

## **BPW Hanse**

### **Hanseatic Days in Turku, Finland**

The BPW Hanse Network exists for two years now. It unites BPW members especially from German hanseatic cities to a strong group. After regular meetings in cities of northern Germany in the past, the BPW Hanse Network now participated for the first time at an international meeting: the Hanseatic Days which took place in Turku, Finland, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2004. The Hanseatic Days are a regular event that is each year organised by a different international hanseatic city. BPW Hanse is a very important and necessary part of BPW Europe. It is based on the international BPW idea to bring together women with different experiences from all over the world. For BPW Hanse networking has top priority, travelling is based on low costs and efficient organisation.

17 German BPW travelled together with BPW from Sweden and the Netherlands to Turku. They met Finish BPW in order to go on weaving the BPW Network on the hanseatic level. The aim of this meeting was to offer BPW from different European hanseatic cities the possibility to exchange experiences, to integrate women from the „new“ EU countries and to gain and fill new members with enthusiasm for the Hanse Network.

After the arrival at the airport of Stockholm the BPW Hanse group spent an impressive day in this magnificent town and had a maritime lunch together with Swedish BPW. Soon a lively exchange started about experiences and visions with regard to the Hanse Network. Over night the ferry brought the group directly to Turku (Basic information: inhabitants Finland 5 Mio., Turku 170.000, 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest city). A member of the Finish BPW welcomed the travellers and invited them to have an interesting look at her business, a large nursery for plants.

Afterwards first contacts were made with different international hanseatic cities, e.g., Finland, Sweden, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, Germany, which represented themselves during the hanseatic days along the river in Turku. Very impressing was the great number of German hanseatic cities, especially from the Westphalian Hanse. The group talked to delegates from different cities and was offered to represent the BPW association at the next Hanseatic Days in Germany.

This successful day was completed together with Finish BPW by a delicious Fish-buffet on a ship. Conversations showed that well-known problems the German BPW faced in the nineties now appear in Finland: loss of members and the increase in the proportion of elderly members. The Finish BPW consists of over 31 clubs with approximately 1.500 members. The Swedish BPW has got 14 clubs with approximately 1.000 members. The German BPW were asked for solutions. They shared their experiences and offered help to successfully overcome these problems. Still not answered is the question how the relatively low membership subscriptions of 35 Euros (Finland) and 50 Euros (Sweden) respectively influence this development.

In turn the Finish BPW introduced their governmental project “Women and Business“. The aim of this project is to secure the finance of the maternity leave. In the future both the employer of the father and the mother have to share the costs for the maternity leave.

On Friday the group separated in order to participate at the various workshops organised by the city of Turku. Under the overall topic „Vitality through co-operation“ different workshops were conducted, e.g. „Information society at work for the citizens“, „Co-operation between cities, universities and business – key to success“, „Culture and history – strategic resources of town development“. A special focus was turned on the individual groups affected by these topics, such as the role of women and family.

In addition to the possibility to attend the workshops a cultural programme was organised: a sightseeing tour round the cities of Turku and Helsinki; shipping to Naantali, well-known for fishing; shipping parade; medieval market within the historic 775 years old city of Turku with outdoor theatre, organ concerto in the cathedral of Turku, Dutch film festival.

Next year the hanseatic days will take place in Tartu, Estonia and in the following years in Osnabrück, Lippstadt, Salzwedel (all Germany) and Nowgorod, Russia.

Kippiis!! Ulrike Kessler, BPW Germany / club Bonn

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