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Arts unite: The Third International Snow Festival in Tromsø *

© Elena GIANESIN, project manager

E-mail: gianesinelena@gmail.com

Organizing Committee of the International Snow Sculpture Festival, Tromsø, Norway

Abstract. The article is a brief overview of the Third International Snow Festival in Tromsø, January 23–26, 2019, from the perspective of international cooperation in northern Europe in the context of the world culture integration and cross-cultural dialogue.

Keywords: *Tromsø International Snow festival, international cooperation, culture, Norway*

Intercultural dialogue is essential for peaceful inter-community relations and joint efforts, to foster and promote cultural exchanges, are crucial. Through processes of dialogue and exchange, through knowledge and education, a new cultural dimension can be formed, where differences among all cultures and sub-cultures of the world's regions are accepted and strengthened, where cultural diversity becomes beneficial to an innovative international community.

Participating in this process of dialogue in a cross-cultural perspective means encouraging an approach to cultural diversity, based on the concept of “unity in diversity.”

A small, but no less significant contribution to the international cultural cooperation was made by the **Third International Snow Festival**, held in the main square of the northern Norwegian city of Tromsø, January 23–26, 2019. Along with its intercultural significance, the Tromsø International Snow Festival is an event that helps spread and strengthen the knowledge of the Arctic and attracts a multitude of tourists. This year, art and the Arctic have brought together many snow sculptors from different parts of Eurasia, allowing them to exchange ideas and experiences in a friendly multicultural atmosphere. Eight teams of professional sculptors took part in the event. The participating countries were Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Russia, Thailand, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. The snow masterpieces ranged from a tempting “Arctic cupcake,” created by the Finnish team, to the “Arctic friendship” Thai sculpture, representing a magical bond between a dragon and a polar bear. The Arctic fauna inspired the creations of the British, German and Russian team. The Ukrainian team sculpture represented the nature of human existence with an Arctic twist. The northern lights and an Arctic romance inspired the Italian and Norwegian masterpieces, respectively.

Art brings communities together, erasing any difference, breaking down language and cultural barriers. The result is an exciting international festival and a friendly atmosphere. Some old friends had the chance to meet again, and many new bonds of friendship were created. The festival is seen as an opportunity to socialize, to share experiences and make new plans for future projects.

The first Tromsø International Snow Festival was held in January 2014. Five teams from different countries took part in the event: Germany, Italy, Norway, Russia, and Thailand.

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As the festival grows from year to year, it attracts more and more visitors and the participation requests are sent by teams worldwide. The festival organizers are already receiving applications for the next edition, even from Latin America.

The snow sculpture event takes place every two years. This year edition was held with the help and financial support of the Tromsø Kommune, the Royal Thai Embassy in Oslo, the Tourism Authority of Thailand -Stockholm Office-, Tromsø Sentrum AS and the Barents Secretariat.

The founder of the event is Mrs Wanna Helnes, president of the Thai Tromsø Association and also employee at the Polar Museum in Tromsø, which is now one of the four exhibition venues, part of the Arctic University Museum of Norway. Mrs Helnes has been working for many years to promote polar history and culture, as well as organizing different multicultural events. Interaction with teams and organizational issues management are some of the responsibilities of the project manager, Mrs Elena Giancesin, who is assisted by an extraordinary group of volunteers from the participating countries.

Workshops for schools and kindergartens were planned and organized during the first and second edition of the Tromsø International Snow Festival. The purpose of this activity was to let the children learn how to create their little snow artworks. Some members of the teams were not only professional sculptors, but also art teachers.

Thus, the festival has not only become a platform for intercultural dialogue, developing and strengthening cultural relations among Northern Norway and several other countries by sharing experiences, ideas and creating new lasting bonds of friendship, but it also offers the opportunity to get closer to the art of snow sculpting.



Fig.1 Thailand. "An Arctic friendship": the sculpture represents an improbable and magical friendship among a dragon, a polar bear and her cub, born in the cold and solitary lands of the Arctic. Photo: Wanna Helnes



Fig.2 Italy. "Dreaming Aurora": the sculpture represents a woman sailing in rough Arctic waters, with an origami boat, catching an aurora. Photo: Wanna Helnes



Fig. 3 Finland. "Arctic Cupcake": the sculpture represents an Arctic cupcake to celebrate this polar land. Designed to serve one person. Eat it, before it's too late! Photo: Wanna Helnes



Fig.4 Russia. "Winter Fairytale": the sculpture represents a northern winter forest with frosty ice patterns. The trunks of trees are columns that nature itself has created. Every fairy forest has residents. Photo: Wanna Helnes



Fig.5 Ukraine. "Lifetime": the sculpture shows how complex, unexpected and changeable the life can be. It can take a direction at first, but suddenly change the way it goes. It can rise, fall, go up, down and sideways...

The sculpture consists of a spiral-shaped faceted form, turning around like a whirlpool and a sitting human figure. The whole composition is based on the outline of an iceberg. The spiral-shaped form has many engravings, showing some scenes from the Arctic life. Photo: Wanna Helnes



Fig.6 Germany. "Hygge Spot": the sculpture represents a group of some funny and chubby seals lying together on an iceberg. "Hygge" is a Danish and Norwegian word for a mood of coziness and comfortable conviviality, with feelings of wellness and contentment. Photo: Wanna Helnes



Fig.7 United Kingdom. "Playing with your food": the sculpture represents a killer whale in the sea, with a seal in its mouth. The whale is in the process of throwing the seal up in the air, as they do in the wild. It is meant to be realistic, but also humorous, appealing to the Norwegian sense of humor. Photo: Wanna Helnes



Fig.8 Norway. "All that is left is a snowman's heart": a big snowman falls in love with the town of Tromsø and loses his heart to the city. As spring comes nearer, he melts down becoming a little pond of water. During the spring, two swans come flying by and decide to stay in the pond to raise their little swans.
Photo: Wanna Helnes