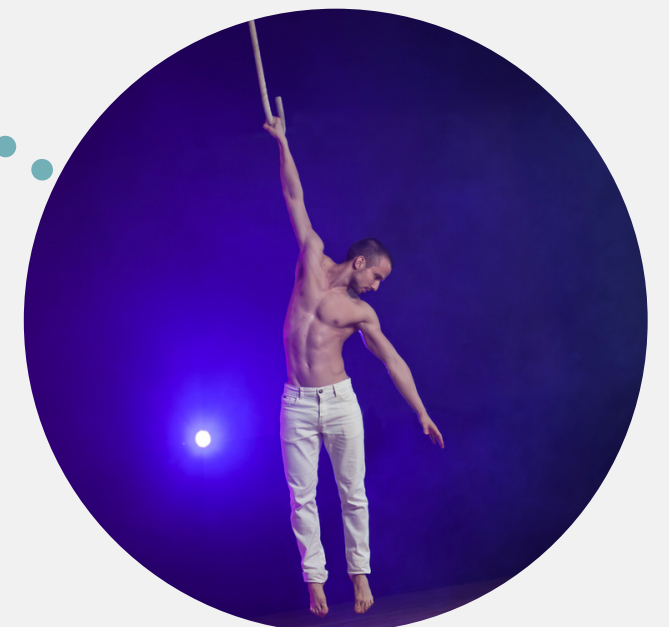


Baltic Sea Cultural Cities and Regions

CONCEPT NOTE

JANUARY 2021



Project overview



The Baltic Sea Cultural Cities and Regions is a project **aimed at connecting** cities and regions, people, cultural organisations and professionals by **increasing the visibility** of the cultural diversity within the Baltic Sea Region.

Under the heading "water connects us, but culture unites us" it is aimed to **create synergies and cooperation** focusing on **citizen participation and ownership** rather than on competition among participating cities and communities.

It is a **cross-border initiative** to nominate with regular intervals the titles for the "**Baltic Sea City/Region of Culture**".

The project is currently being developed by a consortium of relevant organisations and stakeholders active in the region.

The lead partner is the **Council of the Baltic Sea States**. Partners include Agency for International Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Kaliningrad; Ars Baltica; Department of Youth and Culture of City of Kiel; City Culture Institute in Gdansk; Cultural Department of the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia; Kaunas Artists' House; Ministry of Justice, European Affairs and Consumer Protection of Schleswig-Holstein; and Union of Baltic Cities.

The initial development of the project is funded through seed money by the **Swedish Institute**.

The timeline of the project:

- **November 2018** - workshop "A Cultural City for the Baltic Sea Region!?" in Rendsburg
- **October 2019** - Baltic Sea Cultural Cities workshop in Malmö
- **December 2019** - Workshop in Baltic Sea Cultural Cities project development in Kaunas
- **June-September 2020** - preparing a Concept Note for the initiative
- **October-November 2020** - validating the concept with key stakeholders
- **December 2020-February 2021** - preparing operational roadmap and mapping possible funding tools
- **March-May 2021** - partner outreach

Key objectives

1

To strengthen the "**we-feeling**" of the people and **empower citizens** within the Baltic Sea Region

2

To increase sustainable **cross-border cooperation** between cities and regions, cultural organisations and professionals

3

To **celebrate the region's immense creativity**, rich cultural heritage and diversity

4

To **raise visibility and awareness** of region's vast cultural potential

5

To **improve quality of life** in region's cities and regions through culture and creativity

6

To provide **smaller cities and regions** more opportunities to attract international audiences

7

To contribute to the UN **Sustainable Development Goals** through enhancing cultural crossovers to other sectors

Unique features of Baltic Sea Cultural Cities and Regions

The Baltic Sea Cultural Cities and Regions (BSCCR) initiative aims to **complement other networks** and titles to cities or regions, e.g. European Capitals of Culture, UNESCO Creative Cities Network, etc.

The initiative proposes more **collaborative, inclusive, affordable** and **sustainable** model, particularly for **small and medium-sized cities** and regions in the Baltic Sea area.

1

Collaborative: Unlike other similar titles, the BSCCR awards more designations to cities or regions across the Baltic Sea area. The designated cities are expected to cooperate actively with other cities holding the title and establish long-lasting partnerships.

2

Inclusive: The goal of the BSCCR initiative is to support bottom-up community-based activities and encourage citizens participation at all levels. The initiative prioritises youth engagement, cultural accessibility and combating segregation in the society.

3

Affordable: Other similar titles are less accessible for smaller cities and regions as both the expected programs as well as required budgets are overwhelming. The BSCCR initiative encourages more small scale, approachable and community-based programming with emphasis on sustainability.

4

Small and medium-sized places: While many bigger cities in the region have already carried the European Capital of Culture title, the BSCCR initiative is designed to highlight the hidden gems and lesser known cultural and creative pearls.

5

Baltic Sea Region: the initiative is open for cities and regions from 11 Member States of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden.

Selection principles of the BSCCR

The BSCCR initiative is currently a work in progress. The proposed model will be validated with stakeholders.

- **Time and duration:** the BSCCR title is awarded annually for a period of one year.
- **Number of designated places:** the BSCCR title is awarded to 3-5 cities or regions, maximum one per country. Cooperation between candidates is encouraged, but the title is given to cities and regions individually, not as a group or network. A city or a region can apply for the title again in 5 years after previously holding the title.
- **Types of places:** The BSCCR will be awarded to a town/city, entire municipality (could include a town with a surrounding area) or a region. Emphasis will be on small and medium-sized places (e.g. with population of 5000-100,000 inhabitants) which are lesser known for wider international audiences (not capitals), but exceptions are possible.
- **Selection panel:** the selection will be carried out by a panel of 11 experts nominated by the key organisations engaged in the fields related to the BSCCR initiative within the Baltic Sea Region and convened by the Council of the Baltic Sea States.
- **Selection process:** Selection will be two-step process - shorter preliminary applications to outline key objectives and plans, and then followed by more detailed final application for short-listed candidates. No pre-selection will be organised nationally. The candidates will use a predefined and uniformed application form. The cities will be awarded the title two years in advance (in the implementation phase other shorter period is foreseen).
- **Thematic priorities based on UN SDGs:** In addition to overall priorities of the BSCCR initiative, each year an additional focus theme will be agreed to highlight one of the Sustainable Development Goals, including education, environmental sustainability, reduced inequalities, less waste, etc. Joint projects on the selected theme are expected from the entire BSCCR network.
- **Networking:** the designated cities and regions will be included in the BSCCR Network, a close partnership of likeminded cities for initiating joint projects and raise visibility of all participating cities. The membership of the network will be available for a specified period of time.

Positive impacts of BSCCR

Building bridges between people, communities and organisations in the Baltic Sea region.

Encouraging development of creative industries and boosting cultural tourism through prolonging the tourism season.

Strengthening crossovers between culture, creativity, sustainability, innovation, business, education, etc.

Making culture more visible and providing new opportunities for creative professionals.

Developing and engaging new audiences locally and attracting international audiences to lesser-known destinations.

Contributing to implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals through culture and creativity as a catalyst for change.

Demonstrating the power of CCS for a prosperous development of cities and regions as every €1 for CCS brings €4 added value.

Making culture more accessible for all, including empowering youth and engaging older people through intra-generational approach.

Improving quality of life in urban and rural environment and developing creative city and region concept.

Encouraging grass-root community based cultural activities and improving accessibility of culture.

Providing capacity building and networking opportunities for cultural and creative professionals.

UN Sustainable Development Goals as strategic priorities



Success factors for candidates



Successful candidates have **clear vision and strategy** for their cities and regions, which highlights the role of culture and creativity. The BSCCR title will not be awarded for the past achievements, but for energy and dedication to thrive for the better.

We are looking for applications, that are **co-created** by authorities, citizens, cultural professionals, institutions and organisations. BSCCR are not just for the people, but also by the people. Successful cities and regions are those that value their **communities**, their culture and heritage. Candidates are expected to introduce a **citizens' participation formats** to engage them in the programming.

The BSCCR is all about **inclusivity, transparency** and **accessibility**. The successful candidates pay attention to all social groups, including young people, elderly, people with special needs, etc. Cultural and human rights must be upheld and advanced.

The successful candidates are not expected to organise over-the-top cultural manifestations nor invest huge sums into new cultural infrastructure. Rather, they are expected to **creatively propose new approaches and small-scale interventions** to improve quality of life through culture.

The BSCCR celebrates **togetherness in the Baltic Sea area**. Successful candidates open up themselves to collaboration with other cities, organisations and professionals from other Baltic Sea countries. They encourage touring, residency programmes, exchange of people and ideas.

The successful candidates are **environmentally conscious** and have **sustainability** at heart. They are ready to contribute to the Baltic Sea Cultural Cities and Regions Network after completing the title year.



Next steps

- 1** Propose detailed selection criteria and process, including principles of choosing experts
- 2** Propose detailed time schedule for the process
- 3** Identify budgetary expectations for potential candidates and costs for maintaining the entire system
- 4** Introduce the BSCCR concept at other Baltic Sea Region cooperation initiatives and networks
- 5** Validate the proposal with key stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region through questionnaire and workshops
- 6** Prepare a communication plan to raise awareness of key stakeholders and general public
- 7** Map potential financing sources for the launching and implementing the BSCCR initiative

Connecting Citizens and Cities through Culture



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