

Friendship Relations between Gulbene and Them during 26 Years

After the liberation of the 3 Baltic States, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1990-91 there was a great feeling of solidarity with the Baltic People among the Danish public and the political sphere.

The Danish minister of foreign affairs Uffe Ellemann was the first to establish an Embassy and send a Danish ambassador to Riga in August 1991. And he also established a special foundation to support the developing of democracy in The Baltic States and other parts of Eastern Europe.

Several Danish municipalities, organisations and companies and also churches established contacts to corresponding organisations in Balticum and especially in Latvia and invited to make Friendship relations and cooperation in different areas.

Them Municipality Council made contact to Gulbene Municipality Council and send a delegation to Gulbene in September 1992 and in May 1993 a delegation from Gulbene Municipality visited Them and signed an Agreement of Friendship Relations and Cooperation, which is still forming the basis of The Friendship Relations between Gulbene and Them. Them was at that time a small countryside municipality with 7500 inhabitants and Gulbene was a townmunicipality of 10-11.000 inhabitants. Them is now part of the greater Silkeborg Municipality with 90.000 inhabitants as well as Gulbene has become a greater municipality with 20.000 inhabitants after the municipality reforms both in Denmark and in Latvia.

The beginning of the Friendship Relations

The aim of The Friendship Agreement is to work for mutual understanding and knowledge of the culture, industry and business affairs and social conditions in both societies and it should be based on respect for democracy and peaceful coexistence. The friendship relations should encourage direct contact, exchange and cooperation between individual persons, schools, institutions, associations and companies etc.

In June 1993 there was an invitation from The Lutheran Church in Gulbene to The Churches in Them to send representatives to the 150 Years Anniversary of The Lutheran Church in Gulbene and 2 representatives from Them made the first direct contact between the 2 congregations, which has been working since then.

In August 1994 The Teachers Choir at Gulbene Musicschool with 50 participants visited Them and was accomodated in private homes all over Them Municipality. Many people were engaged in the arrangements and concerts in Them and Silkeborg and many personal contacts were established, which we experienced next year in July 1996, when a delegation from Them visited Gulbene and was heartily received of many people and institutions in Gulbene.

Many different Exchangevisits

During the years there has been several visits of different groups from Gulbene in Them: Teachers, healthpersonal, folkdancers, childrenchoirs, musicians and artists, hunters, workers from the veteran train, pensioners and representatives from the municipality administration and council and from the lutheran congregation. As well as many different groups from Them have been visiting Gulbene: Teachers, healthpersonel, firemen, businessmen, representatives from Them municipality Council and from the churchcouncil in Them.

In May 1997 there was arranged Danish-Latvian Culturedays in Gulbene with 43 participants from Them: Folkdancers, people working with handcraft and art, musicians and members of Them Municipalitycouncil. They experienced again the friendly and welcoming athmosphere, especially the young musicians playing rock-music for the youngsters in Gulbene were very popular.

May 2004 Them arranged Latvian-Danish Culturedays and received 70 participants from Gulbene: Footballplayers, brassband, people working with handicraft and art and folkdancers. All of them were accomodated in private homes in Them and Bryrup. There were footballmatches, concerts, exhibitions and Holyservice in the Church and a festive evening in Them Sportshall with 400 participants. These Culturedays were also to celebrate the entry of Latvia into the EU and the project was supported by EU and we received together an EU-Award for The Townfriendshipproject.

Changing Friendship Relations and Cooperation

In the 1990'es there were exchangevisits of teachers and healthpersonal and some businessmen and collections of secondhand clothes and materials for schools and a dentistclinic, X-rayapparatus and a fire-engine was

send to Gulbene. Unfortunately has the exchange of teachers and health-personel not continued the following years and the bussinessmen did not succeed in making trade agreements

In the following years there have been many exchangevisits both ways between cultural institutions, but the schools and institutions have not been able to establish direct contact between them-selves, allthough we have personal contacts f.ex. to teachers at Gulbene Musicschool from people in Them.

But the contact and exchange and support between The Churchcouncil at The Lutheran Church in Gulbene and The Churchcouncil in Them is still functioning, allthough there has been some breaks in the contact over the years.

As a result of the municipalityreform in Denmark, when Them became a part of Silkeborg Munici-pality, they did not want to continue the Town-friendship relations with Towns in The other Nordic Countries and in Germany. But they proposed to form a Friendship Association to continue the Friendship relations and cooperation with Gulbene, just as The Hungarian-Danish Friendship Asso-ciation in Kjellerup, which is another part of Silkeborg Municipality, have friendship relations and cooperation with Tiszalpar og Kiskunfelegyhahaza Kommuner i Ungarn.

Silkeborg Municipality Council promised to support both Friendship Associations with 20.000 kr. every year, but the last 2 years they have cancelled this financial support. We may apply for support to occasional cultural projects involving both people from Gulbene and from Them/Silkeborg.

Over the years members of The Friendship Association have experienced at lot of things during the contact and exchangevisits with people in Gulbene: We have learned about Latvian history, culture and traditions, your way of living and sense of humour, music and singing and we have also made personal acquaintances of people in Gulbene. But we must admit, that the public opinion and feeling about the friendship with Gulbene is no longer so strong as before and we have not been able to engage new and younger people in Them and Silkeborg into the friendship relations.

The committee of The Friendship Association have discussed, what will be the possibilities of continuing the friendship relations in the future. We shall of course continue to arrange exchange visits for the music schools and other cultural institutions and for people from the municipality council and administration. And we have prepared a Catalog with Suggestions of Sites to visit in Them-Silkeborg especially about environmental protection and ecological farming, for which we have many companies and institutions with great expertise in Silkeborg Area.

Niels Uldall-Jessen
The Friendship Association Them-Gulbene

Further information about the friendship relation and the history, see www.Them-Gulbene.dk