

2nd International Danube Conference on Culture was successfully closed

Novi Sad even better than Ulm! (extended version)

Not only that the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad, together with the European Danube Academy, successfully organised the 2nd International Danube Conference on Culture, event of an international importance, but as an organiser and host it received a big compliment from Joachim Uhlmann, state secretary of the Ministry for Science, Research and Art of the State of Baden-Württemberg, i.e. the host of the 1st International Danube Conference on Culture held last year in Ulm. Uhlmann thanked for the good organisation and concluded that the cultural atmosphere in Novi Sad surpassed the one at the previous Danube Conference in Ulm.

“The organisation is perfect, we had the chance to participate in the work with excellent groups, and I am sure that this conference will have positive effects for Novi Sad”, said Uhlmann.

“We want the future in which the others will be our partners, where our diversity will be the common heritage, and not an obstacle, and the culture will be the one that will place and build bridges. This diversity is what distinguishes Novi Sad”, said Andrej Fajgelj, the director of the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad and the president of the Organisational Board of Novi Sad as a European Capital of Culture, while greeting more than 130 cultural activists from European countries and Serbia who, within workgroups, discussed the two leading topics concerning European culture: “European capitals of culture – experiences and future prospects” and “Danube related events and networks – contributions to the Danube identity?”. The moderator of the first workgroup was the Hungarian researcher in the field of culture, Dr Márton Méhes, who participated in the project Pécs European Capital of Culture 2010. Engaged cultural activists and artists led the dialogue, exchanged experiences and discussed programmes, concepts and tenders that are suitable for development of the common cultural identity in Europe or in one European macroregion like Danube Region. The second workgroup was lead by Peter Langer, founder and long-time manager of the International Danube Festival in Ulm, who led the discussion on the Danube identity and networking along the Danube together with the representatives of numerous festivals from the Danube regions as well as with other cultural activists.

What is especially important for Novi Sad, which will submit the application for the European Capital of Culture 2021 candidacy next year, is the fact that the participants of the Conference were addressed by the representatives of the “Creative Europe” Elisabeth Pacher, and of the Ministry of Economy, Energy and Tourism Evgeni Spassov, who explained in which way to create projects in order to be financed by the European Union, among which is the project “European Capitals of Culture”. They mentioned the importance of this project, the goal of

which is to brand, develop culturally and emancipate a city, state, region and the entire society, and which brings great benefit, both in cultural sense and in economic and tourist sense.

The director of the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad, Andrej Fajgelj, stated that the International Danube Conference on Culture is very important for the candidacy of our city for the European Capital of Culture, but also for the strengthening of cultural capacities. Dr Fajgelj said that the hosts of the next Danube Conference on Culture are Timiș oara and Ruse, and then he presented areas adopted by the Declaration.

“The recommendations that we adopted are grouped in three important areas. These are primarily cooperation, then expanding our activities into new media and digital culture. A good example of this is the digitisation of cultural heritage of Novi Sad”, said Fajgelj.

Guests thrilled with the presentation of our culture at the Conference

Although it is always difficult to present the richness of our culture to someone who is in Novi Sad for only two days, the participants of the Conference were thrilled that they had a chance, in just a few hours of their free time, to visit the city, exhibitions, performances, as well as to see one segment of the modern project “Digitisation of Cultural Heritage of Novi Sad”. Namely, within the Master Centre the following was exhibited: “With a Longboat in Our Hearts”, “The Making of World Art along the Danube” and the digital exhibition of cultural heritage of German people in Novi Sad entitled “Citizens in the History – Citizens Forever”.

The exhibition “With a Longboat in Our Hearts” by Veselinka Marković and Siniša Jokić, was shown as a part of commemoration of 250 years since the foundation of Šajkaš Battalion, which was exhibited for all who were interested in the Museum of Vojvodina. The author explained that the Šajkaš Battalion had an important role within the Habsburg army.

River flotillas were always very important for keeping the border between Austria and Turkey, therefore “Šajkaš” soldiers participated in almost all wars waged during 17th and 18th centuries. When the border moved to the south, these formations lost its importance, and new ones were started to be conceived. In that way the Šajkaš Battalion was formed, and the name stems from the name for a longboat “Šajka”.

The exhibition “Making of World Art along the Danube” by Professor Harald C. Traue from the European Danube Academy shows the beginnings of culture along the second biggest river of the Old Continent, but also the peoples who lived there and who contributed greatly to the emergence of culture we know today. The author thanked the organisers of the International Danube Conference for invitation to show his exhibition, not hiding his excitement for being the part of this great project.

The digital exhibition of the cultural heritage of German people in Novi Sad entitled “Citizens in the History – Citizens Forever” was presented by the author and director of the Museum of Vojvodina Dr Agneš Ozer. She pointed out that she is very pleased that this exhibition exists in digital form, because in other forms it does not exist anymore.

“Digital filing of the life of German people who lived in Novi Sad is of great importance, because after World War II this nationality almost completely disappeared from our city. Confiscation of their property led to disappearance of the historical traces and cultural heritage. Luckily, they were not destroyed but just scattered across various institutions. Because of that, digitisation is a way to save, i.e. rediscover and identify German cultural heritage in Novi Sad”, concluded Ozer.

The director of the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad, Dr Andrej Fajgelj, agrees that this digital exhibition is one of the three best platforms of cultural digitisation on the planet.

“The Cultural Centre has three big international projects: “European Capital of Culture”, “Danube Strategy” and “Digitisation of Cultural Heritage”, which is very important for cultural preservation. That project is just part of what we do in order to be awarded the prestigious title “European Capital of Culture”, said Fajgelj.

History came to life on “Štrand” city beach

The Danube festival, within the International Danube Conference, organised a number of cultural and entertaining events for the citizens on “Štrand” city beach, one of the most beautiful ones on the entire Danube. Visitors had the chance to see the battle ship of the River Flotilla of Serbian Army, but also to enjoy musical programme of the “Panon” vocal group, screening of the film “Šajkaš Battalion”, as well as the stage fight between Šajkaš soldiers with Ottoman warriors, choreographed by the associates from the “Green Shield”. The historian and curator of the City Museum of Novi Sad, Siniša Jokić addressed the visitors and explained that this programme, apart from having great cultural-artistic importance, has the goal to show civilisation connections between Serbian people in Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germans, Hungarians and Austrians, who were part of the historic mission.

“Through the exchange of state-building and political interests, technical-technological knowledge, military and life skills people, especially Serbian and German, fought with common efforts and great sacrifice against dangerous and powerful enemy – the Ottoman Empire. In that way, they tried to preserve their own national, cultural and religious identity, embedding it firmly in the identity of a European man on the common multicultural space of Europe, on which we build common future. This can be clearly seen in this Danube Conference on Culture”, said Jokić.

Apart from great number of citizens, visitors from abroad who participated at the Danube Conference, also visited this performance.