

International conference

DANUBE + New dimensions, new synergies (<http://danubecluster.eu/intro>)

Leopold Museum, Vienna, March 10-11, 2011.

REPORT

It is well known that the country holding the EU chairmanship organizes at least one large conference on the topic of culture, cultural politics, cultural production and art. Hungary, as EU chairman, has continued this practice. A very important and hot topic has been chosen - cultural cooperation in the Danube region. The executive organizer has been wisely chosen as the Collegium Hungaricum (Hungarian Cultural Center) in Vienna. (<http://www.collegium-hungaricum.at/>). That way, many government and non-government organizations from Austria and Vienna are included in the organization itself.

Many conference participants were from the political and economic sector, as well as cultural experts and artists from the Danube region.

The high level of the conference has been confirmed by the presence of government officials of Austria and Hungary, the Serbian minister for culture, as well as many representatives of international institutions. <http://en.danubecluster.eu/program>

Alongside two plenary meetings, at the beginning and end of the conference, there were two panel discussions, namely expert forums. One was on the topic of creative industries development, namely the Creative Industries, and the other on the topic of Culture and eco-tourism.

Considering the fact that the participants came from different institutions and different levels of knowledge and interest, the speeches at the plenary and the panels were varied in length, depth of theme and practicality. Maybe, that variety itself is what reflects the relationship many people have from the Danube region towards the cultures they create and live with.

In any case, all speeches can be divided into two groups, according to the concepts used: political and expert-practical.

The political speeches were primarily based on repeating well-known phrases about the importance of culture, cultural identity, cultural heritage, cultural interaction created in the Danube region, about the importance of the Danube region for cooperation within the European Union, along with obligatory quotes from famous writers or historians.

The expert-practical speeches at the panel discussions were more concrete, more engaging, and with many ideas and clear suggestions.

Development of Creative Industries

On the topic of cultural cooperation, inventive speeches were held by Gottfried Wagner, Marton Mehes, Regina Hellwig Schmid, Constantin Chiriaca, Dessy Gavrilova, Dimitrije Vujadinović.

The comments from the audience were extremely useful too.

All those present have agreed that there are large unused cultural resources in the Danube region. The most used term was "creativity", namely how to turn the creative potential into creative capital in the Danube region.

Experiences from the city of Sibiu were very useful, as a cultural capital of Europe, mentioned by Constantin Chiriaca.

Gottfried Wagner, with his years-long experience as former director of the European Culture Fund, spoke about the conceptual and financial issues and offered some solutions.

The idea of creating a Danube cultural cluster has gained special attention. Everyone agreed that for further successful cooperation it is necessary to create several clusters which would work on certain areas of cultural production, like: festivals, artist mobility, film production and distribution, cultural heritage and others. In that context, the importance of cultural networks and networking of existing institutions and cultural events has been emphasized.

It has been established that there is a shortage of relevant information about cultural events and arts production in the Danube region.

The need for offering support to the mobility of artists, cultural practitioners and art works has been emphasized.

Most participants have agreed that the clusters need to be organized as independent professional institutions, financed both by public and private sources. It has been suggested to establish public-private funds which would financially support the cultural cooperation within the region.

It has also been established that for the further development of the cultural cluster plan it is necessary to rely on existing research on cultural politics, cultural production and international cooperation in Danube region countries.

In that context, the need has been emphasized for cooperating with research institutions in the region, like the Budapest Observatory, Croatian Institute for Culture, IRMO, Balkankult Foundation and others.

It has been concluded that for successful work of a cultural cluster it is necessary to have inter-sector cooperation of - culture, education, media, economy, fiscal and tax policies and other.

It has been suggested that in further work on establishing a cultural cluster and cultural cooperation in the Danube region, it is important to emphasize the public which contribute and participate with their cultural life and strengthen the cultural sector with their demands, first of all, towards political structure.

As an example of good practice, which experience can be useful, cooperation within the Nordic region has been named. As an example of a successful cluster, Filmkontakt Nord has been named, which works on productional support for making documentaries, short and animated films in Northern Europe, as well as their placement in other parts of the continent and the world.

It was proposed that the institutions which organized the conference with the EU support initiate meetings among several smaller expert teams to work out concrete proposals within set deadlines in order to operationalize the status and all aspects of cultural clusters activities. The proposals would then be reviewed at a higher expert meeting and followed by the establishment of clusters.

Conclusion

General impression is that the conference in Vienna has been conducted in a highly positive atmosphere, where the participants respected each other's views, standpoints and proposals. In addition, positive atmosphere prevailed during informal meetings and other programs related to this event. <http://en.danubecluster.eu/photo-gallery>

Collegium Hungaricum was an excellent host and organizer.

The conclusion is that the conference was a success and that the outcome will ultimately depend on further steps to be taken by the organizers and participants in order to step up creative production and cultural cooperation in the Danube region, as well as in order to present and position cultural potentials and art production in other parts of Europe and the world.

Major efforts invested by the organizers of the conference and all participants should not remain in realm of the possible!