

Žilina

Beskids

2026

Window of Opportunities / 2nd Bidbook

Candidate

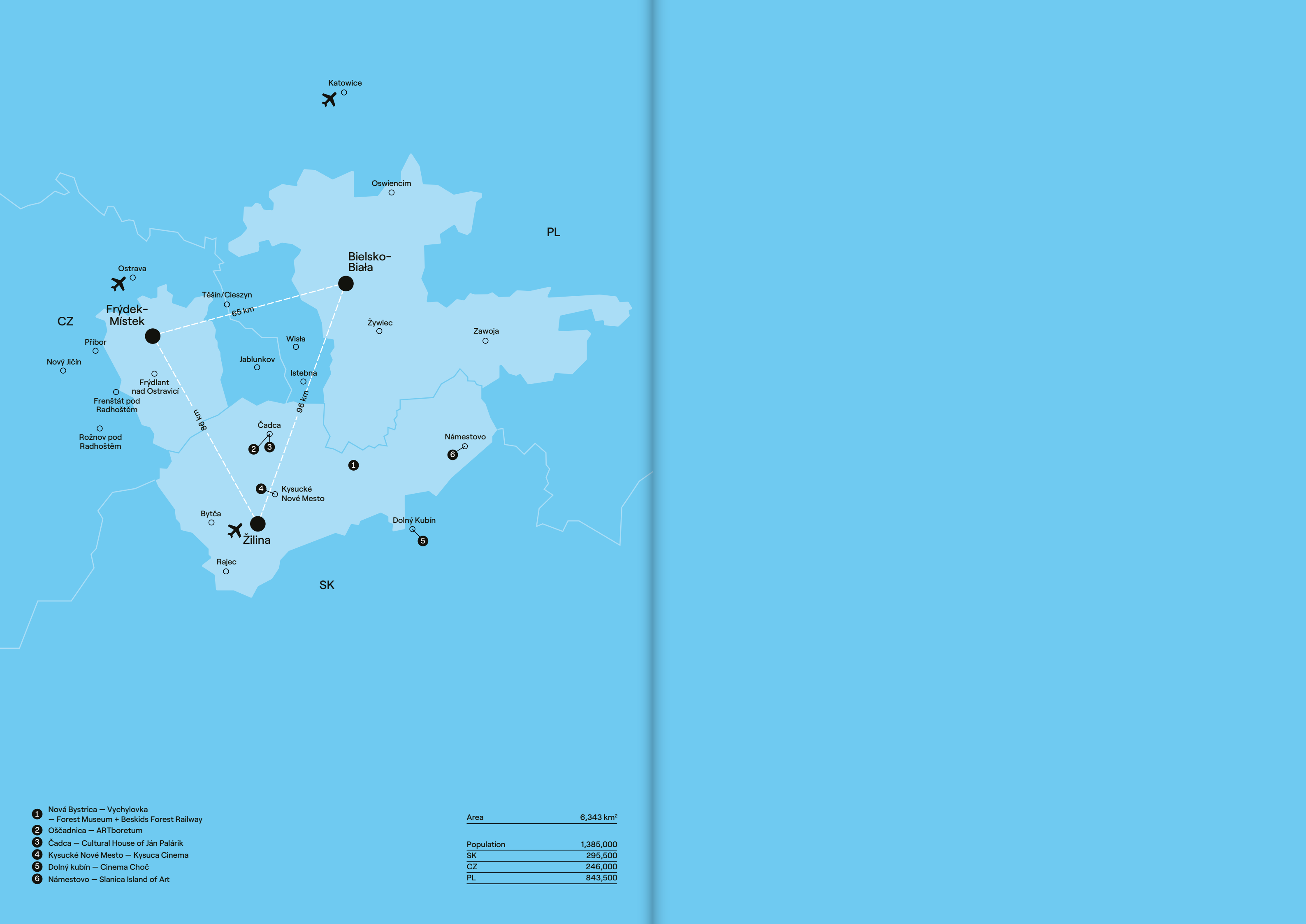
European

Capital

of

City

Culture

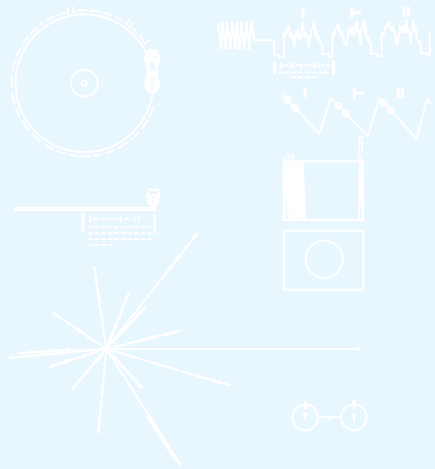


- 1 Nová Bystrica – Vychylovka
– Forest Museum + Beskids Forest Railway
- 2 Oščadnica – ARTboretum
- 3 Čadca – Cultural House of Ján Palárik
- 4 Kysucké Nové Mesto – Kysuca Cinema
- 5 Dolný kubín – Cinema Choč
- 6 Námestovo – Slanica Island of Art

Area	6,343 km ²
Population	1,385,000
SK	295,500
CZ	246,000
PL	843,500

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0. INTRODUCTION



0.1 Has the concept of the programme described for the ECOC year changed between the pre-selection and the selection stage?

This bid book is partly an attempt to square the circle. Aspiring to become the European Capital of Culture always requires expanding the horizons of one’s imagination – but how is this to be done while under lockdown? We still believe in culture as a *community-building activity*, therefore it is truly paradoxical not to be allowed to meet each other. Likewise, it feels strange to engage in planning big investments in new cultural infrastructure while observing the existing facilities closed or half empty, to work on strengthening European and cross-border cooperation while the physical borders remain closed, to plan lineups of large-scale events for European audiences while at the same time confined to the refuge of our homes (or offices).

However, social and cultural life during the pandemic may have slowed down, but it never stopped. We observed amazing creativity on part of cultural institutions that kept producing content, both virtual and live, pioneering a shift to online to keep in touch with their audiences, or events such as when a cultural centre in Žilina organized outdoor concerts for people queuing up for mass COVID-19 testing. We have witnessed hiking and deconcentrated events regaining significance as platforms for social and cultural interaction while traditional places like theaters and galleries were closed.

Life will not return to the old tracks in the postcovid era, the pandemic took too much from us, it has reversed our social practices too deeply, produced too much frustration, and, after all, caused too much suffering for us to simply get over it. It is therefore hard to tell where our societies will be in five years.

Some say that out of adversity comes opportunity. Culture is the realm where we intend to struggle against the rise of *fear, atomization, and polarization* in our societies, therefore we address those compelling issues in our programme.

Let us turn ahead to the future. Culture is a source of *hope*. What if the coming years prove a sort of *golden age* as the 1920s following WWI and the vanishing of the Spanish flu? People will be happy to meet each other again, the sense of relief and joy will prevail and art and culture will prosper. On the other hand, what if the impact of this trauma continues and our societies focus more on social distancing, deconcentration, and the shift to online?

We have picked the metaphor of Window of Opportunities as our project's tagline, a credo that precisely captures the tense but potentially fruitful situation we are in, in a city and region which lacks neither potential nor challenges.

Metaphors usually do not evoke strict definitions, however, window of opportunity does have one, according to which it is a *rare set of circumstances and a brief moment of time in which an otherwise impossible outcome is potentially achievable*. Originally it is a NASA phrase indicating the spatial and temporal limitations for the launch of a spacecraft. We like it, as it eschews fatalism in favour of the idea of a certain *momentum* which must be produced and sustained. Running for ECoC under these specific circumstances is a perfect fit.

Voyager mission

In the summer of 1964, a young NASA engineer named Gary Flandro was tasked to study ways of exploring the outermost planets in our solar system: Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. Flandro sat down to calculate and made a stunning discovery: once in 176 years these planets align in such a geometric arrangement that would function as a “slingshot” for a satellite launched from Earth in a precise moment using each planet’s gravity. This would allow the trip of a spacecraft to be made in just ten years, instead of forty. The problem was, the next such constellation would occur in 1977, just thirteen years away. Based on his findings, NASA included Flandro's project among top priorities and used the window of opportunity to launch the Voyager programme. It is now regarded as one of the most successful planetary discovery missions in history. The key message here is that windows of opportunities end. *Imagine now what it is like to capture the right moment for action to save thirty years of effort!* Running for ECoC is our Voyager mission. We want to catch up with this opportunity whatever it takes – shifting priorities, building alliances, mobilizing resources to make the most of the moment.



What is new?

➤ We have spent the last few months focusing on better interconnecting our program across the borders, spreading it in our large territory and deepening involvement with our partners and citizens. New project coordinators from Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek joined the team in March 2021 and together we did a lot of field work. Through numerous site visits, online meetings, workshops, the networking programme Accelerator Beskids 20 < 26, and the conference Cultural Forum Beskids, we have managed to set up a myriad of new formal and informal links with partners obtaining better territorial balance, finding new richness of initiatives, and reinforcing collective ownership of the bid.

➤ Strong political support from all three self-governing regions as well as mayors of the three partnering cities has been confirmed by legal and financial commitments, even though there was a change in the position of mayor of Frýdek-Místek in the meantime. We have reinforced the regional character of our bid through signing more than 130 memorandums with local and regional municipalities, various platforms, and other organizations proving that our project is becoming a lively initiative, grass-rooted across the entire Beskids region.

➤ Feasibility studies have been made for most of the investment projects that will create new opportunities and a sustainable setup for culture in the region. For instance, we are happy to announce a new plan for reconstruction of the main railway station in Žilina, which will bring a representative entry point into the city and new cultural functions into the station building. We have also redeployed investments across the region with new cultural infrastructures in smaller cities and communities in the regions of Kysuce and Orava. Further two investments have been drafted in Frýdek-Místek with the *New stage*, a modern multifunctional theatre building and the *New Eight*, a partial refurbishment of the city's old textile factory.

➤ We have spent a big portion of our capacities on deepening the European dimension of the programme, partly through establishing new contacts and communication with international partners, but mainly through more precise specifying of the roles of existing ones. We are fully committed to the principle of internationalization under to which each flagship and main project will have its own European partners.

How has our concept of the programme evolved?

We have not changed the initial concept which still deals with three main elements: Future's Factories, Flow of Nature, and Borderless Identities. We understood the decision of the jury shortlisting our bid for the final selection as a signal that our concept is viable, and have further developed it based on the jury's feedback. Below, to indicate the advancement of our concept, we briefly introduce some new projects or mention those that have evolved most.



- 1 In our first programme pillar **Future's Factories**, we have reinforced the Beskids essence of the bid through focusing on what we have in common – strong industrial past and present.
 - We built upon our industrial heritage in the project *Textile Art Season*, which will present seven parallel exhibitions spread all over the region with different curatorial approaches towards textile and different European textile traditions.
 - The reinforcement of the European dimension often led to unexpected ideas like the group show *Prospects for the Future: VAL – Prospective Architecture and Design Today*, curated by David Crowley (Ireland), drawing parallels between the 1970s Žilina-based collective VAL and Romania's Sigma group or Italy's Superstudio.
 - The final bid inspired several institutions to come up with new visions and to propose new long-term activities, for instance: Studio Filmov Rysunkowych decided to start the *International Festival of Animation in Bielsko-Biala*, the three universities operating within the region agreed to launch a joint *Independent Games and Digital Art Festival*, the curators from the PGU Gallery took the opportunity to put up a *Biennale of Videoart*.
 - Likewise, we carefully listened to jury's feedback and focused on bringing more memorable events for the general public, including a season of new circus with the *Cirkulum festival*, a series of performances of the best European puppet theaters in Žilina, and large-scale Spanish puppets of *Carros de Foc* in the streets of Bielsko-Biala, as well as a public art programme with, for instance, a monumental installation of the utopian *Akusticon* or top European classical music concerts at historical heritage sites, such as *Nosferatu*, an original 1922 film screened with full orchestra in its original filming location of the Orava Castle.
 - In Frýdek-Místek, a creative hub titled *New Eight* and textile exhibitions will be open in the brown-field of the former textile industrial complex. The theatre programme, including the festival *Odpoutaná scéna*, will be able to take advantage of the new modern multifunctional stage of *Nová scéna*. In Žilina, the city bought the protected industrial building *Ciachovňa* as a clear commitment to preserve its cultural function with a focus on media art and interconnection of art and science in project *STE(A)M²*. These elements of the programme were in the previous bid book proposed to take place in the "Áčko" university building, which was eventually decided to host a science popularisation centre. Moreover, a large-scale technologically oriented exhibition space was added to the plan of the *Bôrik Centre* for staging of immersive experiences in the context of environmental education.

- 2 Mountains and deep forests of the Beskids formed the highland mentality of local communities, hiking and outdoor activities are integral part of local people's lifestyle, much like with other European mountain regions.

In our second programme pillar, **Flow of Nature**, we focus on non-urban communities, on sustainable culture, reflecting on how in some parts of Europe nature and traditions still form culture and are a source of inspiration.

- This programme pillar went through a major reorganisation and many new projects from Czech and Polish Beskids were added.
- Limiting the impact of climate change is still not yet considered by some of us as a matter of absolute urgency, therefore we will be dealing with environmental issues and exploring how art and culture can raise awareness and inspire new societal model changes. Some of our biggest investment projects – *Bôrik Centre* in Žilina or *Park Aqua* in Bielsko-Biala will bring new educational and exhibition spaces dedicated to environmental issues, but it is in Frýdek-Místek that the programme of this pillar evolved the most. A new *city gallery MOBA* will be created, with a main focus on environmental art. In parallel, the *Environmental Artistic Centre* will be established as a curation platform and will focus on data and acoustic ecology with the *Prototyp / Water of Beskids* project.
- We will produce smaller size deconcentrated cultural events through a series of *Cultural regional trails* as a proposal for a mental and physical journey helping the audiences to contemplate art in nature. In the flagship project *-Scape festival*, we are still looking at cooperation between environmental activists, land stewards, and artists together with new partners from the European Land network. Furthermore, we added a new land art festival *Landart Zawoja* in the Polish Beskids.
- A series of attractive outdoor musical events of the *Summit of Culture* will bring classical and contemporary productions into unusual natural and rural settings.
- In the new cluster *Living near the Forest*, we look at the rich history of rural secession architecture in the region with a unique *Dušan Jurkovič exhibition*. At the *Helter Shelter* project, we will redesign mountain shelters and construct new cabins. We will also focus on temporary architectural interventions in rural parts of the Beskids in our *Architecture in Small Villages* project.

- 3 The founding father of Czechoslovak democracy T.G. Masaryk once famously remarked that "democracy is a discussion" and warned that its foremost threat is a lack of democrats – citizens eager to raise their voice in the public sphere.

This could be a credo for our third programme pillar, **Borderless Identities**, wherein we will provide numerous platforms for citizens' engagement, as well as for reflecting and debating conflicting issues, such as that of defining our identities in a borderless European context.

- Since pre-selection, we have elaborated on the idea of the *Polis Festival* together with a new partner from the Foundation FORUM 2000, resulting in a plan of a week-long forum organized in 2026 in Žilina and Prague with prominent speakers invited from around the globe. As a visual counterpart of the Forum conversations, we will bring a special edition of the *Biennale of photography*, an established festival from Bielsko-Biala, inviting world-renowned photographers also to the city of Žilina and the whole region.
- In our flagship project *Vrba-Wetzler Memorial* we are honored to establish a partnership with the Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau (PL) and together we will co-organize an event on the occasion of 80th anniversary of the Vrba and Wetzler's escape in 2024.
- With the Žilina Jewish community, we this year opened a *Commemoration Room* in a building which we will further transform into a *Literature Centre*, including a residency program for writers and translators. A permanent exhibition about the story of Vrba and Wetzler will be staged in the *Palárik House* in Čadca.
- In our project cluster *Windows of Diversity*, we have involved many new local and international partners and developed the project of the *International Minority Theatre Festival Upon the River* in the border city of Český Těšín. *Voices from the Borders* is now a project cluster with a truly Beskid dimension: with *Borderless VR Mobile Cinema*, we look at historical and contemporary migration within the region or with *Cinema on the Border*, a long-standing film festival established in the Polish city of Cieszyn, expanding to Žilina and its region in 2026.
- In our flagship project *Interconnected*, we have reached an agreement with the City of Žilina and Slovak Railways that the *Museum of Transportation* and several other cultural facilities will find their new home at the main railway station in Žilina after its reconstruction.

1.CONTRIBUTION TO THE LONG-TERM STRATEGY

1. 1 Describe any changes to the cultural strategy since the preselection stage, and the role of the ECOC pre-selection in these changes.

The City of Žilina started the preparation of its cultural strategy along with the launch of the ECoC candidacy process in 2020. This ambition led to approval of the cultural strategy by the City Council on 20 September 2021. In fact, it is historically the first legally binding comprehensive policy document focusing solely on strategic development of the cultural field and the creative industry. The process of candidacy has also aligned with the preparation of *SMART Cultural Strategy* at the Žilina Self-Governing Region, which builds on the previous strategy for 2014–2020 and was approved by the regional parliament as part of the *Plan for Economical and Social Development*. The strategy's focus is on the issues of audience development, improvement of services, and smart solutions in the cultural sector.

Development of the Creative Žilina 2035 strategy: a two-year process

The preparation started in 2020 with framing of the strategy. Getting available data, realising the first analytical entries, organizing thematic focus groups to conduct a SWOT analysis, and an online questionnaire were the first steps. This preliminary research which we have participated in led to the definition of initial strategic goals and objectives included in the first bid book. After pre-selection, the city overtook the initiative and commissioned a public opinion poll to collect base-line data and to better understand citizens' current level of cultural participation and needs. Furthermore, researchers from the University of Žilina conducted qualitative research into areas that came out as priorities after the initial inquiry. They conducted numerous individual in-depth interviews and thematic focus groups with key stakeholders in cultural and creative sectors to validate the initial findings. At the end, several public workshops were held and led to formulation of the vision, goals and measures in the strategic document. As part of the process, community mapping was conducted in six neighborhoods, since the initial insights indicated poor opportunities for cultural participation in remote areas of the city. Besides, the current state of cultural tourism in the city and region was analyzed by an external expert who mapped the field, ran interviews with operators, and then proposed strategic priorities. On the level of the whole Beskids region, a joint cross-border strategy dedicated solely to culture does not exist yet, but we updated bilateral agreements and memorandums between partner cities and regions. The Euroregion Beskids' offices have a joint development strategy for the Euroregion Beskids 2016–2023, where culture is present in the frame of cross-border tourism and cross-border cooperation between organisations. The Euroregion Beskids is currently working on a new strategic document for the next period.

Outline of the Creative Žilina 2035 strategy

The cultural strategy of the city covers four areas and has thirteen strategic goals.

- City Support for Culture
- A diverse, lively and cooperating cultural scene in the city operating in adequate infrastructural conditions and with participation of an engaged audience.*
- GOALS
 - City as a partner and catalyst of cooperation
 - Effective management of culture
 - Audience development – promoting a more accessible culture

- An Inspiring and Innovative city
- Investment in innovation – creative industry as the industry of the future, strengthening recognition and competitiveness of the city.*
- GOALS
 - Promoting a creative ecosystem with sustainable working conditions for CCI
 - Capacity building and development of creative and innovation potential
 - Rise of attractivity and reputation, based on a recognizable brand of a creative city

- Identity and Cultural Tourism
- An attractive destination for domestic and foreign cultural tourism thanks to its natural richness and ability to develop its urban identity through culture.*
- GOALS
 - Creation of a diverse offer for cultural and creative tourism
 - Reinforcement of the cross-border region Beskids through cultural cooperation
 - Building up a stronger European profile of the city, well-connected and participating in European networks

- Inclusive and Sustainable City
- Healthy, democratic, open, inclusive and sustainable city with a complex cultural offer.*
- GOALS
 - Developing a cultivated public space for all
 - An inclusive city with space for creativity and community development
 - An engaged city – development of a culture of democracy and cultural openness
 - A sustainable city

Žilina Beskids 2026 contribution to the strategy Creative Žilina 2035

Even though Žilina Beskids 2026 operates on the larger scale of a cross-border candidature, its strategic goals overlap with the city's strategy in most of the defined areas. The strategic document Creative Žilina 2035 reflects ECoC candidacy's high ambitions, however, it is not a policy document tailored specifically to needs of the ECoC, such as would need to be cancelled in case of the candidacy's failure. Obviously, ECoC's contribution to achievement of the set goals remains essential due to the possibility of unprecedented mobilization of resources between 2022 and 2026. The strategic goals of Žilina Beskids 2026 in connection with the goals of Creative Žilina 2035 are:



- Inspiring and innovative region ↔ Inspiring and Innovative city
- Cross-border European region Beskids ↔ Identity and cultural tourism
- Inclusive and creative communities ↔ An inclusive city creating space for creativity and community development
- Developing a culture of democracy ↔ An engaged city – development of a culture of democracy and cultural openness
- Cultivated public spaces and sustainable cities in a mountain region ↔ A sustainable city

The Inspiring and Innovative City strategic section of Žilina Beskids 2035 is fully aligned with Žilina Beskids 2026 strategic goal of Inspiring and Innovative Region. Large amount of the proposed activities and investments are aiming to reinforce sustainable development of the existing cultural scene and to supply the missing segments of the local cultural offer. For instance, proposed investments like HANGAR – Creative Centre for Art in Public Space, Audiovisual Hub, Dance Centre S2 or Ciachovňa will result in creation of accessible venues and related technological facilities for creation and production of innovative contents (makerspaces, studios, ateliers and co-working spaces). New facilities will bring new technologies, employ skilled professionals and inspire intersectoral cooperation, thereby actually reinforcing the city's innovative potential.

The ECoC title is often associated with high expectations regarding the city's and region's position as a tourist destination, therefore we included the Cross-Border European Region Beskids as an ECoC strategic goal, linked to the city's strategic area Identity and Cultural Tourism. The city aims to become an attractive European destination and the proposed activities of the ECoC will deepen its collaboration with European networks and build new European partnerships, which are in line with this ambition. The very decision to run for the ECoC as a cross-border consortium is also a signal of the ambition to make the Beskids a destination of European importance. Already during the ECoC candidacy, a new Marketing Alliance Beskids 2026 was established, with sixteen tourism and regional development organizations aiming to work together on the shared tourism brand Beskids.

It will bring an opportunity to access new markets, create new innovative products, and promote a new cultural tourism model for the city and its cross-border region.

The ambition of the strategic area of Inclusive and Sustainable City is clearly reflected in two ECoC strategic goals: Inclusive and Creative Communities and Cultivated Public Spaces and Sustainable Cities in a Mountain Region, but also both in our main programme and among the outreach projects. We dedicate one entire programme pillar Flow of Nature to the topic of climate emergency and sustainability. In Future Factories, there is a strong focus on co-creating and cultivating public spaces, either through promoting art in the public space or through usage of temporary architecture as a tool to test the future functions. Establishment and activities of Pasá:Ž represents a step towards improvement of citizen participation in public affairs.

The ECoC strategic goal of Developing a Culture of Democracy is also reflected in the city's strategy as Engaged Democratic City. These strategies are directly linked to the third programme pillar Borderless Identity, where we focus on promoting European democratic values, media and artistic freedom of expression, as well as intercultural dialogue. The activities of the ECoC are looking for new modes of interaction with citizens, exploring participative models and creative bureaucracy. Making culture accessible to a broad spectrum of citizens is at the core of our outreach strategy, not only by removing physical barriers, but also by bringing culture closer to citizens. The ECoC project promotes community development and cultural participation in peripheral communities, for instance by creating a network of seven Cultural Houses.

The candidature was approved by the local government with an aim to accelerate achievement of the strategic goals in the field of culture and creative industry. The process of the ECoC candidacy itself empowers the management and administration of the cultural sector in Žilina, given the inherent requirement for better data-based and strategic decision-making in that field. The candidature also represents an opportunity to build new regional and European partnerships and to substantially strengthen the capacity of the local cultural scene.

1. 2 Have your intentions in terms of long-term impact of the European Capital of Culture action on the city changed since pre-selection?

Throughout the process of preparing the final bid, we have been focusing on cross-border and regional cooperation, on further development of the programme, and on the European dimension. As a result, we have included these in the expected long-term impact. However, in terms of the more general aims there was no major change. For further elaboration on links between our strategic goals, expected impacts, actions taken, and indicators to measure and evaluate the impact, please see table 1.

Tab 1. Contribution to the long-term strategy

STRATEGIC GOALS OF CANDIDACY	IMPACTS CULTURAL / SOCIAL / ECONOMIC / URBAN DEVELOPMENT	POSSIBLE INDICATORS
Inspiring & Innovative Region	<div>↘ Cultural</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Audience development and widened audience cultural perspectivesNew opportunities for local artists, new creation contexts, and European visibilityIncreasing capacities and ambitions of the local cultural sector <div>↘ Social</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reinforced sustainability and financial stability of the cultural sceneStronger collaborative culture between cultural operatorsImproved working conditions and better recognition of the importance of culture <div>↘ Economic</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Scaling up the share of creative industries within the local economiesInnovative ecosystem with better access to spaces, technologies, and production toolsBetter access to training and education opportunities for creative workersIncreasing attractivity of the Beskids as a destination for creative workers and decreasing brain drainBetter online presence and cultural marketing <div>↘ Urban development</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">New cultural infrastructures offering innovative cultural and artistic content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Total number of ECoC events generated by ECoC activity and attendance at ECoC events, including demographics and satisfactionEvolution of attendance in cultural institutions compared to the regular cultural audience before ECoCNumber of new working spaces and number of studios for creative workersNumber of training courses for creative workers and attendanceNumber of original artworks commissioned by ECoC and establishment of new artistic collaborations that arise from ECoCNumber of collaborations between cultural operatorsNumber and profile of people participating in creative activities and the scope of visited cultural events and institutionsPercentage level of city budget invested in culture (including CCLs) and number of applications to the cities' / regions' cultural grant schemesPercentage of creative and cultural industries in local GDPPercentage of employment in cities' / regions' cultural and creative sectorsNumber of start-ups and new organizations in CCLsNumber of cross-sectoral collaborations including the cultural sectorPercentage of generated own incomes and of private sponsors in cultural eventsNumber of new and refurbished cultural spacesValue of investment in new cultural infrastructure
Cross-border & European region Beskids	<div>↘ Cultural</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Better connected cultural sceneParticipation of local cultural operators in European networks and projectsIncreasing intercultural competencies of the citizensImproved perceptions of the Beskids region locally and internationally <div>↘ Social</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased citizens' sense of belonging to the EU and its valuesMaking the region more welcoming for visitors and non-native inhabitantsHigher geographical and social mobility in the region <div>↘ Economic</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Turning the Beskids into a recognisable tourism destination in EuropeDiversifying the tourism offer in the region and its interconnectivityBetter quality of hospitality and visitor services in the region <div>↘ Urban development</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Better interconnected region, incl. transportation, trails and cycle routesBetter geographical distribution of cultural infrastructures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of cross-border and European visitors to ECoC eventsNumber of European and cross-border collaborations, co-productions and artists' mobilities involving local and international operatorsNumber of geographical spots covered in the ECoC's artistic programmeNumber of European and V4 / Interreg cultural and creative applications and number of successful projectsNumber of cross-marketing of events between cities / operators in the regionNumber of activities highlighting European diversity, based on European themes or based on transnational cooperationPerceptions of Europeaness among citizens and ECoC impact on itNumber and percentage of positive mentions of international, national and local press articles with reference to ECoCPercentage of recognition rate of ECoC at local, national and European levelPercentage of positive / negative image of the city and likelihood/desire to visitPercentage change in visitors to the city (number / origin / length of stay)Percentage change in motivation to visit the region, visitor expenditures, places visited and average number of overnight staysPercentage of visitor satisfaction with servicesNumber of new thematic itineraries developed and guided visits realised in the regionNumber of train connections, intensity of traffic, cultural cross-border trails and cycle routesNumber of architectural interventions realised in the region

Inclusive and creative communities	<div>↘ Cultural</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increase in cultural participationCultural decentralisation in the region's remote areasRealised community cultural development plansCustomized offer for seniors, children, and families <div>↘ Social</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased social cohesion and self-confidence of Beskids' inhabitantsReinforced intergenerational dialogueAccessibility of cultural institutions for visitors with special needsCultural participation of marginalised or lower-income groupsImplementation of nondiscriminatory policy in the culture sector <div>↘ Economic</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">More volunteering work in cultural sectorIncrease in participative tourism and heritage interpretation offers <div>↘ Urban development</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Refurbishment of cultural houses in remote urban areasAdaptation of public cultural institutions to be wheelchair accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Local attendance at cultural events and audience geographical, age and socio-cultural spreadExtent and diversity of cultural offer in the region's remote areasNumber of measures to facilitate citizens' participation in decision-making processes and number of people involved in the execution of the ECoC projectsNumber of cultural professionals trained and audience development strategiesNumber of projects involving specific social groups: seniors, marginalised groupsGender balance and cultural diversity of the cultural workforcePerception of life well-being in the region, sense of belonging, safety perception and positive / negative impacts of ECoCs among diverse target groups in the regionNumber and profile of active volunteers and level of involvementPercentage of inhabitants involved in producing cultural and tourism offersNumber of Cultural Houses refurbished in remote areas and number of events inPercentage of institutions wheelchair accessible by 2026
Developing a culture of democracy	<div>↘ Cultural</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Reinforced freedom of speech and tolerance to diversityReinforced local democracy and dialogue between public institutions and citizensIncreased citizen participation in public debatesReinforced plurality of local media <div>↘ Social</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Improved dialogue between communitiesIncreased level of critical thinking among the general populationHigher number of self-initiated local networks <div>↘ Economic</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Raised awareness on anti-corruption measuresDeploying participatory budgets <div>↘ Urban development</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Co-design of public spaces with citizens and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of persecuted writers, artists, and journalists hosted in ŽilinaNumber of citizens involved in public debates and strategic decisionsPerception of trust in the ECoC project and percentage of fulfilment of engagement from the MemorandumDiversity of sources and number of authors of articles concerning ECoCNumber of projects involving members of different communitiesNumber of self-initiated local networks and local grassroots initiatives created during or after the ECoCNumber of verbal attacks on cultural diversity and plurality of opinionNumber of participatory budgets deployed and of projects by local citizensNumber of published information and financial reports of the organisationPercentage of open calls and public procurementsNumber of urban and architectural projects co-designed with citizens and local communities
Cultivated public spaces and sustainable cities in a mountain region	<div>↘ Cultural</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">New outdoor cultural events in nature and environmental artworksRaising awareness about art in public space and improve its qualityMobility of cultural services to the remote parts of the regionReinterpretation of local cultural traditions in European and contemporary contextsIncreased awareness about architecture, urbanism, and refurbished built environment in cities and rural areas <div>↘ Social</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Better access to culture in remote areas of the region and renewed relationship between rural areas and citiesRaised public awareness of ecological issues and inspiring changes in collective behaviours (recycling, upcycling, green mobility, water management, biodiversity)More community events in public space <div>↘ Economic</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased natural tourism in the regionFrom cities of transit to hub for mountain activities and evening urban cultureIncreasing the number of successful SMEs, bar, restaurants, and cultural street life <div>↘ Urban / rural development</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Decreased environmental impact of cultural events, implementation of circularity into the lifecycle of cultural infrastructuresNew leisure destinations around the cities, better quality of city greenery, parks, and courtyardsRefurbished city center and brownfields in the city, increasing its attractiveness and quality of lifeAccessibility of waterfront areas and improved respect for protected landscape areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of outdoor cultural events in natureNumber of architectural and design awards for works from the regionNumber of new works and innovative products based on local cultural traditionsNumber of new cultural services in remote parts of the regionNumber of community events organised in the public spaceNumber of events implementing eco-friendly practicesQuantity and evolution of CO² produced during ECoC eventsNumber of active architects and of architectural competitions organisedNumber of new cultural and tourism products in natural context respecting environmental criteriasNew use of refurbished brownfields, unused spaces and new public space developmentImplemented environmental policy for eventsAmount of waste produced during events and percentage of it recycledPercentage of upcycled materials usedNumber of new and refurbished parks and leisure infrastructureNumber of kilometers of newly accessible waterfront areas and leisure activities next to water

1. 3 Describe your plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the title on your city and for disseminating the results of the evaluation.

We find it important to go beyond the evaluation required, and our intention is to conduct a research-based evaluation with a stable monitoring consultancy body – Constellation. We will collect and use the data to evaluate progress for continual optimisation of the process, and for data-based decisions and management.

Already during the pre-selection phase, we invited the University of Žilina (UNIZA) to be the *main partner* in the evaluation process responsible for all research-related activities. Since Žilina Beskids 2026 is a cross-border cultural cooperation involving three countries, it represents a unique research opportunity on many levels. Therefore, we have called for research partners from the Beskids region and have agreed with the Ostrava university (CZ) on the Czech side and the Silesian university (PL) on the Polish side to take part in this process. A dedicated person in the Žilina Beskids 2026 team will be in charge of facilitating the evaluation process and collecting usable data, making all the collected material freely accessible to researchers.

Researchers working at these three universities and other external experts will create an *evaluation coalition* involved in the ECoC impact assessment process and will manage the subsequent in-depth analysis of the collected data. The impact research will include assessment of cultural, economic, media, social and environmental impacts. Each partner will focus on a specific domain, for instance the University of Žilina (SK) together with experts on economical impact of culture from the Krea group (CZ) will focus on evaluation of the economical impact. Furthermore, experts from the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Žilina (SK) will conduct an evaluation on the impact of tourism and media coverage. Experts on cultural animation from the Silesian University in Cieszyn (PL) will look at cultural participation of local citizens, while experts from the Ostrava university (CZ) will look at management of culture. The Department of Biology and Ecology from the Technical University of Ostrava (CZ) will assist in evaluation of the environmental impact of our ECoC. The Institute of International Sociology in Gorizia (SI) will help us evaluate cross-border cooperation and innovations in public administration. The experts of the Centre for Cultural Evaluation (DK) who worked on Aarhus 2017 evaluation will provide us with theoretical frameworks and international points of comparison together with the University Network of the European Capitals of Culture (UNeECC). The cultural and research organisation Die Bäckerei (AT) will use their project The Culture of Culture to help us evaluate the impact of ECoC on independent artists and cultural organisations. Finally, the Polish organisation Medialab Katowice (PL) will look at the available data and help us interpret and communicate big data to the general public. In addition, we will support independent researchers and development of novel and creative or active research methods (artistic research, transformative methods, individual artists projects). The system will be based on individual projects responding to research grant calls for proposals, often focusing on in-depth analysis of certain aspects, localities, and artistic micro-interventions.

Concerning the *evaluation timeframe*, in 2022, the first step will be the signing of a coalition agreement with the aforementioned partners, contracting the PhD students and researchers



to be involved and then identifying the research topics to be explored. Every year, the Constellation platform will produce an online evaluation report and a list of recommendations for the management and the board of the organisation. This process will culminate in a final evaluation conference and a publication in 2027, while at the same time already introducing the follow-up phases.

Besides the submission of three mandatory monitoring reports and a final evaluation report, the University of Žilina and the ECoC team will organise the annual *Cultural Forum Beskids*, where actual research findings will be presented. International experts will be invited to present best practices and engage in discussions with our Constellation platform. The conference will serve as a platform for regular feedback on the development and overall impact of the project, aiming at its continuous strategic readjustment, but also peer education. We started our cooperation already during the bidding phase, the Cultural Forum in 2021 had a particular focus on evaluation of culture, open data, and baseline data collection in culture, since these are crucial issues for the arrangement of our evaluation and monitoring programme. We also plan to evaluate the impact of the ECoC after one (2027) and five years (2031) from the ECoC title year.

The Constellation platform at the Cultural Forum Beskids will tackle the following areas:

- 2021 → Evaluation of culture (introductory workshop)
- 2022 → Participation in culture and audience development
- 2023 → Crossborder cultural cooperation and European brand building
- 2024 → Environmental impact of culture, circular cultural models
- 2025 → Economical impact, cultural tourism, intersectoral cooperation
- 2026 → Sustainability of the cultural ecosystem and new cultural production models
- 2027 → Final evaluation of the Žilina Beskids 2026 project

As a part of the preparatory process for Creative Žilina 2035, we generated a set of *baseline data* through opinion polls and qualitative research run by the University of Žilina, with the plan to repeat the surveys on longitudinal basis so that the comparison of advancement and impact measurement can be realized using evidence-based methods. Further, we will keep on collecting and analyzing a set of existing statistical data about attendance, number of activities, and economic indicators of the public cultural institutions. In the year 2022, we will also complete data from the baseline studies, especially the sets missing from Frýdek-Místek and Bielsko-Biała.

A list of *Indicators*, corresponding to Žilina Beskids 2026’s strategic goals is presented in table 1. We will also gather information concerning satisfaction and quality of the work done by Žilina Beskids 2026 according to values and principles defined in our MANIFESTO. Those are: diversity, inclusion, quality and independence of art production, sustainability, transparency and accountability, participation, innovation, creative bureaucracy, deconcentration and the online shift, environmental protection, and outdoor culture. The Žilina

Beskids 2026 will adopt policies and measures of non-discrimination policies in the different areas described by the Manifesto.

The *results of the evaluation* will be disseminated during the annual Cultural Forum Beskids and in an online publication. A final evaluation report will be produced for experts in 2027, as will be a photobook of Žilina Beskids 2027 for further marketing purposes. The Culture of Culture report and performance will be presented by Die Bäckerei (AT) in 2026 in Žilina. MediaLab Katowice will produce an evaluation exhibition and site specific data visualisations, presenting the outputs of the ECoC in the public space and in an open data format accessible for the audience.

Besides *Window of Opportunities*, which we adopted for our credo, there is another famous NASA phrase saying “*Failure is not an option*”. However, in contrast to space flights, failures are allowed in art and culture, but are much harder to define, since they are to a certain extent spiritual and subjective. *Art itself could be seen as an eternal quest for the victory of spirit over materiality*. If the local inhabitants and visitors remember Žilina Beskids 2026 event as a mind-opening occurrence, widening their horizons and moving their perception of culture, we would consider it a real “success”.

Concerning measurable aspects of success, we will evaluate the event using indicators from table 1., with a selection of expected values for 2026 below:

1million

EVENT AUDIENCE OF 1,000,000 PEOPLE

500,000

INCREASE OF VISITORS TO ŽILINA AND MALA FATRA UP TO 500,000

400+

INVOLVEMENT OF 400 VOLUNTEERS

2,500

MEDIA PUBLICATIONS IN 150 INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

↗ 25%

INCREASE OF OVERNIGHT STAYS IN 2026 COMPARED TO 2023

↗ 30%

INCREASED NUMBER OF VISITORS OF CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS BY 30%

↗ 2%

THE CULTURAL & CREATIVE SECTOR IN THE ŽILINA REGION MAKING UP 2% OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT

2. CULTURAL & ARTISTIC CONTENT

2.1 Describe in detail the artistic vision and the strategy for the cultural programme of the year outlined at pre-selection stage, explaining any changes brought in since preselection.

A window invites opening, looking outside, and letting in fresh air from the Beskids or other parts of Europe to inspire us.

Our strategy stems from the initial idea of looking outwards, going beyond the borders and uniting three cross-border cities within the Beskids region. So, after initial enthusiasm about the idea of a joint candidacy we have, after pre-selection, tried hard to extend our cultural union by focusing on better interconnecting and spreading our programme across the whole Beskid territory.

We consider ECoC as an opportunity for both a giant leap and small steps – systemic changes on the level of management of the cultural sector as well as incrementally strengthening the capacities at the operating level.

We take advantage of strong cultural operators and distinctive cultural contents present in the region, we build on them and push them further by opening up the “windows” to Europe for them. We also look at how to deal with improving audience development and visitor experience and try to accelerate those transformations. In most of our projects, we now cooperate with international partners and networks, which facilitates the mobility of artists and artworks, and also brings new European perspectives on regional and local contexts.

Apart from standard institutional art presentations and cultural events like concerts, festivals or theatre performances, we decided to focus on rather unexpected cultural situations in unusual urban and rural contexts, taking into account their authentic topos, e.g. by installing context-specific artworks in the public space or in nature.

As suggested by the panel, we have put energy in completing the programme with large and memorable events, to mark the year with strong experiences to attract local inhabitants as well as European visitors, like in: puppet and new circus programmes, our biggest public art project Akusticon or dozens of temporary architectural constructions, the Echoes of the City festival, the Flow and -Scape festivals, Summit of Culture, the Lotos Jazz Festival, Music trips or Nosferatu events, the Week of Beskid Cultures, Vrba and Wetzler events, the Polis festival or Argillia, animated film and game festivals or the Steam² biennial... We tried to come up with original ideas and be innovative in terms of audience experiences, with cultural trains, immersive contents, trails in place of traditional ways of presenting content.

We seek to connect art with other disciplines, and look for topics that are less usual for ECoCs, like journalism, freedom of speech, democracy, prospective architecture, which we believe are relevant locally and at European level. We focused on various niches like textile, enamel art, animated films, and gaming, where we have a bigger chance to be on the cutting edge.

We need to address common, everyday cultural needs of our citizens just as much as big societal issues like the atomisation of society – a problem which the French philosopher Paul Virilio called “mass individualism”, and which has been highly accelerated by the pandemic. We believe that culture gives hope, counteracts loneliness, and our programme is therefore based on collectivity and care. It will be a call for numerous self-initiated collectives to emerge, sustain and deliver. In this sense, our artistic vision follows the concept of *Window of Opportunities* aiming to offer multiple chances for participation, learning, growth, and action.



Behind our bid there is a set of values and principles which we have developed and written down as our [MANIFESTO](#), in order to make them communicable to the public and possible to evaluate in their implementation:

1. Diversity

Celebrating European diversity, promoting intercultural dialogue and balancing the plurality of art forms and genres.

2. Inclusion

Being tolerant, open and proactive towards all audiences, taking measures to lower barriers, mobilizing diversity of cultural references.

3. Quality & Independence of Art Production

Discovering talent, supporting artistic freedom and putting strong emphasis on high quality of art production.

4. Sustainability

Supporting professionalization of the scene, caring for artists, investing in education and capacity building, looking for new economic models for culture.

5. Transparency & Accountability

Opening access to information, committing not only to these values, but especially to high standards for their enforcement.

6. Participation

Requesting feedback, empowering citizens to raise their voice, partnering with local networks, offering them a share in decision making.

7. Innovation

Supporting disruptive solutions, building new connections and intersectoral cooperation, transforming cultural offers and experiences.

8. Creative Bureaucracy

Focusing on user-friendly solutions, improving structure and processes of delivery of public and cultural services.

9. Environmental Protection

Promoting green and meaningful mobility, supporting recycling, upcycling, and circular economy, sensitizing audiences to eco issues through art.

10. Deconcentration and Shift to Online

Reaching remote areas, searching alternative online models of cultural presentation, amplifying the impact.

11. Outdoor Culture

Going public, bringing art where people are, developing contact with new audiences and contexts.

2. 2 Describe the structure of the cultural programme, including the range and diversity of the activities and the main events that will mark the year.

The programme for Žilina Beskids 2026 is structured around three main programme pillars, each of these further divided into clusters consisting of flagship, main, and associated projects, for a total of 148 projects. The content presented in the bid book comprises more than eighty percent of the planned final ECoC programme. The final selection of projects will be completed via complementary calls for projects announced during the realisation phase. The programme will be spread equally throughout the ECoC year, taking into account the seasonality and weather conditions in northern Slovakia. The programme will be structured around the four annual astronomical momentums.

We will start the ECoC year with a pre-opening ceremony on the winter solstice, the 21 December 2025, an appetizer for the Opening of the ECoC to take place on the third weekend of January, 2026. We will close the city centre to car traffic to accommodate the maximum number of pedestrian spectators (we expect at least 30,000 people) and develop an outdoor programme adapted to the season’s harsh weather. We expect to transform the entrances to the city’s Národná street and Bulvár by visual art and scenographic installations by Les plastiqueurs (FR) and local scenographers like Juraj Poliak (SK), Katarína Máliková (SK). The event will include allegorical parades, with large scale inflatable structures by Cirkus trochu jinak (CZ), symbolically bringing in people from all three directions of Beskids. We will also light up the Dubeň – Straník, a hill dominating the city skyline, with a torchlight procession. The main show will be run by Komplex Kapharnaum (FR) on the Hlinka square and the city balustrade, offering audiovisual projections, vertical show, and music against the historical backdrop of the City Theatre, the Holy Trinity Cathedral, and Burian’s Tower. Komplex Kapharnaüm (FR) will create the show following several residencies in Žilina and in the Beskids, collecting oral history and images from the region.

On Mariánske Námestie, a large-scale light installation by the remarkable Studio Roosegaarde (NL) evoking our three pillars will offer an unique outdoor immersive experience. That day, several exhibitions will be opened – including the Prospective Cities group of exhibitions in Pasa:Ž, Museum of Art in Žilina, and Ciachovňa, plus Building the Town by Sutnar in the Interactive Children’s Museum, Inside Slovak Modernism in the Bôrik immersive centre or, finally, Akusticon, our most iconic installation. Concerts will be organised in different spots around the city, including a large one in HANGAR in partnership with the festival Beat for Love (CZ). While an official programme with hosts will take place in the City Theatre Žilina, cultural embassies from our partner cities and EU countries or other ECoCs will be organised with cultural programmes in various courtyards around the city. We will spread the programme in space and time during the whole weekend in order to create mobility in the city, to allow at least 30,000 people to experience the opening ceremony safely.

The opening programme will tour Frýdek-Místek and Bielsko-Biala over the weekend, with certain elements from Žilina (e.g. Komplex Kapharnaüm) to happen also there. In Bielsko-Biala, the plan is to close Zamkowa Street between the Sułkowski Castle and the Polski Theatre for car traffic, so that it becomes a promenade for part of the day. The programme will be centred around illuminations on the walls of the Sułkowski Castle,

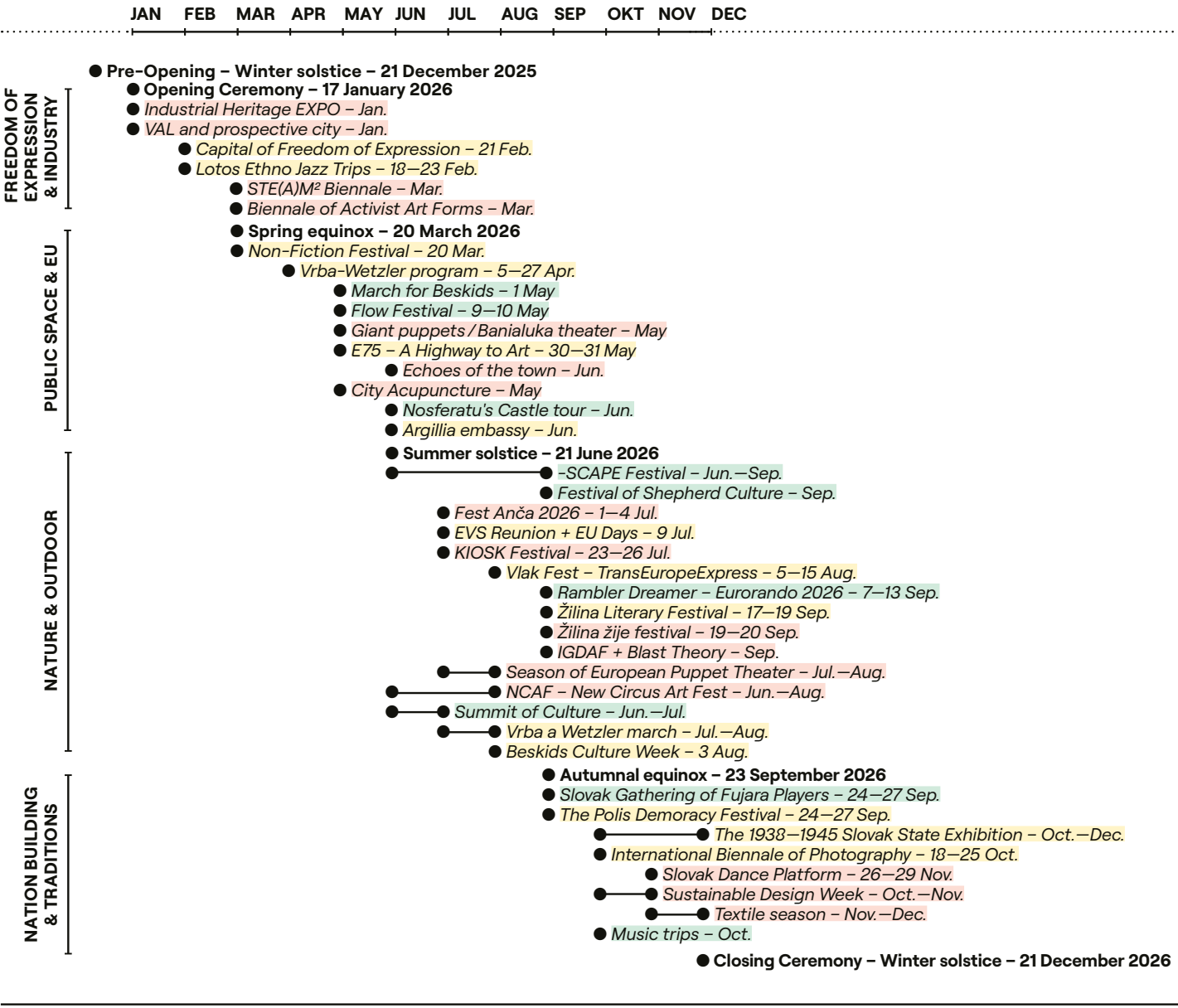
maps projected on the Castle facade with the Memorymorph collective (PL), and concerts. In Frýdek-Místek we plan a new circus performance in the public space by Cirkus trochu jinak (CZ) and a kinetic installation by Michal Pustějovský (CZ) across the river Ostravice.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** Kultúra FM (CZ), Beat for Love (CZ), Cirkus trochujinak (CZ), Komplex Kapharnaum (FR), Studio Roosegaarde (NL), Memorymorph collective (PL)
- **Budget:** € 540,000

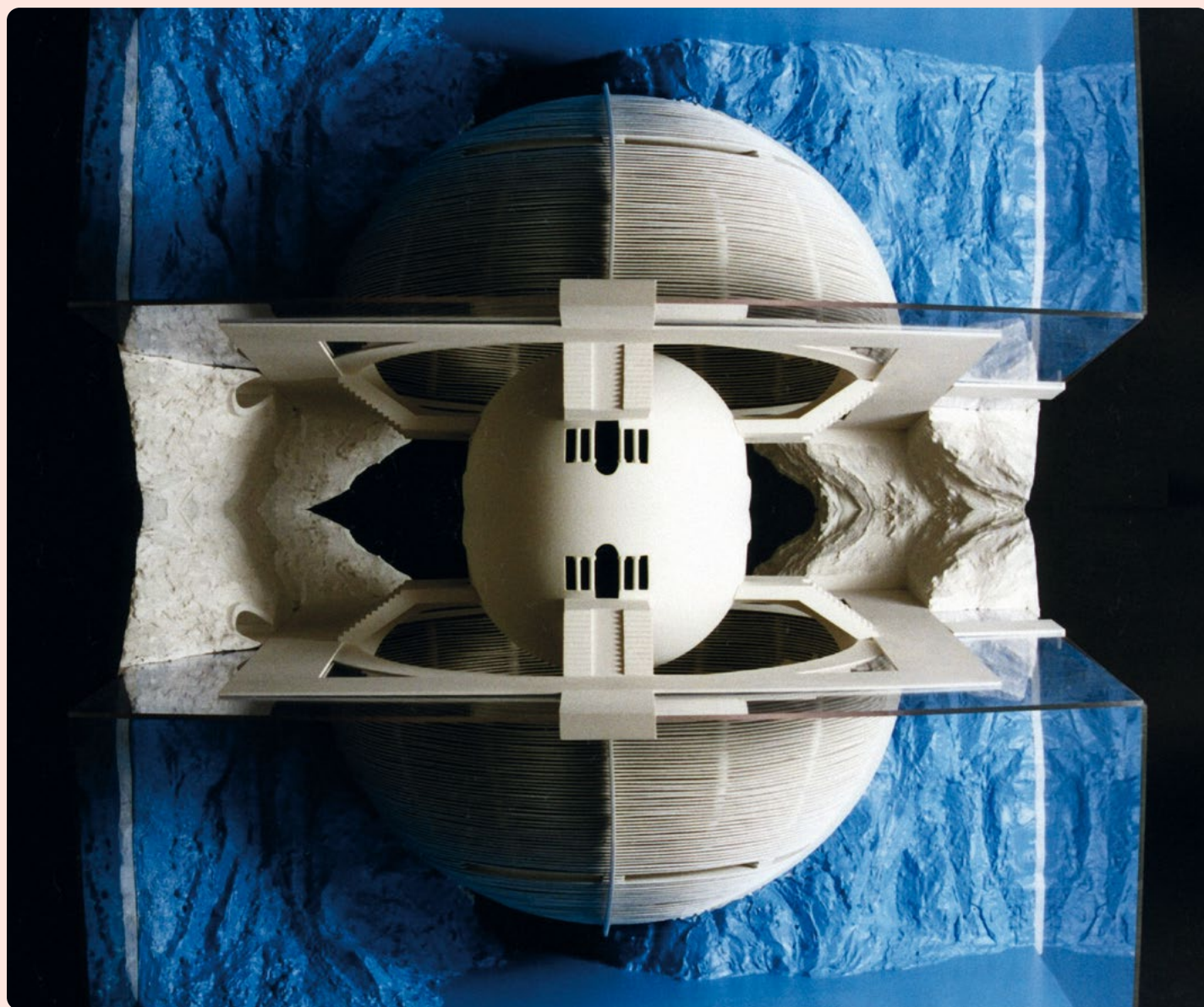
Graphic repartition of the program by genres

	Future Factories	Flow of Nature	Borderless Identities	Sum
Performing Art	10	5	4	19
Visual Art	12	13	4	29
Music	4	7	1	12
New media / Audiovisual	14	1	7	22
Heritage	5	5	6	16
Literature	2	0	11	13
Architecture and design	13	5	1	19
Interdisciplinary	4	9	5	18
Total	64	45	39	148

Structure of the 2026 Programme



Future Factories



Žilina, Bielsko-Biała and Frýdek-Místek are typical examples of cities that developed along with their respective industries. Industrial production has been a fertile ground for a particular culture, one that consists of both tangible and intangible assets: factories as the foundation of new urban structures; crafts, engineering and entrepreneurial skills as a source of social and economic capital. Specific mind-sets, loyalties, and attitudes co-create the social fabric and everyday life in industrial regions, even if their people are often not aware of it.

Žilina and Bielsko-Biała also have a longstanding tradition of being the go-to places for art production. In this program pillar, we develop it further, build new capacities, and as a result, the existing creative and innovation ecosystem in the Beskids region will gain new production facilities, exhibition spaces, ateliers, and workshops. We nevertheless have to be cautious, as the founder of e-flux, Anton Vidokle, reminds us in his famous essay “Art Without Artists?”,

wherein he criticizes tendencies to turn artists into mere producers and artworks into products created on demand from curators and programme managers. This risk surely also applies to developing ECoC’s artistic and cultural programmes, including ours. We will be careful, emphatic, and always work closely with artists; we will prioritize direct investments in development and production of new artworks. It is also an expression of our concern for artists and the related professions, represented by an effort to improve their working conditions based on the principles of circular and social economy and promotion of fair pay. We believe that collective imagination, empathy, and generosity make up a space where art and culture meet social activism, management, and local networks in the most productive way. Therefore, a big part of the programme in this pillar will be dedicated to citizen participation, sharing, and co-creation of strategies and artistic interventions for public spaces.



Interwoven Cities

Urban development of the Beskids region is directly linked to the establishment of the Košice-Bohumín railway at the end of the 19th century and the ensuing industrialisation. Historically, the cities of Žilina, Bielsko-Biała, and Frýdek-Místek drew strength from their industrial tradition, especially textile production. A century ago, Beskids held a prominent place in the field. Now, textile production barely exists anymore, but it left a great mark in the shape of the cities and even the industries of today.



Textile Season

We decided to honour our joint industrial past by dedicating sixty days of particular attention to textile art and looking at it from different perspectives in our *Textile Season*. The project is built on cross-border cooperation between the three cities, all of which have a strong tradition of textile production.

Six large exhibitions employing different curatorial approaches will be accompanied by a high-profile international conference and educational workshops, initiating dialogue across disciplines, media, and methods of interpretation. Markéta Vinglerová (CZ), curator of the Textile Collection at Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague (CZ) will present the intriguing history of woven tapestries in Czechoslovakia at the exhibition *Don't Design. Weave! Tapestry in Czechoslovakia 1958-1989* in the Museum of Technology and Textile Industry – a branch of the Museum in Bielsko-Biała (PL). At the end of the 1950s, in connection with the worldwide renaissance of the tapestry, the history of

the original Czechoslovak tapestry began. The state-subsidized placement of works of art in new architectural realizations during the former regime resulted in creation of many monumental textile works. The exhibition intends to show the most important examples of Czechoslovak tapestries from the period, aiming to unfold the political, personal, and cultural circumstances of their creation.

With a slightly different perspective, BWA gallery's (PL) exhibition *Silent History* will focus on past generations of female workers, whose hard work produced billions of meters of woven fabrics. Their labor went often unnoticed and faded away in the repetitive rhythm of days immersed in the ash factory and domestic work. This exhibition is inspired by the book of Marta Madejska – *Aleja Włókniaerek*, one of the most important Polish books dealing with the subject. The silent story of female workers remains a part of a much longer history that took place not only once upon a time in Beskids but rather goes on today in the factories in China, India, Bangladesh...

Lottozero (IT) is an Italian center for textile design, art, and exchange with an open lab for textile production, experimentation, and research. Their curated exhibition to be presented at Nová Synagóga in Žilina will explore the use of textile material in contemporary art and new approaches to making fashion, where the worker is placed at the center of the creative process. *Textile Biophilia* is a showcase of selected design, research, and art projects that offer a glimpse of what is happening in the field of textiles when biology and technology come together, to be presented in Ciachovňa.

Curated by Giulia Tomasello (IT), an expert on biotechnology, interactive wearables and female's healthtech, the exhibition will bring a fresh look at the forefront of textile innovations like growing new materials or developing concepts using living organisms. The exhibition *Textiles as (non) Materials*, curated by Kristína Hermanová (SK), will map the expanded possibilities of textiles as a material in contemporary art and will focus on the possibilities of working with textiles beyond their traditional forms. Apart

from an exhibition with an international representation of artists, the project also includes the publication of a catalogue and other educational materials for the public. *Textiles in the Beskydy region* is a research-based project led by Lenore Jurkyová (CZ) which will result in site-specific works for the New Eight center in Frýdek Místek, inspired by traditional techniques and materials specific to the Beskids region.

- **Organiser:** Bielska Gallery BWA (PL), Kultura FM (CZ), Museum of Art in Žilina (SK), Museum of Technology and Textile Industry – a branch of the Museum in Bielsko-Biała (PL), WNOOZOW (CZ), Textile HUB Čadca (SK)
- **Partners:** Rosenfeld Palace (SK), Nová Synagóga (SK), Lottozero (IT), STE(A)M² LAB – Žilina Beskids 2026 (SK), ALMA (IT/DE), Giulia Tomasello (IT), Lenore Jurkyová (CZ), Markéta Vinglerová (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 310,000

European Textile Network Conference 2026

Along with an exhibition programme, we will also contribute to international debate by hosting the *European Textile Network Conference 2026* in Žilina, with workshops and the *ETN exhibition* in the Rosenfeld Palace. This high-profile international conference will be co-organized by the European Textile Network, an international association founded in Austria in 1991 with the aim of promoting exchange between nations and strengthening European community spirit through reflections of the textile medium. Every second year, an international conference takes place in a different country at a location with a textile background. In 2026, it will provide an opportunity for us to present our strong regional history in the field for scholarly European audiences.

- **Organiser:** ETN European Textile Network (AT), Žilina Beskids 2026 (SK)
- **Partners:** Textiles Zentrum Haslach (AT), Textile HUB Čadca (SK), WNOOZOW (CZ), The Museum of Technology and Textile Industry – a branch of the Museum in Bielsko-Biała (PL), Museum of the Považie Region (SK), Rosenfeld Palace (SK), City Theatre Žilina (SK)
- **Budget:** € 50,000

Textile HUB

In collaboration with one of the last existing textile manufacturing companies in the

region, the *Textile HUB* (SK) opened this year on the premises of the former Slovena factory in Čadca. The Textile HUB is an open laboratory for artists and designers to test their concepts in practice. The facilities contain, among other things, a unique historical Jacquard machine restored by a group of designers and engineers after long research, and offer a place to experiment by combining the original production processes with modern materials and approaches. While Textile HUB is primarily a space for professional artists, designers, and technologists, it also offers a space for non-formal education, factory tours, and workshops for the broader public. During the Textile Season, it will offer international workshops and Artist in Residence programmes for European artists, with renowned textile centres like Lottozero (IT).

- **Organiser:** WNOOZOW (CZ), Textile HUB Čadca (SK)
- **Partners:** Lottozero (IT), Kultura FM (CZ), The Beskids Museum in Frýdek-Místek (CZ), The Museum of Technology and Textile Industry – a branch of the Museum in Bielsko-Biała (PL), Museum of the Považie Region (SK)
- **Budget:** € 37,000

Industrial Heritage EXPO

In 1903, the city of Žilina hosted the Austro-Hungarian Industrial Exhibition and its twenty-five pavilions. We will re-enact the event. The *Industrial Heritage EXPO 2026* will give space to regional as well as European heritage organisations to present old textile mills, products, and machines, and their related social contexts. In the region, we speak of Slovena in Žilina, Makyta in Púchov (SK), Slezan in Frýdek-Místek (CZ) or Bewelana in Bielsko-Biała (PL), but also European organisations like Musée Bargoïn, the Carpet and Textile Arts Museum in Clermont-Ferrand (FR-TBC). Defunct pavilions will be replaced by contemporary architecture from the workshop of European architects and designers. These “stands” with links to individual histories and fates of the industrial heritage will also serve as reminders of those interesting places from the past and create a new circuit with an up-to-date and attractive way to present industrial history. An international conference, organised by the Museum of the Považie Region on the industrial heritage of the Beskids region, will bring new research and contributions to the topic. Besides the EXPO, we will create the *Beskids Industrial Heritage Route*, an expansion of

the existing Techno Trasa in the Moravian-Silesian Region (CZ) which will comprise experiential cultural and touristic offers of the region’s industrial heritage museums and sites. The project will result in an online map of interesting sites and databases, a publication, and tourist products presenting the industrial heritage. With *Odyssea Beskids* events we will revisit the industrial heritage of the region through a series of cultural events combining cutting-edge electronic music and visual arts in non-traditional industrial settings.

- **Organiser:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK), Jungle Heads, o. z.(SK), Odyssea events (SK)
- **Partners:** New Eight (CZ), Kysuce Museum (SK), The Museum of Technology and Textile Industry – a branch of the Museum in Bielsko-Biała (PL), Slovena. A.s. (SK), The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage – Textile section (BE), Technotrasa (CZ), Swine Daily (SK), Musée Bargoïn, the Carpet and Textile Arts Museum in Clermont-Ferrand (FR-TBC)
- **Budget:** € 390,000

European Textile Time Machine

In collaboration with the Time Machine Organisation (AT) and other European partners, we will create the *European Textile Time Machine*, a digital information system mapping the European textile industry and its economic, social, cultural, and geographical evolution in time. In our case, this involves processing historical data from the Museum of the Považie Region and working with university students on an immersive exhibition using 3D scanning of industrial buildings of the region. At the same time, we will run the Time Machine Academy, focusing on educational activities for staff members of the participating cultural institutions, where they will learn about big data and create a digitalisation strategy. There will also be special workshops for museum curators and IT developers to learn about VR software solutions to enhance visitor experience.

- **Organiser:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK), Time Machine Czech Republic (CZ)
- **Partners:** New Eight (CZ), Kysuce Museum (SK), The Museum of Technology and Textile Industry – a branch of the Museum in Bielsko-Biała (PL), Slovena. A.s. (SK), The

- International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage – Textile section (BE), UNIZA (SK), Broumov 2028 (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 90,000

The Textile Museum Slezan

Already in the 1950s, there was an idea to establish a textile museum in Frýdek-Místek but the suggestion did not find any expert or public support, perhaps because the textile industry was at the time still present. After seventy years, and with the industry all gone, the *Textile Museum Slezan* (CZ) is coming to life. It will be both a curated online project with an archive of historical visual, audio, and textual content, and a live programme organized in the old New Eight centre weaving factory, with historical lectures, guided tours, 3D models, textile workshops or gatherings of former employees. The Museum

will be accessible online and in the textile factory, where it will be expanded with a live programme from May to September, and year-round guided tours, including an augmented reality project created by the local artist Jan Adamus (CZ).

- **Organiser:** Kultura FM (CZ)
- **Partners:** Muzeum Beskyd (CZ), Jan Adamus (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 35,000

Slovena

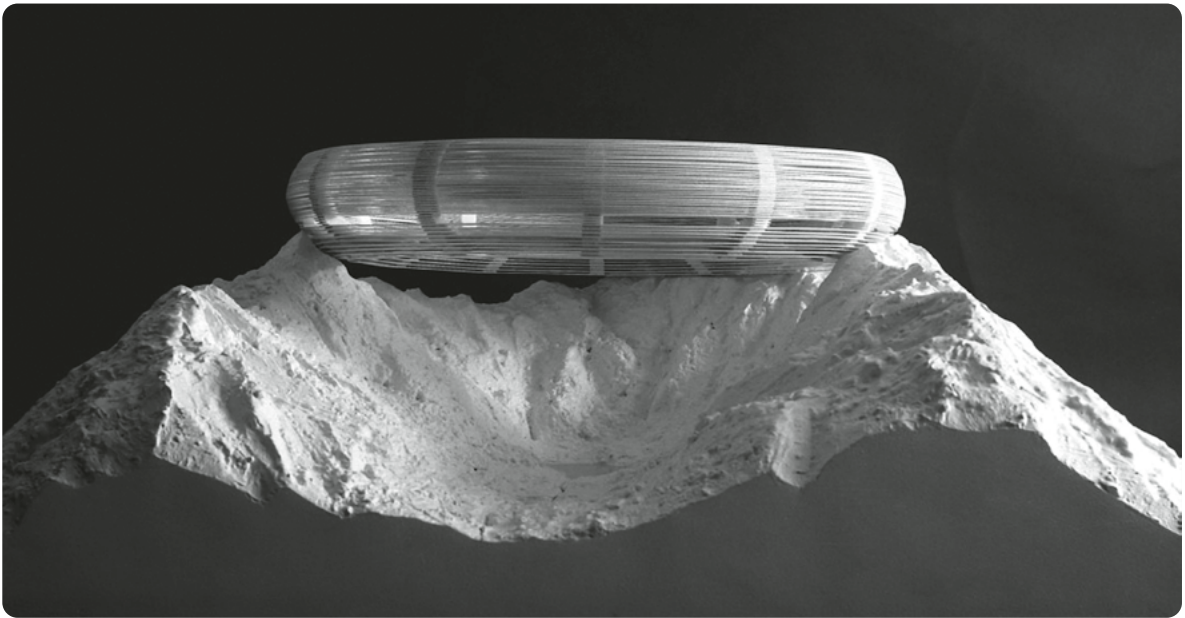
A new theatre performance created and produced by the City Theater Žilina (SK) will reflect on the history of the textile industry in the region, told by the story of Irena Horečná, a factory worker who got politically engaged and even became one of few female members of parliament during the Communist regime. It will be a story of the Slovena factory, its

success and fall, a story of loneliness in various ideological turbulences, a testimony about the past which still forms our present and future. The production will be based on historical research about the economic and professional growth of the factory during the socialist era and its subsequent disintegration and defragmentation after 1989. Through cooperation of several international teams, we will look for parallels with industrial collapses in different parts of the former Eastern Bloc, analyzing the processes of ideological change and the value of labour in society. It will be a testimony about a former industrial stronghold which got lost and smashed in the meanders of the wild post-1989 transformation.

- **Organiser:** City Theatre Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK), Slovena a.s. (SK)
- **Budget:** € 25,000

Prospects for the Future

We observe that more and more citizens care about their environment, in particular the younger generation is very keen to actively participate in taking actions towards a better future. The EU responded to the environmental emergency in part by means of its ‘New European Bauhaus’ initiative, planning to turn Europe into a green industry leader and focusing on building more engaged and sustainable cities and communities. In this project cluster, we are joining in, providing multiple platforms for citizens to engage and jointly address the topics of how to improve local democracy and public space and how to make our lives and cities better. We believe an enhanced collective imagination is a key to doing so, therefore we will involve citizens, artists, and architects in common creation of strategies for the public space and will as well invite kids and teenagers to engage with prospects of future cities. We will nevertheless also look back, shedding light on artistic utopias from the past, exploring what makes them persist.



PASA:Ž

The premises of the investment project *Pasa:Ž* (SK), an open platform for citizen participation and debates about architecture, urban planning, and governance will become the central stage for the activities of the Urban LAB and Creative Bureaucracy programme in Žilina. The activities of the *Urban LAB Žilina* will aim to increase awareness about architecture and urban planning among the general public through workshops, debates, and educational activities like guided walks through the city during the Architecture Days or the *Žilina Architectural Manual*, a map of interesting architectural buildings in the city. It will also be a space for professional artists, architects, and urbanists to network and explore prospective cities. *The Pasa:Ž architecture gallery* will host inspiring temporary exhibitions focused on current trends in architecture and urbanism. In 2026, we expect to host two thematic exhibitions in collaboration with the BETA Biennale of architecture (RO) in Timișoara (SIGMA Group, Enough is Enough), with MOTA (SI) in Ljubljana (Nonument), PROLOG (Borderless Cities), and with Moravská Galéria (CZ) – the Jurkovič Retrospective. In collaboration with the Architecture for Kids (CZ) platform from Prague, we will run in Urban LAB the pilot educational project *My City* to support active involvement of school-age children (ages six to sixteen) in planning and designing public space and understanding development of their cities in a playful way. Pasa:Ž will also host the *Creative Bureaucracy platform* – the development and training programme for public servants, inspired by the concept introduced by Charles Landry. We want to use creativity and art to drive capacity-building and institutional culture change. Firstly, we will use service design and human-centred design thinking, in cooperation with artists and designers like the Kiuub (SK) or Playable City (UK), to redesign selected public services so that they better address the needs of both clients and public employees. Secondly, we will facilitate knowledge exchanges between public servants from all three sides of the Beskids border, and beyond, with long-time cross-border leadership learning facilitators from the Institute of International Sociology in Gorizia (IT). Finally, we will invest in creative and participative employee training, developing employee skills in areas such as participation, nudging, management, and communication, in cooperation with the Slovak bottom-up public servant initiative The Good Bureaucrat (SK) and Nada Kurilova (SK), a

long-time high-profile public servant and activist for better governance. Our efforts will culminate in a showcase of creative public service practices at the Polis Democracy Festival in 2026. We plan to approach the Berlin based Creative Bureaucracy Festival (DE) for cooperation on the said projection. An exhibition visualizing the gathered city data is also planned in collaboration with the leading organisation in the field, MediaLab Katowice (PL). In Frýdek-Místek, the New Eight will host an ongoing series of public debates *Discussing the City* with an aim to bring attention to architecture and urbanism. Workshops with small research projects using techniques of emotional mapping of urban public places will be conducted, presented, and discussed. The results will serve as basic data for the upcoming City Acupuncture programme. Two main focuses will be tackled: how to deal with the monumentality of the city and the current post-industrial problems with grasping these vast spaces, and how to emphasize the qualities of and incorporate in the city the abandoned large peri-urban zones of Frýdek-Místek, consisting of greenery and brownfields.

- **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž
- **Partners:** Brno 2028 – Brno Architecture Manual (CZ), Chief City Planner's Department Žilina (SK), OZ Mulica (SK), Medialab Katowice (PL), The Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic – Žilina office (SK), Hellowood (HU), BruitDuFrigo (FR), Město přátelské k dětem, z.s. (CZ), OZ Územne Plány (SK), Atrium architekty (SK), UNIZA (SK), The Good Bureaucrat (SK), The Chamber of Architects of Slovakia(SK-TBC), The Czech Chamber of Architects (CZ), Institute of International Sociology in Gorizia (IT), Kiuub collective (SK), Creative Bureaucracy Festival (DE-TBC), Playable City (UK-TBC)
- **Budget:** € 330,000

City Acupuncture programme

Neglected public spaces are among citizens' top concerns, we see them as spaces of opportunities for citizen engagement where we can move forward with smaller-sized collaborative projects and "quick win" strategies and to better interconnect the existing public sector activities with citizen initiatives and citizens' needs. We know from experience that temporary artistic and architectural interventions are good for inspiration and testing new solutions. We believe in the power of

participation and collective ownership of developed concepts as an alternative to ordinary commercial or bureaucratic solutions. People treat spaces they helped to create with more care. The mission of this programme is to engage citizens in cultivation of their cities. It starts as an annual open call for ideas from citizens and local civic organisations, followed by a showcase of the ideas with the best ones selected by a panel of experts, which in turn receive consulting from specialists and the main city planner's office (workshops, seminars, guided walks) as well as appropriate financial (micro-grants or existing participatory budgeting) and technical support from the City's Technical Services (SK). In this programme, we will also hold public workshops / international workcamps under guidance of top European architecture collectives like BruitDuFrigo (FR), HelloWood (HU), or Refunc (NL) resulting in architectural interventions in neglected parts of the city. Based on the same model, in Frýdek-Místek, following the educational activities of the "Discussing the City" programme, we will run an *FM Summer Academy of City Acupuncture*. The outcomes of these educational and expert formats will serve as a prerequisite for the follow-up Summer Academy in 2025, where the participants will identify spots for a series of temporary installations in the city, on the borderline between architecture, environment, and art installation, which will offer new perspectives on unused city spaces. The Summer Academy will be organizationally divided into four studios led by European experts like GutGut Architects (SK), Studio NO (PL), or the Dusts Institute (AT). Each team will select a group of four students enrolled on the basis of an international open call. This format will connect the international creative community with the local people and their city. It is a collaborative platform that aims to develop public awareness of its grass-root power. For these purposes, we will use the former hall of the Silesian weaving mill – "New Eight" which will be temporarily transformed into a laboratory of Urban Acupuncture.

- **Organisers:** Kultura FM (CZ), Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž
- **Partners:** Střední škola řemesel FM (CZ), MgA. Richard Loskot (CZ), FM Municipal Architect Ing.Arch. Ondřej Zdvomka (CZ), GutGut Architects (SK), Studio NO (PL),Dusts Institute (AT), Ondřej Bělíca (CZ), Chief City Planner's Department Žilina (SK), OZ Územne Plány (SK), Atrium architekty (SK), Hellowood (HU), Bruit Du Frigo (FR), City of Frýdek-Místek,

- City Upgrade (CZ), Refunc (NL), Bellastock (FR), Privește Orașul (RO)
- **Budget:** € 208,000

Prospective Cities

In 1977, Žilina based art/architectural group VAL (Voies et Aspects du Lendemain) presented a number of designs for 'prospective architecture' in the Galerie Lara Vincy in Paris. Alex Mlynářčík, a member of the group, was at the time a well-known ne avant-garde artist and together with local architects Viera Mecková and Ľudovít Kupkovič (SK), dived into the field of radically utopian architecture. In the 1970s, they created several emblematic projects that earned them international recognition. VAL represents the last waves of radically utopian architectural thinking in the 20th century which contain traces of a new, emerging environmental sensibility. In an exhibition in Ciachovňa, titled *VAL and Prospective Architecture Today*, the curator David Crowley (IR) will explore their legacy where past speculative concepts of VAL and other European collectives like Sigma group (RO) and Superstudio (IT) will be put in confrontation with works of contemporary art, architecture, and design. At the same time, the Museum of Art in Žilina (SK) will expand its collection with works and documentation of VAL group projects and conduct an extensive research resulting into an *International Conference on Radical Architecture – Experiments in the Art of the 60s–80s*. Apart from the first international exhibition, we will present unique VAL concepts also through a large *retrospective monographic exhibition of VAL*, staged at the Museum of Art in Žilina in 2026, part of which will be a re-enactment of the 1977 Paris exhibition. The comparative framework of David Crowley's exhibition mentioned above will be deepened by means of a monographic exhibition in Pasá:Ž by the *SIGMA Group* (RO), one of the most interesting Romanian ne avant-garde collectives to mesh art with science and technology, active between 1969–1981 in Timișoara. We will exhibit a comprehensive collection of their analytical drawings, experimental films, models etc., in collaboration with the Timișoara Architecture Biennial (RO).

- **Organiser:** Museum of Art in Žilina (SK), Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž, BETA – Timișoara Architecture Biennial (RO)
- **Partners:** Chief City Planner's Department Žilina (SK), Olomouc Museum of Art (CZ), Katarzyna Cytlak (PL), David Crowley (IR)
- **Budget:** € 420,000

Svojdovov Housing Estate

In 1927, the Weissenhof Estate was built for the world exhibition in Stuttgart. The clear, austere and minimalist architecture of its white, cube-like buildings attracted international attention and it is now regarded as one of the cornerstones of modern standards for living. Soon after in Žilina, *Svojdovov housing estate* was built, one of the early examples of implementation of these new standards. In 2026, we will hold an exhibition in PASÁ:Ž which will map the economic, architectural and social contexts of how Svojdovov was built, bringing back the ethos of the era and presenting similar projects in Brno and Vienna. Guided tours and a temporary site-specific exhibition in one of the houses will be realised in cooperation with the architect Dušan Mellner (SK) and other international partners.

- **Organiser:** Dušan Mellner
- **Partners:** Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž, Chief City Planner's Department Žilina (SK), Brno 2028 – Brno Architecture Manual (CZ), KARCH SvF, STU Bratislava (SK)
- **Budget:** € 20,000

Building the Town by Sutnar

On the floor plan of the existing exhibition project from Pilsen 2015 (CZ), *Building the Town by Sutnar*, we will recreate the toys and models of the ingenious Czech designer Ladislav Sutnar on larger scale and transform them into an exhibition in our Children's Interactive Museum with the ambition to present the iconic design in a playful way to the youngest generation and their parents. The exhibition will be conceived as a vibrant playground, where children and visitors can rearrange the blocks, build buildings, operate public

transport, catch Sutnar's animals escaping from the ZOO, etc. There will be a navigation system which will teach visitors to bring the necessary order to this world. The exhibition will be expanded by augmented reality and blend physically into the world of VR.

- **Organiser:** BDZA Puppet Theater Žilina (SK), Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž (SK)
- **Partners:** Plzeň 2015 (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 20,000

International Conference on Fortified Centers of Power of Lutisian Culture in Europe

In the Beskid region there are numerous important archaeological sites, among them the fortified center in Divinka near Žilina of Lutisian culture, which was present in the region around 9th century B.C. It was studied and researched for decades bringing a plethora of unique findings. We will also highlight prehistoric parts of the story of the region through an international conference *Fortified Centers of Power of Lutisian Culture in Europe*. The conference will address issues related to the construction of fortified settlements, funeral rituals and material culture and will intensify contacts between the academic and museum spheres of archeology.

- **Organizer:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK)
- **Partners:** Institute of Archaeology at Slovak Academy of Sciences (SK), University of Wrocław (PL), Institute of Archaeology at Silesian University in Opava (CZ), Bielsko-Biała Museum (PL), Faculty of Archaeology at Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań (PL); The Institute of Archaeology, Nicolaus Copernicus University in ToruńToruń (PL); Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Institute of Archaeology (PL); West Lusatian Museum, Kamenz (DE), Institute for Archaeological Heritage Brno (CZ); Masaryk University (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 20,000

Public Subjects

After a period of full political and aesthetic control over the public arena in the Communist era, a certain disengagement of the Slovak art scene from the public space took over in the 1990s. Now, with new (crowd-)funding opportunities, artists again look to monumental realizations in public spaces. However, they often lack professional production facilities and support to realize such projects, from performances art to installations and large-scale sculptures. They are therefore forced to curb the ambition and impact of their works. The Public Subjects project cluster is about art going public. We will support local production capacities and introduce new and existing large-scale art productions which we will co-create with a group of local and European artists and performers. It is there, on the streets, squares, parks, by the rivers... that the window of opportunities for contacts with new audiences is fully open. Let us see and meet there in thousands! The project will also present a challenge for artists and creators in the form of reaction to their work by the general public.



HANGAR – Creation Centre for Art in the Public space

Starting with artists and their ability to creatively transform places, to mobilise and inspire the inhabitants, we plan to create HANGAR – Creation Centre for Art in the Public space. Creations that will be supported range from visual art, sculpture and installations to performance art, theatre, dance, and new circus, with the ambition to be presented in the public space rather than in dedicated artistic spaces.

The idea for a creation center came from the lack of such structure in the larger region. Inspired by models of similar types of infrastructure from various Western European countries, but adapted to the artistic, technical and financial condition of the region. Independent festivals and cities in Central Europe often lack the funds

to accept offers from Western Europe and/or cannot always find suitable offers from local artists, who in turn lack the support and spaces necessary to produce artworks at this scale and under these specific conditions. HANGAR Creation Centre will provide a large hall where companies can test their shows or produce their artworks, in line with the Žilina Beskids priority of producing rather than only programming.

It will be a creation and production centre for art in the public space that aims to cater to every stage of the creation process:

● Creation Support

– by means of programming consultations and residencies, artistic research involving citizens and city's professionals

An artistic board will be created, including artistic directors of several

festivals and curators, to select companies / artists for residence and to consult companies in the development of the show. The idea of a regional network appeared as a necessity. Co-operations with PLACCC (HU), Biela Noc (SK), and Cirkulum (CZ) festivals will be put in place to co-produce and co-finance shows and artworks in the fields of performance, visual / light art and new circus.

● Production Support

– production facilities with technical equipment and machinery, professional technical services and consultations, spaces to rehearse shows and engage audiences

The transformed bus depot and garage of the local mass transit company will host the creation centre and offer ideal conditions for art production

with: technical equipment, material repository and resource center, a large hall to rehearse or present productions, a large empty square ideal for outdoor shows, and an artistic makerspace studio to produce artworks or props for shows.

● Educational Support

– workshops, lectures, and resource centre for professionals as well as programmes promoting European art in the public space to locals

Capacity building for artists is the key element of the programme. In cooperation with European schools of art in public space, we want to propose a week-long intensive study programme in 2024 and 2025 to develop skills of artists from the region for creation in the public space.

● Distribution Support

– assistance in creation of a Central European market for art in the public space, proposing shows to cities and festivals, co-producing and hosting larger international projects

The economy of a centre of this kind, outside of direct public subsidies, consists of offering technical services, renting facilities, residency programmes, selling co-produced shows / artworks and tickets for its own events. Rather than create another festival, we decided to organise regular presentations of locally produced and hosted (often co-produced) shows. Following most residencies, a public presentation / meeting with the audience will be organised, while co-produced shows will be invited back to presenting the final shape of their productions. The creation centre will be assisting in production of a multitude of ECoC outdoor projects, installations in the city or outdoors, ranging from -SCAPE or Flow festivals to the City Acupuncture programme or the opening ceremony. Hangar will also work closely with the already successful festival *Žilina žije* (SK) and the *4 x 4 All Terrain Art platform* (SK), where during the three-week intensive creation workshop, several dancers and performers under the direction of the local dancer and choreographer Zuzana Burianová will meet to create a performance for the public space and explore the potential of Žilina's urban

spaces and architecture. The project is scheduled for four years, whereas each year the city will present to the public a new work in a new place with a new set of participating artists.

● **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids, n.o. (SK)

● **Partners:** PLACCC (HU), Biela Noc (SK), Cirkulum (CZ), Žilina žije (SK), Zuzana Burianová (SK), Daniel Andrieu (FR)

● **Budget:** € 400,000

European Puppet Theatre Season

The Žilina Puppet Theatre (SK) was established in 1950 and is the oldest professional puppet theatre in Slovakia. Its repertoire includes adaptations of classic folk tales, with emphasis on dramatization of fairy tales and plays for children, but there are also regular newly created projects, object theater productions aimed at teenagers and adults. The theatre has its own repertoire with a troupe of professional actors and organises the bi-annual Puppets Žilina, a showcase festival presenting the best of Slovak puppet production. In 2026, following the said event, Žilina will host a *European Puppet Theatre Season* which will showcase some of the best European contemporary puppet and object theatres every weekend for two months during the summer season. The programme will focus on topics relevant for the young public, in particular the climate crisis. The acuteness of this problem calls for collective social engagement which could in part be mediated by art.

STØV / DUST by Sew Flunk Fury Wit (DK) tells the story of a world that has experienced its own collapse. The dramatically rendered cycle of songs shows what is left after the catastrophe that struck this sensual and mobile puppet dystopia. The interplay of traditional artistic genres culminates in a multimedia-based modern work. The performances *Figures and Lights* by Fossekleiva Kultursenter (NO) will take place along the Žilina artificial lake and will depict the beauty of the natural environment and display its nest keepers. Attractive lighting design and objects add extraordinary colour to the environment and make nature a scenery for a unique theatrical form. The *Duda Paiva Company* (BR/NL) creates associative, narrative performances with dance and puppets. The company's use of foam puppets has become its most distinctive feature, opening up an expanded palette of expressive possibilities and providing performers with a flexible extension of their own bodies. The figurative puppets used in the *Merlin*

puppet theatre (GR/DE) represent lonely heroes living in an unhealthy society, using recycled materials for their backdrops, while their shows often contain satire of current social circumstances. The aim of *MECANIKA* (PT/FR) is to develop and explore contemporary puppetry in interaction with other contemporary artistic fields in a form called visual theatre. The production *NOVO* shows the viewer a city and the beings that inhabit it; dreamy, amused, tragic, and contemplative. This multispecies project explores the relationship between a banal but dizzyingly complex material, the reality of the city, and the absolute uniqueness of the simplest human situations. Furthermore, the *NOVO* show offers an opportunity to set up art workshops for young theatre technicians in Žilina.

● **Organiser:** Žilina Puppet Theatre (SK)

● **Project partners:** MECANIKA (PT/FR), Merlin puppet theatre (GR/DE), Duda Paiva Company (BR/NL), Fossekleiva Kultursenter (NO), STØV / DUST (DK)

● **Budget:** € 70,000

The International Festival of Puppetry Art by the Banialuka Puppet Theatre

The Banialuka Puppet Theatre (PL) has been organising the International Festival of Puppetry Art since 1966. Since its very beginning, it has been a platform for a free flow of ideas and experience exchange as well as a worldwide meeting point for puppetry artists among whom it enjoys high prestige. The festival has been acclaimed by both theatre critics and audiences, with many viewers from across Poland and abroad. Thanks to its open framework, the festival offers a variety of forms, including performances and other accompanying events: exhibitions, seminars, workshops, and concerts. There are also outdoor shows open to the public, as the festival is directed at a broad range of audiences.

In May 2026, the Banialuka Puppet Theatre will host *A Giant Puppets Parade* in Bielsko-Biala, as a part of the International Festival of Puppetry Art. On this occasion, car traffic in the city's main street will be stopped and the artists, festival guests, residents, and tourists will pass along in a parade led by the giant puppets. The invited companies will put on an amazing outdoor performance that will become the highlight of the festival, attracting large audiences through its scale and uniqueness.

We plan to invite Spain's *Carros de Foc* (SP) with their giant puppets. Two giant puppets guided by telescopic cranes will descend on the 3rd May Street in Bielsko-Biala. Carros

de Foc is fully dedicated to creation of giant sculptures and puppets, taking them all around the world, telling big stories and enacting a fusion of cultures through the universal language of emotions. The festival will also host *Theater Titanick* (DE), one of the largest open-air theatre companies in Europe. Their fascinating productions are enjoyed by people of all cultures, combining wild action and poetic scenes with bizarre humour or grotesque characters. Fantastic figures. Fascinating, huge objects. Live music. Special effects. Theater Titanick tells the stories of humanity, nature and technology. In the show Firebirds, to be hosted in Žilina in 2026, the dream of flying is celebrated in a parade through the city centre that electrifies the audience. Six daredevil pilots and their flying machines, accompanied by ground crew and fanfares, take part in a flying competition and try to win the favour of the audience as they go along.

- **Organiser:** Banialuka Puppet Theatre (PL)
- **Project partners:** Carros de Foc (SP), Theater Titanick (DE)
- **Budget:** € 100,000

Tanečno

Tanečno (SK) is a multi-genre contemporary dance festival that takes place every year in Námestovo, Slovakia. Tanečno offers a diverse program of dance performances, cultural events and workshops aimed at all fans of dance. It runs for a week during August in the beautiful surroundings of the Orava reservoir and Slanecký island. After five years of existence, the festival has the ambition to create year-round activities in the region of Orava to better develop the local scene. There is therefore a strong focus on co-productions, where invited international choreographers collaborate with local dancers to produce shows that are in turn premiered during the festival. The Tanečno program for 2026 will particularly focus on dance shows in the public space, site-specific shows and international co-productions. Highlights among the planned projects include: *Orava DAM (Dance/Art/Movement)* by the choreographer Manuel Ronda (IT), which will reflect the origin and impact of the Orava dam through dance in a site-specific performance. The performance itself will take place in several key spots along the Orava reservoir: the waterfront in Námestovo, the Jewish cemetery, the Slanecký Island of Art, as well as on the water, on floating rafts and pedalos in places of flooded

villages. The work will take its point of departure and inspiration from interviews with the original inhabitants of the flooded villages, historians, and archival research of visual materials. *The Urge* is a performance for the public space from the choreographer Ceren Oran (TR/DE), which originated from online videos of various dancers during the lockdown. The performance originally took place simultaneously in several places and thus created a virtual connection among the isolated individual dancers. As part of the festival, we want to present this unique project, combining Slovak, Czech, and German dancers and stage the performance in the building of the unfinished hospital in Námestovo, as a recollection, through the combination of the online and live art of the pandemic. Les Slovaks (SK) is an association of five prominent Slovak dancers based in Brussels. Their *Journey Home* is a work based on improvisation and intertwining of Slovak folklore with contemporary dance and articulates the question of identity, the search for it, and the need to define one's origins. The award-winning international theatre studio Farm in the Cave (CZ) is preparing a new project, *Commander*, which deals with the threat of radicalization in the online space. We plan to include this production as an educational art event touring elementary and secondary schools in the region with a lecture on and discussion of the threats of hate speech and online harassment, addiction to social networks or games. A performative response to missing train connections, *Orava Passing/Station*, is a project by two Slovak dancers and a musician which takes place in train stations.

- **Organiser:** Tanečno (SK),
- **Project partners:** Farm in the Cave (CZ), Les Slovaks (SK), Manuel Ronda (IT), Ceren Oran (TR/DE)
- **Budget:** € 40,000

NCAF – New Circus Art Fest

NCAF is a new circus festival that will take place in HANGAR in Žilina. Main shows will be hosted in the main hall, others in an outdoor tent, yet others around the square in front of Hangar or in specific places around the city, before potentially touring the region. The project draws from the experience of Cirkus trochu jinak (CZ), a collective which runs a festival and a small creation centre in Ostrava, mobile shows around the Moravian-Silesian Region, and educational circus activities.

The program of the festival in 2026 will be spearheaded by the two companies below and be complemented by smaller and more recent shows from other companies: Firstly, we plan to host the French company *Cirque Inextremiste* (FR) which combines compelling acrobatics and enthralling storytelling. The search for balance and trust, the challenge of being constantly in tune with the tiniest movement of someone else, existing in a world that is threatened by collapse at every moment. Then, we will look at the acclaimed company *Recirquel* (HU) which represents a unique style of circus combined with dance, building upon the distinctive Central European mentality. Recirquel has opened the gates for contemporary circus in Hungary and made it its mission to acquaint audiences with this new form of performing arts; a similar quest could await them in Žilina. In order to make this event sustainable, we will gradually develop the activities and relationship with the public, offer educational activities (various groups training different techniques, workshops), set up artist residencies and international exchanges to build the community.

- **Organiser:** Cirkus trochu jinak z.s. (CZ)
- **Partners:** City of Žilina (SK), City of Frýdek-Místek (CZ), City of Bielsko-Biala (PL), Cirque Inextremist (FR), Recirquel (HU)
- **Budget:** € 362,000

Akusticon

Akusticon will be a realisation of the artwork originally designed in 1969 by Alex Mlynárčik (SK) in collaboration with the architect Viera Mecková (SK) and musicologist Miroslav Filip (SK). Under artistic lead of Alex Mlynárčik (SK), the young Žilina-based artist Juraj Gábor (SK) will together with a team of external experts bring this utopic artwork to existence. With Akusticon, we believe to break the boundaries of “possible”, it will be the largest monumental art installation produced as part of Žilina Beskids 2026. Its sophisticated artistic, technical and engineering essence aspires to become a new symbol and an icon of Žilina and the region. The project was initially conceived as a pure fine art problem, meant as a tribute to Brancusi – the author of Mlle Pogany, showcased in 1969 in Milan, Italy as Flirt of Mademoiselle Pogany. At the time, it was intended for a show in Moscow which never took place. During the process, the idea of stability of the ovoid shape acquired an increasingly precise functional use – that

of a kinetic music auditorium. The movement of the audience inside the monumental object is reflected in the reaction of the main oscillator, resulting in an aleatoric musical instrument. The so-called Columbus' egg is 18 m high, with the widest diameter of 13 m. Stability is ensured by means of a weight in the lower part. Entrance and exit elliptical ramps are connected to the internal spiral pathway.

- **Organiser:** Alex Mlynárčik, Juraj Gábor, Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž
- **Partner:** UNIZA
- **Budget:** € 750,000

Echoes of the Town

“Scenography is not simply concerned with creating and presenting images to an audience; it is concerned with audience reception and engagement. It is a sensory as well as an intellectual experience, emotional as well as rational,” writes Joslin McKinney in his Scenography Expanded. We will establish a new urban scenography festival *Echoes of the Town*, a hybrid event exploring the urban public space in a series of large scale stages, narrating a single story across the entire city. Site-specific interventions at the crossroads of stage design, architecture, visual and performing art will draw audiences into multisensory experience and interactions. The festival will explore town ambiances and (re)search for new potentials of seemingly abandoned locations. The concept of urban scenography reveals the interconnections between spatial configurations and everyday scenarios that take place in urban settings. On the practical level, the concept of urban scenography as a dynamic set of city elements appears to be a tool applicable to revitalization of underused public spaces. The event, held biannually for a week, comprises various distinct components that run and are presented simultaneously, like the official invited artist selection made by the festival art board (Katarina Malikova (SK), Sodja Lotker (CZ), and others) and laboratories that shape and stage the festival together.

For the 2026 edition, we plan to invite among others: interactive audiovisual installation by Mammasonica (IT / GR), interactive utopian installation by Dalia Khalife (LB) and Maria Vera Alvarez (SP) alias Nicolai Bosko, soundscapes/sound installations by Gabriel Paiuk (NL), smellscape installations by Klara Ravat (SP), performative haptic walks and installations by Sisters Hope (DK), and immersive experiences by the Narrative Collective (LB / NL). In 2026, the festival will host a curated sound art exhibition by Construction Festival (UA) and Dnipro Centre for Contemporary Culture (UA). *The psycho-geography lab* will be dedicated to framing and mapping spaces with sound, creating audiovisual performances and soundscapes – site-specific listening and sensory environments or sound walks and soundmaps using psychogeography. *Eco-scenography* will be the festival's peak moment, creating a single big extended scenographic installation realized in two to three days with all workshop participants and presented during the festival. The main aim is to show how to build something new from repurposed, found items and/or second-hand fabrics and teach participants how to approach the public space differently. One topic, one big piece, all together. Furthermore, the festival will have an educational platform in cooperation with *HKU MA Programme of Scenography* (NL).

- **Project organiser:** Katarina Malikova (SK), Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž
- **Partners:** HKU MA Programme of Scenography (NL), Sodja Lotker (CZ), The Narrative Collective (LB / NL), Sisters Hope (DK), Mammasonica (IT / GR), Dalia Khalife (LB), The Smell LAB (DE), Maria Vera Alvarez (SP), Gabriel Paiuk (NL), Construction Festival (UA), Dnipro Centre for Contemporary Culture (UA)
- **Budget:** € 200,000

Nonument

The Nonument group (SI) is an artist and research collective based in Ljubljana. They are focusing on 20th century architecture,

monuments and public spaces that have undergone a shift in symbolic meaning or had lost their purpose as a consequence of political and social changes. They call them “Nonuments”. In 2026, Nonument Group will curate the *International Nonument Symposium and an exhibition* in Žilina, where participants from all around Europe will consider open use of space, and through case studies of transformed buildings, squares, and cities, will discuss possible strategies and interventions in a continually developing contemporary city. The Nonument group, with assistance from local researchers and activists, will map ten to twenty different objects – Nonuments, using methodology developed in the Mapping&Archiving Public Spaces Project, exploring which tensions could be released through repurposing of each nonument, leading to a series of site-specific interventions under the artistic lead of the Nonument Group.

- **Organiser:** Nonument group (SI)
- **Partners:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no – PASA:Ž (SK)
- **Budget:** € 60,000

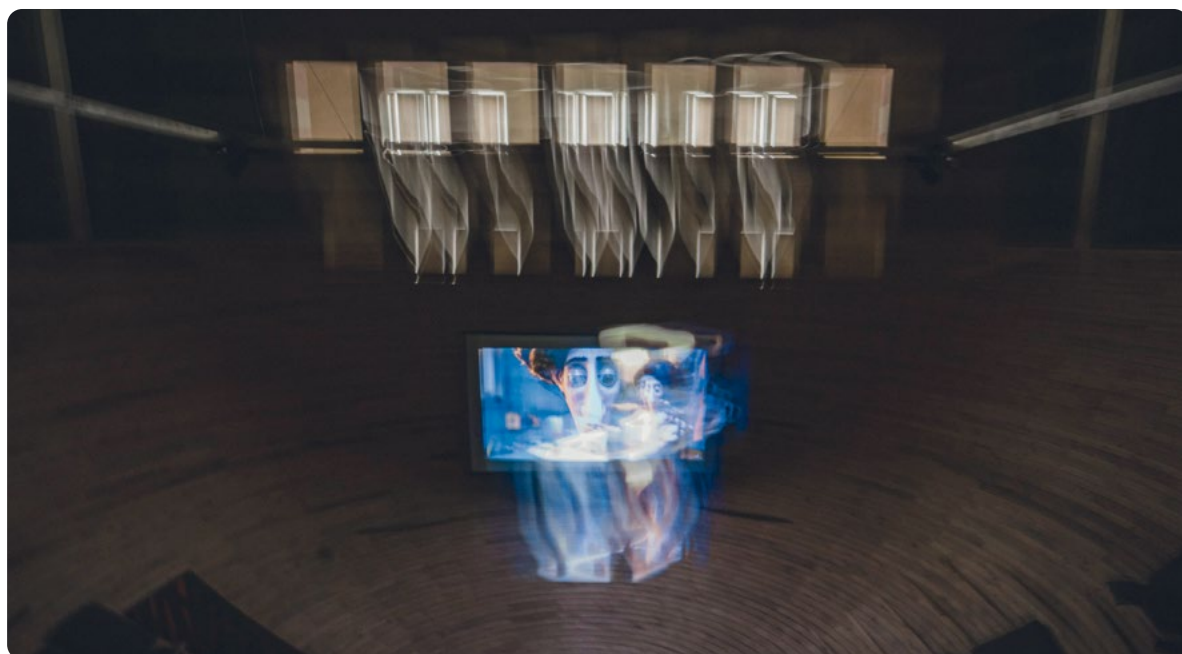
Žilina žije

Each year, the city festival *Žilina žije* (SK) unites several venues and cultural operators of the city in a single event, with offer for fans of almost every music genre. The accompanying programme includes free tours, exhibitions, as well as the Other Gastronomy festival by the FIGA organisation (SK). In 2020 and 2021, the festival went on hold due to pandemic-related restrictions; in the coming years, the organizers are eager to go on and expand their activities e.g. by working with light installations placed all over the city. Annually, a selected group of European participants will be invited to work on these proposals under the leadership of experienced practitioner Jacek Złoczowski (PL).

- **Project organiser:** Žilina žije, oz (SK)
- **Partners:** FIGA organisation (SK), City Theater Žilina (SK), Smer club (SK)
- **Budget:** € 40,000

Future In-motion

Beskids, like most mountainous regions, have a strong connection to fairy tales and mythical narratives, which is perhaps the root of the strong local tradition of animation.



International Festival of Animation in Bielsko-Biala

The Poland's Studio Filmów Rysunkowych (SFR) has been based in Bielsko-Biala since 1948. It made the city the main centre of hand-drawn animated films in Poland, with famous creations like Bolek and Lolek and Reksio. Besides the opening of the new *Interactive Centre of Fairy Tales and Animation* – a seven million EUR investment due to be completed by 2023, the SFR (PL) is planning, as part of ECoC, to establish the new International Festival of Animation in Bielsko-Biala. The festival will take place in summer, with open air screenings, educational activities, concerts, art installations, and other attractive events for the public which will be complemented with a scholarly programme focused on international networking, workshops, lectures, and debates. The program will be built on several lines, e.g.: international competition for future-length films and shorts; selections of best films from other festivals; artist retrospectives, thematic sections (women, documentary animation), and the award ceremony.

- **Organiser:** Studio Filmów Rysunkowych (PL), the City of

- Bielsko-Biala (PL)
- **Partners:** Fest Anča (SK)
- **Budget:** € 60,000

Fest Anča 2026

In 2008, a group of activists founded the animation festival *Fest Anča* (SK) in Žilina which has since then attracted a wide audience and gained international reputation. Žilina has in turn become a strong alternative centre for the animation community, with a one-of-a-kind festival in Slovakia. Several ECoC investment projects like the Contemporary Dance Centre or the City Theatre Žilina (SK) will provide additional venues for the festival's expansion. In 2026, we are planning a special edition dedicated to the topic of climate emergency. We will host film selections and authors from partner festivals like those in Liberec (CZ) and Braga (PT). It will include a programme for professionals dedicated to sustainable practices and adopting green measures in animated film production across Europe. In addition, the Slovak Sinfonietta and Fest Anča will join forces in the *Animated Music Tour*, a series of events of silent movie screenings accompanied by new compositions performed by the Slovak Sinfonietta (SK). The compositions will be developed between 2023 and 2025 and performed in

2026 as a tour through the Beskids region. These audience development activities will make use of the *Anča Kinematograf*, a mobile cinema in a refurbished bus, and will also bring special programmes to reconstructed cinemas in Kysucké Nové Mesto (SK) and Dolný Kubín (SK), including animation workshops for children and seniors.

- **Organiser:** Fest Anča (SK), Slovak Sinfonietta (SK)
- **Partners:** Kinematograf (SK), Jena orchestra (DE), Norwegian and Icelandic film schools.
- **Budget:** € 150,000

Audiovisual HUB

Slovakia's school of animation is concentrated mainly around the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (SK), with several important figures originally from Žilina, like the young producer Martin Smatana and Katarína Kerekesová, the author of several successful animated movie series. ECoC 2026 is an opportunity to underscore this development, setting up an *Audiovisual HUB* in collaboration with the Žilina University. A new technical infrastructure will be built, consisting of a greenbox, bluebox, stop motion studios, and post-production facilities among others, which animated movie production in Slovakia has been

lacking. The Audiovisual HUB will invest in capacity building and internationalisation of the animation film sector in Slovakia. For example, we will bring to Žilina the CEE Animation Forum 2026, the leading pitching, financing and co-production event in Central and Eastern Europe. The forum aims to boost the projects' international potential, visibility and access to a wider European market.

At the same time, we will participate in the *CEE Animation Workshop*, a year-long project development and producer skills advancement training programme designed for film professionals from low production capacity countries working in the field of animation. The educational modules will take place in 2025 in Žilina and in 2026 in Bielsko-Biala.

Furthermore, 2022, will see the launch of the *Fest Anča Student Platform* – a unique programme aiming to nurture collaboration between different European schools and supporting student movie production in collaboration with Norwegian and Icelandic film schools. The activities will consist of presentation of student works, knowledge transfer, professional networking, capacity building, and opportunities to meet professional producers. The student platform is a new permanent project in Fest Anča's professional programme. We

believe that the project aimed at schools and animation students will have good results and help to continually improve education in the field of animation as well as bilateral bonds between European animation schools, possibly leading to establishment of a permanent student exchange programme.

Finally, in cooperation with the Trixfilm festival (CZ) and the Elementary Art School in Frýdek-Místek (CZ), we will bring *Echoes of Trixfilm*, the best of the international festival of children's and students' multimedia works to Frýdek-Místek and Žilina.

- **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž, CEE Animation Network (EU), Fest Anča (SK), Ostrava School of Art (CZ)
- **Partners:** Studio Filmów Rysunkowych (PL), Elementary Art School in Frýdek Místek (CZ), UNIZA – Centre for Popularisation of Sciences (SK), Katarína Kerekesová (SK), Martin Smatana (SK), Academy of Performing Arts (SK-TBC)
- **Budget:** € 160,000

Animators in Residence

With the organisation Pop Up Film Residency Visegrad, we will run the *Pop Up Film*

Residency Beskids with particular focus on animated movies – each year a group of four selected filmmakers from four different Visegrad countries will spend three weeks together in residency in the Beskids region. We will launch the program in 2023 at the Studio Filmów Rysunkowych (PL) in Bielsko-Biala – it will allow authors to immerse themselves in their work in an inspiring atmosphere of Bielsko-Biala's SFR studios. It will allow them to work along and receive project support from animators and cartoonists from the SFR. In 2024, the residents will spend some time working at the Audiovisual Technology HUB in Žilina (SK). In 2025, both places will host residents from across Europe, applicants of an open call. Outcomes of all these residencies will be showcased during a special show in 2026 in Žilina and Bielsko-Biala.

- **Organiser:** Pop Up Film Residency Visegrad (SK), Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž
- **Partners:** Studio Filmów Rysunkowych (PL), UNIZA – Centre for Popularisation of Sciences (SK)
- **Budget:** € 140,000

STE(A)M²

The COVID-19 pandemic boosted public interest in science but often also led to science skepticism and as consequence to harsh polarization within societies. We need to better understand and remedy such rejection of science. On the other hand, due to poor general art education, art is still regarded by the general public as something 'artificial', impractical, concerned rather with beauty, decoration, and entertainment. We will try to overcome both of these shortcomings and bring new platforms for communication of how science works, what is the essence of the scientific method and how it could be reflected and applied in art production.

We believe that art and science are not separate domains, but rather two dimensions in the common cultural space, therefore we will practically implement the idea of enriching the set of standard technical disciplines (STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) with Art (STE(A)M) and accelerate new interdisciplinary approaches in our squared STE(A)M >> STE(A)M² project cluster.

STE(A)M² Biennale

We will establish a new tradition of *STE(A)M² Biennale* in Žilina to showcase and promote works that blend science and art. First edition of the Biennale will take place in 2024 in Ciachovňa, Nová synagóga and the Museum of Art in Žilina (PGU) and will be curated by Agnieszka Kubicka-Dzieduszycka

(PL), curator of WRO art center and Sapporo International Art Festival 2020. The double-encoding of the concept of STE(A)M suggests a range of tangible, accessible ideas and enables the curators to flexibly tackle the emerging issues. The Biennale will consist of exhibitions and discourse production formats – conference, master classes, workshops. The

tentative list of participating artists and developed projects includes Lazy Machines by *Anna Olszewska* (PL) or an installation on the human/nature/tech relationship from the *Ivan Henriques studio* (BR); Internat which aims at re-creation of the installation by the Viennese artist *Klaus Pobitzer* (AT); the *Lithuanian Space Agency* (LT) with their research on space architecture

and gravitational aesthetics. *Quartet for Tomatoes* is an inclusive, environmentally responsible generative sound installation by Wrocław-based artist and musician *Maciej Markowski* (PL). *Kat Austen* (DE-UK) fits in with her research on microplastic pollution addressing the ubiquity and longevity of microplastics in the environment.

The processes leading towards the STE(A)M² Biennale will include capacity building and educational actions under the name *STE(A)M² NextGen LAB* aiming at bringing artists closer to scientists and researchers, like the STE(A)M² Summer Residency Programme, STE(A)M² Beskid Camp, and *Arzenal SPACE*.

STE(A)M² NextGen LAB is a space for exploration and collaborative practices at the intersection of art, technology, science and industry. We are entering a different era of technology; in order to create the amazing future made possible by technology, we need artists and engineers to join forces. STE(A)M² NextGen LAB will be a platform for educational and research collaboration between the University of Žilina, a leader in technical education in the region, and the art academies based in Bratislava, Ostrava, and Cieszyn. It will consist of thematic labs, workshops, seminars, and training, hosting international experts like *Niklas Roy* (DE), *Kati Hyyppä* (FI), *Anna Dumitriu* (UK) or the *SOURCE Kolektyw* (PL).

Arzenal SPACE will be another on-going platform for fostering dialogue between artists and scientists in fields like future mobility, new materials, and the impact of technological change on society. Led

by the Slovak artist Pavlina F. Čierna, it will bring contributions from: *Pavel Mrkus* (CZ), *Yuk Bun Wan* (CZ), *Petr Hanžl* (CZ), *Polina Khatenko* (BY), *Jan Krambholz* (CZ), *Karim Tarakji* (CZ), *Matej Vakula* (SK), *Ladislav Janoušek* (SK).

The *STE(A)M² Residency Programme* will set up short-term international art and technology residencies for emerging artists and designers. In order to increase inclusion of artists in research and innovation activities, artists will be invited to explore new materials and technologies available at the UNIZA labs. At the same time, there will also be an inverse art and science residency model – scientists from a diverse set of disciplines will have the opportunity to work on artistic projects alongside selected European artists. *STE(A)M² Beskid Camp* will be a series of a week-long international hackathons facilitating explorations into the various intersections of art, technology, and nature. The events will take place in various natural locations in the Beskid mountains and will consist of hands-on workshops, presentations, field trips, and – most importantly – spontaneous collaborations and skill exchanges. Each year, a particular topic will be selected, for instance, creating DIY pollution monitoring stations, creating custom bio-based sensors or working with environmental data.

● **Organiser:** WRO art center (PL), Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž, Arzenal (SK), Sucha Beskidzka (PL), UNIZA (SK)

● **Partners:** V2_Lab for Unstable Media (NL), Ljudmila (SLO),

Humanities department of AGH TU (PL), Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. (PL), IT kraj (SK), Project Zavod Atol (SLO), Lithuanian Space Agency (LT), Aveiro TECH City (PT), INDEX – Biennial of Art and Technology (PT)

● **Budget:** € 420,000

Cross-Border FabLab and Creative Development Centre

FabLab Bielsko-Biała is the first 3D printing and rapid prototyping laboratory in the region, created by Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. (ARRSA) in 2014. In 2023, It will move to new facilities of the Creative Development Centre Bielsko-Biała. In cooperation with ARRSA (PL), we will run a *Creative Development Centre* in Žilina. Equipped with modern VR, AR, and rapid prototyping technologies, it will allow creatives from all over the Beskids to implement new projects ranging from immersive audiovisual installations, through prototype production, to production in small batches, or the so-called reverse engineering. ARRSA (PL) will help us facilitate processes and organise knowledge transfer, with the outcomes of interdisciplinary research showcased during the *STE(A)M² Biennale*.

● **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž (SK), Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego S.A. (PL)

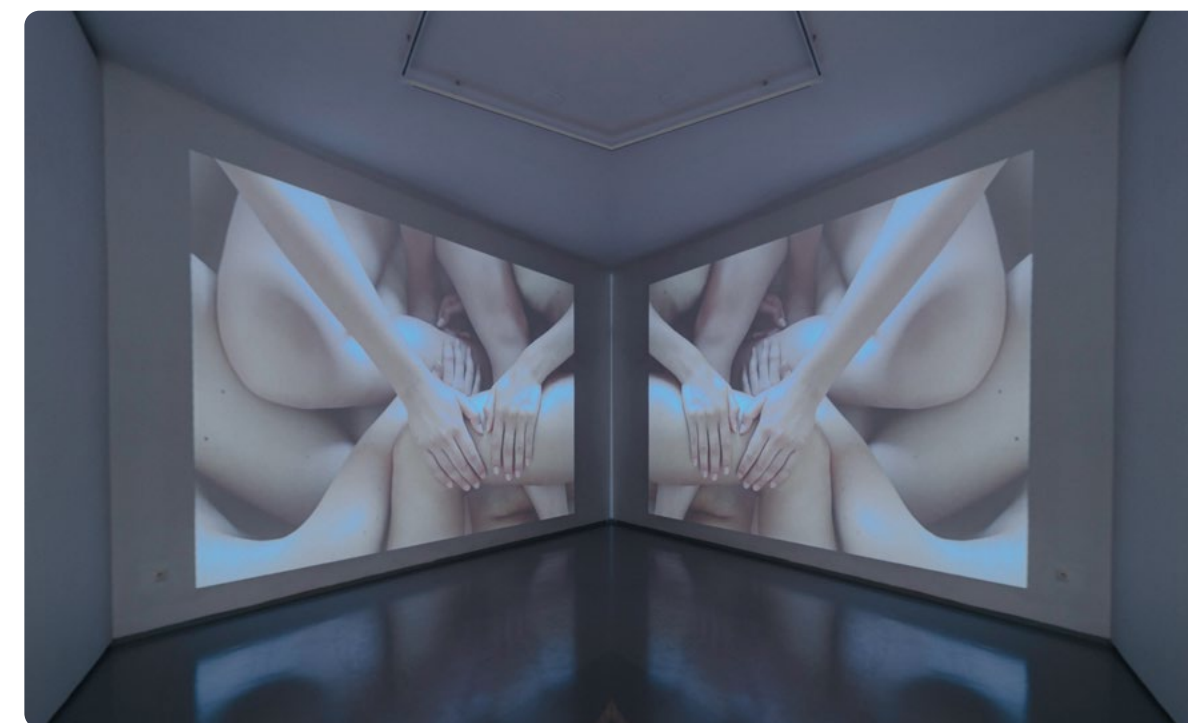
● **Partners:** IT kraj (SK), UNIZA (SK)

● **Budget:** € 90,000



Screen Age

The pandemic experience shows how much we need to adapt our presentation models of cultural events to the new normal with cultural content being consumed through screens. Social distancing and change in social practices of audiences could have a lasting behavioral effect beyond the last wave of the pandemic, we therefore need to rethink and introduce new models for digital outreach of cultural contents. Mastering the technical side of new streaming technologies is the lesser problem, the key challenge is how to blend the potential of these technologies with the specific limitations of the individual genres. In the near future, we will also experience a technological shift from plain screens to more hybrid forms of virtual experiences, some kind of embodied internet, where instead of merely viewing the content, the visitor will be drawn inside it (advanced immersive, VR/AR or holographic projections).



These changes will affect not only the way artworks are made, but also bring new opportunities for audience outreach and deepening their experience, even if direct contact and live physical experience is not fully replaceable. We heard from past ECoCs that a big part of European audiences reached by the ECoC productions were not in fact physically visiting the city, but rather consuming the contents online. Therefore, we will invest not only in streaming and reporting about physical events, but also producing content specially made for online channels. Our investment projects will also help to implement this Smart cultural turn, with a *Video Point Media Library*, a mediatheque in the Museum of Art in Žilina (SK) and STE(A)M² labs in Ciachovňa and the unique Immersive museum in Bôrik.

Windows to Europe

In this project cluster, we will focus on implementing the technologies to reach new European audiences and bring new, augmented experiences to our online and offline spectators. Through our *Windows to Europe* project, we will live stream most of the ECoC programme and will allow visitors to explore digital artworks and immersive installations online, we will also include an online drama platform for presentation of performing arts and establish a dedicated VOD (Video On Demand) platform as well as an online gallery consisting of 3D tours of exhibitions and heritage sites in our programmes. Furthermore, the digital space will allow the visitors to network and interact with each other through educational activities and artistic games. The shows from the ECoC programme will go on the *Žilina Beskids 2026 VR European*

Tour with Brejlando (CZ), offering custom art and cultural programmes on VR headsets in cultural spaces around Europe. In order to secure sustainability of the Windows to Europe project, we will run a capacity building programme focusing on strengthening digital skills of cultural workers as part of the *Open Design LAB*. Moreover, a well-equipped technical team based in Ciachovňa in collaboration with Žilina University will be created to support cultural organisations in producing their online contents (more on this in the Outreach section). Another part of the Windows to Europe will be the *25 000 Gallery*, a large virtual deposit with a rich variety of digitized artworks from galleries and museums of the Žilina self-governing region which holds the biggest regional artwork collection in Slovakia. Each of the five regional galleries will showcase the thirty best works from its collection in a single online show, the

selection will include one hundred and fifty works from the earliest periods to contemporary and experimental art. With the project *Inside Slovak Modernism*, a particular focus will be put on the most important painters from the Žilina region. The exhibition will be a representation of the founding generation of modern Slovak art, which draws on themes from rural environments, and later also urban and intimate environments, with artists intersecting with and highly influenced by European modernism. The visitors will be able to walk inside artworks by Fulla, Benka, Galanda, Weisz-Kubínčan, and Hložník in a spectacular immersive exhibition. The exhibition is an invitation to discover the original paintings in the galleries of the region, with supplementary educational activities and augmented experiences. The Windows to Europe online platform will include a special journalistic section produced as an outcome of the *Cultural Journalism Platform*. We will recruit professional cultural journalists, citizen journalists from engaged groups of visitors, high school students, as well as senior students of the Beskids Intergenerational University to produce blogs, videos, and written reviews and reports on the Žilina Beskids program (more on this in the Outreach section).

- **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026 – PASÁ:Ž (SK), Museum of Art in Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** UNIZA (SK), Brejlando (CZ), Žilina Self-governing region (SK), Liptov Gallery of Peter Michal Bohúň in Liptovský Mikuláš (SK), Orava Gallery in Dolný Kubín (SK), Kysucká Gallery in Oščadnica (SK), Turčianska Gallery in Martin (SK), University of Žilina (SK), Redakcja BB (PL), Swine Daily (SK), Fundacja Laja (PL), Materahub (IT)
- **Budget:** € 500,000

Independent Games and Digital Art Festival

Together with partner universities from Cieszyn (PL), Ostrava (CZ), and Žilina (SK), we will establish a new *Independent Games and Digital Art Festival* (IG-DAF) as an annual international platform for games and digital media. The inspiring three-day programme with talks, lectures, workshops, and a showcase of the art of video game making will be accompanied by an exhibition and a music programme open to the general public, as well as educational activities targeting younger audiences. The final event will

take place annually at the beginning of the academic year in Žilina and will be supported by game jams and events at the partner universities in Cieszyn and Ostrava. Festival participants will be able to take part in workshops led by top regional and European artists, leading to realisation of bigger art projects, like the ones mentioned below. *The Walker* is an artistic hybrid game developed by The Blast Theory (UK), one of the most adventurous artist groups creating groundbreaking new forms of performance and interactive art that draws in a blend of audiences from the internet, live performances, and digital broadcasting. The new game will invite participants to choose a pedestrian route in the surroundings of Žilina. Each guided walk will be created with a specific health benefit: exercise, relaxation, socialising, brain training or problem solving. The Walker will be created in cooperation with IG-DAF festival participants, local community, and representatives of disadvantaged groups, musicians, and health professionals to best meet the needs of different target groups and local realities. The Walker will address the themes of Liveable Cities, where Community Art Centres will function as starting or ending points for the walks. As part of the Cult Creative's (SK) *Story in Space* project, we plan to create an interactive exhibition in the Puppet Theatre Žilina – Children's Interactive Museum (SK) an arranged space with a scenographic environment, haptic games, physical puppets, videomapping, sounds, and images. As a base for the installation, we will use books by selected European authors. Children will be able to actively play and physically interact with the space and objects in the installation, which will immerse them in the world from the books. *Legends and Myths of the Beskids* is a cross-media narration project by Jacek Złoczowski (PL), dealing with stories from the Beskids Region with output in the form of games with multimedia access points in the public space. Based on field research, we will collect a set of urban legends that will be in turn sorted by topic, character or location and will serve as the narrative and interactive elements of a cross-media game – an online game for digital content and a city game (treasure hunt) for objects in the physical space. The collected legends will be depicted as small physical installations in the public space, serving as interactive access points to the narrative in the online game.

- **Organiser:** The Blast Theory (UK), UNIZA (SK), Ostrava University (CZ), Uniwersytet Śląski Cieszyn (PL), Cult Creative o.z.(SK), Memorymorph group (PL)
- **Partners:** Raphael Vanhomwegen (BE), Lucia Svobodová (SK), Jacek Złoczowski (PL), Johanna Gruszka (PL), Tomasz Schaefer (PL), Martina Fintorová (SK), Timotea Vráblová (SK), Małgorzata Łuczyna (PL), Matera hub (IT), Butterfly effect (SK), IT Kraj (SK)
- **Budget:** € 690,000

Video Art Biennale

The Museum of Art in Žilina (PGU) boasts the most extensive collection of intermedia and video art in Slovakia. To make the unique collection more accessible, in 2024, we will set up a *Video Point Media Library*, a physical space allowing visitors and researchers to easily access the deposits. In addition, the PGU (SK) will in 2024 launch a new event, the *Video Art Biennale*, which will take place in the PGU, Ciachovňa and Nová synagóga (SK), but also in unexpected outdoor locations over three weekend nights – screened on facades of buildings, projected on shop windows, in court-yards and cinemas. The 2026 edition will investigate how the societal and political challenges of the 1990s were reflected by new media artists. The *90s Intermedia and Video Art in Central and Eastern Europe* exhibition will be the outcome of historical and curatorial research on video art from 1989 to 2004 in post-communist countries. It will focus on the major events, artistic groups, and individual artists working with video and intermedia in the field of video art. It will be carried out in cooperation with a group of international researchers from CEE countries resulting in a large exhibition accompanied with an international symposium, both held in the Museum of Art in Žilina (SK) in 2026.

- **Organiser:** Museum of Art in Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** WRO art center (PL), Olomouc Museum of Art (CZ), Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb (HR), Galeria Bielska BWA (PL)
- **Budget:** € 169,000

Wires

The UNESCO heritage wire craft art “drotárstvo” is a unique folk technique which allows the maker to create three dimensional shapes using just their hands and a few tools. Dating back to the beginning of the 18th century, it developed in the most socially and economically deprived mountain regions of Slovakia around Žilina and the Kysuca river. This unique tradition deserves better international promotion, we will therefore organise WIRE School – international workshops, and offer an artist-in-residence programme to showcase examples of contemporary interpretations of wire craft, inviting artists and designers to work with wire. This early mending craft is similar to several other traditions from around the world, like the Japanese kintsugi art of repairing broken pottery with powdered gold – the subject of our Kintsugi Art Exhibition. To promote the tradition in the city, we want to install a specially created wire craft sculpture in the public space, as part of our Public Art programme. Another event aimed at presenting Slovak wire craft to European audiences will be the String concert with the Slovak Sinfonietta, using motifs of traditional tinker songs and a contemporary music composition performed with specially invented string instruments.



“Drotárstvo” Exposition

The new permanent exposition in the Wire pavilion of the Budatín Castle forms the foundation for maintaining the tradition and presentation of the craft's story. At the same time, a temporary exhibition will provide an opportunity to confront this traditional method with contemporary art, which can inspire new forms of working with wire. The Museum of Považie in Žilina (SK) is the guarantor of activities which resulted in wire craft being entered in 2019 in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. The creation of a new exposition will include accompanying activities like workshops, international meetings of wire masters and residences of artists working with wire. In 2026, there will be an exhibition curated by the leading Centre for Folk Art Production (SK) in Slovakia

on contemporary reinterpretation of wire craft. The current lack of appreciation for this time-consuming technique results in it being rarely practiced today. In collaboration with the Centre for Folk Art Production (SK) we will establish a wire school with courses and masterclasses for designers and the general public to build theoretical knowledge and practical skills of wire handling techniques. The courses will provide an opportunity to learn the technological procedures of shaping 3D objects from wire, various types of braiding, and to use the appropriate materials and work tools for each type of product.

- **Organiser:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK)
- **Partners:** ÚĽUV – The Centre for Folk Art Production (SK)
- **Budget:** € 155,000

String

The Slovak Sinfonietta will in collaboration with the ensemble of early music Solamente Naturali prepare a special musical compositions related to the tradition of “drotarstvo”. Based on traditional craftsman songs collected by the Museum of the Považie Region, a new unique musical composition will be created. The ensemble for early concert music Solamente naturali (SK), whose founder and artistic director is the violinist Miloš Valent (SK), was created in 1995 to focus on the interpretation of 17th and 18th century music on historical instruments.

- **Organiser:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK), Slovak Sinfonietta (SK)
- **Partners:** Solamente naturali (SK)
- **Budget:** € 10,000

The State of Amplitude – Wire Edition

The state of amplitude is an experimental sound art installation curated by Mike Reijnese (NL), presenting a series of sonic sculptures, instruments, and sound transmitting vessels built using metal wires and strings. Focus is put on the potential of re-amplifying the micro-powers of vibrations. Using the strings and wires as an instrument, excerpts of sonics are filtered, distorted, and amplified. An assemblage of active sounding objects and sonic architectures remain open for compositional coincidences, new spatial conditions, and modes of relation. These dynamic aspects result in a shifting soundscape forged by the acoustic setting and the state of the observer. By entering this space of vibrations, an identification occurs between listener and the elemental material mass, between inside and outside, between hallucination and realism.

- **Organiser:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK), Qartair (NL)
- **Partners:** STE(A)M² LAB (SK), UNIZA (SK)
- **Budget:** € 35,000

Kintsugi – The Art of Repairing

The four hundred year old Japanese art of kintsugi (golden repair) or kintsukuroi (golden joinery) is a pottery repair method that honours each artifact's unique history by emphasizing, rather than hiding, the crack. According to art historians, kintsugi came about accidentally when the 15th-century shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa broke his favorite tea bowl, sent it to China for repairs and was disappointed that it came back stapled together. The metal pins were unsightly, so local craftsmen came up with a solution – they filled the crack with a golden lacquer, making the bowl more unique and valuable. This repair elevated the fallen bowl back to its place as shogun's favourite

and prompted a whole new art form. In the exhibition *Kintsugi – The Art of Repair*, we will introduce the kintsugi craft to regional and European public, who will get a chance to try the technique in a workshop run by the kintsugi master Kunio Nakamura (JP) and Naoko Fukumaru (JP), who will in the preparation phase work with the broken ceramics from Europe and explore how to apply kintsugi techniques on them. In addition, we will showcase work and workshops by Chiara Lorenzetti (IT) and Lotte Dekker from Humade (NL), a design collective creating contemporary sustainable products and creative DIY solutions based on redesign of traditional repair methods like kintsugi.

- **Organiser:** Museum of the Považie Region (SK),
- **Partners:** Humade (NL), Chiara Lorenzetti (IT), Kunio Nakamura (JP) and Naoko Fukumaru (JP), Eva Lenz-Collier (DE)
- **Budget:** € 55,000

Re:Design Craft

The Beskids region is famous for its local crafts and traditional wood, wire, and textile working techniques, which often overlap country borders. Given the historical scarcity of material resources, several innovative techniques developed in the region – for instance, the aforementioned wire craft technique, or the “modrotlač” indigo dyeing and block printing technique. The Czech side of the Beskids region is famous for enamel work, hat making and natural fibre working techniques. On the Polish side, a specific tradition of filigree, wooden toy making and Koniaków lace developed. While we believe in the importance of preservation of traditional craft techniques, we are convinced that the attention brought by the ECOC title is also an opportunity to reevaluate the creative crafts and the role they play. The knowledge, accumulated over centuries, represents added value, especially in the time of mass production and uniformity. For us, crafts stand for quality, identity, diversity, skills, and innovation.

European Traditional Craft School

As part of our programme, we are planning to address the future of craft on European level – we fully support the Manifesto for a European strategy for craft, since we believe craft is not a thing of the past, on the contrary – we believe that maker culture and crafts can help to shape development of our material culture. In order to promote and raise awareness of these crafts in collaboration with the Regional Cultural Centre Žilina (SK) and the national *Centre for Folk Art Production* (SK), we will create a *Traditional Craft School*, a place where visitors

and designers will have the opportunity to learn about these techniques in regularly organised workshops and summer schools. It will be complemented by a handbook and an online database with contacts and video tutorials and a new *souvenir shop* in the Žilina Main Railway Station. In addition, we will run a *ULUV CraftBus* – a mobile craft workshop offering courses in the region. We will annually participate in the *European Artistic Crafts Days*, a three-day Europe-wide event that puts a spotlight on Beskids region's arts and crafts professionals, to raise awareness and visibility of the sector. During this event, we will organise showcases and workshops of European

crafts in collaboration with the network Mad'in Europe (BE).

- **Organiser:** Regional Cultural Centre Žilina (SK), ÚĽUV – The Centre for Folk Art Production (SK)
- **Partners:** Mad'in Europe (BE), Braga 2027 (PT), Aveiro 2027 (PT), Jurmala 2027 (LT), Koniaków Lace Centre Istebna (PL)
- **Budget:** € 100,000

Beskids Sustainable Design Week

In a newly launched cross-border event *Sustainable Design Week*, we will create a platform to showcase innovative use of traditional crafts with focus on sustainability. Sustainable Design Week will be an annual event to discuss possibilities and reflect obstacles of design production in recent times, and to present to both experts and the general the way best European designers address these issues. The event will consist of exhibitions curated by Zamek Cieszyn (PL), Krásná práce (CZ), Fundacja Ludzie-Innowacje-Design (PL), Aparát (SK), and the Centre for Folk Art Production (SK).

A *Re/design craft group show* will showcase the outcomes of the art and design residencies. A special *Hat Fashion Show* presenting the diversity of the Beskids region will be organised and a community hat parade is planned. A special *Chair project* is planned with the Martin-based organisation Parta (SK) in cooperation with the Slovak Design Centre (SK). The project maps creation and life in the largest furniture factory in Slovakia of its time, “Tatra nábytok”, in an exhibition, including masterclass workshops for designers.

The *“Arting Sustainable Design Award”* is an industrial design competition organized by the City of Bielsko-Biala and Fundacja Ludzie-Innowacje-Design FLID (PL). The event studies the relationship between heritage and contemporary design, discussing the topic of balance and sustainability. The *Arting 2026* project will include an international competition, an exhibition, a conference, and seminars dedicated to sustainable industrial design involving top European designers. In 2026, we will host an exhibition showcasing the outcomes of the design and craft competition *Kruh na vode 2026*. Since its inception, the competition has gained the reputation of a respected show, in Slovakia and abroad.

It establishes a discussion about traditional values, their preservation and form in contemporary craft, applied art, and design.

- **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026, n.o. (SK)
- **Partners:** Mad'in Europe (BE), Regional Cultural Centre Žilina (SK), ÚĽUV – The Centre for Folk Art Production (SK), Zamek Cieszyn (PL), Krásná práce (CZ), Fundacja Ludzie-Innowacje-Design (PL), Aparát (SK), City Nový Jičín (CZ), PARTA – Cultural Platform (SK),
- **Budget:** € 290,000

Re/design Craft Residences

Despite years of ambivalent relation with visual and craft culture of the past, in recent years, traditional crafts began to be actively included in global fashion trends and are experiencing a revival. Designers are adopting traditional techniques and ornaments and honest craftsmanship is becoming increasingly popular. Nevertheless, without support, original craft processes, passed down from generation to generation, will slowly disappear. To survive in the context of contemporary fashion and interior design, they need support in terms of education and real marketing. The project aims to support contemporary, living craft, where designers in residence do not approach it from a historical point of view, but on the contrary appreciate the modifications and changes brought about by creators' hands.

In collaboration with the Contemporary Art & Craft (SK) organisation, we will investigate possibilities for alternative souvenir production in the project *Made in Beskids*. We will further develop the activities of this Slovak organisation and set up annual residencies and summer workshops, always collaborating with a different institution. The outcome will be a collection of tourist souvenirs and their exhibition,

accompanied by educational activities for the general public. The Centre of Traditional Technologies (CETRAT), run by the Museum Novojičínka (CZ), works as a museum and an educational centre but also runs an experimental, where scientific staff of the museum research traditional technologies and materials, their possibilities and usages. Two international designers per year will have an opportunity to join *CETRAT residencies*, use the premises and equipment of CETRAT as well as the knowledge of its scientific staff to explore and find new use for traditional materials and techniques such as intarsia, wool, linen, and nettle fibre or production of felt slippers using waste from textile production. For more than two hundred and twenty years, the Beskids town of Nový Jičín (CZ) has been synonymous with hat production. Hückel and later the TONAK factory (CZ) operates in the city, the oldest and most recognizable hat brand in the world. History and recent activities in the city make it a vivid place to research and re-define hats – their form, design, and use. *Hat design residencies*, co-organised by city of Nový Jičín and Muzeum Novojičínka (CZ), will allow designers to draw from the rich historical sources as well as the living present of hat production while using original machines and getting inspiration from past production. We expect to organize two residencies per year, each lasting one month.

- **Organiser:** CETRAT – Muzeum Novojičínka, Contemporary Art & Craft (SK), Krásná Práce (CZ),
- **Project partners:** CETRAT – City Nový Jičín (CZ), Regional Cultural Centre Žilina (SK), ÚĽUV – The Centre for Folk Art Production (SK), Zamek Cieszyn (PL), Orava Museum (SK), Kysuce Museum (SK), Orava Gallery (SK), Karolína Bašteková (SK)
- **Budget:** € 90,000

Art Factory

Žilina is firmly grounded in its technical, engineering identity. As a middle-sized city, surrounded by nature, easily accessible, with well developed cultural infrastructure and technical opportunities, the city is an ideal destination for artistic residencies and creative processes. In recent years, Žilina has already come to be seen as the place to create new art works, by both performing and visual artists, probably thanks to the co-production strategy of the Stanica and Nová synagóga cultural centres (SK), along with the Žilina City Theatre (SK) and the Puppet Theatre of Žilina (SK). Therefore, one of the goals of Žilina Beskids 2026 is to build upon the existing experience, support new capacity building, and become the art factory of the Slovak cultural scene, in this way supporting its sustainable development.

Still, as mentioned above, we have to consider Vidokle's warning and the risk of "art without artists". This is an attempt to answer the question: How can we build a space where art and culture will be anchored in the social life of local communities and live and contribute contextually to the wider surroundings? Our answer is that strategies must be developed, cultivated and shared together to ensure sustainability of art factories for the future.

HEY! Europe – European Theatre Incubator

Žilina's City Theatre is a unique institution in Slovakia, a progressive and acclaimed city-run theatre with a professional actor troupe, exploring Slovak and European contemporary drama. Žilina's City Theatre (SK) will launch the *HEY! – European Theatre Incubator* in a repurposed alternative performing stage: Studio. HEY! will consist of author residencies for up-and-coming playwrights and actors, giving them an opportunity to develop their own plays and produce their own shows on stage, with all the necessary consultations and support an established institution can provide. The common theme of the creative incubator HEY! EUROPE is to offer a variety of views on the subject of radicalization from an European perspective. Participants of the Author Incubator will be selected based on an open call to young Czech, Slovak, and Polish playwrights for a year-long online and residential consulting process with the artistic director and programmers of the Žilina City Theater and will host European playwright like Iva Klestilová, Petr Zelenka, and Anna Saavedra (CZ). The process will culminate with stage readings of the produced texts, an online publication, while the most inspiring text will be staged by the Žilina City Theatre. The Actor incubator will take the form of a monthly residence at the City Theatre under the direction of the prominent Croatian director Bob Jelčić (HR) with the aim of creating an original production called *Radicalisation*, to be premiered in 2026 as part of the ECoC programme. Likewise, the incubator will also cooperate with the renowned Hungarian stage director Árpád Schilling (HU) and the project *Shared Cities* dealing with the topic of human rights.

- **Organiser:** Žilina City Theatre (SK)
- **Partners:** Bob Jelčić (HR), Iva Klestilová (CZ), Petr Zelenka (CZ), Anna Saavedra (CZ), Árpád Schilling (HU)
- **Budget:** € 83,000

Dance Center S2_KIOSK Festival + Slovak Dance Platform

Žilina, thanks to one of Slovakia's leading independent cultural centres, Stanica, has been for years one of the favorite destinations of the Slovak and Central European contemporary dance scene, and a popular destination for performing art residencies. The cultural centre occupies the refurbished building of a still operating railway station with a nice garden, located in between a labyrinth of concrete pillars. Unfortunately, in spring 2019, S2, Stanica's main venue for large shows burned down. We therefore decided to build up the new black box *Dance center S2* as part of the project, a multifunctional space for contemporary dance and physical theater, with a residency/studio space, to provide as many performers as possible with appropriate creative space and conditions. In 2025, the space will host several residencies to prepare premieres for 2026. In 2026, the place will also host two major events, the Kiosk festival and the Slovak dance platform. *Kiosk* is a festival of independent theatre and dance with four days of informal meetings of artists, spectators, and cultural activists. Through its more than twenty performances, but also installations, concerts, and accompanying events, it offers a dramaturgically compact overview of the current Slovak and Czech independent theatre scene, which makes it an important occasion in the Slovak theatre festival season. In 2026, the festival will also open to a wide range of European artists invited via open calls and pre-festival residencies in the S2 venue. Kiosk is an already ambiguous festival which erases boundaries between theatre and reality. It has always been operating within a variety of contexts – from traditional venues through public spaces of suburbs to gyms, abandoned houses and woods. In 2026, it will focus on projects that explore the outskirts of the city and the urban wilderness. As a venue for festival projects, we will work on discovering new open-air spaces beyond dedicated theatre/gallery/dedicated buildings; we will encourage artists to enact specific interventions for the festival, to undertake interactive exploration of the city, its greenery and wilderness. *Slovak Dance Platform* is an official showcase of Slovak performances for professionals and promoters. It is a newly established format on the dance scene, which Slovakia previously lacked, which enables networking and establishes closer cooperation between the local and international

dance scenes. The project was initiated by four organizations: the Bratislava in Motion Association, the Platform for Contemporary Dance, NuDance Fest and the Theatre Institute (SK). Out of the estimated fifty to sixty submissions,, the artistic council selects between ten and fifteen for the main programme.

- **Organiser:** Truc sphérique (SK)
- **Partners:** Slovak Dance Platform (SK), Kiosk (SK)
- **Budget:** € 80,000

Performance Festival Malamut

Malamut (CZ) is the oldest international action art festival in the Czech Republic, and already an established event on the cultural map of the Moravian-Silesian Region. Throughout, the artists' messages immediately reach the spectators as well as, in the case of outdoor events, the passers-by, with whom there are frequent interactions. In 2026, this three-day festival of performance art will expand to the entire Beskids region with projects in public or gallery spaces of Žilina, Bielsko-Biała, and Frýdek-Místek. The festival will introduce thirty performers from the Czech Republic, Europe, and Asia, reflecting on the social situation in the city and questions related to borders and identities. The festival hosts leading international artists with a history in action art and previous participation in numerous performance festivals around the world. Their shows are conceptual, often engaged, they reflect the problems of contemporary humanity through original physical statements and interaction with the local context. The festival programme will also feature younger artists who will contribute the viewpoints of their respective generations.

- **Organiser:** Jiří Surůvka (CZ)
- **Partners:** OSU university of Ostrava (CZ), Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- **Budget:** € 10,000

The Culture of Culture

The ECoC process comes with a lot of public attention and financial resources. At best, it has a long lasting positive effect on the city and its cultural scene. However, with public attention comes the pressure of expectation of "doing well" and a danger of focusing exclusively on the what (great architecture, impressive cultural content) and leaving out the how (the way we do things and work together) and the why (long-term cultural impacts). The Culture of Culture project will focus on the how and why of the ECoC process.

Together with *Die Bäckerei* (AT) we will create a profound understanding of the effects of the ECoC on the self-perception and working culture (in short, "the culture of culture") of cultural workers in Žilina and the Beskids. By focusing on the culture of culture, we hope to contribute to the sustainability of the ECoC process, for cultural worker engagement and for the ECoC team's evaluation.

Die Bäckerei (AT) is a vital platform for cultural and social exchange based in Innsbruck, Austria, where the authors, the artist and social science researcher Florian Ladstätter (AT) and Shawn Antoni Wright, developed this method for the Trans Europe Halles European network. The culture of culture approach consists of two interconnected processes:

- A research process that applies a set of social scientific research methodologies (e.g. interviews, focus groups, workshops, videography, multisensory sculpting) in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture of culture.
- An intervention process that reflects those findings back to the cultural scene, working with artistic interventions, playwrights using quotes taken from real life, culminating in a documentary theatre performance to establish a discourse about the working culture of cultural workers.

- **Organiser:** Die Bäckerei (AT)
- **Partners:** Trans Europe Halles (EU), Stanica (SK)
- **Budget:** €55,000

Object in the City / City in the Object

Object in the city / city in the object is an artist-in-residence programme built around three cities and three buildings (Nová synagóga in Žilina, St. John's Tower in Frýdek-Místek, Villa Sixta in Bielsko-Biała) dedicated to exploring the relationship between the building of a gallery and the city. In each of these three places, a significant visual artwork will be created in the public space, responding to, working together with and blending with the building in question (a synagogue, a tower, a villa), thus turning the building of the gallery into its own object. The working territory of the project will not be restricted to the interior of these buildings, but rather include and focus on the cities which surround them, to which these objects contribute their significant visual, historical, and urban footprints.

A curatorial platform with a symposium connecting all those on the curator – artist – architect – urban planner – city – public axis will be created to select the artworks.

- **Organiser:** Galerie Věž (CZ)
- **Partners:** Nová synagóga (SK), Galeria Bielska BWA (PL)
- **Budget:** € 40,000

ARTboretum – International Sculpture Symposium

The Kysuce Gallery (SK) is a regional gallery situated in a manor house in Osčadnica which is, along with the adjacent forest park, registered as a national cultural monument. The idea is to build on the tradition of artists residencies in the park, which used to take place in the 1980s, and transform it into an International Sculpture Symposium. It would provide a natural contribution to the existing sculpture garden, reviving the art life of the park and the countryside along the Javorník Art trail. To supply the missing infrastructure, the Kysuce Gallery (SK) will acquire two new residency flats and studios for European artists. The title of the symposium's 2026 edition will be *At the Border*, pointing to not only the place's own proximity to borders with the Czech Republic and Poland, but also the topic of borders as an inspiration for the artworks to be created – internal as well as external ones. The participants will be artists from Slovakia and the surrounding countries directly invited by the Kysuce Gallery (SK). The aim of the project is to provide a space for creative dialogue, for a period of seven days. The benefit of the location is also its proximity to wood-working and metalworking industries and a newly built technical space.

- **Organiser:** Kysuce Gallery (SK)
- **Partners:** Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko (PL), Bubec (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 30,000

Scale Up

As mentioned in the previous cluster, the HANGAR – Art & Design Production Centre will serve as technical backstop for production of many of the ECoC projects and will create a sort of makerspace for artists, providing them with the necessary technology and technical support during their production phase. It should be a place to work, build, and assemble large-scale works. HANGAR will also be an exhibition space, a place for outdoor festivals and interactive exhibitions or large-scale

events, like the Industrial Heritage EXPO planned for 2026. It can also provide the necessary service to regional artists or school studios as part of support and assistance in implementation of contracts and projects. Together with the Ostrava University, we will run a series of sculpture masterclasses with students and renowned artists like Čestmír Suška (CZ) or Juraj Gábor (SK).

- **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** OSU university (CZ), Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko (PL-TBC), Bubec (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 15,000

Smalt Art Symposium

A history of enamel in the Czech Republic goes back as far as the 14th century, when it appeared on the Bohemian Crown Jewels. From the 19th century onwards, it was used on metal to decorate it and make it more durable. At this time, the Beskids region was also established as one of the centers of enamel production. In collaboration with the Beskids museum (CZ), we will organize an international symposium of enamel art with participation of prominent international painters in cooperation with the European enamel art network. The symposium offers an opportunity to use and connect the industrial background of the Beskids region with contemporary art, by means of creation of large-format works of enamel art. Artworks will be completed by firing in a special furnace at temperatures of more than 800 °C. The enamel technique's unique features allow for many experimental overlaps and enable painters to create durable images that can be exposed to outdoor conditions. The final exhibition will therefore be produced in the outdoor park of the Hukvaldy castle and will then go on a tour, including a stop at the Kysuce Gallery (SK).

- **Organiser:** Beskids Museum (CZ)
- **Partners:** Faculty of Arts and Educational Science, University of Silesia in Katowice in Cieszyn (PL), Kysuce Gallery (SK)
- **Budget:** € 70,000

Book Incubator

Printing and bookbinding are rarely mentioned, but still strong and active craft traditions of the Beskids region. With the first printing factories established in Český Těšín (CZ) already in 1809, and in Martin (SK) in 1869, and the first bookbinding workshop

in Žilina established in 1928, the region remains the go-to place for publishers looking for high-end solutions. In our *Book incubator*, we draw from the rich history and living present to educate, instruct and exhibit the best in book production. We are book lovers and we will bring the craft background of physical book production to a spotlight.

The *Book Art Triennial* in Martin is an exhibition project focused on the presentation of artists' books. It started as a biennial in 1995, was reformatted into a triennial in 2009, and in 2026 will be a part of our ECoC programme, taking place simultaneously in the Turiec Gallery (SK) in Martin and the Rosenfeld Palace (SK) in Žilina. The exhibition will present actual artists' books as art objects or installations. In the section "Beautiful books", it will showcase the best of contemporary book design with a focus on illustration, graphic design, typography, and bookbinding. A historical section will reflect upon experimental Czechoslovak book design from the 1960s. Artists' books by world-famous authors such as Sol LeWitt, Andy Warhol, Edward Ruscha, etc. will be exhibited in the "Exceptional books" section. Moreover, a monumental book sculpture Omfalos by the renowned Slovak artist Matej Krén (SK) will be installed in Žilina. Tentative list of participating artists: Gina Renotière (IT), Kestutis Vasilunas (LT), Róbert Makar (SK), Renata Pacyna (PL), István Szirányi (HU),

Jadwiga Tryzno (PL), Miloš Kopták (SK), Ján Kralovič (SK), Jaro Varga (SK).

- **Organiser:** Turiec Gallery (SK), Rosenfeld Palace (SK)
- **Partners:** Faculty of Arts and Educational Science, University of Silesia in Katowice in Cieszyn (PL), Kysuce Gallery (SK)
- **Budget:** € 50,000

The cross-border (SK/CZ/PL) literary competition "Creating Our Own Book" has been around for twenty-one years. The contestants write, illustrate, and produce their own books, complete with cover and binding. Together with the organizers, we will dedicate the 2026 edition to the topic of united Europe and will open a category for adults in our *Wandering books – Mobile book factory* project. Participants will join creative writing workshops supervised by experienced writers. Similar workshops will be organised for book illustration and bookbinding. These workshops will take place in the regional libraries, and in a mobile book "factory" – a bus, specially equipped for this purpose, that will tour the Beskids region. The fully equipped bus will offer workshops in bookbinding, illustration, and printing provided by the graphic workshop Uutěrky (CZ). With the bus, we will reach even the most remote parts of the region where local libraries are often the only forum for

cultural activities. This project seeks to revive them and diversify their cultural offer.

- **Organiser:** Regional Library of Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** Municipal Library of Frýdek-Místek (CZ), Beskidzka Library in Bielsko-Biała (PL), Lida Mlichová Bookbinding Workshop (SK), Uutěrky graphic workshop (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 60,000

Former Czechoslovakia developed a tradition of high-quality book illustration. Nowadays, we can observe a certain revival of this tradition with many new independent publishers and original projects exploring the field. We want to support this trend by getting together illustrators and publishers through the *Symposium of Illustration* in the Frýdek-Místek Municipal Library (CZ), with weekly programme of workshops and presentations where we will showcase the best of the international production but also listen to local storytellers and have the illustrators work on visual stories and even three-dimensional illustrations, inspired by them.

- **Organiser:** Municipal Library FM (CZ)
- **Partners:** Kultura FM, Uutěrky graphic workshop (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 40,000

CC: Circular Culture

In line with the EU Green Deal and its new circular economy action plan, we believe culture and creative economy should pave the way for a greener future for the EU. We see the role of circular culture as one of the driving forces of this transformation, by investing in creative research and making circularity work for people. Cross-cutting actions and a market for secondary raw materials are needed. However, a circular economy is not possible without an existing circular culture in society.



Secondary raw materials and upcycling methods are alternative resources for culture, with access to cheaper and greener materials. With *CC: Bank*, we will start with reuse of waste from the cultural and creative sector. This involves collecting, storing, and archiving waste from cultural institutions, theatre companies, and exhibitions. We then plan to look at reusable waste or surplus from communities and companies that would be in turn made available to cultural centres, artists, and creative industries. An on-line database and marketplace for the cultural and creative sector will be created with experts from Cyrkl (CZ) and Rotor (BE). Both represent leading cooperative design practices that investigate the organisation of the material environment and material reuse strategies. This will involve training in waste management, upcycling workshops, production consulting, and technical support for transformation of the collected material for designers, artists, and other cultural institutions. A material bank and handbooks will be prepared. The material from the bank will be repurposed in projects like City Acupuncture, projects by Bellastock (FR) or Refunc (NL), as well as in the Art not Waste programme, with, for instance, creations of Nicole Taubinger (AT). Which materials and objects are considered scarce enough to be worth repairing, and what are the factors affecting this evaluation in different cultures? What is the role of the individual in circular culture? *CC: Education* will deal with popularisation of the circular economy for students and the general public, with production of handbooks, fix-it workshops, and swap markets. A cooperation and several workshops by Critical concrete (PT) and Rotor (BE) are planned. *CC: Workshops* should actually network shops and education spaces throughout the city to bring circular culture closer to the communities, with branches at the Hájovňa and Stanica cultural centres and Community Art Centres, but also in Frýdek-Místek and Bielsko-Biała.

In *CC: Research*, we would like to look at innovation in the field and potential cooperation with experts from the University of Žilina, and to collaborate with local waste management companies to access waste before it goes to a landfill. In this field, we would like to offer artists/scientists joint residencies, and to establish awards for creative solutions. *CC: Exhibition* is a large showcase of upcycled artworks to be organised in HANGAR in 2026, with artefacts collected by different European partners through open calls.

- **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** Hájovňa (SK), Cyrkl (CZ), Refunc (NL), Rotor (BE-TBC), Critical concrete (PT-TBC)
- **Budget:** € 150,000

Reconnecting People and Material

Refunc (NL) is a design laboratory based in Hague promoting the idea that everything can be used to create something new. Repurposing of objects and materials that seem useless is their specialty. Together with Refunc, we will co-create a set of pavilions / stages for the Echoes of the Town Festival which will be spread all over the city, but centred in HANGARs Maker-space. Refunc (NL) will create experimental structures, transforming local waste material suitable for both performances and audience interaction using scrap material from the CC:BANK.

During the process, they will be questioning and playing with architecture, exploring the limits of how life, living, public and private spaces can merge naturally. The realisation of the project will be done in the form of exchange with local people in playful experimentation, inventing and exchanging of ideas.

- **Organiser:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no.
- **Partners:** Hájovňa (SK), Cyrkl (CZ), Refunc (NL)
- **Budget:** € 100,000

"Enough is Enough" Exhibition

It is time for architects to step up and assume greater responsibility for the fate of our planet and fully recognize the environmental impact of their work. The construction industry consumes about half of all resources extracted from the earth and is responsible for more than a third of global energy use and emissions, with cement production alone accounting for roughly 7% of CO₂ output. Reducing this environmental toll will require a radical new approach to construction – starting with architects' approach design. Do we really have to build anew? We should always consider "no" as a possible answer. We must think of our cities as mines ripe for exploitation, reusing, maintaining, and transforming what already exists rather than demolishing and building anew. It is also clear that we need to build for more people, but with fewer resources. This large-scale exhibition which will take place in Pasáž presents dozens of interactive projects – local and international – by

architects who say "Enough is Enough". Their work highlights methods for treating our planet with respect and responsibility – to the environment, to the economy, to the society as a whole. The exhibition will be curated by Ilka Ruby, Anca Cioarec, and Brindusa Tudor (RO) in cooperation with BETA, the Architecture biennial from Timișoara (RO).

- **Organiser:** BETA, the Architecture biennial from Timișoara (RO)
- **Partners:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no – Hangar
- **Budget:** € 60,000

Art not Waste

The Art not Waste festival, to be organised in Frýdek-Místek in 2026, will focus on the problem of pollution, bringing attention to the questions of recycling and respect for nature. It will be about the search for ways of cultivating the city and inspiring sustainable practices on part of its citizens. The festival's main event will be the happening "Recycling kites consuming wastes", created in collaboration with the scenographer Matěj Sýkora (CZ) and an improvised recycling slam/rap performance by Bio Masha (CZ). A performance for water by the Lithuanian artist Ruta Putramen-taitė (LT) will premiere at the festival. Large-scale sculptures made of recycled building material and rubble by Barbora Dayef (CZ) will be installed in public spaces of the city. The Austrian jeweler Nicole Taubinger (AT) will organise workshops where plastic wastes will be transformed and present her creations to the public. Finally, the Circular Fashion Centre Ostrava (CZ) will organise textile workshops and present sustainable fashion.

This programme is aimed at the general public and families with children, it will include lectures on waste recovery, possible recycling and upcycling. The topics of sustainability, material transformation and resource management will be communicated to the public primarily through artistic interventions and interactive workshops with artists and further complemented by performative on-site visits.

- **Organiser:** Kultura FM (CZ)
- **Partners:** Frýdecká skládka a.s. (CZ), Frýdek-Místek sewage treatment plant (CZ), Urban Jungle, zs (CZ), The Tržnice community garden z.s.(CZ)
- **Budget:** € 12,000

Flow of Nature



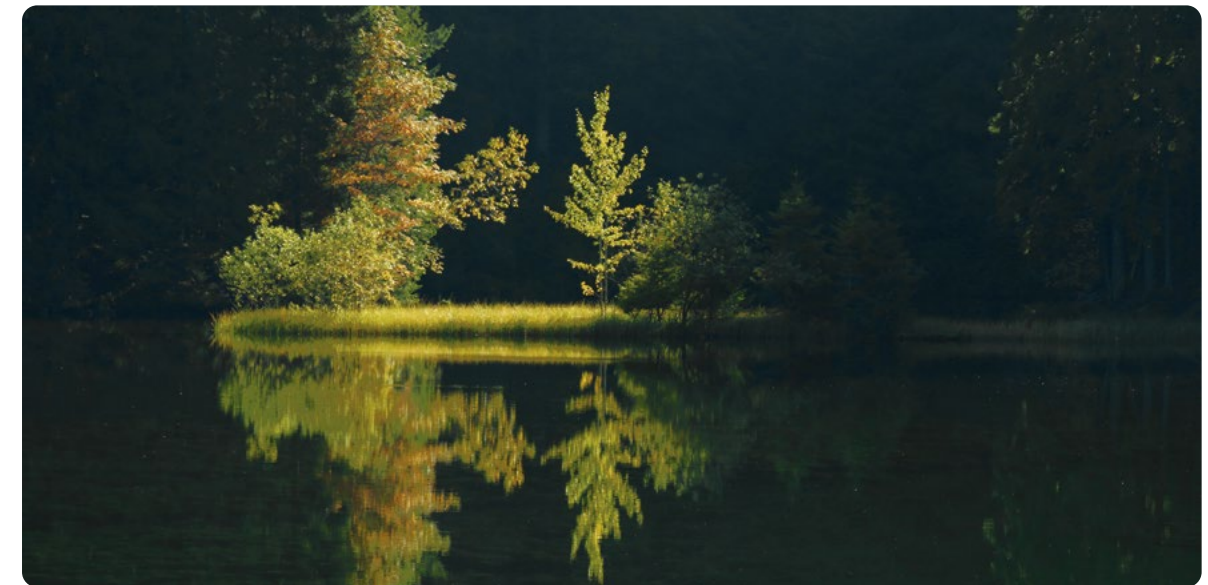
No matter which direction you take from our cities, you quickly reach nature and beautiful mountains.

In this programme pillar, we merge thematic focus on environmental issues with artistic creation and pay cultural tribute to the surrounding Beskids. Through deconcentrating our programme, spreading the events over a large territory and bringing them to remote areas, we will engage natural landscapes and dozens of small towns and villages in the ECoC programme, so that they also can be a part of the European dialogue. We will offer visitors

from all over Europe the experience of the wilderness of Beskid forests and mountains, and opportunities to embark on a journey of art and adventure into themselves and the region's identity. We will explore traditional culture and inspire its contemporary reinterpretation. We will be as well addressing conflicting environmental and economic interests, and critically reconsider the relationship between humans and nature; the tension between the urges to protect and master it. We will be focusing on the issue of climate change and support adaptation techniques through better care of urban greenery and water management.

Living Water

Slovakia is a water power and together with the Czech Republic contains one of Europe's major drainage divides. With its huge water reserves, wild rivers, and streams shaping the landscape, the struggle between humans and nature has been going on for centuries with the first water dam built in 1510. Nowadays, there are 281 artificial water reservoirs, fifty of which are included in the World Register of Large Dams. However, technocratic approaches have conceived and used water management mainly as a means of supporting economic and urban development at all costs. Rivers and streams were regulated and water's presence was often made increasingly "invisible" to urban people.



In the region, water flows down from the Beskids mountain in torrents to broad basins of rivers like Váh, far from city centres and caught in large dam water reservoirs. Water has been taken out of city life and transformed to a source of energy for hydroelectric power plants. The climate crisis brought about an urgent need for emergence of a "new water culture" and in this perspective, art and culture can play a key role in water awareness education, linking ancient knowledge to contemporary agendas for developing sustainable solutions. In this project cluster, we want water to become an inspiration and a substance of artistic creation and a symbol of our care for a sustainable environment. We want to bring water back to the city, re-enchant riverbanks and dams places for free-time and cultural activities, and promote its more enlightened usage and management of water.

Flow Festival

The Váh Cascade is a unique system of twenty hydroelectric power stations with

dams, which had a major impact on life and environment in the surrounding areas. The most recent dam of the Váh Cascade system is The Žilina Dam, completed in 1997, which has since become a popular recreational site, but also forced 150 families to relocate. We are preparing a multidisciplinary festival: the Flow Festival, directly on the water surface and around the dam, which will allow thousands of spectators to experience it. Likewise, the wide banks of the Váh river are ideal for contemporary and light art presentations, located along the river in a kind of art mile. Art sculptures and light objects by Biela Noc (SK) will transform the shore and light up the water surface. Pontoon islands, boats, and traditional wooden rafts on the dam will be transformed into kinetic sculptures that will offer a unique esthetic experience for thousands of spectators, sportsmen, and passers-by. Large water-inspired performances by Ilotopie (FR), French street artists, where they will blend the skills of paddlers, acrobats, dancers, and musicians into a theatrical evening show. The Flow Festival will be a celebration of water,

the joy of the play of lights above the water surface, and a reimagined water landscape. Artificial lakes are a typical sight in our landscaping history. Hydroelectric power plants provided us with energy and prevented regular floods, but their enforcement often resulted in the demise of whole communities, flooding of entire villages. *Floating Gardens* is a year-long project that deals with creating original archipelagos on the surface of dam reservoirs in the Beskids region. The project will be designed so that some of its parts can be presented at other dam reservoirs in Orava (SK), Žermanice, near Frýdek-Místek (CZ), and near Żywiec (PL). This artificial, artistic floating land will be a place for exhibitions, meetings, and discussions. The artist Juraj Poliak (SK) will be installing floating gardens on the Žilina dam, where events will be held and as year-round gardening and contemplation, including elements from the flooded villages. The Danish art group By Forfra (DK) will create a temporary floating structure on the Orava dam. The temporary nature is a significant feature of this project, giving it the smallest possible ecological footprint, with

its own energy resources and waste-free solution. The life on board of this autonomous cultural archipelago will offer opportunities for artistic performances and installations, but the archipelago itself is an architectural kinetic artistic form. It will be a beacon of memory but also a vision of a possible sustainable future on the water surface. As part of the Tanečno festival, a site-specific performance Orava DAM by the choreographer Manuel Ronda (IT) will reflect the origin and impact of the Orava dam through dance.

- **Organizer:** Biela Noc (SK), Juraj Poliak (SK), House of Culture in Námestovo (SK)
- **Partners:** By Fofra (DK), Ilotopie (FR), Tanečno (SK)
- **Budget:** € 232,000

Water Exhibitions

The Žilina Beskids 2026 application includes two water museums, one in the Bôrik Environmental Park, next to Žilina’s oldest water reservoir, the other in the Aqua centre, as part of the new swimming pool building in Bielsko-Biala. They will promote a new relationship, a new water ethic, which helps to reconnect people with the tangible and intangible heritage of water, including its social, cultural, ecological, artistic, and spiritual dimensions. The museums will exhibit and interpret artefacts, techniques, and traditional knowledge to preserve and promote water-related values and heritage that have been passed down through civilizations, from generation to generation, and still inform and can influence everyday life today. The permanent exhibition *The Story of Water* will be installed directly in the oldest underground reservoir of drinkable water in Žilina. The exhibition, realised by visual artist and exhibit designer Juraj Poliak, in collaboration with museum conservator Martin Chmelík (SK), will reflect three main topics: water as source of life (water on earth, cycle of water, water footprint, and climate change), the relation of water and humans (water in history and in different cultures), water management (water in cities, water-related disasters, and thirst). The Story of Water should be a favourite with schools and family trips. The project will include a permanent interactive outdoor water installation in the beautiful park surrounding the reservoir. It will be an open installation of artistically conceived playful water elements that will offer space for children to play, presenting various simple mechanisms and mobile installations demonstrating various ways of using water-based energy.

The Bôrik Environmental Park will also offer a large immersive exhibition space with the highest standards in modern technology, allowing innovative artistic presentation of ecological topics. For instance, the project *Melting*, an immersive new media installation which thematises the anthropocene by the acclaimed Slovenian multimedia artist Tadej Droljic (SI). In the middle of the dark, a large illuminated chunk of ice hangs from a ceiling and under the effect of heaters starts melting. Drops of water fall into a pool beneath, triggering the sound of a clock, step by step immersing visitors in real footage of natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, drought or even climate change related economic events. Next to those exhibitions, *River of Pure Becoming* will be a three-years-long research project on the relationship between the city and the surrounding ecosystem; between rivers and the city’s identity; between cities and waters and collective memory (water movement, flooded areas); between urban and natural landscapes. These issues will be addressed by individual artists and creative teams composed of various cultural, educational, and social science professions with the help of water managers, environmentalists, and city officials. The project will be divided into research and presentation parts (lectures, seminars, workshops, art works). It will be carried out annually as an individual artistic research by invited domestic and European artists, the results of which will later be implemented outdoors. The project will be organised by NGO Transkunsthalle (SK) and the Arzenal Gallery (SK), both dealing with art and sciences projects, under the curatorial supervision of Anton Čierny, Jakub Kopecký, Ján Kralovič (SK) and involving students of the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, OZ Transkunsthalle (SK), Arzenal Gallery (SK), Anton Čierny (SK), Juraj Poliak (SK), Memorymorph collective (PL), Tadej Droljic (SI), João Martinho Moura (PT), Braga 2027 (PT)
- **Partners:** Martin Chmelík (SK), Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava (SK) Spatial Communications + Urban Strategies Studios
- **Budget:** € 560,000

Bringing Water Back to the City

In this project, we look at revitalizing the banks of the Rajčanka river in Žilina, which pass through a mix of peri-urban commu-

nities and industrial zones of the city, a kind of lost paradise. Firstly, it will start as an investment project, which plans to improve the access to the river and new community and cultural infrastructures. The place will then host *Hello Rajčanka*, an international architecture and design festival by Hello Wood architects (HU). Since starting out as an art camp in 2010, Hello Wood has evolved into an international creative hub of architects, designers, and woodworkers. The festival will reflect on the relevant urban planning challenges of the area, more specifically the absence of an interactive public water space close to the city centre and artists – architects are going to create temporary installations with practical, leisure, educational, and artistic character to reclaim the territory for cultural and community activities. Based on Hello Wood’s experience-oriented practice, the curatorial concept will be rooted in preliminary data collection and research with the involvement of a local NGO and the residents. The success and essence of the festival lies in complementary buildings that set the scene both literally and figuratively. The central structure, designed and implemented by Hello Wood, creates a community space and a symbolic landmark; it adds identity to an existing space or formulates a new one. The final format of the curatorial concept will result in an open call to professionals and students of architecture/design from all around the world to form ten teams for ten temporary urban green installations. This international architecture and design festival will last ten days and bring one hundred architecture students from around the world, twenty leading architects and twenty organizers to Žilina. *The Všivák stream* is partially connected to an investment project as well, since the project will take place in the SNP Park in Žilina’s city centre. This sound art project will bring the Všivák stream, hidden in the city’s bowels by the previous regime, back to the surface. The sound artist from Bad Ischl, Thomas Grill (AT) will symbolically bring the stream back up in a sound memory and visual installation. The whole project shows the lack of respect given to water and water management in our cities.

- **Organizer:** Hellowood Architects (HU), Žilina Beskids 2026 – Hangar (SK)
- **Partner:** Thomas Grill (AT), citizen collectif Rajčanka (SK)
- **Budget:** € 573,000

Water from Beskids

The project *Water from Beskids* uses art as an epistemological tool and by observing the local context, using scientific data combined with sensitive methods, we want to create a temporary mobile platform that will record the imprint of water on the landscape. During the observation of the environment, we will create visual and audio outputs using various media (e.g. drawings, photography, site-specific interventions). Material will be collected chronologically in an online time collection, in the form of an information stream about the life of a water entity. The invited artists are Tomáš Hruža, Karel Kunc, Tereza Záchová, Michal Klodner (CZ), and Alexandra Čihanská Machová (SK). The project, run by the Prague-based Studio Prototyp and led by curators Karin Šrubařová and Nikola Brabcová (CZ),

will provide resources for the Environmental artistic centre FM and future artworks in Frýdek-Místek and the Beskids. The main topic of the *Rainy Days* project is water in the city, based on the current perspective that water is not a granted and inexhaustible source. We are looking for inspiration in the field of art and landscape architecture to extend the horizons of our imagination and develop new models of water-wise cities. The project consists of a Landscape Symposium, where participants will be reflecting on complex water management systems, but which will be mainly devoted to landscape and artistic interventions in urban space. These could end up producing water-purifying sculptures, fountains, irrigation systems, rainwater harvesting systems, groundwork, and permeable urban surfaces...

Participating artists and architects will be selected through an international open call in cooperation with Klára Salzmann (CZ) – International Federation of Landscape Architects, Ondřej Zdvomka (CZ) – Frýdek Místek city architect and Kurt Gebauer (CZ), a renowned land artist. Following this process, we will invite some of the selected authors to implement their interventions in the urban space and to present their works in an exhibition at the MOBA city gallery.

- **Organizers:** KulturaFM, Studio Prototyp (CZ), Frýdek Místek city architect office (CZ)
- **Partners:** Faculty of Natural Sciences of University of Ostrava (CZ), Kultura FM (CZ), IFLA Europe, Ondřej Bělíca (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 73,000

–SCAPE

The Beskids region is a popular hiking destination for locals and visitors alike, therefore we could not think of a better audience development strategy than going where our audiences spend most of their time – to nature. The region boasts two national parks, Malá Fatra and Babia Góra, and five protected landscape areas across the three countries. Cooperation between artists, land stewards, scientists, and the environment protection specialists offers an opportunity to come up with innovative ideas and unique landscape interventions. Landscape art can be understood as a field of experimentation reuniting what is often seen as separate: art, nature, and science. It has the ability to raise the general public’s awareness of natural treasures. At the same time, we will scrutinize the position of the artists. How do we create new interventions without conquering, colonizing territories? What is our place in nature as both strong and creative beings?

–SCAPE

–SCAPE is a deconcentrated festival helping audiences to contemplate art in nature. It will take the form of a biennial, the first two editions will be run under the curatorial direction of Sodja Lotker (CZ) who is currently working as artistic director on her fifth Prague Quadrennial, a leading European scenography festival. –SCAPE is a year-long artistic season in the natural landscape of the Beskid mountains which every two years includes fifteen installations, regular small group events and guided tours of artistic trails. The journey itself becomes an artwork, the time spent moving between the artworks is suited to contemplation, silence, or storytelling. It is an interdisciplinary art approach involving visual artists, architects, and performers, where they are invited to conduct artistic

research into different kinds of environmental issues, ordinary or extraordinary territories, species... The artworks as such could be seen as a means of transfer of knowledge from land stewards, scientists, or rangers. In between our seasons, we will organise creative exchanges between artists and scientists to help them come up with new thoughts, open calls, and we will work, in collaboration with our European partners from the LAND network, on a series of training and art exchanges for both local and European artists. Artworks will be selected based on each individual site, with focus on works made from natural materials, to enable their eventual disintegration into the terrain. The goal is to avoid concentrating too many spectators in one outdoor spot at once, which will be facilitated by spreading the artworks over a larger territory, connected by foot,

cycle or nordic skiing paths rather than being easily accessible by car. Invited artists include: Mali Weil design collective (IT) – dealing with relationship between design and Anthropocene; TAAT with Breg Horemans (NL) and Gert-Jan Stam (BE) – a duo focusing on research of the relationship between architecture-space and the human body; Riitta Ikonen (FI) – a photographer exploring relationship between the human body and nature; Jan Edler (DE) – an architect working with architecture and ecology, Lotte van den Berg (NL) – a performance artist working with specificity of place, and Adéla Svobodová (CZ) – a visual artist working with ecology, technology, and rituals, plus others.

- **Organizer:** Sodja Zupanc Lotker (CZ)
- **Partner:** LAND European network, Oerol (NL), Activate Performing

Arts (UK), Le Citron Jaune (FR), and Artopolis / PLACCC (HU)

● **Budget:** € 220,000

Land ART Zawoja 2026

The Land Art Zawoja Festival (PL) is a direct continuation of the tradition of the largest Polish land art festival, which has been held since 2010 in Lublin, to great international acclaim. Its founder and curator Jarosław Koziara will be the main curator of the 2026 edition. He is a famous Polish performer and visual artist, as well as the

author of over a dozen monumental land art works spanning hectares. In 2020, the festival moved to the beautiful landscape of Zawoja, a place full of secrets dominated by Babia Góra, the highest peak in Beskids, located next to the eponymous national park.

At the festival, prominent artists like Ewa Dąbrowska (PL), Mirosław Maszlanko (PL), Waldemar Rudyk (PL), Ryszard Litwiniuk, and Jan Sajdak regularly create under the credo “smuggling art into nature and nature into art”. For 2026, we expect significant international participation and cooperation

with artists like Daisaku Ueno (JP) or Karin van der Molen (NL), Siarhiej Leskiewicz (BL), Lorenzo Palmeri (IT), Donald Buglass (NZ), Vladimir Topij (UA), Sergiy Radkevich (UA), and Vlodko Kaufman (UA). The selection of artists will be finalized following an international competition.

- **Organizer:** Babiogórskie Centrum Kultury (PL)
- **Partner:** Fundacja Latająca Ryba (PL), Galerie Plato Ostrava (CZ), Izolatsia – Platform for Cultural Initiatives (UA)
- **Budget:** € 17,000

Forest Glam

Even with its solid tourist infrastructure, the Beskid mountains are not suffering from mass tourism, yet. The character of the local landscape and nature makes it an ideal territory to develop the concept of slow tourism, enriched with deeper cultural experience. In this project cluster, we will produce unique artistic events where music facilitates experiences that deepen sensitivity to the natural habitat. We will also bring new perspectives on different aspects of forest culture and people’s relationship with nature. In recent decades, we have witnessed constant transformation of forest’s societal and economic functions and there is an increasing tension between ecological and economic interests, therefore we will address conflicting issues, like logging, intensive leisure time activities in protected areas, foraging, and climate emergency, through an interactive exhibition and educational programme in the newly built forest museum. Stemming from the art of foraging and other traditional ways of interacting with forest, we will also develop new materiality and modes of experiencing nature.

Hug the Forest

The aim of the new *Vychylovka Forest Museum* (SK) is to raise visitors’ awareness of the importance of forests for the environment, their role in forming local culture, and potential to improve their quality of life. The museum will offer a complex educational experience dedicated to the relation between people and forest, its past, present, and future, but also its cultural, ethnographic, industrial and environmental aspects. The *Interactive Permanent Exhibition* will provide information about methods used by the wood industry and document the evolution of logging methods and techniques. It will also present the diversity of the fauna and flora inhabiting the Beskid mountains, as well as human impact on that landscape. It will present ethnographic documentation of the living and working conditions of inhabitants of these remote areas and their traditional habits, myths, and stories. The *Vychylovka Forest Museum* (SK) will also host *temporary exhibitions*, like Fairy Tales and Legends of the Forest with the Finnish Forest Museum Lusto (FI) or Legendary Brigands from the Beskids; while

other projects will focus more on biology, like for instance: Growth of a Tree and Photosynthesis; Erosion; Genetics of a Forest. Apart from them, we also plan more contemporary art projects, like *Decomposition*. Štefan Papčo (SK) will be developing complex experimental artworks in an exhibition, where he plans to work with abstract drawings, video, and objects. The output will be a sculpture installation integrating natural processes and artificial interventions into pieces of dead wood collected from the surrounding nature, showing the contrast between the dead material and the fungal life this decomposition brings. The exhibition will partially happen in a wet and dark exhibition space based on haptic experience and natural bioluminescence phenomena. The museum will also become a platform for interdisciplinary research-based activities, producing high quality cultural, scientific and educational outputs. It will host debates and conferences for professionals working in wood industry and environmental research, as well as wood-oriented contemporary architecture and design workshops. As part of Žilina Beskids 2026, we would like the museum to also offer a

pan-European perspective on forest cultures, in cooperation with the Finnish Forest Museum – Lusto (FI) in Savonlinna and other European forest museums.

- **Organizer:** Kysuce Museum – Forest Museum (SK)
- **Partner:** LUSTO (FI), Lesy.sk – Lesnícke múzeum vo Zvolene (SK), Zvolenská univerzita – Lesnícka fakulta (SK), UNIZA – Fakulta vysokohorské biologie (SK), CHKO Kysuce (SK), Claudia Martinho (PT), Braga 2027 (PT)
- **Budget:** € 240,000

Myco Fiction – Mushroom Galactics

Our region developed a real passion for foraging mushrooms, therefore there is no wonder that mushrooms have a strong presence in our programme. In collaboration with mushroom artists and connoisseurs from around the world, we are preparing a multi-genre series of events that will bring together a wide range of people: mycologists, conservationists, and artists from various artistic fields.

These unique events will include a large international mushroom-themed exhibition in the Vychylovka Forest Museum, with mushroom as a topic as well as a unique material for creation, curated by Marek Pokorný (CZ). For those interested in penetrating the inner world of mushrooms, audio walks and sound installations will be prepared by Jonáš Gruska (SK). Everything will culminate in a symposium led by Peter McCoy (US), the founder of Mycologos, where he will present how mushrooms are, according to him, the future of humanity, capable of feeding the world and colonising other planets. The symposium will focus on the concepts of mushroom ecology, mushroom foraging, mushrooms in human history, and modern applied mycology (e.g. mushroom growing, medicinal mushrooms, and mycoremediation). Of course, projects from the world of mushrooms cannot stay only in big cities’ conference halls or galleries, we therefore invited the Hungarian artist Csilla Hódi (HU) who with her travelling project Mycolab will offer meetings and workshops to mushroom fans from the region.

- **Organizer:** Kysuce Museum – Forest Museum (SK)
- **Partner:** Csilla Hódi (HU), Mycologos

– Peter McCoy (USA), UNIZA – biochemical faculty (SK), LOM Space – Jonáš Gruska (SK), Marie Ladvová (CZ), Mycohood – Maria Subczyńska (PL), Environmental Artistic Centre FM (CZ), Faculty of Natural Science of the Ostrava University (CZ), Galerie Plato Ostrava (CZ)

● **Budget:** € 67,000

Voices of the Forest

Quiet. Rustle of the forest, gossip of a stream, cracking of twigs, singing of birds, the roar of a chainsaw cutting down a tree. All this can be heard in the forests of various continents. This will be the playground of contrasts on which the composition of *Voices of the Forest* is built. The Mixed Choir of Žilina, the organiser of the renowned Voce Magna International Festival of Choral Art (SK) will invite choirs from various countries for this occasion, including the world-famous screaming men’s choir Huutajat from Olou (FI).

The project involves local people working together with international singers on an experimental new composition for a large choir and natural instruments. Together, there will be about 200–250 singers who will create an unusual world premiere,

based on a composition by Peter Špilák (SK). The performance will include recorded sounds and musical motifs associated with the forest, complemented by an attractive minimalist choreography. The composition will be an experiment with voices, sounds, feelings, and emotions of the listeners. The listeners immerse themselves in the atmosphere of forest habitats and feel their beauty in sharp artistic contrast to the acute threats of climate change and deforestation.

The performance setup goes beyond the traditional frontal format with performers and listeners facing each other, singers in Voices of the Forest will be scattered over a large area, the listeners will explore and contemplate the piece while wandering around the forest. A big challenge will be the synchronization of the performers, therefore the conductor Štefan Sedlický (SK) will use mobile apps and digital equipment as coordination aids. In addition to the live performance a short film will be produced, documenting all phases of the project to serve as inspiration to others.

- **Organizer:** Žilinský Miešaný Zbor (SK)
- **Partner:** Huutajat (FI)
- **Budget:** € 43,000

Escape

Forests and mountains have long served local people in the Beskids as a source of livelihood, and a refuge – previously from the controlling regime, nowadays from the fast pace of urban living. The Beskids already have a developed infrastructure for free-time and sport activities, hiking and walking in nature has long been a common part of the lifestyle of local people, with further increase in outdoor activities during the pandemic. In this project cluster, we address the mentality of locals as mountain people and invite specific target groups of international visitors. Nature lovers, hikers from Europe will find great offers of cultural trails and sport events with deeper cultural dimension. We want to bring art outside, to places where people are and where they go, adding new cultural layers to existing natural settings and offerings. To do so, we join forces with many existing local networks of hikers, climbers, paragliders, land stewards, environmental scientists etc. and together develop unexpected connections between nature, art, and adrenaline.

Art Trails Beskids

Hiking and walking are the ways we most often use to explore a territory, to access unique views of landscapes, to play with representations through maps and explore socio-cultural contexts. Creating a series of trails will bring new opportunities to discover the complexity of the territory, helping locals and visitors discover thematic aspects of the region’s

story or its alternative realities. The trails will draw attention to the in-between spaces, they will offer an opportunity to pass borders, both national and social ones, or to drift from urban to natural zones. Art is also a mental journey, we therefore propose to connect it with a physical one. Art Trails Beskids will also allow hikers to discover artworks installed throughout the Beskid mountains or to join walking artists in their sensitive exploration of the territory.

Artist residencies will be organised to produce performative walks and artistic situations along the trails. Moreover, throughout the Žilina Beskids 2026 programme, several artworks, installations, and artistic projects will take place in the territories that the trails will be connecting. The trails will be marked, an official map will be published, and even if they are temporary, some of them might become a permanent part of the exploring Beskids. A mobile

application will be created for geolocation and additional information on each point of interest you pass by. Through the Beskids participatory hospitality program, locals will be involved in hospitality and heritage presentation activities.

The potential Art Trails are:

- *Legends and Myths of Beskids – a trail dealing with urban and traditional legends, with digital content available directly at individual spots in the public space*
- *Vrba and Wetzler Route – a 130-km-long trail, a four-day-long participative memorial and pilgrimage from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum to Žilina in the footsteps of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler*
- *Javorník sculpture trails – based on an already existing one on the ridge of the Javorník mountain, using new artworks from the ARTborethum project*
- *Beskid redík – a tour to discover shepherd culture, farms, and cottages; a culinary and traditional culture experience*
- *Environmental tour of the Beskids – with land stewards and environment protection professionals, focused on natural treasures and threats in the Beskid mountains*
- *Urban Forest Dubeň & Straník – a periurban walk with a specific vista above Žilina and educational activities*
- *Mural rural graffiti route – a walk through Beskid villages in search of murals by Etnograff*
- *Industrial and craft route – a route to discover industrial heritage and meet local craftsmen of the Beskids region*

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** Slovak Tourists Club (SK), Memorymorph collective (PL), Etnograff (PL), PTTK (PL-TBC), Asociácia prírodného turizmu (SK)
- **Budget:** € 90,000

Beskids Wide Open

In this project we will look at a different type of walking, not recreational but artistic, reminiscent of the Situationist drift as proposed by Guy Debord, a playful wandering through cities exploring territories and the effects they have on us. Beskids Wide Open is a three-year-long project, during which the French art collective Ici-Même Grenoble (FR) will be exploring the Beskids region. They will spend the first two years in several long-term residencies in the region, preparing culture trails to be produced for 2026. During these two

years they will discover rural, industrial, agricultural, isolated and rather fragmented regions of Beskids. They will explore circulatory flows and meeting points of the Beskids, collecting stories and situations they will later connect.

Ici Meme Grenoble is a multidisciplinary, multi-form art group, expert in creating conditions for a conversation, conditions to explore territories, creating unusual situations for meetings to happen. Ici- Mème moves forward by sliding, from exploration to construction, and later designs artistic protocols and situations. They will initiate various meetings juxtaposed with other micro-actions, conversation agencies, radio broadcasts, nighttime drifts and conclude with artistic productions the form of which remains to be defined. After a night walk and a bivouac in the forest, they can propose a sound exploration of a factory and the creation of “base camps” with cultural programmes, readings, and film projections. Finally, in 2026, they will propose two or three trails, create sound productions, maps, a book, and an exhibition.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- **Partners:** Ici- Mème Grenoble (FR), Truc Sphérique (SK)
- **Budget:** € 140,000

Rambler Dreamer – Eurorando 2026

The European Ramblers’ Association is a network of organisations promoting hiking and creating trails all over Europe. They organise exchange of know-how and secure rights of free access to nature for walkers with help of their members, national hiker organisations. Every five years, they organize a major event, Eurorando, the largest European Hiking Event, where thousands of participants from different EU countries meet in one place and over one week navigate several hiking and cultural trails. After France, Czech, Spain, Sweden, and Romania, this could be the opportunity for Slovakia to invite Europe for a walk through the Beskids, with potentially 5,000 to 10,000 participants. The key theme of Beskids Eurorando 2026 will be the hiking culture. We want to significantly strengthen the “cultural routes” traditionally planned as a side programme for tourists and propose them to discover the above-mentioned Art Trails Beskids. We will, for instance, take participants to places where new works of art will be installed, some of them will be able to stay overnight at our newly built shelters, but also follow the route of the famous escape of Rudolf

Vrba and Alfred Wetzler from Auschwitz Birkenau to Žilina. Outside the traditional trekking programme, we will also offer visitors a rich offer of cultural events including small exhibitions, readings, traveller film projections, and acoustic concerts in mountain cottages as well as outdoor games based on geocaching and orientation walks.

- **Organizer:** Slovak Tourists Club (SK)
- **Partners:** European Ramblers’ Association, Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- **Budget:** € 85,000

From the Sky

The slopes above the Váh valley near Žilina have provided ideal opportunities for gliders since the 1930s. Already in 1936, the first national gliding races in Czechoslovakia took place there at the Straník hill and due to the suitable shape of the hill and wind conditions it remains one of the most popular spots for gliding lovers in Slovakia today.

The From the Sky project connects the adrenaline of unpowered flight with land art. Polish land artist Jarosław Koziara and his collaborators will create three unique land art prints in the landscape for Žilina Beskids 2026, which will be visible not only from above by paragliders but also from various vantage points above the Žilina valley. Jarosław Koziara is a Lublin-based multidisciplinary visual artist. Since 2000, he has been involved in land art, creating monumental images plowed into the ground, and since 2010, has been the artistic director of the International Landart Festival.

- **Organizer:** Paraglidingový klub X-air (SK), Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- **Partner:** Jarosław Koziara (PL)
- **Budget:** € 28,000

Sun on the Rocks

The *Sun on the Rocks* is a multi-genre festival of outdoor culture, a friendly gathering of climbers, mountaineers, tourists, and fans of alpine tourism. Since 2015, it regularly hosts meetings with inspiring personalities, travelers, climbers, and writers. An important part of the four-day meeting is screening of travel films and films with the topic of adrenaline outdoor sports, complemented by workshops of various climbing disciplines, but also cultural events and concerts. The 2026 programme will include performances of artists who use rope techniques in their work

(rope walkers, hanging acrobats, and vertical dancers).

In cooperation with the MOVE Ostrava Festival and the curator Jana Ryšlavá, the festival will feature the Budapest Ziggurat Project performance group, which together with climbers – festival participants and other performers (StroMY) will prepare an original site-specific air dance performance for a rock wall and trees. Vertical dance is a young discipline on the borderline between dance and circus that defies the laws of gravity and opens a new spectrum of movement possibilities for performers. With the help of climbing harnesses, the performers can move and dance high above the ground.

The Ziggurat Project (HU) is an international, independent, interdisciplinary art collective consisting of ten artists that connects contemporary dance to other art fields (theatre, music, visual and digital arts), based in Budapest. Their focus is to create site-specific or site-sensitive performances and socially conscious projects. StroMY (CZ) is a group of performers from Brno, which after exploring the possibilities of dance and physical theatre in various spaces and conditions, decided to

shift their attention to the natural environment. From a close relationship with nature, seduced by the magical power of trees, the group’s focus shifted solely to vertical dance in the trees.

- **Organizer:** Slnko na skalách o.z. (SK)
- **Partners:** Ziggurat Project (HU), StroMY (CZ), MOVE Ostrava (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 40,000

March for Beskids

March for Beskids is the kick-off event of the series that brings culture and art, food and dance, to the borders on a very symbolic day, the 1st of May. The project is meant as a celebration of spring, of togetherness, and last but not least, of our accession to the EU. Hikers, walkers, and jazz-lovers will be invited on an easy walk from the Polish, Czech and Slovak border that will converge at the emblematic Tripoint where all three borders meet. It will be an easy walk with cultural and artistic checkpoints along the way, along the borderline with jazz quartets playing under trees, artistic activities for children and quizzes on trivia about European

cultures. The event is family friendly and the walk will be designed specifically for families with small children. At the Tripoint, food stalls, music, and dance performances will await the walkers, where Polish, Czech and Slovak participants can exchange traditional meals, listen to each other’s music and engage in artistic and craft workshops. One of the three routes will see sheep from a local farm in Koników herded towards the Tripoint along with the walkers, with special commentary on sheep-farming. Another route will be led by the group Hřava from the eponymous Czech border village, focusing on the history of smuggling. This is a follow up event to Nova Goriza 2025’s March for Europe, which is every year celebrated 1st of May and explores the notion of borders.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- **Partners:** Euroregion Beskids (SK/CZ/PL), Zadymka (PL), farma Koników (PL), Národopisná skupina Hřava (CZ), Krajské kultúrne stredisko v Žiline (SK), Nova Goriza 2025 (SI)
- **Budget:** € 12,000

Summit of Culture

Summits are usually held on unusual and neutral premises, ours will take place on the summits of the Beskids. In this project cluster, we will invite local and international visitors to unusual spots in the mountains where we will organise top-quality cultural summits, not necessarily massive, but in any case events that draw inspiration from the sites and surrounding where they are organised, while staying aware of their ecological impacts.

The *Summit of Culture festival* is a three-day open-air music festival taking place at one of the mountain meadows on the Slovak side of the Beskids. We expect it to attract around 15,000 visitors. The events will be distinguished by their remarkable open-air location, modern and artistically brilliant musical arrangements, and natural scenery of the Beskid landscape.

The important feature of the festival is a blend of musical styles aimed to attract wider and diverse audiences. The lineup would consist of three main concerts and a fusion of different music genres:

- “Beskid Mountain Classical Gala” – a symphony concert with music inspired by mountains and folk music, by composers such as Bedřich Smetana (fragments from *The Bartered Bride* and *Vltava*), Karol Szymanowski (the *Harnasie ballet*), Wojciech Kilar (*Krzysztof*) with participation of leading

opera singers such as Piotr Beczała, Iwona Sobotka (PL), and the Slovak Sinfonietta Orchestra (SK).

- *Redík – a symphonic fantasia* – a ninety-minute folk music symphony show with Beskid shepherds, based on folk music of the Beskid region, composed by Przemysław Zych and Patryk Walczak (PL). The performing artists will include Katarína Málikova (SK), the Volesi ensemble, the PoPieronie ensemble, and the Śląsk choir and orchestra.
- “Classic Techno” – a DJ set combined with classical music played by the Bielsko-Biała Chamber Orchestra, an acoustic reinterpretation of an originally electronic score, by and together with a renowned DJ.

The festival will use high-end technology, with acoustic outputs obtained in a twenty-two-channel system, matching the sound quality of leading European concert

halls in outdoor conditions. It will also use cutting-edge sound mapping and noise control solutions that will ensure optimal sound experience for the audience and, at the same time, minimal noise pollution impact on the surrounding environment. The unique project will have great promotional power, potential for TV retransmission, with support from top Polish production and audio technology companies.

- **Organizer:** Temida Arts & Business Foundation (PL)
- **Partners:** Bielskie Centrum Kultury (PL), Slovak Sinfonietta Žilina (SK)
- **Budget:** € 350,000

Lotos Ethno Jazz Festival

Bielska Zadymka Jazzowa (PL) is a festival organized since 1999. The festival, as

hinted by its name (Zadymka means “bliz-zard”), takes place in the winter season, when the region sees the largest influx of tourists. It is an event “with soul”, embedded in the winter scenery of the Beskids. For five days, visitors have an opportunity to experience dozens of concerts held at various venues. The unique atmosphere and world jazz stars often coming to Bielsko-Biała for their sole performances in Poland or even Europe are the magnets attracting jazz fans from all over the country and abroad.

For Žilina Beskids 2026, Zadymka will organise six special outdoor concerts in the spring, accessible after a small walk and organised next to selected mountain cottages, with stages directly on the hillside. Some spots have already been selected, like Góra Żar – the Beskid peak towering over the lake Żar, the Równica hostel in the heart of the Silesian Beskids, or the Vrátna Ski Resort area on the Slovak side. The festival will bring the world's top ethno-jazz musicians to the region already rich in folk music. It will inspire collaborations and engage folk music from the region and other parts of the world in a dialogue with jazz. We will host for instance Dhafer Youssef (TN) with his own distinguished style, inspired by his being descended from a long line of muezzins. Dhafer’s music is a fusion of oriental influences and urban grooves, a vibrant encounter of tradition and contemporary influences, a universal call for peace.

- **Organizer:** Art Theater Association – Zadymka (PL)
- **Partners:** KulturaFM (CZ), Žilina Beskids 2026 (SK)
- **Budget:** € 160,000

Musical Trips Across Borders

The St. Wenceslas Music Festival (CZ) is the biggest international festival of sacred and Early music in the Czech Republic. Since its founding in 2004, it has been presenting concerts with European dimensions featuring both domestic and foreign performers.

Nine monumental vocal and instrumental concerts will take place in 2026, focusing on authentic interpretation of Early and sacred music. It will bring Europe’s best interpreters and ensembles to sacred and historical buildings across the whole Beskids region on all three sides of the border. Invited ensembles and soloists are: AKAMUS – Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (DE) and Isabelle Faust – violin (DE), Terra Nova Collective (BE), Europa Galante and Fabio Biondi (IT), Solamente Naturali

with Miloš Valent (SK) and Filippo Minecchia and a contralto (IT), Orquestra barroca by Vespres d’ Arnadí (SP) and Carlos Mena – countertenor (SP), Collegium 1704 by Václav Lukš (CZ) and Magdalena Kožená – mezzo-soprano (CZ), Gabriele Mirabassi – jazz clarinet (IT) and Simone Zanchini – accordion (IT), Janoska Ensemble (SK/AT), Wojciech Myrczek – voice (PL) and Paweł Tomaszewski – piano (PL).

- **Organizer:** Svatováclavský hudební festival, z.s.
- **Partners:** Narodowa Orkiestra Symfoniczna Polskiego Radia w Katowicach (PL) / Generální konzulát Polské republiky v Ostravě (PL) / Instytut Polski (PL) / Instytut Adama Mickiewicza (PL) / Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina (PL) / Spoločnosť Theodora Lotza, o. z. (SK) / Česko-německý fond budoucnosti (CZ, DE) / ČAF – Česká asociace festivalů (CZ) / PKF – Prague Philharmonia, o. p. s (CZ) / Baroque Opera Stars s.r.o. (CZ) / Collegium 1704 o. p. s. (CZ), Terra Nova Antwerpen VZW (BE) / Accion Cultural Española (ES) / Associació Ateneu D’Historia i Art (ES) / MTÜ Collegium Musicale (EE)
- **Budget:** € 289,000

Slanica Island of Theatre

The festival *Slanica Island of Theatre* usually takes place in the unique environment of the Slanica Island, in the middle of the Orava reservoir, but also in other suitable spaces in Námestovo and throughout the Orava region. The festival usually runs for one week and offers one theatre production per day and other accompanying programs (concerts, film projections on boats, discussions, exhibitions). In 2026, the seventh edition will be organized together with Žilina Beskids 2026, putting special focus on European topics, the EU’s common history, cultural diversity, and reflections on its enlargement and integration processes. The festival will be expanded with additional performances by European theatres and an opening show on the island and light show on the surface of the Orava reservoir. It will also feature the first open air contemporary opera in Orava, realised in cooperation with the unique musical project VENI Academy, under the direction of Daniel Matej (SK). The VENI Academy is a community of young musicians who like to play music they do

not normally encounter at music schools, namely contemporary classical music.

- **Organizer:** Kult.1629 (SK)
- **Partners:** Mestské kultúrne stredisko Námestovo, ŽSK
- **Budget:** € 95,000

Nosferatu Castle Tour

The silent movie *Nosferatu* (1922) made its mark on history, not only as the first vampire film, but also as a telling artifact from a turbulent socio-political time, a prominent example of the German Expressionism artistic movement, and an achievement in early filmmaking, especially in the field of special effects. Based on the original music composed by Hans Erdmann, the Slovak Sinfonietta Orchestra (SK) in collaboration with the Jena Philharmonic (DE) will perform during a massive outdoor film projection against the backdrop of the Orava castle, *Nosferatu*’s original filming location. After the Orava castle premiere, we will bring the spectacular performance to the Hukvaldy castle near Frýdek-Místek in the Czech Beskids in co-production with the Leoš Janáček International Music Festival (CZ).

- **Organizer:** Slovak Sinfonietta (SK)
- **Partners:** Leoš Janáček International Music Festival (CZ), Jena Philharmonic (DE)
- **Budget:** € 25,000

Odpoutaná Scéna

The traditional event Odpoutaná scéna in Frýdek-Místek is a theatre festival for a wide range of audiences that will in 2026 connect unique local context with current European topics and challenges. The programme emphasizes the current climate crisis and contrasts it with industrial and technological development. *Kill Climate Deniers* is a satirical black comedy written by the Australian playwright David Finnigan and adapted by Kristýna Jankovcová (CZ) and Adam Svozil (CZ) from Švandovo divadlo (CZ), concerning a group of extremist eco-terrorists who hold 1,700 Australian politicians and journalists hostage in the Parliament House until a solution to combat climate change is implemented. This performance and others from *Odpoutaná scéna* festival will open the new theatre space New Scene in Frýdek-Místek.

- **Organizer:** Kultura FM (CZ)
- **Partners:** Švandovo divadlo (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 25,000

Traditions Forward

The Traditions Forward programme cluster is a space for traditional culture rooted in the natural environment and its contemporary interpretation. The Beskids and northern Slovakia, given its mountainous morphology, witnessed the development of strong cultural identities – one could say, each of the valleys developed its own unique traditions. Some, like for instance the fujara or the music of Terchová, are even listed on UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Žilina region is also particularly well known for its sheep and cow milk cheese production, and for its highland shepherd culture in general.

Shepherd Culture

The Carpathian Redik 2026 will be a three-month journey of shepherds with herds along the ridges of the Carpathian mountains. An international group of shepherds with documentary artists will set out from Romania at the beginning of May on old pastoral paths up to the Beskids mountains, together with flocks of sheep arriving in Žilina at the end of September. The pilgrimage of more than a thousand kilometres will be in remembrance of the Wallachian settlement of the Beskids and the shepherds with their sheep will pass through Romania, Ukraine, Poland, and Slovakia, all the way to the Czech Beskids. The Carpathian Redik recalls the traditional form of transhumance and pastoralism in Europe, referred to in our region as “redyk”. This sheep rearing method has shepherds or their whole families regularly moving herds to seasonal pastures. The state of vegetation changes in the course of years, as do grazing conditions. This way of sheep husbandry and life of pastoral communities in general is slowly disappearing. Mountain villages are becoming depopulated as young people move to cities in search of a better life.

Along with local partners, a rich cultural programme will be prepared at individual stops, including not only presentation of pastoral skills but also music, dances, and presentation of craft. An important part will also consist of sharing of experience and joint work on traditional products, which originate in sheep rearing, wool processing, leather, and especially milk / cheese production. Ethnographers and artists (writers, photographers, visual artists) will also be part of the travelling group, creating a unique document of this disappearing way of life. *The Festival of Shepherd Culture* will be a new two-day festival, where we intend to set up a temporary, showcase sheep and goat farm in Žilina’s main square. The festival will include tasting of shepherd culinary specialities from different European countries, music and dance folklore programme,

presentation of farmers’ working traditions, and demonstration of crafts. The main event will be a procession of sheep through the city back to the mountains, connected with the passage of the Carpathian Redik through Žilina. Shepherd culture is one of Slovakia’s hallmarks, the ECoC will nevertheless present an opportunity to host shepherds from different parts of Europe. The festival will also include a conference on preservation of mountain farming and culture in Slovakia and in Europe. This project aims to highlight that agriculture is not just the process of producing food, but also a key constituting element of culture.

- **Organizer:** Regional Cultural Center Žilina (SK), Valašské muzeum v přírodě Rožnov p. R. (CZ)
- **Partners:** Spolek Koliba Košařiska (PL), Centrum Produktu Regionalnego Koniaków (PL), European Shepherds Network
- **Budget:** € 115,800

Music Encounters

In 2026, the twentieth annual edition of the *Slovak Gathering of Fujara Players* will take place in the village of Čičmany, famous for its original log houses with typical white ornamentation patterns. Fujara is a long wooden pipe with three tone holes. Originating in central Slovakia, it is one of Slovakia’s treasures on UNESCO’s cultural heritage list. This four-day event usually consists of an exhibition of handmade traditional instruments and a rich musical programme with about fifty fujara players from different parts of Slovakia. In addition to this traditional event, we plan a site-specific outdoor concert in nature, with interaction between traditional Slovak fujara players and other outdoor wind instruments from European cultures, like the alphorn or the Great Highland bagpipe.

Echoes from Beskids is an original and unique project of the Berg Orchestra who will play original compositions by three contemporary composers, Michal Rataj (CZ), Bruno Sanfilipo (ES), and Marek Keprt (CZ). The composers will study original compositions for traditional instruments by Beskid musicians and reinterpret them. The concert will take place, as is typical for the Berg Orchestra, in an unusual setting, a natural location with the echo of the surrounding mountains. The Berg Orchestra (CZ) is a leading Prague-based ensemble that presents attractive and innovative projects with an emphasis on contemporary and 20th-century music, often performed outside traditional concert halls.

European Capital of Culture offers a space for unusual meetings, and one of the highly anticipated joint projects is *Unexpected Meeting*, a fusion of two unique folk music traditions, the music from Terchová in Slovakia and the kantele musical instrument from Finland. The project will include creative workshops by the kantele master Marjo Smolander (FI) from northern Karelia and joint concerts with different bands from Terchová. In 2013, the music of Terchová became part of UNESCO’s cultural heritage list. Terchová is a village located twenty-five kilometres from Žilina and its music is characterized by being played by three-member string ensembles and polyphonic singing. The Finnish musician Marjo Smolander (FI), an expert on folk and world music exchanges, plays the traditional Finnish instrument called kantele.

The last project, *Carpathian Brigand Bands*, will bring together the Tomáš Kočko orchestra (CZ), Nebeská muzika from Terchová (SK), and the Bartnický band (PL) – three groups inspired by mountain music from the Beskids, which they transform into modern forms. They will connect, undergo joint workshops in order to create a musical performance referring to mountaineer traditions, history of local outlaws, and the beauty of the Beskid mountains.

- **Organizer:** Regional Cultural Centre Žilina (SK), Berg Orchestra (CZ), Tomáš Kočko orchestra (CZ)
- **Partners:** Marjo Smolander (FI), Michal Rataj (CZ), Bruno Sanfilipo (ES) and Marek Keprt (CZ), Bartnicky (PL), Nebeská muzika (SK)
- **Budget:** € 83,000

Rural Murals
– Projekt Etnograff

This mural trail in rural areas of the Beskids region will be created in cooperation with an international group of graffiti and mural artists. The newly produced artworks will present and popularize topics related to traditional culture and identity among young audiences in a modern and accessible way. A residency and exchange program is planned with other graffiti festivals like Wallz (CZ) and Sewer Street Fest (SK), but most of the paintings will be the result of open calls. The project also involves creation of a mural trail, with orientation signs (greeters or inflatables), a map and an interactive mobile app to discover these large wall paintings all over the Beskids region. The author of the project is Maciej Szymonowicz (PL), a member of the group Projekt Etnograff,

who will produce the project together with other Czech and Slovak partners. He already focuses on creating murals on the walls of towns in the Polish Beskids, with references to highland culture.

- **Organizer:** Projekt Etnograff (PL)
- **Partners:** Roman Wirth (CZ), Wallz festival – Plzeň 2015, zs (CZ), Sewer Street Fest (SK), Samuel Daniš (SK), Memorymorph Collective (PL)
- **Budget:** € 68,210

Last in the Village

Last in the Village is an immersive festival in remote settlements in the Beskids’ rural areas, dedicated to the theme of leaving. Departure from the countryside to cities has been going on in the Beskids region for centuries. This week-long festival will try to capture the decline of small remote villages. We use the model of the Goat Milk festival (BG), which takes place in a similar type of abandoned village, Bela Rechka in the Stara Planina region in Bulgaria, where it offers cultural activities to local communities. The Bulgarian organization New Culture Foundation has been organizing the festival since 2003, connecting locals,

often elderly people, with international contemporary artists and social scientists. The *Last in the Village* festival proposes an artistic programme, but also includes discussions and workshops in the field of oral history. The festival is an opportunity to stay with locals, to experience with them their rhythm of life, share memories, and discuss generational differences, but also to help bring life back to the villages. It will host the legendary Polish rural theatre Teatr Wiejski Węgajty (PL) which has been active in a remote region in the northeast of Poland for more than thirty years, using anthropological methods in their creative work. The Czech–Norwegian–Icelandic group Moetivi Caravan (CZ/NO/IS) will also offer an original artistic experience to locals in a specially adapted caravan, combining visual art and music with elements of puppet theatre. They travel to the smallest villages to offer an insight into the phenomenon of home from the perspective of a traveller.

- **Organizer:** New Culture Foundation (BG)
- **Partners:** Teatr Wiejski Węgajty (PL), Moetivi caravan (CZ / NO / IS)
- **Budget:** € 57,000

Rurban exchange

One of the distinctive features of today’s society is the deepening of differences between the rural and urban worlds, between the lived rural experience, established practices and, on the other hand, the constant innovation through technology of the everyday world in cities. In recent decades, rural areas have undergone huge transformations all around the world, but it is in European rural areas that one can especially clearly see the striking impact of industrial farming and modern urban lifestyle on the traditional rural ways of life. Nevertheless, there is a growing interest in local farms, bio and local products, where traditional herbs and spices and grandmother recipes come back to life thanks to contemporary chefs. This way, the traditional art of Beskids herbalists is also reflected in the form of desirable natural cosmetics. Rurban exchange is a process of creative questioning and exploration of potential, based on both inherited and new inputs, using approaches of food curation, culinary archeology or hacking.

Creative marketplace

The Creative Market in Žilina will meet the long-neglected needs of the locals. The project is an outcome of the pilot version of the City Acupuncture programme, the design was created during workshops with Žilina’s Chief City Planner’s Office and students of the Faculty of Architecture and Design of the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava. The marketplace will consist of spacious modular stalls for daily sale of fresh food and stalls

for gastronomy workshops. The creative marketplace is a temporary building and will operate like a cultural centre in the public space with a market, cultural, educational and social function. It will have a regular cultural programme dominated by open air concerts, art exhibitions in public spaces, thematic public discussions, and workshops with guests. In addition, there will be farmers, seasonal or other conceptual thematic markets such as design markets, vintage markets, slow food, from farm to fork and others.

- **Organizer:** City of Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** ENVIC (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 20,000

European Meeting of Culinary Arts

We do not perceive cooking as a mere replenishment of calories, but above all as highly aesthetic creation with a potential to appeal to everyone. During the year of title, we will host an open-air culinary festival with more than fifteen national teams

of chefs. The festival will include an evening of competition between the national teams, but also a joint working session, culminating in the preparation of a European menu. There will be a strong focus on the quality of food and ingredients, as well as on sustainable use of resources. Large part of the festival will be dedicated to workshops for the public, containing demonstrations of special cooking methods with regard to aesthetics and creativity, and courses on sustainable cooking, gardening, and landscape care.

The highlight of the festival will be a large culinary show of prominent European chefs on Žilina’s main square. The festival will be organised by Tomáš Popp, a famous Czech chef and a promoter of the slow food concept, who founded and with his NGO Envic (CZ) operates a farmers’ markets in Pilsen.

- **Organiser:** Tomáš Popp (CZ)
- **Partners:** ENVIC (CZ), Plzeň 2015 (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 45,000

Culinary Archeology

In Žilina, the *Culinary Archeology* research project will be exploring how the traditions and relationship with food developed in different European geographical and historical contexts. The emergence of national cuisines in Europe is relatively recent, while previously the main difference was noticeable mainly between Southern and Northern European countries. With experts on food archeology, *Zora Mintalová-Zuberová* (SK) and *Vladimír Tomčík* (SK), and the food curator *Monika Kucia* (PL), we will demystify the origin of our traditions and renerate the story of food in Europe. We will partner on this topic with Faro 2028 and Bad Ischl 2024.

Millions of people around the world use forest plants to prepare meals and produce hundreds of sustainable products, including beauty products, and make use of medicinal herbs. *Food of the Forest* is a multi-layered project combining activities exploring resources of the forest, which will culminate in a large exhibition in the Beskids museum (CZ) in Frýdek Místek. The project seeks to recall traditional recipes and forgotten ingredients, as well as

cooking techniques typical for people living in the Beskid mountains. The project will include presentation of food products, tastings, workshops, and a special edition of farmers’ market. The project will also include publication and translation of recipes for European visitors with a food guide of the region presenting family and craft bakeries, confectioneries, breweries, cheese factories and sausages produced based on traditional methods.

- **Organizer:** Beskydské muzeum Frýdek Místek (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 48,000

Ventriloquism

It is often said “We are what we eat!”, but this has become disturbing in recent decades. The masculine nature of previous farming practices, aimed at subordinating and dominating their surroundings, is an increasingly unconvincing recipe for the present, and instead of apparent control, our fragility and interconnectedness are shown. It is said that during digestion, most blood flow is redirected from the brain to the stomach, so we decided to give a name to our stomach processes. The *Ventriloquism* project seeks to link the accessibility of the eating experience with the poetics and critical approach of contemporary artistic strategies. It will be presented in a bistro format run by Dávid Koronczi (SK), an artist and designer linking performances with gardening practice, soil care, and food policies, and the artist David Přilučík (CZ) whose work thematizes the relationships that shape our social and cultural backgrounds.

- **Organizer:** Kultúra FM – the New Eight centre Frýdek-Místek (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 5,000

Multispecies Academy

The artist collective de Onkruidenier (NL) focusses in their practice on wild plants, giving them new meaning in our daily lives, and acting as foraging grocers. In the Beskids, they will conduct an artistic research to understand the region’s ecosystem from the

perspective of the users; a farmer, a cow, a factory, a grain of corn or a historian. During one month-long residency in Frýdek-Místek, de Onkruidenier (NL) proposes to develop a temporary learning environment; a *Multispecies Academy*. The role of this community programme is to give shape to a (non-) human community. With the Multispecies Academy, de Onkruidenier (NL) wants to make visible that we are already part of a multispecies community. With this work, de Onkruidenier (NL) invites the public to actively engage with the environment and become crew members on this voyage of new transition involving the natural ecology that surrounds us. The public will be part of a multisensorial installation in a farm where smell, taste, and touch play a central role in relearning our relationship with the environment. The work is launched with a public programme where we train ourselves by foraging, exploration, physical exercise, experimental tastings, and visual observations to enhance our senses using our body as a tool to experience our part within the multispecies community.

- **Organizer:** Kultúra FM (CZ)
- **Partners:** Collective De Onkruidenier (NL), MDK Bielsko-Biała (PL), Stanica Žilina Záriečie (SK)
- **Budget:** € 20,000

Hack-the-nature Camp will be a series of week-long international hackathons facilitating explorations into different topics, overlapping art, technology, and nature. The focus will be on innovative usage of new technologies in the fields of bio-hacking, citizen science, and open source hardware and software in relation to environmental topics. The hackathons will take place in various natural locations in the Beskid mountains and will consist of hands-on workshops, presentations, field trips, and – most importantly – spontaneous collaborations and skill exchanges. Each year, a particular topic will be selected.

- **Organizer:** Sucha Beskidzka (PL)
- **Partners:** Environmental Artistic centre FM (CZ), Project Zavod ATOL (SI), Ljudmila (SI)
- **Budget:** € 15,000

Sustainable Communities

A view of a blooming garden or a walk in a sunny park always provide a refreshment from the daily bustle, typical of city life. Everybody agrees that the presence of nature and greenery is an important factor for quality of life in the city. Sustainability in communities is not only about greenery and resource management, it is also about cultural and

social harmony. Co-designed solutions and solving of aesthetic issues could drive better acceptance of new environmental measures, and new models of water / energy management solutions should be integrated with the fabric of our urban communities.

Community Courtyards

Investments in community infrastructure and greenery were often suspended in the 1990s and have not been a priority for the past thirty years. In order to increase the overall quality of community and cultural life, we decided to establish a network of Cultural Houses in peripheral areas of Žilina (more on this in the Outreach section). Through these, we will propose creative residency programmes directly in the communities, for artists or makers to prepare public interventions with the locals. Similarly, in order to increase the sustainability of suburban communities and decrease the impact of climate change in the city, we decided to transform several Community Courtyards. The project involves revitalisation of suburban inner courtyards. It will produce new cultural and community functions (small stages, kiosks, walls of expression, benches), but also introduce new green infrastructure (mobile greenery, composters, community gardens) or water elements.

A set of fountains will be designed in a project called Fountains for Zuzanas, a reference to the eponymous popular Slovak film from the 1980s. The fountains from that period have probably all disappeared. We will involve the locals in a dialogue with cultural mediators, resulting in an artistic competition that will select eight artistic fountains to be realised in the courtyards of Žilina’s housing estates. The city of Žilina only recently created the new position of the Chief City Gardener to manage urban green spaces. The Chief City Gardener together with PASÁ:Ž will run Community Gardening courses and competitions for condominium front yards and flower balconies.

- **Organizer:** City of Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** Chief City Planner’s Department Žilina (SK), SEVAK (SK)
- **Budget:** € 96,000

Sensitive Neighbourhoods

Housing estate blocks are often seen as an inhospitable anonymous environment, where

people are less receptive to the environment and to others. In their monthly research project and subsequent performance, the Danish performative group Sisters Hope (DK) will enter an unknown space, a typical Slovak housing estate. They will try to establish contact with the inhabitants, with the rhythm of their lives. Sisters Hope will employ their sensory city methodology, which they applied in their successful Copenhagen events. The output will be an immersive performance with the involvement of local people. The project should open up new experiences for neighborhood ties through strong sensory experiences and poetic creation. Sisters Hope (DK) is a Copenhagen-based performance group with an associated international group of artists from a variety of backgrounds. Led by Gry Worre Hallberg (DK), who founded the group with her sister Anna Lawaetz (DK) in 2007. They work at the crossroads of performance, research, activism, and pedagogy.

- **Organizer:** Sisters Hope (DK)
- **Budget:** € 14,000

Beyond Concrete

As ancient cave paintings suggest, addressing and exploring the interactions between humans and nature might be the original source of artistic spirit and talent. Rapid environmental change in the past decades has sparked a huge interest in the art scene in ecological and environmental issues. Artists often join forces with scientists in formulating their ecological concerns. In the current state of climate emergency, the need to seek ecological solutions has become more than just a problem of communication for the scientific and artistic community, it is now a hot political agenda. In this project cluster, we bring a series of art exhibitions and architectural interventions which will explore and imagine new tools for more sustainable cities.

Environmental Art Exhibitions

In 2024, the city of Frýdek-Místek will open its new city gallery in the building of the former Moravia Bank (the MoBa City Gallery). The programme of this new exhibition space for the period 2025–2026 will focus on environmental questions and sustainable city. As part of the two-year program, we want to present streams of contemporary visual art that thematize the situation of the climate crisis, look for ways out and offer visions for future development. We will open a debate on changes in the society as a whole, and at the same time will ask the question of what the price of such change would be. The

Environmental Artistic Centre FM (EAC) will be the main tool to fulfill these intentions. It will be a platform for contemporary environmental art and a curatorial workspace in MoBa, which will mediate online exhibitions and a live programme in the gallery space. The EAC will collect data, organise debates and develop a basis for art and environment residency programs, and present the outputs of those collaborations in a hybrid format, as well as other environment art projects from Bielsko-Biala and Žilina. In *Fresh AiR – Art and Environment Residencies*, the Faculty of Natural Science of the Ostrava university (CZ) will every year present an environmental problem that is

currently being solved within the framework of its academic research. Together with the EAC and through an open call, they will select one artist to collaborate with university scientists to create an artwork intersecting with the said scientific research. Both the artistic and scientific outputs of the residence will be presented in the city gallery and on the university website.

- **Organizer:** Kultúra FM – MoBa (CZ)
- **Partners:** Environmental Artistic Centre FM (CZ), Faculty of Natural Science of the Ostrava University (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 53,000

MoBa City Gallery

The following projects represent the exhibitions and interventions expected to take place in MoBa as part of Žilina Beskids 2026 between the years 2025 and 2026: We will host Martin Briceji (SI) and his *Cyanometer*. The cyanometer is a simple measuring tool, invented by the Genevan scientist Horace Bénédict de Saussure in 1789. He systematically documented the blue colour of the sky with his cyanometer, a simple circular tool with fifty-three shades of blue. He concluded that the shade of blue is influenced by both moisture and the amount of suspended particles in the air. The Cyanometer by Martin Bricelj Baraga is inspired by the original cyanometer. De Saussure’s blue colour wheel forms the core of the monument, gently directing our gaze back to the sky. The monolith gathers data on the colour shade of the sky and the quality of air and visualises them, thus becoming an instrument which raises awareness of the quality of one of the crucial elements of our lives. *City Herbarium* by the artist Oldřich Morys (CZ) aims at reformulating our attitude to plants in the city environment, currently perceived more as a means to our ends or a city decorating tool. We want to begin to see plants as independent entities that inhabit the city with us and next to us. The Frýdek-Místek born artist Oldřich Morys (CZ) will prepare an exhibition and outdoor programme in Frýdek-Místek and will organise exchanges with other similar European projects. The project alters the usual perspectives of perceiving the world. It proposes to watch it from the perspective of non-human beings such as plants, animals, stones, water, etc... It proposes that the visitors experience it in the form of an interactive exhibition.

The exhibition *Future Art Forms* curated by Jakub Adamec, an artist and curator at PLATO Ostrava (CZ) and Martina Johnová, a theorist and curator at Hraničář in Ústí nad Labem (CZ) will create a positive vision of a fair transformation for regions affected by coal mining, in cooperation with Re→set (CZ), a platform for socio-ecological transformation and Salamandr (CZ), a non-profit organization active in nature protection. The institution of the gallery and the exhibition are both seen as tools for change. Interdisciplinary cooperation and research will result in an exhibition with accompanying public events such as discussions, workshops, debates, walks, and lectures. Invited artists: Kateřina Konvalinová (CZ), Denisa Langrová (CZ), Marika Volfová and Mikuláš Černík (CZ), and Mari-ka Smreková (SK).

The MoBa gallery will host the environmental art exhibition *Invisible Air*, curated by Tereza Záchová (CZ), whose curatorial projects deal with topics such as ecology, food-chain systems, and participatory thinking. The power of art lies in the reflection of current issues resonating in society. The exhibition’s main question concerns climate change and new technologies and seeks the limits of responsibility of contemporary art in today’s society. The main theme is “invisible air”, which affects us all and which we all breathe.

The contemporary art exhibition *Go Forward... Never Go Back!* by the curator Tomáš Knoflíček (CZ), co-founder of the Kukačka festival in Ostrava, reflects a contemporary world full of paradoxes. The exhibition presents current environmental and technological threats and reflects on possible scenarios for the future, including that of art. No prior civilization has achieved such a degree of power, knowledge, and abundance as the present one. However, neither has any civilization endangered its future as significantly as ours. We live in a time when technological reality has surpassed even the bravest dreams of our ancestors, but the quality of our lives has not improved dramatically. Yet, at the same time, we continue to be happy to succumb to technology and allow it to expand into our lives. Invited artists: Libor Novotný (CZ), Jaroslav Kyša (SK), Ján Gašparovič (SK), Juliana Höschlová (CZ), Martin Kubica (CZ.)

- **Organizer:** Kultura FM – MoBa city gallery (CZ)
- **Partners:** Spolek Salamandr (CZ), Re→set (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 51,000

Frambor Park

Bruit du Frigo (FR), an urban creation studio founded in 1997, creates participative and contextual projects in the public space, combining urban installations, collective actions, and cultural events. Together with a local activist group set to revive the Frambor Park, a large abandoned stretch of green land under highway bridges, Bruit du Frigo will design and build facilities and installations that will enhance the potential of the park and intensify its adoption by the public. Volunteers already involved in the preservation and improvement of the site and local creative forces will be involved in all stages of the process: design, construction, and activation. The Frambor Park offers an ideal context to become a laboratory and demonstration of an alternative way of creating the city and making public spaces more sustainable, more collaborative, and

more user-friendly. The aim is to design an exemplary place for the necessary paradigm shift in urban planning, which takes into account the climate emergency (resilience, urgency, low-tech, re-use) and which gives the capacity to act back to civil society (inclusion, DIY, self-organisation, etc.). The process of transformation will take approximately two years and will start with research and co-creation with citizens and culminate in a final participatory building work camp with small festive and cultural events.

- **Organizer:** Bruit du Frigo (FR)
- **Partners:** Žilinský Skrášľovací Spolok (SK)
- **Budget:** € 128,560

Early Anthropocene

Rudolf Sikora (SK), a Žilina native born in 1946, is a notable figure in East European neo-avant-garde from which he stands out with his early focus on ecological issues, something he has pursued since the early seventies. With his artworks represented in some of the world’s top collections, there is persistent interest in his work in Slovakia and abroad, with most recent participations on the shows in London, Warsaw, Basel, and Vienna. In 2026, on the occasion of the artist’s 80th birthday, Žilina audiences will for the first time get a chance to see a major retrospective of Sikora’s ecological artistic oeuvre. It will include his works from the seventies and their critical examination from his current position.

Early Anthropocene, a show curated by the artist in cooperation with Fedor Blaščák (SK), will be a site-specific combination of his famous sculptures, photo series, graphics, and drawings from the 1970s, with the most recent works commenting on political and scientific developments in the field of ecology. The exhibition will deal with the question of why political decisions often diverge from the scientific consensus on risks of climate change. It will be a sort of testimony, a culmination of longstanding efforts of the artist to reflect and alarm the society to ecological threats. However, after fifty years of engagement, Sikora has been recently expressing increasing skepticism about the future prospects for the survival of mankind, as he laconically commented in a recent interview: “I believed then, but I am losing faith now.”

- **Organizer:** Nová synagóga (SK)
- **Partners:** Museum of Art in Žilina (SK)
- **Budget:** € 30,000

By the Forest

The Beskid mountains, as well as the immediate surroundings of Žilina, Bielsko-Biała, and Frýdek-Místek, offer a number of ways for urban people to return to the bosom of nature, at least for a while. The inclination to spend weekends, holidays, and vacations in nature is reflected in local architecture and urbanism. In this project cluster, we will explore different forms of countryside and mountain architecture and how it has evolved over time. We find it important to incite discussion about the quality of life, architecture, and environment in rural areas, too.

Helter Shelter

Mountain shelters are intended for emergencies, as places where hikers can stay when caught off-guard by a change in weather or darkness. As humans, we do need protection, but that does not mean that we cannot find it in harmony with nature. Shelters can also be an opportunity to inhabit, even if only temporarily, the landscape. Who never dreamed of spending the night in the forest after a long day of hiking, and starting the next day surrounded by nature? The shelter as a constructed building represents only a milestone, an oriented point of view on the broader landscape surrounding it. Its minute size represents a balance between nature and culture, a building made from local materials to allow a person to inhabit a certain site. It brings us back to childhood, allowing us to hide and observe. They are only a pretext to offer and share a different perspective on the Beskids and should facilitate a simpler relationship with nature, especially in these complicated times.

Helter Shelter is a design competition for artistically designed cabins and mountain shelters. Every year, an international jury will pick three projects from an open call competition with predefined locations. Selected works will be realised by the architects themselves, or during participative workshops with the locals and the hiking community. The shelters will have to be very small in size, using mainly local wood. They can take very different forms, perched, hidden, floating on water, or others, but the partnership with land stewards and conservationists is fundamental. We are building upon the Zaží útlne project by Hidemates (SK) with whom we will be opening a shelter in Malá Fatra already in 2022, and extending it to the entire Beskids. Starting from 2023, we will hold the first competition for three new shelters along the Vrba-Wetzler trail, so that by 2026 we will have built nine more cabins. In 2026, we will organise a cabin festival at ten locations along the Beskids Art Trails.

- **Organizer:** Katarína Mačková (SK), Aktiv park Rajec (SK), SYTEV (SK)

- **Partners:** Žilina Beskids 2026 – Hangar (SK)
- **Budget:** € 450,000

Borderless Territory

In the Borderless Territory project, the PROLOG architectural studio (PL) will build upon their *Trouble in Paradise* exhibition at the Polish Pavilion at the International Architecture Biennial in Venice 2021, exploring the vision of the Polish countryside. The project is structured as an intertwined framework of investigations of the countryside, an architectural exhibition in PASA:Ž and prototyping interventions projected within the rural landscape (architectural proposals, speculative designs, 3D models and visualisations). The investigation part of the project operates as a multidisciplinary inquiry implementing methods of comparative analysis of the existing policy, archival and journalistic research, field trips, and architectural surveys, both photographic and drawing-based. In fact, it serves as a foundation to the second part of the project – an open workshop that involves specialists from different disciplines as well as students of design. The objective of the workshop is to bring attention to the problems facing the contemporary countryside and test a multiscale approach towards the architectural projects. The analytical and projective components of the project will serve as a basis for the exhibition, and a publication presenting the findings of the research and architectural proposals created during the workshop. We will be also exploring topics like building and planning regulation in rural and protected areas in different European countries, resulting in a kind of architectural manual for the rural Beskids.

- **Organizer:** PROLOG (PL)
- **Partners:** Museum of Architecture in Wrocław (PL), Dr Platon Issaias – Architectural Association School of Architecture in London (GB), Dr Hamed Khosravi – Architectural Association School of Architecture in London (GB), Czech Association of Architects (CZ), National Institute of Architecture and Urbanism (PL), Slovak

Association of Architects (SK-TBC), National monument protection – Žilina (SK), Zdeněk Trefil (CZ) and students from his studio at VŠB TU Ostrava (CZ), Ondřej Bělca (CZ), Milan Šuška (SK), Atelier 2021 (SK), municipalities of Pribor, Čeladná, Palkovice (CZ)

- **Budget:** € 130,000

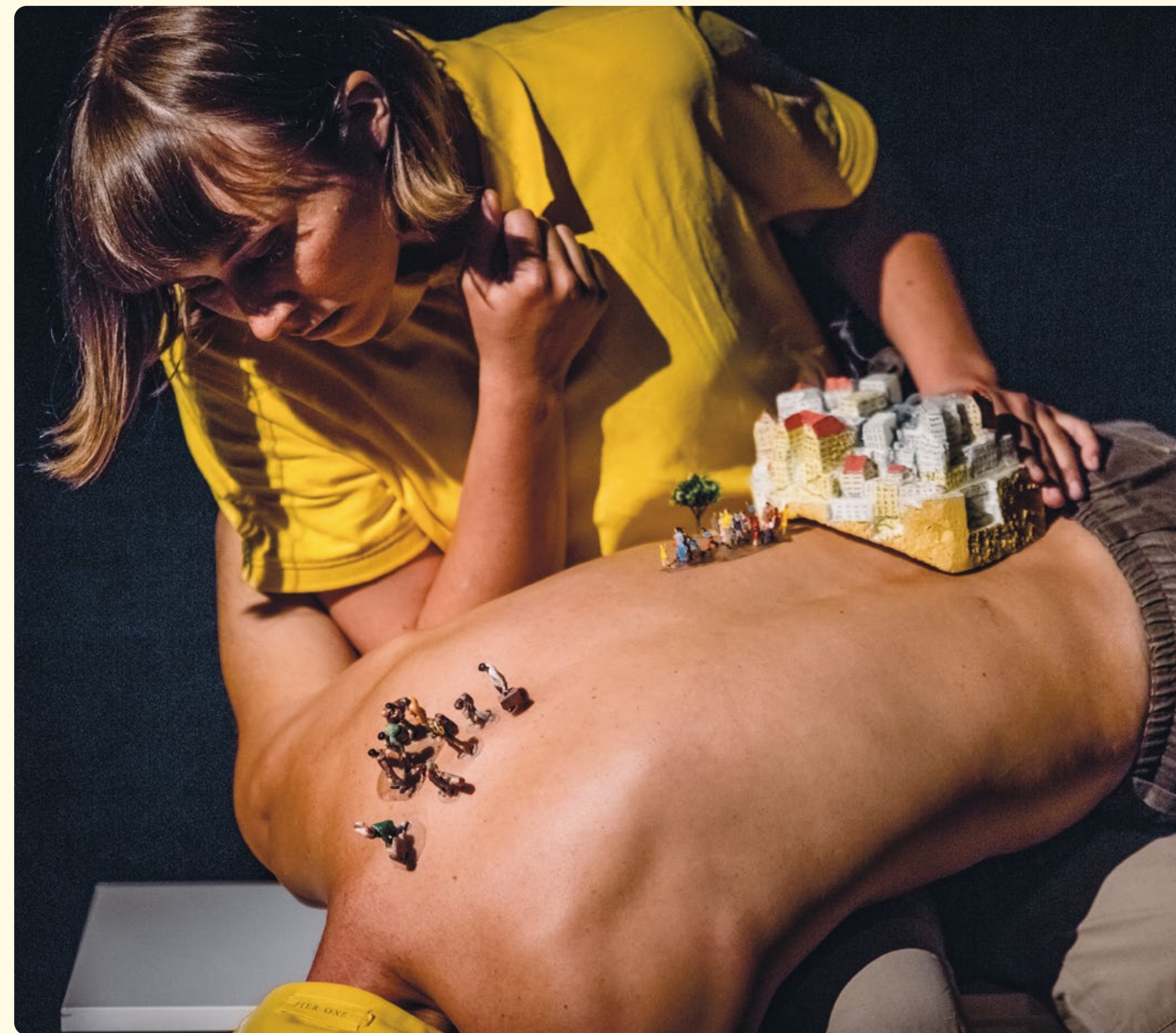
Leisure Time

Dušan Samuel Jurkovič was a Slovak architect and one of the best-known promoters of Slovak art in 20th century Czechoslovakia; he was in charge of the reconstruction of the Čičmany village in the Žilina district after the fire in 1921. He developed a very distinctive, so-called national style, influenced by folk architecture and most closely associated with Art Nouveau. The mountain cottage hotel Maměnka and the canteen Li-bušín at Pustevny na Radhošti were erected in the style of Folk Art Nouveau with elements of Wallachian, Považie and Kysuce folk architecture. Opened on 6 August 1899, they were commissioned by the first Czech tourist association in Austria-Hungary, Pohorská jednota Radhošť, and were related to the new phenomenon of leisure in the second half of the 19th century, related to the emergence of a new high-ranking social class consisting of the industrial elite and a strong urban middle class. Pustevny are nowadays an iconic symbol of the Czech Beskids. In collaboration with the Moravian Gallery in Brno (CZ), we will present a complex overview of Jurkovič's work with a particular focus on leisure architecture in the Beskids region in PASA:Ž in 2026 and in 2028 in Brno.

In collaboration with the Olszówka organisation (PL), we will run architectural tours in the Gypsy Forest park in Bielsko-Biała – another demonstration of the 19th century boom of leisure time architecture.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026 (SK), Brno 2028 (CZ)
- **Partners:** Peter Szalay (SK), Moravian Gallery in Brno (CZ), Olszówka organisation (PL)
- **Budget:** € 30,000

Borderless Identity



If culture is one of the forming elements of our identities – whether national, regional or local – the societal role of art is to challenge those identities and to put our history in perspective. We see the ECoC title as an opportunity to better understand that past, to confront the taboos lingering in our collective unconscious, especially those related to the region's role in WW2 and subsequent nationalisms, and turn them into a force of construction, rather than destruction.

Yet, we do not want to get stuck in the past. We see the title, first and foremost, as an opportunity to use art to imagine a different kind of world, through art, challenging established narratives and envisaging new ones.

We also want to reflect Žilina's long-standing identity as a transportation hub, and drive European mobility and intercultural

dialogue throughout the ECoC process. We think that such dialogue is the essence of all transportation and mobility, not just their accidental byproduct. Our programme is a celebration of that dialogue.

Last but not least, murders of the investigative journalists Daphne Galizia in Malta in 2017 and Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in 2018 in Slovakia shook the European public's belief in freedom of expression and the fundamental principles of democracy. The events in Malta and Slovakia were not standalone, we see freedom of speech attacked throughout the world. In our programme, we feel an urgency to explore this freedom in any artistic or journalistic expression, and to become a European centre for debate on the freedom to speak and create, whether in art or in the media.



Imagine Argillia

We lost the ability to imagine something else. A different society, a different way of doing things and conducting societal affairs, organising economic life, a different way of how to associate, organise our communities, welcome newcomers, decide who we do or do not let in.



Embassy of Argillia

In Argillia, we want to imagine a different world. With completely out-of-this-world premises, founding myths, rules, rituals – a different “universe”, possible in our imaginations. Imagined and conceived by us, together. As if the societies of today were to be rebuilt from scratch, as blank slates. We are building on the radical artistic project of Argillia by Alex Mlynárčik (SK) and his international associates from the 1970s, which questioned and parodied the organicity of state rituals, officialdom, of the things our society ascribes status to; not through performative acts but rather through erasing the rigid line between reality and imagination, through art. The site of this experiment will be the *Embassy of Argillia*. A set of transparent, colourful, inflatable, differently-sized bubbles, merged together, detachable, expanding, shrinking, in constant interaction with each other, built by the art group Plastique Fantastique (DE). Set in the centre of Žilina, it will be the forum for imagining a different universe where we decide the rules. Meanwhile, the bubbles of the Embassy will move and merge, separate, change shapes, as alive as the movements and processes that will be taking place inside them. The bubbles will play with our optics of ever-changing, appearing and vanishing

borders, that, in the end, always prove to be only temporary. The Embassy, after its main event in Žilina, will also tour Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek. The world of Argillia will include a virtual bubble as well – with the creative process spilling online, engaging those who cannot join physically. A film will be made during the process to capture the emergence of a new type of society and build on it, work with it, providing the basis for any further artistic or real-life extensions of Argillia.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- **Partners:** Plastique-Fantastique (DE)
- **Budget:** € 90,000

World-Building

Argillia will be created through World-Building, a creative technique used by sci-fi authors and film-makers to build their fictional worlds. Our partners from the World-Building Institute (US) and the Guild of Future Architects (US) will spearhead the “construction works”. The Embassy of Argillia will invite artists, policymakers, technologists, students, scientists, to create together. More importantly, it will invite all prospective visitors, in the brief window of opportunity when everything is possible,

tourists, accidental passers-by, to join the efforts. Or will it? Will everyone be allowed to enter and participate? If so, how? As Argillians, we will decide how we choose those allowed in. What will they need to do to get initiated? How will we greet them? With food? By touching them? By creating something together? What will the mark of belonging be? Together, we will create the rules of our world, we will honour and celebrate our founding myths. What will they stand on? Will there be a founding myth at all? We will decide on our core values. Will status be part of the conversation? If so, how will it be reflected? By money? By colour? What categories will we use to relate to others – the love of a certain climate, food, quality of the air around us, who we feel safe with, who smells nice? The participants will create the laws for Argillia, come up with the decision-making processes, organisation of the community, language, objects they will use.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** World-Building Institute Paisley Smith (CAN/US), Beata Calinska (PL/US), Guild of Future Architects Lafayette Cruise (US), Ruthie Doyle (US)
- **Budget:** € 130,000

Vrba-Wetzler – In the Footsteps of Heros

On 7th April 1944, Good Friday, two Slovak Jews, Auschwitz-Birkenau prisoners Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba, were reported missing at their barracks. It was the beginning of their heroic escape from the Auchwitz-Birkenau death complex – the 70-km march on foot through the Nazi-occupied Polish Beskids and across the border into the wartime Slovak State, a Nazi ally. Helped on their way by several families and individuals, they finally made it to Žilina, where they hid in the cellar of the Jewish retirement home, along with a number of documents they had taken with them from Auschwitz. These, together with their accounts of the internal workings of and everyday struggle for survival in the extermination camp, formed the famous Vrba-Wetzler Report, or Auschwitz Protocols as it is also known, the world’s first comprehensive and confirmed report of what was going on in Nazi death camps and one of the most important documents of World War II relating to the Holocaust.

Vrba-Wetzler Route

The *Vrba-Wetzler Route* retraces the steps of the two heroes and turns their journey into a “secular pilgrimage”, a journey, on which individuals and groups – schools, students, adults – can discover the story, and, through it, not only learn and discuss the Holocaust, WWII and the historical Jewish experience in a unique way, but also reflect on the broader legacy of their heroism, applicable to any age, including ours, namely how hope and human dignity, the good and the brave in us, can overcome seemingly all-powerful evil and hatred. It is a universal story, a story of the struggle of good against evil, of hope against desperation. It is a story that, to some degree, we all experience, individually and collectively, regardless of the time and circumstances we are born into, a story that defines human existence as such. We want to create the Vrba-Wetzler Route as a possibility for individuals, groups, young people, survivors of the Holocaust, their relatives, anyone wishing to explore these questions, to walk through Vrba’s and Wetzler’s story, accompanied by works of art along the way.

Marking the way is only the first step. Once the path is marked in 2024 and officially open on the 80th anniversary of Vrba’s and Wetzler’s escape, in 2026, we will take a group of artists and take the route with them, creating works of art along the way. We plan an open call for artists working on sound installations, music, poetry, dance, literature, visual arts, to join the *Vrba-Wetzler Art March* and reflect on the route and Vrba and Wetzler’s story. These works of art will be displayed at various important spots along the way, together with carefully curated art works in the collections of the Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau

(PL), and other art collections, especially those which include works by survivors of the Holocaust. These artworks will either remain in place for the duration of 2026, or, depending on their character, stay permanently.

We aim to mark the Route by 2024 in association with the Polish and Slovak Tourist Clubs (SK), and open it on the 80th anniversary of Wetzler’s and Vrba’s escape, with an event co-organised with the Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim (PL). In 2021, our main partners, Vrba-Wetzler Memorial and ICEJ Slovakia (SK), in association with the Žilina Self-Governing Region and the municipality of Skalitz marked the first part of the Route at the Slovak border in Skalitz. In 2022, we will liaise with all relevant municipalities on the route from Auschwitz to Žilina, in both Poland and Slovakia, to gain their support for a permanent marked Vrba-Wetzler Route. Currently, participants of the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial pass through the municipalities as they walk the route of the annual community march, a permanent route has not been proposed yet. Since the initiation of the Memorial in 2014, more than three hundred people from all over the world have taken the route and the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial can already count on a dedicated international community.

The Vrba-Wetzler Memorial and ICEJ Slovakia (SK) have already started working on a beta version of an interactive map of the route for a future online tool. It should serve as an *online route*, with a virtual tour of the most important spots, information about the Vrba and Wetzler story, and the historical background, as well as details about service providers along the way, hotels or shelters to take refuge in, restaurants, etc.

A graphic novel about the story of Vrba and Wetzler that will make the story more accessible to school students will also be illustrated and produced in partnership with Tomáš Kriššák. We count on a print run of 1,000 copies. We are in talks with the Anne Frank Funds, the official administrators of the Frank family legacy, about support for distribution of the graphic novel to schools and students around the world.

- **Organizers:** Vrba-Wetzler Memorial, Tomas Krissak (SK)
- **Partners:** Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau (PL), ICEJ Slovakia (SK), ICEJ Czech Republic (CZ), Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SK), The Holocaust Documentary Centre (SK), Milan Šimečka Foundation (SK), the village of Skalitz (SK), Truc spherique (SK), Polis Foundation (SK), Jewish Community of Žilina (SK), Tourist Information Centre Žilina (SK), Slovak Museum of the Holocaust in Sered’ (SK), Slovak Tourist Club (SK-TBC), Jewish Community in Bielsko-Biala (PL), Polish Hiking Association (PL-TBC)
- **Budget:** € 160,000

A Tiny Teardrop

The annual Vrba-Wetzler Memorial (SK) will be followed up, as it has so far, in Žilina, with ensuing cultural events designed to help reflect on the experience of the journey. Our partners, the cultural centre Nová synagóga (SK), as well as the Polis Foundation (SK), will provide their premises for discussions with interesting speakers, concerts, film projections, and other cultural events for the pilgrims. One of these is the unique concept of *A Tiny Teardrop*, a musical and literary experience, with

original music by Central European Jewish composers silenced by WWII played by the Slovak Sinfonietta and accompanied by live readings from the namesake book by Agata Schindler about the composers' life stories. A Tiny Teardrop will also be presented on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Ebensee concentration camp at the Ebensee Memorial (AT) in 2025, as well as in Bad Ischl 2024 (AT). In total, five concerts are planned in various European cities.

- **Organizers:** Slovak Sinfonietta (SK)
- **Partners:** Agata Schindler (DE), Ebensee Memorial (AT), Bad Ischl 2024 (AT), Musica classica Žilina, oz (SK)
- **Budget:** € 100,000

Vrba-Wetzler Commemoration Room and Exhibition

In 2021, we opened the reconstructed *Vrba-Wetzler Commemoration Room* in Žilina, in the room where Vrba and Wetzler were hiding and wrote their famous report. The room is part of the Žilina-based programme related to the Route. The premises will host, apart from the exhibition, regular lectures and innovative educational events for schools and discussions as part of other cultural events (it has been used, e.g. as a site of public readings and discussions with authors), in cooperation with the Museum of Holocaust in Sered'. A *Vrba-Wetzler exhibition*, set in the context

of the wartime Slovak State, will take place in the newly reconstructed Palárik House in Čadca, the town where Vrba and Wetzler were helped by a local doctor before being escorted to Žilina. We plan to enter in talks with the World Holocaust Remembrance Center Yad Vashem (IL), through its accredited partner in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, ICEJ, and receive know-how and inspiration on how best to communicate the Vrba and Wetzler story in an exhibition format to a wide, multigenerational audience.

- **Organizers:** City of Žilina, City of Čadca (SK)
- **Partners:** Žilina Jewish Community (SK), ICEJ Slovakia (SK), ICEJ Czech Republic (CZ), Museum of the Holocaust in Sered' (SK), Ukrainian Institute of Holocaust Studies (UA), Museum of Jewish Memory and the Holocaust in Ukraine (UA)
- **Budget:** € 100,000

International Literature House Vrba Wetzler

The Vrba and Wetzler story is also about writing a report that was translated into many languages and changed the perception of WWII and brought about initial awareness of the Holocaust. We will turn the rest of the building which holds the commemoration room into the *International Literature House Vrba Wetzler*. Literary translation is the basis of intercultural cooperation and promotion of

European literature across borders. Translators' work requires continuous contact and communication with the source language and literature. In the past, Slovak literature did not particularly resonate in the international context outside of the immediate Visegrad region, due to the relatively short history of the country and its language. The House represents a chance to increase the quality level of translation, strengthen cultural ties with Europe, and foster contacts between Slovak authors, translators, and foreign publishers. The establishment's disposition, cozy, practical and modern equipment, is intended to create a creative atmosphere and enable, above all, translators of Slovak literature into foreign languages to concentrate and produce meaningful work. The House will be a model of an independent cultural institution that will provide space for individual residencies, consultations, joint meetings, seminars or lectures. It will host workshops, public readings, book presentations and actively participate in cultural events like the Žilina Literature Festival. The residency programme will also be open to international writers and journalists that have a special interest in Žilina and Slovak literary and cultural life.

- **Organizers:** OZ Mona Sentimental (SK)
- **Partners:** DoSlov, oz (SK), Hungarian Translators' House Balatonfüred (HU), ŽNO Žilina (SK), city of Žilina (SK)
- **Budget:** € 30,000

Capital of Freedom of Expression

Capital of Freedom of Expression is a homage to the investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, two young members of the post-1989 generation, who, through their lives, symbolised a more democratic Slovakia, but whose voices were prematurely silenced. We want to show that despite this, they have through their example become our collective voice, which calls for a better, freer, more democratic future, and that the legacy of their story continues to reverberate through the core of our society, mobilising it into action.

Capital of Freedom of Expression

Capital of Freedom of Expression is a year-long programme dedicated to exploring and celebrating freedom of speech, along with other fundamental freedoms – to associate, worship, believe, decide – as cornerstones of a democratic society. The programme kicks off with a week-long event

during the anniversaries of Ján's and Martina's deaths, dedicated to political caricature from around the world exploring silenced authors and voices, repressed topics and stories. The week will see an outdoor and indoor exhibition of political caricature from around the world in Žilina and the region, with associated events like discussions and lectures by authors and political caricaturists in association with

Cartooning for Peace (FR). A special edition of news with political caricature from around the globe, as well as works created on the spot in Žilina, will be published. The highlight of the week-long programme will be the unveiling of a Memorial to Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová, chosen through an open call. The location, Žilina, is not accidental – Ján Kuciak was born and raised in the region.

- **Project owner:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- **Partners:** Cartooning for Peace (FR)
- **Budget:** € 120,000

Free Speech Hub

The event will kick off an eight-month residency programme in our *Free Speech hub* in the International Literature House Vrba and Wetzler for six reporters, six artists and six researchers working on the topic of freedom of speech, or, more broadly, democratic freedoms. We will focus specifically on creators with backgrounds that involve persecution, chosen in association with our partners Reporters Without Borders (FR), Freemuse (DK), and the Absynt Publishing House (SK). Researchers in the hub will work on developing policy recommendations for the EU and international organisations, based on the three goals we have identified in in-depth conversations with expert stakeholders as critical for freedom of expression, namely:

- Promoting artistic and press freedom in the digital space on EU level
- Fighting judicial, economic, and political pressures
- Improving physical security of artists and journalists

The results of the eight-month artistic and journalistic residencies will be exhibited at the Non-Fiction Festival (see further below), with further workshops and discussions held there. The research efforts will also culminate at the Non-Fiction Festival with reporters, artists, and experts jointly finalising and formulating a white paper on defending and furthering freedom of speech for international organisations and the EU. Another strand of the research efforts will focus on formulating best practices and recommendations on how cities can become havens for freedom of speech in our joint initiative with Freemuse (DK) and the Cities for Free Speech initiative.

Another strand of the programme will see the *Slovak Journalism Award* move to Žilina in 2026 and conduct its Investigative Journalism Academy, as well as public debates on the workings of the media, as part of the Žilina Beskids 2026 programme.

- **Project owner:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** Slovak Journalism Award (SK), Absynt Publishing House (SK), Reporters Without Borders (FR), Freemuse (DK), global), Institute of International Sociology of Gorizia (IT), Q Code Magazine (IT)
- **Budget:** € 159,000

Media Labyrinth

In 2021, we have completed a joint, international project application for Erasmus Plus funding for the project *Media Labyrinth* which explores the topics of media propaganda through art and non-formal learning for students and young professionals in the media and creative sectors. We have partnered with Novi Sad 2022 and Chemnitz 2025, the Novi Sad School of Journalism, as well as a number of other excellent Western Balkans partners, including Tirana European Youth Capital 2022 and others. The project should start in 2022 with the first international youth exchange and training of trainers in Novi Sad, where a touring media propaganda exhibition will be put together by the participants. The exhibition will then travel to all the partner cities, complemented by other activities, such as conferences or workshops. In Žilina, the main partner, the University of Žilina, will hold a week-long youth exchange in April 2023, aimed at divulging best practices in creating original youth media, facilitated by media professionals, information experts, and seasoned youth media creators.

- **Partners:** Novi Sad 2022 (RS), Novi Sad School of Journalism (RS), Chemnitz 2025 (DE), ASA-FF e.V. (DE), Tirana European Youth Capital 2022 (AL), Pertej Barrierave (AL), Media Institute of Montenegro (ME), Media and Civil Society Development Centre Mediacentar (BH), Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Kosovo (KS), Fundacja Zrobmy To (PL)
- **Budget:** € 45,000

Žilina Literature Festival

The *Žilina Literature Festival*, an established and stable part of Žilina's cultural calendar, will, in 2026, centre its programme around graphic novels and the relation between text and image. We intend to approach the International Biennial of Illustration in Bratislava, to hold the Biennial in Žilina in 2026. In doing so, we want to facilitate international exchanges between writers and illustrators from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We already have a confirmed interest from the Festival of Literature in Mantova for author exchanges. Alongside the Žilina Literature Festival, the Prague-based Svět knih (CZ) will hold a parallel event in Žilina. It will be a festival-type book fair focused on Central European cross-border cooperation, a gathering of the publishing industry, as well as a promotional event for the public. In the project *Discover European Literature*, twenty-seven national winners of the European Literature Award will be invited to promote their works and foster ties between national literatures within the EU.

- **Project owner:** Žilina Literature Festival (SK)
- **Partners:** Artforum (SK), Absynt Publishing House (SK), Svět knih (CZ-TBC), Festival of Literature in Mantova (IT)
- **Budget:** € 72,000

Interconnected

Transportation is not just a way of moving oneself through space, or a mere relocation from one geographical point to another. It is, first and foremost, a dialogue – a dialogue between different places, cultures, individuals, between different ideas. Dialogue is not transportation's byproduct, it is its main focus, its very essence. Žilina has long stood at the crossroads of this dialogue. It was the intersection of transportation routes, most significantly the first Slovak train route from Košice to Bohumín, that helped it evolve from a small town into one of the largest cities in Slovakia; and it was the establishment of the University of transportation in 1959 that helped Žilina to become a true transportation and technological hub.

Highway to Art

The multigenre festival *Highway to Art* will take place on the not-yet-opened section of the E75 highway near Kysuce. Planned for completion in 2027, the highway will connect the Polish and Slovak Beskids. Before it officially opens, we want to celebrate it by having it host concerts, circus performances, inline and skateboard ramps, picnics, and exhibitions. Our partner Cirkus trochu jinak (CZ) will hold new circus performances on the spot, engaging audiences, Slovak Sinfonietta will play classical music concerts. Festival-goers will be able to engage with cuisines of the world thanks to cooperation with the Festival of Different Gastronomy (SK) which will organise a big multicultural picnic. *E75* is a joint artistic venture with Oulu 2026 (FI). It will bring a bus full of artists down the European E75 route all the way from Oulu, our ECoC partner for 2026, through Poland and Slovakia, creating works of art on the way – film, poetry, document, literature, music, visual art, and design – and taking advantage of the interconnectedness of Europe, both infrastructural and cultural. The bus will also make a few days’ stop at our Highway to Art festival and take part in the cultural programme. It will then continue on its way to the south of the continent, the Mediterranean Sea in Greece. The final results of the journey will be showcased in Oulu and in Žilina, as part of the Non-Fiction Festival.

- **Organizers:** D3 pre Kysuce, Oulu 2026 (FI), DogDocs (SK), Truc sphérique o.z, Cirkus trochu jinak z.s. (CZ), Festival of Different Gastronomy (SK)
- **Budget:** € 75,000

Vlak Fest

VlakFest (CZ) is another way to celebrate our interconnectedness and weave it into

the very fabric of our artistic programme for 2026. It will connect Europe in three important ways, bringing art and culture to the tracks. Firstly, it will connect Žilina, Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek by the *Window to Beskids* trainline. It will be a bi-monthly circular train ride between the three cities with concerts, talks by philosophers and travellers, and exhibitions on-board, as well as a cultural programme in the cities, with overnight stays. With the *TransEurope Express*, VlakFest will connect Finland to Bulgaria, through an ultimate train and cultural adventure. The epic trip through Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Belarus, Russia, and Finland will see up to two hundred participants engage in exploration of the interconnectedness of European culture inside and outside the train. Travellers, authors, artists, historians, and journalists from places along the way will talk about and showcase their works, or even create them on board. The main topics that will guide the train ride to Finland, and connect us as Europe, will be democracy and the struggle for freedom of expression. A regular tourist train connections between Western Europe and Beskids will also be enriched with cultural programmes.

- **Organizers:** Vlakfest (CZ), Muzeum Nový Jičín (CZ), Tatra transportation Kopřivnice (TBC-CZ)
- **Partners:** Absynt (SK), Slovak Railways – Youth Section (SK)
- **Budget:** € 130,000

Locomotion

In *Locomotion*, a project inspired by DiscoverEU and Nurnberg 2025 (DE), one hundred young people from Žilina, Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek aged eighteen or more will be chosen through an open call and given InterRail train tickets to go and explore

Europe during the summer following their high school graduation and capture their experiences and impressions of Europe in a variety of media. The results of their travels will be showcased at the newly refurbished Žilina main train station in an exhibition, as well as in a travel book they will create for other young audiences. A network of partners acting as mentors will help them to meet other young people in select cities around Europe and help them witness the current state of the continent and its cultural diversity, especially as expressed by its youth.

- **Organizers:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no.
- **Budget:** € 150,000

Cultural Crossroads

By 2026, we plan to accomplish one of the main investment projects the city of Žilina has seen so far – the much needed reconstruction of the main train station and the space in front of it, to be turned into a new square and a renovated gateway to the city. The train station building will be turned into Cultural Crossroads, with site-specific installations in the main hall and the waiting room, like the exhibition Bon Voyage with Art Station Dubulti (LT). A Museum of Transportation run by the Museum of the Považie Region in Žilina, will be expanded and moved from its current location in Rajecké Teplice, to a 350m² space in the main basement of the Main Station. A new tourist information centre will be housed in the building to provide information and sell tourist souvenirs and products by local designers to travellers.

- **Partners:** Slovak Railways (SK), Museum of the Považie Region in Žilina (SK), TIK Žilina (SK)
- **Budget:** € 335,000

Mobile Documentary Theatre

We want to narrate stories of the borderland region as a string of different site-specific audio-visual, theatrical, multimedia and interactive performances. *Mobile Documentary Theatre* is a mobile performing arts festival, a fourteen-day decentralized event that will take its audiences – both local and international – to mountain settlements, industrial sites, water dams, and other unexpected spaces. These stories will be locally-sourced, yet communicate wider, globally-relevant messages about our relationship with nature, impact of industrialization or mass migration on often poor and isolated communities. In 2021, we carried out our first study trip to all three countries by the border and identified main sites and topics – the impact of heavy industry in the Třinec and Těrlícko areas, the impact of migration culture, Jewish legacy in Orava, communist-era underground culture in Kysuce, and the Romani Holocaust in the Lesser Poland region. In 2023–2024, we will continue researching and building these stories, making interviews with locals, collecting authentic material in partnership with local cultural and community organisations, as well as individuals (such as amateur historians of the region). In 2025, we will weave all this input into the creation of ten to fifteen narratives and performances linked to specific sites. Each story will be mapped and elaborated on by a theatre group, based in one specific site for a period of time, so as to develop a deeper and more intimate relationship with the local community. The resulting performance will be a product of the cooperation between the community and the given European theatre company, helped by a local producer. We are aiming to develop formats as diverse as sounds installations used as a tool to untangle local traumas, in collaboration with Marek Kundlák (SK); opera and music compositions composed for local brass bands and amateur orchestras, in cooperation with Marek Piaček (SK) and Ivan Acher (CZ); as well as AR and multimedia compositions with Adam Hanuljak (SK). A more traditional approach, with drama performances based on texts produced through community research, will be taken in partnership with Roman Sikora (SK) and Natália Deáková (SK); site-specific drama projects with Tomáš Ziška (CZ), Klára Jakubová (CZ), Anna Smolar (PL), and Veronika Hajdučíková (SK), as well as new, original plays created in partnership with local amateur and professional troupes, in cooperation with Júlia Rázusová (CZ) and Filip Nuckolls (CZ). We will also use the

cherished traditional local radio format for radio plays in cooperation with Marold Langer-Philippsen (DE). Puppet theatre for kids and families with Katarzyna Dudzic-Grabińska (PL), as well as experimental drama projects aimed at creating a space for dialogue between two antagonistic groups with Gianina Carbutariu (RO). The performances are intended for both local and visiting audiences and will be designed to support local story-telling and identity-forming as well as better understanding of the regions on the part of outsiders, while also reflecting European topics. Last but not least, the sites will attract visitors not only to see the performances, but also as tourist destinations. A special bus and train programme will be in place for the duration of the festival to facilitate accessibility, as well as to extend the cultural and tourist experience.

- **Organiser:** Ján Šimko (SK)
- **Partners:** Adam Hanuljak (SK), Marek Kundlák (SK), Júlia Rázusová (SK), Veronika Hajdučíková (SK), Marek Piaček (SK); Roman Sikora (SK), Natália Deáková (CZ), Tomáš Ziška (CZ), Ivan Acher (CZ), Klára Jakubová (CZ), Filip Nuckolls (CZ); Katarzyna Dudzic-Grabińska (PL), Anna Smolar (PL); Gianina Carbutariu (RO), Marold Langer-Philippsen (DE)
- **Budget:** € 100,000

Kino na Granicy

Kino na Granicy is a long-standing film festival in the multicultural town of Český Těšín/ Cieszyn that celebrates the three cultures of the Beskids – Polish, Czech, and Slovak. The event consists of retrospectives, discussions with filmmakers, interpersonal multicultural meetings, a friendly atmosphere, and one-of-a-kind cross-border movie screenings over the Olza river with viewers on the Czech side and screen on the Polish side of the river. Kino na Granicy naturally confronted the reality of a town divided by state border and reconnected through Schengen, allowing people to meet, communicate and live together despite their differences in language, culture, and mentality. In 2026, the festival will take a step out of its natural habitat in Cieszyn/ Český Těšín and spread to the broader region (Žilina, Frýdek-Místek, Bielsko-Biala). From 2024 through 2025 and 2026 we will support it as part of the Žilina Beskids 2026 programme. These editions will thematically focus on Freedom and Independence in 2024; on Myths and Legends in 2025; with the climax in 2026 bringing to fore a retrospective of the several-time

Oscar nominee and winner of numerous European film awards Agnieszka Holland’s (PL) cinematography, reflecting the Holland family history spread across the region. The festival also includes the literary project Crossing Borders (Cieszyn, Žilina) with author meetings, discussions, and readings, with participation from the Nobel Prize for Literature laureate Olga Tokarczuk (PL).

- **Organizer:** Stowarzyszenie Kultura na Granicy
- **Confirmed participants for the movie festival:** Agnieszka Holland (PL), Jan Komasa (PL), Krzysztof Zanussi (PL), Michał Żebrowski (PL), Martin Šulík (SK), Judith Bárdos (SK), Csongor Kassai (SK), Kryštof Hádek (CZ), Jan Budař (CZ), Petr Forman (CZ), Jan Hřebejk (CZ), David Ondříček (CZ).
- **Confirmed participants for the literary section:** Olga Tokarczuk (PL), Dorota Masłowska (PL), Jerzy Kronhold (PL), Jaroslav Rudiš (CZ), Petr Zelenka (CZ), Kateřina Tučková (CZ), Michal Hvorecký (SK), Dezider Tóth (SK), Peter Macsovszky (SK)
- **Budget:** € 130,000

Kinobus

Kinobus is a several-day travelling film festival that takes participants on a bus tour to old rural cinemas, putting on screenings of European and world cinema, helping with maintenance and repair of the often dilapidated buildings, and exploring local identities and cultures through site-specific performances. The festival ran for several years in the past, fuelled by a group of young enthusiasts from Žilina, and we are planning to revive the tradition. Between 2024 and 2026, Kinobus will take on a distinctly Beskid character and take film-lovers on a vintage bus trip through the region, visiting old rural cinemas on all three sides of the border, such as the one in Kysuce Nove Mesto, Choč in Dolný Kubín, and others. The project seeks to create a participatory database of these cinemas, to which people can freely contribute online.

- **Organiser:** Truc sphérique, oz (SK)
- **Partners:** City of Kysucké Nové Mesto (SK), Mestské kultúrne stredisko Dolný Kubín (SK), Department of Film Studies at the Masaryk University in Brno (CZ), National Film Archive in Prague (CZ), Kinobus.pl (PL), Fundacja Wspierania Kultury Filmowej Cyrk Edison in Krakow (PL)
- **Budget:** € 113,000

Voices from the Borders

Remote. At the edges. Borderline. This cluster is about stories from the borders – not only those between countries, state borders, but also borders that divide the urban and the rural. The interfaces between them, the joint, fluid space, where seemingly different national narratives, national cultures, and national languages meet, are what interests us. For this is a space of paradox – it is there that the different “variables” should be distinguished, yet also where we understand that no rigid borders can be drawn and that the space is essentially a continuum, flowing effortlessly from one side to the other, gradually changing as if on a spectrum.

Borderless Mobile VR Cinema

Borderless Mobile VR Cinema is a travelling immersive VR exhibition. The works presented in the cinema will deal with the subjects of travel, migration of peoples and ethnic groups in the Beskids region and the whole of Europe. Contemporary and historical migratory movements inside the EU and its borders will be visualized. With the help of techniques available in 3D and VR technology, space imaging, combining data visualization, animations and interactive 3D space, we will create a unique virtual reality, an immersive world that will create a narrative image of movements of social groups in the history of the Beskids region and the whole of Europe. In this way, we want to draw attention to the issue of migration, the reasons behind it, the obstacles faced by migrants, and provoke a discussion of this topic. We also want to use these issues to symbolically show the unity of the entire EU area,

as a space of constant movements of social groups, mixing with each other beyond or despite country borders, old and new. The work will also consist of individual, personal stories of people who participated in contemporary and past migratory movements, stories of understanding beyond cultural divisions. These will be collected in cooperation with the Kysuce Museum (SK), Orava Museum (SK), Považie Museum (SK), Museum of Nový Jičín (CZ) and the Museum of Beskids (CZ) in Frýdek-Místek. In combination with the personal character of experiencing virtual space through VR goggles, it will allow for a very intimate immersion in the created world. The spectators will therefore be able to learn about the topic from the micro-perspective of single stories, and the global view of migration movements and ethnic divisions. The technology of dynamically changing, interactive VR space will allow the recipient to freely change between perspectives. The visual character of the work will serve

both to present the subject in an attractive way, as well as create space for interpretation by the viewers. The Borderless Mobile VR Cinema will tour the project's three main cities, as well as smaller towns in the region. An accompanying exhibition, showing additional documents, objects, photographs, and stories will take place in the Budatín Castle, the seat of the Považie Museum, in cooperation with the listed museums from the region.

- **Organizers:** Orava Museum (SK), Kysuce Museum (SK), Považie Museum (SK), Museum Novojičínnska (CZ) in Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, Galeria Bielska BWA (PL)
- **Partners:** Považie Art Gallery (SK), Museum of Beskids Frýdek-Místek (CZ), Vnlab Łódź (PL), Fundacja Pełne Zanurzenie (PL)
- **Budget:** € 280,000

Culture of Democracy

In Greek, the words for politics (politiká) and culture (politismos) derive from the same word – polis, the city. For ancient Greeks, culture and politics were not two different things, but rather two facets of the same thing – a democratic community, that is inherently both political and cultural. With growing decentralisation and the trend of addressing issues with context-specific solutions rather than one-size-fit-all “universal” recipes, democracy is increasingly being decided where the relationship between the representatives and the represented is the most immediate – in cities. That is why we return democracy back to where it originated and put the city centre stage in our exploration and celebration of the European culture of democracy.



The Polis Democracy Festival

The Polis Democracy festival is a week-long, outdoor, multi-stage festival, a forum for conversations, encounters, self-expression, and dialogue that centres around the main issues that impact the city, the polis, today – ecology, mobility, inclusiveness, digital democracy, participation, and many others. It is a place where diverse groups of people meet, it is a territory where borders cross and overlap, it is a place where bubbles burst, where one can enter into a dialogue and where being wrong is allowed. Fundamentally, it is a place where we come to fulfil that instinct of ours which drives us to be political animals, the urge to be a part of public affairs.

The programme at Polis foundation (SK) is partially curated and partially pooled through an open call for discussion panels, lectures, and artistic activities. We encourage grass-root organisations, civil society organisations, informal community groups, but also individuals to submit their projects for inclusion in the programme, so as to make it as diverse as possible. A special focus is given to young people and schools – a whole stage, the Youth Stage, will be dedicated to young people from Bielsko-Biała, Žilina, and Frýdek-Místek to set up and curate on their own, with discussions and activities involving topics that matter to them, with their own cultural programme and their own rules.

The *debate programme* looks back at the turning point in our struggle for democracy – the 1980s and 1990s pro-democracy movements in the former Eastern Bloc. We want to invite pro-democracy and 1989 anti-totalitarian revolution leaders from across the Eastern Bloc and create a forum for exchange of their and their audiences' experiences and ideas during and after the revolutions. A similar in-person gathering of all revolution leaders from the 1980s and 1990s has not yet been organised, to the best of our knowledge. Have the democracy movements lived up to their promise? How did they unfold after the revolutionary breakthroughs? What can we learn from each other and what can others learn from us? This will be a moment of reckoning, a moment of coming together and reliving and reflecting together on the historical events.

Around one hundred speakers from around the globe will be invited. We are partnering with FORUM 2000 and their Festival of Democracy to join forces in 2026 and organise the festival as parallel, partner ventures, with intensive speaker exchange. Our partners from the Democracy Festivals Association (DK), Forum 2000 (CZ) and the other

national democracy festivals involved, will help us identify and invite revolution leaders from the whole former Eastern Bloc. The festival will take place at seven different outdoor sites around the city of Žilina. Each site will be dedicated to a different stage, dealing with different topics, e.g. education, social inclusion, politics, sustainability, and culture.

The curated artistic programme starts with the French collective Bellastock (FR) and their project *Agoras*. They will design temporary agoras, experimental architectural constructions at the seven outdoor sites around the city of Žilina, where the debates will take place.

At the same time, to capture the moment of reckoning, we will have artists creating works of art right on the spot – inspired by the stories, the discussions, the relationships developed. It will be a lively and dynamic conversation between art and discussions, between artists, audiences, and speakers.

We have for instance approached the Vienna-based art group Wochenklausur (AT) about their project *Public Debate*, where individuals/groups that usually avoid each other for ideological or other reasons were invited to sit down and talk, in a strategically positioned pavilion. Although information regarding the participants was made public, the meetings themselves always took place in private. The debaters were limited to two hours and assisted by professional mediators. We also plan interventions of Dan Perjovschi (RO), an internationally acclaimed artist and political activist who covers surfaces across the world with subversive cartoons, commenting on current geo-political events and socio-cultural crises.

To celebrate the onset of democracy in Czechoslovakia, as well as elsewhere in Europe and the world, we will mark the anniversary of the 1918 establishment of the first Czechoslovak republic with a celebratory event with discussions and concerts, bringing together the urban community again, in the *Freedom Park*, a local fruit orchard established by the Háčovňa cultural centre (SK) in 2018.

- **Organizers:** Pontis Foundation (SK), FORUM 2000 (CZ), Polis Foundation (SK), Háčovňa Cultural Centre (SK), Bellastock (FR),
- **Partners:** Vize 97 Foundation (CZ), Democracy Festivals Association (DK), LAMPA Conversation Festival (LV), Opinion Festival Paide (ET), Fundacja Zrobmy To (PL), Wochenklausur (AT)
- **Budget:** € 220,000

Biennial of Activist Forms

The year-long programme will also include our landmark Biennial of Activist Forms, a platform for artists and activists to showcase, create and explore art which actively seeks to exercise social impact and to transform policy-making and politics. The Biennial has the ambition of becoming a regional leader in showcasing the newest and most boundary-pushing activist art. It is however also an organisation that will, during the off years, cultivate dialogue on social and political issues. It does not only seek to provoke and shock through its art, but also engage in difficult conversations and cultivate dialogue with the community. In 2024, we plan to hold the first edition of the Biennial, curated by Lenka Kukurová (SK), in order to prepare the grand edition in 2026, with approximately thirty author exhibitions. We could confirm interest from: Tomáš Rafa (SK), Michal Koleček (CZ), Margarethe Markovec and Anton Lederer (AT), Katharina Jesberger (AT), Zuzana Štefková (CZ), Enzo Umbaca (IT), Oliver Ressler (AT), Sorour Darabi (FR/Iran), Mamoru Okuno (JP), Rini Tandon (AT), Tere Recarens (ES), Ewa Bobrowska (PL), Artwall Praha (CZ), Ján Gálik (PL), Janeil Engelstad (USA)...

- **Organisers:** Biennale of Activist Art Forms (SK), Pavlína Fichta Čierna (SK), Johann Claude Čierny (SK),
- **Partners:** Lenka Kukurová (SK), Stanica, Nová Synagóga, Považie Art Gallery, Amnesty International Slovakia (SK), Greenpeace SK (SK), Tranzit Slovakia (SK), IVO Bratislava (SK), Iniciatíva Inakosť (SK), VIA IURIS (SK), < rotor > (AT), University of Applied Arts, Vienna (AT), XR Arts Groups (USA), TBA21-Academy, Thyssen – Bornemisza Art Contemporary Privatstiftung (AT)
- **Budget:** € 300,000

Windows of Diversity

Windows of Diversity celebrates the multicultural, multilingual nature of Europe. It is a year-long series of events that looks at the riches of intercultural exchange from several perspectives – in folklore, music, in volunteering and community work, in sharing borders or life stories.

Beskids Culture Week

There are several important festivals of folk culture in our region, but the international festival *Beskids Culture Week* (TBK) occupies a special spot: on top of presenting traditional culture from Beskids, it also showcases and celebrates the diversity of traditional and folk cultures from across Europe, thanks to its membership in CIOFF (International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts).

The Beskid Culture Week (PL) is currently a massive event which takes place all over the Beskids in the middle of summer. There are five large stages: in Wisła, Szczyrk, Żywiec, Maków Podhalański, and Oświęcim, where several-hour concerts are held for the nine days of the festival's duration. Shorter concerts also take place in market squares and band parades in the street. Individual concerts are also held in other places: in Ujsoły, Istebna, and Bielsko-Biała. Selected bands participating in TKB (PL) also play concerts in Jablunkov in the Czech Republic, during the Goral Folklore Days (CZ). During Beskids Culture Week, next to a hundred bands usually perform. The concerts are watched by an audience of almost 200,000 people. There are exhibitions of folk art, artistic handicrafts, photography, etc. The organizers prepare a folk art fair, workshops and competitions. It can be said that the entire region comes alive during this colorful gathering. In 2026, TBK will be expanded to Slovak sites as well, for example the village of Skalíté (SK), with their 800-seat open-air theatre. We intend to include further small municipalities at the border. Also with the support of Žilina Beskids 2026, TBK will host about twenty foreign groups from all over the world and will reflect with other members of the CIOFF network on the preservation of cultural heritage and the role of folk culture in European societies.

At present, there are a number of folklore groups in Beskids that are dedicated to folk dance, its preservation, development, and presentation on stage. However, there are far more folk dance enthusiasts than there are members of these collectives. Therefore, in order to make folk dance accessible

to everyone, the idea of "Dance Houses" arose in the 1970s, as a place where people meet to enjoy dance, with no stage rules and no barriers between performers and spectators. Our *European Dance Houses* will give visitors and locals in many municipalities of the Beskids an opportunity to experience the spark and charm of folk dance and folk song, local and from elsewhere. The first part, with screenings of authentic recordings or live presentations by European hosts, is focused on teaching one or two folk dances, while in the second part participants are free to try out what they just learned.

- **Organiser:** Regionalny Ośrodek Kultury w Bielsku-Białe (PL), Regional cultural center Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** municipalities active in the Beskids Week of Cultures (Wisła, Szczyrk, Żywiec, Maków Podhalański, Oświęcim, Ujsoły, Istebna, Bielsko-Biała, Jablunkov), Krajské kultúrne stredisko v Žiline (SK), Municipality of Skalíté (SK-TBC)
- **Budget:** € 70,000

Festival Upon the River

International Minority Theatre Festival Upon the River brings together theatrical narratives of national and ethnic minorities that find themselves at the edges of mainstream societies, often literally inhabiting the edges of their respective countries. In 2026, the festival will be held at the end of summer in Těšín, with approximately six performances. The aim of the festival is to build a new tradition of regular encounters of European minority theatres, to show their narratives, present their languages and cultures, interconnect them, and, last but not least, to foment international co-creative work between them. The Těšín theatre is currently initiating talks with potential partners, like minority theatres in Košice (SK), Novi Sad (RS), Prešov (SK), Trieste (IT), and Bautzen (DE).

- **Organizer:** Těšín Theatre (CZ)
- **Partners:** Thália Színház (SK-TBC), Újvidéki Színház

(RS-TBC), Alexander Duchnovič Theatre (SK-TBC), Terst Theatre (IT-TBC), Folk Sorb Theatre (DE-TBC)

- **Budget:** € 80,000

Žilina from Elsewhere

To celebrate yet another angle of European cultural diversity, we will bring all former European and local volunteers of the European Voluntary Service and the European Solidarity Corps back to Žilina for a grand *European Volunteering Reunion* 2026. They will re-engage in their former community work, as well as new tasks. They will participate in rebuilding community courtyards, cultural houses, help in cultural organisations and NGOs. They will curate the cultural programme of the week – with concerts, readings, exhibitions pooled from their own experiences, interests, current professional or artistic activities, as many of them are active artistically, etc. They will talk about their experiences from Žilina in a series of discussions in the *Žilina from Elsewhere* series, and engage with current international inhabitants of Žilina. As many of them will travel with their families, often multicultural ones, the programme will be children-friendly. The stories of these volunteers will be compiled and followed by documentary filmmakers from the DogDocs collective (SK) in a documentary *titled European Memoirs*, building on their previous works on documenting the lives of young families from Oulu, Finland, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Likewise, our partner Tomáš Kriššák (SK) and his team of illustrators and graphic designers will explore more of the volunteers' stories and contrast them with the stories of those who could not cross borders due to political and other restrictions, e.g. before 1989, in the *Borderless graphic novel*.

- **Organizer:** Truc sphérique, oz (SK), Nadácia Krajina harmónie (SK), Artforum Žilina (SK), DogDocs (SK), Tomáš Kriššák (SK)
- **Budget:** € 85,000

Nations Deconstructed

Many people's response to an increasingly globalised world is taking refuge in traditional nation states, seen as safer and connected by common languages, history, education, and borders. The push for the cosmopolitan, for the globalised, for the international (or European), is leaving many people insecure about their place in the world. We want to go back to the "roots" of nations to explore and better understand how our national identities have been formed. We hope that understanding them will help us define what nations are for the future and what we want them to mean.



Slovak State (1939–1945) Exhibition

To debunk and understand the problematic and highly controversial period of the Nazi-allied wartime Slovak State, the first independent state of Slovaks, we will attempt to hold the first historic exhibition, Slovak State, of the period in Slovakia. There have been attempts to understand it through a contemporary art exhibition on wartime propaganda, but a sober, balanced historical account has not yet been attempted. We are joining forces with the Považie Museum (SK), the Museum of the Holocaust in Sered' (SK), the Slovak National Museum (SK), the Nation's Memory Institute (SK) and the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SK), as well as the American author Madeleine Vadkerti. The exhibition will take place in the newly created exhibition spaces in the Budatín Castle, the seat of the Považie Museum in Žilina (SK).

- **Organiser:** Považie Museum in Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** Museum of the Holocaust in Sered' (SK), Slovak Academy of Sciences (SK), Slovak National Museum in Martin (SK), Nation's Memory Institute (SK), Madeleine Vadkerti (US)
- **Budget:** € 150,000

Undiscovered Narratives

Neue unend_ckte Narrative (DE) is a German collective of theatre producers and conflict researchers based in Chemnitz. The project *Undiscovered Narratives* is an interface project spanning art, civil society, and social sciences. They work with undiscovered narratives by questioning existing narratives and discourses, exploring new and different perspectives, telling stories that make the previously unheard audible and the invisible visible. In Žilina, they plan to explore the relationship between nationalism and racism and discrimination towards the Roma minority. They seek to build a narrative around it based on field research and mapping, together with NGOs, policy-makers, and communities on the ground. The resulting theatrical performance attempts to create a space for dialogue between the mutually antagonised communities, taking into account both perspectives.

The planned study trip to Žilina was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions, but was rescheduled for early 2022. It will be followed by workshops and interviews and then by joining forces with local actors in producing novel cultural formats that counteract the narratives of hatred.

- **Organiser:** Neue unend_ckte Narrative (DE)
- **Budget:** € 60,000

Report to the Nations

The Slovak nation-building process and return to nationalisms is not an isolated occurrence restricted to Slovakia, we witness these tendencies throughout Europe and the world. Therefore, we feel a sense of urgency to uncover further nation-building processes, juxtapose them, contrast and compare them with each other, in our *Report to the Nations*, a series of five to ten innovative narrative fiction books by European and global authors trying to uncover the symbols, language, rituals, and objects that condensed into our national identities. To debunk the myths associated with nation-building narratives, legends, and white-washed truths that nations stand on, we will create the *Myths Illustrated* graphic novel with Tomáš Kriššák (SK) which will not focus only on Slovak national myths, but also contrast them with others from around the world. The graphic novel is intended for both youth and academic audiences.

- **Project main organiser:** Absynt publishing house (SK), Tomáš Kriššák (SK)
- **Budget:** € 15,000

Non-Fiction Festival

The Non-Fiction Festival will celebrate non-fiction and documentary art, bringing together journalists and artists from across artistic disciplines – literature, film, photography, animation, radio, drama, etc. Building on the rich traditions of narrative nonfiction in Poland and documentary art in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the aim is to support interdisciplinary cooperations between artists and journalists, showcase the best in non-fiction and documentary art, as well as provide opportunities for further learning, networking, B2B interactions, for journalists and artists alike, and promote the genres among public on a European level.



Non-Fiction festival

The festival builds on the established format of the Damned Reporters touring festival which Absynt (SK) organizes in Slovakia, bringing world-renowned reporters to regional hubs around the country for discussion and readings of their works, promoting the genre among the public as well. By 2026, it seeks to have gradually grown into a European-level festival that showcases the best in narrative non-fiction from around the world created in the previous year – across all arts rather than just literature. Because the *Non-Fiction Festival* is a gathering of reporters and artists alike, in cooperation with Freemuse, we will also showcase the most boundary-pushing art that speaks on current political, social or environmental issues, i.e. art that tries to document reality through its particular poetic language. Artists we have in mind are, for example, Paolo Cirio, an Italian visual artist whose exhibition on the use

of facial recognition apps by the police was banned in France; Jeton Neziraj and his dramatic works, with his theatre production company Qendra Multimedia reflecting the political and social realities in Kosovo, Serbia, and the Balkans, touching on issues such as endemic corruption or populism and nationalism; Shurook Amin, a Kuwaiti visual artist challenging the hypocrisy of patriarchy and gender inequality; and Pakistani filmmaker Sarmad Sultan Khoosat who explores aspects of Pakistani conservatism, including religious issues, in his works. All these artists will have an opportunity to mingle and network with reporters and narrative non-fiction writers identified together with Reporters Without Borders, creating an exciting opportunity for the interconnection of their work. The first Non-Fiction Festival will take place in 2022 and grow gradually, adding a young narrative non-fiction creative-writing contest, international exchanges, finally becoming a full-blown,

international event in 2026. The long-term aim of the festival is to become a regular stop in the annual non-fiction, documentary artists and journalists' festival circuit. The Non-Fiction Festival will be a platform to explore new techniques and develop interdisciplinary cooperation at the *School of Non-Fiction*. Workshops on investigation and working with sources with Reporters Without Borders (FR), multimedia creation and innovative story-telling with consultants and creators from the Sundance Institute Beata Calinska (PL/US), Ruthie Doyle (US) and Anna Trzebiatowska (PL/US), narrative-nonfiction writing with the Institute of Reportage (PL), photography and documentary film techniques with Slovak Press Photo (SK), photographers from around the world through the Fundacja Centrum fotografii in Bielsko-Biała (PL) and documentary collective DogDocs (SK), Slovak Journalism Award (SK), and many more. The festival will also award its *Non-Fiction Festival Award* for established non-fiction

artists and the year's most ground-breaking interdisciplinary collaborations between the invited and showcased authors. Likewise, the festival seeks to identify and support young narrative nonfiction talent. In cooperation with the Mantova Literature Festival, the Non-Fiction festival will hold a narrative nonfiction creative-writing contest for young writers. The winner will be awarded the Young Non-Fiction Talent Award, with possible publication deal with Absynt, as well as a financial grant for further work.

- **Organiser:** Absynt publishing house (SK)
- **Partners:** Reporters Without Borders (FR), Freemuse (DK), Institute of Reportage (PL), Slovak Journalism Award (SK), Q Code (IT), Beata Calinska (US/PL), Ruthie Doyle (US), Mantova Literature Festival (IT), Nová synagóga (SK), Stanica (SK), Slovak Press Photo (SK), Fundacja centrum

fotografii (PL), Anna Trzebiatowska (PL/US), DogDocs (SK)
● **Budget:** € 100,000

Biennial of Photography

The *Biennial of Photography* is an established Bielsko-Biała event that has been running for a decade now and has attracted authors from around the globe, as well as audiences from across Poland, which will in 2025 take place in Bielsko-Biała. The 2026 Biennial will be a parallel event to the Non-Fiction Festival and will bring world-renowned photographers and their work to Žilina and the surrounding areas. There will be showcases of their work – author-based exhibitions – and they will also participate in the School of Reportage (PL) events, as well as workshops fostering interdisciplinary, cross-border cooperation. We will present the work, among others, of Ragnar Axelsson (IS) on links between the relationship between the harsh natural environment and its people, Ernesto

Bazan (IT/US) on his documentation of life on peripheries, Julia Fullerton-Batten (DE) and her explorations of everyday life, or Dina Goldstein (IL/CA), whose work has never been exhibited in Slovakia before. After the Biennial and the Non-Fiction Festival, the exhibitions will travel to the regions and tour smaller towns and villages on all three sides of the border. The Biennial will exhibit both indoors and outdoors, in established cultural spaces, but also unexpected, surprising ones, such as highway bridges or building facades.

- **Organiser:** Centre for Photography Foundation (PL)
- **Partners:** Lucia Benicka (SK), Truc sphérique (SK), The Museum of Art Žilina (SK), Považie Museum in Žilina (SK), Ragnar Axelsson on (IS), Ernesto Bazan (IT/US), Julia Fullerton-Batten (DE), Dina Goldstein (IL/CA)
- **Budget:** € 50,000

Community Museum

The *Community Museum* is a place where collective memory, scattered in families and communities, comes together. It will be the crossroads where stories, artefacts and ideas from communities meet, intersect and concentrate. Curated by the community's youth and elders as part of the Beskids Intergenerational University, it will, for the first time, attempt to create a collective communal narrative of our regional history, as seen through the eyes of its inhabitants. It is also a guide for visitors and the youngest locals to the local history. Family stories, objects cherished in households, passed down from generation to generation, manual and craft techniques, material and immaterial heritage created in the region, will all make up the Community Museum. Participants of the Beskids Intergenerational University will be guided and trained in archival work and exhibition curation by experts from local history museums – the Považie Museum in Žilina (SK), the Historical Museum of Bielsko-Biała (PL), the Senior gymnázium of the Museum of Beskids in Frýdek-Místek (CZ) – as well as artists and researchers using the technique of community research.

Our network of cultural houses around the city and its peripheral districts in Žilina, Bielsko-Biała, and Frýdek-Místek, which will become hubs for community cultural

life, will be the decentralized branches of the Community Museum that will further explore local identities in the smaller communities. A special section will be dedicated to the particular knack of locals in the region for solving practical problems through ingenious, improvised, do-it-yourself, figure-it-out-yourself solutions. We will map, create a database and an exhibit of these solutions with workshops in the Do-It-Yourself Museum – on mending clothes, fixing broken furniture, house-building, or taking care of the nature and physical environment (sometimes to tame it, sometimes to help it flourish, sometimes to learn how to co-exist with it for mutual benefit).

- **Organiser:** Rosenfeld Palace (SK), Miejski Dom Kultury (PL), FM kultura (CZ)
- **Partners:** Katarina Živanović (RS), UNIZA U3V (SK), Považie Museum in Žilina (SK), Historical Museum of Bielsko-Biała (PL), Seniorgymnázium of the Museum of Beskids in Frýdek-Místek (CZ)
- **Budget:** € 100 000

European Family Photo Album

One of the flagship long-term projects in the Community Museum, mobilising the

network of cultural houses located in the region, will be the *European Family Photo Album*. Thanks to volunteers and community workers in cultural houses, but also schools and participating organisations, we will collect family photos of different categories – family occasions such as weddings, graduations, or baptisms, as well as first school days, skiing holidays, time spent in nature or other “everyday” activities. Firstly, in 2023 and 2024, we will do so in the Beskids region. We will then sort through them and organise mini-exhibitions in the different categories. In 2024, we will expand the project to other European countries as well. We will call on different organisations and individuals to submit their family photos in the same categories, building and creating a European Photo Album to show how European cultures are at the same time similar and diverse. We will contrast and juxtapose the everyday life of different communities in Europe, thus creating a collective image of European life as it is on the ground, in its everyday form.

- **Organiser:** Rosenfeld Palace (SK), Miejski Dom Kultury (PL)
- **Partners:** J-P. Mouleres (TBC-FR)
- **Budget:** € 50,000

2.3 How will the events and activities that will constitute the cultural programme for the year be chosen?

In the preparation process, we focused on securing reliable partnerships with skilled operators, complementary calls for projects on specific topics will be announced during the realisation phase. Moreover, participatory and capacity building programmes will be produced together with the citizens, as will new projects in cooperation with the arts scene. In the development and production phase, we will continue supporting local organisations and artists in building their projects. Our strategy is to focus on supporting projects with impact that will extend beyond the title year; in this respect, we find it important to systematically support growth of the existing organisations or creation of new ones. Part of our strategy is to support independent artistic production, multiple curated AIR programmes will offer the space for artists to create new custom content for our programme. The final part of the production phase also involves contracting, testing, preparing production, and financial plans for 2026. Finally, before the end of 2026, we will also deal with preparation of follow-up and sustainability of the projects. New projects will be selected according to criterias embedded in our MANIFESTO.

From Working Groups to Project Producers We will invest in capacity building of the scene (see Capacity building table), organise workshops and consultations for project owners to meet and further develop their projects. It is the phase of project establishment, precise defining of the project framework and dramaturgy with the team, developing the European dimension thanks to mobility, and inviting international experts and partners. Further financial and curatorial support, for instance in the form of research and mobility microgrants, will be given for sake of feasibility and reality checking, as well as development of the European dimension.

Open Call 20<26 At least one more open call will be launched in 2022/23 for operators and artists who did not take part in the bid process. After 2023, we do not plan any large-scale open calls, only potential topic-specific calls will be organised, addressing potential needs of projects in the specific fields.

Accelerator 20<26 Accelerator 20<26 is the name of our main educational and capacity building tool for the local cultural scene. It will use design-thinking methods, that is to say, a way of thinking about art production and maximizing its impact or finding the right balance between form, concept, scale, and the expected outcomes (empathise – define – ideate –prototype – test – production). It usually takes the form of an intensive three-day workshop, followed by further mentoring, with a final public presentation and feedback session. For testing, participants will have access to research or mobility microgrants.

We will run different versions of the Accelerator for different stages of the project:

- **Accelerator start-ups** – to support projects by emerging artists and young cultural organisations not yet involved in ECoC.

- **Accelerator Audience Development** – to run audience research and audience development projects in cultural institutions.
- **Accelerator Beskids and Ukraine** – to develop networking and shared projects on a cross-border or European level.
- **Accelerator 2027+** – to prepare follow-up and sustainability of projects after the year 2026.

2.4 How will the cultural programme combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions?

Despite the existence of a strong cultural scene in Žilina and the Beskids region, there remains an obvious gap between the high-end artistic productions and the mainstream culture that we try to bridge. As expected from ECoC projects, we are often looking towards the future, rather than parading historical traditions, therefore many projects deal with contemporary aesthetics, current European topics and the transformative power of art. At the same time, Žilina and the entire Beskids region are well known for their local traditions and folk culture in music, dance, food, crafts, and architecture, and the programme reflects this richness. Traditional culture, especially music, is also an element of pride and the existing heritage will be used to host events and explored in the programme as well. References to traditional culture are integrated in all three main programme lines, each of them using a slightly different approach, but generally we intend to create a space for bridging projects that create a fusion of the two elements.

While *Future's Factory* is mainly looking towards the future, innovation, research, production, and city development, we find it important to reflect our history as part of this process. Historically, the city of Žilina and the cities of Bielsko-Biała and Frydek-Místek were famous for their textile, enamel working, and wire craft traditions. Within this programme line, we will reflect upon our industrial heritage and traditional craft techniques in the programme clusters *Interwoven Cities*, *Re:Design Craft*, and the *Wire*. The *Textile Season* is a homage to the shared textile past that defined the character of all three regions, but at the same time it is an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of what textile is and can be in the future. In the *Re:Design Craft residency programme* we will facilitate dialogue between contemporary designers and craftsmen, with the *Sustainable Design Week* being a moment of showcasing how different ways of applying traditional techniques to new materials and modes of production can lead to innovative products and materials. In *25,000 Gallery* and *Inside Slovak Modernism* we will use immersive technologies to enhance viewers' experience of the most iconic traditional artworks. We even look at city archeology with the *International Conference on Fortified Centers of Power of Lutisian Culture in Europe*.

The *Flow of Nature* programme takes a more popular approach, entertaining or educational; here we aim to bring art closer to the general public and also to engage with the traditions of the region. The *Traditions Forward* programme cluster will be a space for traditional culture rooted in the natural environment and its contemporary interpretation, represented by events like

the *Music Gathering* (meeting of folk culture, incl. Terchovská music and Fujara are both listed as UNESCO's World Heritage) or the *Lotos Ethno Jazz Festival* – bringing concerts of jazz, fusion, and world music to remote outdoor settings. The *Festival of Shepherd Culture* we will bring the atmosphere of traditional sheep rearing to the city centre, and at the associated conference, we will discuss the prospects and preservation of traditional mountain farming in the Beskids. The *Vychylovka Forest Museum* will be founded as a new cultural infrastructure to bring complex educational experience to outdoor settings, displaying traditional wood industry in contrast with the contemporary approaches to forestry and ecological topics. We will also dive into food-related traditions through the unique *Culinary Archaeology* research dedicated to the story of how cuisine developed in different European geographical and historical contexts. The *Nature Makers* programme cluster will explore traditions like mushroom foraging and herbalism and their reinterpretations in contemporary art and design. There is also a strong focus on classical music, as an attraction of the region, with events like *Musical Trips across Borders*, a festival of spiritual and early concert music.

In *Borderless Identity*, we take part in an ongoing process of reconciliation with our past by abstracting the uneasy parts of our history and revisiting them in their actual contexts. For instance, the programme cluster *Nations Deconstructed* will help us to reflect on our national identity. Perhaps the most challenging historical project within this cluster will be *The 1939–1945 Slovak State Exhibition*, an objective exhibition of a dark period in Slovak history based on thorough historical research, to be presented in a newly reconstructed part of the Budatín Castle. In *Myths Illustrated*, we will analyse heroic national narratives and debunk the stereotypes, myths, and labels commonly present in our language. In the programme cluster Vrba-Wetzler, we will explore and spread the knowledge about the story of Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler. We have secured a partnership with the Vrba-Wetzler Memorial to scale up the existing annual march and turn it into the year-round, permanent *Vrba-Wetzler Trail*. We have already set up a *Vrba-Wetzler Commemoration Room* in the place where they originally wrote their report, together with a *Literature House* for translation of Slovak literature. A new *Museum of Transportation* will be created in the Žilina main railway station.

2.5.1 How has the city involved local artists and cultural organisations in the conception and implementation of the cultural programme?

The local artistic and cultural sector has been involved in the process of preparing the candidacy and the cultural programme from the very beginning. In January 2020, together with the city representatives, we engaged in conversations with key cultural operators and held a public discussion with the entire cultural scene introducing the ECoC concept and making the decision to run for the title together. Only after having received feedback from the showcase of the cultural scene did the mayor of Žilina pass the candidature on for approval by the city council. Since then, a dialogue with and across multiple platforms of cultural operators, artists, and creatives has been at the core of our candidacy. Apart from all these opportunities for collective participation, we have conducted numerous bilateral meetings where most of the projects with involvement of cultural institutions were co-developed.

FIRST ROUND OF THE BIDDING PHASE

→ Art Board With the objective of enhancing the quality of our cultural program, Art Board Žilina 2026 has been formed consisting of twelve members representing various art forms and different types of local organisations (NGO, artist, city, region or government-run cultural institutions, and the local university). We have held monthly meetings with countless discussions, brainstorming sessions, and feedback loops which helped to shape the proposed programme in many different ways.

→ Focus Groups Together with the city's cultural office and with the aim to prepare a new cultural strategy, we started the analytical phase, by collecting data from cultural operators and public bodies, as well as by launching an online survey on the visions and needs of the cultural scene. We then formed several focus groups spanning key topics such as the public space, visual art, street art, classical and popular music, nightlife, social inclusion, outdoor sports, regional development, nature, tourism, family, and children or seniors. The participants have engaged in preparing a SWOT analysis, identifying the strengths and challenges of their respective fields, as well as their needs, laying the groundwork for potential projects.

→ Accelerator 20<26 With the aim of stimulating cooperation and launching co-creation of cultural projects for the bid book, we managed to organize a six-week long support programme called Accelerator 20<26 in June and July 2021. Participants were guided to elaborate on their project ideas using the Double Diamond method, and during the midterm market of ideas, they had an opportunity to merge ideas and interests with other participants. In the final stage, they received consulting from experts in order to finalize and benchmark their project ideas. The outcomes were presented at the Final Accelerator night in front of the general public and the Art Board.

→ Žilina 20<26 Open Call While our strategy was to build the programme mostly through a co-creation process, we launched an open call as well. In response, we received sixty quality projects.

→ Žilina Beskids City Conference The highlight of this preparation phase was the City Conference that took place in Žilina at the beginning of September 2020 at the City Theatre. This event had about a hundred participants from the three cities, to whom we presented the first preliminary programme frameworks. There were online lectures from other ECoCs and international experts for each of our programme lines. A big part of the conference was devoted to networking between the three cities' cultural operators – all common projects included are a result of this process.

→ Beskids 20<26 Open Call After confirming the cooperation framework with the representatives of the cities of Bielsko-Biała and Frydek-Místek and mapping out cultural issues and potential partners of their cities, at the beginning of the summer, we held public presentations for the two cities' cultural operators. These were eligible for a specific Beskids Open Call with a deadline in mid-September 2020. Around sixty projects were submitted.

→ Culture-Tech Ideathon

In July 2020, we encouraged members of the local IT community to collaborate with the local cultural operators in a two-day CultureTech Ideathon. Together they discussed tech solutions and identified opportunities for joint projects in areas like audience development, open data management, immersive presentation technology, and strategic marketing.

→ Urban Interventions Programme

Early in the bidding process, we – together with our partners from Atrium Architects, Uzemneplany.sk, and the Chief City Planner’s Department – organised an expert workshop with local architects, urbanists, and cultural stakeholders in order to discuss the most interesting areas for potential urban development and for new cultural infrastructures within ECoC, like the now confirmed projects of the Bôrik Environmental Centre and Rajčanka Riverbanks. As a follow up, experts along with the general public were invited to upload their suggestions into an online idea database. So far, thirty-one projects were proposed. In addition, we organised a workshop with students from the Slovak University of Technology on how to regenerate the open city market in October 2020. Although the COVID-19 crisis did make our work more difficult, especially in its collective and cross-border aspects, we are very happy with the involvement of the scene, with a large range of participants and a strong dynamic.

SECOND ROUND OF THE BIDDING PHASE

In 2021, we strengthened communication and cooperation with cross-border partners. Personal visits to cultural institutions and meetings with stakeholders took place, as did personal and on-line meetings.

→ Open ECOC – Expert Workshops

In the second round, we organised eight Open ECoCs – international programme development workshops with flagship project owners, open to the broader audience, where we used a mix of international and local experts to consult and discuss the planned project and hot topics of our candidacy, to deepen the European dimension and artistic quality of the projects within our programme. In addition, intensive bilateral and multilateral programme development meetings and smaller workshops were conducted with project leaders and partners, where the team Žilina Beskids 2026 offered project development and curatorial support. Some projects from the first accelerator submitted by individuals were further developed into truly European projects with help of experienced partners like LAND – Land stewards AND artists network or Hellowood (HU). Despite the travel restrictions due to the pandemic, some of our international programme partners were able to conduct field research and mapping in the region – WRO Art Centre (PL), Medialab Katowice (PL), Dnipro Center for Contemporary Culture (UA), The

Auschwitz–Birkenau State Museum (PL), while others have been cancelled, such as NUN (DE). In order to deepen the European dimension and get new partners for the programme, our team and selected project leaders participated in international conferences and expert meetups like the EMAP/EMARE conference in Halle (DE) the FORUM 2000 democracy festival, and the International Committee for the Conservation of the Textile Industrial Heritage conference.

→ Accelerator Beskids 20<26

The special edition of the project Accelerator Beskids 20<26 was organised to intensify the cooperation between Slovak, Czech, and Polish partners. Participants were cultural stakeholders (NGO, state/local/city organisations, individuals) from the whole cross-border region. Over two weekends (11–12 June 2021 in Žilina, 25–26 June in Bielsko-Biała) we held an idea pitching night, networking and matchmaking sessions, educational workshops, project development sessions, testing, consultation phase, and a final presentation. This process led to creation of some projects that are now involved in this candidacy (Etnograff rural murals, Urban Legends, Story in space, Object in the city/city in the object, Enamel Art symposium, Borderless Mobile VR Cinema...), others are still under development with realisation planned for 2022–2026.

→ Žilina Beskids 20<26 Open Call

A new open call for project proposals was launched in July 2021 and twenty more art projects from the cross-border region were submitted. Some projects were included in this candidacy (from Accelerator mainly) and some other applicants were invited to cooperate on other pre-existing projects (Ondřej Bělíca Gimonfu, Urban Jungle...).

→ In-Depth Interviews And Focus Groups

As part of finalisation of the cultural strategy, we organised thirty-three in-depth interviews with key cultural operators and eight thematic focus groups to help to confirm and finalize policy proposals based on the analytical part of the strategy.

→ Beskids Cultural Forum

In September 2021, we launched the second cultural conference of our candidacy, where about one hundred visitors met. The scope of the conference was expanded from just the city to the Beskids, giving path to establishment of a Cultural Forum for the Beskids – a development, networking and capacity building tool for the cross-border region. It was an opportunity to present the status of the candidacy to the public, to discuss with the local scene and international experts topics like: art in nature, cultural tourism in Beskids, community art development, new models of cultural houses, and evaluation of culture and ECoC. The Forum provided an opportunity to sign a partnership agreement with tourism partners and to present the cultural strategy of the city titled Žilina 2035.

2. 5. 2 Please give some concrete examples and name some local artists and cultural organisations with which cooperation is envisaged and specify the type of exchanges in question.	
PROJECT	ARTIST
Akusticon	We put together artist <i>Alex Mlynarčík</i> (SK), with the young Žilina based artist <i>Juraj Gabor</i> (SK) and a team of <i>experts from Žilina University</i> (SK) to bring utopic artwork to existence.
Textile season	Within Accelerator 2021 , we supported the development of <i>Textile Hub Čadca</i> (SK) and helped them to team up with the <i>Museum of Art in Žilina</i> (SK), <i>BWA gallery</i> (PL) and four other institutions to provide premises and organize curated exhibitions.
Object in the city / city in the object	Three galleries from all three cities (<i>Galerie Věž</i> (CZ), <i>Galeria BWA</i> (PL), <i>Nová Synagoga Žilina</i> (SK)) will unite in a common exhibition project. Accelerator 2021
Dance Center S2	With <i>Marek Adamov</i> (SK) from the leading Žilina independent cultural centre <i>Stanica</i> (SK) the new dance theater will be built and operate as a Public NGO Partnership.
The International Festival of Puppetry Art	<i>Teatr Lalek Banialuka</i> (PL) will organize a major Giant puppet show in Bielsko Biala, while <i>Puppet Theater in Žilina</i> (SK) will organise a summer season full of European puppet theaters in Žilina.
Slovena, HEY! European Theater Incubator	<i>City Theater of Žilina</i> (SK) was concerned with the history of the local textile factory and will produce original theater performances on the topic. Moreover, together with the ECoC they initiated the project of a Theater Incubator, raising opportunities for creation and European cooperation.
Festival Upon the River	<i>Tesin theatre</i> (CZ) will organize a new international minority theatre festival.
STE(A)M² – Arzenal Space	Led by artist <i>Pavlina F. Čierna</i> (SK) and organisation <i>Arzenal Gallery</i> (SK) the space will be a platform for fostering dialogue between local artists and scientists in our larger platform in Ciachovňa.
Animation Festivals	The ECoC will be an opportunity to support the development of <i>Fest Anča</i> (SK), better incorporation of the festival into the city, works with the regional audiences and collaboration on international projects. A new festival of animation films will be launched by the prestigious <i>Studio Filmów Rysunkowych</i> (PL) in Bielsko Biala and residency programs will be run as well for local animators.
Animated Music Tour, Wires, String, Nosferatu, A tiny teardrop	We helped to connect and involve the outstanding Žilina based <i>Slovak Sinfonietta Orchestra</i> (SK) into several projects with local and international partners, but also in unusual cross disciplinary cooperation.
Rural murals – Etnograff	Thanks to their meeting during the Accelerator Beskids 2026, <i>Maciej Szymonowicz</i> (PL) from Bielsko-Biała will lead a cross-border project of mural trails in rural areas of Beskids, together with <i>Roman Wirtz</i> (CZ) from Czeszyn and <i>Samuel Daniš</i> (SK) from Žilina.
The Wires, Slovak state (1939–1945), Industrial heritage EXPO, European Textile Time Machine, Cultural Crossroad	<i>The Museum of Považie</i> (SK) will organize three major exhibitions within our program, develop a new field of research, open a new Museum of transportation, and will join an international network.
Floating gardens, Story of the water	The Žilina based visual artist <i>Juraj Poliak</i> (SK) will work on the stable exhibition in the Water Museum Borík, which he inspired at the first architectural workshop and he will coordinate the project Floating gardens that he proposed on the Žilina dam.
–SCAPE festival, Helter Shelter	<i>Lukáš Hrošovský</i> (SK), <i>Katarína Mačková</i> (SK) and <i>Peter Kasman</i> (SK), architects and activists from Rajec and Kysuce met at Accelerator 2020 , where they helped to developed the concept of Landscape festival and took part in an Erasmus+ meeting in UK with the Land European network and will help us with implementing Helter Shelter program.
Videoart, Val – prospective architecture	A biennale of video art by the curators from <i>The Museum of Art in Žilina</i> (SK) will be established, building up on long term activities of the Museum, a new permanent exhibition on local phenomena of prospective architecture and collective VAL will be created.
Voices of the Forest	Renowned <i>Mixed Choir of Žilina</i> (SK) will be leading a unique international performance of 200 singers in the forests of Beskids, composed by <i>Peter Špilák</i> (SK) and conducted by <i>Štefan Sedlický</i> (SK).
Urban legends, Story in space	Following local artists will participate in Story in space and Urban legends projects as an outcome of our Accelerator 2021: <i>Lucia Svobodová</i> (SK), <i>Johanna Gruszka</i> (PL), <i>Tomasz Schaefer</i> (PL), <i>Martina Fintorová</i> (SK), <i>Timotea Vráblová</i> (SK), <i>Małgorzata Luczyna</i> (PL), <i>Cult Creative o.z.</i> (SK), <i>Memorymorph group</i> (PL).
Kino na Granicy	Film festival Kino na Granicy in Czesin organized by <i>Stowarzyszenie Kultura na Granicy</i> (PL) will go thanks to the project cross-border with Films projections in <i>Nova Synagoga</i> (SK).
Frambor Parc	Local NGO <i>Žilinský Skrášľovací Spolok</i> (SK) and <i>Iveta Martinková</i> (SK) were behind the initiative leading to refurbishment of large abandoned greenland under highway bridges. Open call 2020
Raj~čanka	A local citizen’s collective <i>Raj~čanka</i> led by <i>Lucia Šimo</i> (SK), <i>Peter Kotrha</i> (SK), <i>Šimon Kern</i> (SK) will participate in revitalizing the riverbanks of the Rajčanka river in Žilina. Accelerator 2020

3. EUROPEAN DIMENSION

3. 1 Elaborate on the scope and quality of the European activities

We think the European dimension essentially relates to the concept of transition. It is about crossing borders, transforming mental barriers, performing one's own position, regardless of potential misunderstandings, which can always be discussed further. Through our joint ECoC bid, we address all these aspects of the Beskids' European dimension at once – through substantial strengthening of cross-border cooperation we are simultaneously transforming mental barriers. We bid for ECoC because we are eager to perform, to tell our story to Europe and, conversely, to promote European values in the Beskids. Strengthening the European profile of the Beskids through ECoC means securing that the exchange will be a two-way “street”. Therefore, we are fully committed to the principle of internationalization, with 75% of projects in the cultural and artistic programmes presented in this bid book have an international partner, an artist or an organization from outside the Beskids.

In our MANIFESTO, we have placed the value of diversity at the top, committing to “celebrating European diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue”. We draw its importance directly from our own cities' historical experience which proves that we have performed best in periods when openness and tolerance prevailed over close-mindedness and isolation. Unfortunately, the diverse, even cosmopolitan character of our cities could not withstand the political turbulence of the 20th century and vanished with the processes of Polonization and Slovakization, and the traumas of WWII and the Cold War. We share a history with our neighbours which does not consist of only nice stories, but also conflicts, like the short war between Poland and Czechoslovakia over the Silesian and Orava territories after 1918, or the disputes between the constituting nations and eventual disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1939 and 1993. Enhancing mutual understanding, reestablishing relations with the closest neighbours and opening ourselves to Europe is therefore the cornerstone of our bid. Our programme stems from the cross-border dimension and extends far beyond. Promoting European dialogue and mobility, exchanging ideas and networking with our European partners are key elements of our strategy. Opening the windows to Europe and letting fresh air in to inspire us brings focus to European issues such as promoting diversity, defending democracy and free speech, moving beyond past conflicts towards a common future, reflecting ecological concerns and coming up with practical solutions in line with the European Green Deal, as well as transformation of urban and rural built environment as part of the New European Bauhaus initiative. There is a lot Europe can learn from the difficult journeys of smaller regions like ours. We want to be in the forefront of the discussions about our common

European future, since we believe our experiences, skills, and way of thinking can bring fresh air to Europe, too.

Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue

There are several projects that aim to emphasize the importance of diverse identities and their roles in the shared story of the Beskids. In the project *Žilina from Elsewhere*, we look at the richness of identities that we may be overlooking in our closest neighbourhood, we will engage international citizens living in Žilina in regular conversations about what it is like to live in the city as foreigners, together with the local Artforum bookstore. We will also give the European volunteers who live or lived in Žilina an opportunity to meet back here and present their cultural backgrounds in the *European Volunteering Reunion*, analysing the effects of EU-supported youth mobility on our cities. The City Cultural Centre in Bielsko-Biała will realize *Art Education*, providing workshops, meetings, and concerts to families, reaching out particularly to those of minority ethnic and national backgrounds (mostly Ukrainians, Spaniards, Roma, Italians) living in the city, as well as to families with special needs children. In the *Art Caravan* project, we look at traditional cultural diversity in Žilina in a community art project by the artists Daniela Krajčová and Oto Hudec, in partnership with the Bratislavská street Roma community. Regarding the large Korean community in Žilina, a special *Korean Culture Festival* is envisaged to build intercultural links. *Ambassadors of Diversity* is a project where high school students will be appointed as peer educators in their communities on issues of diversity. In *Festival Upon the River*, we look at minority communities in the region and all over Europe, specifically with regard to the issue of preservation of uncodified languages and dialects, like for instance Goral and Silesian dialects in the specific context of Český Těšín and Cieszyn on the Polish and Czech border. Throughout Europe and the world we see a rise of xenophobia and nationalist tendencies. To debunk the myths associated with nation-building narratives, legends, and white-washed truths nations stand on, we will create the *Myths Illustrated* graphic novel, critically exploring not only Slovak national myths, but also putting them into perspective of other nation building myths from around the world.

Borders and Cross-Border Cooperation

While in the first bid book we were approaching cross-border dialogue as a rather novel thing and a window of opportunities,



it has by now become an integral part of our bid, with *50% of our programme involving a cross-border partner* or being planned to take place across borders. The backbone of our bid is formed by the *Euroregion Beskids*, a cross-border territorial entity established in 2000. The purpose of Euroregions is to create a coherent space that is developed collectively to ensure that borders are no longer an obstacle but become a resource and an opportunity for development. Therefore, we will reinforce the Euroregion Beskids, a framework for our cooperation that makes it possible to bring together the different stakeholders and to put in place common policies, for instance in the fields of culture and tourism. The following projects represent only a selection of highlights from the planned cross-border collaborations or projects focusing on the border as a topic. In the *March for Beskids*, we will follow the initiative from Nova Gorica-Gorizia 2025 and their project March for Europe, dealing with physical borders and converging at the Tripoint, the symbolic place where Polish, Czech and Slovak borders meet in the Beskids. In the cluster Voices from the Borders, the *Kino na Granicy* film festival will celebrate the three Beskid cultures – Polish, Czech and Slovak right on the border, in the multicultural city of Český Těšín/Cieszyn, and throughout the region. With the *Borderless mobile VR Cinema*, a touring immersive exhibition, we will deal with migration of people and ethnic groups in the Beskids region and the whole of Europe. In the *Beskids Culture Week*, we take a look at the diversity of traditional cultures in the region and in the broader European context. The economic ties between our cities are of course strong and with projects like *Cross-border Fab Lab and Creative Development Centre* we focus more on actual cross-border cooperation in the field of creative industry.

Promoting EU Mobility

We are building on Žilina's long-standing identity as a cross-roads and a transportation node by turning it into a hub of intercultural dialogue and learning. We like stories of trains and railway stations here; it was already a hundred years ago that the Košice-Bohumín railway put Žilina on the map of Europe. With the project *Locomotion*, young people will receive dedicated Interrail passes to go on a train tour of Europe, then turn their experience and stories into an exhibition in the Žilina railway station, a testimony of their intercultural experience as well as the state of the union. With *Vlak fest (CZ)* we will offer to participants from across Europe an intercultural adventure in our EuropeanTransExpress cultural train from North-West to South-East, from Finland to Bulgaria by way of Žilina. The *E75* project will instead opt for a bus filled with artists on a pan-European route that connects the continent from the brink of the polar circle in Oulu, Finland all the way to the Mediterranean basin in Greece, stopping at various cities and spots along the way, including Žilina. EU mobility is not only about physical mobility, but also about free movement of ideas and knowledge. We will run several mobility tools and artist in residence programmes (AiR) to support international skill and knowledge transfer. For animation professionals, we will hold *Animators in Residence* in Bielsko-Biała's historical Studio Filmów Rysunkowych and the *Audiovisual HUB* in Žilina. In the *Fresh AiR* residency programme, we will organise art and nature focused residencies in collaboration with the scientific laboratory of the Ostrava University and in EAC in Frýdek-Místek, while the *STE(A)M² residency* programme will focus on art and

sciences in Žilina’s Ciachovňa. *The Re:Design craft residencies* will provide an opportunity to discover various craft techniques and design (Made in Beskids / CETRAT residencies / Hat design residencies), as will the *Textile HUB* where the residencies will be focused on textile art. In the *Performing Art Hey! Theatre incubator* and *Dance centre S2*, we will offer new dancer and actor residencies, while the *HANGAR Creative Centre* will provide new facilities for developing artworks for public spaces. Finally, the *International Literature House Vrba and Wetzler* will be created especially for author and translator residencies, and the *Free Speech Hub* for persecuted artists and journalists from different parts of the world. Apart from hosting artists in residence in Žilina, many bilateral agreements will offer international residency opportunities for local artists. Together with the *On the Move – Cultural Mobility Information Network*, we plan to organise debates on deep mobility (as an alternative to green mobility) in Europe’s cultural scene, as well as a reflection on the Žilina Beskids 2026 plans for a sustainable ECoc strategy. A conference to promote international cultural cooperation of operators from the V4 countries and ECocS is also planned, with potential guests from the Eastern Partnership network, the Asia-Europe Foundation, and the Roberto Cimetta Fund for artistic cooperation projects in the Euro-Arab geographical zone. In parallel, we will organise a series of capacity building workshops with NGOs and artists from the region, to enhance their cooperation with international partners and involvement in EU’s external relations. The training will include info sessions provided by the partner networks supporting worldwide mobility, but also long-term mentoring and job shadowing visits.

European Cultural Networks

European networks are the optimal channels to get in touch with the European context and exchange best practices. We have spent a substantial amount of time and effort in identifying the relevant European networks in each field, with the aim of establishing long-term and mutually supportive cooperation, but also to co-produce future projects. Already in the first round, we established cooperation with some of them, like the *LAND network*, and joined forces with the following organisations to facilitate creations in natural settings – the Oerol Festival (Leeuwarden 2018), Bodø 2024, Le Citron Jaune (Marseille – Provence 2013), and Activate Performing Arts (UK). Together, we already prepared a joint Erasmus+ project. *IFLA Europe* (BE) will work with the EAC in Frýdek-Místek on transforming landscape, through summer academy and workshops for artists and landscape architects. We partnered up with the *European Ramblers’ Association* (CZ) and will organise Euro-rondo 2026 cultural hiking across the Beskids. Last year, we became an associated partner of the *EMAP/EMARE European network*, who are helping us establish our art and science residency programme, while this year we participated in a conference and hosted a residency of the Italian artist Silvia Rosani. We deepened our collaboration with *CEE Animation*, agreeing to host a CEE Animation workshop and a CEE Animation Forum – educational and networking activities for Central European professionals and organisations in the field of animated film. This year, we continued in establishing new partnerships with European networks. In 2026, we will organise the European *Textile Network* conference to promote our shared interest in the field of textile and to intensify cultural exchanges. With the *International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage* (FR) we will look at historical industrial objects in

order to prepare our Industrial Heritage Expo, while with the *Time Machine Network* (AT) we intend to collect historical resources, digitize them, and present them in an online museum. With *Mad’in Europe* (BE), a network dedicated to promotion of European crafts and cultural heritage, we will raise awareness of the diversity and richness of European crafts. Together with *Reporters Without Borders* (FR), *Freemuse* (DK) and their Cities for Free Speech network initiative, we will organise residencies in our Free Speech Hub and join international advocacy for the cause. With the network *Democracy Festivals Association* (DK), we will build on the Northern European tradition of Democracy Festivals to build our own event in Žilina, giving a boost to local democracy. Together with the Puppet Theatre Žilina, we will collaborate with *Hands On! – the International Association of Children in Museums* on our Interactive Children’s Museum, and with *UNIMA – Slovensko*, an international puppet network, on our puppet festival planned for 2026 in Žilina. The Slovak Sinfonietta is further collaborating with *ONE – an Orchestra Network for Europe* and we will produce a joint concert with one of its members, Jenaer Philharmonie (DE). Moreover, the city’s cultural centre, the Rosenfeld Palace, made its entry into the *ENCC – European Network of Cultural Centres*, with whom we were shaping our strategy for the future Cultural House network. We plan to work on several collaborations with Trans Europe Halles (TEH), a network of self-organized cultural centres with over hundred members from all over Europe. We agreed to host the *TEH 2025 Spring Meeting* in Žilina, at the Stanica cultural centre, a prominent TEH member. It will host approximately four hundred people from all over Europe. Moreover, together with Die Bäckerei (AT) and several other TEH members, we have been working on the aforementioned project The Culture of Culture, with the aim of increasing understanding of the culture of cultural workers and increasing the sustainability and impact of their work. We joined the *Culture Next Network*, which is currently operating as an informal network, with over four years of experience in supporting current and former European Capital of Culture candidate cities to implement culture-led urban development programmes and policies. Together with them, we have very recently applied for a Creative Europe project.

From Different Histories to Promoting Common Future

Our program accentuates the common aspects of European culture, often looking at the future of Europe but also at the shared historical aspects. We explore the foundational trauma of WWII; in the region, remembrance of the Holocaust is of special importance, with the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp located in the Euroregion Beskids. This is reflected in our flagship project *Vrba-Wetzler Route* on which we are partnering with the Museum and Memorial Auschwitz-Birkenau. Another historical wound of this part of Europe is the history of revolutions and political struggles for independent nation states, a historical feature shared by many European countries. Therefore, we created a publishing project *A Report to the Nation*, a series of five to ten fiction books which will bring critical accounts of nation building processes, uncovering the use of symbols, rituals, objects, and beliefs that condensed into our national identities in different parts of Europe. We take a closer look at the industrial heritage, especially related to textile, and traces of the industrial revolution in the region and Europe with projects like the *Industrial Heritage Expo*.

Furthermore, we consider it important to place the region’s strong tradition of crafts and intangible cultural heritage (with several items listed as world heritage by UNESCO) into dialogue with other European traditions in our *European Traditional Craft School* or the *Week of Beskid Cultures*. We will reflect on shepherds’ history and traditions in our Shepherd Cultures and organise Musical Encounters, a fusion of folk musical traditions from different parts of Europe. We would like to deal with European culture from the perspective of citizens, looking at their everyday habits, culture, and memories, focusing not on the differences but rather on the prevailing common aspects that make us all Europeans, like in the project *European Family Photo Album* (see Outreach). We will also look at the ancient history of the region that connects us all, and organise an international archaeological conference on the *Fortified Centers of Power of Lutisian Culture* in Europe.

Democracy and Freedom of Expression

Another set of our projects seeks to highlight the urgent issues of contemporary Europe, with the intention to take part in the existing discourse and involve the locals in the debate. Here, we outline key projects that explore the topics of democracy and building trust in societies; the rise of nationalism and populism across Europe and the related topic of freedom of the media; hybrid threats and the spreading of fake news. Following the established format of Democracy Festivals from the Nordic and Baltic regions, we are planning the *Polis – Democracy Culture Festival* in cooperation with the foundation Forum 2000 (CZ), an event with first-rate speakers, and envisioned as a celebration of civic engagement as one of the cornerstones of free and democratic society. In addition, in *HEY! Europe – European Theatre Incubator*, we will have projects like *Shared Cities* by Árpád Schilling (HU), dealing with the topic of human rights, or *Radicalisation* by Bob Jelčić (HR). In the *Capital of Freedom of Expression*, we want Žilina Beskids 2026 to become a hub for debates about freedom of expression and the future of media, and to critically reflect the recent rise of fake news and attacks on media across Europe. We have partnered with Reporters Without Borders in order to establish our *Free Speech Hub*. Furthermore, in the *International Literature House Vrba Wetzler* we plan to start hosting our own journalist and writer/translator residencies. Žilina is also seeking to become a member of ICORN, a network of cities that offer refuge to persecuted writers, artists, and journalists.

Cultural Green Deal for Europe

In the light of the escalating climate emergency and the response provided by the European Green Deal policies, we want to contribute in our own way by putting forward several initiatives revolving around environmental issues. There are four protected landscape areas and two national parks in the Beskids, but the current intensity of logging inside the protected areas is unprecedented. With our new *Vychylovka Forest Museum*, we will provide a new immersive experience, focused on the relation between people and the forest. Our application also involves two water museums, one in the *Environmental Park Bôrik* in Žilina, the second in *Center Aqua*, as part of the new swimming pool building in Bielsko-Biała. Rapid environmental changes in the past decades have sparked a huge interest in ecological and environmental issues in the art scene. The

Environmental Artistic Centre FM will collect data, organise debates and develop a base for art and environment residency programmes in Frýdek-Místek, as well as present the outputs of these collaborations. In *the Fresh AiR – Art and Environment Residencies*, the Faculty of Natural Science (of the Ostrava University) will every year present an environmental problem that is currently being researched and together with EAC and through an open call, they will select one artist to collaborate with university scientists on an artwork intersecting with actual scientific research. Both the artistic and scientific outputs of the residence will be presented in the city gallery and on the university website.

Re:building Urban and Rural Europe

The EU responded to the environmental emergency also by means of its New European Bauhaus initiative which plans to turn Europe into a green industry leader and focuses on building more engaged and sustainable cities. In our bid, we are joining in and in projects like *PASA:Ž, Urban Lab* or *Discussing the City* will provide platforms for citizens to engage and jointly address the topics of how to improve local democracy and the public space. In project *City Acupuncture*, we will involve local citizens of Žilina in co-designing public spaces, inviting European architects to inspire the change, with an exhibition or temporary structures to test out ideas and intended functions. With the *Rainy Days* project in Frýdek-Místek, we will explore different alternatives on how to adapt cities to climate change and with *Community courtyards* in Žilina, we will refurbish courtyards of housing estates and build eight new artistic fountains. Resilience of the built environment is a question not only for cities, the rural areas with their mass depopulation are in the forefront of this discussion. The objective of the *Borderless Territory* project is to bring attention to the problems of contemporary countryside. Through workshops, lectures, and research, we will explore topics like building and planning regulation in rural and protected areas in different European countries. Exodus from the countryside to the cities has been going on in the Beskids region for centuries. We will reflect on the current trends in *the Last in the Village* festival which will take place in remote settlements of the Beskids region, highlighting topics of depopulation and leaving behind one’s birthplace.

Creative and Competitive Europe

We believe it crucial to support the rise of creative industries, and join the effort in projects like the *Cross-Border FabLab and Creative Development Centre* or the *Audiovisual HUB*. The pandemic boosted public interest in science, in *STE(A)M² Biennial* and *STE(A)M² NextGen LAB*, we will introduce new platforms for communication of how science works, the essence of the scientific method and how it could be reflected and applied in art production. Digital skills will increasingly become the bedrock of both the creative sector and knowledge economy. In order to increase the innovative potential and to ease the adoption of new technologies in cultural organisations, we will run a capacity-building programme focusing on strengthening the digital, entrepreneurial and design skills in the *Open Design LAB*. In addition, we will organize expert training and conferences to increase the international transfer of expert knowledge, like the *CEE Animation Workshops*, the *ETN Conference* or the *EMAP network*.

3. 1. 4 Name some European and international artists, operators and cities with which cooperation is envisaged and specify the type of exchanges in question.



● **ARTISTIC COLLABORATIONS:** <rotor> (AT), Agata Schindler (DE), Agnieszka Holland (PL), Anna Smolar (PL), Anna Trzebiatowska (US/PL), Architects Lafayette Cruise (US), ASA-FF e.V. (DE), Beata Calinska (US/PL), Cartooning for Peace (FR), Cinema Culture Support Foundation Cyrk Edison (PL), David Ondříček (CZ), Dina Goldstein (IL/CA), Dorota Masłowska (PL), Ernesto Bazan (IT/US), Filip Nuckolls (CZ), German-Sorbian folk theatre (DE), Gianina Carbu-nariu (RO), Ivan Acher (CZ), J-P. Moulères (FR), Jan Budai (CZ), Jan Hřebejk (CZ), Jan Komasa (PL), Jaroslav Rudiš (CZ/DE), Julia Fullerton-Batten (DE), Katarina Živanović (RS), Katarzyna Dudzić-Grabińska (PL), Kateřina Tučková (CZ), Kinobus.pl (PL), Klára Jakubová (CZ), Kryštof Hádek (CZ), Krzysztof Zanusi (PL), LAMPA Conversation Festival (LV), Madeleine Vadkerti (US), Marold Langer-Philippson (DE), Michał Żebrowski (PL), Natália Deáková (CZ), Olga Tokarczuk (PL), Paisley Smith (CAN/US), Pertej Barrierave (AL), Petr Forman (CZ), Plastique-Fantastique (DE), Ruthie Doyle (US), TBA21-Academy, Thyssen – Bornemisza Art Contemporary Privatstiftung (AT), Terst Theatre (IT), Tirana European Youth Capital 2022 (AL), Tomáš Ziška (CZ), Újvideki Színház

(RS), Vnlab (PL), Wochenklausur (AT), XR Arts Groups (USA), Claudia Martinho (PT), João Martinho Moura (PT), AKAMUS – Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (DE), Bartnicky (PL), Bruit du Frigo (FR), Bruno Sanfilipo (ES), By Fofra (DK), Carlos Mena (ES), City Upgrade (CZ), Collegium 1704 o.p.s. (CZ), David Přílučík (CZ), Europa Galante and Fabio Biondi (IT), Filippo Mineccia (IT), Gabriele Mirabassi (IT), Hellowood Architects (HU), Huutajat (FI), Ici-Même Grenoble (FR), Iltopie (FR), Isabelle Faust (DE), Janoska Ensemble (SK/AT), Jaroslawa Koziara (PL), Jena Philharmonic (DE), Latająca Ryba Foundation (PL), Le Citron Jaune (FR), Magdalena Kožená (CZ), Marek Keprt (CZ), Marie Ladrová (CZ), Marjo Smolander (FI), Michal Rataj (CZ), Moetvi caravan (IS/NO/CZ), Monika Kucia (PL), MTŮ Collegium Musicale (EE), Museum of Architecture in Wrocław (PL), Mycohood (PL), Mycologos (USA), New Culture Foundation (BG), Paweł Tomaszewski (PL), Platon Issaias (GR), Re→set (CZ), Richard Loskot (CZ), Simone Zanchini (IT), Sisters hope (DK), StroMY (CZ), Švandovo divadlo (CZ), Tadej Droljic (SI), Terra Nova Antwerpen VZW (BE), Terra Nova Collective (BE), Rotor (BE), Theatre Węgajty (PL), Thomas Grill

(AT), Vespres d’Arnadi (ES), Wojciech Myrczek (PL), Ziggurat Project (HU), ALMA (DE), Anna Dumitriu (UK), Anna Saavedra (CZ), Árpád Schilling (HU), Bellastock Paris (FR), Bob Jelčić (HR), Carros de Foc (ES), Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko (PL), Ceren Oran (TR/DE), Chiara Lorenzetti (IT), Cirque Inextremist (FR), Dalia Khalife Beirut (LB/NL), David Crowley (IR), Duda Paiva Company Amersfoort (BR/NL), Dusts Institute (AT), Emmanuelle Chiap-pone-Piriou (FR), Eva Lenz-Collier (DE), Farm in the Cave (CZ), Fosseklaiva Kultursenter Berger (NO), Gabriel Paiuk (NL), Giulia Tomasello (IT), Humade (NL), INDEX – Biennial of Art and Technology (PT), Iva Klestilová (CZ), Ivan Henriques studio (BR/NL), Jan Kramholz (CZ), Karim Tarakji (CZ), Katarzyna Cytlak (PL), Kati Hyypä (FI), Klara Ravat (SP/DE), Kunio Nakamura (JP), Lithuanian Space Agency (LT), Lottozero (IT), mammasONica (IT/GR), Manuel Ronda (IT), Maria Vera Alvarez (ES), MECANIKA Montpellier (PT/FR), Merlin Puppet Theatre (GR/DE), Naoko Fukumaru (JP), Nicolai Bosko (LB/ES), Niklas Roy (DE), Nonument group (SI), Pavel Mrkus (CZ), Petr Zelenka (CZ), Polina Khatenko (BY), Raphael Vanhomwegen (BE), Recirquel (HU), Refunc (NL), Sew Flunk Fury Wit (DK), SOURCE Kolektyw (PL), Studio NO Wrocław (PL), Textiles Zentrum Haslach Haslach an der Mühl (AT), The Blast Theory (UK), The Narrative Collective (LB/NL), The Smell Lab (DE), Theater Titanick (DE), Yiling Hung (NL), Yuk Bun Wan (CZ), Daniel Andrieu (FR), Dubulti Art Station (LT), TAAT (NL), Gert-Jan Stam (BE), Anna Smolar (PL), Bruit du Frigo (FR), Hotel du Nord (FR), Jan Edler (DE), Lotte van den Berg (NL), Mali Weil design collective (IT), Riitta Ikonen (FI), Tadej Droljic (SI), Louis Nebelsick (DE), Mu-seum der Westlausitz (DE), Collective De Onkruidenier (NL), Csilla Hódi (HU)

● **CURATORIAL COLLABORATIONS:** FORUM 2000 (CZ), Svět knih (CZ), Vlakfest (CZ), LAND – Land stewards AND artists network (NL), Berg Orchestra (CZ), Ljudmila Art and Science Laboratory (SI), Project Zavod ATOL (SI), PROLOG (PL), Sodja Zupanc Lotker (CZ), Studio Prototyp (CZ), Tomáš Popp (CZ), Moravian Gallery (CZ), BETA – Timișoara Architecture Biennial (RO), Die Bäckerei (AT), Dnipro CCC Construction Festival (UA), European Textile Network Haslach an der Mühl (AT), Krásna Práce (CZ), Lenore Jurkyová (CZ), Markéta Vinglerová (CZ), Mike Rijnierse Studio (NL), V2_Lab for Unstable Media (NL), WNOOZOW Karlín (CZ), WRO art center (PL), Neue Unentd_ckte Narrative (DE), Reporters Without Borders (FR)

● **KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGES:** Ebensee Memorial (AT), Freemuse (DK), Hungarian Translators’ House (HU), ICEJ Czech Republic (CZ), Institute of Reportage (PL), Mantova Literature Festival (IT), Media and Civil Society Development Centre Mediacentar (BH), Media Institute of Montenegro (MNE), Museum of Jewish Memory and the Holocaust in Ukraine (UA), National Film Archive in Prague (CZ), Novi Sad School of Journalism (RS), Opinion Festival Paide (EE), Peľne Zanurzenie Foundation (PL), Q Code Magazine (IT), Ragnar Axelsson (IS), International Democracy Festivals Association (DK), Ukrainian Institute of Holocaust Studies (UA), Vize 97 Foundation (CZ), Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Kosovo (KS), QRER (PT), Activate Performing Arts (UK), Architectural Association School of Architecture in London (UK), Baroque Opera Stars s.r.o. (CZ), ENVIC (CZ), European Ramblers’ Association (CZ), Hamed Khosravi (UK), Izolatsia – Platform for Cultural Initiatives (UA), Oerol Festival (NL), Aveiro TECH City (PT), CEE Animation Network (SI), International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (FR), Mad’in Europe (BE), Bubec (CZ), Critical concrete (PT), Cyrkl (CZ), Czech Chamber of Architects (CZ), EMAP/EMARE (DE), Institute for Contemporary Art (HR), Institute of International Sociology in Gorizia (IT), Mad’in Europe (BE), Medialab Katowice (PL), Město přátelské k dětem (CZ), Olomouc Museum of Art (CZ), PLACCC (HU), Privește Orașul Timisoara (RO), TICCIH – The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (FR), Trans Europe Halles (EU), Center for Cultural Evaluation (DK), Culture Next Network (RO), On the Move – Cultural Mobility Information Network (FR), ONE – an Orchestra Network for Europe (DE), Cal-XL Community Art Lab (NL), AITA/ IATA (BE), FairBnB (IT), Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums (AT), Hidden Pilsen (CZ), Ústav archeologické památkové péče Brno (CZ), Materahub (IT), Time Machine Network (AT)

● **INTERDISCIPLINARY COOPERATION:** Polish Hiking Association (PL), University of Applied Arts, Vienna (AT), Associació Ateneu D’Historia i Art (ES), HKU MA Programme of Scenography Utrecht (NL), Humanities department of AGH TU (PL), Adam Mickiewicz University, The Faculty of Archaeology (PL), Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Institute of Archaeology (PL), Masaryk University (CZ), Mikołaj Kopernik University, Institute of Archaeology (PL), University of Wrocław (PL)

● **ECOCs COLLABORATION:** Aveiro 2027 (PT), Bad Ischl-Salzammergut 2024 (AT), Bodo 2024 (NO), Braga 2027 (PT), Brno 2028 (CZ), Broumov 2028 (CZ), Chemnitz 2025(DE), Faro 2027 (PT), Nova Goriza 2025 (SI), Novi Sad 2022 (RS), Oulu 2026 (FI), Pilsen 2015 (CZ), Tartu 2024 (EE), Matera 2019 (IT), Timișoara 2023 (RO)

3. 2 Can you explain in detail your strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public?

Our strategy for attracting European and international audiences is to a great extent linked to our cultural programme’s focal points and a variety of tourism development approaches: *cultural tourism* with large-scale cultural events and cultural content offered throughout the year, *creative tourism* which offers visitors an opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation, *nature tourism*, mixing the mar-velous landscape and outdoors activities that the region offers with culture, *memorial tourism*, clearly linked to the opening of the Vrba and Wetzler Route, *participatory tourism* with cultural content and hospitality offered directly by local inhabitants, and finally *niche tourism*, based on expert-oriented programmes for professional or connoisseur audiences.

Concerning *the attractiveness* of our programme for a broad European and international public, we can count on a diverse se-lection of large-scale events in both natural and urban settings. The expected highlights of the programme will be the opening and closing ceremonies with large outdoor shows in the cities. The programme cluster *Public Subject* will bring art closer to the general public by activating the public space through large-scale sculptures like *Akustikon*, which we believe will become the icon of our ECoC, performances like the *Giant Puppets Parade* or temporary interventions like the *Embassy of Argillia*, made of large plastic inflatable bubbles touring the region. The festival *Echoes of the Town* or city games like *Blast Theory* will trans-form the city into a playful stage and offer visitors a novel form of interaction with the urban environment.

The *Flow Festival* will be a celebration of our relationship with water, using music, light installations and extensive performanc-es on the water. The *Summit of Culture* will let the international audience experience music in combination with majestic scen-eries, like the *Nosferatu* philharmonic concert combined with projection of the namesake film, at its original filming location, the Orava Castle.

The modern cultural infrastructure built as part of the ECoC (five museums / one gallery / one theatre) will offer year-round attrac-tive cultural programmes, with attractive permanent and tempo-rary exhibitions like, for instance, *Inside Slovak Modernism*. The annual programme will be split in seasons, each of them marked by existing or new festivals like the *Sustainable Design Week*, *the STE(A)M Biennial*, *the Žilina žije festival*, *Tanečno*, *Kiosk*, *the Lotos Jazz Festival*, *the Odpoutaná scéna festival*, and *Kino na hranici*, which will turn the region into one large festival venue.

In the field of creative tourism, we will develop active, creative and experiential offers for our visitors. As part of the *Re:Design Craft* programme cluster, we will make the unique local tradi-tion of crafts accessible to European visitors in the newly es-tablished *European Craft School*. Visitors will be able to learn about unique craft techniques related to wire craft, enamel, lace or the modrotlač printing technique, but there will also be an opportunity to learn techniques from other parts of Europe, or even the Japanese technique *kintsugi*. In *Wandering Books*, a mobile book factory, visitors will be able to learn bookbinding and illustrating skills, given the strong tradition of bookmaking in the region. There will also be an opportunity to try traditional and new textile techniques in the *Textile HUB* or to make one’s own hat in the *Nový Jičín Museum*. In addition, we will run cu-linary workshops as part of the *European Meeting of Culinary Arts*. In the field of traditional culture and folklore, which is al-ready an attraction of the region with offers like the *Week of Beskid Cultures* or the *Jánošík Days in Techová*, we will offer a

series of *European Dance Houses*, in order to offer the visitors an opportunity to learn traditional dances, both local and from different parts of Europe. One of the Beskids' most attractive assets is the captivating natural landscape and we will fully make use of the opportunities it provides for intertwining with arts and culture. Moreover, in the context of the current pandemic, we need to adapt to the international tourism market's growing preferences by offering space for more deconcentrated and outdoor events. We would also like to build on the existing winter sports offer and summer nature tourism already developed in the region, by combining it with the urban cultural offerings and evening programmes. The *deconcentrated programmes* will be offered through plenty of site-specific installations or events happening directly in nature, via fusion of outdoor activities with unexpected artistic journeys, creating cultural experiences for smaller groups or even individual contemplation of art in nature. There are several particular projects in our second programme pillar designed specifically with these principles in mind, such as the *SCAPE Festival*, or projects within programme clusters like *Escape* and the *Summit of Culture*. One of our major offerings in this field is the *Art Trails Beskids*, a series of trails with specific contents which will allow visitors to discover the complexity of our territory, providing specific points of view on the region, packed into stories and including concrete hospitality offers. Some of these trails are linked to concrete artworks in nature, raising environmental awareness of visitors or presenting traditional culture. On top of this, we are committed to promote the offer of participatory tourism. In the *Beskids Participatory Hospitality Programme*, we use the Council of Europe's Faro convention model of Heritage Communities. The project incentivizes locals to interpret their heritage, prepare guided tours in their neighbourhoods, and design experiential offers for visitors. We have also teamed up with the FairBnB cooperative platform which represents a new model of circular economy and sustainable tourism. The added value for the visitor is the access to authentic cultural programmes and intercultural experiences offered directly by local communities. With our flagship project *Vrba-Wetzler Route*, we will offer a strong feature of memorial tourism, in a region which includes the city of Oświęcim and the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Part of our programme will be devoted to developing new ideas and cutting-edge projects in niche areas that can attract expert and connoisseur audiences to the region. Our programme has a strong focus on architecture and the public space, which is reflected in numerous exhibitions like *Prospective Cities*, research projects on public art like the *Nonument symposium*, or rural architecture like *Borderless Territory* and the *Leisure Time* exhibition. Built upon the strong literary and bookmaking tradition of the region, we will have a complex offer for book lovers in the form of the *Book Art Triennial*, the *Symposium of Illustration* and the *Žilina Literature Festival*. Visitors passionate about new media, art, and science or experimental art forms will be given the opportunity to attend the *STE(A)M² Biennial*, a new festival devoted to gaming, *IGDAF – Independent Games and Digital Art Festival*, or to see the best of *90s Intermedia and Video Art in Central and Eastern Europe* in the Museum of Art in Žilina. There is already a strong classical music tradition in the Beskids, with international visitors travelling to the region for first-rate concerts, like those at the *International Leoš Janáček Music Festival* or the *St. Wenceslas Music Festival*; the *Slovak Sinfonietta concerts* in Žilina, or at the newly built *gigantic Cavatina Hall*

in Bielsko-Biała. We want to build on this with our programme *Music Trips across Borders*. There will also be a strong focus on animation, with two festivals held in the region, the by now staple *Fest Anča* in Žilina and the new *International Festival of Animation* in Bielsko-Biała. In the unique project *Vlak Fest*, the journey itself is already a part of the cultural experience of the ECoC and moreover puts an emphasis on green and sustainable mobility. Apart from regional lines and TransEuropeExpress trains, we and our partners will work on plans for special tourist trains from several European destinations to bring visitors to the region. From the perspective of tourism development, in cooperation with the Euroregion Beskids as well as the regional tourism organisation, we have been engaged in developing the *cross-border Beskids tourism brand*, embracing touristic areas in all three countries involved. In September 2021, we established the *Marketing Alliance Beskids 2026*, where sixteen tourism and regional development organizations, each working independently on tourism development in their location, joined forces to develop a shared cross-border destination of European importance: *the Beskids*. Thanks to this strategy, we will gain access to the tourism markets of all three countries and be present at European travel and tourism fairs to promote the destination under the common brand. We aim at offering complex thematic tourism packages for several-day stays in all three countries. We will focus on improving the access to selected tourist information from the region in one place, on a separate subdomain of the project website: *Window to Beskids*. An interactive calendar of events, attractive online programme, and an easily accessible online booking system will be directly available on the website. Improved destination marketing and visitor experiences are key elements of visitor satisfaction, which in the end increase the destination's attractiveness. We believe that a reconstructed main railway station and refurbished gateway to the city, with reconstruction of the central Hlinka square, and an ECoC welcome HUB and Tourism Information Center will also help us reach this objective. To conclude, we believe that the combination of a broad variety of cultural events, breathtaking natural scenery of our region together with experiential exposure to arts, crafts, and heritage will make for an unconventional adventure, waiting to be discovered by European travellers of all ages.

3. 3 Describe the links developed or to be developed between your cultural programme and the cultural programme of other cities holding the European Capital of Culture title.

Collaborations with previous and future ECoCs as well as the current candidate cities are sources of invaluable inspiration and advancement for the Žilina Beskids 2026 project. This exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices has significantly influenced our bid preparation and has been gradually contributing towards numerous international cooperations. In addition, we became part of The Culture Next Network, a platform for current and former European Capital of Culture candidate cities to implement culture-led urban development programmes and policies.

Current ECoCs

With *Oulu 2026*, though more than 2,000 km apart, we are connected by the European route E75, which forms the base of our common project A Highway to Art. We plan to send a bus full of artists on a journey through cities and undiscovered spots

of the E75, producing site-specific artworks and online reports on the way. We also agreed with Huutajat (FI), a well known Screaming Men's Choir from Oulu to participate in our project Voices of the Forest. With *Nova Gorica-Gorizia 2025*, there are two distinct projects agreed on so far: partnership between the March for Beskids and their project March for Europe which challenges the notion of borders and focuses on divided cities and regions. Further, with the organisations Ljudmila Art and Science Laboratory (SI) and Project Zavod Atol (SI) running Isolabs, we agreed on a collaboration on our Hack-the-Nature Camp. With the Institute of International Sociology in Gorizia (IT), we will develop capacity-building activities in cross-border collaborations and trainings in our Creative Bureaucracy programme. With *Chemnitz 2025*, we have agreed on becoming a part of their AiR programme Dialogue Fields where artistic interventions in the urban space are at the forefront. Another essential cooperation is with Neue Unentd_ckte Narrative with whom we agreed on the project Undiscovered Narratives, tackling questions of hidden nationalist narratives in context-specific artworks. Another cooperation with Neue Unentd_ckte Narrative is the Media War, an Erasmus+ cultural and educational project, planned for the next three years, which also involves Chemnitz 2025 and Novi Sad 2021. With *Novi Sad 2021*, we will also establish cooperation between our Cultural Houses network and their network of the so-called Cultural Stations, also concerning transfer of experience on establishing heritage communities. With *Tartu 2024* and their Curated Biodiversity, we agreed on collaboration with our Environmental Centre Bôrik, culminating in workshops on urban ecology, architecture, design, and gardening. Concerning the development of mutual links with other upcoming ECoCs, we have been in touch with several of them. Together with *Bodø 2024* and the Oerol festival, which was a part of the *Leeuwarden 2018* programme, we joined the LAND artist network this year with our -Scape festival. We have involved *Bad Ischl-Salzammergut 2024* in our project A Tiny Teardrop, mapping the lives and works of Jewish musicians deported to WWII concentration camps, which should culminate in 2024 with a concert and film projection in the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Ebensee concentration camp memorials. The sound artist Thomas Grill (AT) from Bad Ischl will also symbolically bring the buried stream Vřivák back to the surface in a sound memory and visual installation project. With *Veszprém 2023*, we are in talks about an exchange of immersive exhibitions and experience between their CODE museum and our Immersive Museum Bôrik. With BETA – Timișoara Architecture Biennial Timișoara (RO) from *Timișoara 2023*, we will investigate the utopic and perspective architecture of the 1960s and 1970s, with particular focus on the architectural collectives of VAL from Žilina and the Sigma Group from Timișoara.

Past ECoCs

We have also been nurturing our connections with organisations from past ECoCs, for instance with *Košice 2013* (Biela Noc, SPOTs), *Plzeň 2015* (Hidden Plzeň, the Wallz festival, Building the Town by Sutnar), and *Marseille-Provence 2013* (Citron Jaune, Hotel du Nord). With the latter two cities, we plan to cooperate on our European Family Photo Album project, creating a joint collection of family photos intended to bring attention to the common points in our personal histories across various European countries. With *Plzeň 2015* we are collaborating on three levels, an exchange with the Hidden Plzeň organisation on European Family Photo Album project, collaboration in the

field of graffiti art with exchange of artists between the Wallz and Rural Murals festivals, and we will coproduce the interactive children's exhibition Building the Town by Sutnar that we plan to present in our Interactive Children's Museum. We are collaborating with the WRO Art Centre from the *Wrocław 2016* programme on our art and science events of the STE(A)M² Biennial, and are teaming up with them within the EMAP European network. We collaborated on setting up Constellation – our monitoring and evaluation platform with the Centre for Cultural Evaluation responsible for rethinkIMPACTS, the evaluation platform for *Aarhus 2017*. We will collaborate on our Open Design LAB with the MateraHub, a legacy organisation of *Matera 2019*, by joining the Deus project and the TraCEs – Cultour Is Capital project, dedicated to development of sustainable tourism by involvement of creative industries operators. We will collaborate with the curator of the *Rijeka 2020's* exhibition 90s Scars, on our exhibition 90s Intermedia and Video Art in Central and Eastern Europe.

Candidate Cities

Moreover, we have also established initial contact with other forthcoming candidate cities. With *Aveiro 2027*, we found a strong match in the art and tech domain and we agreed on collaboration between their Aveiro Tech City and our STE(A)M² Biennial. With *Faro 2027* and the Portuguese QER organisation, we plan a joint research project on Culinary Archeology. With *Braga 2027*, we will collaborate on a joint AiR programme for artists working on the intersection of Art and Science, between the STE(A)M² Residency Programme and the INDEX Biennial of Art and Technology (PT). Together with João Martinho Moura (PT), we will collaborate on co-production of an exhibition in our Immersive Museum Bôrik, while with Claudia Martinho (PT), we will look at a new media and sound art piece for our Forest Museum Vychylovka. With *Jurmala 2027* and the organisation Dubulti Art Station, we agreed on a contemporary art exhibition Bon Voyage in their cultural center located in a train station in the Dubulti neighbourhood and in parallel in the main railway station in Žilina. Cooperation with *Clermont-Ferrand 2028* involves potential exchanges of exhibitions with Musée Bargoin du Tapis et des arts Textiles on the Festival International des Textiles Extraordinaires within the framework of our Textile Season. In the *Rouen-Normandie 2028* context, we set up cooperation with Daniel Andrieu, ex-director of Atelier 231, to provide consulting related to the reconstruction of HANGAR. In collaboration with *Brumov 2028*, the Time Machine Organisation and the Museum of the Považie Region will establish a European Textile Time Machine, a collective digital information system mapping the European Textile industry and its economic, social, cultural and geographical evolution in time. With *Brno 2028*, we have several collaborations planned. The first of these involves one of our key partners, Vlak Fest, with whom we will launch cultural trains across Europe and in the region. The other one is the Jurkovič retrospective exhibition Leisure Time on which we work together with the Moravian Gallery. Cyrkl is a unique platform for the circular economy and one of the largest digital waste marketplaces in Europe with whom we plan to exchange good practices for our CC: Circular Culture cluster and create our online platform for material management. We will organise an exchange of experience with BAM – the Brno architectural manual, in order to create our own in Žilina, and a joint exhibition presenting in parallel architectural concepts of the housing estates Svojdovov in Žilina and Nový dům in Brno.

4.OUTREACH

4. 1 Explain in detail how the local population and your civil society have been involved in the preparation of the application and will participate in the implementation of the Year.

Pandemic reversed our social practices deeply, we can observe significant reduction of social contacts, with free-time and vol-unteering activities taking the brunt of the impact. Therefore, we have been particularly focused on strengthening outreach already through the bidding process. Culture is a natural means of bringing people together, which gives it the role of one of the foremost binders of civil societies, and therefore a prima-ry domain worth putting effort into, to rebuild a new culture of participation across the sectors – public, non-governmental, as well as private.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN 2020

Our bid for ECoC started for the local public on 18 February 2020, when the candidacy was presented at the Žilina City Council and in the media. After launching our online presence on the web and on social media, we engaged in a number of further outreach activities.

The *Urban Interventions platform* gathered ideas and proposals from the public on how concrete spots in the local public space could be improved and host cultural or community events. An *online questionnaire* was launched to understand the citizens' cultural needs. Another landmark participatory tool was our *Accelerator 20<26* programme which pooled projects from the public, selected the most promising ones and provided an in-tensive six-week mentoring and project-building support to the participants. A number of those projects were later included in the bid book, as were the projects submitted to our *Open Call 20<26*. We also held *twelve working thematic groups* on spe-cific areas such as social inclusion of the elderly and families with children into the cultural space, to map the needs of spe-cific social groups. Finally, in September 2020, we held our first *City Conference* with participants from the whole cross-bor-der Beskids region where we presented the strategy and pro-gramme of the bid. Throughout the year, we held numerous *public presentations* and hundreds of *bilateral meetings* with local NGOs, activists, citizens, and politicians.



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN 2021

The most important participatory tool we used in 2021, was the pilot, multi-stage *community mapping* process that involved almost 7,000 inhabitants in five peripheral districts of Žilina. We conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with community leaders and activists, collected quantitative data through questionnaires delivered to every household, and through facilitated community workshops brainstormed and planned future solutions for the communities. The aim of the whole process was to better understand the current state of affairs and cultural needs of the inhabitants of these districts, to map the strengths and challenges of the community, as well as potential activities within ECoC 2026. We will continue the community mapping process in the rest of the fourteen peripheral city districts in 2022–2023. We also focused on *involvement of schools*, and about 5,500 pupils from the fourteen primary schools in Žilina used their creative potential to express their views and ideas on how Žilina and its cultural life could look like in 2026. As a result we have a three-hundred-meter long rope made of 2,000 flags – each flag contributed by a child with a wish for 2026. Other children, not only in Žilina, but also in Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek have painted the Beskids in 2026 through open windows. The selection of best drawings will be exhibited in Žilina at the end of the year, while teenagers are involved through social media activities. We also built on the *Urban Interventions programme* initiated in 2020. In July 2021, we inaugurated an interactive outdoor exhibition of the thirty-two selected proposals for intervention with a presentation from the authors. Some proposals are already in the realisation phase and some are included in our bid book. We also held our planned *Accelerator Beskids 20<26* programme, an accelerator of ideas and cross-border networking activities. The accelerator connected the most promising projects across the Czech, Polish and Slovak side of the Beskids over two intensive project-building weekends in May and June, with training, mentoring, and on-site visits of potential local cultural partners. The result of those efforts were about ten cross-border, interdisciplinary project proposals, which are to-day part of our core programme. At the end of September, we hosted an Erasmus+ study trip for youth and social workers from Europe *“Being Inclusive is IN”*. The main aim of the trip was to understand how to better include young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, in dialogue and decision-making. This included mapping organisations and initiatives in the social and youth sectors, especially those working with young people with fewer opportunities, such as could join our activities. *Small Talks* is a format of short presentations for different communities and organised groups about the Žilina Beskids 2026 candidacy, followed by a debate about citizens' cultural needs. There were a few Small Talks organised in 2021, for instance with the youth group Youth Office, with participants of the Kiosk theatre festival, people with disabilities catered to by the Foundation Krajina Harmónia, and Žilina's expatriate community. Throughout 2021, we continued building our *Momentum volunteer platform*, especially during the community mapping process where they helped us involve active members of the communities, as well as representatives of churches, schools, and local service providers. Moving on towards the final decision, we engaged further volunteers as ambassadors of the bid to help communicate the ECoC programme to the public. We finalised our programme-building activities and participation efforts at the *Beskids Cultural Forum* in September, where about hundred visitors from the region came together and engaged

in final talks about programme and strategy for Žilina Beskids 2026. It was also the first public presentation of the final structure of our bid. The intense one-day programme included a round table about new models for the region's Cultural Houses.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN 2022–2026

In Žilina, the main driver of our citizen participation processes will be the network of newly revived cultural Houses in all peripheral districts of the city. The strategy counts on a cross-border participation of these networks from Žilina, Bielsko-Biala, and Frýdek-Místek. A number of further participatory tools involve citizens in ECoC decision-making, hospitality, volunteering and coverage of the ECoC processes.

Cultural Houses Network

Our main platforms for citizen participation, community cultural activities and non-formal education will be the network of newly revived Cultural Houses around Žilina, in connection with the already established ones in Bielsko-Biala. The network of Cultural Houses should be grouped under the city's future main cultural centre housed in the Rosenfeld Palace, planned to merge its current activities (exhibitions, art education, puppet museum, bookbinding workshop), with those of the City Library (peripheral library branches usually located in the Cultural Houses). In Bielsko-Biala, a similar network is already well developed, thus the Rosenfeld Palace will also facilitate exchange of know-how with our Polish partners. Seven Cultural House buildings are included in the Žilina Beskids 2026 investment projects in order to adapt them to their future function, and to turn them into community art platforms of the 21st century.

In our community mapping process, we found out that the main functions of the Cultural Houses and community centres that locals seek are similar across all the mapped city districts:

- A community “living room” – i.e. an informal space where locals can meet, across different groups (youth, families with children, seniors)
- A multifunctional cultural space – i.e. a platform for concerts, drama performances, exhibitions...
- A platform for community and family events such as traditional seasonal community celebrations like carnivals, Christmas, but also with possibility to organise private weddings, graduations, baptisms...
- A non-formal education platform – i.e. a space for workshops, lectures focused e.g. on non-formal cultural education, IT skills, maker and craft skills, volunteering...

The Cultural Houses will be partially autonomous, i.e. local citizens will be able to reserve and use the space for their planned activities, it will be open and serve for the benefit of the community. Other purely private activities will have access to a renting system. We will employ several community workers and cultural mediators who will help the locals and community leaders in formulating their community development strategy and organising their activities, but will not be present permanently on site. The central Rosenfeld Palace will support the network by providing cultural content, artists to work in the community, and consultancy. The city is planning to reform its grant system so that it supports non-formal local networks in development of their community activities.

We plan to organise the following activities in the Cultural Houses:

- Regular *community-planning* – they should host regular city consultations and participatory planning activities, concerning development of their neighborhood and community or cultural activities to be organised.
- Create spaces for *artistic residencies* – we identified that artists can be a key element in community building, uncovering local narratives and helping to drive dialogue in the community. We will therefore provide space for a number of artistic residencies in the Cultural Houses for artists. They will be provided with space for their independent work, with a commitment to organise regular activities that involve the locals, and engage in an exploration of local identities and community issues.
- Several Cultural Houses will have *mini-Maker Spaces*, to boost the DIY and creative activities of the citizens.
- Cultural Houses will also function as *platforms for non-formal education, organising lectures, workshops, and volunteering activities* within our *Momentum volunteer programme*.
- We also identified a need to inspire and support artists to create for and with the communities, therefore we will establish the *Community Art Lab*, for capacity-building activities helping local creative communities to meet their needs, in cooperation with our Dutch partners Cal-XL.
- The Cultural Houses will also provide space for *grass-roots youth initiatives* in cooperation with the Žilina Youth Office platform.

The network of Cultural Houses will also host or collaborate on cultural and outreach activities of Žilina Beskids 2026 that are listed below, e.g. Community Courtyards, Neighbours' Day, the European Family Photo Album, and the Community Museum.

- **Partners:** Rosenfeld Palace (SK), City Library (SK), Miejski dom kultury (PL), SPOTs (SK), European Network of Cultural Centres (EU), Cal-XL (NL)

Community Courtyards

Investments in community infrastructures and greenery were often suspended in the 1990s and ceased to be a priority for the past thirty years. Therefore, in order to increase the overall quality of community and cultural life but also sustainability of suburban communities, and to decrease the impact of climate change in the city, we decided to focus on transformation of several courtyards in between blocks of flats. The project involves revitalisation of a dozen suburban inner courtyards. It will produce new cultural and community functions (small stages, kiosks, benches), but also introduce new green infrastructure (mobile greenery, composters, community gardens) or water elements, but also present an opportunity for community art projects and art mediation by means of debates on the planned public art interventions.

The aim of the project is to raise local citizens' awareness about their community's public space and to mobilize them in its transformation. Artists operating in a given space will cooperate with the residents so that the developed solutions are a joint, mutually negotiated work. This project offers a unique opportunity for meeting and cooperation of the audience directly with the artists, and also functions as a source of non-formal artistic education. The co-development of public artworks directly in the community will require support of cultural mediators. Artistic activities are to change the faces of courtyards located far from the city centre and bring cultural life to these urban areas. The artists' interventions should make

the inhabitants aware of the direct power they have over their immediate surroundings.

Fountains for Zuzanas is a sub-project of Community Courtyards that will focus on bringing fountains back to the suburbs. What once used to be fountains have since many years ago turned into dirty stretches of concrete in between blocks of flats. In this project, we will involve inhabitants in a dialogue with cultural mediators, resulting in an artistic competition that will produce eight artistic fountains to be realised in the courtyards in Žilina's housing estates in Žilina. Another aspect of our work in the communities is represented by *Community Gardens* and green community spaces that we intend to support. In general, involvement of communities in transformation of the public space will be supported through the *Urban Intervention* open call and education programme.

As a concrete example of artistic activity to be organised around these courtyards, we chose to involve the Danish performative group Sisters Hope (DK) who will visit and work in one of the housing estates. They will establish contact with the local inhabitants, and with their sensory city methodology they will together create an immersive performance titled *Sensitive Neighbourhoods*.

- **Organizer:** City of Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** Chief City Planner's Department Žilina (SK), SEVAK (SK)

Momentum Volunteer Platform

Volunteer programme is a key element of outreach strategy of any European Capital of Culture project. It offers diverse types of people an opportunity to build a stronger bond with the ECoC, serves as a relay of information, its presence reinforces the feeling of pride and strongly contributes to audience development. Volunteers are the first to engage with the programme and inspire other citizens to participate. The Momentum volunteer platform will unite active citizens and members of communities with a wide range of skill sets from various age groups across the entire Beskids region.

Some of the activities in which the volunteers will participate are:

- Hospitality and guides – volunteers will act as liaison officers for delegates arriving in the city.
- Communication and orientation of the public – volunteers will be spokespeople for the ECoC in their communities; they will also help with crowd management during the events.
- Production support – technical support during production, taking part in activities that do not require specific expertise.
- Assistance for visitors with disabilities and special needs.

Those interested will be given an easy channel to sign up online, then their skills, availability, and interests will be matched with the corresponding volunteer opportunities offered by local organisations in the Beskids. A system of non-financial incentives and rewards will be in place, with benefits such as access to exclusive courses and training, merchandise from our sponsors, and free entry to the events.

A coalition of several existing volunteer platforms and youth organisations all over the region will be established to collaborate with our central platform, as relay in our large territory. We will also have a special section of the programme dedicated to corporate volunteering, i.e. engaging employees of our partner companies, in association with the Pontis Foundation, for the more expert-oriented parts of our programme.

- **Partners:** Pontis Foundation (SK), Fundacja Laja (PL), Petrklíč help (CZ), Volunteers Center – Theater Grodzki (PL), Žilina Self-Governing Region, Youth Department

Citizen Council

In order to empower citizens to engage in the ECoC, we will establish a Citizen Council within our formal management structure. In this way, citizens will be engaged in the programme’s decision-making process, management, or financial issues. Every six months, the Council’s ten members will meet with the ECoC team and will be given a report on the latest developments. The platform has two main functions: a) educational – the members will gain direct insight into what the ECoC is doing; and b) citizen monitoring. The Citizen Council will hold a seat on the board of the Žilina Beskids 2026 organisation and will have access to all high-level decisions. It will serve as a direct link between the ECoC management and the communities, providing the ECoC team with invaluable community feedback, and vice versa. Positions on the Citizen Council will be paid. To ensure a representative group, members will be selected randomly every year from the pool of citizens in our Momentum volunteer platform. In this way, we are making a clear public statement about our commitment to transparency.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no

Beskids Participatory Hospitality Programme

FairBnB is a fair tourism rental platform that reinvests its profits from vacation rentals in local communities. *Žilina Creative Community Fund* is inspired by the models of community foundations and participatory budgets abroad. We will raise funds from our FairBnB tourism platform, crowdfunding campaigns, 2% tax designations, and sponsors, and will match the funding for the selected community and cultural activities using sources from our main budget. The public, together with the Citizen Council, will decide which projects will be supported each year, based on submitted project proposals. Alongside our FairBnB, we will set up a *hospitality programme* and a *heritage communities programme*. Hosts will be able to sign up for the programme and offer a room for rent, mainly for delegates, artists, and participants arriving in the city to perform or join an event. These host families will be paid for their services, and a percentage of what the visitor pays will be reinvested in the community. The added value for the visitor is the intercultural experience and also access to the cultural programme offered by local communities. The project incentivizes local inhabitants to interpret their local heritage, prepare guided tours in their neighbourhoods, and design experiential offers for visitors. In 2021, we have entered into a partnership with the Olszówka community organisation in Bielsko-Biała to organise heritage tours in the famous Bielsko-Biała park of Cygański Las, formerly a popular weekend and holiday area for wealthy industrialists, artists, and writers from the region. We also intend to involve the contacts that we have gained during the community mapping process – the volunteers and local activists – in design and realisation of tours in all the peripheral districts of Žilina, presenting hidden local gems to visitors.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** Olszowka (PL), the future City Cultural Centre and network of Cultural Houses, FairBnB (IT), Les oiseaux de passage / Hotel du Nord (FR), Hidden Pilsen (CZ)

Citizen Cultural Journalism Platform

The project seeks to incentivize cultural journalism in the local media, as well as provide first-hand media experience to non-professional citizen-journalists. It is a tool to increase *media literacy*, support *critical thinking*, and to deepen citizens’ *understanding of the ECoC*. Media, as such, and their inter-section with the arts, is one of our main focuses in our overall programme as well. The online platform *Windows to Beskids* (as part of Windows to Europe) will be divided into several thematic blocks to record the ECoC throughout its duration in a variety of media (video, audio, text), in all three cities of the Beskids region. Citizen journalists will comprise, among others, young people and seniors from the Intergenerational University in Žilina, and youth from organisation RedakcjaBB in Bielsko-Biała. These will serve as expert mentors to further amateur journalists that will join the ranks. All journalists from the platform will have exclusive access to the ECoC events and all artists, policy-makers and event organisers involved. They will access training courses led by professionals and teachers from the Mediamatics Department of the University of Žilina, writers of the online cultural platform Swine Daily, as well as our international partners in the area of media, specifically those involved in the *Media Labyrinth* project.

- **Partners:** University of Žilina (SK), Bodø University (NO), Masaryk University in Brno (CZ), Fundacja Zróbmy to – Redakcja BB (PL), Swine Daily (SK), Fundacja Laja (PL)

Neighbours’ Day

During one weekend in May, local communities in the entire region will organize their own Neighbours’ Day – an event that will bring together people who live in the same area, but often do not really know each other. Neighbours’ Day is meant to be a celebration of local communities in the form of a picnic and presentation of what locals know, do and like (market, workshops, concerts, shows...). Žilina Beskids 2026 will promote the event, create a map and a system for neighbourhoods to apply, and provide a tool kit for the local organizer, with instructions and support for event organization, concerning issues like event graphics and posters, but also mobile programme, and funds from partners to support the festive gatherings. However, the events will be organised locally by the inhabitants’ own local networks.

- **Organizers:** Miejski Dom Kultury Bielsko-Biała (PL), Kultura FM (CZ), City of Žilina (SK)

4. 2 How will the title create in your city new and sustainable opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in cultural activities, in particular young people, volunteers and the marginalised and disadvantaged, including minorities?

Based on the results of the process of community mapping, we provided the city with recommendations for a sustainable increase in the rate of cultural participation in its outskirts. This resulted in a strategy for completely redefining the functioning of the city’s *network of Cultural Houses* and transformation of its *grant system* to support local community-based cultural activities. The Cultural Houses are to become the main forums for community and cultural life in these peripheral districts, and a lively platform for citizen participation. We have developed projects to facilitate cultural participation of marginalised people and those with less opportunities, like the

Roma community living in and around Bratislavská street in Žilina with our project *Art Caravan*. With the *Festival Upon the River*, focus has been put also on other minorities living in the Beskids region, like the language minorities in Orava and Silesia. With several projects we will also focus on supporting integration of the growing numbers of expatriates living in our cities, with several projects within our cluster *Windows of Diversity*, like activities with Žilina’s *Korean community* or presenting an outside point of view in the project *Žilina from Elsewhere*. Further below, we also present *Ambassadors of Diversity*, a project wherein high school students are designated as peer educators on issues of diversity in their communities. Several parts of the Beskids territorium can be seen as highly underprivileged due to their bad geographical accessibility, de-population, and aging. We have therefore created several projects targeting those areas, often travelling ones like *Wandering Books*, focused on work with identity of these communities, or *Mobile Documentary Theatre*, *Théaterapia*, and *Last in the Village*, while yet others bring cultural events to these remoted places through *Rural Murals*, *Musical Trips Across Borders*, *Kinobus* or the *Borderless Mobile VR cinema*. Concerning people with disabilities, there are several strong organisations working in the field, with whom we partner in the *Access ECoC* programme. The Žilina Self-Governing Region pledged to make all its cultural institutions fully wheelchair accessible by 2026. In line with this plan, Žilina Beskids 2026 will be an accessible ECoC, with free seats for assistants, equipment for all sorts of interpreted content, and accessible artworks, including proper training of the personnel and volunteers with regard to special needs people and people with disabilities. We will implement special projects for elderly inhabitants, using an intergenerational approach in the *Beskids Intergenerational University*, *European Family Photo Album* or the *Intergenerational Art Education Workshops*. In Bielsko-Biała, we will support the series of Oldies Neighbourhood parties, popular gatherings for seniors run by the City Cultural Centre. We will also adapt our marketing strategy by providing seniors with discounts and free admissions. Last but not least, a special programme to support participation of young people will be launched based on the initiative *Young Office Beskids*, and will offer space for self expression of youth. The aim is to empower young people to take an active role in their city’s cultural life, as well as to diversify its cultural offer based on their needs and views about the world. The Youth Stage at the Polis Democracy Festival will give young people a space to organise their own debates and their own cultural programme. Some other projects on youth mobility like *Locomotion*, or media literacy of young people like *Media Labyrinth* or the *Youth Nonfiction Award*, focus on improving critical thinking among the youth. The *Momentum volunteer platform* will involve volunteers of all ages and social status in different parts of the projects.

SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE

Art Caravan

Art Caravan is a community art project by the artists Daniela Krajčová and Oto Hudec that seeks to engage kids from the socially marginalised Bratislavská neighbourhood in Žilina, a predominantly Roma-populated central district, in creative interventions in the public space, and to enhance their creative skills. The project is conceived as both a community and an artistic project, and is building on previous work of the local community

centre. In the first phase, artists focus on building a deeper and lasting connection with the local community through regular meetings at summer art workshops. This takes place both at the existing community centre, and in the premises of a city-run leisure centre. The aim is to keep the participants rooted in the local community while also providing them with new opportunities outside their social bubble. In summer 2024, the community will start to work towards creating a new playground in the neighbourhood, working with elements of illustration, design, open-air architecture, and sculpture. In the course of 2024 and 2025, the new playground should be built. Once in place, the work will continue with further drama and animation workshops where the kids will be able to tell their stories in a number of media – video, audio, drama. In 2026, there will be a live open-air projection of the outputs of these workshops and live performances in the Bratislavská neighbourhood, at the location of the playground and its surroundings. The events will be aimed at both local audiences and people from other city districts in Žilina.

- **Organiser:** Oto Hudec (SK), Daniela Krajčová (SK),
- **Partners:** City of Žilina (SK), Community Centre Bratislavská (SK), Stanica (SK), Simona Gottierová (SK), Hana Lukšů (SK), Natália Veľká (SK), Júlia Vráblová (SK), Karin Andrášiková (SK)

Ambassadors of Diversity

Ambassadors of Diversity is a project co-organised with the Land of Harmony Foundation, a Žilina-based champion of greater inclusion of people with disabilities, and the City Cultural Centre in Bielsko-Biała. The ambassadors are high school students who act as spokespersons and peer educators in their classrooms on questions of diversity – social, educational, sexual, geographical, and cultural. They collect questions from their classmates and address them to partnering field organisations. The project’s aim is to raise awareness of the wealth concentrated in the diversity of our communities. The ambassadors will receive training in communication, critical thinking, and conducting interviews from the Land of Harmony Foundation, as well as in intercultural communication from our partner, the Pontis Foundation. They will then lead discussion groups at their schools and present the outcomes from the conversations between peers and field NGOs in their classes. The project will culminate in a series of documentary works using various media, in partnership with professional artists.

- **Organiser:** Land of Harmony Foundation (SK)
- **Partners:** Pontis Foundation (SK), Miejski dom kultury in Bielsko-Biała (PL), Bielsko-Biała libraries (PL), Institute of International Sociology in Gorizia (IT)

FOREIGNERS

In order to look at the richness of identities that we may be overlooking in our closest neighbourhood, we want to engage international citizens living in Žilina in regular conversations about what it is like to live in the city as foreigners in the project *Žilina from Elsewhere*. What misunderstandings have they encountered? How important is it to speak the language? Where are the limits of tolerance? What are the taboo topics for Slovaks and for foreigners? The discussions will start in 2025 and in 2026 they will culminate during the *EVS Reunion in Žilina*,

with both present and past expatriates living in Žilina, providing a platform for an exchange of views and experiences and helping to reflect both on the local identity and the state of the collective European identity.

Art Education for All

The City Cultural Centre in Bielsko-Biała will provide regular art classes as well as workshops, family meetings, and concerts to families with children, reaching, particularly, those with minority ethnic and national backgrounds (mostly Ukrainians, Spaniards, Roma, Italians) living in Bielsko-Biała. The aim is to develop art skills as well as to help integrate and provide educational opportunities to those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- **Partners:** Miejski dom kultury Kubiszowka (PL), Municipal Social Welfare Centre (PL), Community Help Centre (PL), “Heart for Heart” Foundation (PL), Foreigners Integration Centre in Bielsko-Biała (PL)

GEOGRAPHICALLY MARGINALISED PEOPLE

One peculiarity of the Beskids region is the number of remote villages and settlements with difficult access to cultural programmes. We will bring cultural content to the people of these areas through art projects such as Mobile Documentary Theatre, Wandering Books, Last in the Village, Rural Murals or Musical Trips across Borders.

Théaterapia

Théaterapia is both an artistic and a community project that uses improvisation on stories heard from the audience to explore shared experiences, conflicts, similarities, and differences in a community. The improvisation performances that border on a workshop format, will be held at the Cultural Houses in peripheral parts of Frydek-Místek and Žilina in small, intimate groups of ten to twenty people. In the preparation years 2024 – 2025, we will hold monthly playback theatre workshops in our Cultural Houses in Žilina and in Frydek-Místek’s Liskovec. The stories collected will culminate in the creation of a series of original theatre plays, produced in cooperation with professional directors and artists, in 2026.

- **Organizer:** Théaterapia (SK)
- **Partners:** Na-po-je-ni (CZ), Rosenfeld Palace (SK), Kultura FM

ELDERLY PEOPLE

Beskids Intergenerational University

Through our Intergenerational University, in cooperation with the University of Žilina’s Lifelong Learning Institute, we will bring together seniors and young people in an educational programme that will teach them skills in art curation, media, current EU issues, art history, and community research, with oral history research training. This is a much-needed forum for intergenerational dialogue where seniors and young people can exchange knowledge, views, and memories. We will partner with the SYTEV youth organisation as well as the Youth Office Beskids to identify young participants and help promote the project. Between 2022 and 2025, we will use the Intergenerational University also

as a platform to prepare and train participants for several other participatory projects organised in 2026, including the *Community Museum*, *European Family Photo Album* or *Wandering Books*.

- **Organizer:** University of Žilina (SK)
- **Partners:** SYTEV (SK), Youth Office Beskids, Rosenfeld Palace (SK), Regional Library Žilina (SK), Považie Museum, Miejski dom kultury in Bielsko-Biała (PL), Museum of Beskids’ Seniorgymnázium (CZ)

Intergenerational Art Education Workshops

With art workshops led by artists with experience in art therapy, this initiative brings together elderly people from city districts in cooperation with the Senior Citizens’ Clubs run by the Municipal Social Welfare Centre and active seniors who are able to mobilise other elderly in their communities as peer-to-peer ambassadors. Their focus is especially on those who are reluctant to leave their homes, and who badly need to establish relations with both their peers and younger age groups. These workshops are open to all demographic groups rather than only the elderly, in order to foster community-building across social groups. As an example, the project *Mosaic BB – the World of our Values* will bring together youth and seniors in the creation of a mosaic that reflects their community values. First a multigenerational debate will be facilitated in order to help participants to formulate the identity of their neighborhoods. Then a joint workshop will be organised to create the design of the mosaic and start installing it on a local wall. An event will be organised for the mosaic’s unveiling party. The aim of the project is to increase cultural and social competences of the inhabitants and to make them collaborate with artists. The project will be repeated in several suburbs of Bielsko-Biała and Žilina.

- **Organizer:** Miejski dom kultury Kubiszowka (PL)
- **Partners:** Rosenfeld Palace (SK)

Another project that we already mentioned and that is dedicated for elderly people in rural communities is *Last in the village*.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Access ECoC

The Žilina Self-Governing Region pledged to make all its cultural institutions fully wheelchair accessible by 2026. In line with this plan, Žilina Beskids 2026 will be an accessible ECoC. We will have a diversified offer of cultural activities for citizens with hearing and vision impairments, as well as those on the autistic spectrum, drawing on the successful mechanisms put in place e.g. by the City Theatre in Žilina or the Orava Castle. In collaboration with the Slovak Association of Persons with Hearing Impairment and its local subsidiary in Žilina, we will have regular drama performances with sign language interpreting and *closed captioning* for people with hearing impairments. We will subsidize the purchase of such equipment for cultural centres that currently lack it. We plan to produce special promotional material in several languages, in print and online, for local and international audiences with special needs. We will make sure that our events are fully accessible, with a number of seats or protected areas reserved for the purpose, with our volunteers trained to secure safe access to these at any time. We will also offer special programmes thanks to the cooperation with multimedia artists and

organisers of the *Screen Age* programme. We will, for instance, use visual and perceptual displays that allow hearing-impaired people to feel music through vibrations and low-frequency tones in addition to music visualisation. Sign language interpreters and closed captions, audio description of performances, and catalogues in braille alphabet are also planned.

- **Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no
- **Partners:** Land of Harmony Foundation (SK), ANEPS (SK), Theater Grodzki (PL)

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young Office Beskids

Young Office is an initiative started by European Solidarity Corps volunteers at the Stanica and Nová Synagóga cultural centres with Žilina high schools. It takes active high schoolers and university students and gives them free space to create and organise cultural programmes based on their interests, especially focusing on alternative culture or counterculture, community art, and youth media. In 2021, this included, e.g. the organisation of an inaugural Mad Hatter party with creative crafts workshops and concerts, the “Naked Gallery” where young people could walk in with their art works and freely display them, as well as the multi-genre One-Day Festival and open-mics / DJ sessions organised by the young for the young. The aim is to empower young people to take an active role in the city’s cultural life and diversify its cultural offer based on their interests and perspectives. Participants of Young Office meet every week to discuss the programming and realisation of activities. Further added value of the initiative is the intercultural dialogue between volunteers from Europe and local students which further enhances their cross-cultural skills. This is an Erasmus+ funded project, running from 2021 through 2023. Starting in 2023, we intend to transform Young Office into a cross-border youth cultural initiative, which we will gradually expand to Frydek-Místek and Bielsko-Biała, and in 2026, make a full-fledged youth partner in a variety of ECoC projects, taking an active and meaningful role in organising programme of the title year.

The *Youth Stage* at the *Polis Democracy Festival* will for instance give young people an opportunity to organise their own debates and lead their own cultural programme. Young Office Beskids will take full control of the stage – they will decide on its main themes and direct the youth part of the open call, selecting submitted projects, speakers, and overall programming. They will be given a free hand and budget to pick young emerging artists, they will also decorate the Agora on their own in cooperation with the agora creators Bruit du Frigo. The *Art of Engagement* exhibition will take place on the Youth Stage in association with the City Cultural Centre in Bielsko-Biała. The *Young Democracy Award* will be awarded to one youth activist and one young artist by the organisers in an interactive polling with the public.

- **Organizer:** Youth Office (SK)
- **Partners:** Stanica (SK), Nová synagóga (SK), Žilina’s high schools, Fundacja Zróbmy To (PL), Swine Daily (SK), Bruit du Frigo (FR)

4. 3 Explain in detail your strategy for audience development, and in particular the link with education and the participation of schools.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

According to the EU Study on audience development (2017, A. Bollo, C. Da Milano, A. Gariboldi, C. Torch), the audience development happens on three levels: a) increasing audience commitment (i.e. audience education); b) deepening audience’s existing relationship with the artistic content (i.e. enriching experience and cultivating taste); and c) diversifying the audience (i.e. reaching new audiences and cultural inclusion). Audience development involves redefining the organisation’s culture and the way it works, rather than just better marketing, it is an opportunity for revising its mission and an opportunity for change. The first step towards audience development is having good data. In order for organisations to identify needs and remove barriers to audience engagement, they need to know their audiences first. This entails understanding their profile and their motivations: is it education, professional development, change of context, inspiration, socialisation, self-representation, or self-expression? (DCMS 2007) Each organisation should then define its own strategy vis-a-vis the target audiences and identify the methods to deepen or broaden the experience of their existing core audience.

Unfortunately, in our local and national contexts, quality and availability of data in the field of culture is rather limited. During our preparation of cultural strategy, we worked on collecting baseline study data on the cultural habits of inhabitants of Žilina, but each organisation needs to collect data about their visitors and understand the barriers met by their non-audience in order to set up a strategy. Our in-depth interviews did show that frequent barriers for audiences include lack of additional services, absence of children-oriented content and children-friendly spaces or café-style spaces for socialisation. Moreover, elderly people often quoted barriers in terms of geographical distance and loneliness (not wishing to visit cultural institutions alone). Another target group facing barriers are young men, teenagers of up to twenty-five years of age, looking mainly for more entertaining / interactive contents. A complex audience development strategy for each participating institution will be developed in a special Accelerator 20<26 edition in 2022.

Accelerator 20<26 Audience Development

- Audience development workshop and mentoring for local cultural institutions
- Audience research in each involved organisation
- Creation of tools for systematic collection of anonymized data, like a cultural card, membership, shared reservation portal

Improvement of Visitor Services

- Additional services for visitors: coffee, parking slots, possibility to pay by card, playground areas for kids

Audience Education

- Public curation projects – education by means of participation in the creative process – Community Museum, Family Photo Album
- Active spectatorship – audience feedback and discussion before final performance (HANGAR – Creation Centre for Art in the Public Space), Hey! European Theatre Incubator
- Guided tours and workshops with authors – KIOSK Festival, Tanečno Festival
- Intergenerational University and Citizen Cultural Journalism Platform

Enriching Experience and Taste Cultivation

- Cooperation between institutions, bridging audiences – Slovak Sinfonietta concerts in the park of the Museum of the Považie Region, Nosferatu film/concert at the Orava Castle, Anča Animated Music Tour
- Immersive exhibitions at the Bôrik Environmental Park and Children’s Interactive Museum
- Augmented reality as a source of extra information on artworks and their context – 25,000 gallery project – Inside Slovak Modernism
- Gamification of culture – IGDAF festival, the Story in Space project
- Outdoor culture and art in nature – outdoor concerts at the Summit of Culture and Lotos Ethno Jazz events

Cultural Inclusion

- Strategic marketing – Windows to Beskids artistic online platform
- School programmes for teachers and students – Nová synagóga and Museum of Art Žilina – children’s programme
- Workshops for children from socially deprived neighbourhoods – Museum of Art Žilina
- Systematic translation of contents into English and Polish for foreign visitors
- Cultural institutions accessible by wheelchair and adapted artistic contents for people with special needs
- Wandering Books – a mobile book factory and library visiting less accessible villages of the region – the Regional Library Žilina
- Programme in the public space – Giant puppets parade
- Price strategy – a balance needs to be found between free outdoor programmes and programmes charging entry fees

EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION OF SCHOOLS

One of our main ambitions as an ECoC is to create a sense of co-ownership of the project on the part of children, youth, and educators. We aim to foster creative skills by providing young people a free playing field for their creativity; to forge a relationship with Europe by providing opportunities for European mobility; and to enhance understanding of democracy and critical thinking through youth empowerment. In order to facilitate cooperation with schools and promote the ECoC among pupils/students, we will create a network of teachers at primary and high schools in the region. These teachers will have exclusive access to information about the ECoC, to training and tickets to cultural events. Their task will be to identify pupils in their school who can act as peer promoters and, in turn, receive special offers. We will give schools in the Beskids a chance to cooperate with Žilina Beskids 2026 on several projects, like Locomotion – travel and intercultural learning, Media Labyrinth – fake news and media literacy, Ambassadors of Diversity – tolerance and intercultural learning or other projects described below:

Art of Engagement

Art of Engagement is a competition for young people that seeks to enhance understanding and promotion of human rights. The

competition is modeled on the Auschwitz Museum-organised International Biennial of Socio-Political Poster. City Cultural Centre Bielsko-Biala in partnership with the Auschwitz Museum will network with high schools from around the world. Our focus in 2026 will be not only on posters, but also on object design, poetry, video art, and music. Through an international open call, students will be able to contribute their works to the competition in the above-mentioned categories. The best works will be awarded and displayed first in Bielsko-Biala’s cultural centres, then in Žilina, on the Democracy Festival’s Youth Stage. We seek to then partner with European institutions to further display the works on their premises. Winners of the competition will also be invited to Bielsko-Biala and Žilina during the *Polis – Democracy Festival* to further talk about their works and to lead engaged artistic workshops.

- Organizer:** Bielsko-Biala Municipal Cultural Centre (PL)
- Partners:** Fundacja Zróbmy To (PL), High schools in Žilina, Frydek-Místek and Bielsko-Biala

Absynt Prize for Young Critical Thought

The Absynt Prize organized by the T. Ružička Bilingual Grammar School in Žilina and the Absynt publishing house seeks to foment reading skills, critical thinking, and argumentative skills in young people. A dozen high schools from the Northern Slovakian region get selected narrative non-fiction books on current and historical topics from around the world (such as on censorship in Afghanistan, antisemitism in post-WWII Europe, and others) and students critically reflect on their content using a number of literary formats: speeches, literary critique, and nonfiction. Students are guided in their efforts by professionals from the respective fields, such as journalists from the Slovak daily SME and professional literary critics, who provide in-depth seminars. By 2026, we plan to expand the competition to the whole of Slovakia, as well as expand the portfolio to include a debate format, to be held between Slovak and Czech high schools from the Žilina and Frydek-Místek regions. Our ambition is to open the event to non-participants as well, through online streaming and online discussions.

- Organizer:** Martin Benikovský (SK), Absynt (SK),
- Partners:** T. Ružička Bilingual Grammar School (SK), Žilina Literature Festival (SK), City of Žilina (SK), Self-Governing Region of Žilina (SK), SME daily (SK)

Creative Digital Skills for Future

Digital skills will increasingly become the bedrock of both the creative sector and knowledge economy. *IT Kraj*, a cluster of 20 IT companies from Žilina Region runs several community-building and educational projects that seeks to foster those skills in young people, through a partnership between schools, academia, and businesses. Through hands-on workshops, lectures, and community events led by IT professionals, such as Y robot, Girl’s Day and IT Camp, it encourages young people to acquire new digital skills for the future job market. We are partnering with the initiative to create a programme focused on digital skills in the creative fields such as graphic and game design. Within the *Creative Industry Job-Shadowing* program, high school students deciding on their university applications will be able to shadow professionals from the creative sector to gain insight into the nature of their jobs. By fostering understanding of the everyday workings of the sector, we want to incentivize greater professional interest in it. At the end of the programme, the participants will receive a certificate of completion.



- Project Owner:** IT Kraj
- Partners:** Materahub (IT), UNIZA – University of Žilina (SK), Agencja Rozwoju Regionalnego SA (PL), Inovia (SK), Miejski dom kultury in Bielsko-Biala (PL)

Urban Interventions and Architecture for Children

To foster interest in physical public spaces and empower students in their ability to influence the way public spaces work and look, we will design a special educational program, workshops, and a microgrant scheme. The children will have an opportunity to suggest architectural and urbanistic solutions for their schools and public spaces surrounding them, and to test the ideas in practice, ultimately implementing them. In collaboration with the Architecture for Kids (CZ) platform from Prague, we will run in Urban LAB the pilot educational project *My City* to support active involvement of school-age children (ages six to sixteen) in planning and designing public space and understanding development of their cities in a playful way.

- Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- Partners:** Chief City Planner’s Department (SK), Architecture for Kids (CZ)

International Amateur Theatre Festival

AITA/IATA is an international amateur theatre association, their mission is to promote international understanding and education through theatre. The aim of the International Association of Amateur Theatres (AITA/IATA) is to bring people together through international amateur theatre. In 2026, we will host a festival in Dolný Kubín of approximately ten theatre groups from different parts of Europe. Besides performance showcases, there will be space for seminars, workshops, and meetings on current issues related to the theatre field.

- Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)
- Organizer:** AITA/IATA – Slovak centre

Children’s Interactive Museum

One of our flagship investment projects to involve schools, young families and children in the ECoC is the establishment of a new Children’s Interactive Museum with interactive exhibitions and experiential learning facilities designed especially for schools and families with young children. One of the planned exhibitions in the museum, *Building the Town by Sutnar*, will recreate the toys and models of the ingenious Czech designer Ladislav Sutnar on a larger scale and transform them into a playful exhibition with the ambition to present the iconic designs in a playful way to the youngest generation and their parents. Other exhibitions are planned in the museum, like *Story in Space* and others in collaboration with Sladovna in Písek (CZ), UUUL – dětské muzeum (CZ) and Depo 2015 in Plzeň (CZ).

- Organizer:** Puppet Theatre Žilina (SK)
- Partners:** Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums (AT), Sladovna Písek, o.p.s. (CZ), UUUL – dětské muzeum (CZ)

Experiential Environmental Learning

The new *Bôrik Environmental Museum*, the *Vychylovka Forest Museum* and the *Aqua Museum* in Bielsko-Biala will be running special exhibitions and learning programmes for young people to deepen their understanding of global environmental challenges and foster sustainable behaviour. They will offer activities to the general public, including families with children, and to schools. The permanent exhibition The Story of Water will be installed directly in the oldest underground reservoir of drinkable water in Žilina and will reflect three main topics: water as a source of life, the relation between water and humans, and water management. The aim of the new Vychylovka Forest Museum is to raise visitors’ awareness of the importance of forests for the environment, about their role in forming of the local culture, and will propose a complex educational experience dedicated to the relation between man and forest, its past, present, and future, but also its cultural, ethnographic, industrial, and environmental aspects.

- Organizer:** Žilina Beskids 2026, no (SK)

5. MANAGEMENT

5.1 Finance

5.1.1 Operating budget for the title year

The total income to cover operating expenditure was increased compared to the pre-selection phase by 8.5 M EUR. After communication with the ministry of culture and agreement with other candidate cities, we decided to raise the contribution of the Slovak government from 9 M EUR to 15 M EUR, however the incomes from the Slovak government have not been confirmed yet. The amount of incomes from partner cities and regions was raised significantly as well from 1.5 M EUR to 3.8 M EUR, as co-candidate

cities Frýdek-Místek and Bielsko-Biala approved an overall contribution of 2 M EUR and further ninety towns and municipalities made a commitment for a contribution of 0.83 M EUR. The Moravian-Silesian Region and the Silesian Voivodeship also expressed support to the Žilina Beskydy 2026 project with an expected contribution of 1M EUR. The contribution from the private sector slightly increased from 1.5 M EUR to 1.7 M EUR, reaching the same figure as Košice 2013.

Incomes for operating expenditure

TOTAL INCOME TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE (IN €)	FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR (IN €)	FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR (IN %)	FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR (IN €)	FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR (IN %)
32,061,535 €	29,961,535 €	93%	2,100,000 €	7%

Income from the public sector

INCOME FROM THE PUBLIC SECTOR TO COVER OPERATING EXPENDITURE	IN EUROS	%
National Government	15,000,000 €	50%
City of Žilina	6,000,000 €	20%
Žilina Self-Governing Region	4,000,000 €	13%
Partner cities and regions	3,861,535 €	13%
EU (except. M. Mercouri Prize)	1,100,000 €	4%
Total	29,961,535 €	100%

Financial commitments of public authorities to cover operation expenditure

Žilina City Council unanimously approved the overall vision, concept, and financial arrangements concerning Žilina Beskydy 2026 on 2 September 2021. Žilina Self-governing Region council unanimously approved the same on 27 September 2021. A common memorandum was approved by Frýdek-Místek’s City Council and Bielsko-Biala’s City Board in September 2021. Further ninety towns and municipalities in the region of Žilina expressed their support for the bid and approved a memorandum with an overall concept of joint activities and financial engagements. The Moravian-Silesian Region in the Czech Republic signed a Letter of Intent on 4 October 2021 with the Žilina Self-governing Region, while the Silesian Voivodeship in Poland

did the same on 6 October 2021. The Slovak national government expressed support for the cultural programme of the city and its bid for the title of European Capital of Culture 2026, but no official statement has been made yet confirming the precise amount and conditions of this support. The projected income from the national government was increased to 15 M EUR in coordination with the other two candidate cities.

Fundraising strategy

Our aim is to raise at least **1.1 M EUR** from EU funds to cover operating expenditure. We are already participating in three Erasmus+ projects with the Land network, Media Labyrinth and Being Inclusive is IN; these projects are already in the phase of implementation. We have recently applied, along with other ECOC candidate cities, for the

Creative Europe programme with the Culture Next network. Our presence in several European networks will have us join several grant projects. Since Žilina Beskids 2026 will be founded immediately on 13 December 2021, in case we are designated, we will be able to take part in the first calls for EU funding at the beginning of 2022. There will be a team member dedicated to this mission on the finance team, serving also as the support person for partners from the independent sector. We can also count on the EU funding experts from the city administration, who have successfully carried out major EU projects. It is a central part of our desired legacy to empower our local project partners to apply for EU funding. Our independent scene especially needs support, fundraising will therefore be a central focus within our capacity-building programme.

FUNDING SOURCE	PROJECT NAME	OBJECTIVES / TOPICS OF THE PROGRAMME	STATUS
Creative Europe	STE(A)M² Biennale – EMAP network, IGDAF – Independent Games and Digital Art Festival, Culture Next network, LAND network, Animation Hub, Industrial Heritage Expo, International Literature House VW, Immersive museum Bôrik	European cooperation projects, European networks, I-Portunus, media, Creative Innovation Lab action, journalism partnerships	Planned for funding 2023–2026
Horizon Europe	European Textile Time Machine, STE(A)M² Biennial, River of Pure Becoming, Multispecies Academy, Myco Galaxies	Research projects: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society: democracy and governance + cultural heritage and CCIs● Climate, energy and mobility● Food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment	Planned for funding 2023–2026
Erasmus+	Land network – Land Stewards AND artists 21-23, Media Labyrinth, Being Inclusive is IN European Artistic Crafts Days, Creative Digital Skills for Future	EU programme for education, training, youth and sport: students, staff, trainees, teachers, adult learners, exchange, networking, learning mobility and innovation in education.	Ongoing + Planned for funding 2023–2026
European Solidarity Corps	Intergenerational University, Young Office Beskids, EVS reunion, Momentum volunteer platform, City Acupuncture events	Volunteering, traineeships, local Solidarity Projects	Planned for funding 2023–2026
INTERREG (CZ-SK, CZ-PL, SK-PL)	Beskids Art Trails, Vrba Wetzler trail, ARTboretum – International Sculpture Symposium, Borderless mobile VR Cinema, Beskids Culture Week, March for Beskids, Borderless Territories, Textile Season...	Cross Border collaboration, <ul style="list-style-type: none">● stronger Central European region● developing the potential of natural and cultural resources to support employment, Institutional and community cooperation	Planned for funding 2023–2026
INTERREG Europe (transnational cooperation)	Cross-border FabLab and Creative, Development Centre, CC: Circular Culture	Central European projects of collaboration on ecological and smart CE priorities	Planned for funding 2023–2026
Common agricultural policy (CAP) – Rural development	Borderless Territories The Festival of Shepherd Culture Last in the Village	Supporting local actors in rural areas in the development of their own regions through local action groups and leader methodology	Planned for funding 2023–2026
COSME	TraCEs – CulTour is Capital, FairBnB – Beskids Participatory Hospitality Programme	Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Support of tourism businesses	Ongoing
IRDF – URBACT IV	Pasá:Ž – Urban lab	European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development: Transfer Networks, Capacity-building activities, Thematic communities	Planned for funding 2023–2026
LIFE 2021–2027	CC: Circular Culture, SCAPE festival, Community Courtyards, Flow festivals, Riverbanks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Circular Economy and Quality of Life● Nature and Biodiversity● Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	Planned for funding 2023–2026
CERV	Capital of Freedom of Expression, Polis Democracy Festival	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values EU programme: Union Values + Equality, Rights and Gender Equality + Citizens’ engagement and participation + Daphne	Planned for funding 2023–2026
EEA & Norway grants	Mitigation and adaptation to climate change in Žilina CC: Circular culture, Cultural Houses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Climate change mitigation and Adaptation● Business Development, Innovation and SMEs● Active Citizens Fund	Ongoing + Planned for funding 2024–2027

Timetable for the income to cover operating budget

SOURCE OF INCOME FOR OPERATING EXPENDITURE	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL
EU	0 €	0 €	50,000 €	50,000 €	300,000 €	700,000 €	0 €	1,100,000 €
National government	0 €	0 €	0 €	330,000 €	5,190,000 €	9,480,000 €	0 €	15,000,000 €
City of Žilina	245,000 €	500,000 €	630,000 €	755,000 €	1,000,000 €	2,510,000 €	360,000 €	6,000,000 €
Partner city – Bielsko-Biala	0 €	15,000 €	30,000 €	102,625 €	461,000 €	691,500 €	15,000 €	1,315,125 €
Partner city – Frýdek-Místek	0 €	15,000 €	30,000 €	73,800 €	230,400 €	345,600 €	15,000 €	709,800 €
Partner cities in Slovakia	0 €	0 €	0 €	278,870 €	278,870 €	278,870 €	0 €	836,610 €
Region (SK)	0 €	0 €	250,000 €	250,000 €	835,000 €	2,305,000 €	360,000 €	4,000,000 €
Region (CZ / PL)	0 €	0 €	0 €	0 €	0 €	1,000,000 €	0 €	1,000,000 €
Sponsors	0 €	0 €	35,000 €	110,000 €	380,000 €	1,175,000 €	0 €	1,700,000 €
Other	0 €	0 €	0 €	0 €	50,000 €	350,000 €	0 €	400,000 €
Total	245,000 €	530,000 €	1,025,000 €	1,950,295 €	8,725,270 €	18,835,970 €	750,000 €	32,061,535 €

Fundraising strategy to seek support from private sponsors

Incomes from the private sector and from own commercial activities are important in terms of building cross-disciplinary cooperation and making the ECoC investment more sustainable. The sum expected in our budget from the private sector and sponsorship is *1.7M EUR*. We count on involving private stakeholders in several areas of the Žilina Beskids 2026 project, such as: direct participation in selected thematic projects, technical help and production support, art and technology residencies, audience development with companies’ employees programme, and business volunteering programme for the companies’ staff. Multiple marketing and presentation formats will also be used, with different logos used to differentiate the type of support they give to the ECoC and the type of visibility they desire: project partnership, service and product placement or brand visibility. In our first bid book, we listed several sectors and companies with the prospect of generating strong local public-private partnerships, e.g. from the IT sector, automotive industry, media and telecommu-nication, clothing, water, and paper industries, or the beverage and tourism sectors. In May 2021, the Žilina Beskids 2026 team took part in a meeting with representatives of the private sector, presenting the Žilina Beskids 2026 bid, resulting in thirty of them officially ex-pressing support with a Letter of Intent. Frýdek-Místek’s important industrial sector expressed their support as well and the Region-al Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Bielsko-Biała signed an agreement with us, too.

We decided to split our private partners into four categories: *One general partner – financial target: 500,000 EUR*
The main partner of Žilina Beskids 2026, building a unique relation-ship with the project, identifiable by all. The general partner will take on the leadership position in the transformation of the region. This position offers top visibility to the company and tailor-made market-ing approach, with a potential link to several programme events that can be developed together. The general partner should have access to numerous advantages: an event development workshop, media, and promotional presence at major events, visibility in our print com-munication, web and social-media communication channels, special

merchandising, service and product placements, reserved seats, business partner space, and a programme for company employees. *Main partners (three slots) – financial target: 600,000 EUR*
National and international companies who will establish a strong relationship with the project. This position offers high visibility to the companies involved and tailor-made marketing approach. Our general partners should have access to numerous advantages: an event development workshop, media and promotional presence at major events, visibility in our print communication, web and so-cial-media communication channels, special merchandising, ser-vice and product placements, reserved seats, and a programme for company employees.

Partners / project partners (ten slots) – financial target: 500,000 EUR
This position is reserved to national or regional companies that wish to get some business benefits out of their relation with the ECoC project, mainly brand visibility in our printed materials and on our web; they might be exclusive suppliers of the ECoC project or choose to support a concrete project in our existing programme. *Supporter / members of Klub 2026+ (twenty slots) – financial tar-get: 100,000 EUR*
This position counts on involvement of mainly small and medi-um-sized companies from the Beskids cross-border region which wish to support the region’s transition. For them, the main bene-fits are their logo presence and membership in the Klub 2026+. The main objective will be networking and developing opportunities for cooperation between the business and creative sectors. We plan to regularly organize Creative Corporate Breakfasts, with discussion and programmes for businesses.
Moreover, we plan to initiate cooperation with private companies’ foundations and key organizations focused on philanthropy and fundraising in Slovakia, such as the Pontis Foundation, in order to work together on a sustainable fundraising strategy in the cultural context, based on the principle of shared values. We plan to take advantage of the unique Slovak tax designation system for compa-nies and individuals, wherein these can assign one or two percent of their income tax directly to eligible organisations. We also seek to develop independent revenue streams for the project, such as: ticketing, merchandising or online booking. Altogether, these other private incomes and own commercial activities represent the sum of 400,000 EUR in the budget.

Breakdown operating expenditure

Programme expenditure (in €)	Programme expenditure (in %)	Promotion & marketing (in €)	Promotion & marketing (in %)	Wages, overheads, evaluation, administration (in €)	Wages, overheads, evaluation, administration (in %)	Other (Reserve) (in €)	Other (Reserve) (in %)	Total sum of the operating expenditure
21,636,535 €	67%	4,215,000 €	13%	5,900,000 €	18%	310,000 €	1%	32,061,535 €

Timetable for operating expenditure

Timetable for spending	Programme expenditure (in €)	Programme expenditure (in %)	Promotion and market-ing (in €)	Promotion and market-ing (in %)	Wages, overheads, evaluation, administra-tion (in €)	Wages, overheads, evaluation, administra-tion (in %)	Other (Reserve) (in €)	Other (Reserve) (in %)	Total Year n-5
2021	0 €	0%	5,000 €	2%	240,000 €	98%	0 €	0%	245,000 €
2022	50,000 €	9%	10,000 €	2%	420,000 €	79%	50,000 €	9%	530,000 €
2023	300,000 €	29%	25,000 €	2%	670,000 €	65%	30,000 €	3%	1,025,000 €
2024	735,295 €	38%	250,000 €	13%	935,000 €	48%	30,000 €	2%	1,950,295 €
2025	6,100,270 €	70%	1,200,000 €	14%	1,385,000 €	16%	40,000 €	0%	8,725,270 €
2026	14,150,970 €	75%	2,675,000 €	14%	1,950,000 €	10%	60,000 €	0%	18,835,970 €
2027	300,000 €	40%	50,000 €	7%	300,000 €	40%	100,000 €	13%	750,000 €
Total	21,636,535 €	67%	4,215,000 €	13%	5,900,000 €	18%	310,000 €	1%	32,061,535 €

5.1.2 Budget for capital expenditure	Breakdown of income for capital expenditure	
National Government (incl. EU)	38,000,000 €	38.13%
City of Žilina	1,720,000 €	1.73%
Region	1,104,000 €	1.11%
EU (except. M. Mercouri Prize)	5,700,000 €	5.72%
Partner city Bielsko-Biała	22,050,000 €	22.13%
Partner city Frýdek-Místek	31,000,000 €	31.11%
City of Kysucké Nové Mesto	20,000 €	0.02%
City of Dolný Kubín	25,000 €	0.03%
City of Čadca	35,000 €	0.04%
Total	99,654,000 €	100%

Financial commitments of public finance authorities for capital expenditure

Official statement from the Slovak national government confirms that 40 M EUR will be granted for investment projects of ECoC 2026 from EU funds. This sum is calculated with expected co-fi-nancing of 5 % by the beneficiaries. The Žilina City Council approved the financial arrangements on 20 September 2021 and the Žilna Self-governing Region’s Council approved them on 27 September 2021. Frýdek-Místek approved their plan to realize the declared investments projects at the City Council meeting on 16 Septem-ber 2021. The investment projects from the city of Bielsko-Biała already secured financing and construction works will start from the next year. The cities of Kysucké Nové Mesto, Čadca, and Dolný Kubín approved investment projects and their co-financing at their City Council meetings respectively on 20 and 23 September 2021.

Timetable for incomes to cover capital expenditure

SOURCE OF INCOME FOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	
National Government	0 €	412,775 €	4,145,608 €	6,739,718 €	26,701,899 €	0 €	38,000,000 €
City of Žilina	0 €	56,725 €	303,190 €	224,722 €	1,100,363 €	35,000 €	1,720,000 €
Region	0 €	9,000 €	610,000 €	145,000 €	340,000 €	0 €	1,104,000 €
EU (except. M. Mercouri Prize)	0 €	665,000 €	3,040,000 €	665,000 €	665,000 €	665,000 €	5,700,000 €
Partner city Bielsko-Biała	0 €	0 €	3,600,000 €	9,000,000 €	9,450,000 €	0 €	22,050,000 €
Partner city Frýdek-Místek	0 €	0 €	0 €	15,000,000 €	16,000,000 €	0 €	31,000,000 €
City of Kysucké Nové Mesto	0 €	0 €	0 €	20,000 €	0 €	0 €	20,000 €
City of Dolný Kubín	0 €	0 €	25,000 €	0 €	0 €	0 €	25,000 €
City of Čadca	0 €	0 €	35,000 €	0 €	0 €	0 €	35,000 €
Total	0 €	1,143,500 €	11,758,798 €	31,794,440 €	54,257,263 €	700,000 €	99,654,000 €

Breakdown operating expenditure

PROJECT NAME	BUDGET	INVESTOR
PASÁ:Ž	2 370 300€	City of Žilina
Hangar	4 506 520€	City of Žilina
Dance Centre S2	1 716 050€	City of Žilina
Environmental Park Bôrik	5 206 250€	City of Žilina
KD Budatín	1 181 500€	City of Žilina
KD Zástranie	639 120€	City of Žilina
KD Žilinská Lehota	414 760€	City of Žilina
KD Vranie	151 325€	City of Žilina
KD Trnové	553 195€	City of Žilina

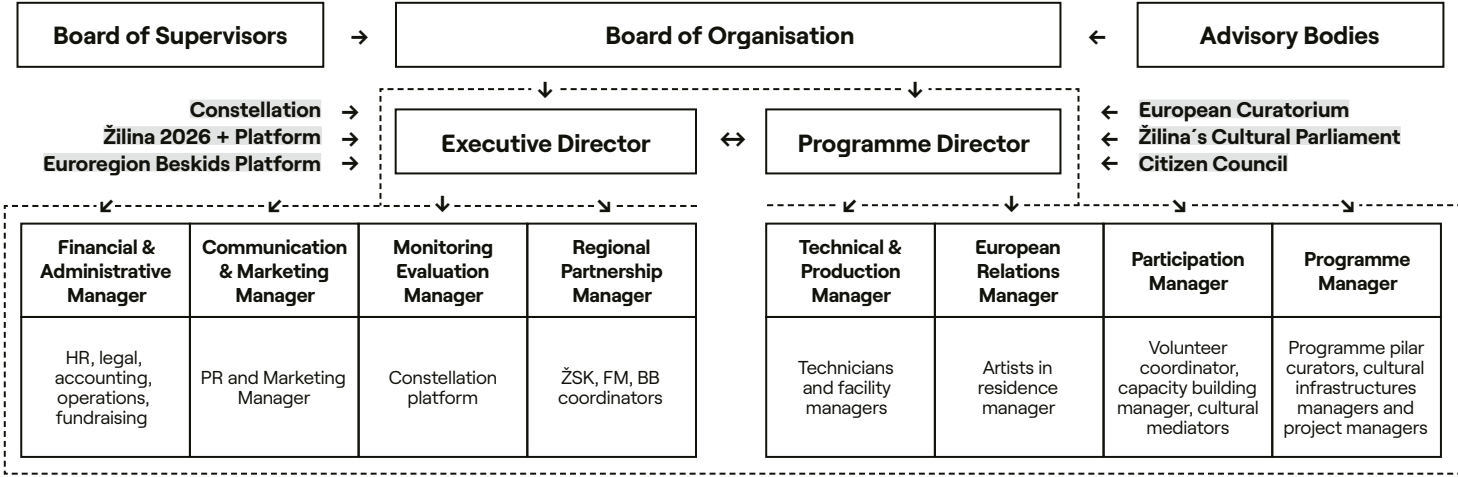
91	ŽILINA BESKIDS 2026	ECOC	CANDIDATE CITY
	KD Strážov	553 780€	City of Žilina
	KD Bytčica	975 800€	City of Žilina
	Ciachovňa	2 149 400€	City of Žilina
	Main railway station Žilina – Transportation Museum	297 000€	City of Žilina
	City forest Dubeň	230 000€	City of Žilina
	City forest Strník	230 000€	City of Žilina
	Waterfront Rajčanka	580 000€	City of Žilina
	Waterfront Bánová	515 000€	City of Žilina
	City Theatre Žilina	630 000€	City of Žilina
	A. Hlinka Square + SNP park	5 150 000€	City of Žilina
	International Literature House Vrba and Wetzler	350 000€	City of Žilina
	Community Courtyards	3 500 000€	City of Žilina
	Historical City Hall – exhibition spaces	2 500 000€	City of Žilina
	Choč cinema and museum	500 000€	City of Dolný Kubín
	Kysuca cinema	400 000€	Kysucké Nové Mesto
	Palárik Culture House	700 000€	City of Čadca
	Forest railway Vychylovka	3 475 000€	Žilna Self-governing Region
	Forest Museum Vychylovka	3 160 000€	Žilna Self-governing Region
	Interactive Children’s Museum	2 210 000€	Žilna Self-governing Region
	Budatín Castle	705 000€	Žilna Self-governing Region
	Museum of Art in Žilina	460 000€	Žilna Self-governing Region
	Kysuce Regional Gallery – ARTboretum	309 000€	Žilna Self-governing Region
	Orava Gallery – Slanica Island of Art	285 000€	Žilna Self-governing Region
	Interactive Fairy Tale and Animation Centre	8 450 000€	City of Bielsko-Biala
	Ecological Education Park AQUA	13 600 000€	City of Bielsko-Biala
	Nova Scena + Moravia Bank + Narodni Dum	30 800 000€	City of Frýdek-Místek
	New Eight	200 000€	City of Frýdek-Místek
	Total	99 654 000€	

5. 2 Organisational structure

Governance and delivery structure

The City of Žilina has prepared all the necessary documents for the founding of a new non-profit organization managing the project Žilina Beskydy 2026. Non-profit organizations under the Slovak law system include all key features and functions needed for the project, and options have been carefully considered with the legal and economic departments of the city administration. During November, the documents will be evaluated by the City Council's financial and cultural commissions and the proposal will be presented and supposedly approved by the City Council on 13 of December 2021, immediately after the jury's decision. The founder of the organization will be the City of Žilina. The first narrow Board of the organisation will be expanded after the first meeting of the Board by representatives from both co-candidate cities and from the Žilina Self-governing Region. Their presence in the Board of Supervisors will also allow them to control the efficiency of the management and the regularity of financial flows. Public partners did agree on their participation and competences within this new organisation by signing memorandums. If we are not successful with the ECoC bid, the non-profit organisation will carry on the legacy of the ECoC candidacy. It will go on developing already defined projects that will still receive support and funding from the city and other stakeholders, focusing mainly on the implementation of the city's cultural strategy objectives.

The proposed organizational bodies are: *The Board of the Organisation*, as the main decision-making body, will consist of one representative per each city – Žilina, Bielsko-Biala, Frýdek-Místek, and one for the Žilina Self-governing Region. One international expert in the field of culture will also be part of the board, chosen from the European Curatorium of the project, while two cultural experts from Slovakia will complete the Board's seven members. Members will meet at least once every six months and receive a report on project advancement from the Executive Director. *The Board of Supervisors* will be established in order to monitor the financial activities and procedural effectiveness of the organisation and intervene in case of any wrongdoing. Members of the Board of Supervisors will be proposed and approved by the Board of the Organisation and regional and city councils (of Žilina, Bielsko-Biala, Frýdek-Místek). Each of the three cities and the Žilina Self-governing Region will have their representative on the Board. To assure objectivity, candidates will be from local self-governing bodies or representatives of the political opposition. The Board of Supervisors will convene every six months. The Board of the Organisation will appoint the *Executive Director* and the *Programme Director*. These positions have not been filled yet. For both organisations, we aim to establish structures that act according to our Manifesto and will be effective and stable, compliant with the objective of ensuring independence of the programme and protecting it from political changes and interferences in its everyday delivery.



The *Executive Director* will have overall responsibility for the project and strategic management, finances, administration, HR, communication, and marketing. The Executive Director is the person with final responsibility for global leadership of the project. He/she will also supervise the Programme Director, leading the discussions about the legal, administrative and financial framework of the independent artistic vision. The role of the *Programme Director* will be to ideate, curate, and lead the programme and its implementation together with the programme team and with the help of the European Curatorium. Autonomy of the Programme Director with regard to the programme's content will be guaranteed.

- Complementary and yet crucial to the outlined structure will be the following advisory bodies:
- The *European Curatorium* will work closely with the appointed artistic director on cultural content development, drawing on the experience of the actual Art Board, completed by further international members;
 - Žilina's *Cultural Parliament* will constitute a platform for cultural operators engage in co-producing of the activities and tools for a sustainable cultural and creative scene;
 - The *Euroregion Beskids Platform* is a cross-municipal and cross-border partnership platform, meeting once a year, where representatives of municipalities receive a report on the project's advancement.
 - The *Citizen Council* will not only provide consistent monitoring and feedback from the citizens;
 - The *Klub 2026+* will encompass key private stakeholders;
 - The *Constellation platform* is the monitoring and evaluation platform of the project;

The *selection of the Executive Director and Programme Director* has not been executed yet. After establishment of the non-profit organisation on 13 December 2021, an international open call will be issued. Both positions will be approved by the Board of the Organisation, while the position of Executive Director due to legal requirements needs to be approved also by Žilina's City Council. Both Executive Director and Programme Director must have commitment to long-term transformative cultural projects and ability to manage them, ability to plan and achieve goals, strategic thinking, and strong leadership. The Executive Director needs to have general knowledge of Slovak tax, political and legal system, administrative background and experience with EU programmes, very good managerial and negotiation skills, and insight into the Beskids region specifics. The Program Director needs to have a strong artistic vision and cultural

background, proven experience with delivering international cultural events and programmes, knowledge of broad European networks, and be a creative person with the ability to coordinate a large team.

Cooperation between the local authorities and the Žilina Beskids 2026 team

The Žilina Beskids 2026 project, once approved, will have one politically responsible person in charge from each co-candidate city's top management. The role of political power is to assure support, financing, and the process of realizing key investments supporting the implementation of the approved artistic and cultural programmes. There will be on-loan employees from the partnering bodies working directly in the ECoC team, who will attend weekly meetings. There will be monthly meetings with the Executive Director and the Mayor of Žilina, Bielsko Biala, Frýdek-Místek and the President of the Žilina Self-governing Region or their deputies in order to keep information flowing and the investment process smooth. Other municipalities are represented in the Euroregion Beskids platform, which will be one of the consultancy bodies of the organisation. A dedicated team in charge of the investments will be created at the city's and regional offices. There will be regular meetings of the Board of the Organisation, at least twice per year, where the Executive Director will present the financial, programme and marketing plans' achievements to the Board. Representatives of the Board will approve the strategies and pass the information on to city and regional councils in order to inform and assure appropriate cooperation between local authorities.

Staff, skills and experience

Since the start of the bidding process, all positions on the team were publicly announced and there has been significant interest from candidates. It seems that the topic of ECoC is highly interesting for young professionals. Meanwhile, the core of the team will continue to work on projects within the existing structure of OOCR Malá Fatra or within the Mayor's office until the new organization is established and the city budget transferred. Once the Executive Director and Programme Director are appointed, all the new working positions will be announced with open calls for candidates. We will pay special attention to recruit candidates from the whole Beskids region and to assure continuity. The partner cities Bielsko-Biala, Frýdek-Místek, and the Žilina Self-governing Region will be asked to appoint their on-loan employees to the new team. Numbers of employees expected from the year 2022 until the year after the ECoC title are listed in the table below. We intend to attract skilled local and international professionals to the team, especially some of the numerous professionals who have left the region.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES PER YEAR	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Full-time	10	17	24	35	49	8
Part-time (½ FT)	2	2	2	4	8	0
Trainees (¼ FT)	2	2	4	6	8	0
Total (FTE)	12	19	26	39	55	8

5.3 Contingency planning

TOPIC	RISKS	IMPACT (1– 5)	MITIGATION / MANAGEMENT
Cross-border collaboration / Beskids brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lack of deeper institutional cooperation with the cities of Bielsko-Biała and Frydek-Mistek and insufficient cross-border cultural projects● Underdeveloped capacities and resources of the Slovak office of the Euroregion Beskids● Competition between local authorities and institutions● Inhabitants of Žilina do not identify with the idea of the Beskids and competition between identities● Political conflict of one of the three cities' member states with the EU	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Capacity building in cross-border cooperation and the Accelerator Beskids project in 2021● Developing a joint cross-border strategy for culture and tourism to strengthen the common brand Beskids● Further initiatives reaching detailed formal agreements and creation of a regional platform to foster bilateral relations● Investment into administration capacities of the city to process EU projects and into the Euroregion Beskids' Slovak office● Strategic communication, campaigning, and cultural projects aiming to build local ownership of the Beskids brand● Recognition of the cultural diversity in the region while intensifying cross-border cooperation
Economy and Creative industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Mono-industrial model of heavy industry and the automotive sector, which might experience a slowdown● Underdeveloped creative industry, lack of higher creative education, accelerating brain drain of creative people	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Opportunities for strategic fundraising for ECoC projects – forming partnerships with big companies and regional business alliances – and supporting the development of creative cluster in the region with the help of the new InoVia – Regional Innovation Centre● Organizing life-long trainings, creating new study programmes, cooperation between UNIZA and art-focused universities● Investment in new coworking / FabLab facilities and production centres, accessible for creative entrepreneurs and acceleration programmes● Investment into the creative industry, supporting the cross-border network of creative businesses, exchange of good practices and introduction of Creative Development Centre based on the Bielsko-Biała experience
Political changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Municipal and regional elections in 2022 in Žilina may cause a shift and undermine political support● Local elections in the Czech Republic in 2022 and in Poland in 2023 might bring changes and influence the willingness to invest in the project	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Consistent and open communication with the City Council, involving political opposition in controlling bodies of the organisation, transparency and accountability of the management to local and regional stakeholders● Dialogue with all political constituents in the city, maintaining a politically neutral position,building on the heretofore unanimous support
Investment delay	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Delayed realisation of investment projects● Low administrative capacities and level of preparation of investment projects● Delay in the transfer of funds from Slovak implementation bodies, incl. still unclear financing framework for the programme and its implementation criterias	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Extensive preparation of all investment projects including feasibility studies, detailed budgets, technical analysis and timing, with, for some of them, already prepared construction documentation and authorisations● Significant increase of capacities in the city's investment department and department of EU funds, with special task force established starting from 2022● Gradual progression of investments throughout the period of 2022-2025 so the capacities are no overloaded● Advocacy activities with other candidate cities for clarifying budgets with the Ministry of Culture
Capacity Building and Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Institutional fatigue – local cultural NGOs and institutions may be heavily impacted by the COVID pandemic in the coming months resulting in a decreased capacity of local cultural operators to co-produce projects● Problems with attracting skilled local and international professionals to the team, with relevant experience	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Intensive investment in capacity building of the sector● Securing involvement of the sector throughout the entire preparation of the bid and for the title year, with mechanism like Žilina's Cultural Parliament● High professional standards and engagement in implementing of our Manifesto,● Competitive working conditions for professionals with incentives and salaries ⅓ higher than average salaries in Slovakia● Head hunting and strategy to attract skilled professional that left the region back to the Beskids
Public support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Low level of social capital in certain part of the region and lack of societal dialogue● Lack of understanding and support for the ECoC project in the local community, concerning topics developed in the programme● High level of mistrust in public authorities	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Strategic communication and campaigning among the local population● High professional standards, transparent decision-making processes and focus on strengthening of local democracy● Investment in public servant capacities, improving management of public services and citizen participation
Covid-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Economic decline due to the pandemic and subsequent decrease in public income and expenditure in the coming years● Impact on audience, reverted social practices and downturn in tourism	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Involvement of the ECoC team in preparation of strategic documents by the City and the Region concerning the new EU financial framework● Continuous debt burden decrease of the City of Žilina and open opportunity for potential future financial loan● Prepared shift from physical to digital programme of ECoC and deconcentrated programme● Alternative tourism offers (slow and nature tourism)

5.4 Marketing and communication

We use *Window of opportunities* as a project tagline from the start and we plan to develop the whole communication strategy and campaign around this slogan. On a symbolic level, it allows us to work with ideas of *passage, sky, horizons, even count down, and spacecrafts* and thus communicate the messages of *openness, inspiration, momentum, call for action*, but also the very core idea of the Beskids as territory inter-connected with Europe. We will further link these key messages with the principles from our Manifesto (diversity, inclusion..) and build upon the slogan a coherent narrative of ECoC as an opportunity for the region and for the communities to reunite and to open up through art and culture. *Let some fresh air in!* We will also alter a slogan into a first-person claim “I am opening the window of opportunity” with the hashtag *#openwindowofopportunity*, which is personal and more engaging towards the target audience to share their experience on social media. Our main communication principle is to remain as engaged and authentic as possible.

Marketing and communication strategy

BACKGROUND → The majority of cultural events in the Beskids territory have mainly national audiences, with few international leaders. The current obstacle to cross-border cultural mobility is mainly poor territorial accessibility and lack of information about the existing cultural offer. There is no cross-marketing, joint cross-border tourism packages or common marketing strategy in place. The candidature is therefore an opportunity to get better acquainted with the cultural offer on the other side of the border and to look outwards. The recognizability of the brand Beskids varies across the three countries. While in Poland and the Czech Republic it is a strong national brand in tourism, in Slovakia it is weakly recognized even within the region. The title is an opportunity to change this.

MARKETING ALLIANCE → The ECoC project was a driving force behind the dialogue between the candidate city of Žilina and its two partner cities, with sixteen local and regional tourism organizations operating in the Beskids Mountains, bringing together approximately six hundred partners (hotels, tourist offices, tourist facilities, etc.). The dialogue culminated in a joint Memorandum to create the Beskids Marketing Alliance and to implement a data driven marketing plan for Žilina Beskids 2026 together with the ECoC team. The memorandum was signed at the Cultural Forum Beskids on 9 September 2021 and is a huge step towards cooperation in the areas of international branding and marketing of the Beskids destination. Using the international spotlight, ECoC brings an opportunity for the region to redefine its joint identity through the cultural content of Žilina Beskids 2026. The title is also an opportunity to create a new tourism offer linked to the ECOC programme in sustainable cultural and green tourism.

BRANDING → The Žilina Beskids 2026 brand as the European Capital of Culture will become an umbrella brand that will cover all project partners from local governments, cultural institutions, all the way to the sponsors, tourism industry, and the media. Different versions of the Žilina Beskids 2026’s logo, with the design manual, will be available for the different kinds of partners, as will be a series of freely downloadable logos, visuals, filters, animations templates with instructions, as an open design system on our website. The affiliation of each cultural institution and municipality as a project partner should be visually visible in the public space by placing an “information totem”, which will also become an official checkpoint.

TARGETING → The communication strategy will be tailored to the needs of different audience groups, based on their geographical location and interests. In Žilina, we want to use communication to improve citizens' involvement in public affairs, to involve them in participatory programmes and to arouse greater pride in the region Beksids and the city.

By drawing in communication with the inhabitants of Bielsko-Biała and Frydek-Mistek, we also want to awaken in them a relationship to the shared Beskids region. The communication in the Beskids region will focus on making the cultural offer more accessible for inhabitants of more remote areas of the region. Our target group outside the inhabitants of the Beskids region will be divided into visitors from Slovakia, those from the Czech Republic, and Poland, and in turn visitors from the rest of Europe. Visitors will be further targeted based on their areas of interest – visual arts or performing arts, industrial heritage, design and architecture, memorial tourism, traditional folk culture, sustainable slow & green tourism, and community based tourism.

TRADITIONAL MARKETING → We are aware of the need for communication in the form of traditional communication tools, especially for specific target groups, in order to capture the widest possible audience in the Beskids region. A preparatory and final *programme book* will be published in 2025 and 2026. We will create our own *poster and leaflet* for each major event in the ECoC programme, and we will include each event in the printed *monthly programme overview*, which will be part of our own *ECoC magazine* during 2026. We will use the possibility of personal presentation at B2B and B2C exhibitions or tourism fairs and the Žilina Beskids 2026 presentation stand will be visible at traditional mass events both inside and outside the region.

DIGITAL ERA → We have learnt from former ECoCs that most of the international audience is discovering the ECoC’s activities online and in the media space, therefore our ambition is to bring an equally engaging experience to our online audience. We will use the most popular online communication channels of the moment, which we will combine with creatively tuned campaigns around major ECoC events and thematically focused guerrilla marketing with the involvement of artists in places where people naturally gather.

The backbone for the project's online presence will be a separate sub-domain of the ECoC project website – *Windows to Beskids* will have practical features like an *interactive calendar of events*, from which each visitor will be able to choose according to their own preferences (event, project, date, place) or receive customised suggestions based on their user profile. The calendar of events will also be connected to a ticketing system and a *communication chatbot*, which will, according to preferences, offer other events and activities from the ECoC programme. It will also contain an online *booking system* for accommodation and cultural tourism in the region, in collaboration with the FairBnb. coop system. The Beskids Marketing Alliance will improve access to selected tourist information from the region on the website. We will live stream most of the ECoC programme and allow visitors to explore digital artworks and immersive installations online. Furthermore, it will also include a *Video On Demand* platform as well as an *online gallery* consisting of 3D tours of exhibitions and heritage sites, educational activities, and artistic games connected to a loyalty programme. Some of the shows from the ECoC programme will also go on a *VR European Tour* in cooperation with Brejlando (CZ), offering custom art and cultural programmes on VR headsets in cultural spaces around Europe.

We will use digital PPC campaigns to support targeted campaigns, which are also valuable due to marketing data. We will also focus on cooperation with popular digital platforms with a tourist and cultural offer such as TripAdvisor, zlavadna.sk, goout.sk or others. We will invite influencers focused on culture and lifestyle for a weekend in the Beskids.

WORKING WITH THE PUBLIC → We realize that personal meetings with the public cannot be underestimated. And so, from March 2022, in each of the three cities (Žilina, Frydek Mistek, Bielsko-Biała), we will organize information events for the communities, the so-called “*Small Talks*”. Team members or trained volunteers will visit concrete communities, centers for the elderly, companies, and schools, and will organise a ready-made interactive presentation of the project, with a promo toolkit. In addition, every year until 2027, we will organize a public annual event for partners, *Cultural Forum Beskids*, where together with

experts we will summarize what the given year brought within the ECoC project and what will come next.

WELCOME SERVICE → First-line workers and volunteers – in tourist information centres, hotel receptions, railway and bus stations, public transport, local authorities, in sports facilities, tourist attractions, regional airports, but also policemen and taxi drivers, will be provided with *information packages and communication training* about the ECoC programme. From 2025 on, we plan to issue a *loyalty card* (a combination of several existing ones) for the visitors of the Beskids,

Communication plan

Communication phase	Intention of communication	Key activity
Initiation 2020 – 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Obtain and involve partners and supporters for the ECoC Žilina Beskids 2026 project● Create a marketing alliance Beskids 2026 together with 16 tourist organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Communication locally in the three cities through press releases, websites, and social media● Communication with professional and lay public through the annual conference Beskids Cultural Forum and community information events “Small Talks”
Gaining attention 2022 – 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Strengthen the active cooperation of all stakeholders of the ECoC project● With the members of the marketing alliance Beskids 2026, compile a detailed marketing plan, communication project and destination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Active campaign which will present to the professional and lay public the main topics of the European Capital of Culture project, its expected benefits, community information events “Small Talks”, and communication online and offline
Engagement 2024 – 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Promote enthusiasm for the project among all stakeholders and the public● Actively promote the project and its story as well as its content (events and activities) and gain regional and international audience in the target markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Lead intensive communication and marketing campaigns for target audiences in the three countries and internationally● Broadcasting and presenting content of the year
Consolidation 2027+	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Summarize what was learned from the ECOC project, outcomes and impacts● Consolidation of the Beskids marketing alliance and preparing a marketing plan for the next period (2028–2032)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Spread Evaluation of ECoC and most memorable moments in different formats and present the outputs to the public locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally● Continue marketing campaigns presenting the Beskids destination and its tourism offer

Partnerships with media and media coverage

We will ask the national public radio and TV for an official *media partnership*, for coverage of the preparation and broadcasting a series of official reports from the major events of the year. In addition, we will also involve fifty-nine local and regional media partners. We will invite international TV crews especially to the *Opening Ceremony* and will create a separate press office for them with full press service. We will stay in touch with them throughout the year by sending selected press information, with an online photo and video bank. From 2025, we will contact foreign journalists from various countries for *press information trips*, which will be primarily focused on presenting the ECoC project and the Beskids region. To complement the media mix and in connection with targeted campaigns, we will purchase commercial media space, always with regard to efficiency.

Our intention is also to build our own *“ECOC Media House”* and together with our partners and the Citizen Cultural Journalism Platform produce content for our YouTube channel. We will also produce podcasts about the project and interviews with invited guests. On the project’s website, we will regularly publish up-to-date information from behind the scenes of the project. For important events we will publish press releases, or organize briefings for journalists, including “breakfast with journalists”.

Let the people tell it to the world

Our subproject the *Citizen Cultural Journalism Platform* will engage the public – amateur journalists – and they will receive training, exclusive access to the ECoC events and space for publication. The main idea is to obtain a free citizen point of view on ECoC, in line with our free speech and journalism programme lines. We will also actively motivate local fans, addressing them using creative campaigns and providing them with an online platform and support to upload videos, photos, and texts in various languages. We will use the method of “storytelling” with locals from the three countries to record their stories from the past or

which will allow them to move easily around the region, while we will obtain marketing and evaluation data. We will set up *Welcome ECoC Hubs* in each of the three cities as contact points with the ECoC project. In Žilina, Welcome Centres will be located in the refurbished main railway station and at the renewed Tourism Information Center on A. Hlinka Square. We will also establish a partner *Welcome ECoC Desk*, or at least have media / tourism partners, relaying our information in the partner cities, as well as in the country capitals Bratislava (Slovakia), Prague (Czech Republic), and Warsaw (Poland).

present Beskids and publish them through podcasts to draw visitors’ attention. We would like to experiment with a *peer-to-peer marketing* approach, involving young people and other target groups directly in building their own communication campaign. We will choose real locals (parents, children, seniors, nature lovers, heritage fans, artists) as marketing ambassadors or “persona”, who will speak to their own target groups. For instance, we will involve young people through focus groups in creating their own communication plan and then connect them with marketing experts, in order for them to actively participate in the implementation of their own plan and communicate the content the most relevant to their peers. Another channel of spreading internationally will be the *European Voluntary Service Reunion* where all the European volunteers who in the past spent time in Žilina will gather in 2026 with their families. Their stories will be disseminated while targeting the audience in their own countries. *Beskids Participatory Hospitality Programme* will consist of building, alongside accommodation offers, guided tours in hosts’ neighborhoods, cultural and hospitality offers, and unique experiences together with the locals.

Highlighting the European Capital of Culture as an activity of the European Union

The openness of borders and transnational cooperation is one of the core values of the European Union, strengthening its unity and integrity. Our joint cross-border bid and European dimension of our programme makes up a sort of model of the Union and as such provides structural opportunities to communicate the ECoC as an EU activity. The main layer of recognisability will of course be the strong branding of all spaces and events with logos and flags, but also pop-up information totems around the city, info-points at events in cooperation with Europe Direct and EU representation in Slovakia. We will also organise an outdoor event to commemorate our EU accession in May 2026. Another layer of communication will be activated through numerous investment projects which will be funded from EU funds.

6. CAPACITY TO DELIVER

6. 1 Continuous political support and commitment from the relevant authorities

The City of Žilina has been the initiator of the candidacy. After an initial consultation with the city’s cultural scene and the Cultural Committee and their consent, the City Council unanimously approved the candidacy as well as funds provided for bid preparation in the first round and the first bid book was presented to them on 2 February 2021. A project team has been created, temporarily under the city’s tourism organisation OOCR Malá Fatra. Since then, key city stakeholders have been regularly informed about the progress of the project team, with the vice-mayor involved on a weekly basis and the mayor along with the entire city leadership once a month. Furthermore, several members of the City Council became involved in our participatory programmes and events, with the chairman of the Cultural Committee taking a seat on our Art Board.

In the second phase, on 25 February 2021, the City Council unanimously approved the funds to be provided for the second round. We made a presentation of the second bid book at the Cultural Forum Beskids which members of the city’s administration were invited to, with a special consultation meeting held for them as well. The bid book, operating and capital budget, and investments list were presented to the Cultural and Financial Committees on 31 August and were *unanimously approved at the meeting of the City Council on 20 September 2021*. Cooperation with the Žilina Self-Governing Region has been systematic and stable throughout the whole bidding process, since a specific coordinator has been appointed as the main contact person for the Region. The proposed investments and programme were prepared in close coordination with Žilina Beskids 2026 team. The bid was presented and approved *unanimously in the regional council on 27 September 2021* as well as by its committees on culture and finance, culminating in the signing of the common Memorandum on 13 October 2021 which included financial commitment on part of the Region. Frýdek-Místek’s City Council voted to support the bid, including programme, invest-

ment, and financial commitment on 16 September 2021 and a memorandum was signed. Bielsko-Biala’s City Board formally agreed to support the bid, including programme, investment, and financial commitment as well. In Frýdek-Místek, the previous *change of mayor and the governing coalition did not impact the city’s support for the bid*. In both cities, we have recruited cross-border coordinators in charge of involvement of each city and the local cultural scenes.

Furthermore, *ninety and municipalities* from the Beskids signed an agreement with the city of Žilina concerning support for the bid, including programme cooperation and financial support. The Moravian-Silesian Region in the Czech Republic, signed a Letter of Intent on 4 October 2021 with the Žilina Self-governing Region, while the Silesian Voivodeship in Poland signed its own on 6 October 2021.

6. 2 Description of infrastructure projects, incl. timetable for the works and connection to ECoC project

CITY OF ŽILINA PROJECTS

HANGAR

Investment: *Partial reconstruction / Indoor surface = 4 280m², Outdoor = 12 600 m² / Ownership: City of Žilina*
Timeframe: *09.2021 – feasibility study → 10.2022 – architectural competition → 2022–24 – construction documents and legal process → 2024–25 – reconstruction → 10.2025 – opening*

HANGAR is a large bus depot used by the city’s transport company to repair its trolley-buses, with a large parking area. The city’s mass transport company will move to a new location and this city-owned facility will be refurbished and become a multipurpose artistic production facility, through a complex reconstruction of the roof and interior. The reconstructed premises will be dedicated to production of performances and artworks for the public space. The production facilities will at the same time serve as technical background for production of all ECoC projects and a Makerspace for artists providing them with access to technology, technical support, and mentoring. In addition, HANGAR will host an upcycling centre with a material bank for artistic creation. HANGAR will also have a dedicated space for production and filming of animated movies, and will occasionally host large events and concerts and the parking area, an ideal space for outdoor

events, markets, or a circus tent. A new entrance will be created with reception desks, a café and a resource centre.

ECoC events: *“Enough is Enough” exhibition, Scale up workshops, Sustainable Design Week, European Artistic Crafts Days, Animators in Residence, Echoes of the Town, NCAF – New Circus Art Fest, Industrial Heritage EXPO, CC: workshops*

PASÁ:Ž – Platform for architecture and citizen participation

Investment: *reconstruction / Indoor surface = 2 700 m² + Atrium = 300 m² / Ownership: City of Žilina + third party*
Timeframe: *11.2021 – feasibility study + competition → 12.2022 – construction documents and legal process → 2024–25 – construction works → 09.2025 – opening*

PASÁ:Ž is a partially unused building in the city centre owned by the City of Žilina, to which the Chief City Planner’s Department recently moved its offices. The Žilina Beskids 2026 team is using the building as its headquarters and will continue using the premises even before the full reconstruction planned for 2024. The building consists of shopping spaces on the ground floor, with a small courtyard used as a passage, office space on the first floor, and attic space about to be reconstructed. The investment will consist of interior reconstruction of the building needed for its new functions, including a gallery space on the ground floor, but also a design shop and a café, the first floor will be used for offices and a studio, while the attic will be transformed into a co-working space and a conference room. PASÁ:Ž will present new trends in architecture, host exhibitions, workshops, conferences, public meetings, and events.

ECoC events: *My City, Creative Bureaucracy, City Acupuncture, Prospective Cities, SIGMA Group, Borderless Cities, Leisure Time, Svojdodomov, Nonument*

Environmental park Bôrik

Investment: *new construction / Indoor surface = 1430 m² + Outdoor = 3 610 m² / Ownership: City of Žilina + SEVAK*
Timeframe: *09.2021 – feasibility study → 03.2023 – arch. competition → 12.2022 – construction documents and process → 2024–25 – construction works → 11.2025 – opening*

The project of the *Environmental Park Bôrik* will be the outcome of a complex reconstruction of the city’s oldest underground water reservoirs from 1908, currently owned

by the private water distribution company SEVAK. The Environmental park Bôrik will consist of an Immersive museum, using cutting-edge technologies to offer a unique cultural experience and reflect current environmental issues in projection-based installations. It will also present, directly on site of the old water tank, permanent exhibitions about the water cycle, intended mainly for children and school trips. It is completed by a nice park, with interactive outdoor water installations, and the construction of a new building offering space for a visitor centre with a café and a workshop space.

ECoC events: *Story of Water, Melting time, River of Pure Becoming, Inside Slovak Modernism*

Ciachovňa

Investment: *reconstruction / Indoor surface = 883 m² / Ownership: City of Žilina*
Timeframe: *2022 – changes in construction authorisation → 2023–24 – construction works → 12.2024 – opening*

Ciachovňa is a technical heritage building of the steam-power station built in 1908 which has gone unused for many years and was recently bought by the city from the Žilina Self-Governing Region. It is spread over two floors and offers 651 m² of exhibition space. The building will become an art, science and technology gallery and laboratory. The STE(A)M² NextGen LAB will offer a creative development centre for technological and new media artworks. It will host a FabLab, creative workshops, and an artist-in-residence programme.

Functions: *laboratory, residency, workshop and exhibition space for art, science and technology*
ECoC events: *STE(A)M² NextGen LAB, Cross-Border FabLab, Video Point Media Library, Textile Biophilia, STE(A) M² Biennale, The State of Amplitude, IGDAF Festival, Video Art Biennale, VAL and Prospective Architecture Today*

Dance Center S2

Investment: *new construction / Indoor surface = 920 m² + Outdoor = 360 m² / Ownership: City of Žilina + Truc sphérique*
Timeframe: *09.2021 – feasibility study → 2023 – construction documents and process → 2024–25 – construction works → 3.2025 – opening*

The Dance Center S2 will be a new two-storey building with a multifunctional hall for performances with approximately 150 seats, flexible stage and seating layout, and with residential, studio, and workshop spaces. This is a much-needed black box for

rehearsals and performances in the field of physical theatre and contemporary dance. It will be administered by Stanica's team, in a new public-private partnership model, offering a year-round space for various events and festivals. It sits in a small park, next to the Cultural center Stanica, connected to a still active railway station and under a highway bridge roundabout.

ECoC events: *Kiosk, Slovak Dance Platform, fest Anča, Independent Games and Digital Art Festival, CEE Animation Forum*

International Literature House Vrba a Wetzler

Investment: *partial reconstruction / Indoor surface = 500 m² / Ownership: ŽNO Žilina*
Timeframe: *2022 – changes in construction documents and authorisation → 2023–24 – construction works → 12.2024 – opening*

The building, where in 1944 Rudolf Vrba and Alfréd Wetzler were hiding after escaping from the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau and where they wrote their famous report about the atrocities that were going on there. This year, the city refurbished the basement of the building and transformed it into a memorial room, building on the touristic and historical potential of the place. In the coming years, we will transform the rest of the building into a residency space for writers and translators, to promote European literature. It will also host our Free Speech Hub, where persecuted reporters, artists, and researchers will be given space to work and create in 2026. The building will host public events in the basement, a meeting and workshop room, with a library on the first floor and accommodation for residencies on the floors above it.

ECoC events: *ECoC events: Žilina Literature Festival, International Literature House Vrba and Wetzler residency programme, Vrba-Wetzler commemoration room, Free Speech Hub*

Cultural Houses – KD Budatin, KD Zástranie, KD Žilinská Lehota, KD Vranie, KD Trnové, KD Strážov, KD Bytčica

Investment: *reconstruction / Ownership: City of Žilina*
Timeframe: *till 12.2023 – construction documents and process → 2024 – construction works → 12.2024 – opening*
KD Budatin = 800 m², KD Zástranie = 1040 m², KD Žilinská Lehota = 700 m², KD Vranie = 245 m², KD Trnové = 1150 m², KD Strážov = 1110 m², KD Bytčica = 1710 m²

The Cultural Houses investment project involves the transformation of seven buildings in the outskirts of Žilina. We will refurbish city-owned traditional Cultural Houses into modern spaces for culture and community life in various satellite villages of Žilina. With two of these, Strážov and Budatin, this involves introduction of new functions to the buildings. The spaces are currently in urgent need of a new impulse to raise their attractiveness and expand their activities – both interior and exterior reconstruction and investments in technical equipment are needed. They will usually consist of a community central space with the possibility to meet and present cultural programmes, a workshop place (e.g. small makerspaces), an office space and a kitchen corner. They will work as a network of city community art centres, administered by the Rosenfeld Palace, offering cultural contents and focusing mainly on community planning, artistic responses, and mobilisation of the locals, all with the support of trained cultural mediators.

ECoC events: *European Family Photo Album, Community Museum, Wandering Books, Beskids Intergenerational University*

Main railway station in Žilina – Museum of Transportation and Welcoming Centre

Investment: *partial reconstruction / Indoor surface = 300 m² + 50 m² / Ownership: Railways of the Slovak Republic – ŽSR*
Timeframe: *2022 – construction documents and legal process → 2023 – construction works → 12.2023 – opening*

The main railway station was built in 1942 based on a design by Ferdinand Čapka and Eduard František Bednárik and is nowadays considered to be one of the most valuable modernist buildings in the city of Žilina. The building will be undergoing a complete reconstruction from REACT-EU funds, and in addition, a new square will be created in front of it, creating a new gateway to the city. The reconstructed station will contain new cultural functions, a part of the building will be turned into the Museum of Transportation, an expansion of the existing exposition of the Museum of the Považie Region, and the main hall will become a space open to temporary exhibitions and interventions. Furthermore, it will host a Welcoming Centre for ECOC visitors.

ECoC events: *Bon Voyage, VlakFest, Locomotion, Cultural Crossroad, Museum of Transportation*

Žilina City Theatre

Investment: *interior reconstruction a technical equipment / Content = electrical and water supply and sewerage, stage and auditorium, windows, light and sound systems / Ownership: City of Žilina*
Timeframe: *2022 – construction documents and legal process → 2023 – construction works → 01.2024 – opening*

The Žilina City Theatre is housed in a monumental classicist building covered by white travertine, originally built as a Roman-Catholic school in 1941 in the very centre of the city. The main auditorium has a capacity of up to 310 seats and a studio to host the European Theatre Incubator. Both of these spaces need a complete refurbishment, with new seats, repaired wiring, water conduits, and windows, as well as modern lighting and sound technology.

ECoC events: *HEY! – European Theatre Incubator, Shared Cities, Radicalisation, Slovena, Beskids Cultural Forum*

SNP Park & Andrej Hlinka Square

Investment: *refurbishment + reconstruction / Outdoor = 17 500 m² + 11 000 m² / Ownership: City of Žilina*
Timeframe: *2022–23 – construction documents and legal process → 2024–25 – construction works → 11.2025 – opening*

SNP Park & Andrej Hlinka Square are central parts of the city centre in the vicinity of the main railway and bus stations. The projected reconstruction of the SNP park involves mainly refurbished greenery, street furniture, fountain, space for art installations, and a gazebo for outdoor concerts. The Andrej Hlinka Square will be completely reconstructed, with new paving, fountain, street furniture, and sculptures. The project also includes refurbishment of the city's main tourist office located in the square, and basic infrastructure for regular outdoor events and markets.

ECoC events: *Water Stream Všivák, Embassy of Argillia*

Rajčanka + Bánová Riverbanks

Investment: *refurbishment + sanitary facilities / Indoor surface = 50 + 25 m² + Outdoor = 2400 + 2225 m² / Ownership: City of Žilina + 1. Slovenský vodohospodársky podnik, š.p.*
Timeframe: *09.2021 – feasibility study → 2022–24 – construction documents and process → 2024–25 – construction works → 11.2025 – opening*

The two five-kilomet-relong, currently neglected **Rajčanka and Bánová Riverbanks** are planned to be transformed into a new space for community activities in the city district of Závodie and Bánová. These newly created parks with a walkway extending to the water will contain community meeting places and street furniture, mobile greenery, artworks, space for cultural events, and a cycling path. Large-scale installations are expected as part of the Hello Rajčanka festival.

ECoC events: *Hello Rajčanka, Flow Festival*

Urban Forest – Dubeň & Straník

Investment: *refurbishment / Outdoor = artistic and educational facilities on 5 000 m² land / Ownership: Slovenský pozemkový fond*
Timeframe: *2022–23 – property arrangement → 2024 – construction documents and process → 2025 – construction works → 11.2025 – opening*

We strive to create an **Urban Forest – Dubeň & Straník**, on the foothills overlooking Žilina, by reconstructing the existing footpaths and investing in quality service infrastructure, like a self-service information centre, access to water and toilets, refreshments, nature-friendly outdoor artworks, and spaces for leisure activities. The forest will have good accessibility and will be connected by cycling routes with other recreational locations around the city.

ECoC events: *Art Trails Beskids, From The Sky, Escape*

Žilina's Old Town Hall – City Museum: permanent exhibition about city history

Investment: *interior reconstruction / Content = exhibition spaces / Ownership: City of Žilina*
Timeframe: *2022 – renew construction documents → 2023 – heritage and legal process → 2023–24 – construction works → 06.2024 – opening*

The national cultural heritage building of the **Žilina's Old Town Hall** is nowadays used as the city's ceremonial space. We plan to refurbish the outdated interiors and adapt them for new functions. The town hall will host a permanent exhibition of the city's history for visitors, and an exhibition room. The building will also accommodate our artists in residence and host educational programmes in its training centre.

Functions: *City Museum, training centre*

Community Courtyards

Investment: *Refurbishment / Outdoor surface = average of 500 m² × 12 units / Ownership: City of Žilina*

By refurbishment of twelve inner **Community Courtyards** of the city's largest housing estates, we will create new community and cultural spaces by adding greenery, community and cultural facilities. The community courtyards will also host artistic fountains, the result of a large public cultural mediation project.

ECoC events: *Community Courtyards, Fountains for Zuzanas, Community Gardens, Urban Intervention, Sensitive Neighbourhoods*

ŽILINA REGION PROJECTS

Forest museum Vychylovka & Beskids Forest Railway

Investment: *New construction / Indoor surface = 1750 m², Outdoor = 850 m² / Ownership: Žilina Self-governing Region*
Timeframe: *09.2021 – feasibility study → 03.2023 – construction documents and legal process → do 03.2023 – public procurement → 2024–2025 – construction works → 05.2025 – opening*

The **Forest Museum Vychylovka** project will encompass construction of a new forest museum, including permanent and temporary exhibition spaces, a space for workshops and a welcoming space with info desk, refreshment and a souvenir shop. This new eco-friendly modern building made of wood and glass will be integrated into the landscape and located at the entrance of the existing open-air ethnographic museum. It will offer modern museum services and an interactive family-friendly experience, as well as technical production facilities for artists and artisans working with wood. In addition, we will invest in the reconstruction of the **Beskids Forest Railway**, four kilometres of the historical forest railway in the Beskids mountain pass between Orava and Kysuce; this prominent tourist attraction has currently only a short part of the track in operation.

ECoC events: *Hug the Forest, Myco Fiction – Mushroom Galaxies, Decomposition, Fairy Tales and Legends of the Forest*

Interactive Children's Museum

Investment: *New construction / Indoor surface = 1750 m², Atrium + Green roof =*

250 m² / Ownership: Žilina Self-governing Region
Timeframe: 09.2021 – feasibility study → 04.2023 – construction documents and legal process → do 10.2023 – public procurement → 2024–2025 – construction works → 03.2025 – opening

The new facilities of the *Interactive Children’s Museum* will be built in the courtyard and on the top of the premises of the stage production workshops owned by Puppet Theatre Žilina in the city district of Závodie. This two-storey modern building will offer spaces ideally suited for temporary interactive exhibitions and experiential learning facilities designed especially for children, visiting with schools or with families. The museum will consist of one large exhibition room of 500 m², a smaller one of 400 m², a lab/workshop space, a place for smaller children, and, of course, a large foyer. The production workshop is also an important element, offering an opportunity to either create standalone exhibitions or reinterpret puppet theatre shows in the exhibition format. The construction documents for reconstruction of the Puppet Theatre workshops have already been finished.

ECoC events: *Building the Town – by Sutnar, Story in Space*

Budatín Castle

Investment: reconstruction / Indoor surface = 400 m² / Ownership: Žilina Self-governing Region
Timeframe: do 02.2023 – construction documents for the lift and legal process → do 08.2023 – public procurement → 2023–24 – construction works → 12.2024 – opening

The Budatín Castle was built as a fortress in the second half of the 13th century near the confluence of the rivers Kysuca and Váh, where tolls were collected. Today, it is the seat of the historical Považie Museum in Žilina. This investment consists of reconstruction of the castle’s attic to create new exhibition spaces for temporary exhibitions, plus the construction of a lift for wheelchair access to this iconic object of the city’s heritage.

ECoC events: *Slovak State (1939–1945) exhibition, European Textile Time Machine, Industrial heritage EXPO, kintsugi art exhibition, STRING, European Artistic Crafts Days*

Museum of Art in Žilina

Investment: reconstruction / Indoor surface = 733 m² + Outdoor = 294 m² / Ownership: Žilina Self-governing Region

Timeframe: do 05.2023 – construction documents and legal process → do 12.2023 – public procurement → 2024 – construction works → 02.2025 – opening

The Museum of Art Žilina originated in 1976 with its independence from the Považie Museum. At present time, the gallery specializes especially in the art of new media (video art and installations). The investment will focus on reconstruction of the ground floor, hospitality spaces, the *Museum of Intermedia* exhibition, courtyard, and construction of a lift to improve access to exhibition spaces.

ECoC events: *Video Art Biennale, VAL and Prospective Architecture Today, 90s Intermedia and Video Art in Central and Eastern Europe, Textiles as (non) Materials, 25 000 Gallery*

Kysuce Art Gallery – ARTboretum

Investment: reconstruction / Indoor surface = 120 m² + Outdoor / Ownership: Žilina Self-governing Region
Timeframe: do 09.2022 – construction documents and legal process → do 02.2023 – public procurement → 2023 – construction works → 12.2023 – opening

The ARTboretum project, an initiative of the Kysuce Museum, aims to create new working and accommodation spaces for two artists in residence from Slovakia and abroad who will be able to stay and create year-round in this unique environment of the beautiful historical mansion in Oščadnica and its surrounding forest park. The output of their efforts, mainly sculptures and installations, will be exhibited in the park and along the Beskids Art trails.

ECoC events: *ARTboretum – International Sculpture Symposium, Beskids Art Trails*

Orava Gallery – Slanica Island of Art

Investment: refurbishment + reconstruction / Indoor surface = 450 m² + Outdoor = 3,5ha / Ownership: Žilina Self-governing Region
Timeframe: do 01.2023 – construction documents and legal process → do 06.2023 – public procurement → 2023–24 – construction works → 10.2024 – opening

In the beautiful surroundings of Slanica Island in the middle of the Orava reservoir, there are permanent exhibitions of traditional folk art from the Orava Gallery’s collections. The interior of the church located on the island hosts the exhibition *Traditional Slovak Folk Sculptures and Paintings*, while the exterior holds the lapidary *18th*

and 19th Century Orava Stone Sculptures. The island also contains exhibits related to the flooded villages and construction of the Orava dam. Thanks to the uniqueness of the site, the exhibitions and the performing art and music festivals happening there every year, the island, located near the city of Námestovo, became one of the most visited sights of the Orava region.

ECoC events: *Tanečno, Slanica Island of Theatre, Orava DAM*

PARTNER CITIES PROJECTS IN SLOVAKIA

Cultural House of Ján Palárik – Čadca

Investment: reconstruction / Indoor surface = 1142 m² / Ownership: City of Čadca
Timeframe: 06.2022 – public procurement → 01.2023 – 06.2024 – construction works → 6.2024 – opening

The original building of the Cultural House of Ján Palárik situated on Čadca’s main promenade, burned down in 2004. The project’s main goal is to reconstruct the building, then set up an exposition dedicated to the story of Vrba and Wetzler in its central part. The exhibition will be created in a partnership we are seeking to establish with Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Israel and will form an integral part of the Vrba-Wetzler Route. The second floor will be dedicated to temporary exhibitions and cultural purposes, and used as space for public discussions.

ECoC events: *Vrba–Wetzler Art March, a graphic novel about the story of Vrba and Wetzler, Vrba–Wetzler Route*

Cinema Choč a museum in Dolný Kubín

Investment: partial reconstruction / Indoor surface = 561 m² / Ownership: City of Dolný Kubín
Timeframe: do 12.2021 – construction authorisation → 2022 – public procurements → 2023 – construction works → 01.2024 – opening

The building of the former Jewish synagogue built in 1901 in the centre of Dolný Kubín, served as a community cinema until 2012. Today, the city wants to revive the cinema, along with a newly established museum of the city’s Jewish legacy, dedicated to a local Holocaust survivor, Mr Tibor Spitz. The exhibition is planned to tell

the story of Jews during WWII through his personal story and the story of inhabitants of Dolný Kubín. The museum will be an interactive platform using audio-visual materials meant to transport visitors into the era, rather than just observe it from a distance. The museum will serve as an important tool in historical education for schools and students in the region. After the reconstruction, the building will also host the tourist information office.

ECoC events: *Kinobus, Fest Anča*

Kysuca Cinema in Kysucké Nové Mesto

Investment: partial reconstruction / Indoor surface = 1197 m² / Ownership: City of Kysucké Nové Mesto
Timeframe: do 12.2022 – renew construction documents → 1.2023 – construction legal process → 2024 – construction works → 12.2024 – opening

The neglected building of the cinema in Kysucké Nové Mesto will receive a partial reconstruction and its outdated analogue projection equipment will be restored and complemented with a digital set. The building will be turned into a modern boutique cinema with refurbished auditorium, workshop spaces, and a café and will provide a base for local cultural organisations.

ECoC events: *Kinobus, Fest Anča*

PARTNER CITIES PROJECTS IN CZECH AND POLAND

Nová scéna / Moravia Bank / Národní dům

Investment: new construction + reconstruction / Nová scéna = 3 910 m² + Moravia bank = 1 864 m² + Národní dům = 4 425 m² / Ownership: City of Frýdek-Místek
Timeframe: 2022–23 – construction documents and legal process → 2024–26 – construction works → 01.2026 – opening

In 2018, the city of Frídek-Místek ordered a plan for new cultural infrastructure from the famous Czech architect Eva Jiřičná. The iconic contemporary building of Nová scéna will offer a multifunctional auditorium for cultural events, with a capacity of 450 seats, a facility that the city lacked. It will be suitable for large concerts or theatre performances. The building will also offer a theatre studio with eighty seats and workshop spaces.

Next to it, the unique protected historical building of the Moravia Bank has been purchased by the City of Frýdek-Místek from a private owner, and is to be reconstructed. It will host the city’s new gallery, a lecture auditorium, as well as residency spaces and studios for artists. The buildings stand next to the Národní dům, the city’s main cultural centre, which will get a new roof and will be refurbished. Národní dům hosts a hall for concerts and rehearsal rooms, spaces for local associations and a café. It will host a new exhibition on the city’s history, accommodation capacities for performers, and offices of the Kultura FM coordinating organization.

Functions: *Moba city gallery, Environmental Artistic Centre FM, Multifunctional auditorium for cultural events, theatre studio*
ECoC events: *Cyanometer, City Herbarium, Future Art Forms, Invisible Air, Go Forward... Never Go Back!, Fresh AIR – Art and Environment Residencies, Environmental Artistic Centre FM, Odpoutaná scéna*

The New Eight

Investment: compliance with legal standards / Indoor surface = 13 800 m² + Outdoor = 21 300 m² / Ownership: SLEZAN Holding a. s.
Timeframe: 2024 – documentation and legal process → 2025–26 – refurbishing works → 4.2026 – opening

The city of Frýdek-Místek and SLEZAN Holding agreed to turn the former textile factory building into a new creative HUB in the city – The New Eight. The monumental, rectangular two-storey building of the former textile spinning mill was built by the Neumann brothers in 1889, in the industrial Art Nouveau style. After partial reconstruction, the space will be operating from May to September as a venue for workshops, artistic interventions, exhibitions but will also be turned into a social reactor engaging citizens and visitors of the city in participatory processes.

ECoC events: *Ventriloquing, Multispecies Academy, Textiles in the Beskids Region, FM Summer Academy of City Acupuncture*

Interactive Centre for Cartoons and Animation

Investment: new construction / Indoor exhibition surface = 225 m² / Ownership: City of Bielsko-Biała
Timeframe: 10.2021 – Public procurement → 1.2022 – public procurement and construction legal process → 2022–2023 – construction works → 12.2023 – opening

Starting in the 1950s, the Animated Film Studio located in Bielsko-Biała produced the most famous Polish animated films, like Bolek and Lolek or Reksio. The studio plans to expand its activities along with its traditional film production to include media education and entertainment in the form of the Interactive Centre for Cartoons and Animation. The winning design by the renowned architectural studio Nizio International Design combines historical buildings with new architecture and innovative multimedia solutions, but also plans to revive a part of Bielsko-Biała. The centre is to be a combination of an interactive and modern museum with an amusement park and will contain facilities for workshops and educational activities.

ECoC events: *International Festival of Animation in Bielsko Biala, Animators in Residence, CEE Animation Workshop 2026*

The Ecological Education Park “AQUA”

Investment: new construction / Indoor exhibition surface = 225 m² / Ownership: Aqua sa + City of Bielsko-Biała
Timeframe: 10.2021 – Architectural competition → 1.2022 – public procurement and construction legal process → 2023–2024 – construction works → 12.2024 – opening

The *Ecological Education Park “AQUA”* will become a unique water museum for Bielsko-Biała and its region. It will include four educational rooms and interactive laboratories for organization of educational activities with an exhibition hall dedicated to permanent and temporary exhibitions, in addition to the existing swimming pool complex. The city of Bielsko-Biała has already organised an architectural competition, the winning project has been selected in September 2021, the construction is due to begin in 2022, and the facility should open by the end of 2024.

ECoC events: *Story of the water*

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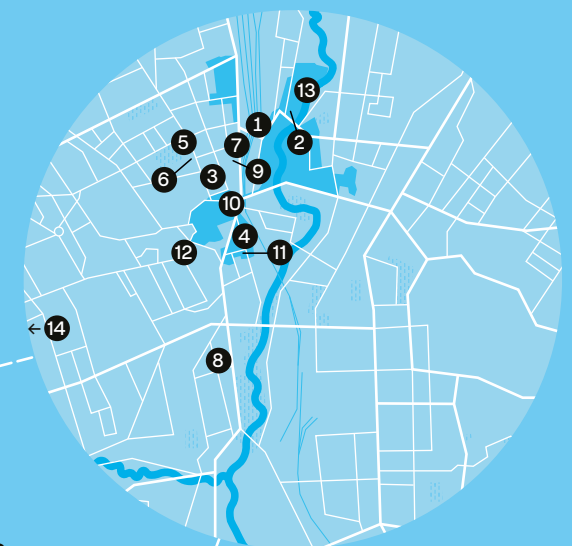
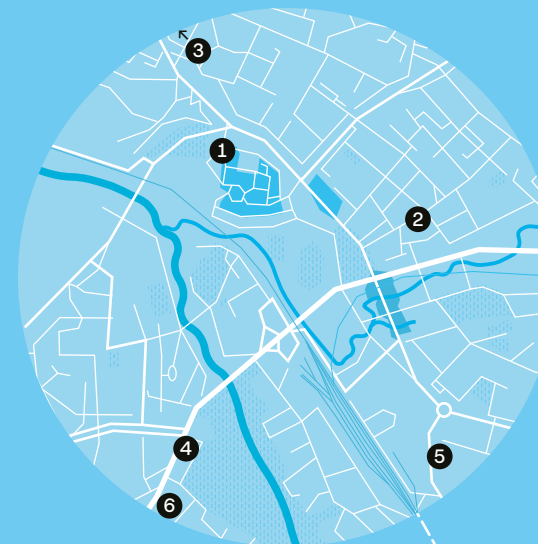
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Frýdek-Místek

- 1 Museum Beskyd
- 2 Municipal Library
- 3 Cultural House Frydek
- 4 Vlast Cinema
- 5 New Eight – Slezan
- 6 Nová scéna / MoraviaBank /
Národní dům



Bielsko-Biala

- 1 Arting
- 2 Lotos Jazz Festival
- 3 Redakcja BB
- 4 Polish Theatre
- 5 Beskids Library
- 6 Bielsko Cultural Centre
- 7 BWA Gallery
- 8 Centre for photography
foundation
- 9 Puppet Theatre Banialuka
- 10 Zamek Książąt Sułkowskich
- 11 Gallery of photography
- 12 Studio Filmów Rysunkowych
- 13 Art Theatre Association
- 14 Ecological Education park Aqua

Žilina

- 1 Budatin Castle
- 2 Interactive Children Museum
- 3 Ciachovňa
- 4 PASÁ:Ž
- 5 Hangar
- 6 Bôrik Environmental Park
- 7 Dance center S2
- 8 Rajčanka riverbanks
- 9 City forest Straník – Dubeň
- 10 SNP park and Hlinka square
- 11 Main railway station



- 12 Museum of Art
- 13 International Literature
House Vrba Wetzler
- 14 City Theatre Žilina
- 15 Rosenfeld Palace
- 16 Nová Synagóga
- 17 Puppet Theatre Žilina
- 18 Slovak Sinfonietta Žilina
- 19 Regional Cultural Centre
- 20 Regional Library
- 21 Hájovňa – Independent Cultural Centre

