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The future *as* now – when innovation is not enough

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Are we in the Baltic Sea region ready for innovation across sectors and disciplines? The potential of the Baltic Sea region lies in the capacity of a group of selected countries in the Northern reaches of the European sub-continent to innovate – the ontological discussion of being, of becoming innovative often discusses potential as a state that will bloom in the future. What if we viewed the future as now, the present, right here already – bubbling under the radar.

Do we have the habitat in place to sustain innovative ideas and prototypes? Does the public sector have the ability to work *across the aisle* with the private sector? The research community often forges inter-disciplinary collaboration or even multi-disciplinary cooperation but in our perspective it is only the art world that has truly managed transdisciplinary hybridization. It is here the unexpected happens – it is not form or function, it is both.

Do we have a common definition of innovation in the public sector in the Baltic Sea region? Away from the sectors of clean-tech, transport infrastructure, health and digital service provision, the role of innovation is considered a feature produced or created elsewhere by others. What would a regional strategy for innovation hence look like? Who would formulate one and without common understandings of innovation, who would have the mandate to go about developing one? Answers to questions such as these have begun to be explored by programmes in the BSR, which have focused on the feasibility of and necessity for peer-review of national strategies; connections between the BSR – South East and the BSR North West; development of a more venture capital centered approach to investment (as well as potential failure) and the necessity of smart specialization in R&D.

However, innovation, be it in the public or private sector, is difficult. To innovate and develop a sense of newness and freshness for either something that did not exist before (and that the general public may not know is needed yet) or to take on a different angle with an existing familiarity requires many facets. A lot of the discussions note the importance of an eco-system or supply chain of infrastructural functions that serve, bolster and encourage the start-up community; the tech hub, the creative cluster, the entrepreneur co-working space and even the artist run collective. In the Baltic Sea region realization has emerged on the necessity of innovation clusters to nurture and create innovation. Yet what happens when one's prototype or innovative service leaves the incubator – does it have enough oxygen to survive in the outside world or is the life supply cut short?

All of these spaces exist in a context – *a habitat*. The question that needs to be asked is whether the habitat is nourishing enough for innovative ideas to take root in our current regional framework and what will it take for it to become the *natural environment* for supported ideation.

Talent and leadership are core in the ability to engender change and innovation but changes and innovation can get stuck or stalled unless the talent and leadership are sustained. The Swedish Institute (SI) has a number of talent and leadership programmes in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea Region and Balticlub is the first one of those to be curated in joint partnership with another organization. The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and SI value the Balticlub ideation programme for its creation of a space to build innovative concepts, prototypes and knowledge across discipline and border.

Balticlub is ultimately a methodology, which focuses on the shift of mindset in our region. The ideation programme is in its third incarnation and as we step forward into spring 2015 we will be moving onwards with all these questions on our mind. That is why we will be working on a Balticlub Manifesto.

We believe a manifesto of Balticlub generated values for these areas should lead the way towards a strategic basis for enacting a Baltic Sea Region Strategy for Innovation that attempts to concentrate on the habitat for the innovation community and represents a bottom-up approach when it comes to designing innovation-friendly policy across regional borders.

This ultimately demands new ways of seeing the region and taking a role in the region's shape in the future, to ensure the habitat for innovative ideas is a rich one. A setting which allows for multiple definitions of innovation beyond tech, research and education; one that is transdisciplinary in its nature. ■

Balticlub is a joint initiative by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Swedish Institute (SI) to create a network of interdisciplinary talent in the Baltic Sea Region, who collectively link the region, as well as act as future front-runners and innovators in their respective fields.

The Ideation Programme brings together cultural operators and entrepreneurs from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Poland in diverse international groups to prototype ideas that reflect their own field of work as well as benefit innovation & integration which hold the key to our collaborative future.

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