

Jämtland Härjedalen – for the benefit of the people and the planet

The 11th – 18th September 2016 UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) delegates from 52 countries representing 116 global cities gathered in Östersund and Jämtland Härjedalen, to discuss culture and creativity as strategic factors in sustainable development, international cooperation and imaginative ideas. Since 2016 Östersund and Jämtland Härjedalen has coordinated the 26 members in the UCCN gastronomy group in international joint projects and initiatives aiming at a better world for the people and the planet.

Östersund together with Region Jämtland Härjedalen was appointed a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy the 20th July 2010. One of the reasons for the designation was the city and region's extensive support for gastronomy entrepreneurs and farmers who have a deep connection to the surrounding nature. The designation is a direct consequence of Jämtland's regional development strategy, which ties together food/gastronomy, culture and tourism in its various value chains.

UNESCO, the United Nations educational, scientific, and cultural organisation, introduced UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) 2004. UCCN is a global cultural network of cities under a UN flagship initiative that brings cities together using culture and creativity to develop themselves and want to share experiences, ideas and best practices for cultural, social and economic development.

The network is a significant tool for UNESCO improving the quality of life implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030 with a special focus on (SDGs Goal 11), "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Currently there are 180 cities in 7 genres: Literature, film, music, crafts and folk art, design, media arts, gastronomy. Examples include: Bologna, Montreal, Beijing, Berlin, Seoul, Santa Fe, Edinburgh, Melbourne, Buenos Aires and Krakow.

The UCCN gastronomy group alone consists of 26 members from 17 countries representing 12 languages: Alba, Belém, Bergen, Buenaventura, Burgos, Chengdu, Cochabamba, Dénia, Ensenada, Florianópolis, Gaziantep, Hatay, Jeonju, Macao, Östersund, Panama City, Paraty, Parma, Phuket, Popayan, Rasht, San Antonio, Shunde, Tsuruoka, Tucson, Zahlé.

Marketing, networking, cooperation on a global platform are lead-words, global solidarity is vital, the members are cities but for us it was recognized as a tool for development in the whole region, we decided to apply in one of our strongest fields, the genre of gastronomy, with the city as the market and the region as the producer of food.

How did we come up with the idea? Our story started with one of our entrepreneurs in food and gastronomy, Ms. Fia Gulliksson visiting a conference in Ireland arranged by UNESCO 2006, "Creative Clusters Belfast Conference", the idea was launched, we decided that this is something we want to be part of.

Next step was to access the political commitment, to establish a regional partnership of stakeholders, taking the idea through the necessary steps, processing the idea through the political establishment, inventory of natural and cultural assets, writing the application in dialogue with the regional stakeholders and the UNESCO secretariat in Paris. In 2010 after three years of hard work, Östersund and Jämtland was accepted as a City of Gastronomy, city number 24 in the network, giving our officials and citizens a shock, what to do now?

What's in it for us?

The Jämtland region is close to Norway in the mid- north of Sweden, an inland region with a large territory the size of the Netherlands, with a population of 126 000, 2,5 persons/sqkm, half of them living in Östersund, the only city. The natural heritage is dominant, the landscape has been formed mainly by the ice age, the countryside consists of lakes, mountains and forests. Our built heritage is formed during the centuries, much of it not obvious, what you perceive as pristine land was used by the Sami people during thousands of years, Jämtland is part of the Sami Nation covering the northern Scandinavia.

We have a large proportional sector of culture, 2000 companies with 4000 employed. The outdoor sector has always been large, tourism, mainly winter tourism, is one of the main incomes for the region. Tourism is now complemented with the food/gastronomy sector, the latest step in the evolution of food development that started more than 30 years ago with the structural change of the agricultural sector, now rewarded by both national and international appointments, where we benefit from the fact that the region never was industrialized. Farming is quite clean, 33% of the farmed land is classified as organic, the highest number in Sweden. We have a national centre for small-scale food production, Eldrimner, named after the ever-cooking pot in Nordic mythology. Eldrimner has for many years trained food-producers in different skills.

Since 2010, what are our experiences being a member of UCCN, does food/gastronomy work as a driver, and has the nomination had any positive influence on development; do we have more jobs and companies, a healthier population and a better environment?

Marketing is the easiest to measure, the region has been acknowledged by journalists all over the world creating articles in international press like the Guardian and CNN.

Networking, new contacts has added to the regions international network making it easier to form partnerships cooperating in different themes, chefs from the region has been show cooking in Spain, Brazil, China and in other member cities, exchange programs for the young generation is ongoing.

Cooperation, there is where the challenge is, we have a number of high-level visits to the region from all over the world, companies and cultural workers from Jämtland has been matched with companies and cultural workers from other members in the network, and not only in the creative sector, we think culture and gastronomy should be the door opener for other business-sectors.

We are now developing joint initiatives and projects in the COG group, to connect us in global cooperation, here are a few examples;

- “Silk Road Project”, a project dedicated to understand the impact of cultural exchange in the ancient Silk Road, and the gastronomy profile emerging from the interaction but also in a contemporary context, with the new initiatives to revive the route. Research project between Gaziantep, Shunde, Chengdu, Macao, Östersund, Tsuruoka, Jeonju and Rasht.

- “Youths in action for a creative and sustainable gastronomy”, European Union Erasmus+ exchange project between Bergen, Dénia, Parma, Östersund and Gaziantep, identifying the skills needed to increase performance in the area of gastronomy and tourism and enhance youth employability.

- “The Slow Food Village Co-building plan” in Chengdu, intended to make an increasing number of people realize the importance of sustainable agriculture and respect people engaged in conservation of biodiversity.

-Biodiversity and gastronomy, the “Global Center of Gastronomy and Biodiversity” in Belém, supported by FAO and UNESCO, dedicated to investigate the food traditions of the Amazonas, and develop the gastronomy profile together with the COG group.

What do we give back?

The UCCN do give the members the opportunity to show themselves on a global platform, but solidarity between the members where more fortunate cities support others is essential. Östersund in the Region of Jämtland is not one of the bigger cities in population, but we want to share our experiences with others, with the word of UNESCO: “Their culinary tradition tightly linked to nature and sustainable development is expected to bring Östersund distinctive profile as a gastronomic city to an international level and serve as a valuable asset to the Network.”

The Culture and creative industry are among the most rapidly sectors worldwide, with an impact on society in a multiple way, improving the quality of life and providing resources for imaging diverse new futures. This is shown in a report from Ernest and Young, “Cultural Times”, from December 2015 mapping the global cultural and creative industries.

The UCCN is a strong global vision, to my surprise, the main result was not the effects of marketing and networking towards the outside of the region, but the impact within, we started to work much better under a strong shared vision, this cooperation could not have been achieved without the membership in the UCCN.

Regionally, we are now working in joint regional partnerships in the whole value chain of food-production, a food-strategy is produced and accepted by the Regional Parliament, a number of food/gastronomy projects are under way, we are now acknowledged and supported by the national Swedish level through our National Commission to UNESCO, we communicate internationally on a daily basis, new partnerships and opportunities for the region are opening up.

Conclusions

So, what are the conclusions after nine years as a UCCN member and arranging the UCCN annual meeting with 300 delegates from 52 countries in 2016? The most important one is that you should build on your assets; to be noticed in the competition, you really must work with what you are good at. Cooperation in strong partnerships, you have to join forces and do crossovers, regionally, nationally, internationally, business sectors, academy, rural-urban, and keep the vision alive.

The network is highly popular; “the attention and visibility of the Network is rapidly increasing globally”, about 50-100 cities wants to become a UCCN city with all its benefits of marketing and international exchange.

UCCN is a strong vision, when entering the Network 2010 Östersund and Jämtland Härjedalen was questioned how we could cooperate and lead megacities in China, as it turns out, we are small enough to be flexible but big enough to be taken seriously. For us this is a long-term commitment.

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