

FilmNet

Baltic Identity

Film Tour: report



About "FilmNet – South Baltic Film and Culture Network"

2 An international project "FilmNet – South Baltic Film and Culture Network" joins institutions actively working in the field of development of film education and culture in the Baltic region. The network is created by cinemas, culture centres and regional organizations from four countries – Lithuania, Germany, Poland and Sweden.

The main goal of this action is to strengthen existing co-operation through exchanging experience and good practice, developing professional skills of the staff (through seminars, job shadowing), testing new educational models for children and teenagers (film clubs) and mapping initiatives taken up in the Baltic region through study visits.

Another element of the project is an attempt to research "Baltic" identity through a universal medium which is film. Screenings of short films of young European directors and discussions with the audience did not give clear answers about this identity but became a beginning of

future dialogue and process described in this publication.

"FilmNet" does not stop existing with the end of the project. We want to give the access to standards, concepts and methods that we developed to all organizations involved in popularizing film culture and developing the quality of film education in the entire Baltic region. All of the project's partners deeply believe that in the contemporary world of multiplied images and instant data transfer we need media and film education that will help – especially young people – to differ truth from fiction, and to use contemporary culture in a conscious way.



The partners of the project:

Leader – Center of European Meetings "Światowid" in Elbląg (Elbląg, Poland)

Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic (Elbląg, Poland)

Baltic Sea Cultural Centre (Gdańsk, Poland)

Institute for New Media (Rostock, Germany)

Filmregion Sydost (Växjö, Sweden)

Rietavas Tourism and Business Information Centre (Rietavas, Lithuania)

Associated partner – Pomeranian Film Foundation / Gdynia Film Centre (Gdynia, Poland)

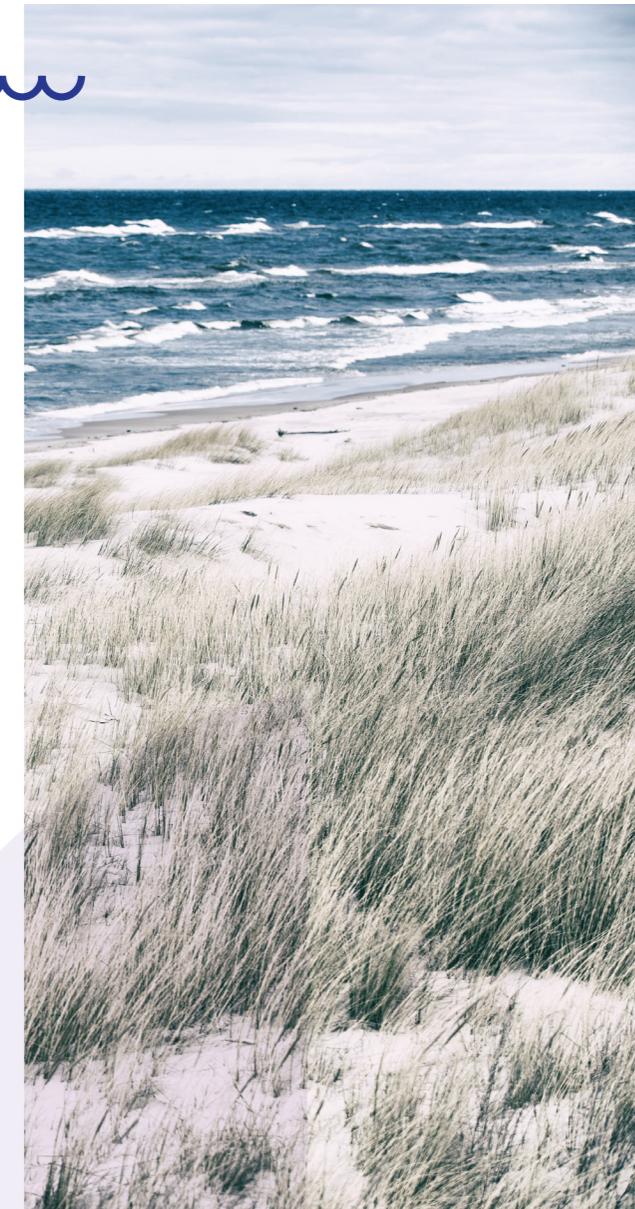
Timeframe of the project:

1st February 2018 – 30th June 2020

The budget of the project:

501.125 EUR

The project is co-financed within the Interreg South Baltic Programme





The idea of the Baltic Identity Film Tour

Countries of the Baltic Sea region may be characterized by various historical experience, cultural codes, patterns of political, economic and social development. These differences have a constant influence on mutual relations.

- 4 The central idea of the Baltic Identity Film Tour was an attempt to answer a question if a mutual Baltic identity exists in spite of differences. Film was a tool that we chose as the best for researching elements of the Baltic region.

From the beginning, during our works on the concept of “the Baltic identity” and attempts to explore it we were asking ourselves a number of questions – both purely practical and those that touched the bottom of the problem. How should the films be selected? Who should select them? What criteria should we use to grasp this issue in a possibly fullest and most interesting way? These and other questions were important to us during our meetings and individual work.



Finally, all of the partners made a mutual decision about taking up the following model of work:

1. The starting point was creating a map of terms connected with our idea of the elements of “the Baltic identity.”
2. Each organization from a certain partner country, using the map of terms, prepared (sometimes with the help of an external expert) a 45-minute set of short films (produced after 2015), which gave us 3 hours of material (Polish set was prepared both by the Baltic Sea Cultural Center and the Centre of Culture and International Cooperation “Światowid”).
3. Then, during the meeting in February 2019, there was the discussion of representatives of the FilmNet and a mutual 100-minute set of films from Germany, Lithuania, Sweden and Poland was chosen.
4. Each of the partners, using the knowledge about local audience and about the topics that are important for their region, prepared about 60-minute set of films that were supposed to be presented during open screenings. All of the screenings were accompanied by the discussions of the audience with experts.
5. All important remarks mentioned during the discussions after the screenings were written down and analysed in this report.



The process of film selection

Basis for the pre-selection of the Baltic Identity Film Tour

Identity: **Common values, sense of belonging**

The trap of thinking about common identity: **differences – languages, nations, religions, political systems, cultures**

So... maybe not the "identity", but "we-feeling": **sense of community in place of identity**

the sea
weather
climate
freedom aspirations

Bonus / in the margin: **The children literature trace (Andersen, Grimm, Lindgren, etc.)**
Archetypes



Lithuanian selection:

| | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|------|-----|-------------|
| 1. "Running Lights" / "Kaukai" | dir. Gediminas Šiaulys | 2017 | 11' | fiction |
| 2. "Watchkeeping" / "Budėjimas" | dir. Karolis Kaupinis | 2017 | 15' | fiction |
| 3. "A Nordic Skater" / "Čiuožėjas" | dir. Paulius Neverbicka | 2018 | 5' | documentary |
| 4. "The Camel" / "Kupranugaris" | dir. Laurynas Bareiša | 2016 | 14' | fiction |
| 5. "Mr. Night Has a Day Off" / "Pono Nakties Laisvadienis" | dir. Ignas Meilūnas | 2016 | 2' | fiction |
| 6. "My Lithuanian Summer" / "Mano lietuviška vasara" | dir. Agnė Jurkėnaitė | 2017 | 3' | fiction |
| 7. "Ice Fishing Trip" / "KŽŽ" | dir. Lina Margaitytė | 2016 | 12' | documentary |

German selection:

| | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------|-----|-------------|
| 1. "ANTON" | dir. Jonas Bongard | 2017 | 13' | fiction |
| 2. „No Time“ / "Keine Zeit" | dir. Max Gleschinski | 2018 | 3' | music video |
| 3. „Village Celebration“ / „Dorfbums“ | dir. Marcus Wojatschke | 2012 | 7' | documentary |
| 4. „Waiting for the Sea“ / „Warten auf das Meer“ | dir. Aaron Krause | 2016 | 4' | music video |
| 5. „What Can The Flowers Do About It?“ / „Was können die Blumen dafür?“ | dir. Jarek Raczek | 2016 | 5' | music video |
| 6. „Seasigns“ / „Seezeichen“ | dir. Sebastian Lindemann | 2004 | 3' | music video |
| 7. „The Most Boring Places On Earth“ / „Die langweiligsten Orte der Welt“ | dir. Kay Otto | 2011 | 3' | music video |

Swedish selection:

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|------|-----|-------------|
| 1. "The Traffic Separating Device" / "Spärviddshinder" | dir. Johan Palmgren | 2018 | 14' | documentary |
| 2. "A Grace in Life" / "Skådarna" | dir. Kim Sundbeck, Paolo Iskra | 2018 | 13' | documentary |
| 3. "The Flood" | dir. Fikret Atay | 2018 | 4' | art project |
| 4. "My Gay Sister" / "Min homosyster" | dir. Lia Hietala | 2017 | 15' | fiction |

Polish selection:

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------|-----|-------------|
| 1. "1410" | dir. Damian Kocur | 2018 | 25' | fiction |
| 2. "Last Season" / "Ostatni sezon" | dir. Sławomir Witek | 2016 | 12' | documentary |
| 3. "The Deal" / "Umowa" | dir. Ewa Smyk | 2016 | 4' | documentary |
| 4. "The Beach" / "Plaża" | dir. Dawid Chrzochol, Bartosz Zimniak | 2018 | 1' | fiction |



Final selection

All members of the selection team watched all the productions before the meeting on February 21st, 2019.

8 All of the films were discussed in detail, often causing a heating debate upon a cohesion with the "Map of concepts". In the process however, a few common thematic areas were defined, forming "groups" of subject-related films from all partner countries.

The subjects are:

- the present
- cultural code
- individual identity
- the past

And from all the films prepared by national selection teams the following productions had been chosen as the final set.



The present

SWE/ "The Flood" /dir. Fikret Atay / 4'

An artistic project (video) produced in Gotland, an island in the Baltic Sea and the new residence of many refugees in Sweden. The artist tackles an issue of global migrations, especially of immigrants who leave their countries at the state of war and search for safety and peace on other continents. They leave their homes on overloaded boats risking their lives to reach the promised land. Unfortunately, the haven they await may never come, as the sea consumes many lives on the way and some won't reach the land at all.

PL/ "The Beach" /dir. Dawid Chrqchol, Bartosz Zimniak / 1'

A short symbolic film about a relation of a man and the sea. A way to an endless open water – space without boards that belongs to all human kind, suddenly leads to a tiny comfy room limited by Polish flag.

PL/ "Last Season" /dir. Sławomir Witek / 13'

A wordless documentary about a fishermen working on cutters at Polish coast of the Baltic Sea. Fishermen still use nets and as they face the ruthlessness of the sea, they remain completely silent. The harsh nature doesn't however seem to discourage young people following the footsteps of their fathers. A moving picture about the bonds of tradition and the power of nature.

LIT/ "Watchkeeping" /dir. Karolis Kaupinis / 15'

Bounded by the hospital routine father and son try to make mother feel comfortable during her final hours at the hospital. The two men do everything they can to avoid admitting it is impossible to do anything more. The intimate plot in the finale acquires the strength of a metaphor that defines the contemporary situation of Lithuania.

Cultural code

SWE/ "The Traffic Separating Device" / dir. Johan Palmgren / 14'

A pleasant, even funny true story about an extraordinary occurrence in Stockholm (Slussen station) that turned upside down a calm and peaceful everyday life of the inhabitants of the city. So called 'bus trap' that was supposed to improve the traffic, somehow caused unexpected results, that allow us however to observe from a distance a variety of Swedish society.

LIT/ "The Camel" /dir. Laurynas Bareiša / 14'

9 Seemingly an absurd situation that happens in a zoo, somewhere in Lithuania, where a beautiful, charming camel passes away and somehow almost nobody seems to care. A story about a human indifference and ignorance, but on the other hand about a light of goodness within every one of us, regardless of the latitude.

DE/ "What Can the Flowers Do About It?" / PRAG/ dir. Jarek Raczek / 6'

A music video, bursting with summer atmosphere, great music and a unique sense of humor. Two man, travelers, seek their way through the picturesque fields of Mecklenburg Vorpommern (Feldberger Seenlandschaft) to find water.

LIT/ "Running Lights" /dir. Gediminas Siaurys / 11'

An animated movie, showing the history of a road accident and its consequences. The coming-of-age story, emphasizing the subject of mortality, combined with the pro-ecological tale of the eternal movement of renewable life energy.



Individual identity

SWE/“A Grace in Life” / dir. Kim Sundbeck, Paolo Iskra /13’

An atmospheric, calm, relaxing film about an unusual life of the “bird-watchers” in Sweden. The documentary portrays the harmonious and picturesque nature, its landscapes and wildlife, as well as amazing people who are connected to it in an inexplicable way.

SWE/“My Gay Sister” / dir. Lia Hietala /15’

A gripping film about a 10-year-old Cleo and her sister Gabbi. Cleo seems to be fascinated with her sister’s girlfriend who stays with them in the summerhouse. The movie tackles the period of going through puberty and discovering one’s true sexual identity in a subtle way.

DE/“ANTON” /dir. Jonas Bongard /14’

An extraordinary story about a desperate need of a young man in a search of the water, or his even more peculiar appetite for fish. A symbolic picture of an attempt to define one’s identity, even if it means risking social denial or solitude.

The past

PL/“The Deal” /dir. Ewa Smyk /5’

“The Deal” is a short animated story about arranging marriages in the 1950s and 1960s set in the the Eastern borderland of Poland. The objects used in the animation help situate the story in its original environment and express the atmosphere of the times. The film shows how import for the young generations are the bonds with tradition.

LIT/“My Lithuanian Summer” / dir. Agnė Jurkėnaitė /3’

A light, atmospheric, wonderfully made animation about the childhood memories of time, spent in a village with a grandmother. Not only it shows a very different life that passes away irretrievably every day, but also presents how much our first experiences influences who we are as adults.

PL/“Last Season” / dir. Sławomir Witek /13’

See above

From left: My Gay Sister, Watchkeeping, The Camel, Anton, Running Lights, The Deal, A Grace in Life, Last Season, My Lithuanian Summer, What Can the Flowers Do About It?, The Beach, The Traffic Separating Device



The report after Baltic Identity Film Tour

The idea of the project

The idea of Baltic Identity Film Tour was to investigate the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region using film as a medium in this process. This action was intended to contribute to building the potential for a common Baltic Identity and to indicate the similarities and differences between BSR countries.

After choosing the films, in the countries of the project's partners there were screenings and discussions with invited guests and audience:

1. two screenings in Poland: on 25th June 2019 in the Baltic Sea Cultural Centre in Gdańsk and on 26th June in cinema "Światowid" in Elbląg – both discussions were participated by Agata Bachórz, PhD (sociologist), Magdalena Sacha, PhD (cultural expert and regionalist), Sebastian Konefał, PhD (film theoretician and Scandinavian film historian) and prof. Krzysztof Kornacki, PhD (film theoretician and film historian); all of the guests are scholars and teachers at the University of Gdańsk;

2. in Sweden on 25th August 2019 as a part of the Carl International Film Festival in Karlskrona – the guests invited for the discussion were the director Agnieszka Lukasiak and the film funding consultant Christina Schöning from Filmregion Sydost; the talk was moderated by Josef Kulengård, program manager of the Carl International Film Festival;

3. in Rietavas Tourism and Business Information Centre in Lithuania on 21st October 2019 – the discussion was participated by a TV journalist Domas Burkauskas and an employee of Tourism and Business Information Centre Laima Dockeyviciene and Rasa Baliulevicienie;

4. two screenings in Germany: pre-screening event at 3000 Grad Festival, Feldberg Germany on 10th August 2019 (the screening was prepared by Arne Papenhagen for 15 young people) and the event in Rostock which took place on 23rd October 2019 – the participants of the discussion were Katharina Bluhm from the Jugendmedienverband M-V (Youth Media Association Mecklenburg-Vorpommern/NGO), Marcel Brache, coordinator of the EUROPE DIRECT (EDIC MV) information network from the European Integration Centre Rostock, Marek Fialek, PhD from the Institute for Slavistics of the University Greifswald and festival organizer of the PolenMARKT Festival, prof. Stephan Kessler, PhD, director of the Institute for Baltic Studies at the University of Greifswald; the discussion was moderated by Arne Papenhagen, the festival manager of the FiSH Filmfestival from the Institute for New Media in Rostock.

The choice of the films and its results

Each partner country – Poland, Lithuania, Sweden and Germany – prepared a set of national short films with a theme connected the Baltic Sea and its cultural, historical and social aspects. Later, after the discussion within the FilmNet network and preparing the joint movie set, each partner made a selection of its choice for screening in the partner's place.

As the Report on Baltic Identity Film Tour selection process (prepared by Dana Jesswein) points, the partners chose films that had something in common, some mutual elements (for instance: motifs of the sea, nature, fish, climate, etc.). On the other hands – and it was an implicit assumption of the selection – films that identified each country's specific were chosen. It is worth emphasizing that this identification process was conducted by a small group of people (engaged in the project in the partners' countries), so it was not a sociologically representative choice. However, at the same time these commissions

– by referring to local experience – chose films that illustrated questions, values and problems important for the public discourse in each country. The choice of the films was then a form of self-identification: the aim was to choose a film that – in the selectors' opinion – would express social and cultural specific of each country.

With such assumptions (both explicit and implicit), it is not surprising that during the discussions actually all experts and viewers pointed at the variety of topics presented in the films (which was the result of the idea of showing the specific of the countries) and weak bonds between them. At the same time, common features were perceived mostly as superficial or universal for entire Europe or even humanity (as the motifs of nature, environmental disaster or migrants). Possible connection between the films was obstructed by the fact that they were prepared in various kinds and genres (and also that in those sets there were both films presenting a problem explicitly, and productions using symbols, very ambiguous, which did not make their identification easy). The process of choosing the films had a practical impact on investigating the common identity of the Baltic Sea Region (before the screenings).

In this situation – where elements are typical for a certain nation/country – the Baltic Sea was actually the only pretext for the conversation. The question concerning "Baltic identity" was a question of possible identity of the countries or bond between the countries that were accidentally located in this part of Europe, the basin of the Baltic Sea. In this context, it is not surprising that German discussion about possible Baltic community was a discussion about European community (of the countries of the EU).

Screening schedule and choice of the experts

If it comes to the schedule of the screenings, it was organized in the following order – in Germany, 5 films were presented: *The Beach* and *The Deal* (Poland), *The Camel* (Lithuania), *Anton* (Germany), *A Grace of Life* (Sweden). In Poland, 8 films (2 from each country) were presented: *My Lithuanian Summer* and *The Camel* (Lithuania); *The Traffic Separating Device* and *The Flood* (Sweden); *Anton* and *Was können die Blumen dafür* (Germany); *The Beach* and *Last Season* (Poland). In Lithuania, 7 films were presented: *The Deal* and *Last Season* (Poland), *Anton* and *Was können die Blumen dafür* (Germany), *Running Lights* and *Watchkeeping* (Lithuania), *The Traffic Separating Device* (Sweden). In Sweden, 5 films were presented: *The Deal* and *Last Season* (Poland), *A Grace of Life* and *The Flood* (Sweden).

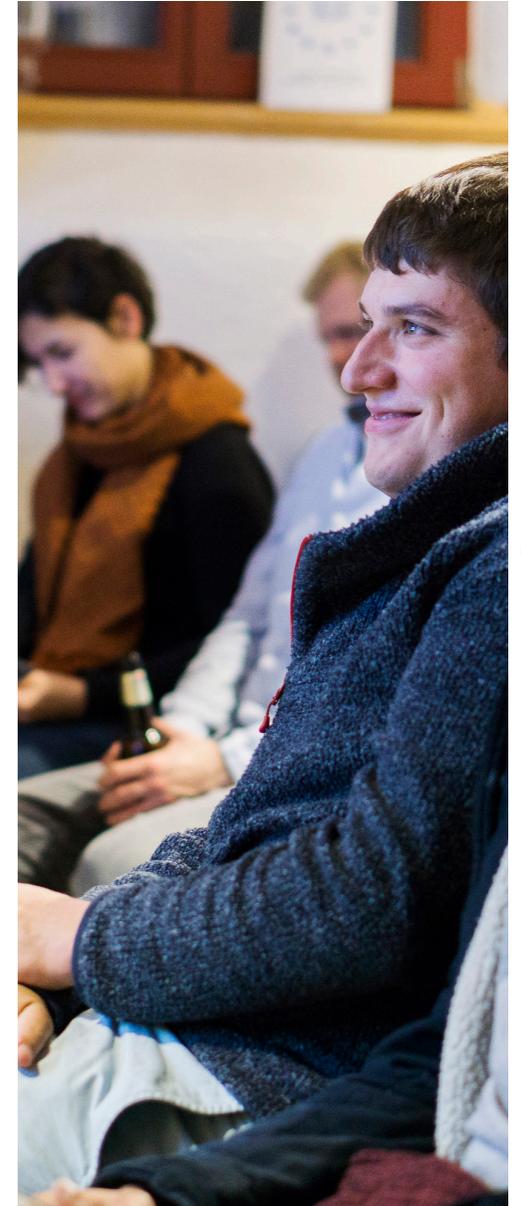
The fact that each country had its own repertoire does not make it easy to compare (we will come back to this issue later). Moreover, the content of the discussions after screenings was determined – sometimes more, sometimes less, but always – by

the chosen films which were various. The variety of the repertoire and its influence on the discussion could be seen mostly in Sweden. Only Polish and Swedish films were presented (whereas in Lithuania, Germany and Poland at least one film from each of 4 countries was screened), which together with the profile of the guests (with the dominating role of Polish-Swedish director Agnieszka Lukasiak) limited the discussion mostly to comparing situations in Poland and Sweden (the motif of current political situation in Poland – which will be analysed later – was strong). In Lithuania, on the other hand, both a film referring to conservative values (*Watchkeeping*) and a pro-ecological film (*Running Lights*) were screened. Polish films had no progressive accent (the meaning of *The Beach* is ambiguous), and according to this identification of Poland, based on the chosen titles, was supposed to be focused much on emphasizing traditionalism.

The profile of invited guests also influenced the content of the discussions and the conclusions. The panellists were strongly connected with the country in which the discussion took place (even if they were immigrants, they had lived in a certain country for a long time). The films confirmed self-identification or national stereotypes, and likewise the discussions headed for emphasizing (self-)identification or (self-)stereotypes. It was as follows: in Germany, individual identity (which is the topic of *Anton*) was more important than group identity; in Sweden, Poland as a conservative country (patriarchalism), where nationalism revives and civil liberties are threatened (based on 3 titles that could lead to this interpretation: *The Deal*, *The Beach* and *Last Season*), was the main topic. Also during Polish meetings the fact that each film illustrates stereotypes of each country was mentioned: German individualism, Swedish leftism and Polish and Lithuanian liminality (societies in the time of transformation, between new and old; between traditionalism and European progressivism).

German meeting

In Germany, there were two screenings – for an audience in Rostock and a selected group of teenagers (15 people) during the 3000 Grad Festival in Feldberg. The first discussion was focused, as mentioned before, on emphasizing the importance of individual identity. In the introduction to the report from this panel, the following words were written: “The goal of the «Baltic Identity Tour» is as much the question of a common identity as the question of a personal identity. (...) The short film programme in Rostock was compiled by the team of the FiSH «Filmfestival im StadtHafen» and is based less on the question of a large common identity than on the search for one’s own personal identity. What makes me special? What should I be like? What do I want to be like? How do I get there?”. A huge part of the meeting followed these ideas – we can find information about it in the report (in several parts of the text): “Discussion participants noted that individuality is important in the sense that community consists of individuals”; “This means one will always have something in common, which for example is the reality of life, growing up and certain experiences. Countries are only political and therefore random borders and not equivalent to individual boundaries”; “At the end of the day, society is a mosaic of little stories. That is why it should be about concentrating on personal insights in the Baltic States.” So, we can write that during the discussion in Rostock actually the main topic was omitted. Group perspective that was proposed was not Baltic, but European perspective (or rather the point of view of the European Union countries). Conclusions in the report from the meeting with teenagers in Feldberg also emphasize individualism: “What is important is not the regional background of a person but what kind of person he is. Thus, it is purely individual aspects that count for a kind of shared sense of identity. To what extent the region in which one lives or grew up plays a role in the individual personality development, remains as a question for the South Baltic Film Tour event in Rostock.”



Swedish meeting

Swedish discussion – during international film festival in Karlskrona – focused on the following topics: 1. “Is there a Baltic identity?”; 2. Nationalism in response to a perceived threat from the outside and to the feeling of “behindness”; 3. Relations and the view on relationship, women’s rights and gender equality in Poland, Sweden and Germany; 4. Relation with nature as a part of culture and as individual response to societies envelopment.

As in other two reports – German and Polish (no information about Baltic identity in the Lithuanian report) – Agnieszka Lukasiak answered for the first question negatively, emphasizing mainly historical differences (“I think the histories of the countries around Baltic are so different. Sweden did not experience war, but Poland is still suffering from WWII and that is still a main topic. They are struggling with politic fundamentalism. Maybe also the water is more dividing than uniting. It takes a long time to get to Poland. It’s the same for UK and the European Union”). On the other hand, Christina Schöning, a German living in Sweden, in searching for the community pointed at the unity of the experience of citizens of former communist countries: “I think there is an invisible borderline at the Baltic Sea because Germany and Poland have much more in common than for example Poland and Sweden because of the history of war, because of the political situa-

tion after WWII. For people in eastern Germany there was a borderline, if you had tried to get over to Sweden or Denmark you could have been killed. I think this is much more of a common identity than what we ever can achieve with free countries as Sweden. I think Swedes can never really understand how it feels to be Polish or German, and vice versa. We may have two Baltic identities, one in the north and one in the south of the Baltic Sea.” Anyway, in German, Swedish and Polish discussions, differences between countries/nations were strongly visible, and there were only a few mutual features.

While discussing other two topics during Swedish meeting, the guests focused on the questions of political and ideological valuation, concerning mainly Poland (question 2 is actually a rhetorical question, with an implied answer, because it assumes that nationalism in an effect of external threats – mostly connected with emigrants – and historical occurrences). During the meeting, another question with a suggestion comes up: “How would you say that the current political situation has affected the view of art in Poland? Has it changed it?”. The film director invited for the meeting answered positively: “They [Polish people] are struggling with political fundamentalism”; “There is a lot of censorship but people agree with that.” A huge part of Swedish discussion was a conversation over the topic of current European political dilemmas with visibly profiled ideological valuation. Christina Schöning said: “The fear for the refugees coming and taking something away from oss [form used originally] I think is the same in both Sweden, Poland and Germany. These fishermen running out of fish and jobs have the same problems in Poland and, Sweden, they find the reason outside the country and this makes you more patriotic and nationalistic.” Also questions about women’s rights and gender equality had a presupposition included: “We are now experiencing in Poland a kind of going back to traditional look at relations” (the reflection based on one film, *The Deal*, not on sociological research, for instance).

In the context of the content of Swedish discussion, it is worth considering if making direct political comments (no matter what are individual views on a situation in a certain Baltic country) are relevant, and if they are a proper way to fulfil the aim of the task (searching for Baltic community).

The fourth topic of Swedish discussion – the role of nature as a common element of all Baltic countries – came up also during German and Polish meetings, and it may be considered as an element joining panellists from different countries. It should be emphasized that the guests saw this threat as universal, typical for the whole Earth. Lukasiak said: “It’s not a Baltic issue, it’s a general issue, it’s global at the moment. All of the films (...) were about the nature inside of us or about struggling with nature or about finding solace in it or somehow relating to it” (only in Elbląg one of the viewers emphasized threats connected with the Baltic Sea’s pollution, together with some things left after WWII). The second thing that connected all three discussions (except for the Lithuanian one) was the topic of refugees, but – just as the issue of ecology – it was described as a European problem; although the report from German meeting brings an issue which suggested that there was a connection between the problem of refugees/migrants and the Baltic Sea, and the film *Beach* was a pretext: “Not only individual isolation is the subject, but also the refugee debate, because the person in the film did not necessarily look Polish. For that reason, the Baltic Sea is proposed as a kind of refuge.” Moreover, the significance of this film is ambiguous (and bushy, curly hair of the protagonist may, though do not have to, signalize that he is of other nationality), so it is a weak proof for identifying the Baltic Sea basin as a refuge (probably in German discussion this motif would have been stronger, if *The Flood* had been screened – it is another example of how important the choice of films was). Both in the topic of ecology and in the topic of refugees/migrants we can see the influence of current politics on the conversation about community – more European than Baltic.





Lithuanian meeting

In the report from Lithuanian discussion, we can find only information concerning the reception of certain films. It is also an illustration of how the choice of the films influenced identifying certain features of Baltic societies. It is good to quote the conclusions: "After watching all movies, participants said that each movie tells something about psychological peculiarities of different nations. The Germans are more sarcastic and individual, the Swedes are more friendly and pragmatic, the Poles and Lithuanians share common peculiarities of depressiveness and gloominess." We could wonder if other set of national films (with a different plot, different character profile, in a different genre) would result in similar categorical conclusions concerning nature of nations, or a if Lithuanian audience would confront characters (e.g. a sarcastic and individualistic Pole or friendly and pragmatic Lithuanian) with a (self-)stereotype.



Polish meetings

At the beginning of Polish discussion, the moderator said that searching for identity does not have to mean that it is necessary to accept a category that is debatable even for researchers (he referred, for instance, to the Baltic Development Forum of Hans Brask who said that mutual identity of Baltic countries is "extremely hard to accept"). The moderator proposed the following schedule of the discussion: 1. interpretation of the films (identifying the meaning of the films which seemed to be quite ambiguous); 2. attempt to find common elements in all the films (mainly if it comes to meaning) and – possibly – grouping them; 3. "Does the Baltic Sea join or divide?" – discussion about the Baltic identity and community; 4. the audience's questions and remarks.

All of the panellists decided that there were not many elements mutual for all films (it is worth reminding that eight of them were screened and only four of them referred to the topic of the sea). Searching for mutual elements, the guests noticed relations between human and nature in six films, and ecology was very visible in some of them. And – as mentioned in previous discussions – it was the only distinctive motif that connected the films. The panellists noticed that possible analogies may be found between films from one country, or between productions from old (Germany, Sweden) and new



22 Union (Poland, Lithuania). In Swedish films, thinking in left-wing and liberal categories dominates: the idea of welfare state, care for emigrants, care for nature. If it comes to Lithuanian films, the motif of a country in the process of transformation was emphasized – the topics of old structures and customs, and difficulties with accepting the new ones (Camel), or costs of modernization (My Lithuanian Summer) were important. Polish films (Beach and The Last Season) were less coherent but thinking in categories old/new could be noticeable there (disappearing profession and strong connection to the idea of the nation state). Due to that, the panellists noticed analogies between films of countries of the old Union focused on civil rights and films of countries from Poland and Lithuania focused on the conflict between old and new. Moreover, Agata Bachórz noticed that in the films of two last countries in defining identity “we” than “me” is more important (it is completely different than in German films where an individual perspective dominates).

In the second part of both Polish discussions – after talking about the films (although here they were also mentioned sometimes as an illustrations of presented theses) – the question about the Baltic identity was most important: Does it exist? What could be mutual for Baltic countries? Should we support/build this identity? Magdalena Sacha gave

an interesting example referring to this issue: she told about finalization of the work on international educational website about the Baltic Sea and Baltic countries that had lasted ten years (balticseahistory.info). However, in the conclusion of her words, she emphasized that the whole decade of searching for a community (not mentioning identity) ended up with nothing, that the perspective changed, because history and culture of the countries were diverse. The perspective was wide, which enriched the experience but also did not make it easy to find a common part.

In the reflection concerning potential community, the moderator introduced another issue – the importance of the Baltic Sea for the history and culture of each country. A sea must be important for a certain culture in order to create a community referring to it. But the status of the Baltic Sea is different for each of the nine countries: Germany is not a seaside country (and does not define its specifics based on the access to the sea); in Poland, the access to the sea used to be limited, so the country did not have a good navy, did not create a distinctive culture of the sea; Lithuania also did not define its history based on the access to the sea (it is different nowadays); only Sweden was strongly connected with the sea; the moderator added here that in this aspect the history divides us because Poland was attacked but Sweden (this event is called Swedish Deluge); also Germany used to be a threat and aggressor for Poland. If it comes to looking for mutual historical tradition, the topic of the Hanseatic League but none of the panellists developed it.

During the meeting in Gdańsk, one of the viewers mentioned the issue of culture as an aspect that could connect the Baltic countries. The panellists, however, were sceptical. Sebastian Konefał pointed that such mutual culture (because of geographical location and centuries of mutual experience) is created by the Scandinavian countries, but it does not refer to other countries. What is more, he pointed out the strong tradition of how the Scandinavian countries perceive the Baltic Sea: they see it as “the dark sea” that causes chaos, and it differs them from the countries of Eastern and Middle Europe. Of course, it does not help in building supra-regional cultural community. The moderator, on the other hand, talked about the fact that even close geographical location of the countries of Eastern and Middle Europe and long-lasting relations did not create a vital community, because the Slavic idea had never been success-

ful and had not persuade these countries to stop bloody fights with each other.

Because of a very modest mutual capital, the panellists decided to change the perspective and ask for the sense and chance for starting to build a community. This aspect was exposed mostly by Agata Bachórz who emphasized the fact that identity (also of a group) is a construct which may be build; it is possible to write a new narration about identity and create new mental maps. According to this, the guests asked themselves a question: is it worth to build the Baltic community and what may be the basis of the future identity? If it comes to the first part of the question, there were arguments such as the will to know Baltic societies better, development of tourism, business contacts and fighting with stereotypical division for East and West. If it comes to possible basis of the future community, there was actually only one proposal – care for the Baltic Sea as a reservoir that is ecologically endangered (which appeared in the discussion before). Referring to this prospective understanding of identity (from co-operation to community), the panellists had no doubts that both meetings (in Gdańsk and in Elbląg) and the whole project Baltic Identity Film Tour had such pragmatic aim – to be one of the initiatives that will build a community, and one day maybe even an identity.





Demands

As it was mentioned, during all the meetings the panellists were sceptical about the existence of the Baltic community. The choice of film did not make this searching easy, because productions that were screened emphasized rather diversity than common elements. We can say that the effect of these meetings was a kind of “diversity protocol” – differences in history, mentality and customs of citizens of each country.

Due to that it is good to consider looking for building a mutual element between the countries of the Baltic Sea basin. We should start from geographically lower level – level of regions, determined in some way by the Baltic Sea (psychosocially, economically, touristically, or maybe historically). In the introduction to the German report we may read: “What unites the countries of the Baltic Sea region most notably is the Baltic Sea itself. Thus, a fishing culture in each of these states, as well as more modern activities such as sailing, seem to be obvious commonalities. Another thing they all have in common seems to be the resistance to cold and wet weather. Due to the harsh weather, one could also see basic characteristics such as callousness, introversion

and dry humour – which certainly also applies to many. The various deserted and vast landscapes might also make something of a person’s personality. This lets you assume you can quickly feel lonely and melancholic. The wide view, which one has through deserted landscapes or out to sea, also contributes to feeling free and makes it possible to overcome limits in one’s own thinking. Due to the low population density, there seems to be a strong sense of community and cohesion. For that reason, family and tradition are very important in the Baltic states”. This psychosocial (mental) identification of seaside countries was not very strong in the project because the chosen films were based on looking for what is generally universal in each nation/country’s ethos, not on what is typical for its regional/local varieties. It must be added, however, that in German discussion, the issue of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern appeared (“In the last part of the discussion the mentality of the people in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was discussed. It was stated that they are reserved and uncommunicative. However, here the perception is of great importance, as not being very communicative is not necessarily negative and not equal to unhappiness”). In Gdańsk, whereas, the moderator suggested that the discussion should go in this direction (e.g. specific of Kashubians as people having connection with the sea), but guests did not follow this suggestion. These regional topics, although talked over during German and Polish discussions, were not analysed enough and – what is most important – the mentality and customs of societies of all four countries were not compared. Similarly – what is surprising – such a strong historical tradition as the Hanseatic League was only mentioned during the conversations (and it is one of several historical phenomena that could be a basis of building a supra-regional identity).

Let’s repeat that: the experience from the screenings and meetings (and pretty common scepticism of the guests if it comes to the issue of Baltic community/identity) makes us go to the lower level in the discussion, which is still strongly connected with the Baltic Sea, which in this case becomes geographical and cultural centre of experience of the Bal-

tic regions. If a film is supposed to be an illustration of problems of societies living in these regions and a starting point of a more monophonic discussion (and conclusions), we should consider choosing films that directly refer to the Baltic Sea and regional societies that are located around it.

These remarks evaluating the Baltic Identity Film Tour are at the same time a demand that the project should not be finished, but that it should be redefined. Differences between the countries have already been – nolens volens – described. Now, it is time to make another step and look (deeper or lower) for common elements. It is possible, of course, to limit it only to a pragmatic aim, such as initiating projects leading to establish contacts between the countries – but the context of the Baltic identity is necessary to do this.

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Project partners' conclusions

SWEDEN:

The Baltic Identity Film Tour was an instructive challenge for us, organizers. It inspired us to take a closer look at current film art in the Baltic Sea region. We found out that the concept of a common Baltic Sea identity is difficult to grasp and that there are very different views on it. We have also learned that the question is very engaging and that film is a good way to discuss Baltic Identity with an audience.

POLAND (ELBLĄG):

The question of the Baltic identity is very controversial. Discussions both of the selection team and the audience who saw the films are the best proofs of this fact. It is not a clear term, very often it is blurred in various perspectives, which makes it more intriguing and forces to think. To us working on the Baltic Identity Film Tour was a special experience because it gave us a chance to give a closer look at how an identity may be defined by using moving pictures. Film – not for the first time – turned out to be the best medium for starting a discourse concerning most important issues of our region.

LITHUANIA:

It was very interesting to see similarities and differences of the Baltic identity with the help of the movies that were screened during the “Baltic Identity Film Tour”. You could even say, that a few movies from different Baltic countries can tell a much bigger story about our countries, nations, cultural background and mentality than a full day discussion on the same topic. It is even a great way to know more about your own country and its culture. This is because movies clearly show certain stereotypes that are so powerful in every culture. All in all, film screening and film making are very effective tools in cross-cultural education.

GERMANY:

Although historically connected by transnational cultures, such as the Vikings, and economic associations, such as the Hanseatic League, when speaking of contemporary society, the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea are often divided between Eastern, Western, Northern and Middle Europe, or split to ethnic or linguistic regions like Scandinavia, Baltic States or Slavic countries. In the framework of the film tour, our renewed search for a Baltic Identity was made possible by young filmmakers that chose to exhibit their native landscapes, languages and stories. It was then fostered by curators that trusted the filmmakers' cinematic expressions and carefully juxtaposed the films into screening programmes. Last but not least, it was the diverse audience that lively engaged in discussions over the people around the Baltic Sea. In the paradoxical times of globalization and neo-nationalism, what unites us here on the Baltic Identity Film Tour around the sea of possibilities is then perhaps the sheer will to create and discuss the matter of common belonging.

POLAND (GDAŃSK):

In the Baltic Sea Cultural Centre in Gdańsk, for years we have looked carefully at the history and culture of countries situated in the Baltic Sea basin, searching for inspirations for our actions. We see the Baltic Sea as a reservoir of unrealized chances, a forgotten sea hiding sins of our European ancestors. After co-organizing the Baltic Identity Film Tour, we notice more differences than similarities between us, the inhabitants of the Baltic countries. The differences are the results of our historical experiences and current political situation of our countries. The similarities, whereas, are the results of universal mechanisms that form human fate. It is good, however, to get to know other points of view and confront them with our visions of the Other. The medium of a short film is one of the most rewarding means which can be used in this process.



Partners:

Center of European Meetings "Światowid" in Elbląg (Elbląg, Poland)
www.swiatowid.elblag.pl

Association of Polish Communes Euroregion Baltic (Elbląg, Poland)
www.eurobalt.org.pl

Baltic Sea Cultural Centre (Gdańsk, Poland)
www.nck.org.pl

Institute for New Media (Rostock, Germany)
www.ifnm.de

Filmregion Sydost (Växjö, Sweden)
www.filmregionsydost.se

Rietavas Tourism and Business Information Centre (Rietavas, Lithuania)
www.rietavovic.lt

Pomeranian Film Foundation / Gdynia Film Centre (Gdynia, Poland)
www.fundacjafilmowa.pl
www.gcf.org.pl





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