

FINAL REPORT GABROVO

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FINAL
REPORT





SUMMARY OF THE GABROVO PILOT CITY PROGRAMME

One of the first European cities to engage in the Agenda 21 for Culture's early Pilot Cities scheme in 2014 and to continue as a **European Pilot City** as from 2016, Gabrovo has gone a long way in **developing its cultural strategy and its engagement in culture and sustainable development**. The **first visit of the expert in 2014** revealed a city keen to develop an ambitious cultural strategy as part of its sustainable transformation.

Gabrovo, historically an industrial town with a renowned technical university, has a well-developed cultural sector with a number of infrastructures and venues that act as the city's landmarks: the Museum of Humour and Satire, the House of Culture, the City Theatre, the National Education Museum, the Regional Historical Museum, a state-of-the-art interactive Industrial Museum, etc., and, just on its outskirts, several interesting heritage sites, one of which, the Etar open-air Ethnographic Museum, includes an active arts and crafts sector. Cultural associations, NGOs and artists from various disciplines are associated to the different infrastructures and venues. The City finances some of the principal infrastructures and runs several programmes providing financial support for artistic projects.

In 2016, Gabrovo held a workshop using the recently introduced UCLG Culture 21 Actions toolkit. Its purpose was to **evaluate the city's cultural situation** and elaborate a work programme which would enable it to build on its perceived strengths and address some of its identified weaknesses. This initial workshop involved a diverse group of participants, including representatives of different sectors of the local government, civil society stakeholders and private organisations. In the course of the workshop, participants examined Gabrovo's current status as regards the 9 'Commitments' or thematic areas that make up Culture 21 Actions, and attributed a mark to each of the 100 Actions described.

The results of this self-assessment exercise gave an overview of the cultural position of Gabrovo in relation to the 2015 global panel average: some Commitments clearly exceeded the figures of the global panel while others were ranked lower. Thus, the workshop's outcome brought forward some strong points in the city's policy, such as in the areas of Heritage, Diversity and Creativity; Culture and Environment; Culture, Equality and Social Inclusion; Cultural Rights; and Governance of Culture. Several good practices in Gabrovo such as the Municipal Culture Fund, the *Chitalishte* (cultural



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centres), and the yearly Gabrovo Carnival, among others, were identified and highlighted by the participants. The weaker points needing further attention concerned Culture and Education; Culture and Economy; Culture, Urban Planning and Public Space, and Culture, Information and Knowledge.

In December 2016, a one-day seminar with different representatives of the Gabrovo cultural civil society was held to further the discussion resulting from the previous September workshop leading to the Gabrovo's 'Radar1' graphic and the expert's report. The following day, the Gabrovo Pilot Cities' "Steering Committee" held its first meeting: the goal of this meeting was to decide and plan the next steps of the work programme, namely the pilot measures chosen by the committee and approved by the City, and its implementation timeline. The **Gabrovo Pilot City work programme** was created around 4 pilot measures:

1. Educational initiatives
2. Laboratory for Innovation and Culture
3. Promotion of Gabrovo Municipality as a preferred territory for creative industries and art residences
4. Managing culture through the creation of public councils / public consultation process

In June 2018, as part of Activity 3 of the Gabrovo Pilot City programme, a delegation from Gabrovo conducted a **peer-learning visit to Timișoara** (Romania). The aim of the visit was to discover and explore the host city's cultural policy, its activities and preparation for its 2021 European Capital of Culture programme, and possible synergies between the two cities.

Later, in September 2018, Gabrovo Municipality representatives **travelled to the cities of Barcelona and Terrassa**, Spain. The visit's main objective was the presentation and discussion of the key points in the cultural policies of both cities and how they contribute to their sustainable development.

In April 2019, **another workshop was organized in Gabrovo** to bring together people with different cultural, social and professional practices to reflect on the development of participatory processes and projects. The methodology consisted in examining and



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questioning a specific territorial 'inhabited landscape' (i.e. Gabrovo) to see what kind of shared cultural projects could be imagined and proposed.

Finally, in December 2019, a meeting was held in Gabrovo to sum up the work done by the city and the cultural stakeholders on the Pilot City programme and discuss the way forward. Introduced by the Mayor, it was attended by the deputy mayor for culture, Mrs. Rachevitz, Gabrovo cultural leaders and stakeholders, members of the city's culture department, as well as Jordi Pascual, Coordinator of the Agenda 21 for Culture, and Catherine Cullen, nominated expert for Gabrovo Pilot City.

In this framework, Elena Vlaeva, Chief expert from the Culture and Tourism department of Gabrovo Municipality, gave a detailed description of the work done in Gabrovo since the beginning of the City's engagement in the Agenda 21 for Culture up to the present day, and the ongoing and future projects and their implementation. Catherine Cullen then summed up the work achieved in Gabrovo from the point of view of the UCLG Culture Committee, and Jordi Pascual presented the global context of culture and sustainable development, the role of culture in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and how cities have a central part to play in highlighting the importance of culture in attaining the Goals.



PILOT MEASURES

The Gabrovo Pilot Cities' work programme, and the four pilot measures implemented from 2017-2019, can be summarized in the following way:

1. Educational initiatives

Diverse educational initiatives were developed for children and young people through several projects including 'Your Time', aimed at stimulating creative thinking and doing in the educational institutions of Gabrovo, as well as the project 'Activities of Interest', encouraging young people to form communities of interest. At the same time, adult training opportunities and exchanges of experience were carried out in different professional domains, such as 'One click Away' for regional museum professionals on the acquisition of digital competences and knowledge of the current trends and new technologies in museography. As part of its pilot measures and its long-standing ambition to set up a 'cultural academy', the City is also currently working on the development of cultural management training activities.

2. Laboratory for Innovation and Culture

Developing the connection between culture and urban planning and the role of culture as an important factor for the transformation of public spaces, several parks were recently renewed and planned as open venues for eco-festivals, sporting initiatives, artistic practices and cultural events. Thus, new opportunities were created for intergenerational exchanges as well as much needed spaces for the cultural expression of young people in Gabrovo.

The City is also involved in an important European project to stimulate innovation through urban regeneration and new service hubs in the Danube catchment area with a special focus on the creative industries, place-based and people-centred for educational development and strengthened employment. This is a major springboard for a new link between economic and cultural development and will be focused on the 'Gabrovo 6th district' project and action plan.

3. Promotion of Gabrovo as a territory for creative industries and art residences

Since 2017, the Gabrovo Municipality has developed a plan to enhance the singular geography of Gabrovo (with its historic centre, river-bound post-industrial sites and 113 rural villages enveloping the city) as a place for artistic and creative residencies: playwrights, architects, artists, graphic designers, young entrepreneurs have exchanged knowledge and skills in the historical village of 'Bozhentsi' and at the Open-air Ethnographic Museum 'Etar'. Since 2017, a new Art Biennale on Land art and Kinetic art



PILOT MEASURES

has been held there with local, national and international partners, bringing contemporary art to the heart of an historic village renowned for its arts and crafts.

4. Managing culture through the creation of public councils / public consultation process

Although a formal structure for the governance of culture has not yet been established, over the last few years the city has implemented several actions to improve its public consultation process: it has established a Municipal Council Fund for independent artistic projects, improved the public debate on the city's cultural policy with the cultural and educational institutes, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders, and opened up its meetings to discuss the organization of the City's cultural calendar and share information on its budget.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the last years, the City of Gabrovo engaged in an ambitious cultural strategy, reaching many of the goals it set itself as 'pilot measures' within the UCLG Pilot Cities Europe programme. What emerges after the completion of the programme are three strong themes, around which the main goals of its strategy can build to become a thriving, sustainable urban centre.

1. Cultural infrastructures and the creative industries

The City has been and will continue to be engaged in infrastructure renovations crucial to its ongoing cultural strategy and development (such as the modernization of the Regional Historical Museum House, the rehabilitation of the Gabrovo Culture House, as well as the planned restoration of its Open-air Theatre and its transformation into a youth centre). Central also to the cultural development of Gabrovo in terms of image, tourist attractivity, and economic potential is the development of 'Etar', the Open-air Ethnographic Museum and Reserve. Already given a Best Practice award for Crafts and Folk Art in the context of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, the City continues to plan the site's future, from the conversion of an old school building into residencies for craftsmen and artists with workshops and accommodation, an open stage for cultural events, new facilities for tourists, to overall handicap accessibility.

As many other ex-industrial cities or regions in Europe and the world have done (e.g. Barcelona, Lille, Mexico City, the Ruhr Valley), ex-industrial sites, hospitals, prisons, retirement homes etc. can accommodate new types of projects, often linked to the creative industries. In Gabrovo, one can well imagine a specific cultural strategy combining the digital assets of the 6th District project, the experience and competences of its reputed Technical University, the city's arts and crafts tradition and contemporary potential linked to its creative residencies and facilities.

2. Sustainable cultural and natural tourism

Along with its ever-present historical and industrial past, nature is everywhere in and around Gabrovo, providing an exceptional potential for sustainable tourism: nature trails, hiking, farmers' markets, heritage villages, living arts and crafts, attractive professional residencies and artistic events, here is a great opportunity for the development of a specific brand of Gabrovo cultural tourism whether it is called 'mindful', 'green', or 'eco-friendly' (or all of these combined). A lively cultural scene in an upgraded town centre with beautiful surrounding villages and scenery and eco-friendly facilities are surely part of Gabrovo's future.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Local participation and decentralisation

A city with important cultural infrastructures and 113 rural villages needs to create internal channels and ways of working together across urban and rural neighbourhoods. Encouraging participatory cultural projects across the city and the villages using the already unique, decentralized network of its cultural centres, as well as generating new ways of bringing culture out of the city centre and out of its infrastructures, are areas of development already envisaged by the City through small-scale initiatives involving the participation of all generations of citizens (indeed, the ongoing project '**Take me to your village**' can be considered as a model of intergenerational and urban/rural interaction).

In the last decade, Gabrovo has developed strong international networks and partnerships, with UCLG and Culture Action Europe and their **Pilot Cities programme**, with UNESCO **as a member of the Creative City Network** in the field of crafts and folk arts, as well as with the European Union through its participation in several major EU projects. This ambition to exist and interact internationally will be all the more successful if Gabrovo can communicate a strong local image of a city undergoing a positive transformation based on its past history, present culture, and its collective capacity to project itself into the future, a city fully engaged in a sustainable, new Cultural Renaissance.



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