

The Foundation of THEATRE-HANSE now.



Previous culture of transfer

The Hanseatic League stands for a success story of half a millennium – not only economically. The common economic interests of cities and trading companies evolved throughout the centuries into a strong sense of unity that even outlived the decline of the initial trading union until today.

By the means of its extensive commerce the Hanseatic League also gained great cultural influence on the various regions they used to trade with. The Hanseatic League did not only spread the knowledge of craftsmanship but also architecture, painting and sculpture that still can be found in certain buildings and museums depicting an obviously common history.

Today the »Hanse« has become a firmly established cultural concept – standing for a regional sense of tradition. At the same time it has become synonymous with internationality, openness and exchange. The Hanseatic League went down in European history as a trading union. Even more than that, it can be considered as the predecessor of today's European Union with its economic interests, security standards, jurisdiction and consensual culture. The Hanseatic idea, being reanimated through the renewed alliances of cities in the 1980s, the end of the cold war and the regained independency of the Baltic states, creates a new geopolitical context in which the following question arises: How can the Hanseatic cities generally and the Baltic Sea region in particular define a new association beyond their economic interests and joint tradition, facing another half a millennium?

Transfer of culture today

Since that time interregional projects and cooperation between cities have built new routes and re-established old paths leading to an infrastructural re-thinking of the Baltic Sea region. Thus the mare balticum gained a strong common impact again. Transnational cooperation and the corresponding funding enabled numerous touristic pilot projects and corporate interest groups in order to cultivate and maintain architectural and urban heritage, as well as the maritime traditions. Some give access to past trading routes by the means of thematic hiking walks and educational trails.

The international cultural exchange in the arts can be observed in the variety of events promoting a cultural interaction across borders including guest plays from neighbouring countries or specific regional programme focuses. The "Usedomer Musikfestival" with its classical orientation and the festival "Nordischer Klang" offering a popular mix of music styles, for example, have made the cultural region of the Baltic Sea to their motto. Both festivals take advantage of the site-specific cultural infrastructure and invite musical guest performances to the beautiful theatres, churches, castles and mansions in Vorpommern. Thereby various ensembles and solo artists could be presented to the region of the Baltic Sea within the past years. Art cooperation and co-productions did not yet result from it. The „Usedomer Musikfestival“ with a lasting cooperation with Poland and its artist-in-residence programme, however, shows the importance of this step.

Though there is no theatre event like this in the German Baltic Sea region yet. In most other countries festivals refer to the Baltic Sea only by their names. Helsinki with its "Baltic Circle International Theatre Festival" is the most successful one in doing so. It offers a mixture of guest plays, cooperation, projects and workshops, however, it mainly presents Finish and Swedish productions. Furthermore, its theatre and festival collaborations are not limited to the Baltic Sea regions, but also include Brazil for example. There is no full cultural network covering the region of the inland sea yet, no genuine Baltic theatre festival appearing on the horizon.

This could become possible now by the founding of THEATRE-HANSE – following the success story of the Hanseatic League. Doing so, the concept of the "Hanse" is due to be put into cultural practice and must be given a highly expressive form. While the trade and public finance of the historic Hanseatic League created a culture of transfer THEATRE-HANSE stands for a genuine transfer of culture. Art is its capital.

While traffic routes connected trading centres for the exchange of resources and goods in the past, THEATRE-HANSE now aims to create a network between artists and institutions, a collaboration of creativity and ideas where mutual exchange and common cooperation can be achieved. Ideas and pleasure instead of buying and selling.

THEATRE-HANSE local and international at the same time

THEATRE-HANSE wants to outline a new geography with its practices and aesthetics of transfer on a sub-national level. In addition to the current international policy, it wants to establish a new cultural policy of alliances based on independent municipal and regional action and creates a transnational, interregional network of artists, companies and theatres from the neighbouring Baltic States. This includes collaborations and co-productions, mutual projects as well as guest appearances. It is essential to initiate a stable union of creative people being able to shape the cultural region of the former Hanseatic League and making a long-term impact on it, regardless of current or prospective national conflicts or alliances, be it East, West, North or South. Moreover, it is important to ensure an awareness of art as emotional, spiritual, public and – in the end also – as an economic resource. Already today the creative and cultural industry gains the third highest share of the German gross value-added.

Just in the same way as Marseille being the European Capital of Culture in 2013 put a focal point on the Mediterranean region and thus engaged various artists from Mediterranean and African countries, the THEATRE-HANSE should consider itself as a *mare balticum* project in which many national and regional cultures of contributing countries serve as orientation for the programmatic and conceptual planning.

Corresponding to the historic hanseatic gathering called *Tagfahrt*, THEATRE-HANSE must assemble its participants, make their variety visible and create a ritual of unity. Therefore, the idea of THEATRE-HANSE culminates in a biennial festival that presents the most remarkable theatre productions by the associated stages, companies and artists. The festival serves as a meeting point, a place for dialogues and developing new projects. Taking a look on the map and at each possible participating stage, you grasp an idea of a festival programme curated of high quality and international reputation.

The Baltic Sea as cultural centre

The German Baltic region is predestined as the ideal epicentre of the initiative taking up its former central position for the Hanseatic League – not only in a geographical way. The festival's artistic profile would be able to bring together cities and their theatres along the coastline of the Baltic Sea to become a significant cultural mark and declare the inland sea to the true cultural centre of North-eastern Europe.

The majority of necessary infrastructure for a festival of this scale is already given through the existing theatres in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Offering a new structural access to the participating stages, the theatre biennale that would gain not only additional local impact and an international standing but also be a powerhouse for financially vulnerable productions. A festival can offer more than the programme of a single theatre or opera house. Its unique and exceptional nature makes it possible to invite great artists, to experiment and organize unequalled projects. As a regional event it can strengthen the cultural attractiveness of the region and its institutions as a whole.

As a venue of this international festival the Theatre Vorpommern with its triad of beautiful stages in Stralsund, Greifswald and Putbus could become a theatre triumvirate of national and international reputation outside the metropolitan area. It can attract audience from Northern and Eastern Europe. Outstanding participating artists and extraordinary productions addressing a multinational audience from the Baltic region can only guarantee this kind of quality. As a remarkable and ambitious event the biennale would also become a tourist attraction of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The dialectics of a regional and at the same time international focus can perfectly develop its impact within this framework.

Possible contributing theatres

Focusing on the Baltic region (with one exception)

- Norway: Bergen
- Sweden: Visby / Kalmar
- Finland: Turku
- Russia: Novgorod / Pskov
- Estonia: Pärnu / Tartu
- Latvia: Riga
- Lithuania: Kaunas
- Poland: Gdansk / Szczecin
- Germany: Rostock / Lübeck

Dates

It is a biennial project, starting either at the end of June / beginning of July or at the end of August / beginning of September

Potential partners, sponsors and promoters

- Kulturstiftung des Bundes (Federal Cultural Foundation Germany)
- General project and cultural funding of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- East-German Sparkassenstiftung
- Private sector
- Separate projects or events may be supported by smaller culture and art funds

Contact

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