

Speeches at the opening ceremony Burning Snow

MARIE-LOUISE RÖNNMARK, Mayor, City of Umeå

Your Royal Highnesses, Ministers, Your Excellences, Citizens of Umeå

“This is the most beautiful landscape on earth. No one ought to have to die here. You can stretch out your hand anywhere in this part of the country and always find yourself pointing at a wonder of nature, whether you want to or not, a sight or a miracle that far surpasses your understanding.

It is a landscape for connoisseurs of snow and ice and hoar-frost, and also for lovers of ancient spruce, birch scrub, scattered stones, waterlogged marshes and cold springs.”

I'm quoting our Västerbotten author Torgny Lindgren in order to describe my feelings on this special day as the European Capital of Culture is about to open. Surrounded by the countless snow crystals in the sky I want to share my thoughts on the year ahead with you:

Curiosity and passion!

Open Source and the art of co-creation.

My heart-felt thanks to the thousands and thousands of committed citizens co-creating the Capital of Culture Year!

We are the Northernmost Capital of Culture ever in the EU.

We are the Northern Room in the European House.

Welcome to Umea - the lighthouse in Sapmi – the land of eight seasons.

Welcome to U-Me, the Capital of Culture with the warm, smiling heart.

Now let's ignite our burning passion for art and culture!

Welcome to this opening ceremony – Welcome to Burning Snow!

**STEFAN MIKAELSSON - Sámedikke ávdđáulmusj -
President of Sámi Parliament Plenary Assembly**

"WE, THE SAAMI, ARE ONE PEOPLE, UNITED IN OUR OWN CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND HISTORY, LIVING IN AREAS WHICH SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL AND UP TO HISTORICAL TIMES, WE ALONE INHABITED AND UTILIZED"

Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Stefan Mikaelsson and I am the President of Saami parliament Plenary assembly. I did choose to paraphrase the ngo Saami Council political statement from 1986 which was adopted at the Saami conference in Åre in conjunction with the adoption of our national symbol the Saami flag. Today the Sámi parliaments and NGO Saami council together administrate our Sámi national symbols.

Already in 1751 our Saami nation was acknowledge in an annex of the border treaty between belligerent countries of kingdom of Denmark-Norway and kingdom of Sweden. And in the Swedish parliament 260 years later was implemented the new constitution where the Saami peoples is mentioned as a people of its own.

Today, the Saami parliament is the only legitimate representative of the Saami peoples, and it is the people who through individual performer claims, upholds and defends the Sami culture.

The Sámi parliament is represented by myself together with Deputy Presidents Per-Olof Nutti, Mona Persson and Lars Wilhelm Svonni.

Our lands and territories are at the core of our existence - we are the land and the land is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands and territories and they are inextricably linked to our survival. Once our lands and territories are devastated we jeopardize to lose our traditional culture and to disappear as indigenous people.

"We walk to the future in the footprints of our ancestors". (Kimberley-declaration 2002)

I would like to thank various Saami artists, musicians and handicraftspersons who have made this opening to be diverse and different compared with the dominating culture. And also for honouring our ancestors & predecessors making our children proud of their Saami origin in the global world filled with its challenges. Thus making it possible to continue transferring the culture to new generations.

"Sunshine and birdsinging, that was the Saamiland, and our thoughts goes back to memories again and again". (Deatnogátte Nuorat)

On behalf of the Saami parliament I do wish you all very much welcome to Sápmi.

LENA ADELSON-LILJEROTH, Minister for Culture

Your Royal Highnesses, Ministers, Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

Can culture and art make us feel better? Does culture always bring joy and happiness?

No! But it can be an eye-opener. Culture can challenge, it can irritate, it can make us ask new questions – and sometimes, often even, culture can provide the largest of pleasures.

Being appointed a European Capital of Culture boosts both culture and creativity - and I know Umeå will be a true showcase for the Creative Europe project in 2014.

It is however not only the cultural life that will be strengthened in Umeå this year.

If you take the chance, there will be closer ties with other European cities, Riga in particular, being the second European Capital of Culture this year.

Riga is a city I had the pleasure of visiting just a few weeks ago, at their inauguration.

The Swedish Government fully understands the significance of Umeå being chosen as one of the two European Capitals of Culture in 2014. So I am glad to say we have been able to allocate 100 million SEK to the city for its success, enabling it to leave marks for several years to come.

But let us not forget that what brings us here today is the result of four years of hard work. Four years where several artists and cultural institutions in Umeå and other parts of Sweden have been and still are hard at work.

Thank you so much to all of you!

The underlying theme is the Sami calendar, with its eight seasons. Every season has its own distinctive character & rhythm, reflected in the activities planned.

I would like to mention in particular the "Sami week", with Sami lectures, concerts, film, theatre and so much more.

This week takes place during the school holidays, and so will be a wonderful opportunity for children, as well as others, to get involved and learn more about the cultural heritage and the contemporary culture of the Sami.

So, ladies & gentlemen, Umeå can really be proud of what it has done to bring us all here to the City of Winter - and for what is to come in the months ahead.

May I wish you all the very best for your year - a year full of eye-openers, inspiration, creativity and the promise of real cultural exchange. Take the chance!

JAN TRUSZCZYŃSKI, the European Commission's Director General for Culture

Your Royal Highness, Dear Madam Mayor, Dear Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

A few years back, when the European Commission designated Umeå, together with Riga, to become the European Capital of Culture, the city was probably best known as the birthplace of a number of heavy metal and punk music bands.

It is a pleasure, and honour, to be one among so many culture lovers tonight to celebrate the launch of Umeå as 2014 European Capital of Culture.

I see that as a testimony of the love affair that the city has with innovative forms of culture; things that are on the cutting edge.

Innovation is indeed a key element in the extraordinary programme people from all over Europe will discover here in 2014; one of these innovations being the way interactive tools have been used to involve people directly in the year's creation process, like the "Caught by Umeå" project. *[flagship project inviting all of Europe to participate in forming Umeå2014 with an art competition for photo, art and design and subsequent tour of 7 European cities in 2013]*

Umeå2014 invites us to follow the eight Sami seasons, enjoy the Sami culture and many other cultures, and reflect on the challenges facing ethnic and migrant minorities across Europe.

Thus the Year will provide an opportunity for Europeans to meet and discover heretofore hidden dimensions of the great cultural diversity of our continent, but also to look freshly at our common history and values.

From its position in the upper reaches of Northern Europe, Umeå will shed a beautiful light on the story of its people and build connections with the whole of Europe. It will become for all of us a tremendous example to follow.

I wish Umeå2014 every success.