

CULTURE
OVER
DIVISION

SKOPJE
2020

S K O P J E



Candidate City for
European Capital of
Culture 2028

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Introduction

1. Why does your city wish to take part in the competition for the title of European Capital of Culture?

Skopje (historical names: Scupi, Üsküp; Albanian: Shkup) is the capital of North Macedonia. As the largest city, it is the cultural, scientific, economic, political, and administrative centre of the country. As the capital of a country on its way to becoming a member of the European Union, we are to show Europe our cultural character and our rich cultural heritage shaped over the centuries through the intertwining and permeation of various ethnicities and cultures. Furthermore, we aim to show Skopje's vibrant artistic life as well as our vivid and diverse cultural scene. Not only to show what we have but also, even more important, what we are going to make.

The desire for change and progress, therefore, led us to apply for the ECOC 2028 title. According to our opinion, a city that is not constantly changing is surely declining. Progress is only possible by solving problems. In doing so, our starting point is the understanding that only the problem recognised as such by the public authorities and which they are actively trying to find an appropriate solution for can truly be said to be a "challenge".

The candidacy for the ECOC 2028 title is by all means a challenge for us. Skopje is currently facing many challenges that city leaders along with city administration are ready to grapple with. Decision-makers have finally become aware that culture can be a generator of change and a catalyst for urban transformation. Thus, culture has become an integral part of the new development vision of the city.

We do believe that art and culture play an important role in modern society. Moreover, it is our strong belief that the role of art in culture in the everyday life of every individual is much more important than it might

be perceived by the general public. The responsibility of all of us who create works of art and all people in culture as well as cultural policy makers is to spread awareness of the importance of culture as a vital asset that binds us firmly together.

We do believe in the hospitality of the residents of Skopje. Many of them, due to economic or social reasons, rarely participate in cultural life, or, unfortunately, are completely excluded from it. All citizens should benefit from the ECOC programme. Keeping this in mind, we see the candidacy as an opportunity to bring art and culture closer to many of our fellow citizens, to bring, for at least a second or two, joy to their lives, and also, to further deepen how they see the world that is growing increasingly out of the possibility of rational reflection.

We do believe in the creativity of our artists. It is but a unique opportunity for them to present themselves to a wide European audience. It is but an opportunity for producers and cultural professionals to develop closer ties with colleagues from all over Europe and create new partnership relationships. This, among other things, is to lead to an even more diverse cultural offer in our city.

We firmly believe that Skopje can become a "proper" European city, despite all the issues and the fact that it is relatively poorer than many European cities. The SK2028 project could be considered a means of our normalisation.

We do believe in the power of the message we want to send through the SK2028 project, both to our fellow citizens and the residents of all European cities, just as we believe in the meaningfulness and long-term benefit of everything we are to do.

We do believe SK2028 is but a success story. We are probably not yet aware of all the efforts we need to make to turn those words into reality, but we are guided by the unwavering belief in the joint action of artists, cultural professionals, and all forward-looking citizens who want to create a better city for future

generations.

During the first two decades of the 21. century, the culture in Skopje has been captured by political interests, mostly as a means of (re)interpretations of the past. The instrumentalisation of culture for political gains harmed even the international reputation of the city. Political misuse of culture has caused many problems for Skopje. It is time for culture to become part of its development solutions. These are the reasons why we take part in the competition for the ECOC 2028 title.

Nowadays, an increasing number of cities throughout Europe are facing large numbers of issues of economic, social, or ecological character, particularly the cities in the former socialist countries. Skopje is no exception. This is due not only to economic, social, and environmental circumstances but also to unstable political conditions which set out all segments of life in this part of Europe.

Skopje is a city at a crossroads. A chosen direction is to have a decisive influence on its citizens' lives. In such circumstances, the question arising is whether culture can play an important role in creating a new vision for sustainable urban development which all citizens are to benefit from. Seeking an answer, the City of Skopje has decided to bid for the ECOC 2028 title. How to transform Skopje into a great place to live and work, i.e., into a city where culture is an integral part of citizens' everyday lives? Our answer to this far-from-simple question is provided on these pages.

2. Does your city plan to involve its surrounding area? Explain this choice.



Ten Skopje Municipalities

The surrounding area of Skopje and its natural hinterland with rich natural and cultural heritage is to be involved intensively in the SK2028 project.

It is important to emphasise that there are no regions (NUTS 2 level) in North Macedonian terms of administrative-territorial units with a system of political representation and own budget. There are only "statistical regions", which the term "planning regions" is also used for to collect and process statistical data. The Skopje region is one of the 8 planning regions, where 33% of all the country's inhabitants live, although it covers only 7.3% of its surface, which makes it the most densely populated by 335 inhabitants per square kilometre. It abounds with cultural and historical objects: Tumba Madžari prehistoric settlement (6,200–4,200 BC), Skupi archaeological site, Gradište archaeological site, the Roman aqueduct, numerous churches, and monasteries, etc.

The Skopje region includes 17 municipalities, 10 of which are part of the city of Skopje as a separate unit of the local self-government. They are:

— municipalities of Skopje: Aerodrom, Butel, Centar, Gazi Baba, Gjorče Petrov, Karpoš, Kisela Voda, Čair, Saraj, and Šuto Orizari;

— municipalities in the surrounding area: Aračinovo, Zelenikovo, Ilinden, Petrovec, Sopište, Studeničani, Čučer Sandevo.

Given that there is no region as a particular legal person that could be our partner as a co-financier of the project, the inclusion of the surrounding area in the SK2028 project means that part of the cultural programme is to be realised in the areas of the neighbouring municipalities and in cooperation with the local actors of cultural life. As far as partner relationship is concerned, we concentrated on cooperation with 10 municipalities that are part of the city of Skopje. We see the SK2028 project as an exceptional opportunity to improve their cultural policies and the relationship between municipal services and culture. Namely, except for Centar Municipality, culture budgets in other municipalities are very low, while, at the same time, there is an evident lack of a strategic approach to cultural development planning. In this sense, partnership relations with all 10 municipalities as legal entities are to be established, in the same way as with the state, in the legal sense. Cooperation agreements are to be signed in the first half of 2023.

Strengthening cultural policy cooperation between the City of Skopje and all ten municipalities is in the interest not only of artists and cultural professionals but of all art and culture lovers as well as of those who care about their city. The SK2028 project is strengthening these kinds of connections.

Apart from the surrounding area of Skopje, we are to include other regions of the country in the SK2028 project, primarily the largest cities: Bitola, Kumanovo, Prilep, Veles, Ohrid, etc. Actual agreements with the ones who accept our offer for programme cooperation are to be made in the next phase of the bidding process.

3. Explain briefly the overall cultural profile of your city.

Large numbers of individuals, groups, organisations, and enterprises operating in the institutional, non-institutional (non-governmental), and private sector consists culture of Skopje. The City of Skopje is the founder of 8 public cultural institutions. In the territory of Skopje, there are 22 national cultural institutions founded by the state and 6 public cultural institutions founded by the city municipalities.

City cultural institutions:

1. Miladinovci Brothers City Library (founded in 1945; consists of 4 central libraries, 16 clones, and a bibliobus; with more than a million books, publications, and other types of library materials);
2. Cultural Information Center (founded in 1967; every year, organises 200+ events: art and other exhibitions, concerts, theatre plays, etc.);
3. Kočo Racin House of Culture (founded in 1954; creates and promotes various cultural and educational programmes);
4. Youth Cultural Center (founded in 1972; creates and promotes cultural creativity of the young; every year, organises 200+ cultural events);
5. Museum of the City of Skopje (founded in 1949; with a fund of 21,950 museum objects);
6. Universal Hall (founded in 1966; audience hall with the capacity of 1,500 seats for concerts, theatre and dance performances, and other cultural events);
7. Children's Cultural Center Karpoš (founded in 1948; space for cultural events for 500+ children aged 4-17 years old categorised in different sections);
8. Skopje Zoo (founded in 1926).

A significant part of the cultural programme offering, particularly when it comes to contemporary art events, is ensured by the independent cultural sector. Unfortunately, there is no reliable statistical data on the number of independent organisations that actively act in the cultural sphere. NGOs are

funded by the city and the state budget. They are, too, very active in the area of international cultural cooperation and exchange, often being co-financed by international donors.

In 2021, there were 5,581 cultural events realised, i.e., 12,5% more than in 2020.

Throughout history, multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious diversity has become embedded in Skopje's identity. In the city, there are 10 peoples and ethnic groups living, among which (according to the 2021 census) the most numerous are: Macedonians (58.7%), Albanians (22.8%), Roma (3.5%), Serbs (1.8%), Turks (1.6%), Bosniaks (1.4%), Aromanians (0.5%), etc. It should be underlined that all these peoples inhabited these areas long before the 20. century. Thus, for centuries, it has been a place of coexistence among peoples, cultures, and religions, whose material and spiritual heritage has embedded values opposing nationalism and xenophobia.

The historic turnover in the cultural and general development of the city was the year 1963, which stirred up great solidarity and connection among the citizens. Skopje is one of the architecturally most recognisable cities by the number and quality of structures built in the first two decades after the earthquake. The urban and architectural renewal plan of Skopje was a unique example of collaboration among many world architects led by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange.



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Cultural Heritage

Skopje is a city with a rich cultural and historical heritage rooted back in ancient times. The SK2028 vision is that heritage is the way to unification, sharing culture, and contributing towards mutual understanding of cultural similarities, rather than differences. The Union's motto is "Unity in diversity". Our city is the prime example of how a multiethnic, poly religious, and multinational society can operate in peaceful co-existence. In Skopje, there are numerous examples where heritage is used as a bridge between two, or sometimes three groups of peoples and their cultures. For instance, Stone Bridge (Kameni Most) in Skopje, is an excellent example that divides the city into two parts: one mostly populated by Macedonians, and the other mostly populated by Albanians, Turks, and Roma. As you cross the Stone Bridge, you begin your stroll through Skopje Old Bazaar, the biggest in the Balkans, populated by Macedonians, Albanians, and Turks who have lived, worked, and constantly produced new heritage in harmony and peace for over a century. In the Old Bazaar, what used to be Ottoman hammams (baths) are now national galleries. What used to be the main Ottoman administrative buildings are now the biggest cultural centres. The buildings were used to divide the high Turkish society that ruled the area from the common people. Nowadays, heritage links these distinct cultures and allows people to mingle and share their cultures.

The Roma population of Skopje, located mostly in the Topansko Pole (Topaana) and Šuto Orizari (Šutka) districts was often segregated and excluded from the social and cultural life of the city. Since the 1950s, the Roma population has been gathering at the Skopje Fortress, deemed as an architectural heritage, to celebrate Ederlezi (Hiderlez) – the spring celebration festival, recognised by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, as a shared event between the Roma and the Turks who leave aside their differences and join in their celebrations. Similarly, amidst the political tensions between Macedonia and Bulgaria regarding Macedonia's status as a candidate to join the European Union, there are positive examples where heritage is used as an example of shared cultures. Such an example is the celebration of March 1 and the making of martinki or martinici – red wool bracelets that are worn during the whole month of March, both in Macedonia and Bulgaria.

Departing from the Old Bazar, the heritage epicentre of our city, you may witness the architectural marvels of the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange and the brutalist architecture from the Yugoslav period including

the post office, now turned into a performance venue. Would you like to go way back? You are welcome to admire the Roman Aqueduct, the ancient city of Stobi located 50km away from Skopje, the Byzantine period churches and the extraordinary frescos, and the mosques and baths from the Ottoman period. Are you a nature lover? Some of our prime examples of natural heritage sites include the Matka Canyon, located in the vicinity of the city of Skopje, where Albanians and Macedonians work together towards its protection and promotion.

4. Explain the concept of the programme which would be launched if the city is designated as European Capital of Culture.

At the outset, it should be described in a context that demonstrates the signification of our concept. Our starting point is the belief that art and culture should deal with the real issues of the society they exist in. We are firmly convinced that the societal relevance of culture is proportional to its ability to address real-life issues faced by most people. The harder the question is, the greater danger lurks behind. Therefore, asking hard questions is a necessary first step toward addressing the real issues.

The SK2028 project is premised on the principle of facing reality, painful as it may be. In thematic terms, the whole concept is based on our intention to tackle the problems that vitally affect our fellow citizens life, such as ethnic division, social exclusion, environmental pollution, marginalisation of vulnerable groups, political polarisation, poverty, unemployment, intolerance, radicalisation, and extremism, etc. It is precisely how culture obtains its real social function.

Currently, Skopje is facing numerous issues, just like other European cities. What distinguishes it from many other cities is its distinctive multicultural, multiethnic, and multi religious nature. In such an urban environment, the hazard potential of any type of division is much higher than elsewhere. Once the ethnic, religious, political, or any other social difference turns into a people-dividing ideology of hatred, divisions among people become cancer killing a community from the inside. Great divisions become visible in the city space when the city starts being divided into two or more separate communities that live alongside one another. That is the danger that needs to be scotched before it takes on an uncontrollable dimension.

Luckily, the situation in Skopje is far from reaching a critical stage. This is precisely why we put the issue of division at the centre of our concept. It is still time for action to bring things in the right direction. We sin-

cerely believe in the intrinsic power of the arts and culture as effective means of overcoming all types of divides.

Unlike material wealth-based distinctions, cultural differences, including linguistic and religious ones, is what bring people together, not what divides them. Where the economy fails, culture takes the stage. The prosperity of a city can't be led by an obsessive desire for wealth and an insatiable hunger for position and power. Instead, every community must be based on common cultural values shared by all its members. Otherwise, it has no future.

The mission of the SK2028 project is to promote public awareness of this concept throughout Europe. By our own example, we would like to show other European cities what can be done by using a mighty unifying force of arts and culture to overcome any type of division.

It is worth pointing out that internal division in a society is not an issue present only in multi-ethnic environments. On the contrary, numerous European cities face the same issue, mutatis mutandis. Namely, different types of divisions are mainly rooted in social inequalities and have a devastating effect on social substance. The income inequality between the rich and the poor segregates people. In many European cities, for example, high-income citizens are pushing citizens in low- and even middle-income brackets away on the edge of cities. Spatial segregation is a serious threat to the existence of the cities as we know them today, i.e., as settlements based on cultural and

other diversities.

Another example, the digital divide between those who have access to ICT and those who do not, is an important factor in social exclusion today.

Thus, at the very heart of our concept is a question of internal divisions in society. The issue is particularly acute in communities where the bipolar political model predominates. This often leads to additional polarisation in society. In communist times, Skopje was but an example of an open city that embodied the values of inclusivity and solidarity, while today it is under an increasingly strong attack from the forces of disintegration that, guided by the political interests, would stop at nothing to seize power. The politics of division and separation along ethnic, religious, cultural, or ideological grounds represents one of the biggest obstacles to stable development.

Many questions are raised by this conceptual framework, which we would like to ask others, yet, also, to ourselves, i.e., to all of us who work professionally in the cultural sphere. Cultural and creative sectors are not an isolated world for themselves, separated from other parts of society. On the contrary, the world of art and culture shares the fate of its social environment. In this context, the fact that art and culture can also be fertile soil for social inequalities and divisions: from the accessibility of art and culture "only for the selected few" to the political instrumentalisation of culture. This is usually the case when art is expected to exclusively deal with the creation of objects as well as objects that serve to glorify the past, which inevitably causes adverse reactions, especially in multi-ethnic environments.

In light of the above, our slogan which sums up well the main message of our concept, and the concept-based artistic vision we wish to send to the people of Europe is:

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I. Contribution to the long-term strategy

5. Describe the cultural strategy that is in place in your city at the time of the application, including the plans for sustaining the cultural activities beyond the year of the title?

Skopje City Council adopted the Strategy with the action plan for the development of the culture of the City of Skopje for the period 2021–2030 on September 22, 2021. It is the first ten-year city cultural strategy. The previous strategy covered a four-year period (2012–2015). The strategy was developed by independent external experts in cooperation with the city's Department of Culture and the SK2028 bid team. It is the most ambitious and comprehensive city cultural strategy to date, which defines goals and priorities in all cultural areas financed from the city budget. In addition, great attention is paid to inter-sectoral cooperation to strengthen the connection of culture with areas such as tourism, education, environmental protection, economic development, spatial development, etc.

This strategic document seeks to network all sectors, resources, visions, and traditions to create a "new, lively and intercultural creative environment". It is assumed that "The city of Skopje must ensure inclusion of culture in economic and social policies, to use the creative and innovative potential of artists and cultural professionals." Acknowledging the fact that we live in crisis and turbulent times, the cultural strategy was made as a flexible plan, i.e. as an "open-ended strategy", and the objectives shall be reviewed in every three years. The strategy also foresees the way for monitoring and evaluation, including the 2026 evaluation process and 2031 ex-post evaluation.

There must be a close substantive connection between Cultural Strategy and the other sectoral strategies, in particular, the following:

- Strategy on Development of Tourism in the City of Skopje for the period of 2020–2023;
- Strategy on Interethnic Integration in the Education and Civic Participation of the City of Skopje (2019–2024);
- Youth Strategy of the City of Skopje for the period 2021–2025;
- RESILIENT SKOPJE – Climate Change Strategy (adopted in 2017).

In this way, an integrated approach to the strategic planning of the city development is guaranteed.

A plan for sustaining the cultural activities beyond the year 2028 is embedded in the Cultural Strategy and the action plan as an integral part of the strategy document. Our goal is to provide financial and other necessary conditions so that all projects and programmes in 2028 proven the best, both in terms of artistic quality and acceptance by the public, can be carried out after the title year. Of particular relevance here are arts and cultural education programmes, and strengthening the capacity of the public cultural institutions and NGOs for good governance and cross-sectoral cooperation. In this context, the SK2028 Foundation's management, in its final report at the beginning of 2029, is to incorporate its proposal of programme activities that are well worth supporting from public resources as an expanded cultural offering. In the search for an answer to the question of which projects and programmes should be continued, the cultural public is to be involved by organising a broad public consultation on the topic in 2029.

6. Describe the city's plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, including through the development of long term links between these sectors and the economic and social sectors in your city.

The cultural and creative sectors in Skopje are to be fundamentally strengthened in the next five to six years. SK2028 project is to create long-term links with both social and economic sectors as well as activities with a direct role in the value of chain transforming ideas into products. Human and other resources available to the cultural and creative sectors are to be used to enhance the positive economic and societal effects of culture.

In economic terms, SK2028 is a considerable boost to the development of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). It creates new conditions for economic growth and successful engagement of the young in the labour market. Some specific "invisible sectors" – such as, for example, the gaming industry, digital fashion, and sound design – are to become more visible and attractive to wider audiences. This is but a unique opportunity for us to create a cultural programme that combines artistic, cultural, economic, social, and environmental aspects. Thus, we are determined to make good use of this opportunity.

We are creating better conditions for the development of the CCIs through new and renewed infrastructure, new co-working spaces, creative labs, strengthening of human potential, creative smart use of the potential from the academic creative education, capacity building programmes, workshops, improving the connection among stakeholders and improving the international

exchange.

We are creating shared spaces for interaction and collaboration between the arts and the CCIs: both private and national cultural institutions are to lend their space and galleries free of charge for workshops and lectures connected to the CCIs. In such a way the "traditional" cultural institutions are to become attractive locations for start-ups and creative workshops. There is to be an app – "Creative Map" – of all events, cultural institutions, formal and non-formal educational centres, creative hubs, and other organisations part of the SK2028 programme, specially designed for enhancing the visibility of all events as easy access to the information for the users.

SK2028 is to contribute to the capacity building of the CCIs in Skopje, in particular by:

— building a bridge between arts and culture, on the one hand, and business and technology, on the other;

— generating new jobs in the creative, arts, and entertainment industries;

— establishing CCIs ecosystem and new forms of cooperation among private companies, non-governmental organisations, and public institutions;

— promoting creative, arts, and entertainment activities and industries through various activities;

— supporting the training of professionals in various fields of the creative, art, and entertainment activities and industries;

— establishing new infrastructure for the young and the creative (Universal Hall Hub); and

— reinforcing cross-sectoral cooperation, with a focus on the synergies among culture, tourism, technology, and education.

The 2016 British Council report "Creative Industries Mapping: Macedonia" highlights that:

As the creative industries become ever more economically and politically valued, it is critical that policymakers and decision-takers have a clear picture of these sectors to support their development. However, there is little existing evidence of the economic size and structure of Macedonia's creative industries by either company numbers, employment or output.

Since 2016, things have drastically changed, and this is particularly important as several industries are growing very fast, such as, for example, the gaming industry, new (cross) media, virtual reality, and digital fashion. This year's British Council report "Mapping the Game Development Industry in North Macedonia" notes that utili-

sation of local resources and infrastructure is to improve the local economy through a link between creativity and economy.

During SK2028, we are to further promote the development of entrepreneurship in the sphere of culture. As things stand, a significant number of young people are working in the creative sector as freelancers.

7. How is the European Capital of Culture action included in this strategy?

The 2021–2030 Skopje cultural development strategy is closely connected to our candidacy for the ECOC 2028 title. This is exactly why such a long (ten-year) period has been covered by this key cultural policy document at the city level. In this way, not only the period necessary for the preparation and implementation but also the period necessary for the evaluation of the SK2028 project is covered. Additionally, the cultural strategy coincides with the candidacy from a content point of view. Namely, throughout the whole current bidding process, numerous insights became crystallised and many ideas emerged.

The preparation and implementation of the SK2028 cultural programme to be successful requires a conceptual framework in the modern understanding of the city's cultural policy, which goes far beyond the responsibility of the city services just for providing financing of culture. It has guided us in formulating strategic goals and actions up to the end of 2030.

The ECOC bid process gave us a new perspective: culture can no longer be viewed rigidly in terms of traditional activities supported by the culture budget: arts, cultural heritage, librarianship, etc. Instead, it should be understood in the broadest sense of the term as a way of life that goes beyond any sectoral division. Thus, the candidacy for the ECOC 2028 title enabled us to gain a broader perspective on arts and culture. For the first time, this broader perspective has been included in the strategy paper. We consider it as the first positive effect of our ECOC candidacy.

A special chapter in the strategy is devoted to the SK2028 project whose primary objective is defined as "to put culture at the heart of city development policies as well as strongly integrate it into all aspects of the city's life and the lives of its residents". All the financial resources necessary to execute the project are provided in the action plan appended to the strategy.

The strategy sets out the ECOC title as further impetus to empower the role and position of culture in city life, rather than think of it as a final objective. The candidacy itself is understood as a wide integrative process, both within the city and between the city and the EU.

8. If your city is awarded the title of European Capital of Culture, what do you think would be the long-term cultural, social and economic impact on the city (including in terms of urban development)?

The SK2028 impact on the city's development we wish to achieve, and the reasons for applying, as mentioned in the answer to Question 1, are closely interconnected. First, it should be pointed out that we consider the ECOC title merely a means to an end. In other words, we do not see the title as the "ultimate goal" but as a broad platform gathering all progressive social forces that wish for Skopje to become a liveable European city that is moving forward and resulting in tangible progress from 2028 onwards. In this sense, all the elements of the application – conceptually, organisationally, financially, etc. – are designed to preserve the ECOC legacy, while bearing in mind that political support is crucial in providing the financial resources needed for establishing and maintaining lasting positive change.

Our strategic goal is to trigger a wide range of changes and ongoing shifts in the cultural and creative sectors that are to remain a lasting legacy of SK2028. In other words, for us, the ECOC 2028 is not only a single-year-cultural-events programme but a long-term project that is to create momentum for the development of the cultural and creative sectors as well as of other sectors closely connected to culture, such as tourism and creative entrepreneurship.

So, in the foreground, a long-term positive impact is created. It can be grouped into three main groups:

CULTURAL IMPACT

- to breathe new life into city culture;
- to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors;
- to enrich the cultural offer of the city in terms of both quantity and quality;
- to enhance the accessibility of culture to citizens, particularly for those on lower incomes;
- to increase citizen participation in cultural life, in particular of the young, including those from vulnerable groups;
- to strengthen international cultural cooperation, including exchanges of artists and professionals in the cultural area;
- to strengthen cooperation between public cultural institutions and NGOs, as well as other actors working in culture;
- to strengthen cooperation among public cultural institutions founded by the city, the 10 municipalities, and the state.

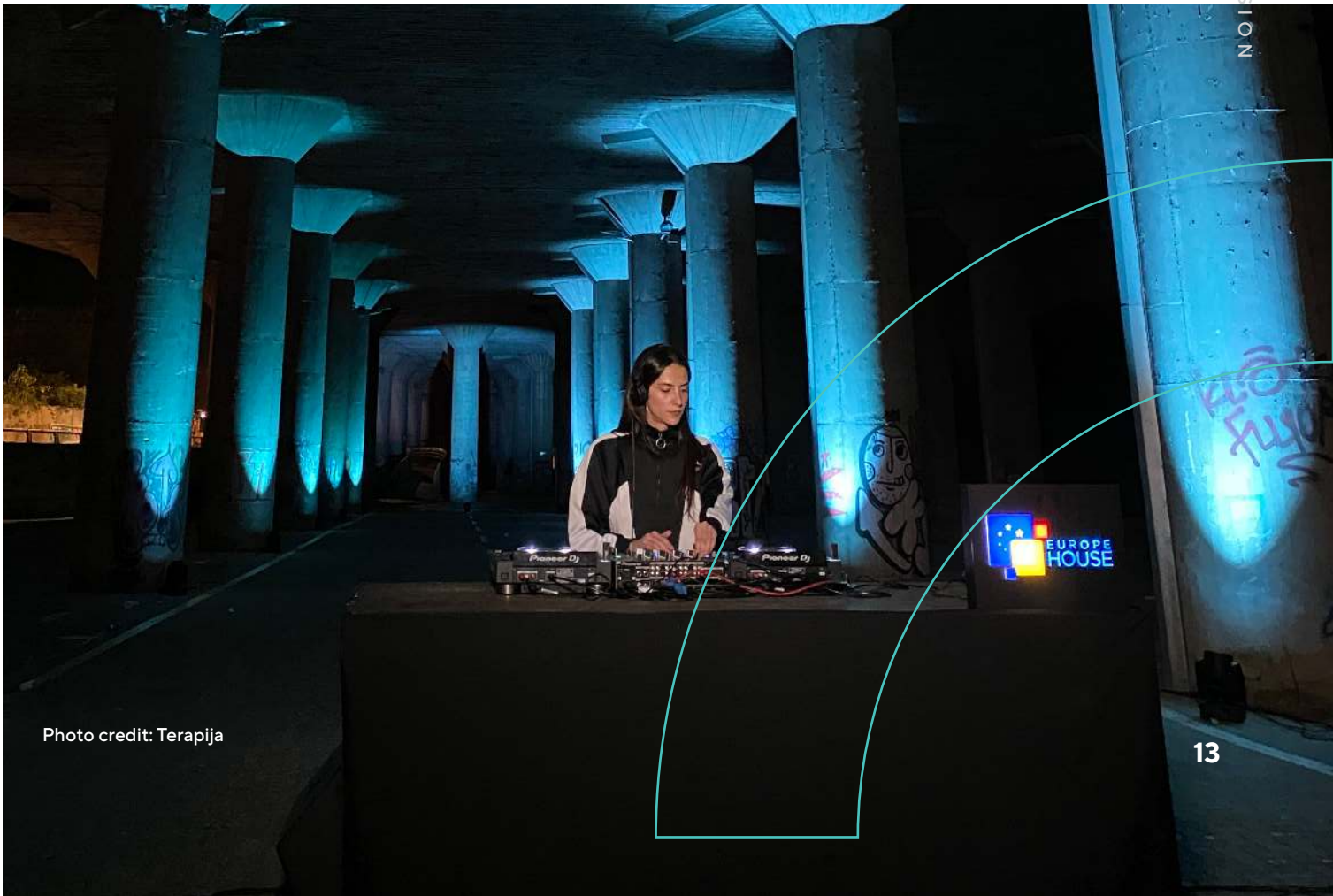


Photo credit: Terapija

ECONOMIC IMPACT

- to place culture at the heart of the city development;
- to give strong impetus to the local economy, in particular in tourism and creative industries;
- to boost the number of tourists;
- to increase the number of jobs in culture;
- to facilitate access to EU funds;
- to promote entrepreneurship in culture, in particular in creative industries;
- to facilitate cooperation among public, private, and civil sectors.

SOCIAL IMPACT

- to increase the level of active participation and integration of citizens in social life through culture;
- to empower local communities in municipalities and neighbourhoods;
- to increase the number of "community projects" involving citizens along with the artists;
- to involve hundreds as volunteers;
- to foster young people's involvement in culture;
- to intensify the cross-sectoral cooperation between culture and social care sectors.

We do believe that we are to make improvements in all the listed areas, thanks to the SK2028 project, of course, provided that the project is to be carried out successfully.

It should be emphasised that the candidacy for the ECOC title has already had a positive impact on changes in the city's cultural policy. For example, we have become aware of certain deficiencies (e.g., shortcomings in cultural statistics) to be remedied. At the same time, the candidacy has already contributed to the enhancement of the cooperation between the city authorities and cultural professionals, focusing on issues such as audience development, cultural and artistic education, community art, creative industries, etc. Finally, all this is manifested in the city's cultural strategy for 2021–2030.

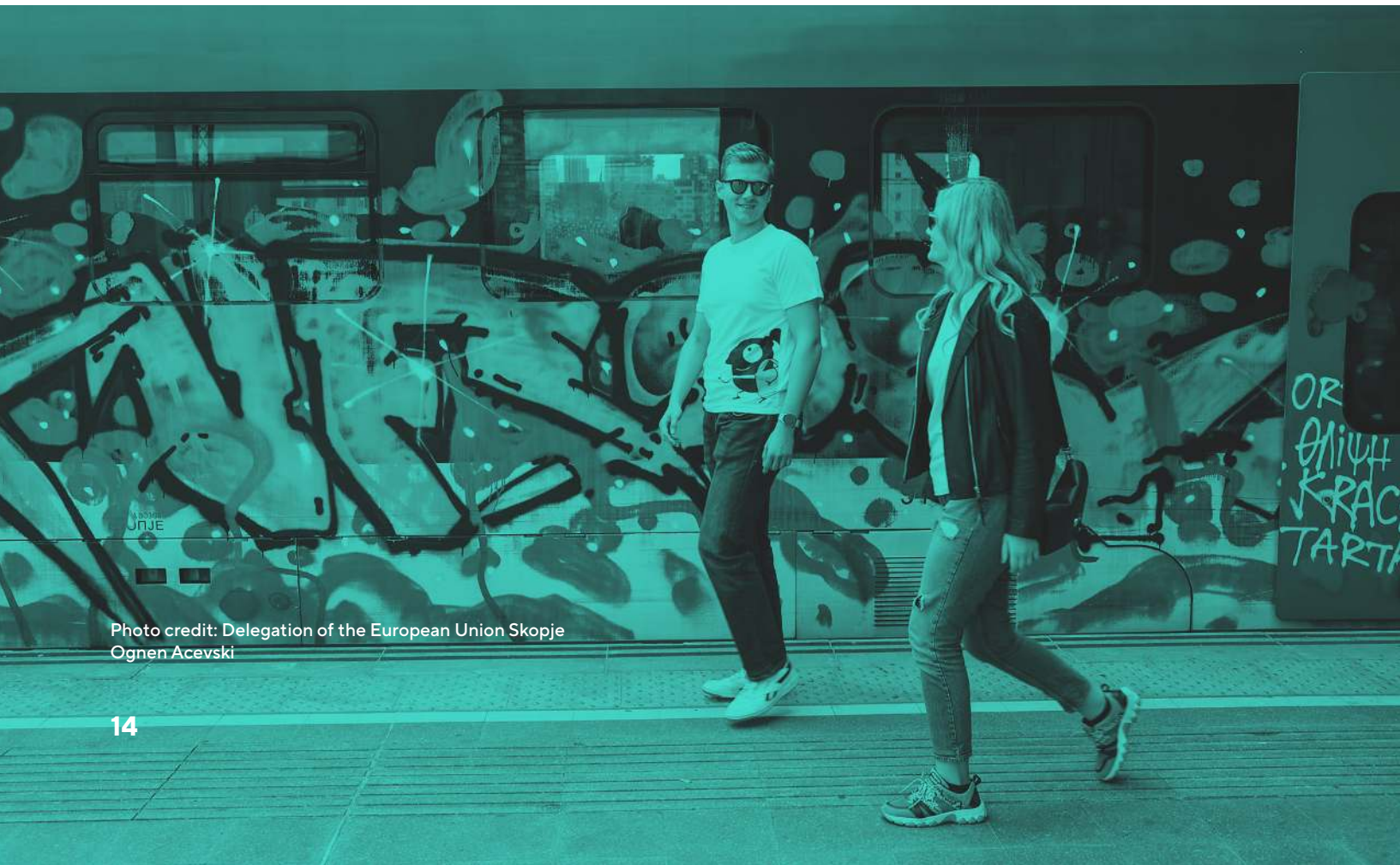


Photo credit: Delegation of the European Union Skopje
Ognen Acevski

9. Outline briefly the plans for monitoring and evaluation.

The SK2028 monitoring and evaluation process aims to produce a comprehensive analysis of the city and to generate long-term documentation and reflective analysis of the transformation of the City of Skopje associated with the ECOC title. We are to design a plan that measures the progress following our objectives and provide clear evidence of the fulfilment of the mission of our ECOC. We aim to enable cultural, social, and economic welfare of Skopje in 2028 and the future.

The evaluation is to be carried out independently by a team led by experts with a hands-on approach and local academics selected based on a call for tender. So far, we have developed some initial objectives for evaluation, yet these objectives are to evolve as the project progresses, and we are to prepare a more detailed plan for the next phase. Our impact strategy is to look beyond the art projects for SK2028, and we are to follow the impact of the transformation process of the city in cultural, social, and economic terms. This is to include establishing specific metrics and baselines, monitoring relevant city data, and keeping current research reports and methodologies up to date. With this information, we can shape and improve the ECOC activities as they develop and monitor legacy planning.

The need for city-wide evaluation is one of our cultural strategy's core objectives and it is to be carried throughout our ECOC year.

IMPACTS

With the indicators, we are to examine the impacts of the SK2028 project in terms of the following:

- **cultural legacy;**
- **national and international reputation of a city;**
- **organisation legacy and capacity building;**
- **performance and efficiency of the cultural sector in a region;**
- **regeneration legacy.**

Our success is to take all the actions to fulfil the process towards **social**, **cultural**, and **economic** welfare, as they are drafted with suggested indicators. Moreover, our most significant success is to be the city's transition from a regional Balkan city into a European city.

We are to draw up the evaluation plan covering:

- **objectives and indicators;**
- **methodology;**
- **dissemination;**
- **expertise;**
- **timetable;**
- **budget.**

The evaluation is to be carried out in line with the objectives of ECOC, which are to be linked to indicators and targets.

Milestones per year are as follows:

- **Winter 2023: Appointment of an evaluation body team;**
- **September 2023: Evaluation plan finalised;**
- **2023: Call for research institution;**
- **2023: Baseline survey I;**
- **2024: Evaluation plan and monitoring data requirements;**
- **January 2025: Start data mining and tracking;**
- **June 2025: Completion of interim evaluation;**
- **September 2025: Review of monitoring requirements;**
- **November 2025: Progress report of the evaluation process;**
- **2026: Baseline data published, Objectives reviewed;**
- **2027: Baseline survey II;**
- **2027: Data gathered throughout the year, quarterly reports on key indicators published;**
- **2028: Impact report (immediate benefits);**
- **June 2029: Delivery of evaluation report;**
- **2029: Baseline survey III;**
- **September 2029: Results report and conference;**
- **September 2030: Ex-post evaluation.**

We are to use an integrated monitoring and evaluation approach incorporating established studies with tailored data collection and interpretation. A baseline survey is to be undertaken in our ECOC region during the first years after designation (2023) to measure citizens' perception building on the experience of the baseline survey work carried out in other ECOCs. Surveys are to be repeated in the years 2027 and 2029.

We are to set up a monitoring system to track the indicators suggested. We are to present the quarterly reports to the panel of citizens, artists, academics, local government (representatives of the City of Skopje), and businesses. Accordingly, all reports are to be published.

SK2028 table with indicators for cultural, social, and economic welfare:

Cultural welfare	Social welfare	Economic welfare
<p>Building the capacity of our cultural sector with the empowerment of cultural operators and strengthening our regional cultural network in a European context</p>	<p>Contributing to the transformation of a city to a better place for the well-being of individuals and society by enabling greater opportunities for individuals and local communities through cultural interventions</p>	<p>Growing the cultural tourism in a city and a region, and developing the sector of creative industry, establishing innovative ways of collaboration among art, economy, and technology</p>
<p>Citizen awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity</p> <p>Citizen sense of belonging to common cultural space</p> <p>Increased number of events</p> <p>Increased number of activities highlighting European diversity and addressing European topics</p> <p>Increased interest in citizen cultural events</p> <p>Increased number of citizens participating in events (70% of Skopje citizens to take part in at least one event in 2028 as visitors; 35% of young people (18-30 years old) to take part in at least one event in 2028 as participants)</p> <p>Increased number of marginal groups and people with challenges attending the events</p> <p>Development of solid cultural policy as part of the city's development</p> <p>Increased value of an investment in the cultural sector infrastructure and facilities</p>	<p>Increased number of active volunteers</p> <p>Increased number of underused public spaces brought into activity</p> <p>Perception of a city and a region as a place to visit</p> <p>Citizens of the city and the region as a place to live (to decrease the brain-drain process)</p> <p>Citizens' and artists' involvement in decision-making</p> <p>Increased number of cultural and social enterprises</p> <p>Increased reputation of a city as smart, green, and culturally attractive</p> <p>Contribution to a reduction in social and physical segregation and increased integration</p> <p>Increased indicators of mental health and well-being</p> <p>Increased social inclusion of all social groups</p>	<p>National/international recognition as being a culturally vibrant city</p> <p>Increase in employment in cultural and creative sectors</p> <p>Estimated multiplier effects on other sectors, e.g., transport, event management, marketing, etc.</p> <p>Increased number of tourist visits and volume of tourist revenues (Increased number of international cultural tourists by at least 30%)</p> <p>Increased number of people trained in cultural and tourism activities</p> <p>Increased number of creative entrepreneurs</p> <p>Increased value of an investment in arts by the private sector</p> <p>Increased investment in digital platforms for culture</p> <p>Increased number of cultural tourism initiatives, including those that are community-led</p>

Increased awareness of ECOC among citizens	Increased levels of tolerance and openness to other cultures
Increased number of partnerships of cultural operators	Increased number of students to study in Skopje
Increased number of European cultural collaborations	Increased number of start-ups in the creative sector
Increased awareness for using public spaces for cultural projects	Collaboration of cultural operators and schools
Renovation of devastated areas for cultural production	Increased number of partner cities involved in the preparatory and delivery of SK2028
Increased number of partnering cities in North Macedonia	Increased number of cross-sector cultural products developed
Increased capacities of cultural operators and cultural managers	Increased number of schools and civic organisations, including marginalised groups participating in culture
Increased number of permanent residencies of artists and cultural managers in the city	International cooperation of universities on the SK2028 activities and facilities

II. Cultural and artistic content

10. What is the artistic vision and strategy for the cultural programme of the year?

The concept of SK2028 is based on the idea of overcoming all kinds of social divisions via culture. This idea is the central point around which the artistic vision is designed.

It should be noted at the outset that the issue of divisions and ways of overcoming them opens up a very broad thematic field within which a wide range of interrelated issues and questions could be tackled. To us, this is but an advantage when creating an artistic vision for such a large-scale programme as ECOC, which greatly exceeds the boundaries of not only art, yet also culture, and reaches into other areas such as tourism, urban planning, economic development, social welfare, education, etc. At the same time, this also hides a certain danger of thematic scattering. After all, social inequalities and divisions resulting from them affect all segments of our lives. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the deep health inequalities in our society: it has affected people with lower incomes the hardest.

Therefore, to avoid that risk, the conceptual idea is subdivided into four central themes. As a consequence, the SK2028 cultural programme is structured in the following four programme strands:

- Art4Hope
- Togetherness
- rECOvering
- CreARTing

The topics we are to deal with in each of these four sections are closely linked to the main conceptual idea. Artists, creators, and other cultural actors are to propose their answers to important questions related to the future of the city and the quality of life of its inhabitants within each strand programme. The broad conception of culture as "a way of life" is our starting point. In this way, we wish as many citizens as possible to be involved in the SK2028 project to stimulate their active engagement to tackle issues of everyday life.

Art4Hope

Feelings of apathy and hopelessness represent one of the biggest obstacles to the development of both the individual and the community and should be fought against with all our might. Within this framework, it is our priority to encourage Skopje's artists and creatives to participate together with other citizens in creating hope and faith that Skopje can become a better living place. If anything, all of us living in the city are in the need of "positive stories" – not fictional, but real ones – that most

people benefit from. Hope is needed, among other things, to stop the increasing emigration of our young fellow citizens.

There is no prescription for stimulating and fostering hope. Just as there is no recipe for creativity. Our motto is "it is not hope that drives action, it is the action that drives hope". SK2028 is but a project that directly encourages action and through joint achievements creates new energy the city needs. We encourage artists and creators to experiment and explore new forms of creative expression without fear of failure, to use different interdisciplinary approaches, and open new locations for cultural events.

Togetherness

As previously mentioned, solidarity is an integral part of the DNA of Skopje, which was best demonstrated after the 1963 earthquake. In this century, however, tolerance, dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding among residents seem to be disappearing.

Skopje is in desperate need of a sensible makeover in line with the principles of solidarity, inclusive growth, and interconnections. From safeguarding public spaces to repurposing old and unused buildings – creative activities of common interest to different communities have the power to transcend divisions. Giving people back their right to the city, providing them with spaces where they can laugh and create together, is to bring back life to the city by weaving strong bonds among inhabitants. The debates, workshops, community art projects, etc., focusing on the necessity of cooperation in tackling common issues is to be the lesson in the culture of living.

rECOvering

Skopje has seen better days. The violent and destructive urbanism implemented by the previous city governments has left the city and its people more divided than ever. The much-needed greenery in the city centre has been but completely destroyed. Skopje has topped the charts of the most polluted cities in Europe and the world. Progressive and joint efforts are needed, as well as an intersectional approach to ensure recovery and revitalisation.

Our vision is to become a healthy united city. Our vision is to become a city that looks to its future with the hope of tomorrow and the determination of today. We aim to become a city evolving into a community of innovation and collaboration; a city that remembers and learns from its mistakes, never to repeat them. We aspire to become a city with an avid awareness that culture requires courage – the courage to reveal its most vulnerable self to the world; the courage to be immersed in the unknown; the courage to see, hear, and feel the world through the eyes of someone considered so different from us; courage to understand and to accept ourselves as well as others.



CreARTing

From an economic point of view, ICTs creators are paving the way for the future. Not getting involved in dynamic technological trends means missing out on the future. That is why we connect artistic creativity with new technologies and science; encourage creative and cultural entrepreneurship; reduce the digital divide between the generations; improve access to innovative, technology-based education; encourage youth entrepreneurial thinking; open new jobs in the sector of creative industries; and we put Skopje on the global map of creative cities.

Photo credit: CreArt Mihail Namicev

11. Give a general overview of the structure of your cultural programme, including the range and diversity of the activities/main events that will mark the year.

The 2028 cultural programme is designed as an addition to the existing cultural offering in the city. Its structure is derived directly from the artistic vision by which the concept of overcoming social divisions through culture is "translated" into concrete programme content. The concept itself and the artistic vision have been conceived as a call-to-action addressed to all, both people in culture and any other citizen.

Following the artistic vision, the whole programme is structured around four main programme strands: *Art4Hope*, *Togetherness*, *rECOvering*, and *CreARTing*.

The main events for each strand are indicated below. Other projects are to be set out in detail during the selection phase, i.e. when the collaboration with project partners from various European countries is to be specified. Furthermore, some other projects selected based on public calls are to be added in the preparatory years (2024-2027).

Art4Hope

Landscapes of the Future

The main question of the project is how cultural institutions and artists can contribute to dealing with the crisis. Culture is an essential tool for generating environmental engagement, while influencing other interconnected political agendas, such as urban planning, social inclusion, and the right to a healthy environment. Therefore, institutions in culture, as well as artists, have the potential to be the engines in dealing with the urgency of the situation nowadays, because of the possibility that, through art, someone can function better than through scientific reports.

Produced by: NI Museum of Contemporary Art. **Domestic and Regional/International Partners:** Museum of Contemporary Art, Skopje establishes collaborations with several faculties in Skopje (Faculty of Fine Arts, Institute of Art History and Archaeology at the Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Architecture, etc.), and secondary and primary schools that follow and actively participate in the joint realisation of the programme activities in the field of education and exhibition activity.

Railways of Illusion

The revitalisation of Skopsko Pole (a peripheral location of Skopje intended for waste of old wagons, locomotives, and trains) in a polygon for art and culture. This location is intended to be transformed into a permanent outdoor range for the performance of various cultural-artistic and socio-cultural projects performed by domestic and international artists.

This space is to be repurposed, conserved, and partially restored – adapted to be spatially functional. It is to become an alternative peripheral place for various outdoor cultural events. The place is to be connected with a frequent bus line and access to other vehicles. The design (exterior/interior) is different, rich, unique, and inspiring. The International Skopje Pole railway platform is to be a new space for contemporary dances, performances, exhibitions, video and film screenings, discussions, readings, chamber performances, installations, and other cultural events. At the moment, it is but a dead yet inspiring location, which is to come to life as an open-air museum and platform with the content of cultural, social, and artistic reset. It is an example of the exceptional industrial heritage of Skopje. The author of the project is Ivanka Apostolova.

Produced by: SK2028 Foundation. **Project partners:** City of Skopje; Municipality of Gazi Baba; Municipality of Ilinden; Municipality of Petrovec; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia; EU Info Centre Skopje; Ministry of Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia; EU Funds for structural and regional development; twin cities of Skopje; ECOC partners, and other international partners.

Scouting Skopje

Mobile artists/creators in residence programme (2023–2029). A dispersed art residency designed for European, international, regional, and local multidisciplinary artists (emerging, mid-career, established artists). A residency for artists without a fixed space; spatially variable and mobile residence; residential casts. The residency is to be realised in cooperation with various cultural institutions in Skopje. The residency is intended for contemporary classical and experimental fine arts and visual artists, theatrical dance performers, performers, photographers, musicians, writers, poets, and other artists who are to reside in cultural institutions that programmatically are in juxtaposition with their original cultural-artistic or social-artistic profession. Artists and creative people are to explore Skopje through their perceptual optics and create a work of art that is to remain a property of the city. The author of the project is Ivanka Apostolova.

Produced by: SK2028 Foundation. **Project partners:** City and national museums in Skopje; national and independent theatres; opera and ballet; national philharmonic; city cultural centres; City of Skopje; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia; 10 Skopje municipalities; private sector; NGO sector; ECOC partner cities: Braga – an ECOC 2027 candidate city, Rouen – an ECOC 2028 candidate city, Maribor ECOC 2012, Plovdiv ECOC 2019, Rijeka ECOC 2020, Novi Sad ECOC 2022, etc.; twin cities of Skopje; artists and creative people who are part of their domestic, European and international networks; cultural and artistic diasporas around the world, both Macedonian and Albanian.

(Urban/istic Redeems)

Transformation and revitalisation, conversion of the two galleys on the Vardar river (a part of Skopje 2014 project) – art gallery and residential space for contemporary culture and art. From newly built cultural heritage to a gallery and residential space for culture and art; from kitsch and notoriety to an international gallery and an international residential space for socio-culture and art; from politicised taste and aesthetics – from the radical divisions of taste – to stopping the demolition of buildings and repurposing them – the two galleys on the Vardar river built with public money; from demolition to conversion, revitalisation, and transformation of the two galleys into facilities useful for professions in culture and art. Demolition is more expensive than building. The project overcomes all divisions, prejudices, and issues (human, social, political, and systemic), transforming issues and dilemmas into useful objects of broad understanding, creation, perception, and practice in culture, life, and art (at home from around the world). The project is in its conceptual phase. The author of the project is Ivanka Apostolova.

Produced by: SK2028 Foundation. **Project partners:** City of Skopje; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia; Municipality of Centar; EU Info Centre Skopje; private sector; civic donations; foreign embassies; foreign cultural centres in Skopje; ECOC partner cities: Braga – an ECOC 2027 candidate city, Rouen – an ECOC 2027 candidate city, Maribor ECOC 2012, Plovdiv ECOC 2019, Rijeka ECOC 2020, Novi Sad ECOC 2022, etc.; cultural and artistic diasporas around the world, both Macedonian and Albanian.

(In-Service) Technical Hands-on Training

Technical Hands-on Training for scenic, museum, gallery, and concert technicians; light and sound technicians; and props makers. In the domestic theatre, museum, gallery, and concert institutions and open stages, there is a rapid and radical deficit of expert technicians with updated hands-on knowledge, for analogue and digital operation and setting of exhibitions, scenography, lighting, sound, and production of props for various projects. The project is to be organised in the long term, thorough, intensive expert and professional training for technical masters who are to be able to realise and implement all the imaginative ideas of the artists and cultural workers. The training is to last from one to three months of intensive training outside Macedonia in cooperation with various expert teams from European institutions of culture and art. Training period: 2024–2027. In this way, we solve the key problem of development and the possibility of realisation of various projects, and we motivate employment in the cultural sector. International cooperation is carried out through long-term series of the practice training. The author of the project is Ivanka Apostolova.

Co-produced by: SK2028 Foundation and Macedonian Center of the International Theatre Institute (ITI)/PRO-DUKCIJA. **Project partners:** All public cultural institutions in Skopje (national and municipal), and the entire domestic NGO sector; ECOC partner cities: Braga – an ECOC 2027 candidate city, Clermont-Ferrand – an ECOC 2028 candidate city, Maribor ECOC 2012, Plovdiv ECOC 2019, Rijeka ECOC 2020, Novi Sad ECOC 2022, etc., and the institutions such as museums, theatres, and music halls connected to them; the cultural institutions connected to the twinned European cities with the city of Skopje; the international networks for performing arts – ITI UNESCO, OISTAT, and Opera Europe.

dePhantomisation of the Arabian House (An Old Deserted Hotel)

We enter and open the old Arab House Hotel in Skopje, which is currently in very poor condition and needs renovation. The old Arab House Hotel is a cultural heritage, from the times of eclecticism of the early 20. century. The hotel's floors and every room is to be created into space for high-quality art projects – exhibitions, performances, concerts, art installations, dramatic and literary readings, etc. – inspired by the themes of the hotel, in cross-narratives with the themes of the Arabian Nights, Arabian cuisine, Arabian cultures, local orient, retro orient, and Europe. A kaleidoscope of escapism, secret meetings, spies, dissidents, revolutionaries, refugees, ladies of the night, masked dervishes and muftis, pimps, lovers, soldiers, police officers, criminals, Balkan tycoons, European diplomacy drinking black tea and distilled jasmine, etc. An authentic project that reflects strong creative energy, and relativises all social and political obstacles and targeting. In art, there is still room for the good old direct democracy, humanism, and tolerance. The author of the project is Ivanka Apostolova.

Produced by: SK2028 Foundation. **Project partners:** City of Skopje; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia; 10 Skopje municipalities; private and non-governmental sector in co-production; global Macedonian and Albanian diasporas; foreign embassies and cultural centres in Skopje; EU funds; ECOC partner cities and other international networks in co-production.

Underground Profane

Re-adaptation and revitalisation of the underground city, corridors, and atomic shelters under Skopje Fortress and Gazi Baba Park, enriched and revived with a rich domestic and international cultural, artistic, and social and cultural programme. Our future plans include a revitalisation of new space for various alternative manifestations via unusual underground cultural-tourism tours, underground galleries, underground theatre stages, concert performances, and other authentic actions and reactions.

Testing, checking underground air and safety, availability of space, determining its functionality, cleaning, lighting, introduction of hygienic infrastructure, electrification for the execution of programmes and projects, security and custody, maintaining, securing, determining official entrances and exits, and infrastructure with employment to install project life. The official opening is expected in 2028. All projects are to be selected based on a public call for a broad thematic and content approach. The quality and freshness of the contents overcome all artificial barriers. It is to be but a joint project with our ECOC partner cities with related fortifications in their cities and underground cities, out of which we are to extract thematic content for specific international project collaborations and exchange of artists and cultural workers. The author of the project is Ivanka Apostolova.

Produced by: SK2028 Foundation. **Project partners:** City of Skopje; Municipality of Centar and Municipality of Gazi Baba; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia; Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning; Ministry of Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia; private business sector; non-governmental sector; informal networks and civil movements and formations; twin cities of Skopje; ECOC partner cities; foreign embassies and cultural centres; global Macedonian and Albanian diasporas.

POLIFONIA Joins Christmas World Famous Tradition Handel's Messiah

It has been almost 280 years since Handel composed the classic Messiah, yet public masses in the world continue to gather to listen to it, and over centuries of performances, the masterwork has become a rite of CHRISTMAS. The glorious Handel's Messiah is considered a monumental work and one of the most famous and widely shared pieces of music in history, yet performed in Skopje only one time in the past.

The project includes a performance of Macedonian musical artists together with experts in baroque music from several west European countries. An introduction to the up-to-date performance specifications of the European baroque era given by West European experts is to enhance the musical careers of domestic professionals involved in the project, thus resulting in overall greater interest and understanding of the music by the audience.

Produced by: Art Centre POLIFONIA. **Project partners:** City of Skopje, Skopje Summer Festival international festival, GAP ensemble from Germany, and the following individual artists: Laura Geen Elligsen from Vienna State Opera, Christa De Silva from Edmonton Opera, Kirill Kalmykov from Lisbon, and a harpsichord lecturer at the Department for Music Art at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Niš.



Photo credit: Stefan Samandov

Together

Meetings in the City Park

A new multi-day festival is to be launched under the umbrella of the SK2028 project: various socio-cultural events, in which rich music is to be performed, enriched with cultural and educational, and sports and recreational programme. The project is enriched with concerts, workshops for children (photography, drama, fine art, etc.), and sports demonstrations (kayak, bicycle, zip line, pedal surfboard, rock climbing, rope balance, hammock, etc.). This is a project with a focus on encouraging an outdoor culture in the city and developing respect and care for urban nature.

Produced by: Universal Hall-Skopje (city cultural institution). **Project partners:** City of Skopje, Municipality of Centar, private companies, and cultural NGOs.

Urban Skopje Excellence

A new, multi-layered cultural and artistic project, consisting of cultural performances and accompanied by awarding professional achievements in culture, science, education, etc., Liberation Day (November 13), as well as awards for various urban achievements and heroism in the city, adopters of homeless dogs, famous humanitarians; Skopje is but a safe place for young people to have fun. Skopje is also a place for the ordinary people, who enrich the quality of life in the city, and improves their attitude towards the citizens, through their actions.

Produced by: Universal Hall - Skopje (city cultural institution). **Project partners:** City of Skopje, Municipality of Centar, private companies, cultural NGOs, and the civil society in Skopje.

Culture at Universities

It is an interdisciplinary project whose main aim is to enhance and enrich the cultural life of students and bring culture and the arts closer to them by offering free cultural events at the universities, such as concerts; recitals; exhibitions; film projections; readings and discussions; guest talks by artists, writers, musicians, and other cultural agents; workshops, and debates. Moreover, our second aim is to provide opportunities for students to get acquainted with the contemporary trends in culture and the arts in the country and abroad, to foster interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, and bring the humanities, the arts, and culture closer to students; to motivate and equip them with the necessary skills to do interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research.

We are to give space to young artists and students engaged in different artistic activities to talk about their works, cultural, and societal issues with the student audience, and to the already established ones from North Macedonia and the European cultural scene. Besides, we are to provide support for formal higher education through debates, student forums, guest talks by artists and guest lectures by domestic and foreign lecturers and interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary researchers, workshops, and provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and analytical thinking skills, skills for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, and to offer a chance for international and intercultural networking. Produced by: Asst. Prof. Ivana Trajanoska, PhD, University American College Skopje. Project partners: University of Belgrade – Serbia, University of Cologne – Germany, Krosno State College – Poland, Polytechnic University of Timisoara – Romania, and other Macedonian universities.



Photo credit: Stefan Rajhl

Soundscape Workshops

Acoustic ecology, sometimes called ecoacoustics or soundscape studies, is a discipline that studies the relationship, mediated through sound, between people and their environment. Soundscape Workshops is an interactive project intended for local artists and youth interested in sound art and sound, field recording, audio editing and production, radio art, sound art, multimedia, etc., and all those who have an interest in getting to know the basics of sound art. The 2025–2028 workshop is to consist of work sessions, short lectures, presentations, discussions, field recordings of sounds and practical work in nature and open space, as well as individual and group performances and improvisation sessions. During the workshops they are to have the opportunity, first, theoretically to get acquainted with the issues and the way of work, and then practically get acquainted with the concept of field recording with portable audio recorders, as well as with the complete treatment of the recorded sound from the transfer, editing, processing, sequencing, all the way to creation, production and performance of a specific sound form.

Produced by: Cultural Information Center – Skopje (city cultural institution). **Project partners:** Kanal 103 radio; post global recordings; SEMI SILENT – Podcast platform for radio art, sound art and field recording, Romania; CONA institute for contemporary arts processing, Slovenia; aMORE festival, Croatia; PiNA, Slovenia; UR Institute, Croatia; LOM, record label and instrument manufacturer, Slovakia; and Abraš MEDIA, Croatia.

City's Theatre for Children and Youth

The idea of *a new professional theatre for children and youth without any ethnic prefixes that are to produce shows suitable for every child from any ethnical background* was created during brainstorming within the framework of SK2028 workshops. The theatre is to have two main activities – production and educational programme. It is to produce multilingual professional theatre shows and performances of any kind for children and youth. It means that all spoken languages are to be used actively and simultaneously on stage without subtitles or translation – Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Romani, Serbian, English, etc. In the educational programmes, workshops, seminars, and various projects are to be organised, where children and youths are not to be in a position of a passive audience, but instead, be active participants in learning theatre technics and crafts, and are to be creating their own shows. Just like the production, the programme, too, is to be multilingual and interethnic by mixing participants from different parts of the city and with different ethnic backgrounds. Both programmes are to have an inclusive character especially when it comes to the marginalised groups, communities, and subcultures based on social status, gender, material well-being, or disabilities. By this approach, the new city's theatre for children and youth is to represent the actual reality in Skopje, where one can be in touch with different languages, communities, and minorities within minorities, and it is to create a cultural unity among the children and youth. It is but something

completely new as an approach and offer. Instead of having cultural segregation, with this theatre, we are building a unified cultural identity for future generations. Together with the city's authorities and in consultation with the civil society and cultural workers, we are currently working on finding the best possible location, as well as an appropriate organisational form.

Partners: Primary and secondary schools; Faculty of Dramatic Arts – Skopje; Youth Cultural Center; City of Skopje; Ministry of Culture, North Macedonia; Ministry of Education and Science of North Macedonia; municipalities of Skopje; Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO); Youth Educational Forum (YEF); The First Children's Embassy in the World MEGJASHI; The National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM); and Union for Youth Work.

VIBES – Youth Festival of Urban Culture

As part of the SK2028 project, a new youth festival is to be launched, dedicated to various forms of urban culture: music, theatre, dance, graffiti, computer games, etc. The aim of the festival is to increase the accessibility and affordability of quality cultural content for all children and young people. We want to bring contemporary art forms closer to the young, who due to various reasons, not only of a financial nature, have a rare opportunity to get to know, for example, contemporary dance, puppets for adults, new media arts, hip-hop culture, etc. Likewise, our wish is to permanently increase their active participation in cultural life, which we have defined as one of the main quantitative goals: 35% of young people (from 18 to 30 years of age) to take part in at least one event in 2028 as participants. In addition to artistic manifestations that are to be free of charge for primary and secondary school pupils, an integral part of the project is a series of workshops that are to offer the young a place to learn to be innovative and creative. The implementation of the project is not only to raise the level of cultural literacy of young people, but also to help to occupy their leisure time and improve their social life. Thematically, many workshops for the young are to be devoted to socially important issues: from environmental protection to relations among minorities. One of the expected effects of the project is the connection between governmental and non-governmental cultural producers in the field of cultural education.

The first year of performance is to be in 2024, and the festival is to be held every year and after 2028, when the most ambitious performance, supplemented with foreign guests, is to take place. **Produced by:** Universal Hall - Skopje (city cultural institution). **Project partners:** city and national cultural institutions, non-governmental cultural organisations, primary and secondary public schools, creative industries companies, and mentors and professionals cultural and artistic education.

rECOVering

The Tale of a Tree

Eco-activists holding "agoras" in different neighbourhoods are spreading awareness of the importance of the greenery in the surrounding residential buildings – to inspire a culture of protection and mindful coexistence between humans and nature. What one of the most polluted cities in the world needs is oxygen factories – and trees are just that. In addition to providing residents with science-based data about the numerous benefits of taking care of our green public spaces, they are to be part of a crowd-sourcing green activity – completing the Green Cadastre of Skopje. People are to be tasked with photographing trees in their vicinity and uploading them to the Green Cadastre base. They are also to be invited to write a story related to the specific tree to provide another level of value in the eyes of their fellow citizens. Officials from the City of Skopje; Hans Em Faculty of Forest Sciences, and Landscape Architecture and Environmental Engineering, Skopje are to add the remaining necessary information about the tree, such as its type, age, state, needs, etc., thus completing its story.

Produced by: O-Krug (NGO). **Project partners:** Hans Em Faculty of Forest Sciences; Landscape Architecture and Environmental Engineering, Skopje; City of Skopje; people of Skopje; and various civil society groups.

Creating Commons

Transforming abandoned and illegally occupied spaces into green public havens and spaces of creativity and prosperity provides much-needed opportunities for communities dedicated to the progressive civic struggle. Repurposing these spaces is to be a great example of clever usage of already urbanised spaces as well as an act of giving the city back to its inhabitants where they are to be free to imagine, create, and produce. The use of these spaces is tangled in a maze of winding uncertainty and personal interests as well as unclear property rights, which require joint

efforts from institutions both on local and national levels. The project is intended to create new common spaces, especially ones that bring people together.

Produced by: Humane Cities (NGO). **Project partners:** City of Skopje, 10 Skopje municipalities, Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of North Macedonia, and Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA).

Building beyond Bar(rier)s

Prison furniture up cycle workshop. The project is to have prison inmates, preferably from different backgrounds, working in pairs. Both inmates are to be working together to breathe new life into a single piece of old furniture guided by professional designers, craftsmen, and artisans. They both are to be tasked with giving the furniture their distinctive seals – what represents them in our society – under the condition of joining those distinctive traits in a perfect whole. The distinctive contributions of both prisoners are to work in harmony with one another, creating a visually pleasing unique piece of up cycled furniture.

The project has several goals: to celebrate the treasure of diversity, to provide inmates with professional skills in a trade to reintegrate them into society and prevent discrimination, as well as to prevent old furniture from being land filled. The pieces are to be exhibited and auctioned, and serve as a testament that tearing down barriers – working together instead of against each other – can create beauty.

Produced by: EduAktiv (NGO). **Project partners:** Ministry of Justice of the Republic of North Macedonia, Public Enterprise Communal Hygiene – Skopje, furniture companies, and activist groups working towards the zero waste goal.

Cultural Garden

The goal of the project is to establish a single pilot centre to bring the community together in all ten municipalities of Skopje. Cultural Garden is a place where ideas, ideologies, and worldviews are exchanged and approximated. Each centre is to feature an urban garden with a semispherical geodesic greenhouse, a photovoltaic plant, a unit for composting bio-waste (kitchen plant-based waste) from households that are to produce both compost and biogas, as well as multifunctional space suitable for holding any type of cultural-educational events.

Cultural Garden is conceived not only as a fountain of knowledge, innovation, and coexistence – it is also a visual reflection of the progress of our society where conflicts are transformed into a dignified exchange of facts and our outdated habits are transformed into advanced and sustainable inclusive practices with which we are to initiate the creation of strong, solidary communities, resilient to modern crises.

Produced by: Animal and Environment Protection Association E.D.E.N. **Project partners:** Faculty of Agricultural Science and Food in Skopje, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technologies – Skopje, Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering – Skopje, City of Skopje, public companies owned by the city, various civil society groups, social enterprises, etc.

The Buoyant Bus

There are many issues regarding public transport in Skopje. The city buses are quite old, often making passengers stressed and moody. Parallel to the efforts to optimise the current and introduce new lines, spirit-lifting activities for the daily commuter are to take their minds off their worries and introduce colour to the grey bus interior.

Reading by Macedonian authors, role-playing with the passengers, stand-up comedy, and magic tricks, are to be activities to open people's minds to new and inspirational content accessible to everyone. The project aims to create connections between passengers that "normally" rarely notice each other.

Produced by: to be defined in the selection phase. **Project partners:** The project is based on the cooperation between the Public Transport Enterprise, artists, cultural professionals, and the citizens of Skopje.

Ambientalisation of Green Markets in Skopje (14 green markets in Skopje)

The project proposes eco-environmentalisation and eco-aestheticisation of the existing green markets; ecological and architectural branding and prominent characterisation of the existing green markets as well as enrichment of their immediate gastronomic offer – development of fair trade gastronomy between producers and creative chefs; green markets transformed as small (continuous) local fairs of raw food, cooked food, honey, wine, brandy, juices, and other domestic products for tasting and purchase.

The green markets in their direct gastronomic offer are to offer rich menus (at small stands – through ambient chambers, mobile kitchens, restaurants, and bars) inspired by fresh market products, traditional and contemporary local and ethnic cuisine (or gastronomic – eclectic: Macedonian, Turkish, Vlach, Albanian, Roma, and Serbian cuisine, including Sephardic-kosher, modern recipes, and revitalisation of old recipes as well as influences from international cuisine, in a vibrant mix). The author of the project is Ivanka Apostolova.

Produced by: SK2028 Foundation. **Project partners:** Skopje green markets; architects and designers; 10 Skopje municipalities; City of Skopje; Ministry of Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, North Macedonia; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia; Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of North Macedonia; Foreign embassies in the Republic of North Macedonia and their gastronomic traditions.

TRANSFORM – Ecology/Sustainability

TRANSFORM is an ambitious project that connects the higher fine/visual art educational institutions from South-east Europe. The first symposium and exhibition were held in Istanbul in 2009, and after that in Sofia, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. Skopje is to host the event in 2028. The event provides an international platform for the professional presentation of young creatives in the fields of visual arts and the development of international exchange of students. The theme of Transform 2028 is ecology and sustainability.

Produced by: Faculty of Fine Arts, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. **Project partners:** National Gallery of the Republic of North Macedonia, Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, Youth Cultural Center, ArsActa, Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, Faculty of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, National Academy of Arts in Sofia, Faculty of Arts of Pristina, University of Arts in Tirana, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in Istanbul.

CreARTing

Creative Industries Expo

Creative Industries Expo is the convergence of all industries on the cutting-edge of technology, design, education, social good, health and wellness, and more. Brands, services, innovations, platforms, and products are to take attendees into the Creative Expo. Hundreds of exhibitors from North Macedonia and across the region are to meet under one roof to ignite passions, collaborate, and share groundbreaking discoveries. Focusing on the diverse and dynamic trends defining tomorrow's technologies, creative pursuits, and more, the exhibitors are paving the way for the future. More than a hundred exhibitors are expected to attend, with innovative and diverse products.

Produced by: Elena Bojadjieva-Cvetkovska, Kiril Gjozev, UMPAKI – Union of Macedonian Professional Associations in the Creative Industries. **Project partners:** KEA European Affairs – Brussels, Tartu Centre for Creative Industries in Estonia, Virtual Campus – Portugal, AKI – Association of Creative Industries (Economic Chamber of North Macedonia) – North Macedonia.

International Forum of Creative Industries and the Role of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy

Creative Industries Forum and the Role of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy to promote and develop the creative industries in the country, to continue to facilitate the discussion of creative industries, creative and cultural entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs in creative and cultural industries, and innovation cooperation to speed up the progress in these industries.

This event is envisioned to be a creative and interactive event in 2028 that is to bring together representatives from creative industries, entrepreneurs, innovators, economic chambers, ministries, institutions, and other high-level policymakers, as well as representatives from civil society and international organisations to discuss business opportunities, development of international projects, funding, etc.

Produced by: Elena Bojadjieva-Cvetkovska, Kiril Gjozev, UMPAKI – Union of Macedonian Professional Associations in the Creative Industries. **Project partners:** KEA European Affairs – Brussels, Tartu Centre for Creative Industries – Estonia, Virtual Campus – Portugal, AKI – Association of Creative Industries (Economic Chamber of North Macedonia) – North Macedonia.

International Game Developers Conference – MGDC

A conference with numerous international and domestic experts in the Game Dev industry that are to deliver lectures covering topics on creative, technical, and financial production of games. This is to put Macedonia on the region's map of GDC providing domestic studios to network and expand outside our borders. Additionally, this is to bring foreign investments, extra education to youngsters, and other financial benefits. The author of the project is Gorast Cvetkovski.

Produced by: Macedonian Game Developers Association – MAGDA. **Project partners:** A1 Macedonia; Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje – Faculty of Computer Science & Engineering; Crazy Labs; Furious Avocado; Data Masters; Netcetera; Napnok Games; Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje – Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research (ISPPI); University Ss. Cyril and Methodius Skopje; Serbian Games Association (SGA); CEEGA – Central & Eastern European Game Awards; British Council Serbia; Nordeus Gaming; Game Developers Conference (GDC); Gamescom Cologne; Robot Teddy; Black Sea Games.

SheLeaders – VR

The project aims to tell the stories of prominent women who ruled in the Balkans in the Middle Ages, and based on their lives, habits, successes, and challenges of their time, to create stories that are to be presented through applications in the virtual (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

Produced by: Center for Scientific Research and Promotion of Culture “HAEMUS”. **Project partners:** Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia; NoHo, Ireland; Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade, Serbia; National Museum of Montenegro; Sarajevo School of Science and Technology.

2028 Young Entrepreneurs Conference

The digital revolution brought profound changes in every area of life, including the spheres of economy, culture, and education. It brought the need for new workplaces, new skills, and new professions. This means overcoming challenges, adaptation, collaboration, new approaches in education, mastering new skills, and training. The Young Entrepreneurs Conference is to be organised in collaboration with Tartu, ECOC 2024, ITTI (Institute for Technology Transfer and Innovation – Plovdiv, Bulgaria), and ECOC 2019 to present and share the best practice of European young entrepreneurs in the fields of digital design, gaming, film postproduction, 3D printing, architecture, etc.

The 2028 Young Entrepreneurs Conference is to be held in Skopje with practical workshops on polishing ideation and elevator speeches focused on young people and business start-ups. The conference encourages youth entrepreneurial thinking and provides practical tools to help them move forward with their ideas. The overarching theme of the conference is to be bridging the gap between cultural and creative industries, and education.

Produced by: AKI – Association of Creative Industries (Economic Chamber of North Macedonia). **Project partners:** Tartu Centre for Creative Industries, Estonia; and ITTI (Institute for Technology Transfer and Innovation) Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

— Explain succinctly how the cultural programme will combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions?



Skopje is not only the capital of North Macedonia, but it is a cultural capital as well, given that the city is populated with migrants from diverse ethnic and religious groups who have migrated to the city throughout history, looking for a better life, and taking their cultural practices along with them. There are numerous examples of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, in the form of sites, objects, and/or cultural practices. What is important to stress is that many of these cultural practices preserved over the years in continuation are still viable, and still play an important role in the inhabitants' daily lives. Yet, for heritage to survive, it has to adapt to its cultural surrounding, i.e., it has to develop and be in step with the current technological developments and innovations. Throughout history, the city has been integrated, and people have lived, worked, and participated in the social and cultural transformations united and altogether. Due to the political developments that took place in the early 2000s and due to the political propaganda of division of the city, its inhabitants, and hence the collective participation in the heritage, nowadays, Skopje is threatened by the forces of disintegration.

Hence, we would like to offer a programme accessible to all, disregarding differences in ethnicities, nationalities, religious backgrounds, and age. To us, heritage is the most important as it is but a tool for connection and integration, given that many of the heritage practices are a flux of two, sometimes three cultural influences, taking into account that Skopje has always been at the crossroad of cultures.

In shaping the SK2028 cultural programme, we paid special attention to linking the cultural HeritAGES that define Skopje as a historical city by utilising innovative approaches and digital technologies. For that purpose, **we developed a special sub-programme named HeritAGES** under the programme strand **Togetherness, which aims to promote the rich cultural heritage of the city through a contemporary approach.** In the everyday social discourse, people stress that heritage practices have been passed on from generation to generation, for AGES. As the notions of AGES long practices are very important for the communities involved in heritage preservation and promotion, it is therefore of great importance to us. Thus, we present HeritAGES: a term that signifies the plurality of cultural expressions and many forms of cultural heritage, rather than a single one; a term that places special emphasis on the past and future AGES, therefore stressing the importance of cultural transmission and the existence of site and objects present with us for AGES; and, of course, a carefully structured programme for all AGES, for our grandparents, who have actively participated in maintaining these AGES long traditions; and for our children, who are yet to learn what heritage is; for the future generations to continue adapting these HeritAGES to their lives, thus continuing to exist, as we say, for the AGES yet to come.

In the programme making, we use different approaches to contemporise, not only the heritage practices, objects, and sites, but also the way heritage is understood and promoted amongst people. We understand and approach the notion of "contemporary" in two main ways: technological and innovative. We combine cultural heritage with technology by incorporating live video streams on the internet, as well as live broadcasting on national television stations. Our focus on innovative approaches implies new and experimental ways of combining the natural, tangible and intangible heritage in a single event, cooperation of different art forms, communities, artists, and heritage sites. As we oppose any kind of separation and division, it is our vision that we disregard separating the natural, tangible, and intangible and offer an inclusive programme of HeritAGES for all.

There are three flagship projects that we've designed under this sub-programme:

Macedonian Heritage

A collaborative project in which heritage meets digital technologies. The project includes a research team made up of heritage experts in collaboration with noted videographers and photographers who are to work together in creating a digital archive in a form of a website that is to contain information, photos, and videos of Macedonia's natural, tangible, and intangible cultural heritage. This is a multiannual project that is to involve on-site ethnographic research which is to be presented in a form of an interactive platform. The archive which is to take a form of a website is to be presented as a photography and video exhibition, celebrating the opening of the European Cultural Heritage Days.

Produced by: The Society for Research, Protection, and Promotion of Cultural Heritage VULGUS Skopje. Project partners: UNESCO Department, Ministry of Culture of North Macedonia; Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje; Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe Under the Auspices of UNESCO.

Heritage Scapes

A multimedia exhibition that is to take place at the Ethnographic Museum, featuring ethnographic photography and ethnographic film, documenting the history of heritage research in North Macedonia. The exhibition is to also feature new works (photography and film) produced by contemporary photographers and cinematographers who find interest in capturing the living heritage (carnivals, festivals, rituals, celebrations, everyday life, etc.) of the communities who live in North Macedonia. The exhibition is to be followed by an electronic music event at the Skopje Fortress (Skopsko Kale) featur-

ing Terapija – a music platform for promoting electronic music and DJ Kiril Džajkovski as one of the few artists who experiment with electronic and traditional music.

Produced by: The Museum of the Republic of North Macedonia. **Project partners:** Cinematheque of North Macedonia; Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences; Marko Cepenkov Institute of Folklore in Skopje; Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University; Terapija; KirilDžajkovski.



Photo credit: Zoran Gjorgjievski, Statue Fest Skopje

Postcards from Skopje

A joint concert of several institutions to promote traditional music and dance that is to take place at the newly built Universal Hall, celebrating the music and dance heritage of the communities that populate the capital city of Skopje. The concert is to honour the flux of different cultural influences that shaped the specific sound of the "čalgija" music, once popular amongst the people inhabiting the cosmopolitan areas, including the city of Skopje. It is to be the pioneer and a historical collaboration among these institutions, as well as an excellent example of cooperation among artists of Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, and Romani backgrounds.

Produced by: Tanec National Ensemble for Dances and Songs of Macedonia. **Project partners:** Albanian National Song and Dance Ensemble, Department of Traditional Music and Dance by the Ilija Nikolovski-Luj State Music and Ballet School Center, Čalgija Sound System, Ljubojna, Džambo Aguševi Orchestra, and internationally celebrated artists such as Duke Bojadziev and Ismail Lumanovski.



12. How has the city involved, or how does it plan to involve, local artists and cultural organisations in the conception and implementation of the cultural programme?

As presented in the answer to Question 33, in which a short chronology of the project activities realised so far is presented, we started working on the candidacy project back in 2014. In 2019, we started intensively involving Skopje artists and cultural professionals in joint brainstorming, mostly about the concept of the programme. In August 2019, the City Council adopted a decision on the use of a distinct city space for the SK2028 project. Then the SK2028 Office got its premises in the city centre. In the past three years, at that location, we organised numerous work meetings, workshops, lectures, and other activities in which many local artists and creators have participated.

In order to collect their views on programming and other issues related to the project in written form, we prepared several questionnaires for the period 2020–2021.

1. Questionnaire for cultural institutions (local and national) working on the territory of the city of Skopje thematically related to marketing and communication, as well as audience development; sent by email (because of the pandemic) to 28 public cultural institutions, out of which 22 answered;

2. The set of Questionnaires for individuals – artists, cultural workers, and professionals from convergent fields to culture (19 questionnaires adapted for 19 thematic groups); sent by email to a total of 306 people, out of which 61 answered.

Through a series of joint activities with artists and cultural professionals, we collected the best ideas and proposals that took their final form in the application book. The cultural programme in its current form is the result of cooperation not only with public cultural institutions but also with non-governmental cultural organisations and numerous individuals. To give but one example: the environment segment of the application is prepared by the Animal and Environment Protection Association E.D.E.N. which is part of a large network of 23 CSOs and civil society initiatives that are to be invited to implement some of the projects' activities in the section of the programme strands "reCOverting" inspired by the Green Humane City vision. Many of the projects require partnering among various CSOs/

initiatives and institutions, with the citizens being at the heart of the implementation.

Should we pass the pre-selection and entered the shortlist to become the ECOC 2028, we are to immediately announce a public call for the collection of additional programme proposals. It is to be an open public call without any administrative obstacles in terms of the formal status of the project's proponents. The selected cultural producers are to have complete autonomy during the implementation of the programme, while respecting common rules, for example, in terms of marketing and project promotion.

III. European dimension

13. Give a general outline of the activities foreseen in view of:

- Promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding between European citizens.
- Highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European integration and current European themes.
- Featuring European artists, cooperation with operators and cities in different countries, and transnational partnerships.

Regarding the European dimension, all our activities should be considered in the context of a long-term enhancement of international cultural cooperation. Our main objectives are as follows:

1. positioning Skopje in the regional and international framework as a city of culture and creativity;
2. strengthening the European character of the city's cultural offer compared to the current cultural offer;
3. strengthening cooperation with Western Balkans and Southeast Europe artists and cultural actors, as well as establish new forms of cooperation with artists and cultural actors from other parts of Europe;
4. attracting European audience to Skopje;
5. polishing the professional and managerial skills of local artists and cultural practitioners through enhanced cooperation with European partners.

The SK2028 project is to enable us to realise all the aforementioned goals faster. Along these lines, we shape the SK2028 cultural programme so that it has as strong a European character as possible. We are currently in the phase of intensive negotiations on cooperation with numerous European partners, primarily with artists and cultural producers from cities that have held or are to hold the ECOC title, as well as candidate cities for the title. Our goal is that at least a third of the SK2028 cultural programme is to have a transparent European dimension, which means that foreign artists and producers from all parts of Europe participate in the

realisation. Our second goal is also connected to an increase in the number of international cultural tourists by at least 30%.

Our concept – "culture as a means of overcoming what divides us" – as well as four major thematic strands (Art4Hope, Togetherness, rECOvering, and CreARTing) derived there from encompass the issues of cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and greater mutual understanding. Within these thematic areas, particular attention is paid to promoting peace and fighting radicalisation through intercultural dialogue. Skopje with its track record of intercultural, interreligious, and inter-linguistic cohesion based on practicing ongoing dialogue can add value to the promotion of diversity, interculturalism, multilingualism, and European identity.

The multi-ethnic character of Skopje testifies to the strong tradition of cultural diversity. As an open city, Skopje has been accepting the cultural expressions of newcomers for centuries. The SK2028 project is to enable us to open up even more for foreign cultural expressions.

One of the topics we intend to pay special attention to is the question of the importance of culture in the context of European integration. We understand a country's EU membership not only as a political and economic, yet, above all, as a cultural and civilizational decision of its citizens. Along with education, culture is one of the 35 negotiating chapters all candidate countries must satisfy to become an EU member state from a purely formal perspective. Yet in reality, it is our firm belief that culture should be at the top of the reasons for EU membership. After all, a feeling of belonging to the EU is a matter of internalised values, not of interests.

As part of the Art4Hope programme, an international conference on that topic is to be organised. We want to hear views and opinions from experts and scientists, as well as artists and citizens.

Besides the role that art and culture play in overcoming social inequalities and divisions, a discursive part of the programme that is to be implemented in collaboration with our international partners, is to be dedicated to the following themes:

- the role of culture in strengthening the resilience of European cities;
- cultural diplomacy in the Western Balkan region;
- cultural participation of young people by using innovative digital tools.

We believe these topics are relevant to many European cities and their cultural policies. Nowadays, perhaps on a greater scale than ever before, Europe and the world face numerous challenges linked to the threat of war, energy crisis, climate change, migration, religious and intercultural conflicts, and the rise of radicalism, etc.

Taken together, these challenges negatively affect identities, affiliations, and possibilities for freedom and peaceful synchronicity. CULTURE OVER DIVISION, based on the city of Skopje and its multicultural and multireligious background, provides an incentive for re-thinking and reinventing culture based on the guiding principles:

- Culture has an intrinsic value.
- Cultural and linguistic diversity is a key asset.
- Intercultural dialogue creates synergies and results in prosperity; thus, the flexibility of culture is essential.
- Culture contributes significantly to sustainable social and economic development.

Europe-related and relevant topics of the main projects are the target of our programme, tackling human/nature relationships, particularly in our programme strand Togetherness which accumulates and showcases common European values and principles. Many projects within that framework are to have an international character.

Artistic Excellence and High-Profile Events:Renowned artists, exhibitions, festivals, conferences, and art residencies take place in diverse locations in collaboration with prestigious European institutions and networks that are to communicate broadly and make sure Skopje is visible on a European level.

Beams of Culture: Cutting-edge technologies produce several digital and visual objects with direct interactive transfer to other European and world cities, enabling people from different places to access, watch, explore, communicate, connect, and relate.

Skopje 2028 Ambassadors: Our communication is humanised and relies on people to be its best holders. Our ambassadors are to spread internationally, in Europe and worldwide, through a partnership with:

1. International networks, which the city of Skopje is part of, such as EUROCITIES (Associate member), Energie Cities, European Cities Marketing, LUCI, CTIF, ECF, etc. The City of Skopje was also an active member of the LIKE Network of European Cities and Region for Culture (Les Rencontres) from 2011 to 2019, when it stopped working.

2. Through our 21 twin cities in Europe and other continents: Bradford (UK), Dijon (France), Dresden (Germany), Tempe (Arizona, USA), Roubaix (France), Wareme (Belgium), Nürnberg (Germany), Ech-Cheliff (Algeria), Nanchang (China), Manisa (Turkey), Suez (Egypt), Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania, USA), Istanbul (Turkey), Ljubljana (Slovenia), Podgorica (Montenegro), Zaragoza (Spain), Zagreb (Croatia), Belgrade (Serbia), Tirana (Albania), Sarajevo (Bosnia and Hercegovina), and Athens (Greece). Also, we have cooperation with other cities following signed Memorandums of Understanding and Cooperation such as Moscow (the Russian Federation), Blagoevgrad (Bulgaria), Craiova (Romania), Ankara (Turkey), Bari (Italy), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Urmia (Iran), Torino (Italy), Konia (Turkey), etc.

3. Internationally, with individuals that share cultural links to our city and Skopje – artists, curators, architecture lovers, etc. – and everyone that gets attracted by Skopje.

It should be pointed out that many cultural operators in Skopje have been involved in a considerable number of international projects and networks, in particular within the European cultural area. This is also confirmed by the fact that Skopje is in the top ninth place among all European cities in terms of the number of projects funded under the 2014–2020 Creative Europe programme (Culture sub-programme).

Since 2017, the city of Skopje has been a partner in the CreArt Project (Network of Cities for Artistic Creativity), co-financed by the Creative Europe programme. By joining the CreArt cities network, the city of Skopje brings initiatives to the cultural life of Skopje in the field of visual arts by establishing new international partnerships and exchanges, while, at the same time, enabling the participation of artists and curators from Skopje in the programme activities held in the cities partners in the project. For example, the Youth Cultural Center city cultural institution is a full member of the most renowned network of concert halls in Europe, Liveurope.

14. Can you explain your overall strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public?

First, we believe in the ability of our artists, creatives, and cultural organisations to create a high-quality programme with a strong European dimension. Top art events with prominent international performers are what are to be at the heart of Skopje's attractiveness to a wide international audience.

Considering the geographic, cultural, and linguistic proximity, it is realistic to expect most of the visitors from the former Yugoslavian countries and the neighbouring countries, too: Kosovo, Albania, Greece, and Bulgaria. However, our activities to attract the interest of foreign culture lovers are not to be limited only to those countries. The plan to be created for this purpose as part of our broader marketing and communication strategy is to provide detailed activities that are to cover the entire territory of Europe.

The key starting points of the plan to attract the interest of the foreign audience are as follows:

1. Inclusion of the Skopje Diaspora

North Macedonia, including Skopje, has a large diaspora in Europe, North America, and Australia. When talking about distant continents, we talk about the members of the second and third generation of emigrants who still feel a strong connection to their homeland and hometown. In addition, in this century, especially after 2009, there was an increase in the economic migration of the young to European countries, primarily to Germany. Among them are numerous intellectuals with nourished cultural needs as consumers of contemporary culture. Among all of them, there is a great number of potential communicators of SK2028 who can successfully promote the project through personal communication with foreigners.

2. Overseas Cultural Ambassadors

These are distinguished individuals not only from the sphere of culture but also from other fields, such as science and sports, who live and work in European and other foreign countries. Due to their wider recognition, they are to play a particularly important role in communicating with the international media. The International Relations Unit, as a distinctive organisational unit of the SK2028 Foundation, is to be in charge of coordinating their activities.

3. International Relations of Cultural Actors

Plentiful Skopje cultural institutions and organisations are members of international networks and associations. In the context of informing and motivating a foreign audience, we are to use the regular smooth connections that local cultural actors have with foreign partners as much as possible. At the same time, we think of the for-

ign cultural producers who are not to be necessarily included in the SK2028 programme. A special action plan with annual activities until 2028 is to be made for the eight city cultural institutions to ensure their coordinated action of international promotion of the project.

4. Use of Digital Media

Nowadays, presence on the Internet is but a prerequisite for international visibility. Digital media have a decisive influence on the choice of a tourist destination. Meanwhile, we are not to ignore the growing influence of social networks, especially on the young.

5. Innovative Approach

At the time of digital culture, saturated with numerous events and information, it is necessary to develop innovative approaches to be recognisable. Therefore, we are to develop innovative approaches (for example, by combining cultural, entertainment, and educational content) to attract as much interest as possible from the foreign audiences.

15. To what extent do you plan to develop links between your cultural programme and the cultural programme of other cities holding the European Capital of Culture title?

In 2021, a letter of intent with the Slovakian city *Trenčín ECOC 2026* was signed. The following areas of cooperation have been agreed: European dimension, inclusion and participation, environmental ambitions, personalisation of cultural persons involved within the region, creation of artistic and cultural programme, and building of capacities and communication. The joints projects are to be detailed in the selection phase.

In 2022, a letter of intent with the French candidate city *Rouen ECOC 2028* was signed. The following areas of cooperation have been agreed: European dimension, inclusion and participation, environmental ambitions, personalisation and identification of cultural persons involved within the region, creation of artistic and cultural programme, and capacity building and communication. In addition, collaboration within the frame of *Roman Fleuve, (Re)sources, Seine monumentale, and Scouting Skopje* projects has been established.

In 2022, a letter of intent with the French candidate city *Clermont-Ferrand ECOC 2028* was signed. The following areas of cooperation have been agreed: European dimension, inclusion and participation, environmental ambitions, personalisation of cultural persons involved within the region, creation of artistic and cultural programme, and building of capacities and communication. The joints projects are to be detailed in the selection phase.

In 2022, a letter of intent with the Czech candidate city **České Budějovice ECOC 2028** was signed. The following areas of cooperation have been agreed: European dimension, inclusion and participation, environmental ambitions, personalisation of cultural persons involved within the region, creation of artistic and cultural programme, and building of capacities and communication. A joint project connected to our socialistic past and historical heritage is to be co-designed in the selection phase, including collaboration in the frame of Scouting Skopje; Ars Biologica; Space Odyssey; Art, City, Region; Literary Quarter, and Theatre of the Oppressed (2028) projects.

In 2022, a collaboration with the Portuguese candidate city **Braga ECOC 2027** is arranged. The joint project is Supracasa, An Artists-In-Residence Programme. It is a long-term programme of multidisciplinary artistic residencies, especially designed by the Braga's ECOC team for their supra neighbours from Northern Africa, the Balkans, Ukraine, Russia, and Caucasus. We have offered our Portugal partner the Scouting Skopje mutual project – a mobile artists/creators in residence programme (2023–2029). The collaboration on these two projects is to be detailed in the selection phase.

In 2019, members of the SK2028 bid team visited Plovdiv for a working meeting with the programme team of **Plovdiv ECOC 2019**. In the same year, members of the SK2028 bid team had a working meeting with the representatives of the organisation board of **Leeuwarden-Fryslân ECOC 2018**. In 2020, they visited Rijeka for a working meeting with the organisation board of **ECOC Rijeka 2020**. Apart from that, we are in intensive negotiations of a collaboration with representatives of **Maribor ECOC 2012** and **Novi Sad ECOC 2022**. An agreement in principle was reached with all of the former ECOC cities on programmatic cooperation within SK2028. Moreover, we have entered into initial negotiations about collaboration with some future ECOC cities, such as **Timișoara ECOC 2024** and **Bodø ECOC 2024**. The mutual projects with all the afore listed ECOC cities are to be defined in the selection phase.

Recently, we have signed a letter of intent with Goethe-Institute Skopje; the Federation for European Storytelling – FEST Network; and AICA International Association of Art Critics Macedonia. In all three cases, the joint projects are to be detailed in the selection phase.



IV. Outreach

16. Explain 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.

SK2028 was designed as a project intended for all citizens of Skopje. Without their involvement, the goal set, to transform Skopje into a better place for living, cannot be achieved. In this sense, the cultural programme is structured to include not only artistic yet also other areas closely related to culture, such as the arrangement of public urban space and neighbourhoods' revitalisation. Likewise, we wish to provide cultural content that is to appeal to a wide variety of different audiences.

When it comes to the involvement of the local population, we have set ourselves a specific goal that is to be one of the main indicators of the programme's success in the evaluation process: 70% of Skopje citizens to take part in at least one event in 2028 as visitors. Participatory art projects are but an important element of citizen involvement, especially within the Togetherness and rECOvering programme strands. In order to increase their involvement in such projects, special importance is drawn to the peripheral city municipalities, such as the municipalities of Butel, Šuto Orizari, and Saraj. In this sense, all producers whose projects are to be included in the programme are to be encouraged to include those locations as well. Thus, we are to reduce the disparity in the number of cultural offers between the city centre and the outskirts.



Photo credit: Stefan Samandov

Our basic methodological approach could be described as making massive small change as Kelvin Campbell, an urbanist, defined it. We are to harness the power of many small ideas and actions to make a big difference. In this way, we are to ensure a proper balance between bottom-up and top-down approaches. With the help of the citizens, current issues are diagnosed and concrete solutions are found. SK2028 has a mobilising character in the sense of encouraging citizens to actively participate in solving common problems. We are developing new models of self-organisation of citizens through micro-projects in municipalities and city neighbourhoods.

10 Municipal Offices – in each municipality we establish ECOC offices as independent holders of neighbourhood programmes.

In the context of citizen involvement, we are developing a special programme of volunteers who are to be not only active participants in the implementation of the cultural programme, yet also promoters of ECOC. This is especially important for the involvement of vulnerable social groups, which are more difficult to reach and characterised as weaker participation in culture. Skopje has a well-developed practice of volunteers in other fields, so the SK2028 project is a good opportunity for them to learn and develop skills for action in the cultural sphere as well. We have already actively involved volunteers in the implementation of the project's activities; for example, they participated in the implementation of the two surveys on Skopje's candidacy for the ECOC 2028 title among the audience at the Zemjotres #9 fes-

tival (May 2021) as well as at FIRSTBORN GIRL Festival For Feminist Culture (June 2021).

To find out the citizens' opinion about the SK2028 project, we conducted the Survey of the citizens of the city of Skopje for the cultural offer and the needs and opportunities offered by the status of European capital of culture in March 2021. 246 individuals submitted responses. Most of the answers to the question "What are some global issues or issues in the context of our country that the ECOC programme could address?" were: environment, climate change, fighting crime and corruption, poverty, and economic inequality.

All public tenders for the selection of projects that are to be announced in the subsequent steps of the process are to be carried out following a "bottom-up" open call to increase citizens' engagement. In that context, we are to make a great effort to engage with local organisations and individuals, including those from the aforementioned peripheral parts of the city. Furthermore, we are to pay special attention to the online dialogue with the citizens.

The emphasis of our programme is not so much on infrastructural projects as on cultural events and increasing all citizens' accessibility to art and culture. By including citizens in the preparation and implementation of the SK2028 project, we are also raising the levels of tolerance and openness and the development of active citizens.

17. Explain how you intend to create opportunities for participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

The City of Skopje maintains a proactive social welfare policy that includes systematic care for various marginalised and vulnerable groups: from persons with challenges and the homeless to people with mental health problems and elderly persons. The city budget, through annual programmes, continuously finances various social security programmes.

Their inclusion in the SK2028 programme is to improve their social inclusion, which contributes to preventing intolerance and violence towards vulnerable groups. At the same time, we strengthen the ties between the public cultural institutions and the organisations that implement social programmes in the long run.

Despite a lack of accurate and reliable statistics on the number of persons with special needs in Skopje and across North Macedonia, there is no mistaking that persons with challenges are one of the most marginalised social groups. Unfortunately, they can be heard only through the voice of civil society organisations and the personal involvement of some individuals fighting for their rights.

There are certain institutional activities for the social advancement of the challenged through sport. The SK2028 project is a unique opportunity to strengthen their social integration and involvement in the cultural life we intend to realise fully. Namely, within the existing activities in the field of culture, the challenged are considered mainly passive observers rather than active participants in cultural life.

The fundamental objective of our actions is to shift to a new paradigm: not just to increase the number of the challenged participating in culture as cultural consumers, but also to enable them to express themselves creatively through active participation in cultural life as cultural creators. This would allow them to make public their position and the day-to-day challenges they face regularly.

Focusing on the challenged as a marginalised group, we launched a sub-programme entitled *Art-for-Disability* under the programme strand Togetherness, covering the whole range of both cultural and social activities for various age groups: starting from the age of primary and secondary schools to the seniors. The sub-programme involves various projects, such as:

- organising and creating opportunities for open public dialog about issues concerning the challenged in all ten municipalities of the city;
- creating digital solutions together with the hearing impaired, the visually impaired, the speech impaired and the learning challenged for their benefit;
- establishing various art workshops, meetings, and seminars for the challenged to join the theatre, dance, music, and other art forms;
- networking and collaborations of talented children and youth with challenges to build their careers in theatre plays, musical bands, dance groups, etc., on local, national, and international scenes.

Projects of the sub-programme are to be precisely defined in the second round of the bidding process, based on a public tender opened to all (public, private and non-governmental) organisations as well as to individuals and informal groups.

In the preparation and realisation of the programme section, our focus is on three key activities:

- active participation of the challenged and the disadvantaged in the planning, preparation, and execution of all the activities;
- connecting and establishing cooperation-based

links among the challenged and the professional cultural players;

- developing creative solutions for improving their inclusion into culture and society, both in the physical and digital environment.



Photo credit: Mladen Bogojevski Madzo

Protecting the most socially disadvantaged citizen groups is but a priority for the Mayor of Skopje, Ms. Danela Arsovska.

18. Explain your overall strategy for audience development, and in particular the link with education and the participation of schools.

CONTEXT

In quantitative terms, in Skopje, there is a large audience with a potential to grow, especially for children and youth, and there is no noticeable lack of audience in terms of cultural events. As for the qualitative parameters, several issues are easy to spot, such as:

- segregation on many levels and lack of equal cultural opportunities for everyone;
- neglected minorities within minorities;
- lack of intersectoral cooperation, communication, and institutional co-production;
- centralisation and lack of community activities;
- inertia and lack of mobility;
- anachronistic approaches;
- underestimation of activities for children and youth;
- lack of regional and international collaboration.

Sadly, segregation is evident on many levels, primarily based on ethnicity, settlements (municipalities and neighbourhoods), social statuses, genders, material well-being, political inclines, disabilities, etc. All of it is a result of wrong policies, especially by encouraging "multiculturalism" misunderstood in the sense that every different community has the right to create and participate in its own culture, yet with no interaction whatsoever. Moreover, within the ethnically divided society, other communities are almost completely neglected, providing a very polarised and segregated society. Besides, like everything else, culture, in general, is very centralised in terms of resources as well as finding and creating new places for cultural events. However, cultural programs and events for children and youth, unfortunately, are traditionally underestimated by both artists and institutions, due to inherited mentality from the past.

There are only two national institutions specialised in producing cultural programmes for children and youth, Macedonian Theater for Children and Youth, and the Albanian Theater for Children and Youth which was founded only two years ago. Both, among many struggles and a lack of funding, have crucial problems with the facilities they are located in. The former is situated inside a residential building and faces numerous problems, like lack of space and a very small unsuitable stage. As for the latter, it has no address whatsoever. The building initially used for its activities was lately given to the Islamic community, leaving the Albanian Theater for Children and Youth practically on the street and at the mercy of the Islamic community. Both theatres are national institutions outside the jurisdiction of the local authorities.

OBJECTIVES

Our strategy for audience development is based on 6 key objectives:

1. Interculturalism

Instead of the misleading concept of "multiculturalism", we are focusing on interculturalism as a primary paradigm in culture. With the shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism we are to reduce ethnic-based segregation, providing equal opportunities for all and promoting inclusivity instead of exclusivity especially where disabilities are involved – as well as intersectoral cooperation and institutional coproduction. Following the objective, we intend to participate, inter alia, in the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities programme.

2. Dispersion

We are working intensively on finding and rediscovering new venues for activities, even some familiar ones which haven't been used for children and youth, or even some forgotten and erased from the cultural map. In every municipality in Skopje, there can be many various venues that are abandoned or which have never been previously used for any cultural activity. Also, there are venues of great significance, yet somehow forgotten, like the Fortress, the Old Bazaar, Scupi Archeological Site, Havzipasa's Lodgings, the Skopje Aqueduct, Canyon Matka, Sport and Recreation Center Saraj, Gazi Baba Forest, and many other. In this way, we are getting closer to the audience in different parts of the city, in different regions and neighbourhoods, and, at the same time, we are promoting the venues and educating the audience about them.

3. New Approach and Offer

There are certain shortcomings of non-commercial cultural offerings for children and youth, particularly in museums, galleries, theatres, and opera and ballet houses. The lack of quality content addressed to children with challenges is particularly notable. Unfortunately, it even can be said that there isn't any "relaxing performance" or challenging-friendly event at all. Children and youth are too often neglected even as visitors, and when it comes to active participation, that's totally out of the scope. With a new approach and offer such as open days, implementing pay-what-you-can models, performances, and installations in public cultural institutions – we encourage cultural organisations in making a step forward towards inclusivity.

4. Openness, Collaboration, and Coproduction

We encourage every type of possible collaboration, coproduction, and partnership under the SK2028 programme. We are putting cultural institutions in a position to work better together and make optimal use of available capacities and resources. Consequently, they are opening their doors for collaboration with the civil sector as well as the private one. This particular collab-

oration is a core methodology used to fully implement interculturalism.

5. Urban Culture

We encourage an urban, contemporary cultural production that brings together European cities as intellectual and cultural centres. We stimulate a sense and awareness of new art movements and waves in culture, as some forms and ways of expression are neglected, not supported enough, or even misunderstood. In particular, we promote ways of expression common to young people, such as graffiti, hip hop, street art, parkour, free styling, different street identity, children's street culture, street dance, urban fiction, etc.

6. Schools as Asset

Schools, both primary and secondary, play a key role in achieving all of the aforementioned objectives. Both pupils and teachers are the main partners of the cultural players in carrying out all activities. The City of Skopje is already implementing a very important project in the promotion and advancing an interethnic integration in education. It is a project that provides joint classes for students of different ethnicities and free Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish language courses. Currently, it is implemented in 8 secondary schools. Our objective is to put all (23) public secondary schools under the umbrella of the SK2028 project.

Two key SK2028 projects were designed for achieving the objectives:

1. New theatre for children and youth with no "ethnic labels", founded with the help of the city

2. New festival of urban culture VIBES

Both projects are described in more detail in the context of the answer to Question 11.

V. Management

19. City budget for culture over the last 5 years

Year	Annual city budget for culture (in euros)	Annual city budget for culture (in % of the total annual budget for the city)
2018	7.104.014	10,28%
2019	6.789.961	7,82%
2020	6.648.251	6,93%
2021	7.415.067	7,28%
2022*	11.458.927	9,87%

*Unlike the financial years 2018–2021, the current financial year is not over yet, and the abovementioned amount for the year 2022 has been planned, yet the final outturn is expected to be higher than 99%.

The reduction of the city funds for culture in 2020 was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because the city cultural institutions could not perform their regular programme for months.

As the preceding chart shows, a substantial increase in funding for culture took place this year. The new city government brought along a fresh breeze and a new approach to culture.

City funds for culture are provided from the budget, which is administratively managed by two sectors of the city administration: the Public Activities Department (which includes the Department of Culture) and the Local Economic Development Sector.

20. In case the city is planning to use funds from its annual budget for culture to finance the European Capital of Culture project, please indicate this amount starting from the year of submission of the bid until the European Capital of Culture year.

Year	Financing SK2028 project from the city budget for culture (in euros)
2022	65,000
2023	65,000
2024	570,000
2025	700,000
2026	900,000
2027	1,300,000
2028	6,000,000
2029	400,000
Total	10,000,000

The table shows the amounts of the project's implementation by year with the closing year 2029, which is to be provided from the city budget for culture exclusively for the SK2028 project.

21. Which amount of the overall annual budget does the city intend to spend for culture after the European Capital of Culture year (in euros and in % of the overall annual budget)?

As presented in the answer to Question 20, funds for culture in the city budget significantly increased in 2022 compared to previous years. The share of culture in the total city budget once again approached the limit of 10%. In the years ahead, a trend of continuous growth of the city budget for culture is to be established, not allowing it to fall below the limit ever again.

The additional increase in the city budget for culture after 2028 is to be influenced by our intention for the most successful projects under the SK2028 programme to become part of regular funding not only from the city budget yet also from the state budget.

22. The overall operating budget for the title year.

Total income to cover operating expenditure (in euros)	From the public sector (in euros)	From the public sector (in %)	From the private sector (in euros)	From the private sector (in %)
22,500,000	21,500,000	95,55%	1,000,000	4,45%

The budget's operating expenditure is relatively high, but realistic. It reflects the fact that the whole project is but an ambitious undertaking. A relatively small part of the private sector that is realistic to expect is a consequence of the reduced income of the local economy in times of crisis.

23. Income from the public sector - What is the breakdown of the income to be received from the public sector to cover operating expenditure?

Income from the public sector to cover operating expenditure	in euros	%
National Government	10,000,000	46,6
City	10,000,000	46,6
10 municipalities	1,000,000	4,6
EU (excluding the Melina Mercouri Prize)	500,000	2,2
Other	-	-
Total	21,500,000	100

The project's main financiers are the city and the state. Co-financing is provided in an equal amount, which is the basis for future agreements between the city and the state regarding mutual rights and obligations.

The estimated share of all 10 city municipalities is one million euros. The funds are to be intended primarily for carrying out activities within 10 Municipal Offices as local ECOC centres.

The amount of funds expected from the EU refers primarily to future projects of Skopje cultural producers that are to be financed from EU funds. So far, many cultural operators have been highly successful in terms of EU funds withdrawal.

24. Have the public finance authorities (City, Region, State) already voted on or made financial commitments to cover operating expenditure? If not, when will they do so?

The Council of the City of Skopje has not yet adopted a decision on the total amount of funding for the whole project, which considers the coverage of all costs from the moment the results are announced in the autumn of 2023 until June 1, 2029 (the preparation of an evaluation report is expected in the first five months of 2029). In December 2022, The Council of the City of Skopje is to adopt the budget for the year 2023, including the necessary funds for the SK2028 project in the next year. It is expected that the decision on the total amount of funds from the city budget for the SK2028 project is to be adopted in the spring of 2023, based on the agreement with the representatives of the state and the representatives of all 10 city municipalities. The agreement is to be a shared financial commitment of the public authorities as main funders to cover operating expenditures.

The planned financial resources, stated in the answer to Question 25, should be confirmed by the competent political authorities at all three levels: city, state, and municipal. As already mentioned, it is expected that in the spring of 2023, representatives of the city, state, and 10 municipalities are to sign a cooperation agreement on the SK2028 project.

25. Income from the private sector - What is the fund-raising strategy to seek support from private sponsors? What is the plan for involving sponsors in the event?

Our strategy of attracting private-sector financing could be summarised in the slogan: "Not help, but cooperation". In other words, ask not what the sponsor can do for you, but what you can do for the sponsor.

A fund-raising strategy is an integral part of our marketing and communication strategy, thus the Marketing and Communication Unit is to be responsible for its preparation as early as in the first half of 2024.

There are few private investors in culture in Skopje. That is why it is important, as a first step, to raise awareness among potential investors and sponsors about the benefits of cultural investments. For this purpose, through the SK2028 digital platform, we are first to improve the visibility of the public cultural institutions and other actors on the Internet, including social networks. We are to implement a series of campaigns to introduce private companies to the benefits of joint performance under the SK2028 brand. At the same time, we are to enable cultural producers to independently create long-term partnerships with business entities.

We rely primarily on sponsorship funds from the ICT sector, especially in the areas that overlap with creative industries, such as interactive computer and video games. The CreARTing programme strand opens the door for vital collaborations between artists and businessmen.

26. Operating expenditure - Please provide a breakdown of the operating expenditure

Programme expenditure (in euros)	Programme expenditure (in %)	Promotion and marketing (in euros)	Promotion and marketing (in %)	Wages, overheads and administration (in euros)	Wages, overheads and administration (in %)	Unforeseen expenses (in euros)	Unforeseen expenses (in %)	Total of the operating expenditure
22,500,000	60%	2,250,000	2,250,000	5,625,000	25%	1,125,000	5%	22,500,000

When planning operating expenses, we adhered to the principle that management expenditure should not affect programme expenditure or promotion and marketing expenditure. The cost structure is designed to enable the successful realisation of the programme, fair remuneration for all persons professionally involved in the project, and an active promotion both in North Macedonia and abroad.

5% are to remain as a reserve for unforeseen expenses, since we live in turbulent times when it is almost impossible to predict all circumstances in advance, including finances.

27. Budget for capital expenditure

What is the breakdown of the income to be received from the public sector to cover capital expenditure in connection with the title year?

Have the public finance authorities (city, region, State) already voted on or made financial commitments to cover capital expenditure? If not, when will they do so?

What is your fund raising strategy to seek financial support from Union programmes/funds to cover capital expenditure?

At this very moment, no capital investment in the sphere of culture is being planned, because it would exceed the realistic possibilities of the city budget. As a consequence, we are not to seek financial support from Union programmes/funds to cover capital expenditure.

Within the framework of the foreseen cooperation agreement between the City of Skopje, on the one hand, and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Culture, on the other, the possibility of defining a joint (city and state) capital investment is to be reconsidered. The signing of the agreement on the co-financing of the SK2028 project from the state budget is expected in the first half of 2023.

Therefore, the SK2028 project is to be carried out within the existing cultural infrastructure, which is to be partially renovated, primarily the building of the Universal Hall.

28. Organisational structure

Please give an outline of the intended governance and delivery structure for the implementation of the European Capital of Culture year.

Should Skopje be nominated as the ECOC title-holder, the City of Skopje is to found *the SK2028 Foundation* following the Law on Associations and Foundations. The Law regulates 5 basic association and foundation principles, and they are as follows:

1. independence (The Foundation is independent in its management, determination, and achievement of goals.);
2. publicity and transparency;
3. non-profitability;
4. non-party action;
5. public life initiatives (The Foundation may freely express and promote its opinions and positions on issues of their interest, take initiatives and take part in creating public opinion and policies.).

Precisely due to the aforementioned principles explained explicitly in the law, we decided on a foundation as the most suitable organisational form. Our main goal regarding the foundation of the governance and delivery structure for the implementation of the SK2028 project is to limit any kind of political influence on the programme's decision-making.

The city, state, and municipalities as the public financers of the project are granted the supervisory role through their representatives on the Board. The aforementioned Law regulates the managing organs of the foundation: the Board and the Director. The SK2028 Board is to consist of 3 representatives of the city, 2 representatives of the state, 1 representative of each city municipality, 2 representatives of the cultural and creative sector, and 1 independent expert.

Following the Law, the foundation may be managed by one or more directors general. The foundation is to be run by the director general, selected by a public tendering procedure. Apart from the director general, there are to be two more directors: a business director who is to directly manage the operational tasks, and an artistic director who is to directly manage the carrying out of all activities related to the programme. The director general to be, business director to be, and artistic director to be, as the SK2028 project management team, are to be responsible for the governance and delivery of the project.

As the organisational chart shows, the organisational structure is divided into five main operational units:

1. The Operating Unit is to be in charge of the administrative, personnel, legal, financial, book-keeping, and account services, as well as the implementation of public tenders and logistic support to the project, including production equipment, and other administrative and technical activities.

2. The Programming Unit is to be responsible for all activities regarding the selection, preparation, and execution of the programme. This Unit is to be divided internally into four programme teams following the four programme strands.

3. The Marketing and Communication Unit is to be in charge of advertising, marketing, public relations, publicity, promotion, media campaigns, and any other task in line with the marketing and communication strategy. It is to be responsible for fundraising and obtaining sponsors too, as well as for carrying out monitoring and evaluation activities.

4. The Citizens Participation Unit is to be comprised of a network of 10 ECOC offices located in each city municipality. Among other, it is to coordinate the activities of the volunteers and local cultural ambassadors, i.e., the prominent individuals that are to promote the SK2028 project in their local environment.

5. The International Relations Unit is to be responsible for collaboration with all foreign partners: artists, troupes, cultural initiatives, NGOs, international networks and platforms, etc. It is to be coordinating the activities of the overseas cultural ambassadors, i.e., the prominent individuals born in Skopje but based abroad.

The SK2028 Foundation is to be established for the implementation of the programme and put into service no later than April 2024. The city is to manage the premises where they are to operate until the end of the project.



29. Contingency planning

What are the main strengths and weaknesses of your project?

How are you planning to overcome weaknesses identified?

The lesson learned during the Covid-19 outbreak is that one should always have to expect the unexpected. In these uncertain times, the ability to deal with crises situations fast and efficiently is no less important than the planning ability to change things for the better. In this respect, it should be noted, primarily, that we have already demonstrated our ability to react quickly to changing conditions. In 2020, when the whole world was affected by the corona virus pandemic, already in April and May, we carried out the Culture During the Corona virus Pandemic project. The City of Skopje offered to help its independent artists who suddenly found themselves without livelihoods. More than two hundred artists performed a series of concerts and other open-air events supported by the city budget. In that way, Skopje artists helped their fellow citizens through the pandemic crisis, too. Indeed, we took immediate action in response to the crisis caused by the corona virus pandemic. It was the first project of its kind throughout the Western Balkans region. Thus, we have clearly shown that we can quickly respond to unexpected and unforeseen circumstances.

CULTURE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

During the pandemic's peak and curfew hours, there were 50+ cultural events, 200+ artists, 500.000+ on-line visitors, and thousands of spectators on the windows and balconies of houses and buildings.



Photo credit: Mladen Bogojevski Madzo

MAIN STRENGTHS

- Majority of the Skopje inhabitants are against ethnic, religious, political, and any other kind of division, which is the core of the story we want to tell to the citizens of Europe.
- There are more than half a million inhabitants in Skopje, and the city has the human, infrastructural and other capacities needed to make a huge impact by the successful implementation of the ECOC project, which is especially important for the cities in the candidate countries for EU membership.
- The proverbial hospitality of the citizens of Skopje;
- Actors of Skopje cultural life have established strong ties and partnership relations with many cultural producers in Southeast Europe.
- The willingness of many artists and cultural professionals of Skopje to engage in a project that is to establish culture as an initiator of positive changes in their city.
- Current local and national governments provide strong political support to the SK2028 project.
- Ethnically diverse population guarantees artistic diversity in terms of interculturality.
- A long-term city cultural strategy by the end of 2030 designed to preserve ECOC's legacy.

MAIN WEAKNESSES

- Lack of cultural visibility of Skopje in the wider European area;
- Skopje has a bad reputation in certain international media as a city with a predominantly backward-looking (conservative) view of culture and art.
- Lack of cooperation among national, city, and municipal authorities in the field of culture;
- Uncertainty of the political situation over the next mandate period (2025–2029) which might put into question the fulfilment of the financial commitments by the public authorities;
- Low living standards and low purchasing power, which prevent many citizens from buying tickets for cultural events;
- The international activities of cultural producers are primarily concentrated in the region, so they cooperate significantly less with producers from other parts of Europe.
- The cultural infrastructure is quite old and in need of reconstruction and renovation;
- The space facilities for artist-in-residence programme are limited.
- Too few managerial and technical staff with professional experience and expertise in the field of culture;
- Progressive apathy and the loss of faith, especially among young people, that anything could change.

The entire SK2028 project is designed so that its implementation is to help overcome the aforementioned weaknesses: from improving international reputation through strengthening infrastructural, human, and production capacities to strengthening international cultural cooperation and restoring citizens' faith in a better and common future.

The major risk we can identify at the moment is closely linked to politics, because, as already mentioned, politics infuses every pore of society in this part of Europe. The main measures we are to take to avoid any chance of being called the project into question by politicians who don't have an ear for art and culture can be summarised as follows:

- Conclusion of formal, legally binding agreements between public authorities, containing precise commitments on financing;
- Transparency in managing the SK2028 project, providing up-to-date information to cultural and general public about the project;
- Meeting the stipulated deadlines, especially regarding the formation of the organisational structure;
- Ongoing work on developing the awareness of the general public about the importance of the project both for the cultural and the general development of Skopje;
- Strong engagement of all actors in the city's cultural life – institutions, organisations, and individuals.

Regarding the financial aspect, given that there is a considerable number of people with low income, ticket prices is a serious barrier to many. Therefore, we are to make the majority of cultural events free to enable access to culture for the socially disadvantaged, too. Consequently, it also reduces the potential for raising own income from the ticket sale. The only possible response is stable budget support, including sponsor support. In that context, we are fully aware of the importance of income planning without overblown expectations. The financial matter is to be based on the realistic underlying capacity of the budgetary resources and the city economy.

During the covid pandemic, we learned the extreme importance of an appropriate digital infrastructure that enables the distribution and consumption of cultural content via the Internet. Concerning contingency planning, every producer within the SK2028 cultural programme is to prepare a Plan B for their project, which is to include a plan for implementing the project in virtual space, if not possible to realise it in physical space.

30. Marketing and communication

Please provide with an outline of the city's intended marketing and communication strategy for the European Capital of Culture year.

Our marketing and communication strategy is designed in a modern way and uses both traditional and digital media and communication channels to present the SK2028 cultural programme to the general public, as well as the cultural heritage and life of the city as a whole. New vitality in the cultural sphere, the increase in the number of tourists, strengthening the citizens' identity with their city, and improving the international reputation of the city – are just some of the effects intended to be achieved. We are committed to achieving the goal – to be an example of realising the potential of the ECOC title for cultural, economic and social development of cities.

We would like to send two key messages to all European cities facing similar issues like Skopje:

- Strengthening the position and role of culture in the community is the best way for citizens to connect more strongly and collectively oppose all political and other forces that are but a threat to separate them permanently.
- As a challenge systematically dealt with by city public policies, the current ethnic, religious, and other differences among citizens may, instead of the roots of divisions, be turned into the root for strengthening a common identity, with the potential to become, if successful, a recognisable brand or a symbol of recognition of the city.

These intended messages are to be conveyed with traditional and new media, not only to the citizens and visitors of Skopje, yet also to the citizens of other European cities. The media campaign is to include a whole series of different projects, among which the following are to be highlighted:

- Specifically-designed media space for SK2028 in traditional city media: SkopjeKult, MRT TV, City Radio, etc.
- Specifically-designed space in national media: Nova Makedonija newspaper, MRT TV, etc.
- Regional (Balkan) media: SEEcult, Kooperativa, CityMagazine, etc.
- Internet: SK2028 website and web pages on social networks, SK2028 monthly e-magazine, etc.
- Cultural Memory of Skopje pocket books edition that is to preserve the memory of the SK2028 project;
- Targeted information on the project not only in main and digital media in the countries of the Western Balkans and Southeast Europe, yet also in other parts of Europe.

Key objectives:

1. 70% of Skopje citizens to take part in at least one event in 2028 as visitors;
2. 35% of young people (from 18 to 30 years of age) to take part in at least one event in 2028 as participants;
3. to increase the number of foreign cultural tourists by at least 30%;
4. to make the SK2028 cultural programme available to the whole world (not only as information about the events but also as programme contents);
5. to raise the international profile of Skopje through culture as a city that changes for the better;
6. to develop SK2028 as an internationally recognisable market brand.

The part of the strategy that concerns the attraction of visitors is geographically divided into five basic areas:

1. Skopje and Macedonia;
2. Western Balkans: Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
3. Southeast Europe: in addition to the countries of the Western Balkans, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, too;
4. other EU countries;
5. non-EU countries.

The first task of the Department of Marketing and Communication after the formation of the SK2028 Foundation is to be the development of an integrated marketing and communication strategy that is to define in detail the steps to be taken and the schedule of the activities. In promotional activities, certain emphasis is to be placed on the inclusion of both public cultural institutions and private and non-governmental cultural organisations. Namely, it is our wish to use their existing channels as much as possible to attract not only foreign co-producers interest, yet, also, the interest of foreign audiences. Besides cultural players, our main marketing partners are the following: travel agencies, travel operators, and media partners.

Our marketing and communication strategy has three progress milestones, the dates being:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| January 2024 | TAKE-OFF |
| January 2028 | JUMP |
| January 2029 | RESUMPTION |

TAKE-OFF

2024 - 2027

The main objective is to widely disseminate to the public, both national and international, the creative potential of the SK2028 project as a model for long-term culture-based development of cities, as well as to stimulate the interest of the general European public in the SK2028 cultural programme.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- creating a Department of Marketing and Communication, including its Head, within the SK2028 Foundation and putting it into service no later than April 2024;
- preparing an integrated SK2028 marketing and communication strategy setting out the detailed actions on an annual basis;
- inclusion of all city cultural stakeholders in the activities of the international promotion of SK2028 and the establishment of partnership relations with domestic and foreign co-producers;
- implementation of designed annual campaigns to attract the interest of the domestic and foreign public;
- establishing local info-points (in all 10 municipalities) responsible for informing and communicating effectively with the citizens;
- organisation of forums, conferences, seminars, workshops, and other meetings with various cultural and media actors to circulate regular information on the course of preparations.

JUMP

2028

In addition to the key goals already mentioned, the main goals in the year of implementation of the SK2028 cultural programme are:

- to gain as much interest as possible from the domestic and international media as well as the general public;
- to attract as many audiences as possible;
- to achieve the highest possible income from sponsorship and ticket sales.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- to get a fully operational system for marketing and communication to work;
- to operate based on a month-by-month communications plan;
- special attention is to be paid to the promotion of the opening ceremony and the flagship projects;
- mobilisation of the entire cultural and creative sector (public institutions, NGOs, private companies, individuals, etc.) to promote the programme and spread the interests of the cultural and general public, in order to cultivate a sense of belonging to the EU;
- usage of innovative ways to attract a wider local, regional and European audience (by merging cultural, entertainment, and educational content).

RESUMPTION

2029

The aim is for the main actors of the city's cultural life to effectively transfer all the acquired experience into their regular practice after 2028.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- promoting European values through cultural programmes and projects financed from the city budget;
- coordinated promotional activities of the city's cultural institutions based on a joint long-term plan;
- continuation of cooperation between cultural actors and foreign partners;
- continuation of the cultural cooperation of the City of Skopje with other European cities;
- transforming the SK2028 website and the SK2028 e-newspaper into a web portal on context and contacts related to arts, culture and heritage in Skopje.

31. How does the city plan to highlight that the European Capital of Culture is an action of the European Union?

As an action of the European Union, the ECOC 2028 is to be integrated into every segment of communication with both the professional (cultural) public and the general public. We intend to promote the ECOC brand in different ways: not only by advertising in the major media outlets (press, radio, and television), yet also, through all programme events, including side events, such as, for example, interviews, round tables, international conferences, and public debates. The success of the ECOC events, taken both individually and as a whole, is the best way to promote the initiative.

The EU label is to be visibly displayed on all our printed and digital material. Due to a wide (global) internet availability, special attention is to be devoted to the visibility of the label in digital form on our website and social media channels.

Promotion and communication activities in all three ECOC 2028 host cities, including the selected cities in France and the Czech Republic, should be consistent with each other. It is of great importance to achieve the highest possible visibility of the EU. In this context, we are to make our best efforts to find an agreement on coordinated promotional activities with the other two host cities.

Also, the visibility of the EU is to be ensured by all producers participating in the SK2028 programme. They will need to make sure that the EU is visible in all communications related to their projects.

As the capital of an EU candidate country, we have a particular interest in promoting European ideals and values through the SK2028 project, firstly, in our country, and secondly, abroad, particularly in the candidate countries, including those in the Western Balkans. It is, too, our goal to stimulate the citizens of those States to think in the European identity way through the medium of art and culture. We would like to exploit SK2028's full potential as an efficient way of promoting European citizenship as an element of identity, which does not replace national citizenship.

By doing all of this, we are to be able to create an international image of Skopje as a real European city.

VI. Capacity to deliver

32. Please confirm and supply evidence that you have broad and strong political support and a sustainable commitment from the relevant local, regional and national public authorities.

The strong desire for change on the behalf of the city authorities is but a guarantee for a sustainable commitment to the SK2028 project. The resolute political support stems from the realisation that if a city does not constantly change and adapt to the changing circumstances, both in the national and international environment, is doomed to long-term stagnation. In the era of global competition, the City of Skopje has decided to redefine its international position primarily within the Western Balkans and Southeast Europe, yet also within Europe and on a global scale. In this context, the SK2028 project plays an important role not only in the field of culture yet also far more widely.

The city authorities led by Mayor Ms. Danela Arsovska recognised culture as a key to building an inclusive and cohesive society. In the election programme of the mayor as an independent candidate, winning the ECOC 2028 title was defined as a strategic project of the city in the field of culture. By winning the elections on October 17, 2021, the mayor managed to bridge parties from the political left and the political right, including the strongest Albanian party – Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). It should be emphasised that broad political support was also provided by the previous city authorities. Thus, as early as 2015, the city assembly unanimously adopted the decision on the formation of the ECOC Initiative Board. Nowadays, Skopje has a stable political governance that is fully committed to the creation and implementation of progressive public policies in all sectors that are key to the long-term development of the city.

Throughout the multi-year period of preparation, the state provides support to the SK2028 project, which was formalised on July 6, 2021, by appointing two state representatives (one representative of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and one representative of the Ministry of Culture) in the Coordinating Body Skopje 2028 – Candidate City for the European Capital of Culture. The body is composed of 23 representatives of city and state authorities, including representatives of the cultural and creative sectors. It performs the function of a Steering Committee.

SK2028 is designed as a project of national importance, and, therefore, the political support of the relevant national

authorities is extremely important, both in terms of funding and in terms of content, including the programmatic contribution of the national cultural institutions. In the spring of 2023, at the latest, a special agreement between the city and the state is to be signed, which is to include 10 city municipalities as administrative and territorial units with independent political representatives. Thus, the political support for the SK2028 project, which is already present in practice, is to be formally defined at all three levels (city, state, and municipal).

The city government provides strong support for the ECOC 2028 candidacy. City leaders recognised the key role of the cultural and creative sectors not only for the social and economic development but also for the sustainable development and shared prosperity of the city. By doing this, they have clearly shown their pro-European orientation and commitment to common European values of democracy, tolerance, equality, the rule of law, and non-discrimination. Thus, our bid for the ECOC 2028 title should be understood as a manifestation of the political will to establish Skopje as a stronger cultural player on the international stage, particularly in the European cultural landscape. The strong support of the cultural sector actors and citizens is the best assurance for attaining this objective.

Our candidacy for the ECOC 2028 title is based on the strong commitment of artists, cultural professionals, and many citizens of Skopje to European values and way of life. The political support is not only strong, yet it is also ongoing for many years even though governing political coalitions have changed three times over the last eight years. Testifying to this is the timeline of the bidding process as follows:

2014

- The Council of the City of Skopje started a procedure for the activities required to nominate the city of Skopje for the European Capital of Culture.

2015

- The Council of the City of Skopje decided on establishing an ECOC Initiative Board.

- "The Meaning of the ECOC Title and Its Contribution to the Cultural and General Development of the City" international conference;

2016

- "Towards the ECOC Title" workshop for representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the civil sector active in the field of culture, representatives from the municipalities and the City of Skopje;

- A promotional brochure was issued.

2017

- "ECOC – Opportunity for Long-Term Development of the Cities" workshop for representatives of educational, national, local, and independent cultural institutions;

2018

- "Skopje – Candidate City for ECOC 2028" international conference;

- A working team of independent experts from the field of culture and sustainable development was formed, which started researching and analysing the application books of the candidate cities and holders of the title.

2019

- The Council of the City of Skopje adopted the Information for Starting the Procedure and the Necessary Activities for Nominating the City of Skopje ECOC 2028.

- SK2028 Bid Office was established.

- SK2028 Bid Team held a working meeting with the programme team of Plovdiv ECOC 2019 and a working meeting with Leeuwarden ECOC 2018.

- A workshop for strategic planning of the candidacy of the city of Skopje – an ECOC 2028 city candidate and a workshop for developing the methodology of the ECOC concept, organisational structure, and planning the candidacy activities;

- The first public call for hiring volunteers was published.

2020

- A series of meetings, conversations and thematic workshops with artists and cultural professionals who have expertise and experience in cultural matters and practices;
- Part of the SK2028 bid team participated in the organisation of "Culture in the Time of Corona" City of Skopje project activities.
- Representatives of the city participated in the opening of Rijeka ECOC 2020.

2021

- The coordination body Skopje 2028 – ECOC City Candidate was formed.
- A working visit and signing of a letter of cooperation with the Slovak city Trenčín ECOC 2026;
- The realisation of an exclusive street art programme in the context of SK2028;

2022

- personnel reorganisation of the SK2028 Bid Team and a continuation of the intensive cooperation with all cultural stakeholders on the creation of the concept, programme, and other parts of the application.

33. Please confirm and provide evidence that your city has or will have adequate and viable infrastructure to host the title. To do that, please answer the following questions:

- Explain briefly how the European Capital of Culture will make use of and develop the city's cultural infrastructure.

- What are the city's assets in terms of accessibility (regional, national and international transport)?

- What is the city's absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation?

Skopje has the appropriate infrastructure, production, personnel, organisational, tourist, and other capacities by which all designed activities relating to the SK2028 programme can be carried out with a high level of excellence.

CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In Skopje, there are 30 city and national public cultural institutions and 6 cultural centres established by the city municipalities. In addition, there are 3 cinema halls. All of the institutions have their own facilities that represent the basic public cultural infrastructure. Together with the spatial capacities managed by non-governmental organisations and private cultural organisations, they are to be included in the SK2028 project as venues and stages for the cultural events.

TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY

In Skopje, there are 30 city and national public cultural institutions and 6 cultural centres established by the city municipalities. In addition, there are 3 cinema halls. All of the institutions have their own facilities that represent the basic public cultural infrastructure. Together with the spatial capacities managed by non-governmental organisations and private cultural organisations, they are to be included in the SK2028 project as venues and stages for the cultural events.

AIR TRANSPORT

There are two international airports, Skopje International Airport in Skopje and St. Paul the Apostle Airport in Ohrid. Both airports are part of the SEETO Comprehensive Network and the Core Network Airports. Skopje Airport is the major airport with 44 flight connections to international destinations in 2022. Skopje airport's location is great for the airport to become the important logistics and transport crossroads not only in the country yet also in the entire Balkan region. Skopje airport has its own parking lot: 1200 marked parking spaces for cars and 6 parking spaces for buses. Skopje airport has services and facilities to ensure better access for passengers with reduced mobility. Bus transportation is available from the Skopje city to the airport in both directions daily. Taxi transportation is also available at Skopje Airport. The airport is connected to the Skopje highway.

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE CONNECTIVITY

State highways have been aligned with the basic European road network since 2016:

- A1 is the highway from the Serbia border to the Greece border,
 - A2 from the Bulgaria border to the Albania border,
 - A3 from the Albania border to the Bulgaria border,
 - A4 from the Kosovo border to Skopje and continues to the Bulgaria border.
- The comprehensive road network is 850 km long, and the basic road network consists of 513 km of roads passing through the territory of the state. The road network connects 15 border crossings with the neighbouring countries: 3 with Greece, 3 with Bulgaria, 2 with Serbia, 2 with Kosovo, and 4 with Albania.
- As for Skopje city buses are concerned, 313 new buses were purchased in 2012. In addition, 226 bus stops were modernised.
- Daily, 22 buses depart from the Skopje bus station to the European cities.

TOURIST ACCOMMODATION

In Skopje, there are:

- 95 hotels (6 / 5-star), (23 / 4-star), (36 / 3-star), (21 / 2-star), and (9 / 1-star),
- 16 apartment complexes,
- 12 hostels,
- 437 rooms for rent.

In 2021, 180,265 tourists visited Skopje and spent 350,871 overnight stays. In the first seven months of 2022, 169,449 tourists (54% domestic and 46% foreign) visited Skopje and spent 270,000 overnight stays.

Hotels and apartments website: <https://macedonian-hotels.mk/mk/hotels/skopje>.

34. In terms of cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure what are the projects (including renovation projects) that your city plan to carry out in connection with the European Capital of Culture action between now and the year of the title?

The main infrastructure project directly related to the SK2028 project is the reconstruction of the Universal Hall building. Since it is the main city hall for cultural events with larger audiences (1500 seats), its renovation is of strategic importance. The project documentation is not yet final since it has not been adopted by the City Council. The construction design documentation, including the timetable and expenditure, is to be presented during the selection phase.

Some of the projects mentioned in the answer to Question 11, which in addition to the programme include renovation, are currently still in the conceptual phase. Railways of Illusion, Scouting Skopje, GAIN OR REGAIN (urban/istic redeems), dePhantomisation of the Arabian House (An Old Deserted Hotel), and Underground Profane. The reconstruction of one of the best existing facilities is one of the possibilities for the implementation of the infrastructure part of the project under the title City's theatre for children and youth. Specific data on all the projects is to be presented during the selection phase too.





SK2028

IMPRESSUM

Bid Book: CULTURE OVER DIVISION – Skopje 2028;
Project of the City of Skopje

Publishers: Public Institution Universal Hall – Skopje
Gorjan Hristovski – Director of the PI Universal Hall

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