

Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) – Maastricht Via 2018

'Cross-border culture' workshops

25th and 26th April 2013 - Maastricht

1. Context

At the AEBR Executive Committee meeting held in Istanbul in May 2012, the Euregio Meuse-Rhine and Maastricht, candidate for the title of European Capital of Culture 2018, have raised the issues of the role of culture in border regions. As a result, the AEBR together with the foundation Maastricht Cultural Capital of Europe 2018 organized a workshop on cross-border culture during the AEBR General Assembly on November 8th and 9th. The participants at this workshop decided to create a Task Force Culture within the AEBR that would gather cultural stakeholders and cultural actors from border regions and would have three main objectives:

- ★ Give culture its own place on the European agenda;
- ★ Support cross-border cultural projects throughout Europe;
- ★ Stimulate the cooperation between European Capitals of Culture and border regions in order to establish a chain of cultural 'welding points'.

At this meeting, it had also been decided to organize a second workshop in the spring of 2013.

2. Cross-border culture workshop

On April 25th and 26th, a meeting in Maastricht (NL) brought together about 50 cultural actors and stakeholders of cultural networks from various border regions. On the one hand, this meeting aimed at engaging reflexions on concrete European cultural projects, and on the other hand, it pursued the objective of building connections between cross-border cultural networks. In this way, it should be thought of new and concrete ways of how cross-border regions throughout Europe can become welding points where practices of cultural diversity are being developed within the context of the Maastricht & Euregional bid for Cultural Capital 2018.

After an introduction by Guido Wevers (artistic director Maastricht Via 2018) and Rudolf Godesar (AEBR), the participants have been divided into four thematic workshops.¹

Workshop I: Euregional portals for culture and leisure

Even though the free movement of people is well established through Europe, cultural and leisure activities often still fail to attract people from the neighbouring countries. There is a very practical reason to this: people do not know what happens on the other side of the

¹ The outcomes of the thematic workshops will be further developed in an upcoming version of the workshop conclusions.

border. There is thus a missed opportunity for people to meet and interact, despite them sharing similar interests and living in close proximity from one another.

In several cross-border regions, euregional portals have therefore been developed in order to give people access to information about cultural activities taking place on the other side of the border. Developers of such initiatives took part at this workshop in order to exchange best practices and discuss the technical, economical and political difficulties that arise when developing such portals: what business model is suitable?; how to gather up to date information from different providers?; how to combine leisure and cultural offers?;...

Besides being an interesting tool for tourism agencies and media partners, such portals have the potential to actively revitalise the process of European integration by promoting contacts between Europe's citizens and stimulating a common sense of belonging. Therefore, the participants wish to promote the establishment of such portals in other cross-border regions. When thinking about how these good practices could be exchanged, various suggestions have been made: the AEBR could work as a platform where information and good practices are exchanged, create a linkedin - profile to keep in touch and exchange good-practices and new developments, open a blog,...

Workshop II: Languages

'How to bring people together who do not understand each other?' This is how the theme of this workshop could be described. In almost every Euregio, language represents one of the main barriers that keep people apart. This workshop tried to tackle this issue by the means of culture.

The participants consider that clubs could work as catalysts to make people who do not speak the same language communicate, because they gather persons who share a common interest. More specifically, they chose carnival associations. On 11/11/2015, carnival groups from different regions of the Euregio Meuse-Rhin could meet and, along with linguistic experts, start developing a linguistic protocol, which would facilitate future contacts and meetings. This protocol could also be integrated in a smartphone application. As carnival is a folkloric event experienced in many regions in Europe, this process should also be undertaken in other border regions.

Workshop III: Pop music

By its very nature, pop music transcends national barriers. However, we see musical education disappear from elementary schools and the talent development decline.

The workshop participants therefore wish to launch a project that focuses on professional musical guidance for kids from an early age on, and that accompanies them through their whole musical development: music initiation, talent fostering, promotion of young artists,.... The pursued aim is that, by putting efforts into talent development at a young stage, eventually artists performing at big venues are fostered. This process is meant to be circular and dynamic, as people who have benefited from professional guidance and become musicians will then be able themselves to guide young people.

This project should also facilitate exchanges between regions. By making it easier to give or attend a concert abroad, musicians' and audiences' comfort zones shall be extended so they do not remain restrained to the national borders. Maybe this could even lead to a euregional musical movement...

Workshop IV: Early music

The Euregio Meuse-Rhine has played an important role in music history, especially as regard to polyphony. Therefore, the workshop participants suggested to compose a canon, which could become the theme song of Maastricht's 2018 candidacy. With this song, they also wish to mobilise a second musical concept: the variations, which implies to reproduce a song in an altered form. For example, this canon could be reinterpreted with different instrument, in different musical genres or by local musicians from different Euregios according to their musical traditions. The various versions of the theme song could thus be representative of the diversity of both the Euregio and Europe.

Also, they made very concrete and innovative proposals in order to take away the wall that separates the public and the performers based on the slogan 'Playing is the game': building big-sized instruments in the city of Maastricht that can be activated by the passers-by; develop an online game that will get the players in touch with early music; develop a smartphone application or a ring-tone with the theme song of the candidacy.

Workshop V: Cultural networks

On the second workshop-day, all participants gathered to exchange best practices of cross-border cultural networks. Four concrete examples were presented, which illustrated how diverse such networks can be organized:

- ★ Cultural Space Greater Region: created in the context of Luxembourg's and the Greater Region's (BE/LUX/FR/DE) year as European Capital of Culture in 2007, this network has become the Greater Region's official cultural TaskForce and aims at pursuing cross-border cooperations in a large range of fields: theatre, movie, music, photography,...
- ★ The Finish-Russian museums collaboration in the city of Lappeenranta (FI): despite being separated by an EU external border, museums from Lappeenranta have engaged in a successful cooperation with their Russian counterparts, which enables among other things professional exchanges, youth workshops and exchanges of exhibitions.
- ★ SPACE-Collection: since its foundation in Liège (BE) in 2002, this project is building up a cross-border contemporary art collection, which aims at stimulating euregional contacts and opening contemporary arts to a large public.
- ★ GrensWerte: this Interreg IV-A project promotes 10 to 15 artistic events a year in the EUREGIO (DE/NL). Around the theme 'border values', it tries to build up a lively and cross-border communication through arts and culture.

3. Upcoming meeting

On November 8th and 9th 2013, the annual General Assembly of the AEBR will be held in Liège and the Task Force Culture will continue its discussions on this occasion.