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Culture unites people across borders.

For 30 years, the Danish Cultural Institute in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania has been engaged in developing the understanding between Denmark and the Baltic states. Bringing Danes and Latvians together through wonderful experiences in music, theatre, art, dance, literature, education and so much more.

Culture builds bridges between people and countries. The exchange of culture and willingness to learn about other societies and cultures is one of the most powerful ways to bring people together and develop good relations. This year, the Danish Cultural Institute in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania celebrates its 30th anniversary. Through numerous projects and events, the Danish Cultural Institute has created ways for Danes and Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians to communicate and develop stronger ties across our common Baltic Sea. This includes both more traditionally artistic such as music as well as more socially orientated urban projects, while constantly focusing on developing together.

The Danish Cultural Institute was officially opening in Riga on August 18. 1990. It was the first official foreign organization to be established in the three Baltic Soviet republics before the restoration of independence. The Cultural Institute became one of the first open windows to the West as well as a channel for Danes to follow closer and understand the rapid developments in the Baltics.

At the time, there was a strong interest in Denmark in the Baltics. The establishment of the Danish Cultural Institute was made possible after a public funding campaign in the Danish newspaper Politiken in 1989 asking their readers to contribute to the creation of a new Institute in Latvia. The collection of almost 2 million DKK – an impressive amount of money at the time - was a testimony of the broad public support in Denmark for the efforts of the three Baltic States to regaining independence.

With the newly opened office in Riga, exchange of visits for cultural representatives, study programmes at Danish universities and language courses were some of the first activities.

Soon after, branches - later independent offices - were opened in Tallinn and Vilnius. The three offices worked parallel with each other and in collaboration across the three countries until they were combined into one office in Riga in 2013. The Cultural Institute is still expanding and exploring new avenues and themes in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Also recently in Ukraine and Belarus where the Cultural Institute is spreading the message of the importance of peace and democracy.

While looking ahead and seeking to improve relationships, the environment, education and living conditions for people in the Baltic Sea Region, it is also important to remember and to celebrate great achievements and events of the past.

Just to mention one highlight is the exchange between Līvāni municipality and the Danish municipality Odsherred in 2013. Līvāni, despite being a small municipality in Latvia, has an impressive amount of cultural events compared to the much larger Danish municipality Odsherred. Latvian culture workers from Līvāni went to Odsherred to introduce the concept of Cultural Self Organisation. Soon after, Odsherred returned the favour when they travelled to Līvāni to pass on Danish experiences with alcohol harm prevention in families. In this way, the two municipalities were able to learn from each other's experiences and improve their work.

This project also goes to show that working with small, rural municipalities can have a big impact. It is important to include these areas that also have a lot to offer. In line with this and on a larger scale, the Danish Cultural Institute is leading an EU-funded project called UrbCulturalPlanning which aims to create more sustainable and socially inclusive cities and rural areas in the Baltic Sea Region. The project was launched in 2019 and focuses on involving citizens directly to give them ownership of the projects, their results and their neighbourhoods. One element is to test and demonstrate citizen engagement in urban development through the creation of real locations in the Baltic Sea Region via the very popular video game Minecraft aiming to engage children and younger people. The Latvian city of Cēsis has been created in Minecraft where local citizens have been invited to add to the model to make it even more detailed. In the following months of the project, the Danish Cultural Institute aims to reach out to more cities in Latvia - both with the Minecraft activities, but also concerning other activities in UrbCulturalPlanning.

In the past 30 years, music has played a big and important role in many of the projects carried out by the Institute. Music is great at bringing people together. It has been proven that music has a positive effect on children's school learning and strengthens their empathy and emotional intelligence. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have all put music education on the top of their agenda to boast great opportunities for children and youngsters to study and practice music. With the 30th anniversary project "Harmonic Voices", the Danish Cultural Institute wishes to create a platform where the four countries can learn from each other to create even better music education in the future.

Latvia and Denmark has a successful joint history, when it comes to setting up Civil Society connections. Today this gives our countries together a chance to in common to reach out to Belarus and beyond and carrying out common projects with our friends. The DCI is a very active participant within many areas.

With a great number of activities on the drawing board, the Danish Cultural Institute continues to focus on its most important task to strengthen Danish-Latvian-Baltic relations through cultural exchange and societal development. After the celebrations of the

centenary of Latvia in 2018, we look forward to celebrate next year the Danish recognition of the Baltic countries' independence in 1921 as well as the 30th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations between Denmark and Latvia in 1991.