

Citadel Twinning Conference 14-16th January 2016 in Cardiff.

The twin cities of Cardiff and Stuttgart were organising a two-day thematic conference in Cardiff funded by the EU involving citizens and organisations from the two cities.

The aim was to promote the shared history of our two cities, but also to look how they might build on this to further develop transnational cooperation and civic engagement. The different attitudes to European integration and the institutions of the European Union were also discussed. How do views vary across the two cities and across different demographics? About 80 people of various age and professions from both cities took part.

The Conference started at City Hall, in Committee Room D.

At 11am Gareth Berry from Cardiff Council, who chaired the conference, welcomed everyone, made everybody feel at ease and introduced the audience to Phil Bale, Leader of Cardiff Council who spoke about the successful 60 years of twinning between the cities. He introduced the Right Honourable Alun Michael, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Wales who spoke fondly about his travels to Stuttgart and his support for the partnership between the two cities, especially in the early stages of the twinning relationship.

Frederic Stephan from the Stuttgart Department of Foreign Relations made a power-point presentation about the facts and figures of Stuttgart and showed off his city in the best light.

Then Jon Day from Cardiff Council Department for Economic Development introduced Cardiff to the visitors from Stuttgart highlighting the history of this once famous port city, how it had changed over the years and how this fastest growing city in the UK will be further transformed in the next years.

The audience was then introduced to Jan Hoppe from the German desk at the legal firm Gordon Dadds. He talked about business in Europe, the opportunities and challenges and what a possible Brexit would mean for business in the UK in general. A "Question and Answer" (Q&A) session followed.

Then the participants were encouraged to do some "speed-dating" by introducing themselves to a person from the partner city and telling them about their job etc. in a very short space of time.

A delicious buffet lunch followed

At 2pm we formed into small mixed groups and were given a sheet of paper with a list of famous sights and hidden gems of Cardiff that needed to be shown to the visitors from Stuttgart. It was called "Photomathon", we had two and a half hours to walk around Cardiff, take lots of photos and tick-off the required sights in the meantime. The search ended invariably in a pub, coffee shop or tea house, but this was the purpose of the exercise anyway: to bond a small group of people by showing them around Cardiff.

At 6pm the talk "Has Germany's image changed?" by the award winning German film maker Uli Hesse was also held at City Hall. The Cardiff-Stuttgart Association was organising this talk. Uli highlighted the ongoing recent refugee crisis in Germany and the New Year's disturbances in Cologne by showing some film clips. It was a very relevant, challenging and partly provocative talk. There was a short Q&A session afterwards

We all then walked to the Park Inn hotel where we were treated to a warm buffet meal and wine from Stuttgart. Gareth Bale, leader of Cardiff Council also attended. Some more questions about the previous talk were also answered, and there was more opportunity to talk to various people during the meal. The winner of the Photomathon was also announced. As there were two runners up, Gareth Berry decided that the best way to find a winner was to challenge the leading groups to a singing contest. This entailed great laughter, but a winning group was found and a good time was had by all.

The next day was more challenging.

The participants met at the shiny new Cardiff and Vale College at Dumballs Rd.

Rob and Alex from Tradebox Media curated the day, which focused mainly on the EU.

Alena Drieschova from Cardiff University spoke about European Institutions, Citizen Engagement and the Democratic Deficit within the EU. There was lots of information about the inner workings of the EU provided.

The next speaker was Christian Bueger also from Cardiff University. He spoke about what the EU means, that it is both a security community and a community of values. He had a positive outlook on the EU.

After coffee we went back into our groups and were asked to find out what the most challenging thing is that the EU is currently facing. The answer the majority voted for via their smart devices was political apathy.

We all had a fantastic lunch at the College restaurant provided by aspiring student cooks and waiters. Ken Poole from Cardiff Council and the principal of the college both welcomed the delegation.

The afternoon sessions focused on how this political apathy in general could be changed.

The winning group had the idea to create a game for young people that indirectly would bring the EU to them by a series of challenging games. The winners of the game would get to see the European Parliament in Brussels.

It was an interesting workshop-day, one that the participants were encouraged to talk to each other and focus on solutions to problems. It was also amazing to see the young people from Stuttgart talk very eloquently and in fluent English.

The next day the Stuttgart visitors were shown Big Pit and spent the afternoon in Cardiff Bay.

It was great to meet up with people from all walks of life here in Cardiff, show off the city in the cold winter sunshine and exchange views on our two cities and the EU in general with the view to make further exchanges, create youth link-ups and hopefully form partnerships with schools etc. This thematic conference definitely encouraged this and it is hoped that the bond between the two cities will remain strong as a result of this coming-together.