

Interreg
Baltic Sea Region



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RESPONSIVE PUBLIC SERVICES

Liveability



A charter for designing the liveable city

Why?

Our cities around the Baltic Sea Region are in the middle of dealing with the complex social, environmental and economic challenges of the 21st century. Our public administration is confronted with multiple crises simultaneously: (health) care crisis, increased migration movements, climate crisis – just to name a few. Our current approaches and tools do not seem to be adequate to meet these new challenges.

Who are we inviting to join?

The goal of the charter is to inspire people working in public administration (and beyond). The charter is a dynamic commitment, inviting municipalities to start their liveability journey. It gives space to grow and develop without increasing the workload on municipal staff.

Why use Public Interest Design (PID)?

We are convinced that a deep rethinking of policy and programme planning is required to meet the current challenges.

We want our work in public administration to be meaningful and effective. We wish to design public services that put the citizen at the centre and benefit the common good. We aim to work closer with our citizens. We want to be more public, transparent and more flexible to better meet the needs of citizens in a fast-paced world. This way, we want to strengthen our public administration and increase our job satisfaction.

Who?

We are employees of public administration from the Baltic Sea Region and want to propose a charter to foster liveability in our cities and municipalities. We were supported in this endeavour by associated non-governmental organisations and academic institutes.

What is our approach?

With this charter, we, as cities and municipalities in the Baltic Sea Region, want to show our dedication to fostering liveable cities, which are socially, environmentally, culturally and economically sustainable and resilient. By proposing the concept of Public Interest Design (PID) we want to outline principles which can help promote liveability in our cities.

Public Interest Design (PID) is a framework that emphasizes socially responsible, community-centred approaches to addressing challenges like inequality and sustainability. Design is both a problem-solving tool and a mechanism for enabling change. It places the public interest and the collective well-being at the centre of design processes and ensures that solutions are co-created, locally grounded, and deeply inclusive.

In addition to the charter, we have developed further resources to strengthen capacities in public administrations: a PID practice guide and a PID training programme.



What does a liveable city look like?

Inspired by the UN Sustainability Agenda 2030, the New Leipzig Charter and the OECD Better Life Index and based on input from our colleagues we see the following qualities as the key characteristics of a liveable city:

- Safety and security
- Availability, accessibility and reachability
- Green, blue and healthy
- Emotional well-being
- Diversity and Unity
- Attractiveness
- Creativity and participation
- Care and Trust

These characteristics represent to us the basic needs of our city's inhabitants. With our work, we aim to contribute to promoting these qualities. Further explanations regarding the key characteristics can be found at the end of the document. We identified a working definition for Liveability as follows: Liveability is strongly entwined with a sense of belonging within the space and community. Liveability is created through meaningful space creation that encompasses a sense of pride and empowerment - I have a say and the power to influence my living environment to make it better so that I feel better within it.

We developed the following principles for our work in public administration because we are convinced that they support us in the journey towards even more liveable cities.

The first principle outlines WHY design approaches are beneficial for public administration. The second and the third principle show how we want to design the FOUNDATIONS for good work in the public administration. Principles 4, 5 and 6 demonstrate HOW we want to work in our administration for liveable cities:

1. Design for public good
2. Integrated and holistic planning
3. Sustainable strategic city management
4. Strengthen trust, transparency, communication and collaboration
5. Co-design with citizens
6. Become a learning city/municipality

Cities and municipalities may develop actions plans based on the charter to set priorities and plan specific measures according to local conditions and needs.

Our Principles



Design for public good

1.



Sustainable strategic city management

3.



Co-design with citizens

5.

2.

Integrated and holistic planning



4.

Strengthen trust, transparency, communication and collaboration



6.

Become a learning city/municipality



1. Design for public good



We consider design principles fruitful for our work in public administration.

Design principles are: understanding the problem/challenge in depth and with curiosity, empathy with the users, developing ideas, prototyping and testing ideas, and diversity in teams for effective and creative solution development. Design concepts provide the necessary approaches and tools to foster qualities in our work such as functionality, usability and relevance.

We want to give space, time and resources to the employees in public administration to get to know and apply design concepts. They provide the basis for fostering creativity and innovation in public administration.

3. Sustainable strategic city management



We want to build a feeling of shared ownership for our cities' development. We see it as helpful to identify the authentic identity of our cities – our city's DNA. We aim to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement (historically, socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically) in our city.

Based on that city identity a coherent vision for our city can be developed. The characteristics of a liveable city give us orientation to do that. The vision provides guidance and direction for our work in public administration. Within this framework we can work flexibly and independently.

We want the vision to be actively communicated to staff and citizens. We identify and circulate knowledge about innovative and creative best practices within the public administration. We want to be aware of any necessary adaptations to the vision. Therefore, we will use a simple but efficient monitoring system, which can help us achieve that. We provide the necessary resources for establishing an active change management that can help enhance trust and ownership. We continuously strive to improve our services and working conditions.

Integrated and holistic planning

2.



We acknowledge the benefit of including diverse perspectives to determine and meet current and future challenges for the city/municipality.

We involve diverse perspectives from the neighbourhoods (citizens and institutions) in city planning. They are the experts on their needs and challenges within their quarter. We plan for their involvement and allocate a budget for participatory processes.

Anticipating the future and system thinking provide perspective and a set of skills for managing challenges sustainably and avoiding the feeling of overload.

We always try to think in an integrated manner. We consider different perspectives and use synergies. We use the strength of the entire public administration to come up with solutions that are environmentally, economically and socially sustainable for the whole city.

The PID practice guide and the training programme can provide necessary tools and skills for integrated and holistic city planning.

Strengthen trust, transparency, communication and collaboration

4.



We want to make diverse collaboration a guiding principle within public administration.

In order to be innovative, staff in public administration need mental and physical space for collaboration and experimenting. We as municipalities clearly signal that innovation and unorthodox solutions are welcome.

We are convinced that diverse teams (e.g. professional and personal backgrounds) can solve complex and complicated problems efficiently and effectively. We value and make use of each other's different perspectives and experiences. To learn from each other we commit to being transparent and open about sharing skills and knowledge with each other. We are aware that we contribute to one goal: a liveable city.

When we involve others (citizens, stakeholders or colleagues) in our projects – we are aware that communication is key. We communicate as equals and follow up with them on results and developments. It shows that we are results-oriented and transparent about success as well as failure. We are convinced this leads to more trustful and reliable relationships within the administration and with the citizens.

5.

Co-design with citizens



We acknowledge the importance of including those affected by our decisions. We want to empower them and activate their agency. We need their input and ideas to continuously make our cities more liveable.

We want to encourage and facilitate different participation formats to ensure the voices of the community are heard and integrated into city planning. We value artistic, aesthetic and socio-cultural actions because they have the potential to make new perspectives visible.

We recognize that society is diverse in many respects. Thus, we take diverse possibilities and needs of citizens into consideration when designing participatory processes. We acknowledge the responsibility and power we have by designing procedures and processes. In order to collaborate with citizens, civil society organisations, businesses and academia we wish to set up easy and transparent mechanisms accessible for everyone.

We are aware that neighbourhoods play a crucial role for how citizens live in their city. People need places where they can come together, get to know one another and form resilient neighbourhoods. We specifically want to strengthen citizens who want to take responsibility and create added value for their neighbourhood.

Become a learning city/ municipality

6.



We are convinced that the journey towards liveability is a learning process.

We deem it necessary to foster an organisational culture that encourages people to learn and thrive. We aim to establish an error-friendly organisational culture that helps give staff security to develop new solutions.

We test our ideas and solutions on a small scale with the actual users. Seeing a solution fail means learning and that is our maxim for a good administration. We use that experience to improve and implement solutions based on actual citizen needs.

We actively seek collaboration with national and international partners. Working together changes our perspective on the known and can open our eyes to possibly inconceivable solutions and ideas. Cooperation enriches our practice and challenges path dependencies and the seemingly self-evident.



Explanatory document for the charter

Meaning of the key characteristics for fostering a liveable city:

Safety and security

- Safe city – low crime rates
- Sense of security, e.g. good lighting infrastructure; adaptable, resilient spaces
- Reliable infrastructure and regulated traffic
- No military tensions/unrest
- All conflicts (social, economic, societal, political) are settled with arguments, not violence
- Affordable medical care of high quality
- Reliable emergency services, e.g. fire department and police services

Availability, accessibility and reachability

- Accessible routes, well-developed public transport, safe roads as well as foot and cycle paths
- Accessible municipal services
- Affordable housing
- Human-centred city planning and design for fully inclusive needs (e.g. people with disabilities)

Green, blue and healthy infrastructure

- Lots of greenery and water, close to nature
- Sustainable, climate-neutral and resilient
- Clean surroundings (e.g. recycling and maintenance systems)
- Enough places of recreation for everyone (all abilities)
- Functioning and regenerative ecosystems (e.g. fresh air, water absorption of the ground)
- Possibilities for exercise and sport in public spaces

Emotional well-being

- Being part of a welcoming community, being a part of something bigger
- Shared values
- Respect
- Democratic and plural

Diversity and Unity

- A diverse society where everybody can reach their full potential – irrespective of their ethnicity, gender or class
- A society free from discrimination
- Integrated and interdisciplinary
- Public spaces where both the elderly and youth are equally welcome

Attractiveness

- Good education and job opportunities (affordable, accessible, diverse and innovative)
- Possibilities for entrepreneurship
- Lively places for all age groups – children, youths, elderly people
- Tidiness and aesthetics
- Positive communication and image
- Open-minded and welcoming for all people
- Public spaces shall serve as platforms for artistic expression, cultural events, and the exchange of ideas
- Quality and spectrum of services and shopping facilities
- Quiet/ little street noise

Creativity and participation

- Bottom-up governance
- Use innovative and creative methods for participation and co-creation of places, such as using the method „cultural Planning“
- Foster a culture of experimentation
- Promote creative networks

Care and Trust

- Create places that are oriented towards the common good and free of charge
- Resilient communities where people care for and trust each other
- People care for their environment
- People can trust each other to treat common goods with respect and care – for everyone’s good
- Transparency and open communication at all governance levels

