

## Report on VASAB Workshop on Urban Revitalization

Łódź, Poland

28 October 2015

The main objective of VASAB workshop on Urban Revitalization was to provide a joint input to the EU Urban Agenda process based on existing sustainable urban planning solutions and partnership concepts. The workshop aimed to share experience on urban revitalization at national and local level in the Baltic Sea Region.

Representatives from the Dutch Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations – Mr. Nicolaas Beets and Mr. Pedro Campos Ponce introduced the latest developments towards the EU Urban Agenda process. It was stressed that cities are engines of growth and innovation, but they also face particular problems and challenges.

The aim of the EU Urban Agenda is to enhance urban dimension of EU policy, address important European urban issues and the impact of EU policies on urban development, as well as provide better support for integrated development of cities and other urban areas in achieving common EU goals.

The next step for upcoming Dutch EU Presidency in 2016 is to prepare a *Pact of Amsterdam* containing of:

- Themes of the EU Urban Agenda,
- Agreement on partnerships,
- Agreement on framework of the EU Urban Agenda.

For now there are 12 priority themes and several cross-cutting issues outlined that should be further discussed and developed within the partnerships which are intended as the key delivery mechanism of the EU Urban Agenda. Partnerships will aim at providing an added value through solutions in the field of better EU regulations, funding and knowledge exchange that can better support cities and urban areas. The upcoming Dutch EU Presidency intends to launch first 2-3, as well as draft the Council Conclusions on the EU Urban Agenda.

Polish representative presented newly adopted by the Government, National Urban Policy 2023 that sets out the planned activities of Government regarding urban policy, desirable directions of activities aimed at targeting territorial approach to sustainable urban development and intended to strengthen the capacity of cities and urban areas to create sustainable growth and jobs and improvement of the quality of life of inhabitants. The system of supporting revitalization (as one of the main urban challenges within the Polish National Urban Policy) is composed of pillars that include legislative solutions, instruments, financing activities under the comprehensive revitalization programs, information and knowledge support, which include among others: Revitalization Act, Assumptions of the National Revitalization Plan, Guidelines for revitalization actions in the operational programs in 2014-2020 perspective, as well as pilot projects and national competition for the revitalization model projects. One of the pilot project is carried out in Lodz city therefore representatives from Lodz City presented their intentions for extensive city revitalization plans during the 2014-2020 as well as serving Poland and Lodz as the candidates for hosting the International EXPO Exhibition in 2022 with the main theme of revitalization.

The Central Baltic Programme 2014-2020 projects “Baltic Urban Lab” and “Live Baltic Campus” contributed with presentations about the projects aims and planned actions as both of them have just been launched. Both projects have received the Letter of Support from the EUSBSR HA “Spatial Planning”. The project “Baltic Urban Lab” will provide an integrated planning and partnership model for brownfield regeneration in 4 pilot brownfield sites in Turku, Tallinn, Riga and Norrköping. The project “Live Baltic Campus” tends to deal with

campus sites development as innovation hubs and their integration in the overall urban management and transport system. Six pilot implementation areas will be conducted in Riga, Turku, Tartu, Uppsala, Stockholm and Helsinki. Both projects will bring an input to the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region and particularly to its Horizontal Action "Spatial Planning" by providing place-based spatial planning solutions.

Other local experience was demonstrated by Valga City which is facing a sharp demographic changes – the number of population have significant decreased thus having dramatic impact on housing sector. In order to have a proper information of housing in Valga town, the data base of real land use (abandoned properties v.s. properties in use) has been prepared. The study shows that almost one quarter of properties are abandoned or apartment houses are underused. That causes several social and economic consequences – the real estate market practically has collapsed, the quality of housing is poor and unattractive urban space has negative impact on its neighbourhood and abandonment continues to grow.

The main goal in shrinking conditions is to decelerate the depopulation process and to adjust the size of the town to meet the needs of the present citizens. The Valga town`s revitalization plan involves a revitalization of the town center, adaptation of building stock to meet actual needs, as well as an industrial and commercial brownfield redevelopment thus to increase an attractiveness of the town center and reanimate the real estate market. As regards the building stock adaptation, particular number of buildings has been selected:

- buildings to be reconstructed (important for urban space, within the area of heritage protection);
- buildings to be demolished, so the brownfield will be turned into open green spaces or returned to the nature.

It was noted that the current system of heritage protection does not prioritize the actual use of building therefore lot of historical values decrease due to abandonment. Due to the low capacity of local governments the EU funding may play a significant role for urban revitalization.

Taking into consideration the complexity of shrinkage, it has become clear that it cannot be tackled by the city alone – the wider national or regional cooperation should be encouraged.

Workshop was concluded by discussions rising up opinions how VASAB could contribute to the EU Urban Agenda process. It was agreed that VASAB could bring an input by highlighting urban issues in the BSR cities: facing the demographic changes, shrinking cities, depopulation, refugee problem; revitalisation and other thematic areas. Moreover, it was suggested that VASAB can offer its experience and know-how in enhancement of a cross-cutting approach. VASAB can also support the partnerships which are in the need of cross-cutting approach and act as a source of know-how and good practice for the partnerships willing to use the VASAB experience. Experience of VASAB countries could be also gathered and deliver to the EU Urban Agenda process as a material highlighting the main challenges that face Baltic Sea Region and in this way adding territorial dimension to EU Urban Agenda.

It was also agreed that above mentioned urban topics should be included in the agenda of the coming VASAB Conference to be held in Warsaw, 6 June 2016.

*Workshop was organized within the frame of Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme project "HASPS - Horizontal Action "Spatial Planning" Support".*