



Contribution to Public consultation on the future EU 2020 strategy

From

Union of the Baltic Cities, Commission on Environment  
Environment and Sustainable Development Secretariat c/o city of Turku  
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Address: Vanha Suurtori 7  
20500 Turku, Finland

Contact person: Head of Secretariat Björn Grönholm, +358449075 987



Union of the Baltic Cities, Commission on Environment welcomes the EU 2020 strategy and underlines the need to transform Europe sustainably. This means, not just sustainable economy, but also sustainable use of natural uses and the human resources. In order to reach this, truly integrated approach is required. This demands more interlinkages between existing EU strategies.

## **The urban dimension of EU 2020 strategy**

### **Governance**

The integration of our societies has been extremely fast since the end of the Cold War. Much of the activity and integration has happened *within* and *between* local authorities. A paradigm shift has also taken place as the cooperation (and thereby also the integration) has changed from *earlier bilateral cooperation to cooperation in networks*, i.e. either city or thematic networks. This paradigm shift and development step has also led to *increased activity in other spheres and arenas* where local authorities and especially cities have not been active before.

This aspect, the already existing networks and cooperation patterns between local authorities, should be taken into account as an *existing and well founded resource in the region* in policy discussions and *implementation* of EU policies and strategies.

Within the urban dimension it is important to stress the variety and different circumstances of the urban areas in the region. Wellbeing of all local governments and their inhabitants is relevant for a balanced, controlled and sustainable development of Europe.

### **Role and mandate of urban areas**

Approximately 80% of the inhabitants in the EU live in urban areas and the proportion of people living in urban areas in the EU. The economic and environmental state of the urban area has a direct influence of the quality of life and health conditions of all citizens in the region.

The *mandate* of local authorities is to serve the inhabitants, plan for the future and be the implementation level of a various number of laws and regulation, depending on the country. The *decisions* taken by the local authorities have a *direct influence on the inhabitants but will also influence on the attractiveness of the urban area*. The overall attractiveness of a city, including the state of the environment, economic viability and political stability as well as cultural sustainability, is very important in the *global competition* on business opportunities, investments, establishments and skilled labor.

It is also obvious that there are several threats to the wellbeing and attractiveness of urban areas in the EU. Some of these security risks are political as there still is some level of instability in the region. Some of the risks are in connection with global economic and local demographic situations. These are often out of bounds for local governments to change but preventive measures can and should be taken.



However, many other threats and problems that are visible at the EU level should be communicated and handled in an integrated way including also local authorities, in cooperation with governments and the EU. Such are for example are; the negative effects of climate change, risks in connection to transportation of oil and chemicals, drug problems and trafficking. Migration is also a problem in the region as some areas are suffering from *migration within EU or even outside EU*. This brain drain of young, educated, skilled labor can lead to severe problems in particularly on the local level / in cities and has therefore been considered as a long term risk for the whole Baltic Sea Region.

## **Direct comments to the EU 2020 strategy**

### *1. Creating value by basing growth on knowledge*

Authorities as important actors and enablers has been forgotten in planning for European Knowledge Area. Without the integration of the decision making level the added value of the Area will not fulfill.

Instruments are needed to allow local level innovative ideas to become mainstreamed.

### *2. Empowering people in inclusive societies*

The strategy should enable societies to become inclusive by increasing tolerance and stakeholder involvement. Efforts should be put on enabling our societies to become transparent. This requires integrated management, especially on local and regional levels.

The 2020 should focus on increasing the citizen´s quality of life.

### *3. Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy.*

Competitive economy is not possible without attractive cities and regions and balanced development of urban and rural areas. This includes the sustainable development of Macro-Regions of Europe as the motors of development.

Transport policies should include also sustainable mobility management to enable the comprehensive shift.

### *Making it happen: Harnessing existing instruments in a new approach*

For the convergence and integration of the EU 2020 strategy, local authorities should not be forgotten when talking about different levels of government, as the local authorities are crucial for any implementation to take place.

### *Setting EU 2020 in a global context*

International trade without multi-level and multi-lateral co-operation is not enough to act as a motor for sustainable growth, employment and investment in the EU.