

## STRATEGY « CULTURE FOR A SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF CĒSIS »



**ECONOMIC COMMUNITY ATTRACTIVENESS**  
**CAPACITY-BUILDING ACCESS PARTICIPATION**  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT HERITAGE

### 1. Context

Cēsis is a small town of 16,000 inhabitants located in the north of Latvia. Surrounded by rural areas and natural parks, its economy is based mostly on food production, retail and small industries (manufacturing, transport). Its cultural profile traces its roots back to even before medieval times, and it has always been a historically important center in building and maintaining the independent Latvian national state. Cultural life in Cēsis has always been vivid despite the city's moderate size and location away from metropolitan centers.



The strategy was initiated by the administration of the municipality and municipal agency “Cēsis Culture and Tourism centre” responsible for culture sector. The benefits of cultural economy were recognized by the municipality upon seeing the success of previously organized big-scale cultural events. There was a need to plan improvements in culture infrastructure, management and marketing. Culture and development were seen as good possibilities to position the city nationally and internationally.

THE AIM OF THE PROJECT IS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF LOCAL CITIZENS VIA CULTURE, CAPITALIZING ON LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE.

## 2. Cēsis and culture

The strategy “Culture for a sustainable growth of Cēsis” was developed along Cēsis’ application for the title of European Capital of Culture (ECoC 2014). Cēsis was the smallest city to ever bid for this title and despite its modest scale for a successful candidacy, the quality of its strategy was still acclaimed by the international jury. The necessary conditions to produce a good application for the ECoC title was a good catalyst to start cultural planning. It led to more interaction with other sectors (education, businesses, tourism, spatial planning) and more involvement in local communities (public workshops were organized to develop new ideas for cultural development by different local stakeholders).

Cultural aims and plans are integrated in the city’s overall development program, where cultural development is defined as a priority of the city. Actions to enlarge contribution of culture for economic and social development are defined. The strategy has been developed according to the main Agenda 21 for Culture principles.

- it aimed at a broader and more active involvement of citizens in cultural practices and creation;
- it fostered the protection of cultural heritage in both tangible and intangible dimensions;
- it supported the activities to foster excellence through close contact and interaction with citizens and their initiatives;
- it promoted the role of culture in the renovation of historic centres and neighbourhood;
- New cultural infrastructure was planned as part of a broader cultural ecosystem.





### 3. Objectives and implementation of the project

#### 1.1. Main goal

The aim of the project is to improve the quality of life of local citizens via culture, capitalizing on local cultural heritage.

#### 1.2. Key stages

To fulfil the set goal there were 3 main strategical directions set with following actions:

- 1) Local cultural heritage as a ground for community building:
  - The main cultural infrastructure (library, museum, cultural center) was developed in old reconstructed cultural monument buildings highlighting historic heritage and traditions, meanwhile making these institutions available for all society groups.
  - Old town revitalization initiatives were planned together with local community, sustainable cultural routes based in local history were made by community;
  - Site-sensitive artistic events were planned highlighting the local history and uniqueness,
  - Yearly cultural heritage days were organized to educate local people in safeguarding the local heritage;
  - Interactive activities were organized for young people to explore the local history;
  - Wide participation in amateur arts (traditional singing and dancing) was supported, providing space and education for amateur art groups of all ages, promotional events were organized connected with safeguarding of local intangible heritage;
  - Local craftsmanship support program was initiated.
  
- 2) Cēsis as a place for unique culture and art experiences, beloved place for cultural festivals: the approach of the municipality was not to support few huge events but a row of events for niche audiences throughout the season to have constant cultural tourism flow with less environmental impact:
  - Cēsis Art festival with 1-month exhibitions and performances on weekends during summer, several classic music festivals, Historic film festival in Cēsis Medieval castle, Rock film festival and days of gastronomy are organized with local initiative groups;



A democracy festival or festival of talks to promote critical thinking of citizens is organized every summer in Cēsis main park. And there is a grant program (10 000 EUR yearly) for small local cultural initiatives based on local cultural resources.

- 3) Social and economic innovation via culture: several activities to boost local creativity and the growth of creative economy were planned.
- Summer schools in cooperation with higher education institutions of Latvia were introduced, bringing international students to share knowledge. In the summer schools open lectures for local people are usually included and local communities are involved in activities with students
  - a new artists' residency was opened to bring creative professionals in Cēsis
  - a grant scheme "Do in Cēsis!" was introduced to support creative entrepreneurship.
  - The new experimental creative center – co-working space and educational center was opened.

As Cēsis started a quite ambitious cultural project for its comparatively small size, there were several doubts coming from different spheres. Nevertheless the strategy was successful. Citizens are satisfied with the new cultural infrastructure, availability of good cultural services and possibility for self-creative expression.

CITIZENS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE NEW CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE, AVAILABILITY OF GOOD CULTURAL SERVICES AND POSSIBILITY FOR SELF-CREATIVE EXPRESSION.

Local cultural board (cultural leaders, NGOs) has a consultative role in setting goals for local cultural strategy and deciding on municipal cultural budget spending. It has been active raising necessary discussions how to manage better local cultural resources and have provided new ideas for innovative approaches to promote local cultural heritage and cultural tourism.

The Ministry of Culture of Latvia was the responsible institution administrating EU finance programs in culture, making available funds for culture infrastructure investment. The Creative Latvia 2014-





2020 strategy – the national cultural policy document acknowledges Cēsis as one of the most important cultural centres of the country. It helps to organize cooperation with national cultural institutions bringing professional art products (concerts, performances, exhibitions) to Cēsis.

All population of Cēsis could be considered as beneficiary to some extent:

1. Creative professionals have a possibility to work and create in Cēsis, having a support and good network,
2. General audiences can get available qualitative cultural services,
3. Active citizens can be involved in voluntary arts and local cultural initiatives, getting municipal support,
4. Special audience development programs are planned for children to engage them in culture from childhood,
5. Local companies (retail shops, hotels, transport and catering services etc.) have an income from an increased cultural tourism.

In the next period more encouragement will be given for involvement of usually un-active citizens and socially disadvantaged groups, reaching for wider audiences.

THE PROJECT IMPROVED ITS COMMUNICATION AND DIALOGUE WITH LOCAL CITIZENS AND ITS IMAGE AS AN OPEN AND PROGRESSIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

## 4. Impacts

### 1.1. Direct impacts

#### Impacts on the local government

The local government gained experience in big project management and cultural planning, including local stakeholders. The cooperation between different departments (culture, education, development planning, and communication) has improved. It has also improved its communication and dialogue



with local citizens, as well its image as an open and progressive local government. It has supported local private and non-governmental initiatives, thus creating trust and encouragement for active involvement.

### Impact on culture and local cultural actors of the city/territory

The improved cultural infrastructure ensures good working conditions for culture managers and specialists of the main cultural institutions, as well as amateur arts participants. The quality of cultural services provided has risen.

### Impact on the territory and its population

There are better cultural services for local inhabitants (both requiring active and passive participation), providing possibilities for self-expression and qualitative rest and free-time spending, improving the overall quality of life. Moreover, Cēsis has strengthened its identity as creative town and important national cultural centre – Latvian cultural capital, making local inhabitants to feel proud and to form a strong sense of belonging to local community.

LOW-COST CULTURAL SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE FOR ALL GROUPS OF THE SOCIETY, ENGAGING SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED AUDIENCIES. ]

## 1.2. Transversal impacts

Economic impact:

- Increased cultural tourism ensures more income for local service companies
- Developing creative economy brings new income to the city
- Cēsis' progressive and cultural image attracts new specialists and families choosing to live in Cēsis and spending here their income as well paying taxes

Social impact:

- Low-cost cultural services are available for all groups of the society, engaging socially disadvantaged audiences
- Active cultural NGOs and voluntary arts movement ensures wide active participation of local citizens in cultural life, raising social inclusion.

Environmental impact:

- Organized environmentally friendly festivals do not harm local environment, re-use and exchange of cultural products (e.g. books), shared economy practices (creative co-working space) have been encouraged.



### 1.3. Evaluation

Certain indicators to be achieved are stated in Cēsis culture development program – these are mainly quantitative indicators (e.g. projects supported, events organized, audiences attracted), but there are also qualitative surveys of local inhabitants to evaluate their satisfaction with available cultural services and information (high levels of satisfaction are shown). Self-evaluation procedures have been introduced in the main cultural institutions, evaluating the achievement of concrete set goals and tasks.

### 1.4. Continuity

As this is a long-term strategy the continuation of it has been planned setting goals for the next phase 2015 -2020, emphasising creative industries development, strengthening cooperation between different sectors.

As the main investment in culture infrastructure has already been made, in the next period more attitude will be given to the quality of cultural products and services, new creative business possibilities, international cultural tourism growth and engagement of new audiences.

## 5. Further information

The city of Cēsis was a nominated candidate for the second 'UCLG International Award - Mexico City - Culture 21' (January-May 2016). The awards jury produced a final report in June 2016 and asked the UCLG Committee on Culture to promote this project as a practical example for the implementation of Agenda 21 for Culture.

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