC member cities to report their environmental data and make their cities' journey towards the climate goals visible and praised. UBC cities acquire an opportunity to track the progress of their own and of similar cities and get assistance in setting up their climate targets and goals in accordance with international standards and initiatives.

Just as previous years, in 2023 the main disclosure period was open between April and July, cities disclosing during this period got their response scored. In order to facilitate more cities joining the disclosure journey, albeit without an opportunity to receive the score, the platform remained open until 12 December. This gave an opportunity to UBC cities to prepare for next year's disclosure and prefill their response already in 2023.

Commitment of cities

Cities have shown their steady commitment towards the climate work and disclosed their data through CDP. UBC member cities have been actively engaged in climate and environmental initiatives over the past year! The disclosing UBC cities (as of 12 December 2023) have been involved in following campaigns and initiatives:

[Race to Zero](#) – Riga, Malmö, Turku, Aarhus, Umeå, Växjö and Arendal.

[Race to Resilience](#) – Malmö.

[WWF One Planet City Challenge](#) – Malmö, Turku, Umeå, Växjö, Luleå, Trelleborg.

[NetZeroCities](#) – Malmö, Turku, Lahti, Aarhus, Umeå.

¹ The data used to produce this part of the report was collected through CDP-ICLEI Track. The contents of this report may be used by anyone provided acknowledgement is given to UBC, CDP and ICLEI using the following wording: This data was collected in partnership by UBC, CDP and ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability.

UBC SCC in cooperation with CDP has prepared the data and analysis in this report based on responses to the CDP-ICLEI Track 2023 questionnaire. No representation or warranty (express or implied) is given by UBC SCC or CDP as to the accuracy or completeness of the information and opinions contained in this report. You should not act upon the information contained in this publication without obtaining specific professional advice.

² 'CDP' refers to CDP Worldwide, a registered charity number 1122330 and a company limited by guarantee, registered in England number 05013650, and CDP Europe (Worldwide) gGmbH, a charitable limited liability company registered under number HRB119156 B at local court of Charlottenburg in Germany.

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability – Tallinn, Riga, Malmö, Turku, Lahti, Aarhus, Umeå, Klaipeda, Växjö, Luleå, Arendal, Elva, Trelleborg, Söderhamn, Greifswald.

Global Covenant of Mayors – Tallinn, Riga, Malmö, Turku, Lahti, Aarhus, Umeå, Växjö, Luleå, Arendal, Trelleborg, Greifswald.

In 2023, two cities – Malmö and Turku have been granted the highest score (A) for their climate transparency and leadership by CDP. We are looking forward to seeing more cities disclose their journey towards climate-neutrality to CDP in the upcoming years!

15 cities disclosed their environmental data through the CDP-ICLEI Track in 2023:

Aarhus from Denmark

Tallinn and a newcomer **Elva** from Estonia

Turku and **Lahti** from Finland

Greifswald from Germany

Arendal from Norway

Riga from Latvia

Klaipeda from Lithuania

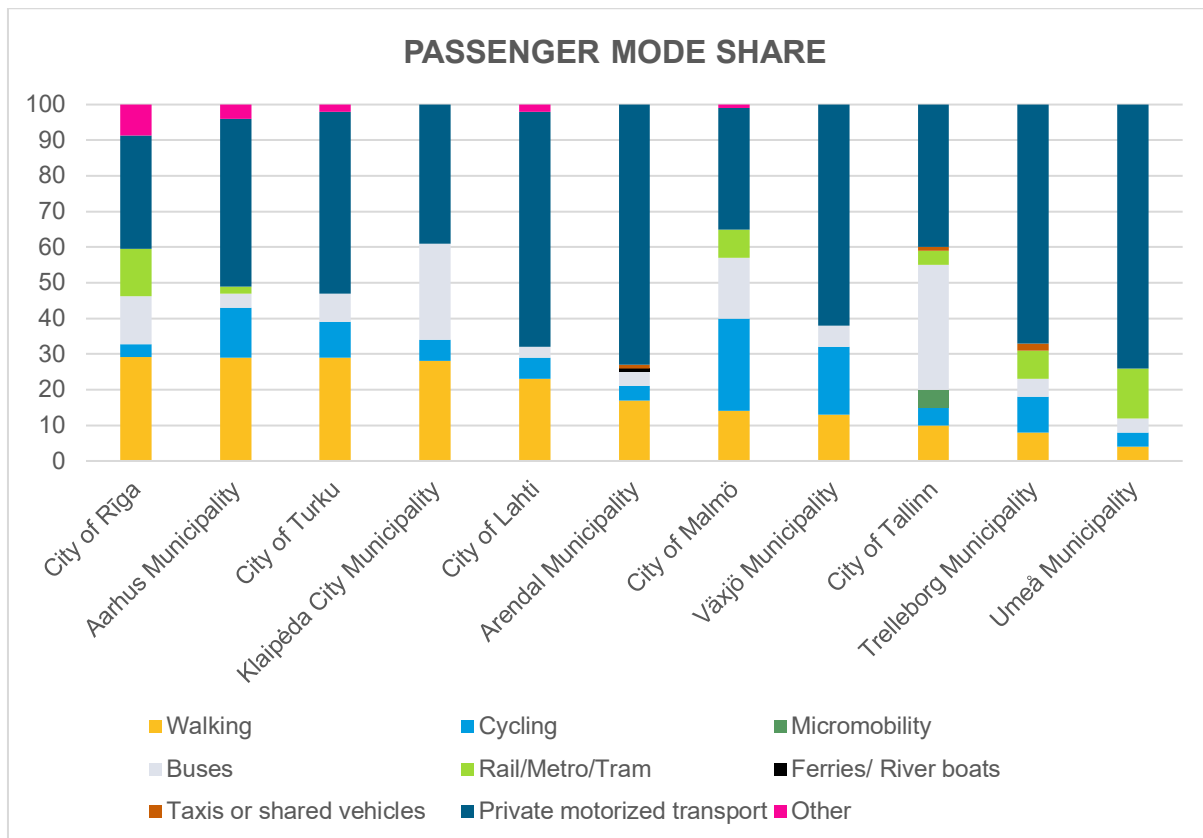
Umeå, Söderhamn, Malmö, Trelleborg, Växjö and a newcomer **Luleå** from Sweden

Mobility actions

Sustainable mobility

Cities in the Baltic Sea Region are putting substantial efforts towards sustainable mobility modes like walking, cycling and public transportation. Walking emerges as the most common mode of sustainable mobility alongside bus and cycling according to reported data in 2023. Even though the share of private motorized transportation is still quite prominent, the cities indicate a substantial shift towards more sustainable transportation modes.

The cities of **Tallinn** and **Klaipeda** are leading in the use of busses whilst **Klaipeda** along with **Riga, Aarhus, Turku** and **Lahti** have the biggest portion of walking. **Malmö** and **Växjö** stand out for their notable share of cycling. The least popular means of mobility share seems to be the use of taxis or shared vehicles, ferries, river boats, micromobility and rail, metro and tram systems.



Voice of the UBC cities

The quotes presented below demonstrate ambitions set by UBC cities.

“By planning the city smarter, we make it easier to walk and bike, instead of using cars. Estimating a reduction of the emissions from cars by 10% due to this.” – City of Växjö

“Skånetrafiken, the city’s public transport provider has a goal that every bus used in city traffic will be run by electricity in 2031. Many busses are already run on electricity.” – City of Malmö

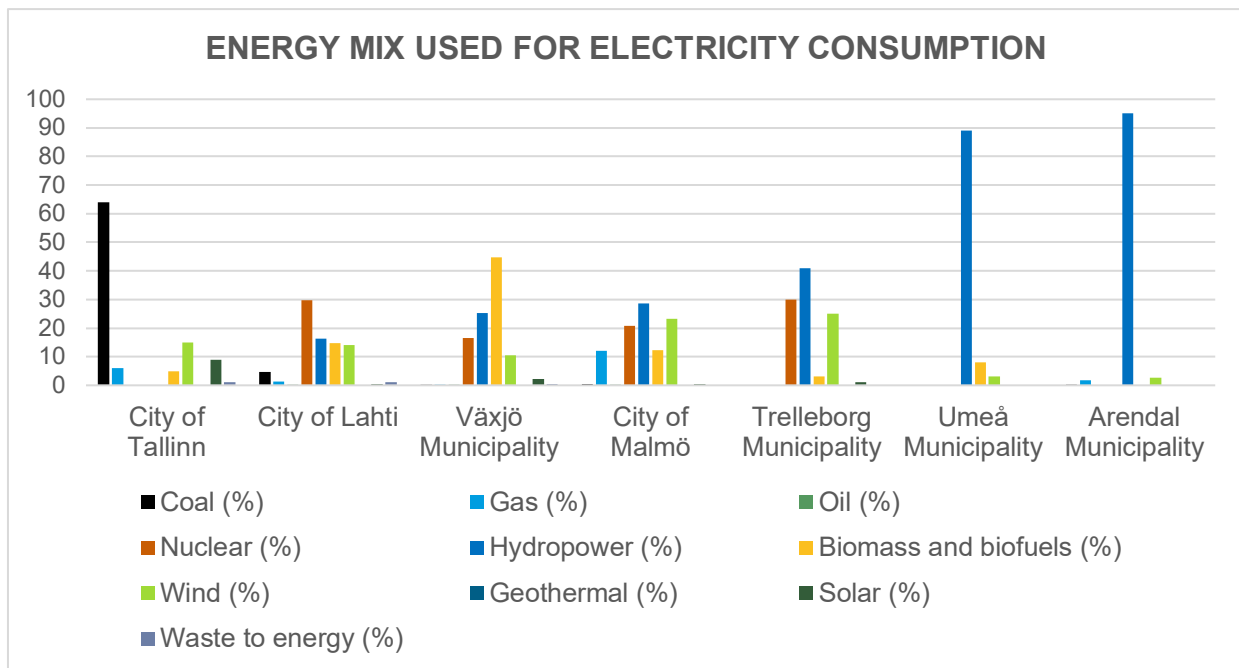
“Turku is investing in redesigning its city center to make it more conducive to ‘soft mobility’ (i.e. human-powered, non-motorized mobility).” – City of Turku

Till date, **Växjö** has managed to reach an estimated reduction of emissions of 10 % only by making it easier to walk and bike. Another great initiative is up in the City of **Malmö**. Skånetrafiken, which is the provider of public transport, has the objective to make all busses run on electricity by 2031. They have already done a big job towards their goal, as many busses run on electricity by now. Alternatively, **Turku** is investing in soft mobility, trying to shift the mobility use towards bikes, scooters, and other similar transport.

Energy actions

Energy mix in electricity consumption

7 out of the 15 disclosing UBC member cities have reported their used energy mix for electricity consumption. The mix is diverse – some cities have a wide variety of different sources whilst other cities clearly rely on one type of energy source. For example, **Umeå** and **Arendal** are excelling in efforts to decarbonize their energy sources as they rely mostly on hydropower. The cities of **Lahti**, **Växjö**, **Malmö** and **Trelleborg** use a mix of different energy sources like nuclear, biomass and biofuels, hydropower, wind and small portions of coal and gas which shows their potential towards completely phasing out the unsustainable energy sources.



The City of **Tallinn** is working on implementing more sustainable energy sources like wind and biomass or biofuels. Additionally, it is possible to see an emerging use of solar energy in **Tallinn**, so the direction towards more sustainable energy sources is clearly observed alongside wind and gas.

One of the biggest users of the wind energy among the disclosed cities in 2023 – the City of **Trelleborg** is currently planning to expand their wind production capacity, so it will cover even more of the city harbor.

“Two new wind power turbines will be constructed in the city harbor.

To ensure the addition of new renewable electricity production for the planned hydrogen production within Trelleborg municipality these two wind turbines are in the planning process.”

Energy efficiency

In the pursuit of energy efficiency, **Elva** is actively seeking financial support to fund the building renewal projects. By renewing existing structures, the city aims to optimize energy consumption and contribute to a more sustainable urban landscape.

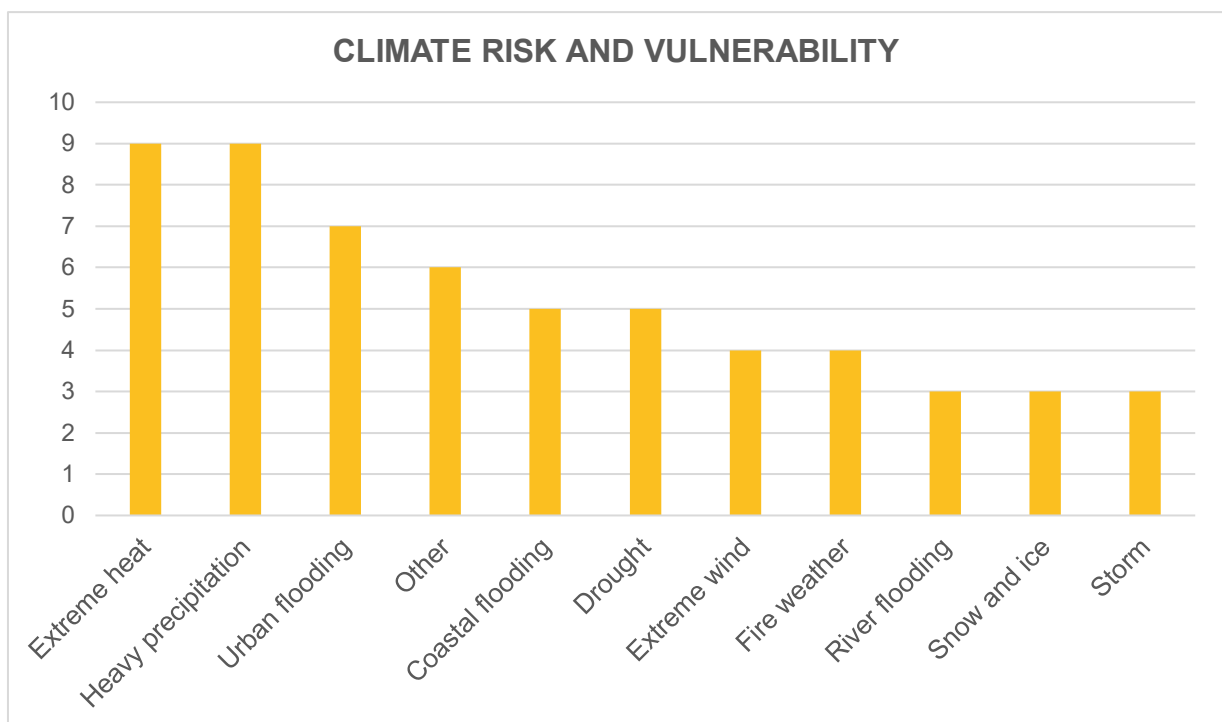
City of **Turku**, on the other hand stands out with its flagship project, "Smart & Wise Turku," an initiative aimed at improving the efficiency of building services. Through this project, an intelligent knowledge management model will serve as a blueprint to monitor and enhance the energy efficiency of buildings.

“Through “Smart & Wise Turku”, one of the city’s spearhead projects, an intelligent knowledge management model was developed to monitor and improve efficiency of building services. The model is now ready to be utilized in new buildings.”

Climate actions

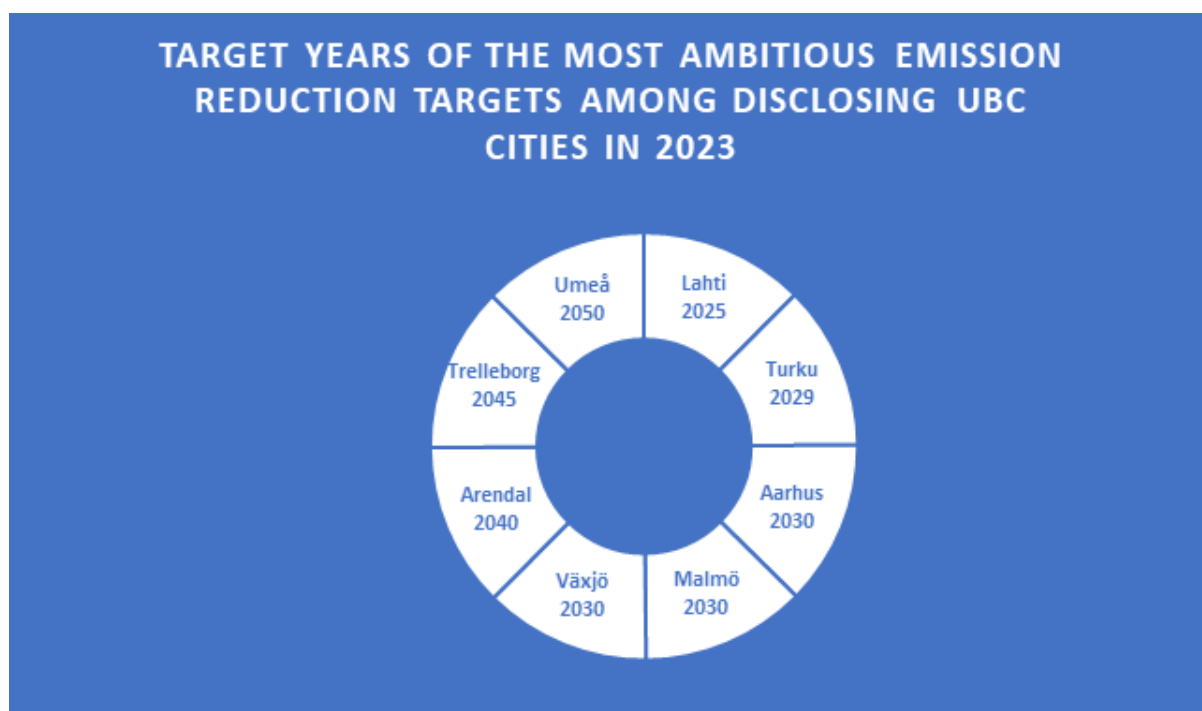
Challenges related to climate risk and vulnerability

Each year most of the reporting cities are facing similar challenges regarding climate risk and vulnerability in the Baltic Sea Region. Extreme heat, heavy precipitation and urban flooding are three of the most reported challenges from year-to-year that the cities have faced so far. Other reported challenges include coastal flooding, drought, extreme wind and fire weather. River flooding, snow and ice and storms are among the challenges related to climate risk and vulnerability.



Emission reduction targets

9 out of the 15 reporting cities have disclosed their ambitious emission reduction targets. While most of the disclosing cities are setting their carbon neutrality target years prior the EU carbon neutrality target year of 2050, **Lahti** is one of the leading cities in becoming carbon neutral with a target year of 2025. Among others the City of **Turku** is set to celebrate the remarkable year of its 800th anniversary by becoming climate neutral by the year of 2029. **Växjö**, **Malmö** and **Aarhus** are aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030 whilst **Arendal** and **Luleå** are aiming for significant emission reductions by 2040 and **Trelleborg** by 2045. All cities have different base years and different emission reduction goals; however they are aiming to drastically cut their emissions by the set target year. The Baltic Sea Region cities are ambitious with their goals and the region is amongst the leaders in emission reduction.



Planning

Considering the data provided, it is important to acknowledge that each city is working towards development with a strong focus on sustainability. While there may be variations in the progress achieved by individual cities, it is noteworthy that every city is on course for a more sustainable future.

13 out of the 15 reporting cities have already adopted a climate action plan or strategy. The remaining 2 cities are either set to formalize their plan within the next two years or have the plans addressing the climate action embedded into the other strategic documents. This consistency in planning demonstrates the shared ambition among cities in the pursuit of effective climate management.

Water actions

Trends on water

Reporting UBC member cities have acted on various topics relating to water like storm water management, wastewater treatment, urban and coastal flooding, cloudburst and restoring natural water environments. One of the trends observed among the reporting cities is the restriction of development in risk areas. **Malmö** has restricted the new building development in areas that are below 3 meters above sea level.

“The lowest level for new buildings should be +3.0 m above sea level unless other measures can be taken as protection against flooding or high groundwater.”

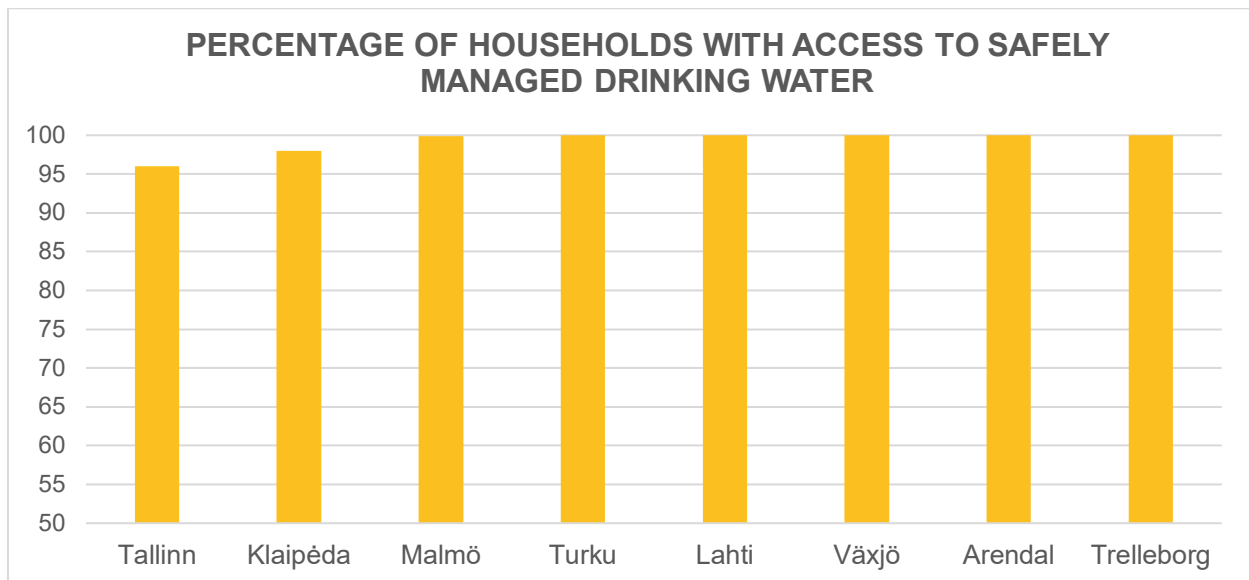
The city of **Arendal** is using a map tool to help identify risk areas for flooding, this way using tool helps them with the construction planning of buildings, so they will not get damaged due to the increasing water level.

“This flood-zone map shows where the height (2.5 meters above sea level) is to build building and other facilities in a risk-free manner. By building outside the risk zone, the risk of flood damaging buildings is reduced.”

“The main goal related to heavy rain, flooding of streams and rivers is to secure that Arendal can handle more water and more rain for short and long periods. To do this, all necessary knowledge about flooding on primary and secondary flood roads must first be obtained. Each precipitation field must be studied in detail regarding to the risk of cloudbursts in order to identify measure that are included in an action plan. The measures will be implemented by allocating funds in the annual financial plans.”

Safe drinking water

One important sphere where UBC cities particularly excel is the share of access to safely managed drinking water services.



Out of 8 cities disclosing their share of the households with access to the safely managed drinking water services 6 cities have indicated 100% or 99.9% which indicates complete coverage of the households with safe drinking water. The rest of the cities have indicated excellent share of over 95 percent of households having the access to the drinking water.

Resource efficiency actions

Recycling

Recycling and practices of circular economy have become a real endeavor for cities implementing sustainable and environmentally conscious practices. A significant role in the recycling landscape is held by the efficient management of textiles. The Cities of **Turku** and **Malmö** have taken action in incorporating textile recycling into their waste management systems. Residents of these cities are equipped with knowledge about where to deposit or deliver their old textiles, contributing to the circular economy and providing these materials with new purpose.

Meanwhile, **Klaipėda** is currently in the process of identifying the most effective implementation method for textile recycling. This indicates a commitment to ensuring the integration of textile recycling in the city's waste management system in the near future.

Expanding the recycling actions, City of **Malmö** has achieved a 20% improvement in the recycling of office furniture. This shows the city's holistic approach to recycling, emphasizing the need to extend sustainable practices. Malmö's achievements serve as an inspirational example for others looking to enhance their recycling share.

Food management

In the aims towards sustainability, cities are recognizing the crucial role of circularity in food systems. The initiatives undertaken by **Växjö**, and **Söderhamn**, are shedding light on their strategies to promote circularity in the food management.

A common trend among these cities is the reducing food waste. **Växjö** is prioritizing strategies to minimize waste of the food supply chain. By incorporating mindful consumption practices and implementing measures to prevent excess, the city aims to make a significant impact on reducing overall food waste.

Söderhamn boasts with an innovative approach to food waste. The city is actively focusing on repurposing food waste as biogas, contributing to a sustainable energy cycle. This strategy not only addresses the challenge of food waste but also aligns with broader efforts to utilize resources efficiently and minimize environmental impact.

Biodiversity actions

Within the topic of urban sustainability, cities are increasingly recognizing the importance of preserving biodiversity. The impactful actions were taken by **Aarhus**, **Turku**, **Lahti**, and **Malmö** to safeguard ecosystems, protect endangered species, and foster biodiversity within their city limits.

Aarhus, as part of its adaptation goals, aims to increase the number of planted trees by 10,000 before 2025. These trees serve more than just greenery purposes; they contribute to addressing rising temperatures, managing rainwater, and providing enhanced conditions for diverse animal and plant life. Aarhus Municipality has set an ambitious target to double the area of wild nature by 2030, from 2,000 to 4,000 hectares. This initiative is aligned with the city's commitment to prioritize biodiversity, allowing more areas to remain untouched.

Turku envisions itself as one of the leading nature cities globally by 2030. With less than 0.1% of Finland's total area, Turku covers over 12% of all endangered species in the country. The city's long-term goal is to stop the biodiversity loss, restore lost ecosystems, and protect all species from the impacts of global warming. Turku's commitment extends beyond rhetoric, as measures to protect nature and combat biodiversity loss are being reinforced within the city organization with securing EU funding for the development of the Skanssi Biodiversity Park, aiming to be Europe's first biodiversity park. This initiative is part of the European Urban Initiative that will serve as a pilot for promoting biodiversity in urban conditions. The park's creation will involve extensive project support, emphasizing nature education, habitat improvement, and community engagement.

Lahti is actively identifying areas for afforestation, focusing on wastelands, fields and meadows. The city's strategy emphasizes afforestation in collaboration with schools for environmental education, ensuring the preservation of biodiversity hotspots and habitats for rare species.

Malmö, on the other hand is taking a holistic approach, introducing the 3-30-300 model, and advocating for a 25% crown coverage rate in the city. This innovative 3-30-300 model ensures that residents have a visual connection to nature, with three trees visible from their windows, districts boasting a 30% crown coverage, and everyone living within 300 meters of a park.

Sustainable Cities Commission events

UBC Planning & Sustainable Cities Commissions meeting on 13–15 September 2023 in Turku, Finland

UBC Planning Cities and Sustainable Cities Commissions joined their forces in the organisation of their annual meeting in 2023. The result was a three-day learning and brainstorming experience embracing sustainability in the urban planning process. The 64 participants from 19 different BSR cities worked in small groups to create plans for the hosting city of Turku that aims at building new urban areas under the vision of “Waterfront Turku”.

These events are excellent places to exchange experiences and knowledge. I hope every city that is present in this event gets to bring something home,
— **Elina Rantanen, 1st Vice-President of UBC**



Planning workshop with representatives of several UBC cities. Photo by Mariia Andreeva.

Invited speakers at the meeting included Professor of Practice **Susa Eräranta** (Aalto University), Turku City Development Director **Timo Hintsanen** and Turku Climate Director **Risto Veivo**. The Deputy Mayor of Turku and 1st Vice-President of UBC **Elina Rantanen** also

participated in the discussions and hosted the members at the city hall. The meeting was organised by the two Commissions, chaired by **Paulina Szewczyk** (Planning Cities) and **Agnieszka Ilola** (Sustainable Cities), together with the Urban Planning Department of Turku.

14th Annual Forum of EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region on 4-5 October 2023 in Riga, Latvia

The 14th Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was organised in Riga on on the topic “Safe and Sustainable Baltic Sea Region for Future Generations”, attracting over 500 guests. The forum was organised jointly by the Riga City Council, Union of the Baltic Cities and VASAB, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia and the Baltic Sea Strategy Point.

At the Forum’s opening, Head of UBC SCC Secretariat **Agnieszka Ilola** joined the panel of the **workshop “Driving collaborative decarbonization and climate adaptation in the Baltic Sea Region”**, presenting our network actions related to decarbonization and the climate aspirations of our member cities. Cities are the key actors for reaching crucial emissions reductions and BSR cities are already increasingly recognized as global forerunners in being climate-smart and green transition.

“Political and business leaders must develop targets and measures to make sure that we are moving quickly towards more sustainable and carbon neutral future,”

– Agnieszka Ilola, Head of UBC SCC Secretariat



Agnieszka Ilola delivering the presentation at the workshop. Photo by Mariia Andreeva.

The closing session of the Annual Forum "**Interreg Funding for the Macro-Region**" brought the collection of successful examples of transnational cooperation over the 25 years of Interreg celebrated in 2023. There, **Björn Grönholm**, Director of Strategic Projects in the City of Turku and former Head of SCC Secretariat presented how the transnational cooperation worked 15 years ago, with an example of PURE project where the UBC SCC was the Lead Partner. PURE project succeeded in motivating cities for voluntary actions improving the state of the Baltic Sea through upgrading their wastewater treatment systems to stricter HELCOM standards.

Throughout the Forum, UBC SCC was exchanging at the **UBC stand in the Networking village**, to share recent activities and projects.

XVII UBC General Conference on 24-26 October 2023 in Palanga, Lithuania

The XVII UBC General Conference in Palanga was filled with a variety of events: Commissions meetings, parallel workshops, plenary sessions, as well as networking, performances and study visits. Over 150 stakeholders joined the event, both representatives from the UBC member cities with associated cities from Ukraine, and the key stakeholders from the region, including the European Commission and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. UBC SCC organised two sessions within this General Conference.

The "**Meet & Greet**" session on 24 October as a meeting for UBC SCC members aimed to engage member cities and inform them on the recent developments in UBC SCC and opportunities for cooperation within the multitude of Secretariat activities.

The **workshop "EU Cities Mission as a source of inspiration and expertise for cities towards climate-neutrality"** on 25 October focused on the EU Cities Mission and how the innovations from it could be transferred further to cities from UBC and beyond. 30 participants attended this workshop. The keynote was delivered by the Mission

Manager **Patrick Child**, opening the session from Brussels, and on site the light on the Mission cooperation was shed by **Anna Huttunen**, NetZeroCities project.

Four UBC members selected among the 100 Mission Cities joined the discussion panel, represented by: **Risto Veivo** (Climate Director, City of **Turku**), **Per-Åke Fredriksson** (Chairman of the City Council, Municipality of **Gävle**), **Kārlis Beihmanis** (Project manager for Climate change and energy efficiency, **Liepaja** City), and **Agnė Petrošiūtė** (Advisor for Sustainability, **Tauragė** District Municipality).

Photo by Mariia Andreeva.



UBC TALKS webinar series in 2023

The UBC TALKS webinar series that we had started back in 2020 continues to air regularly: in 2023, we organised three comprehensive webinars, in which 20 UBC member cities took part.

UBC TALKS webinar about cooperation for the better future of the Baltic Sea Region

The webinar on 28 March 2023 discussed how BSR cities can be more sustainable, regionally cohesive and climate neutral through the support from and exchange with regional organizations. The webinar featured speakers from **Council of the Baltic Sea States**, **EUSBSR Baltic Sea Strategy Point** and **HELCOM**. The webinar was facilitated by Agnieszka Ilola, Mariia Andreeva and Esther Kreutz-Hassinen.

Webinar 1-2023:

- 90 participants and viewers
- [Recording of the webinar](#)

UBC TALKS webinar about revitalizing urban space

The webinar on 30 May 2023 focused on revitalising urban space through the perspective of sustainable urban planning. This webinar was organized with UBC Planning Cities Commission and in connection with the joint UBC Planning & Sustainable Cities Commission meeting. Speakers from **Turku**, **Gdynia**, **Riga** and **Umeå** presented experiences in sustainable urban planning. The webinar was moderated by Agnieszka Ilola and Mariia Andreeva.

Webinar 2-2023:

- 85 participants and viewers
- Presenting UBC members: **Turku, Gdynia, Riga, Umeå**
- [Recording of the webinar](#)

UBC TALKS webinar about plastic plans for sustainable future

The webinar on 28 November 2023 focused on plastic pollution and how forerunning cities tackle this problem. This webinar was organized with the project **BALTIPLAST**, and featured speakers from the lead partner HAW Hamburg University of Applied Sciences, UBC member cities **Tallinn** and **Helsinki** alongside **Västerås** municipality shared examples on addressing plastic pollution on the municipal scale. The webinar was moderated by Mariia Andreeva and Adham Maharramli.

Webinar 3-2023:

- 64 participants and viewers
- Presenting UBC members: **Helsinki, Tallinn**
- [Recording of the webinar](#)

All UBC TALKS webinars are recorded and available as learning materials. We have already prepared [20 videos](#) that you can study and share with your colleagues. Some of the recordings have been used in the university courses a.o. in Turku, Tartu, Berlin.

Projects running in 2023

EMPEREST

The **EMPEREST (Eliminating Micro-Pollutants from Effluents for Reuse Strategies) project** was launched on 1 January 2023, with UBC SCC as **Lead Partner**. EMPEREST aims at the elimination of organic micropollutants, and specifically PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) from the wastewater stream, addressing local authorities, water utilities, as well as regional stakeholders.

The project consists of four main activity strands: 1) preparation of guidelines for monitoring and assessment of PFAS in the aquatic environment with HELCOM, 2) development of a local PFAS risk-assessment tool with cities, 3) testing of advanced treatment technologies at wastewater treatment plants, aiming at reducing micropollutants from effluent, and 4) capacity development for local authorities and water utilities' experts.

As a prominent action addressing important global challenge, in 2023 the EMPEREST project has been successfully accepted as an action within the **EU Mission Ocean**.

In 2023, EMPEREST organised the kick-off meeting in Turku (February 2023), together with several internal workshops and study visits, and project partners drafted first concepts for advanced effluent treatment pilot investments, training package framework, PFAS risk-assessment plans, and guidelines for monitoring and assessment of PFAS in the aquatic environment – that will be tested with a range of municipalities and service providers in 2024.

EMPEREST is funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021–2027, and the duration of this project cooperation is January 2023 – December 2025.

UBC members in the project: Riga, Gdańsk, Kaunas, Tallinn, Tartu, Turku, Jonava, Malmö, Panevėžys, Tauragė.

[EMPEREST web page](#)

BALTIPLAST

The **BALTIPLAST (Baltic Approaches to Handling Plastic Pollution under a Circular Economy Context) project** focuses on reduction of plastic in production and consumption. The project targets city administrations, businesses and citizens, and as a **Work Package 3 Leader**, UBC SCC supports the transfer of the project results to the target groups.

After the kick-off in Riga (February 2023), BALTIPLAST has held two General Assemblies – in Västerås (May 2023) and Tallinn (November 2023), to encourage cooperation around the topic of plastic. Later in November 2023, UBC SCC organised the UBC TALKS webinar to bring to UBC members best practices on how local authorities can address plastic pollution through strategies and action plans.

UBC members in the project: Helsinki, Kaunas, Tallinn, Valmiera, Hamburg.

[BALTIPLAST web page](#)

The BALTIPLAST project is co-funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021–2027, implemented in January 2023 – December 2025.

SUMPs for BSR

The **SUMPs for BSR (Enhancing effective Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning for supporting active mobility in BSR cities) project**, co-funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021–2027, began in November 2023 and will continue until October 2026. UBC SCC, as a part of City of Turku, is the **Lead Partner** in the project and responsible for the transfer activities in Work package 3. The project focuses on increasing the uptake of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) especially in small and mid-sized BSR cities.

SUMPs for BSR will develop a common framework on monitoring and evaluation for sustainable urban mobility planning, a unified model for testing and experimenting with innovative mobility solutions, and a training programme supporting a larger audience of cities in their SUMP process.

UBC members in the project: Turku, Cesis, Gdynia, Greifswald, Gävle, Panevezys, Tartu.

[SUMPs for BSR web page](#)

Climate-4-CAST

The **Climate-4-CAST (A Climate Action decision Support Tool to accelerate cities' progress towards climate neutrality) project**, co-funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021–2027, is implemented from November 2023 to October 2026. The project addresses city administrations alongside regional and national public authorities, and as a **Work Package 3 Leader**, UBC SCC supports the transfer of the project results to the target groups.

Climate-4-CAST aims to assist local public authorities in integrating climate actions into urban governance processes in their efforts to climate neutrality.

UBC members in the project: Hamburg, Aarhus, Riga, Gdansk, Turku, Växjö.

[Climate-4-CAST web page](#)

Urban Biodiversity Parks

The **Urban Biodiversity Parks (Urban Biodiversity Parks as co-creative platforms for enhancing biodiversity, learning and community involvement in urban ecological regeneration) project** is funded by European Urban Initiative.

The project will develop and pilot a concept of urban biodiversity park as a tool for urban ecological restoration and regeneration. The aim is to establish a platform for developing and testing experimental approaches for preserving and actively enhancing biodiversity in urban environment.

Biodiversity parks will be developed as recreational areas and experiential learning platforms for different groups such as citizens, NGOs, private actors and education institutions. The concept will be piloted in the area of Skanssi in city of Turku and smaller pilots implemented in selected sub-urban neighborhoods. Eight local partners and three transfer cities will develop and pilot the concept together. The role of UBC SCC is to support the project transfer activities.

UBC members in the project: Turku, Malmö.

ZeroPfas II

Zero PFAS II project (Minimization and reduction PFAS input to Baltic Sea) led by IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute was accepted for funding by the Swedish Institute in 2022. The project duration is October 2022 – February 2024 and UBC SCC is a **project partner**. The project aims to strengthen the Baltic Sea PFAS network and increase PFAS knowledge sharing and information exchange within stakeholders from different fields and countries through thematic workshops and science roadshows.

UBC SCC joined PFAS Roadshows organised in 2023 in Stockholm (May 2023) and Vilnius (October 2023) to exchange with local and national experts, and to present the PFAS challenge to national ministries and local stakeholders. [ZeroPFAS II web page with more information.](#)

NonHazCity 3

UBC SCC joined as an **associated organisation** the **NonHazCity 3 project (Reducing hazardous substances in construction to safeguard the aquatic environment, protect human health and achieve more sustainable buildings)** led by the Riga City Council. The project co-funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021–2027 is implemented from January 2023 to December 2025.

UBC SCC provided informational support to the project's co-organised Green Governance Day conference in Tallinn (16 November 2023) to raise UBC cities' awareness about sustainable public procurement best practices a.o. addressing hazardous substances.

UBC members in the project: Riga, Helsinki, Tallinn.

[NonHazCity 3 web page](#)

ChemClimCircle

UBC SCC joined the project **ChemClimCircle (Integrating criteria for chemicals, climate and circularity in procurement processes)** as an **associated organisation**. The project aims to equip municipalities with training modules to apply circular procurement and, by this, to use non-toxic and climate-neutral products (chemicals, climate and circularity nexus). The project is funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme (October 2022 – September 2024).

Over 2023, UBC SCC supported ChemClimCircle by sharing among SCC contacts the call for best practices in hazardous substances management. UBC SCC also provided informational support to the project's co-organised Green Governance Day in Tallinn (16 November 2023) to raise UBC cities' awareness about sustainable public procurement best practices from the Baltic Sea Region.

UBC members in the project: Tauragė, Tallinn.

[ChemClimCircle web page](#)

Change(K)now!

UBC SCC joined as an **associated organisation** the **Change(K)now! project (A mindset change from single-use to circular or multiple-use of food delivery systems in cities of the BSR)** focusing on reduction of single-use food packaging in food supply and catering systems and building social acceptance for circular reuse of food packaging. Project is promoting a mind-set change in food delivery systems from single-use to multiple-use crockery and packaging at different use types. The project co-funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme 2021–2027 is implemented from November 2023 to October 2026.

UBC SCC committed to support project activities related to transfer of solutions to other municipalities beyond the project and promote training program on circular solutions for food delivery.

UBC members in the project: Riga, Liepaja, Tallinn.

[Change\(K\)now! web page](#)

Highlights from the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 2023

Umeå's Climate roadmap 2030 – A pathway to follow

In April 2022, the European Commission announced that Umeå was one of the 112 cities selected for the EU-mission for 100 climate neutral and smart cities by 2030. This was an achievement that builds on the long-time work for sustainable development in Umeå municipality. The city's overall growth vision is: To grow with social, ecological, cultural, and economic sustainability, on the path to becoming 200 000 citizens by the year 2050. Umeå's ambition is also to be carbon neutral in 2030.

One key factor is that Umeå municipality is integrating holistic targets like climate neutrality, social sustainability, and gender equality in the comprehensive plan. This enables the city to plan for the future and create conditions for a high quality of life for all citizens, and with that the conditions for a healthy and growing city. But the transition must be inclusive for all, and we need to address today's power structures and behaviors in order to succeed.

When Umeå received the announcement in 2022, **Deputy Mayor Janet Ågren**, chair of the planning committee, Umeå municipality said:

“This gives us better conditions to take the next big step in the transition, together with business, universities, and civil society. This work is crucial so that it will be possible to live well in a sustainably growing Umeå.”

Collaboration is key to succeeding and Umeå has really taken the next step since April last year. With the support from Viable Cities, the Swedish innovation program for climate neutral and sustainable cities we have continued to develop the Swedish climate city contract 2030 that is signed with six national agencies and 23 municipalities. The core message is to break the silo structure of governance and foster a new form of dialogue between local level and national governance. It is a transformative process that is revised every year in December, with new commitments.

Involve the local ecosystem and taking the next step

In December 2022, forty stakeholders from all sectors signed an agreement to join Umeå Climate roadmap 2030. The city of Umeå is coordinating the work but is also one of the

signatories. It is important to stress that the city administration is committed to reaching climate neutrality and that collaboration is a necessity. Other stakeholders that have signed come from a long range of sectors e.g., construction, housing, energy, industry, architects, hotel and restaurants and forestry.

These key actors will now move forward, making concrete actions for example, increase sustainable mobility and transport, electrification, circular and energy-efficient construction, less plastic in the waste and sustainable food. The process involves both citizens, businesses, academia, and other public organizations.

This is also what Umeå's application to NetZeroCities Pilot cities program is all about. Umeå is one of 52 cities that in February 2023 was selected to the Pilot cities program that will start in May. The pilot project will work with the Climate roadmap, to support the stakeholders to build testbeds and concrete actions. We will implement an innovation methodology, and a knowledge center for innovation and education. This will help us break the barriers of organizational lock-ins and the risk of suboptimization. To really make a systemic transformation we will need to rethink how we are running our organizations, budgeting, policies etc. It will require a lot of work, but we are convinced that it is the right way to go, and that it will bring a higher value in the end.

Citizens need to be in the center and be empowered to act and support the transition. We will host several events in an innovation program that we call UMECOM. It is a method that we have developed during the last year to facilitate ideas to implementation. This will be one of our tools to foster a culture where everyone can get involved and be part of Umeå's sustainable growth.

“I really want to say a big thank you to all actors and citizens in Umeå, who are pushing every day so that we can reduce our climate footprint and create an even more sustainable Umeå!”

It is when we all help each other and work in the same direction that we really can succeed in the transition, from companies, municipalities and regions to associations and civil society. And it is thanks to their amazing work that we now have this opportunity,” says **Deputy Mayor Janet Ågren (S)**, chair of the planning committee.

For us, sustainability is part of our identity and soul, so when you visit us, we want you to see, feel and live it too.

Author: Philip Näslund, Strategic Development Officer, Municipality of Umeå

Published in the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 1/2023: 13 April 2023

“We need to reach the finish line together” – the mayor of Espoo invites to join the climate cooperation

The City of Espoo is inviting its partners to join the climate covenant and the cooperation to reach carbon neutrality.

Espoo has the ambitious goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. For a growing city, this requires new solutions for energy production and consumption, traffic, circular economy, land use and construction. Building a carbon-neutral society requires bold new thinking and new perspectives. The necessary expertise can often be found nearby: local research, companies and innovation collaboration. Cooperation to reduce the Espoo community's carbon footprint and increase its carbon handprint, i.e. the export of clean solutions, was bolstered at the Mayor's invitational event in Otaniemi.

A European development environment

Espoo's position as a development environment for smart and sustainable urban solutions of the future is strengthened by the inclusion in the European Union's mission to achieve 100 climate neutral and smart cities. The mission is one of the spearhead projects of the European Union's research and innovations programme.

“In the Espoo story, we have set the goals of reducing the carbon footprint and increasing the handprint. The EU is also interested in new innovative solutions and ways of driving systemic change through open cooperation. Sustainable development and climate action are an essential part of Espoo's award-winning innovation story,”

— Deputy Director of Strategy Pasi Laitala

The cities selected for the mission are working together with local interest groups to prepare a climate city covenant to expedite the green and digital transition as well as rapid emission reductions to reach the carbon neutrality goal.

The invitation to partners is open

The climate city covenant will be prepared over the course of 2023 as part of the Sustainable Espoo programme. Partners are invited to join the shared commitment and cooperation with the City.

“The commitment consists of a text to be signed by the City and its partners, as well as partner-specific appendices. During the process, we will determine the partners' wishes for the cooperation with the City and create a model for the local implementation of the EU mission in Espoo. The invitation to partners is now open,” says Manager for Sustainable Development **Helena Kyrki**.

Author: Helena Kyrki, Manager for Sustainable Development, City of Espoo

Published in the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 1/2023: 13 April 2023

Smart traffic lights in Liepāja in line with UN SDGs

The first smart traffic light in Latvia has been installed in Liepāja. The smart traffic control device equipped with a machine vision technology is now officially operational at the intersection of Uliha and Robežu streets in the coastal Baltic Sea city of Liepāja.

In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly (resolution 64/255) proclaimed a Decade of Action for Road Safety ("Decade"). As part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the goal of the Decade (2011-2020) was to stabilize and then reduce the forecast level of road traffic deaths around the world.

Road safety was expressly included as an important sustainable development issue in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Road safety is also an important development issue because road accidents, in addition to being a major public health issue, causing human deaths and injuries, also bring costs and economic losses, including those arising from medical treatment, lost productivity for those disabled, and time off work or school taken by family members to care for the injured.

Countries with high levels of road traffic death and injury (like Latvia) are often more likely to have an inequitable transport system that Liepāja has already many years improved. Many are travelling at high speed in the wrong direction along the unsustainable path towards high carbon mobility. By putting in place strategies for low carbon transport we can improve road safety, and vice versa.

We need to do more to encourage safe and liveable urban communities with neighbourhoods designed to promote walking and cycling.

Cities need well managed, safe and affordable public transport, the urban space designed with an emphasis on people, not vehicle volumes. We can and must encourage people to use cars less, by ensuring attractive alternatives.

Speed management has a vital role to play in improving road safety, in providing an environment in which people want to walk and cycle more, and in reducing vehicle emissions by smoothing traffic flow.

In this project, we also focus among other things on improving possibilities for children to make their school trips independently using sustainable and safe modes instead of being taken to and from schools by private cars.

The first of its kind in Latvia to be officially included in the traffic monitoring system, the recorded information on drivers crossing the intersection at a red light will be transferred to the databases of the Road Traffic Safety Directorate and the Municipal Police, so that administrative penalties can be imposed on traffic offenders.

This smart solution has been running in a test mode at this intersection since autumn 2019, but until now it has only recorded the statistics of traffic offenders. It is quite impressive. For example, more than 600 red light violations have been recorded in the last 8 months. Earlier

this spring, the City of Liepāja signed a contract with the mobile operator LMT to officially integrate the system into its traffic monitoring system to improve traffic safety and prevent traffic violations. Liepāja has thus become the first user of innovative road safety solutions in the country.

The smart traffic light is able to perform a number of functions: it recognises and classifies objects, determines their trajectory and location, recognises and reads car licence plates, and can detect the traffic light signal. It is equipped with a highly configured mini-computer with computer vision algorithms, two high-definition video cameras, network connectivity, fixtures and software developed by LMT.

Now installed in Liepāja, the smart system is able to recognise a traffic light, a car and its licence plate. Based on the same technology, new algorithms can be developed to detect other types of traffic offences - driving in a public transport lane, halting at a junction, unauthorised turning, unauthorised crossing of train tracks, driving the wrong way down a one-way street, avoiding traffic jams on kerbs, not wearing helmets for category A vehicles, OCTA and technical inspection violations by licence plate number.

Author: Karlis Beihmanis, Project manager for climate change and energy efficiency, Liepāja City

Published in the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 1/2023: 13 April 2023

Linnaniemi – Turku’s first art district combines culture and sustainability

The Linnaniemi area, around Turku Castle and the harbour, will undergo major changes in the coming decades as the shipping companies move to a new joint terminal. The former passenger port will open for new developments, which include services and housing areas that bring vitality to the area. New parks and plazas will create an enjoyable maritime atmosphere and connect Linnaniemi to the riverside. The historically and culturally important area was named as the first art district of Turku.

Just recently, the Turku City Board approved the art programme, which was developed to create a framework for art projects and to define themes for art. The board also decided to start an architectural competition for the Museum of History and the Future on Linnaniemi, which should be finalized by the city’s 800th birthday in 2029. Investing in culture is part of sustainable urban development in Turku: culture contributes to creating a vibrant, active and livable city. Culture also has positive effects on wellbeing, as pleasant environments encourage to walk around the city and enjoying the urban spaces.

Thematically the permanent and temporary artworks of Linnaniemi will be based on the sea – especially the archipelago and the Baltic Sea, internationality, cultural history of Linnaniemi, environmental and ecology – all these will be highlighted by art in the area. The aim is to incorporate art into different projects and connect different actors in the area and beyond.

The area will develop step-by step in an open and transparent process, art can be a way to involve people through events and happenings to make sure that citizens adopt the area as their own. Light and movable art structures, such as specially designed concrete barriers, will be brought to the area. Structures that would otherwise do for demolition can be left for the creative self-expression of people and artist. Places for more permanent artworks are outlined in the art program, concentrating especially in meeting places, arrival nodes and in significant walking and biking routes. The goal is that one can immediately notice that they have arrived into an art district.

Linnaniemi is already home to museums, Turku Castle and maritime museum Forum Marinum, and hosts different events. The Turku Castle, Forum Marinum, the Port of Turku and other actors of Linnaniemi welcome to the developing art district!

Author: Julia Chir, Spearhead Projects, City of Turku

Published in the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 2/2023: 14 June 2023

Innovative collaborations accelerate Malmö's journey to climate neutrality

Malmö, a leading city in sustainable development, has undertaken a determined path towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. With ambitious targets, agile roadmaps, and strategic partnerships, the city is not only focused on climate neutrality but also ensuring an inclusive, just and equitable climate transition.

Malmö has set an ambitious goal to become carbon neutral by 2030 and is a frontrunner leading the way to climate neutral cities in Europe. The key success factors in Malmö's work, involve innovative forms of collaboration and working methods.

"In Malmö, we have reinvented our way of working with a horizontal climate transition office to maximise synergies within the organization and with other stakeholders."

"This allows for rapid deployment of solutions as well as an ability to learn and scale smart solutions across the organisation," says **Jonas Kamleh**, senior climate advisor at the city of Malmö.

The first phase in Malmö's transition work has been based on emissions analyses to prioritize transition pathways that will have the greatest impact on the climate, along with providing additional societal benefits, such as increased employment opportunities and improved living standards for the city residents. Agile roadmaps are currently under development within seven prioritized transition areas to highlight necessary measures within each area.

"While we are on a positive trajectory in Malmö, the challenge of increasing the speed and intensity remains a significant hurdle", Jonas Kamleh continues.

Mobilizing stakeholders through shared understanding

Key takeaways from Malmö's analyses show that Malmö can become climate positive by 2030 if, and only if, stakeholders at local, regional, national, and European level are engaged and work together on accelerating transformation. On a national level Malmö was one of the initiators to Viable cities. As part of the initiative, cities and authorities in Sweden have signed a joint climate agreement and agreed to take concrete actions to accelerate their climate transition.

Malmö has been selected for the EU-mission "100 climate neutral cities by 2030" as one of the frontrunners in Europe. Malmö is also one of 52 cities in the NetZeroCities Pilot cities program that started in May this year.

To mobilize stakeholders in Malmö, the city has initiated a local climate contract. So far, the contract has been signed by nearly 250 actors from a wide range of sectors. The actors will now make concrete efforts in line with Malmö's climate goals, e.g., try circular solutions, reduce food waste, and choose renewable energy.

One great example of local collaboration comes from the work with the waste management company Sysav, the producer of district heating in Malmö.

"Together, we have been establishing shared understanding of Malmö's greenhouse gas emissions and the proportion attributed to Sysav's facility. Sysav has now aligned its goals with Malmö's and efforts are currently underway to reduce emissions through minimizing the use of fossil plastics in waste and by exploring Carbon Capture Storage (CCS)," says Jonas Kamleh.

The building and construction industry in Malmö, initiated and supported by the City of Malmö, has already devised a local roadmap for relevant actors in Malmö: LFM30 - *The local roadmap for a climate-neutral building and construction sector in Malmö 2030*. The initiative has mobilized over 200 stakeholders from the entire supply chain, with the aim of achieving a climate-neutral sector by 2030.

In the area of mobility the priorities are increasing electrification and further scale up public transport investment, as well as contribute to behavioral changes and active mobility. When it comes to mobility the disparity between local and national objectives and policies possesses a significant challenge.

Decisions at the national level to reduce the utilization of biofuels in petrol and diesel will lead to a sharp increase in emissions in Malmö and make it harder for us to achieve our climate goals. A conversation regarding the disconnect between goals is crucial if we are to reach net-zero cities by 2030, Jonas Kamleh explains.

Involving citizens – a key to success

By 2030, Malmö's consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions should be halved to 3.1 tonnes per person and per year. To achieve this goal, collaboration is essential with those living and working in Malmö. It is crucial to increase collaborative efforts in neighborhoods with high needs and low emissions, as well as in areas with high incomes and high emissions, with the aim of co-designing solutions that maintain a high quality of life while reducing emissions.

"This is undeniably an ambitious and complex goal, where citizen involvement is crucial. We need to better understand the citizens' needs and how we can meet them. For instance, how we interact with the civil society organisations in the best way," Jonas Kamleh says.

Malmö has a strong civil society with a significant drive amongst the citizens, which is a true strength and success.

"People want to be part of the transition and the solution, not just the problem. We all need to consider the climate goals and the journey as our collective responsibility. In Malmö, we have a clear stance - either we accomplish this together or not at all," Jonas Kamleh concludes.

Author: Åsa Olsson, Communications manager, City of Malmö

Published in the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 3/2023: 9 November 2023

New sustainable energy solutions tested in Turku

The city of Turku aims to be climate neutral in 2029 and climate positive from then onwards. As part of the transition towards a cleaner energy system, new solutions are being tested in Turku Student Village. The measures are implemented through RESPONSE project.

To reach its climate neutrality goal, the city of Turku has made a strong commitment to transition towards cleaner energy. In the past 10 years, the city has invested heavily into a renewable energy system, and already today more than 80 % of the energy produced by the city's energy company, Turku Energia, is from renewable sources.

As part of the transition, Turku is taking part in RESPONSE project (Integrated Solutions for Positive Energy and Resilient Cities), funded by the European Union's research and innovation funding programme Horizon 2020. The project is focused on building more sustainable and safer cities with particular attention directed towards energy. It brings together eight European cities, demonstrating technological innovations in Turku and Dijon (France) and exploring their replicability in the six fellow cities.

In the RESPONSE demonstration site in Turku Student Village, the city's first **positive energy block (PEB)** is being built by project partners. A PEB is a built area which produces more renewable energy than it consumes over a year, thus decreasing the need to use fossil fuels. The PEB in Turku Student Village is brought about by greatly increasing local renewable energy production, capturing waste heat more efficiently, and reducing energy consumption.

The increase in renewable energy is achieved by installing both novel and conventional solar panels in selected buildings at the Student Village PEB site. Storages for electricity and heat reduce imbalances between demand and production, and near-by city district cooling flows are upcycled to recover waste heat. With the help of smart energy systems, the energy consumption of the buildings is then optimized.

The integrated technological solutions reduce the need to use fossil fuels for energy in the PEB. This need is further reduced by retrofitting measures implemented in the older buildings of the test site, vastly improving the energy efficiency of the buildings. Residents of the Student Village also play an active role in reducing energy consumption within the block. The message is spread by mentors, who themselves are residents of the Student Village. They share tips on saving energy and encourage inhabitants to actively monitor and reduce their daily energy consumption.

As temperatures climb, the pressure to reduce carbon emissions and adopt new innovative solutions in cities continues to increase. RESPONSE is part of a broader group of projects funded by the European Union, aimed to demonstrate and develop PEDs in different surroundings. For the next two years, the solutions implemented in Turku will be monitored and assessed. An evaluation of the results will help show the practical feasibility of building PEDs in colder climates.

Just as in RESPONSE, the energy transition in the city of Turku is implemented together with municipal residents, businesses, and communities. The city has already managed to cut its emissions by 56 % compared to 1990 levels and is continuously searching for new ways to reduce its carbon footprint. Get acquainted with the city of Turku's climate plan for 2029 to learn more about our path towards climate neutrality.

Author: Helmi Andersson, Project Development Unit, City of Turku

Published in the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 3/2023: 9 November 2023

Kemi – City of Snowman

Kemi is a perfect home for the Snowman – we have proper winters and during the summertime the Snowman can rest in the all-year-round Snowcastle – Snowexperience365. We have in progress a project to promote the Snowman’s message – Kemi – the City of Snowman, execution time is 1.8.2023-31.3.2024. This project is funded by the regional council of Lapland.

The aim of this project is to raise the Snowman in the position it has deserved – to be one figurehead for the whole Lapland’s tourism and naturally one figurehead for the City of Kemi. Another purpose is to increase the Snowman’s recognition in Finland and internationally, which will be done in co-operation with the City of Kemi, local companies and operators.

And speaking of co-operation with companies, city of Kemi provides an Environmental Handbook for companies to fill in with their own information. When filled, the company has documented its environmental system which can be useful in advertising and dealing with customers and financiers. Handbook was implemented in “Green and Sustainable Kemi for companies” project – financed by European Regional Development Fund / ELY Centre and it is loadable in kemi.fi – Vihreä Kemi.

Information in Environmental Handbooks reminds us that in addition to Snowman’s cheerful presence it also highlights the importance of fighting against climate change. Otherwise, Snowman can’t live even in Kemi in the future. We must Save Our Snowman!

Author: Eija Kinnunen, Head of Sustainable Development, City of Kemi

Published in the Sustainable Cities Bulletin 3/2023: 9 November 2023

Annual report 2023

Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainable Cities Commission

Authors: Agnieszka Ilola, Mariia Andreeva, Adham Maharramli, Lotta Lehti, Ira Sibelius

Layout: Laura Sarlin (UBC SCC / City of Turku)

Cover picture: iStock

Published: February 2024