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Leadership for the future (plenary session)

The Baltic Biennale of Culture

Months ago some people in Kiel sat together and had the idea of bringing cities and the people in the Baltic Sea region together for the exchange of culture every two years. We may call it 'The Baltic Biennale of Culture'.

The cities in the Baltic Sea region share a long, cultural history. Through the Baltic Sea they are linked by traditions and historical ties and at the same time they have a wonderful and deeply valued cultural diversity.

Many international initiatives have emerged in this cultural area, not at least as a response to and an expression of a division during the Cold War following World War II and the National Socialism in Germany.

President Per Bødker Andersen said in his invitation to Växjö:

“In our region and member cities we have a tremendous wealth of experience and great examples of how we can listen to and engage our citizens. We know how to develop solutions to everyday problems and challenges of tomorrow. There is so much we can learn from each other! And we should do this.

We, as cities and regions, have a wider responsibility to engage in shaping and building the Europe of tomorrow: a Europe based on trust and democratic values, where the voices of the ordinary citizens are heard and taken into account”.

The President is absolutely right, and we would like to do this in 2020 and subsequently every two years.

Our city government decided that we should contact the cities of the UBC family, the regions and Euro-cities to find out if they are interested in coming together with about six or more cities every two years.

With this initiative, the international perception and cohesion of the cities and regions in the Baltic Sea region can only be strengthened.

The participation is conditioned on the willingness to arrange a program with the other participating cities and regions. Every city and region is also to provide a cultural program that

would cover a minimum period of three months, as part of the overall program of the Baltic Biennale.

Just recently the city of Kiel has taken up a sister-city partnership with San Francisco. Almost 50 citizens from the States came to the official start of it and we also had many local citizens attending who all had a lot of fun and showed a great interest in this new partnership.

There are a lot of things to learn from our friends in “non Trump San Francisco”, but citizens’ participation is the best lesson.

The Biennale should not only have the functionaries, officials and politicians in the centre of attention, it must also be the ordinary people in order to strengthen the contacts between the cities across the borders. This is what we in Kiel consider as future orientated cooperation of cities and citizens.

A very special aim must be to get the young people interested because they are our future.

A wonderful example for a future cooperation is our sea film festival Cine-Mare which started two years ago. What is closer than to run such a festival in the participating cities nearby which are all situated by the sea? Each city could show films from their own country or region during this event, either at the same time of the festival in Kiel or at a different time. I think that’s a great idea.

The others who should be involved are obvious: museums, musical schools, jazz, rock, classical music, theatre, ballet, operas, choirs, dance, folk dance, handicraft, graphic and media art as well as poetry slam.

One element which could also be given a special thought, is ‘singing together’. This form of jointly singing pop songs and other songs with musical support, thereby creating a very intense sense of togetherness, is presently becoming very popular in many cities all over Germany and could, because of the English lyrics, overcome all language barriers in the Baltic Sea areas.

Another example for a fantastic event that would be tremendously suitable for the Biennale may be the project ‘Trans Baltic Light’ which could be presented in the cities of Biennale. It is about huge light, picture and film projections which are creating great enthusiasm all over.

The last element I would like to mention is ‘The Little Prince’ by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. A small private theatre in Kiel plays it outdoors every summer. It could be performed by actresses and actors from different countries and is a theatre play which everyone in Europe will understand. This is the point, the youth could perfectly join in.

Through the program ‘Creative Europe’ it is intended to submit a grant application to the EU for the Biennale. All these co-operational projects are to support the transnational distribution of cultural und creative works. That’s what we want, too!

Furthermore it's also about a contribution to the audience development which should offer new and innovative ways for the interaction with the audience and enhancing the accessibility to cultural and creative works. Yes, this is exactly what we want to achieve, too.

We need international cooperation, strong cultural connections and communities now, more than ever! And we need leadership in Europe to focus on these different themes.

The next steps to the Baltic Biennale from now on will be:

I would like you all to think about the idea of being part of Baltic Biennale of Culture 2020. If you are interested please give us an indication and confirm by the end of November.

Our aim - as already mentioned – is to find 5 to 10 participating cities or regions. In the case of a larger number of registrations then I think that there should be a vote within the culture commission of the UBC, headed by our dear colleague Jaana Simalla.

In February or March next year we intend to invite the participating cities to a workshop in Kiel during which the program, topics and schedule should be discussed. This will allow the individual cities to bring forward their own creative ideas and have them included.

During Kiel Week 2018 in June, we will take the subject up again and push it further. Thereafter further steps to proceed with the planning will follow in 2018 and 2019.

The Biennale itself is planned to take place from April to September 2020 for a minimum period of 3 months. In Northern Europe especially these months are suitable for a Biennale with numerous outdoor events.

It is my wish and I do hope that many cities and people will be inspired by this idea. 'The Baltic Biennale of Culture' is a simple but powerful and impressive chance to improve the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region. Over the years it should develop a tradition which in 10 years' time will lead us to say: "We do not want to be without the Baltic Biennale of Culture anymore". Let's do it! I already very much look forward to the opening in 2020. Thank you!