



Cultivating Resilience 2025 Review

Interreg
Baltic Sea Region



Co-funded by
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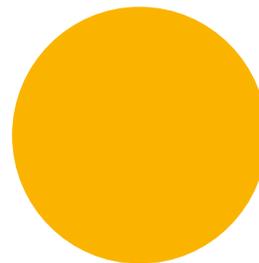
 RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES
BSR Cultural Pearls



RESKOM



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Introduction

Dear Friends,

In times of war, climate-related hazards and economic pressure across our region – promoting culture does not always meet enthusiasm. Three years into the Cultural Pearls initiative, however, **the connection between strong communities and societal resilience has never been stronger.**

The Cultural Pearls initiative is not rocket science. It does not introduce revolutionary innovation and social engineering. Instead it is rooted in the knowledge that resilience is based on **collective capacity, trust, and sense of belonging**, as fundamental traits of any society able not only to survive but also to actively adapt and transform. This inevitably means reaching people on an individual level, meticulous and slow but effective and transformative. In the original description of the Cultural Pearls initiative a key phrase is **“harnessing the potential”** – unlocking what is there with targeted actions and a strategic

approach. In other words, Cultural Pearls has helped to conceptualise, define and promote the importance of the social dimension of security, of resilience and of the liveability of our towns and cities.

For what had been the most competitive selection process to date, **2025 saw six new Pearls joining the Cultural Pearls Network.** In many ways this year was the most prolific ever – dozens of webinars, two network conferences and one grand Culture for Resilience Forum were organised, complementing the six local ceremonies that took place in each of the awarded cities as well as the countless activities performed as part of our Pearls’ action plans. Also, for the first time ever, Pearl cities from different cohorts could exchange experiences and learn from each other.

Our sister project **RESCOM** helped us to put our actions into perspective. Not only do Ukrainian stakeholders provide us with insights on the role of communities and self-efficacy when crisis hits. The central role of culture

across the country - to reintegrate veterans, to welcome internally displaced persons, to cope with the everyday and to preserve their heritage - is clearly visible, placing culture at the centre-stage not only as a tool of resilience but as the very reason to withstand.

Finally, what makes me truly proud is that as this project enters a new reality as an independent initiative – many of our partners and stakeholders have deepened their commitment. **Because we can see that it works.** Our next call opens in March 2026. Join us then.

In the meantime, enjoy our year in review!

Sincerely,

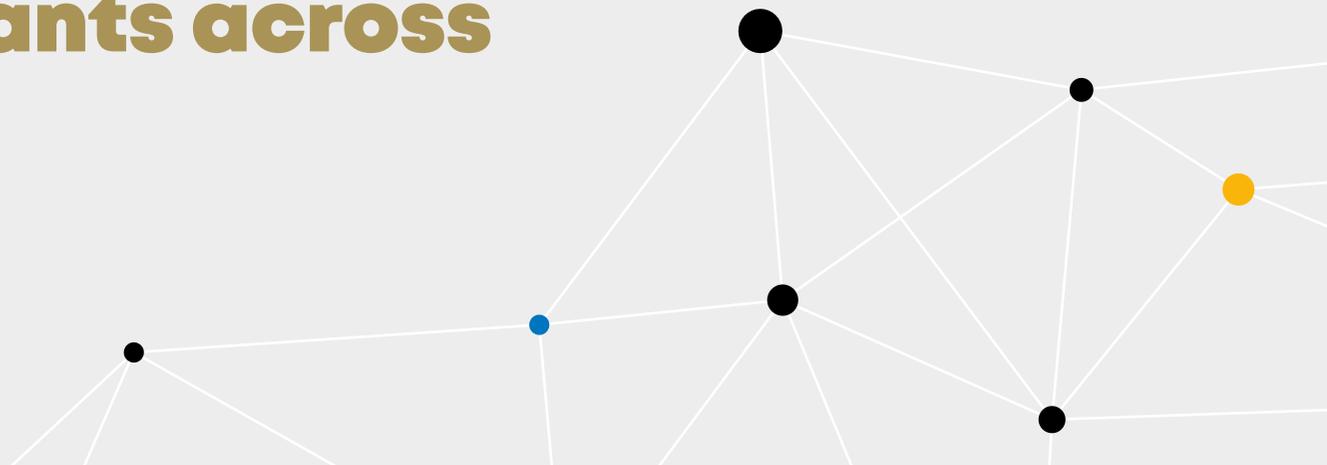
Felix Schartner Giertta

Project Coordinator, BSR Cultural Pearls and RESCOM • Council of the Baltic Sea States



Cultural Pearls in numbers

- **Applications from 40 cities 2024-2026**
- **14 titleholders 2024-2026**
- **1,607,954 inhabitants across applicant cities**



Introduction

What is social resilience?

Social resilience refers to the ability of individuals, communities, and societies to **withstand and recover from social, economic and environmental shocks and stresses**. It involves capacity to adapt and learn from these challenges as well as to maintain or improve social and economic well-being. In simple terms, social resilience is about a community's ability to overcome hardship together.

Countries in the Baltic Sea Region differ in size, historic background and cultural heritage, but they all share common challenges such as climate change, urbanisation, economic down-turn, segregation, aging society or political tensions that influence our daily lives and require collective action here and now. Therefore, it is important to develop a shared understanding of the importance of social resilience and to work together to strengthen it in the region.

In order to adjust to the challenges and demands of this fast-changing world and make our neighbourhoods more liveable,

decision-makers not only have to take good decisions but **involve and engage their citizens**. We need to be able to solve the problems of today, learn how to turn negative trends and prepare for the unexpected in the future. All together.

Social resilience can be strengthened through a variety of strategies, such as building strong social networks and relationships, investing in education and training, promoting economic diversity, and fostering a sense of community ownership and participation. Cultural activities such as music, dance, theatre, and visual arts **can bring people together, create a sense of belonging, and strengthen social connections** that can help individuals and communities to overcome difficult times.

BSR Cultural Pearls - Why it matters

In a fast-changing, ever more urbanised world, some of the most essential aspects of human (co-) existence are diminishing: **trust, connectedness, sense of belonging, ability to collaborate and co-create**.

Introduction

Instead, increasingly fragmented, disengaged societies are having a hard time creating happy coexistence for its inhabitants and prevent effective collaboration to invent a brighter future.

Meanwhile, many smaller cities, towns, and municipalities are struggling with **demographic change, the pull-factor of larger cities, and shrinking budgets**. In the face of global and regional stressors such as war, migration, economic downturn, or the risk of climate disaster, decision-makers call for building **“resilience”**.

Rarely, however, do such efforts focus on the very backbone of any society – **community**. Nor do most cities and towns have the resources, knowledge, or mandate to comprehensively address the subject. This calls for a shift in the narrative around resilient societies. It requires a new perspective on **the role of public authorities** in supporting these essential characteristics of community by being active facilitators of interaction between people. It underscores the

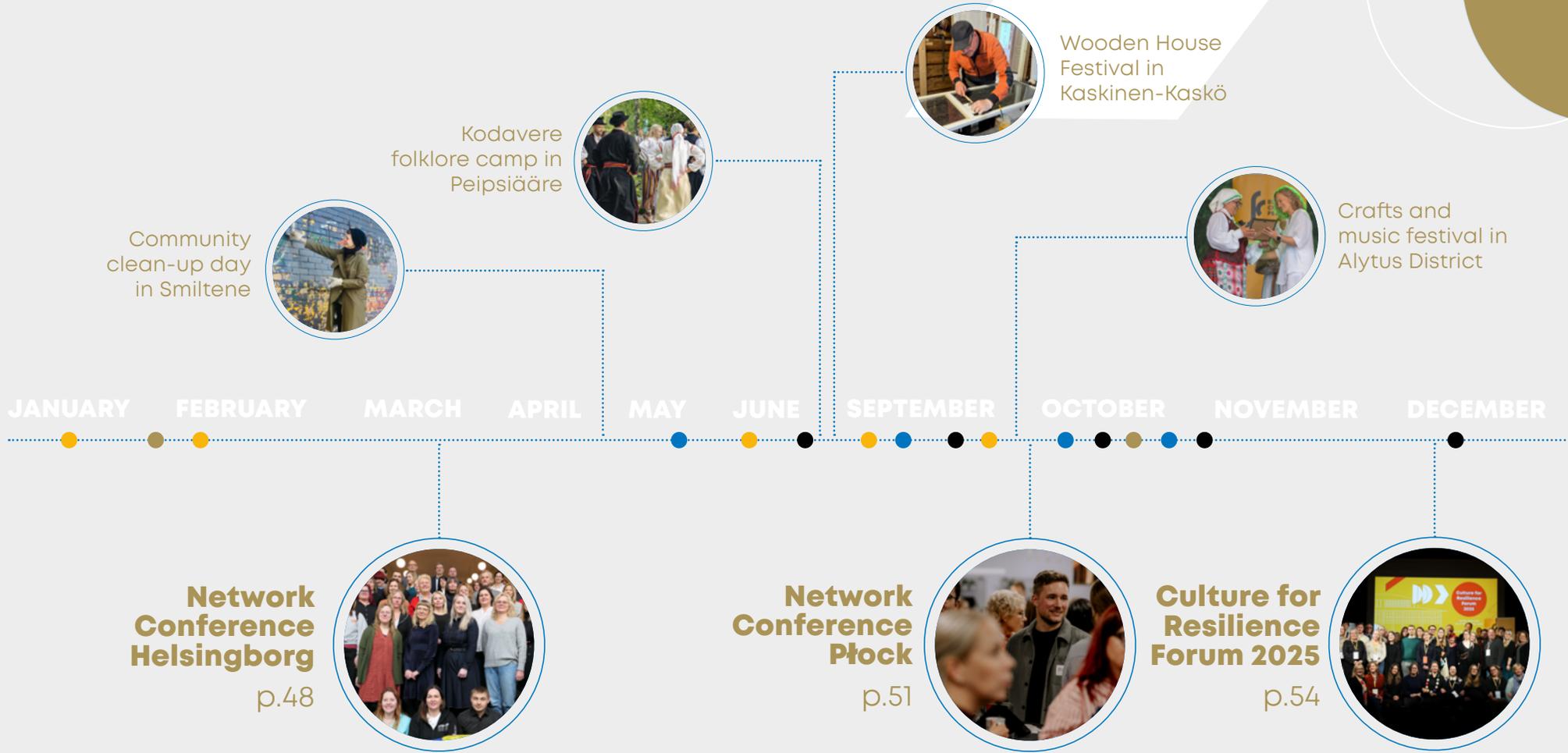
importance of breaking silos and engaging in cross-departmental and cross-sectoral approaches. But it also calls for initiatives to equip local authorities with tools and knowledge about how to support community,

engagement, and participation – **to use the power of local culture and creativity to create spaces for people to meet, connect, engage, participate, and collaborate.** •



Introduction

2025 Timeline



Pearls 2025



Pearls 2025

2025 Cultural Pearls title

2025 welcomed six new municipalities to the Cultural Pearls Network - Helsingborg (Sweden), Peipsiääre (Estonia), Alytus district (Lithuania), Płock (Poland), Kaskinen-Kaskö (Finland), and Smiltene (Latvia). Selected from 14 outstanding candidates across the Baltic Sea Region, the municipalities embarked on a transformative journey to strengthen their communities.

Each candidate prepared an ambitious **Culture and Resilience Action Plan (CuReAP)** aimed at enhancing community resilience through cultural initiatives. The most innovative and convincing action plans were selected by a jury of experts in social resilience, urban planning, arts, and culture, as well as representatives from pan-Baltic and European organisations and networks of cities.

With action plans aimed at intergenerational dialogue, community involvement in decision-making and cultural activities, and harnessing traditions and local trademarks, the solutions gathered by the 2025 Pearls are as diverse as the challenges they faced.



- Smiltene, Latvia
- Helsingborg, Sweden
- Peipsiääre, Estonia
- Płock, Poland
- Alytus district, Lithuania
- Kaskinen-Kaskö, Finland

Pearls 2025

Smiltene

**Culture connects us,
resilience grows here**

Country: **Latvia**

Population: **5,300**



CuReAP – Culture and Resilience Action Plan

Smiltene's CuReAP aims to strengthen community bonds and preserve local heritage amidst demographic and economic challenges. The initiative uses culture as a platform for social change, creating inclusive opportunities that promote local identity, pride, and resilience. By revitalising a local open-air stage and fostering intergenerational connections through festivals, workshops, and youth-driven activities, Smiltene builds a cohesive, empowered, and creative community.

Main challenges

- Population decline due to out-migration and low birth rates
- Limited cultural participation among younger and older generations
- Maintaining community cohesion in changing demographic and economic conditions

Solutions

- Renovation of the open-air stage in Jāņukalns as a new cultural hub
- Introduction of annual youth-led festivals and intergenerational workshops
- Strengthened collaboration among local institutions – cultural centre, museum, music and art schools, library, and NGOs
- Increased local pride and sense of belonging through shared cultural events

Pearls 2025

Smiltene

Evija Dzvinko - Cultural Pearls 2025 Coordinator in Smiltene & **Zane Kaķe** - Public Relations Specialist at the Vidzeme Planning Region

The Cultural Pearl year had a lasting social impact in Smiltene. It strengthened trust between residents, community groups, and the municipality and encouraged people to take an active role in shaping their local environment. Many participants discovered that their ideas and efforts truly matter, which increased confidence and willingness to get involved. Looking ahead, Smiltene plans to continue this **community-driven approach** by caring for the restored cultural spaces, supporting local initiatives, and creating more opportunities for people of all ages to meet, collaborate, and feel connected to their town. The Cultural Pearl year was not a one-time event but a starting point for long-term cooperation and shared responsibility.

Smiltene's BSR Cultural Pearl Year 2025 - Strengthening Community Through Culture

The past year was a special one for Smiltene, as the town proudly held the title of Baltic Sea Region Cultural Pearl 2025 alongside five other cities from Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania,

Photo: **Toms Tomass Brencis**





Poland, and Finland. Activities planned and implemented within Smiltene’s Culture and Resilience Action Plan had a positive impact on local residents, strengthened cooperation within the community, and fostered a stronger sense of **responsibility and pride in their hometown.**

The Cultural Pearl title gave Smiltene international visibility across the Baltic Sea region and allowed local residents to take pride in the fact that initiatives from their town inspired people beyond Latvia—in Poland, Denmark and elsewhere in Europe. However, the most important impact was felt locally.

“The year became a wonderful opportunity for people to come together again after years marked by global challenges, creating moments of laughter, shared effort, and joy,” says Smiltene programme coordinator Evija Dzvinke.

Revitalisation of the Jāņukalns Open-Air Stage and Youth Engagement

One of the most significant highlights of the year was the restoration of the Jāņukalns open-air stage, which brought together adults and children in a joint effort. Residents and local entrepreneurs participated in several community workdays, cleaning, dismantling old structures, painting, and donating materials to achieve a shared goal.

On 1 June 2025, the renewed Jāņukalns open-air stage hosted the opening concert “**Creating, Doing and Celebrating Together!**” and the Baltic Sea Region Cultural Pearl 2025 Award Ceremony. The event brought together **more than 700 children and young people** from dance groups and choirs in the Smiltene and Valka municipalities, as well as local residents and guests from neighbouring countries. The Jāņukalns open-air stage has regained its appeal and now continues to thrive as a vibrant cultural space shaped by and for the community.

Pearls 2025

“The Cultural Pearl year helped people reconnect through shared activities and meaningful time spent together. By taking part in restoring the open-air stage and improving public spaces, we felt proud of our town and of what we can achieve together,” emphasises Kristaps Kalniņš, Chair of the Smiltene Residents’ Council.

Encouraging youth participation was one of the key pillars of the action plan. Young people in Smiltene actively contributed to improving spaces that matter to them by taking part in workshops led by artist Viktorija Zeme and jointly painting a small building in the renewed active recreation park Smiltiņš.

Lasting Impact

A key lesson learned was that people engage most fully when they feel their contribution truly matters, and that intergenerational cooperation makes the process just as meaningful as the final result.

“The Cultural Pearl year in Smiltene had a lasting social impact by strengthening trust between residents, community groups and the municipality. Many people realised that their ideas and efforts genuinely matter, which increased their confidence and willingness to get involved,” concludes E. Dzvinko.

Looking ahead, Smiltene plans to continue its community-led approach by caring for the restored spaces, supporting local initiatives and creating more opportunities for people of all ages to meet, collaborate and feel connected to their town.

“The Cultural Pearl year was a starting point for long-term cooperation and shared responsibility,” adds E. Dzvinko.

Lelde Ābele, Project Manager at Vidzeme Planning Region highlights the broader regional significance of the initiative:

“The BSR Cultural Pearls project has made a meaningful contribution at the regional level, demonstrating culture’s role as an effective instrument for strengthening local communities, enhancing societal resilience

and fostering cooperation across the Baltic Sea region. Although the project concluded at the end of last year, the Cultural Pearls title created within its framework has evolved into a cooperation platform with long-term added value. This work will continue in 2026, with a new call to be launched for cities wishing to apply for the Cultural Pearl title for 2027, thereby further strengthening local communities as well as experience exchange and mutual learning between municipalities.” •



Photo: Zane Kaķe

Pearls 2025

Smiltene

Activity highlights

- **Cleanup and renovation of Jāņukalns open-air stage**
On April 26, 2025, Smiltene hosted a big cleanup event as part of its Culture and Resilience Action Plan. The event united residents, including Latvian remigrants, to foster connections and community involvement. Held at the revitalised Jāņukalns open-air stage, participants engaged in cleanup activities, followed by live music and a shared meal, creating opportunities for meaningful interactions.
- **Stage reopening and award ceremony**
On 1 June, 2025, Smiltene hosted its first concert at the renovated Jāņukalns open-air stage, combined with the Baltic Sea Region Cultural Pearls 2025 award ceremony. Over 700 children, youth, and residents attended, celebrating Smiltene's Cultural Pearl title. The event showcased local talent and marked the reopening of the community-renovated stage.
- **Youth collaboration at Smiltene Active Recreation Park 'Smiltiņš'**
In August, young people from Smiltene collaborated with artist Viktorija Zeme to paint a pavillon at Smiltene Active Recreation Park 'Smiltiņš' as part of the town's 'BSR Cultural Pearl 2025' activities. Over three workshops, participants learned mural techniques and created environmentally themed designs. The pavillon was unveiled on August 23 as the park officially opened to the public for the first time in a festive atmosphere.

Pearls 2025

Helsingborg

**Trust grows where we
create together**

Country: **Sweden**

Population: **113,000**



CuReAP – Culture and Resilience Action Plan

Helsingborg's CuReAP focuses on art and culture as tools to strengthen social cohesion and community resilience. The city aims to increase participation and co-creation, particularly among children and young people, while reducing involuntary loneliness across generations. Through projects that connect youth and the elderly, Helsingborg builds pride and a sense of belonging that counteracts social gaps. Co-creation initiatives strengthen trust in the city's institutions and embed participatory methods in everyday urban development.

Main challenges

- Social fragmentation and conflicts between different community groups
- Involuntary loneliness among children, youth, and the elderly
- Limited trust in city administrations and decision-making processes

Solutions

- New co-creation formats developed for children, youth, and the elderly
- Strengthened collaboration between municipal departments, cultural institutions, and citizens
- Projects empowering youth to tell their stories and shape city culture
- Initiatives enabling elderly residents to share life experiences and build new social networks
- Increased sense of safety, trust, and belonging among residents

Helsingborg

Ola Jacobson • Executive Officer - Children and Youth Culture, Cultural and Creative Industries and International Affairs - CULTURE DEPARTMENT

Culture and Co-Creation Shaping a City for the Future

A year as a Baltic Sea Cultural Pearl has passed in Helsingborg. At the heart of our work lied a clear ambition: to strengthen the city's social fabric and identity by placing **culture and co-creation** at the center of urban development. We wanted residents to move beyond being passive audiences and instead become active participants in shaping their city through shared stories, artistic expression, and collaborative projects.

By engaging people of all ages and backgrounds—especially young people and older citizens—we aimed to foster **dialogue, inclusion, and a stronger sense of belonging**. Through cross-sector collaboration between cultural institutions, schools, businesses, and public actors, our goal has been to build a vibrant, democratic, and sustainable cultural ecosystem that gives voice to diverse perspectives and strengthens social cohesion.

Photo: Rickard Johnsson





Receiving the Cultural Pearl title has been deeply meaningful for both our organisation and the wider community. The recognition affirms **culture as a driving force** for sustainable urban development and social change. It has given visibility and credibility to our work, inspired greater local pride, and encouraged broader participation across the city. Just as importantly, the title has helped strengthen partnerships and long-term support for initiatives that will continue to live on beyond the project period.

Throughout the year, a range of activities brought these ambitions to life. One of the key initiatives was **BUMS – Children and Young People Meet and Create the City** – which took place on April 29–30 and gathered professionals from different city departments to explore how collaboration can foster meaningful learning in preschools, schools, and city organisations. Through inspiring discussions and concrete examples from educational practice, the event deepened understanding of how culture, democracy, and learning can be integrated across sectors.

Another project, **History Comes Alive**, saw Helsingborg Museum testing a new format for its popular theatre walks at the open-air museum. In this initiative, seniors were invited to co-create the content by contributing memories and diary entries that enriched the scripts with authenticity and personal history. Seniors are one of the museum's prioritised target groups, and the project offered them not only a voice but also the opportunity to participate as actors when the performances are staged in the summer of 2026.

Young people played a central role in the **KulturCrew** concept, where groups of 5–15 children and adolescents aged 10–18 take responsibility for planning and participating in cultural events such as concerts, exhibitions, and festivals. Starting with one school in January, the initiative gradually expanded, with another school joining during the title year. Coordinated by Dunkers Culture Centre, KulturCrew empowers young participants to take ownership of cultural life and gain practical experience in organising and creating cultural activities.

Pearls 2025

In the project **My City**, children from four different classes created short films about their city together with a professional filmmaker and a visual artist. Through this process, they expressed their perspectives and hopes for the city's future while developing creativity, collaboration skills, and an understanding of filmmaking as a form of storytelling.

Memory and place were explored through **Walk Through Time**, an audio tour that guides listeners through Helsingborg while transporting them to earlier eras through radio theatre and period-appropriate music. Based on interviews with older residents aged 60 and above, the tour brings personal memories and stories to life, dramatised and recorded by participants and actors from Alla Tiders Teater. The project culminated in an audio tour open to the public, offering a moving encounter between past and present.

The impact of these initiatives is reflected in the voices of those involved. One member of the organising team shared:

“Children of different ages have collaborated and gotten to know each other through the project. It was lovely to hear how the children reflected on what they called: ‘Truly Important’ about their everyday lives and their place.”

From outside the organising team, Educational Developer Per Dahlbeck observed:

“When children’s voices and ideas are seen and allowed to leave their mark, the city becomes warmer and more welcoming.”

Looking back on the year, the impact has been both **tangible and lasting**. Two initiatives in particular—KulturCrew and BUMS—will continue as long-term commitments. KulturCrew has strong potential to transform the role of culture in schools by empowering children to take active responsibility for cultural life, embedding co-creation and engagement into everyday learning and shaping future generations as active cultural citizens. BUMS, meanwhile, has strengthened the school department’s focus on democracy development in close collaboration with the surrounding society and the cultural sector. The

event will return on April 28–29, 2026, continuing to build bridges between education, culture, other sectors and civic life.

Together, these experiences show how culture and co-creation can act as powerful forces for inclusion, participation, and sustainable urban development—helping to shape a city that is not only attractive to visitors **but truly belongs to the people who live there.** •



Photo: Rickard Johnsson

Pearls 2025

Helsingborg

Activity highlights

- **History Comes Alive**

During Helsingborg's BSR Cultural Pearls 2025 title year the Helsingborg Museum launched "History Comes Alive," a project co-creating theatre walks with seniors, who contributed memories and diary entries to enrich performances. The collaboration strengthened intergenerational bonds, reduced loneliness among the elderly, and deepened visitors' connection to the city's history. Theatre walks based on these stories are scheduled for Summer 2026.
- **Co-creation initiatives across generations**

Committed to exploring co-creation formats for children, youth, and the elderly, Helsingborg initiated a long list of activities: "My City" where children created short films with a professional filmmaker, the audio tour "Walk Through Time" based on interviews with older residents, "KulturCrew" where children and adolescents participate in cultural planning and "BUMS" which gathered professionals from the field of education.
- **First Cultural Pearls Network Conference**

Helsingborg hosted the first Cultural Pearls Network Conference on 3–5 March 2025, and showcased its Culture and Resilience Action Plan through guided study visits. The conference was held at key cultural venues, including Helsingborg's Konserthuset, Stadsteater, and the historic Brandstationen Gåsebäck.

Pearls 2025

Peipsiääre

Heritage inspires
the future

Country: **Estonia**

Population: **7,700**



CuReAP – Culture and Resilience Action Plan

Peipsiääre's CuReAP focuses on transforming cultural heritage into a living resource for the future. The municipality engages young people as co-creators of new cultural practices, combining traditional knowledge with innovation. By promoting Kodavere culture, the traditions of the Russian Old Believers, and Baltic-German manor heritage, the plan connects generations and inspires pride in place. Through hackathons, youth camps, and community festivals, Peipsiääre empowers residents to imagine new livelihoods and collaborative futures rooted in local culture.

Main challenges

- Ageing and declining population
- Youth outmigration after completing basic education
- Limited cooperation and competition between villages within the municipality
- Need to strengthen intergenerational and community ties

Solutions

- Launch of a youth hackathon generating new ideas for local life and creative entrepreneurship
- Two youth camps linking young people to local heritage and future-oriented skills
- Organisation of the Kodavere Cultural Dance Festival involving residents and local groups
- Increased cooperation between villages through shared cultural events
- Greater visibility and pride in Peipsiääre's diverse cultural traditions

Peipsiääre

Liis Lainemäe · Project
Manager of the Cultural
Pearls Project

What does the Cultural Pearls title mean for Peipsiääre?

Becoming a Cultural Pearl gave us a chance to strengthen community bonds — involve people in decisions, spark interest in local heritage, and build a culturally active home together.

To earn this title, we created a Culture and Resilience Action Plan, focusing especially on young people and on introducing and valuing the **Kodavere cultural space**. We also included well-known community events that we organise together with local residents.

The year was filled with meetings, seminars, and mentoring for the municipality's organisers. We saw again how important culture is in a small rural area and how it helps create a strong local identity. We learned how other small municipalities use culture to engage residents and support local economic life. We realised that many Baltic Sea municipalities share **similar challenges** (for example, involving young people), and that working together and sharing solutions is the

Photo: **Karl Fredy Kruup**





right direction. We are now part of a shared Cultural Pearls Network, where we can create joint projects and ask each other for advice.

Youth events and initiatives

On 16–17 October, the municipality hosted its first youth hackathon **How to become (culture)rich in your hometown?** for young people aged 12–25. Young participants worked in teams to come up with ideas that would make our home area lively and unique. Together with co-organiser Creativity Lab (Loov Eesti), we involved mentors, and by the second day, 14 young people presented four ideas.

The best idea — the hiking app “PEIPSI COMPASS”, offering fun and guided hiking routes in the municipality — won a €1000 prize to help bring the idea to life. Other teams received special awards and the chance to use municipal and partner mentoring to turn their ideas into reality.

The Cultural Pearls also supported the **Kodavere heritage camp**, where learning the Kodavere language was closely linked

with cooking together. The camp days were enriched with folk music and dance. A central activity was redesigning the Pala bus station — with children’s help and under the guidance of street artist von Bomb, all its walls received new paintings.

We are happy that young people from the Pala area have created their own podcast “Kaugen külän”, where they talk with guests about life, language, and people in Kodavere. They share local stories, memories, and ideas, connecting tradition with the present day. You can listen to the podcast on the “Kaugen külän” YouTube channel.

Traditions and community events

The Sibulatee (Onion Route) network once again organised traditional events: the Fish Buffet Day, Buffet Day, and the Jar Party, which brought together nearly **250 local families, businesses, and active residents**, and attracted around 8000 visitors.

“Buffet days are community-bringing festive

Pearls 2025

occasions, because they also involve people who do not deal with food offerings on a daily basis. Everyone shares the same concern: how many people will come, how much raw material to stock, and how much food to prepare. When everything then works out, the joy is twice as great. For many, it is above all a pleasant social experience and a joyful experience of pushing one's own limits." - Külli Must, Alatskivi Mõisamaitset.

The first **Kodavere Dance Festival** took place in early June. It brought the community together – young and old – with 20 folk dance groups and around 280 dancers.

The nationwide **Living in the Countryside Day** highlighted Estonia's smallest town, Kallaste. Municipal workers introduced local services – from libraries to sports facilities – and visitors could learn about available housing in Peipsiääre.

What comes next?

The Cultural Pearl title is a great honour, but above all – an **opportunity**. The year 2025 showed that when the community, the municipality, and young people join forces, great ideas appear and make our home area more lively and connected.

In the future, we plan to support youth initiatives even more, strengthen cooperation with local organisations, invite people to participate, and keep our diverse heritage alive – including Kodavere traditions, Old Believer heritage, and manor culture. The Cultural Pearl year gives us a clear message: **our home has space for ideas, creativity, and working together.**

Young people – start thinking already, what idea will you bring to next autumn's hackathon? •

Photo: Reet Kruup / KUVAKE and Mikk Kirikal



Pearls 2025

Peipsiääre

Activity highlights

- **Kodavere Folklore Camp**

From 11–15 August 2025, Peipsiääre Municipality organised the Kodavere Folklore Camp as part of the Baltic Sea Cultural Pearl 2025 program. Children and youth learned the Kodavere language, traditional cooking, folk music, and dance. A highlight was transforming the Pala bus station with murals, guided by street artist von Bomb. The camp concluded with performances of stories and songs, celebrating Kodavere cultural heritage and community engagement.
- **Youth Hackathon**

On October 16–17, Peipsiääre Municipality hosted its first youth hackathon, “How to Become (Culturally) Rich in Your Hometown?” at Kadrina Manor. Five teams, comprising 14 participants aged 12–25 from different schools, developed and tested innovative ideas over two days. The participants were mentored by experts from Creative Estonia, Viljandi Culture Academy, and local organisations. The winning idea, “Peipsi Compass,” a hiking app, received a €1,000 prize, while other teams earned special awards for youth-focused initiatives.
- **Celebrating local traditions**

On 26 April 2025, Peipsiääre celebrated local traditions through three community events: the Sibulatee Fish Café Day, the Open Fishing Harbours Day, and the Open Pantries Day. Despite harsh weather, residents united to host pop-up cafés featuring local fish dishes, onion-themed workshops, and shared pantries showcasing regional flavors.

Pearls 2025

Płock

Where people
meet, culture lives

Country: **Poland**

Population: **110,000**



CuReAP – Culture and Resilience Action Plan

Płock's CuReAP uses the metaphor of coffee to go – culture that travels, connects, and warms communities wherever people meet. The plan focuses on bringing culture beyond traditional venues and into everyday public spaces, especially in peripheral neighbourhoods. Through workshops, local events, and co-created activities, culture becomes a catalyst for dialogue and collaboration. Residents take an active role in shaping the “culture to go” model, which strengthens relationships, trust, and belonging across the city.

Main challenges

- Youth migration to larger cities such as Warsaw
- Limited access to cultural activities in peripheral neighbourhoods
- Need to build trust and cooperation among diverse communities
- Integration of refugees and economic migrants from Ukraine and Asia

Solutions

- Introduction of the “culture to go” model bringing culture to everyday places
- New community events in Borowiczki and Winiary neighbourhoods
- Strengthened cooperation between residents, animators, and local institutions
- Creation of small neighbourhood groups supporting social resilience
- Increased inclusion of migrants and newly arrived residents

Pearls 2025

Płock

Mariusz Pogonowski ·
President of Teatr Per Se
Association

The **Cultural Pearls initiative** is above all a wonderful idea: building social resilience, integrating neighbours, turning towards the human being who lives next to us are all so important nowadays. It resonated very well among Płock citizens and especially the Borowiczki neighbourhood residents. No one questioned this idea – everyone was open to it and expressed their approval.

The title of the Baltic Cultural Pearl 2025 awarded to Płock commits us to action and defines us as those who are aware and responsible.

One of culminating points of the Płock Culture and Resilience Action Plan was the stageplay “**The Wedding in Borowiczki**” held on 20 September 2025 in the open-air concert shell.

It was a challenging project as it was not easy at first to encourage people to go on stage and play. We put an announcement online in search for actors, contacted a theatre group operating at a school, and invited Płock citizens by word of mouth through members of the residents’ council and via Radio Płock. The

Photo: **City Hall Płock**





response was not very large due to lack of time or fear of going on stage. However, four women from the University of the Third Age, Wiesław Chrobot - a well-known organiser of the Wheelchair Tennis Tournament in Płock, and Mariusz Olenderek - head of the fire brigade in Borowiczki gave it a yes. With this we went ahead with the project. The cast was largely made up of people I work with in the **Teatr Per Se Association**, and we were supported by the Scouting Song and Dance Ensemble “**Children of Płock**” (vocalists and costumes).

What was absolutely fascinating and valuable was that so many people and institutions joined forces in supporting us. Ms Elżbieta Kusy, headmistress of Primary School No. 20 saved us during the first dress rehearsal when rain made it impossible for us to act in the open and she provided support throughout. The lighting and sound equipment were borrowed thanks to the kindness of the **Płock Centre for Culture and Art**, which also supported us with transport.

Photo: **City Hall Płock**

Pearls 2025

The space of the concert shell for the performance and the later social gathering was provided by Cukrownia Borowiczki.

District councillors, together with several residents, arranged for banquet benches and tables from a company, set them up, and dismantled them after the event.

Firefighters repainted the unused for a longer time concert shell on a voluntary basis as community work.

Promotion was provided in the form of two radio broadcasts, publications on social media portals, and word-of-mouth invitations.

Education and Artistic Association “**OTO JA**” responsible for implementation of another part of the Płock CuReAP was also involved.

And finally, me together with Krzysztof Pesta organised the technical operation of the equipment.

Prior to the official performance we had five rehearsals held at **Płock Art and Culture Centre POKiS** during which there was a lot of emotion and genuine enjoyment.

The Baltic Cultural Pearls project partners witnessed one of them sharing in the positive energy and enthusiasm. The performance itself was not prepared like the productions I usually direct as the actors did not fully know their lines and supported themselves with notes. And while preparing the actors I gave three essential instructions:

- The most important thing is that the audience understands the story;
- Mistakes don't matter and must not be worried about – nothing ruins a performance more than an actor suffering on stage;
- It is important that we enjoy ourselves, because joy is contagious.

The final performance turned out to be a big success and true source of joy for everybody involved, not to mention the attendees – about 500 people.

The event related to the old traditions started with Wiesław Chrobot and Mariusz Olenderek telling the story of Borowiczki in an engaging

way (Wiesław additionally played the role of the matchmaker in the wedding).

It consisted of:

- A performance based on the pastoral work of Kazimierz Brodziński – “Wiesław”;
- Traditional dance – communal dancing led by ethnographer and traditional dance expert Piotr Zgorzelski (Academy of Traditional Dance) lasting for 70 minutes;
- Refreshments from the wedding couple from the play – 200 portions of pea soup and 12 kg of roasted ham with rustic bread;
- Thanks and the naming of the idea of **social resilience**;
- A “request concert” – music played according to requests from the audience.

The initiative was received with great enthusiasm. We received a great many congratulations and I was requested to organise more such events.

Pearls 2025

Krzysztof Pesta, responsible among other things for the music, noticed that “these people simply wanted to meet – they were happy and just lacked a pretext”.

One of the women from the residents' council ran up to me at the end of the event, hugged and kissed me, and asked whether I would organise another event like this for them.

I replied in encouragement: “An event like this costs nothing – you can organise it yourselves, and if you don't have sound equipment, I'll lend you mine.”

So, summing up, was the success in Borowiczki really a spectacular effect, or did we simply find a community that was already waiting for this? Either way, the seed is sprouting wildly in Borowiczki – and that is a good thing. Soon it will become an exemplary, integrated neighbourhood whose practice can inspire other districts.

The idea of social resilience is a clearly defined path through which our lives will not only become fuller, but also safer.

Different organisations and individuals had an opportunity to join forces to act on a voluntary basis, using their own resources, creating local events and thus doing something good for the community and together with this community. The greatest value and success in this were **getting to know your neighbour and thus making the community stronger.**

And this is not the end. The association is currently developing a project for 2026, whose aim will be to organise neighbourhood meetings in which residents participate both as performers and as organisers. •



Photo: Krzysztof Wiśniewski

Pearls 2025

Płock

Activity highlights

- **NEIGHBOURHOOD Mural painting**

In Borowiczki, residents created a mural with the inscription SĄSIEDZTWO (NEIGHBOURHOOD) on the fence of Primary School No. 20, working together with animators. The evening concluded with a bonfire and grilling sausages. The final event was a performance based on Kazimierz Brodziński's idyll "Wiesław" in the form of a wedding at the former sugar factory site. The Residents' Council and local Fire Brigade refreshed and painted the concert shell. After the performance, participants enjoyed a dance party led by ethnographer Piotr Zgorzelski. The event attracted approximately 500 participants.
- **Winiary Neighbours' Historical Walk**

In Winiary, a Neighbours' Historical Walk was organised with Płock actors in historical characters, ending with a bonfire. Residents created and installed a "greeter" sign reading WINIARY on green space by the main roundabout. The idea inspired Borowiczki residents to plan something similar for next year.
- **Second Cultural Pearls Network Conference**

The second Cultural Pearls Network Conference was held in Płock from 17–19 September 2025. It united BSR Cultural Pearl cities, stakeholders and Ukrainian partners from the RESCOM platform to exchange knowledge and showcase local projects. Płock also showcased its own Action Plan activities through study visits across the city.

Pearls 2025

Alytus District

Voices of Dzūkija, one song of belonging

Country: **Lithuania**

Population: **26,000**



CuReAP – Culture and Resilience Action Plan

Alytus District's CuReAP focuses on building a stronger and more united community by connecting residents through music, art, and shared cultural experiences. The plan promotes inclusion and emotional wellbeing through collective creativity, intergenerational exchange, and local heritage. The community choir, Eldership Festivals, and art initiatives strengthen the bonds between villages and foster cooperation across the district. These cultural activities aim to make residents feel proud of their roots and engaged in shaping the district's future.

Main challenges

- Social exclusion and fragmentation between rural communities
- Limited cultural participation and mobility in remote villages
- Ageing population and declining engagement of young people
- Need to strengthen shared identity across 11 elderships

Solutions

- Establishment of a community choir performing traditional Dzūkija songs
- Organisation of Eldership Community Festivals uniting villages across the district
- Declaration of 2025 as the Year of Dzūkija Songs
- Strengthened collaboration between residents, artists, and local organisations
- Renewed pride in local culture and traditions

Alytus District

Andre Zeneviciene -
Head of Finance and
Investment Department of
Alytus District Municipality
Administration

The project “Cultural Pearls”, which was actively launched in April 2025, brought together the entire community of the Alytus district. Activities took place throughout the territory of the Alytus district municipality. Educational activities, lectures for the Year of Song, educational training, and choir rehearsals brought together various groups of Alytus district residents – community organisations, public institutions, high school students, library readers, and individual residents living in remote villages.

Representatives of various institutions and associations joined in the choir activities, which became the basis for the formation of a **stronger and closer community**. The participants emphasised the importance of community, mutual support, and social connection. Project participant Danutė shared:

“By participating in this project, I felt a sense of harmony and friendship – I got to know many of my peers, we shared our hobbies, and we taught each other new activities.”

Photo: **Misko Mote**





Throughout the entire period – from spring until the final joint event on September 6 – there was active communication during rehearsals and events, which significantly contributed to reducing social exclusion. The **dialogue between different generations** became particularly important. Participants noted that young people were actively involved in activities, accepted the experience passed on by their elders, and introduced them to contemporary activities. According to participant Danutė, “[by expressing our life problems, we become stronger and more resilient to life’s adversities.](#)”

During the project, the emotional and physical well-being of the participants improved significantly. The participants actively engaged in local cultural life, promoted calendar holidays, and continued the activities they had started. Participant Ina said:

“[It was very enjoyable and emotional to sing in a choir. Lithuanian folk songs are very beautiful, and singing them at a joint celebration made me feel even more love for](#)

[Lithuania and all of humanity. It strengthened me, encouraged me, and even improved my health.](#)” The participant also noted that she continues to sing folk songs even after the project has ended, which confirms the continuity and long-term impact of the project.

The social and cultural significance of the project was also confirmed by the insights of an expert from the Dzūkija (Dainava) Ethnic Culture Preservation Council. During the project, she provided consultations and expert assistance in order to preserve and promote ethnic culture. The expert pointed out that many residents, especially in rural areas, experience social isolation, and the large distances between municipalities encourage social alienation. According to her, this project promoted unity and active participation of residents in joint events, **strengthening mutual trust within the community**. By participating in the project activities, the residents of the municipality got to know each other better and shared their life, creative, and cultural experiences.

Pearls 2025

The expert also emphasised that preparing and rehearsing the folk song choir programme provided an excellent opportunity to gain a **deeper understanding of the culture of the Dzūkija ethnographic region** and to experience a positive emotional and psychological state while singing in a large group of people. The final event—a performance by the municipal folk choir—was marked by joyful elation and a strong sense of community.

The participants were delighted to have the opportunity to wear national costumes and feel like full members of the project and the entire community. During the events and activities, communication between different communities and generations became particularly active, new connections were established, and initiatives for active cooperation between local residents, artists, craftsmen, cultural organisations, and the municipality emerged.

The final event of the project, held on September 6, was a separate event dedicated to presenting the results of the project activities. The event was successfully implemented, combining culinary heritage, crafts and traditions characteristic of the Dzūkija region, and contemporary forms of cultural presentation. •

Photo: **Lukas Baltuškonis**



Pearls 2025

Alytus District

Activity highlights

- **Crafts and Music Festival**

The year of Lithuanian Folk Songs had its closing celebration on September 6 with the Crafts and Music Festival. The communities of Šilaičiai, Mažoji sodybėlė, Kaimynai, and Venciūniškiai, as well as local libraries and craftspeople all contributed to the festival. Folk collectives and dance groups performed traditional music and dances. The celebration underscored the enduring power of Lithuanian folk culture in fostering community cohesion and cultural pride.
- **Double celebration in Nemunaitis**

The town of Nemunaitis hosted a double celebration on June 7 celebrating both the 400th anniversary of the parish and the awarding of the 2025 title of BSR Cultural Pearl for the Alytus District Municipality. Following a Holy Mass, a festive procession led by the Land Forces Orchestra made its way from the church to the town square, where the BSR Cultural Pearl 2025 award ceremony took place.
- **Cultural activities with local communities**

Participants joined across multiple events such as baking Dzūkija-style potato pancakes, mandala-making, dance lessons, weaving, pie-baking, rap music, clay modelling, and acting. A checkers tournament fostered intergenerational teamwork, while a youth-requested pumpkin festival featured creative carving. The activities were especially attentive to harnessing the cultural value of local traditions.

Pearls 2025

Kaskinen - Kaskö

**Our island city,
lively again**

Country: **Finland**

Population: **1,200**



Photo: **Mårten Sjöblom**

CuReAP – Culture and Resilience Action Plan

Kaskinen-Kaskö's CuReAP focuses on restoring faith in the future through creativity, heritage, and shared action. The city's many artists, craftsmen, and cultural organisations are joining forces to revitalise Kaskinen-Kaskö, reminding residents of their roots and resilience. The plan encourages all citizens to contribute to the renewal of their town, showing that collective effort can overcome challenges and inspire new optimism. By strengthening cultural life, Kaskinen-Kaskö attracts new residents, boosts the local economy, and builds a solid foundation for sustainable development.

Main challenges

- Loss of local services and declining job opportunities
- Closure of the railway line and weakening trust in the future
- Outmigration of young people seeking prospects elsewhere
- Need to strengthen local cooperation and community spirit

Solutions

- Revitalisation of the historic city centre and restoration of cultural heritage buildings
- Strengthened cooperation among artists, craftsmen, musicians, and volunteers
- Increased involvement of residents in cultural and community activities
- Renewed confidence and pride in Kaskinen-Kaskö's identity
- Preparation for the city's 240th anniversary celebration in 2025
- Concrete community-building initiatives such as the Wooden House Fair
- The community-produced Music Video

Pearls 2025

Kaskinen - Kaskö

Jonas Söderlund · Head of
Culture and Library Services,
City of Kaskinen-Kaskö

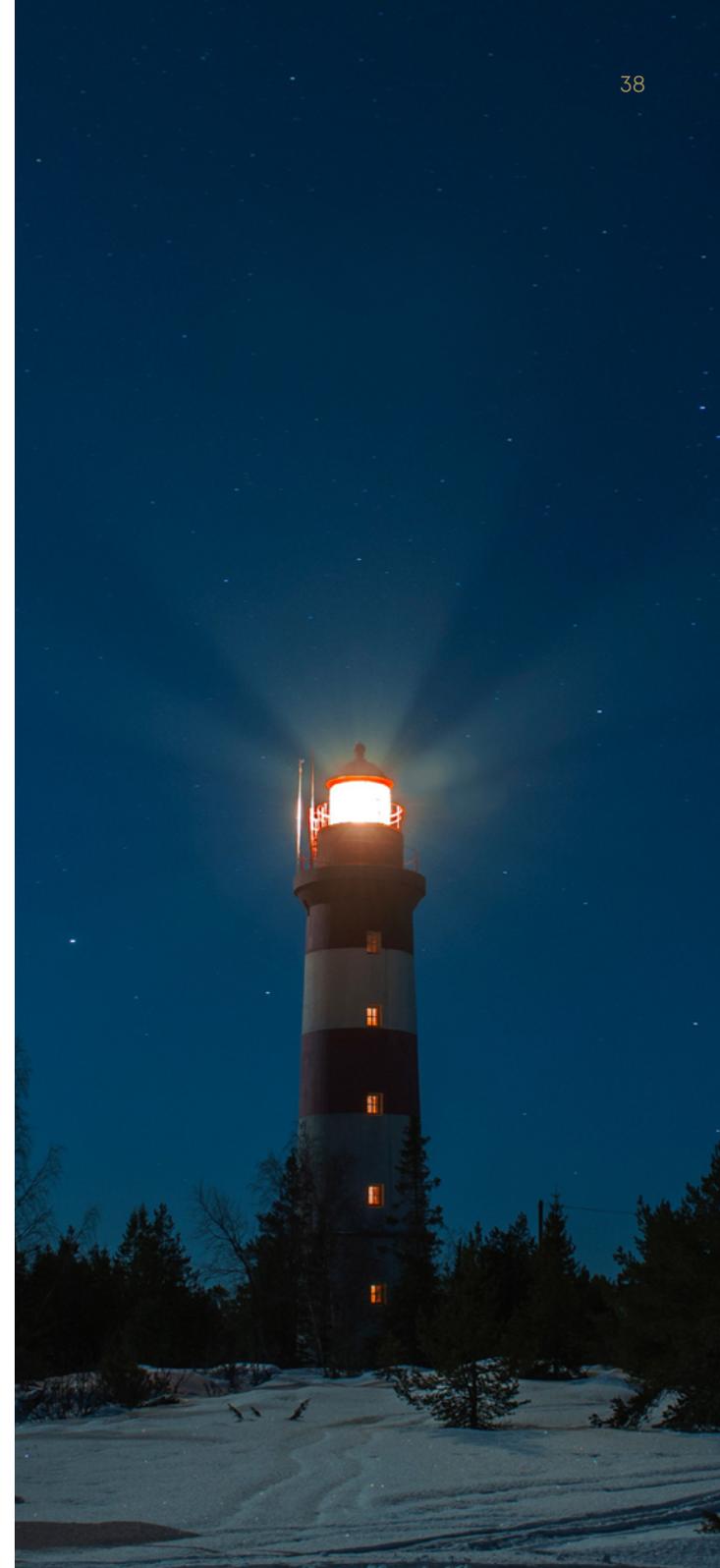
“It feels like the town is alive again.”

The work aimed to strengthen community resilience, increase hope for the future, and build pride in Kaskinen-Kaskö's identity and development. The Baltic Sea Cultural Pearl title provided visibility and credibility, but above all a shared goal that united residents around **culture as a force for wellbeing and renewal**. This was particularly meaningful during the year when the city celebrated its 240th anniversary, creating a natural link between history and the future.

Throughout the year, several activities reflected both local heritage and strong community engagement. A public festival in the town square in June formed part of the 240-year celebrations, followed by a **wooden house fair** in August highlighting the built cultural environment.

In addition, **the music video "Meren Valo - Havets Ljus"** was created as an artistic expression of the town's identity. A key success was the strong local participation and intergenerational involvement. The experience

Photo: **Mårten Sjöblom**





clearly showed that co-creation with residents and low-threshold events are essential for achieving lasting impact.

The organising team summarised the year by saying, “the Cultural Pearl year showed us how much strength and creativity already exists in our small community when people are given space to come together.” This sense of renewal was also echoed by participants, one of whom remarked, “It feels like the town is alive again.”

Overall, the year increased community pride, visibility, and trust in culture-led development. The anniversary celebrations connected Kaskinen-Kaskö’s history with its future, and this work will continue by supporting resident-led cultural initiatives, building annual traditions from the events, and keeping culture at the heart of Kaskinen-Kaskö’s future development. •

Photo: **Tanja Rohula**

Pearls 2025

Kaskinen - Kaskö

Activity highlights

- **Wooden House Fair**
On 17 August 2025, Kaskinen-Kaskö hosted its first Wooden House Fair, celebrating the town's cultural heritage as part of its BSR Cultural Pearl 2025 CuReAP initiative. Emerging from the "Fix Kaskinen" initiative, the fair showcased 15 restored wooden houses, attracting around 500 visitors despite weather challenges. Residents actively participated, sharing renovation stories and fostering community pride. The event's success led to plans for an annual tradition and inspiration for a model for cities in the region more broadly.
- **Music video "Meren Valo – Havets Ljus"**
The entirely new song - with the title meaning "Light of the Sea" - was produced using local aerial footage, event footage and material from the Sea Rescue Unit. It features some of Finland's top artists with Kaskinen-Kaskö-born Abela as the vocalist. The lyrics reflect the people of the region—both those who still live there and those who have moved away—yet the love for Kaskinen-Kaskö has always remained. The project aimed to shift the perception of locals about their home city and put it back on the map.
- **Award ceremony and performance**
On 16 June 2025, Kaskinen-Kaskö celebrated its official awarding as a Baltic Sea Region Cultural Pearl with a lively festival in the town square. The event, organised with the Port of Kaskinen, featured the formal presentation of the title, performance by Krista Siegfriids & Band, and a speech by Minister for European Affairs and Ownership Steering Joakim Strand.

2025 Events

Photo: Sebastian Adamkiewicz



Online events 2025

Development Phase Webinars

The **Development Phase** provides candidate cities with expertise and insights while developing their Culture and Resilience Action Plans (CuReAPs). This improves the quality of their plans and builds capacity among **all candidates**, not only those ultimately selected by the jury for the Cultural Pearls title.



- **Candidates**
- **Candidates & Public**

Online events 2025

Learning Session #1 Participatory methods

With **Anne Tortzen** · PhD in Co-creation in Municipal Frameworks

The **Participatory Methods** Learning Session, held on January 15, 2025, and led by PhD Anne Tortzen, explored the principles and value of participatory methods and co-creation in municipal contexts.

The webinar sought to shed light on **how participatory methods and co-creation can create value, and what it takes to succeed**. It aimed to give an understanding and a language for discussing the challenges and nuances involved in working with participatory methods from a municipality perspective. Participants gained an understanding of the role municipal employees can play in participatory facilitated processes, as well as the mindset it requires.

Anne Tortzen is an expert in citizen engagement and co-creation. She wrote her PhD about co-creation in Danish municipalities and has written multiple books about the topic. She has more than 20 years of experience with communication, engagement, and local

democracy, where she also has worked as a process consultant. She is the founder and director of the Center for Citizen Dialogue. •



Online events 2025

Learning Session #2 Collaboration between CCS and Municipalities

With **Ieva Zemīte** - Expert
in Creative Industries and
Cultural Entrepreneurship

It takes two to tango

The second Learning Session webinar which took place on 4 February 2025 sought out to explore how cultural anchors and creative industries can build pride, cohesion, and engagement in small cities. Led by Ieva Zemīte, an expert in creative industries and cultural entrepreneurship, the session highlighted how **creativity serves as a catalyst for sustainable development and fosters diversity in communities.**

Ieva Zemīte specialises in the intersection of culture and economics, focusing on how creative industries drive sustainable development in small cities and beyond. She has led research and projects that demonstrate the role of creativity in boosting local economies and fostering innovation.

As co-owner of Glass Point, a glass art studio, Ieva applies her expertise to support creative talent and entrepreneurship, bridging theory and practice. •



Online events 2025

Learning Session #3 Tools and Approaches for Co-Creation

With **Monika Arczyńska** -
Co-founder of A2P2,
specialist in architecture
and urban planning with
a focus on participatory
approaches

Engaging Communities

On 4 June 2025, Monika Arczyńska, Co-founder of A2P2 and specialist in participatory architecture and urban planning, delivered a Learning Session presentation on revitalising the Ząbkowice district in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland. Once renowned for its glassworks and world-class designs, the district now faces neglect and requires urban regeneration. The **Local Action Plan**, co-created with the local community, artists, researchers, and businesses, integrates ideas centred on the district's glass heritage.

Monika Arczyńska is a co-founder of A2P2 – consulting and design company, providing services in participatory design of districts and public spaces in major Polish cities, masterplanning and consultancy in pre-planning stage of public buildings. Arczyńska, is also an adjunct professor at Gdansk University of Technology and former architect at Heneghan Peng Architects, and shared insights from her work on **participatory**

design in public spaces and sustainable housing. Her presentation highlighted how collaborative processes can drive meaningful urban regeneration, blending cultural heritage with community-driven innovation. •



Online events 2025

Learning Session #4 Sustainable Cultural Projects

With **Mieke Renders** ·
Managing Director of Trans
Europe Halles

Making it last: Sustainable Cultural Projects, Engaged Networks

The 4th Learning Session, held on September 3, 2025, focused on strategies for long-term sustainability in cultural projects and the effective use of networks.

Led by Mieke Renders, Managing Director of Trans Europe Halles, the session drew on the network's 40 years of experience in cultural management. With a background in cultural management across Europe and the US, Mieke Renders highlights strategies for fostering independence, sustainability, and proactive collaboration among cultural operators.

Participants learned about the importance of **engaged networking and regeneration** in sustaining cultural initiatives over time. Renders emphasised the need for proactive collaboration, highlighting how networks like Trans Europe Halles have successfully supported cultural revival through shared resources, knowledge exchange, and long-term partnerships. The session also

addressed practical strategies for ensuring that cultural projects remain viable, such as diversifying funding sources, building local and international alliances, and fostering community ownership. •



Online events 2025

Learning Session #5 New Forms of Collaboration

With **Jorma Sarv** · Strategy Consultant at Creativity Lab (Estonia)

Shaping CCI through Strategic Support and Cross-Sector Synergies

The fifth Learning Session, and the fourth CuReAP Development Phase Webinar, held on September 24, 2025, explored new forms of collaboration in shaping Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) through strategic support and cross-sector synergies. Led by Jorma Sarv, Strategy Consultant at Creativity Lab, the session highlighted **the regional role of CCI** and examined public sector subsidies, support mechanisms, and conditions fostering CCI growth.

Participants learned about the importance of treating CCI as both an **entrepreneurial sector** and a **unique cultural asset**, balancing standard business support with tailored measures to maximise its societal and economic impact. The discussion emphasised cross-sector collaboration, particularly with tourism, education, and community services, to amplify CCI's value.

The session dived into the relevance and impact of cross-sector synergies. Questions such as “To what extent should CCI be treated like any other part of the local entrepreneurial landscape?” and “When should we expect and provide additional value and impact?” guided the discussion. •



Network events

Helsingborg

Network Conference

3-5 March 2025

Photo: Lotta Wittinger



Network events

Network Conference Helsingborg

Engaged communities – Resilient cities

The [first Cultural Pearls Network Conference](#) took place in **Helsingborg, Sweden** from 3–5 March 2025. It brought together the Cultural Pearl cities of 2024 and 2025 along with other stakeholders to exchange knowledge and develop practical methods for strengthening community resilience through culture.

This event also marked the first joint gathering of the BSR Cultural Pearls and **RESCOM (Resilient Communities Learning Platform)** initiatives. Through the RESCOM project, the conference extended beyond the Baltic Sea Region to welcome partners from **Ukraine** and **Moldova**.



Network events

The event's theme, "[From Case to Method](#)", highlighted the focus on transforming successful examples from Cultural Pearl cities into adaptable frameworks that other cities can implement. Through learning labs, study visits, and roundtable discussions, participants worked collaboratively to refine and scale proven approaches for building resilient communities and adapting them to local contexts.

All participants of the Cultural Pearls Network conference took part in a hands-on workshop trying to convert cases and practices on how to engage local communities using the power of culture into transferrable methods that can be used by any organisation or city administration. The workshop enabled the **exchange of views and experiences from all around the Baltic Sea Region as well as Ukraine and Moldova.**

As one of the Cultural Pearls 2025, Helsingborg showcased its Culture and Resilience Action Plan through guided study visits, offering insights into how the city integrates culture into its resilience strategy. The conference was held at key cultural venues, including Helsingborg's Konserthuset, Stadsteater, and the historic Brandstationen Gåsebäck.

To open the minds for new perspectives for those present, two interesting keynote speeches were given: **Agata Bisping**, future strategist who builds solutions based on futures thinking and radical imagination, and **Niels Righolt**, CEO of the Danish Centre for Arts & Interculture. •



Network events

Plock

Network Conference
17–19 September 2025

Photo: **Sebastian Adamkiewicz**



Network events

Network Conference Płock

Engage and Activate

The city of **Płock, Poland** – one of the Cultural Pearls 2025 – hosted a [vibrant international conference on culture-driven social resilience](#) from 17 to 19 September 2025.

The event brought together former and current BSR Cultural Pearl cities, 2026 candidate cities, and stakeholders from the sister project **Resilient Communities Learning Platform (RESCOM)**. Ukrainian stakeholders joined from

Khmelnyskyi, Okhtyrka, Nova Kakhovka, and **Zhovkva**, adding perspectives from communities facing war.

The second **RESCOM Learning Lab** provided a platform for discussions between Baltic Sea Region and Ukrainian actors on key topics such as activation and engagement, the role of libraries, and youth inclusion. Participants shared practical cases from their hometowns,



Photo: Sebastian Adamkiewicz

Network events

many linked to the implementation of their Culture and Resilience Action Plans (CuReAPs).

Day two featured a [keynote](#) on urban resilience by **Aldo Vargas Tetmajer** (Polish National URBACT Point), who emphasised the importance of civic engagement for building inclusive and resilient cities.

The conference concluded with a **RESCOM session** featuring Ukrainian participants, entitled [Culture under Attack – Reflections from Ukraine](#). They provided insights on the role of culture and community under the conditions of war, illustrating how cultural actors sustain communities, preserve identity, and even save lives amidst devastation.

Delegates also explored Płock's Culture and Resilience Action Plan (CuReAP) in action through study visits across the city. Highlights included community theatre and heritage projects, demonstrating how cultural initiatives foster belonging and togetherness. •

Photo: **Sebastian Adamkiewicz**



C4R Forum

Varde

Culture for Resilience Forum
26-27 November 2025

Photo: Ewa Strozniak



C4R Forum

Culture for Resilience Forum 2025

From 26–27 November the [Culture for Resilience Forum 2025](#) took place in **Varde, Denmark**, bringing together municipalities, cultural leaders, researchers, and practitioners from across the Baltic Sea Region to exchange knowledge on how culture strengthens social resilience in smaller and medium-sized cities.

The forum featured a remarkable group of speakers and facilitators, including the

Director of Placemaking Europe **Ramon Marrades**, social and cultural planner **Jonas Büchel**, art project manager and the developer of the contemporary art space Kurtuve in Valmiera **Liene Jakobson**, expert in arts-based innovations **Krista Petäjäjärvi** as well as the regional director of the Danish Cultural Institute **Anna Enemark** and more.



Photo: **Ewa Strozniak**

C4R Forum

Inese Suija-Markova, the deputy mayor of the Cēsis municipality in Latvia, set the scene by sharing a compelling example of how investing in culture helped Cēsis overcome an economic crisis and become an attractive place to live:

“Small towns can shine if they invest in culture. Culture is as essential as roads. We must redefine what counts as infrastructure. A festival must be seen as an investment in resilience,” stated Inese Suija-Markova.

Felix Schartner Gierlta, the BSR Cultural Pearls project coordinator from the project lead partner, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, reflected on the project’s achievements in his keynote:

“Over the past two and a half years, we have developed a shared narrative, built a strong network, received 40 applications from towns and cities across the Baltic Sea Region, and awarded the Cultural Pearls title to 14 of them. This is only the beginning,” he said.

Photo: **Ewa Strozniak**



C4R Forum

Although the forum marked the formal end of the three-year project, forum participants emphasised that the continuation of BSR Cultural Pearls title. Municipalities, partners, and experts across the region are shaping plans to ensure the methodology, tools and peer network continue to support towns and cities **that recognise culture as key to their future resilience.**

The initiative will certainly remain strong through 2026, as four towns and cities—**Glücksburg** (GER), **Kristinestad-Kristiinankaupunki** (FIN), **Krosno** (POL) and **Schleswig** (GER)—will carry on their path toward strengthening social resilience through culture as BSR Cultural Pearls 2026. Their award ceremony was celebrated within the framing of the Culture for Resilience Forum.

The forum was organised by the **Danish Cultural Institute in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, Varde Library and GoTo Denmark** in cooperation with the project consortium and Cultural Pearls.

In collaboration with the **Resilient Communities Learning Platform (RESCOM)**, the forum also welcomed stakeholders from Sweden and Ukraine to enrich the dialogue. •

Photo: Ewa Strozniak



External events

Fehmarnbelt Days 2025

From June 14 to 16, 2025, the Fehmarnbelt Days took place in **Lübeck, Germany**. At the citizens' festival on June 14 and 15, the BSR Cultural Pearls project was represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Areas, European Affairs and Consumer Protection (MLLEV) of Land Schleswig-Holstein. In addition to companies, associations, and sports clubs, numerous other initiatives presented themselves. Visitors enjoyed a rich program of live music, panel discussions, and interactive workshops. Under perfect weather conditions, the BSR Cultural Pearls project also offered a diverse range of cultural activities and participatory experiences.

Macro-Regional & Sea Basin Strategies Day

On 25 September, 2025, the BSR Cultural Pearls project had the pleasure of hosting a **strategic roundtable** during the Macro-Regional & Sea Basin Strategies Days in **Brussels, Belgium**, which brings together stakeholders from all eight strategies (Alpine, Danube, Adriatic-Ionian, Baltic Sea, Atlantic, Western Mediterranean, Black Sea and Greater North Sea), political representatives, and cultural actors.

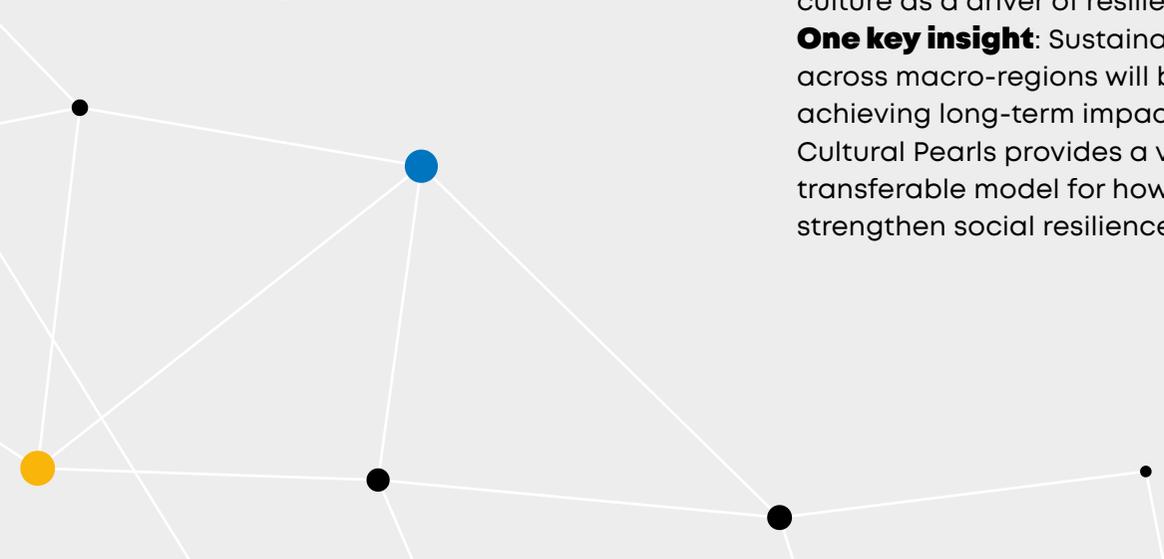
Participants shared valuable experiences and inspiring ideas – from project clustering and cross-regional cooperation to leveraging culture as a driver of resilience and inclusion. **One key insight:** Sustainable collaboration across macro-regions will be essential to achieving long-term impact and the BSR Cultural Pearls provides a valuable and transferable model for how culture can strengthen social resilience.

European Week of Regions and Cities

The BSR Cultural Pearls project was granted the great opportunity of presenting its work at the European Week of Regions and Cities from October 13-15, 2025 in **Brussels, Belgium**.

The stand at the event's fair first and foremost featured the towns and municipalities across the Baltic Sea Region awarded the BSR Cultural Pearls title and their good practices in building social resilience through culture.

The event established a crossroad for diverse exchange, bringing policymakers, experts, and local leaders from across Europe together. This gave the opportunity to make the project and Cultural Pearls' actions wider known on a European level, while also reflecting the successful efforts of the last years when being recognised by different actors.



External events

EUSBSR Annual Forum 2025

At the EUSBSR Annual Forum 2025 in **Sopot, Poland, Policy Area Culture and Policy Area Secure** joined forces to highlight how community cohesion, trust and civic engagement form the “soft core” of “hard security” in building resilient societies.

On October 30, 2025, the session “**The Soft Core of Hard Security: Community Cohesion and Agency in Times of Insecurity**” took place and particularly explored how social trust, community cohesion and civic engagement form the foundation of resilient societies.

By highlighting initiatives that strengthen togetherness, mental wellbeing and democratic participation, the session underscored that societal security begins with empowered and connected communities.

Dialogue on Culture, Social Resilience and Regional Cooperation

The event ‘**A Dialogue on Culture, Social Resilience and Regional Cooperation**’, held on 3 December 2025 at the **Hanse-Office in Brussels**, brought together regional and local stakeholders, particularly from the **BSSSC network**, to explore the role of culture in strengthening community resilience.

In this follow-up event to the strategic roundtable hosted during the Macro-regional and Sea Basin Strategies Days in September, **Felix Schartner Giertta**, lead partner of the project at the Council of the Baltic Sea States, presented insights from three years of the BSR Cultural Pearls initiative, complemented by evaluation findings from **KEA European Affairs** that underscored its added value.



Upcoming

Photo: Kasper Dalkarl



Upcoming

2026 Cultural Pearls title

Four new Cultural Pearls were celebrated with an award ceremony at the Culture for Resilience Forum 2025 — **Glücksburg** (Germany), **Kristinestad - Kristiinankaupunki** (Finland), **Krosno** (Poland) and **Schleswig** (Germany). The four title holders of 2026 were selected from a cohort of 11 highly motivated candidates by a diverse international jury of experts in social resilience, urban planning, arts, and culture, as well as representatives from pan-Baltic and European organisations and networks.

Their **Culture and Resilience Action Plans (CuReAPs)** address diverse local challenges: Schleswig targets urban vacancy and social fragmentation, Kristinestad - Kristiinankaupunki aims to integrate the Cittaslow concept, Krosno will address demographic shifts and social integration, and Glücksburg leverages seasonal tourism and cultural growth. Culture serves as a unifying force through initiatives like thematic walks, festivals, and creative workshops. Supported by the Cultural Pearls Network, these cities will benefit from national contacts, expert guidance, and peer exchange platforms.



- Glücksburg, Germany
- Kristinestad - Kristiinankaupunki, Finland
- Krosno, Poland
- Schleswig, Germany

Upcoming

Network Event Series 2026

**#1
Kick-off
Event**

JANUARY

**#2
Evaluation
and the Self-
Assessment Tool**

FEBRUARY

**#3
Cross-
departmental
collaboration**

MARCH

**#4
CuReAP
Insights**

MAY

**#5
Participatory
Methods**

SEPTEMBER

**#6
Culture and
Creative Sector
Collaboration**

OCTOBER

**CUREAP
DEADLINE
16.10.2026**

Ready to become a Pearl?

The call for Cultural Pearls 2027 opens in March.

The Cultural Pearl Title is a sign of recognition for small and medium-sized municipalities in the Baltic Sea Region and an accelerator for developing socially resilient communities by harnessing the power of culture.

The goal for any city applying for the title is to create and implement an Action Plan leading to better functioning, healthier neighbourhoods where co-creation, cooperation and involvement of different stakeholders creates mutual trust, civic engagement and better understanding between decision-makers and citizens.

Learn more: culturalpearls.eu



Practical information

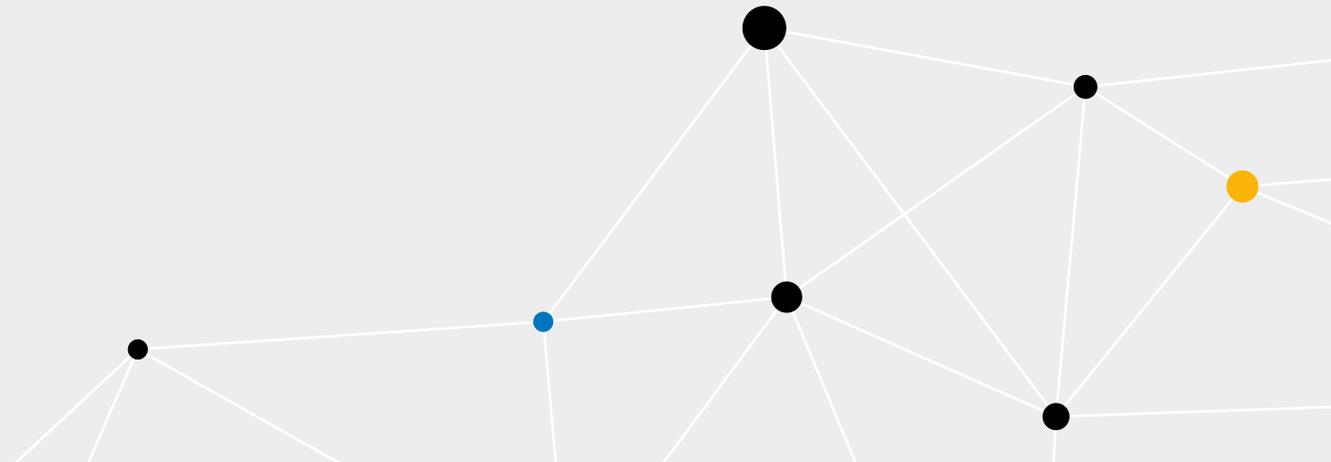
Cultural Pearls Network

At the end of 2025 the BSR Cultural Pearls project, co-funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme, was finalised.

The initiative continues in the form of the **Cultural Pearls Network**, consisting of Pearl titleholders, previous partners and other supporting stakeholders.

The network is led by the **Executive Board** with support of the **Secretariat** and the **National Contact Points**.

You can find their contact details in the following pages.



Practical information

Executive Board

- Conducts the work of the Network
- Oversees the yearly Call
- Develops events, webinars and new initiatives

Secretariat

Can assist with

- Communications & promotion
- Monitoring of CuReAP implementation
- Coordinating events
- General info & administrative questions

- **Council of the Baltic Sea States**
- **Regional Council of Ostrobothnia**
- **Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture**
- **Danish Cultural Institute**
- **Vidzeme Planning Region**
- **Baltic Sea Cultural Centre, Gdansk**
- **Ministry of European Affairs, Schleswig-Holstein**
- **ARS BALTICA**

**Ministry of European Affairs,
Schleswig-Holstein**

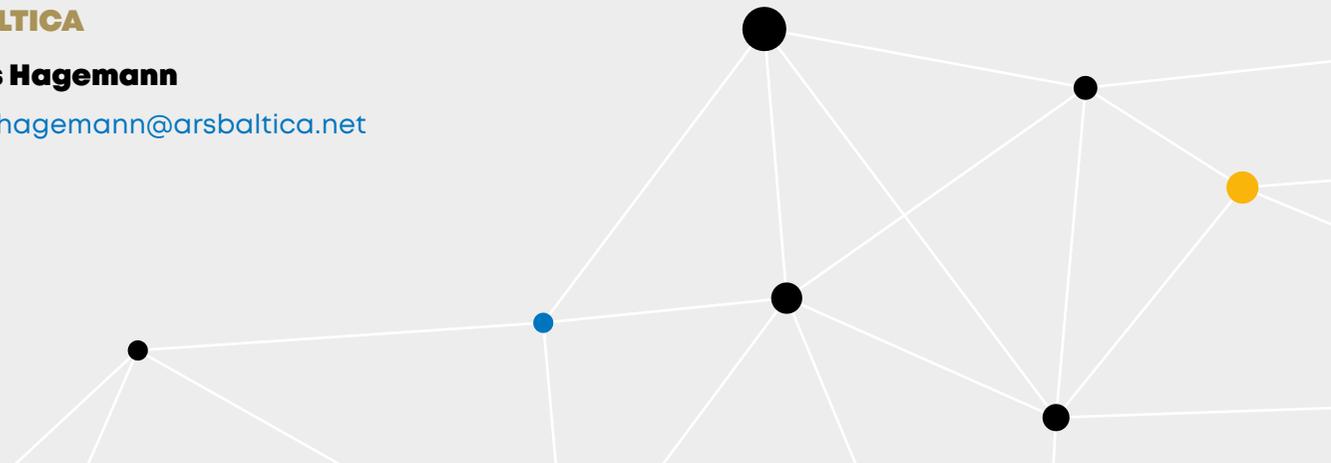
Lena Backes

[lena.backes@mllev.landsh.de](mailto:lana.backes@mllev.landsh.de)

ARS BALTICA

Marcus Hagemann

marcus.hagemann@arsbaltica.net



Practical information

National Contact Points

Can assist with

- Guidance on implementation of CuReAP
- National insights
- Supporting publication on the C4R Platform
- Connecting with experts and other stakeholders

Finland

Regional Council of Ostrobothnia

Tarja Hautamäki & Pia Blomström

tarja.hautamaki@obotnia.fi
pia.blomstrom@obotnia.fi

Poland

Baltic Sea Cultural Centre

Krysia Wróblewska & Kasia Szewciow

krysia.wroblewska@icloud.com
katarzyna.szewciow@nck.org.pl

Germany

Heinrich-Böll Foundation Schleswig-Holstein

Fynn-Ole Eisenhuth & Lea Lükemeier

eisenhuth@boell-sh.de
luekemeier@boell-sh.de

Latvia

Vidzeme Planning Region

Lelde Ābele

lelde.abele@vidzeme.lv

Estonia

Creative Estonia

Kersti Kilg & Eva Leemet & Tiiu Allikmäe

kersti@looveesti.ee
eva@looveesti.ee
tiiu@looveesti.ee

Lithuania

Alytus City Municipality

Kristina Daugeleviciene

kristina.daugeleviciene@alytus.lt

Denmark

EUROPE DIRECT Syddanmark

Marie Feddersen

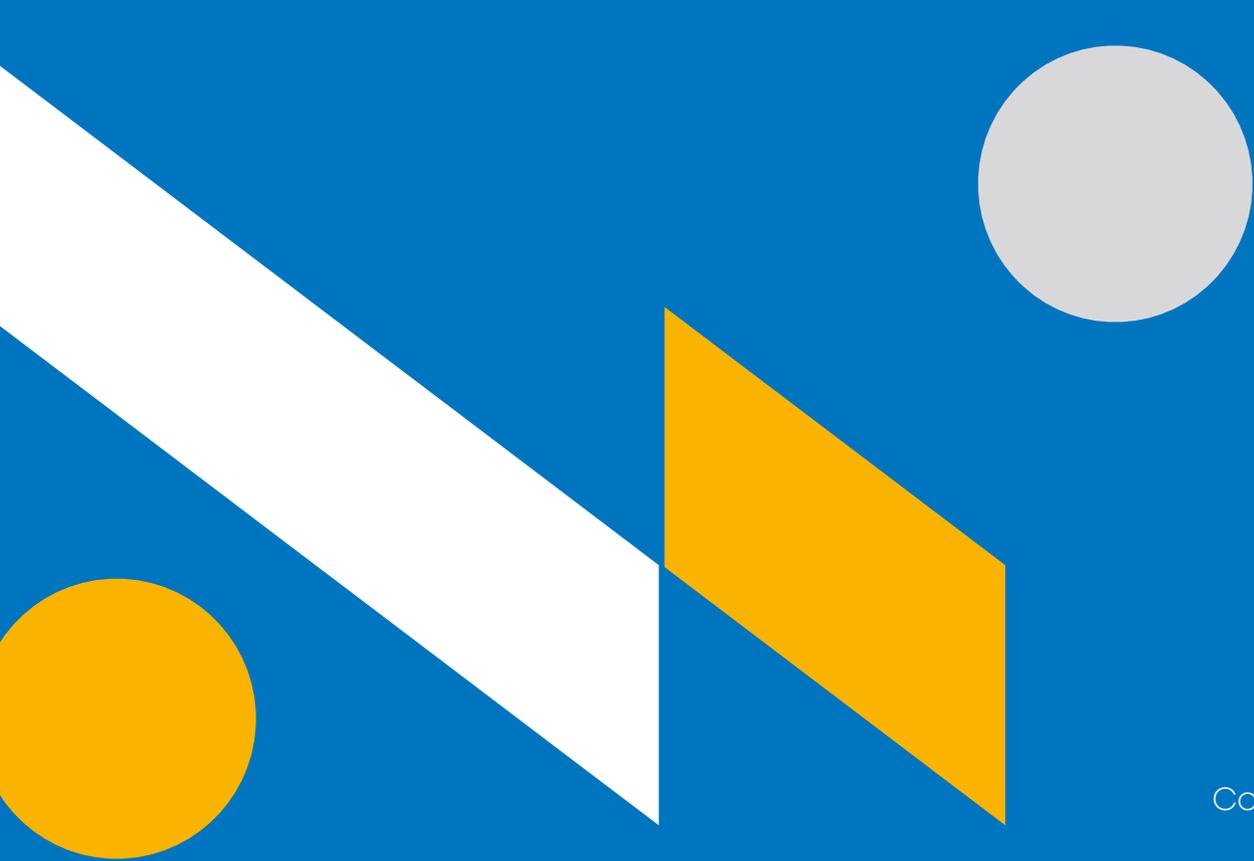
europedirect@varde.dk

Sweden

City of Helsingborg

Ola Jacobson

ola.jacobson@helsingborg.se



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