



culture 21

UCLG Committee

PEER-LEARNING

GABROVO

TIMIȘOARA

OCTOBER 2018



ACTIVITY

Peer-learning.

DATE

25-27 June 2018.

PLACE

Timișoara, Romania

PEOPLE INVOLVED

GABROVO DELEGATION

Martina Grueva, Chief Expert Protocol and Public Relations Dpt., Municipality of Gabrovo

Elena Vlaeva, Chief Expert Culture and Tourism Dpt., Municipality of Gabrovo

Emil Mihov, Photographer

Mariana Prodanova, Executive Director, "Factory" Association

Momchil Tsonev, owner of "Gabrovo Daily" media platform and organizer of "6Fest" art festival

TIMIȘOARA DELEGATION

Dan Diaconu, Vice-Mayor in charge of cultural affairs, Timișoara Municipality

Diana Donawell, Head of International Relations Office, Timișoara Municipality / Focal point, Pilot Cities programme

PILOT CITIES EXPERTS

Catherine Cullen, Special Advisor, Culture in Sustainable Cities, Committee on Culture, UCLG

Ivor Davies, researcher and consultant, expert of the Pilot Cities programme

CULTURE ACTION EUROPE

Natalie Giorgadze, Communications and Community Director, Culture Action Europe

PEER
LEARNING



CONTEXT

The **Pilot Cities Europe programme** is an initiative of the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Culture Action Europe (CAE), which aims to foster peer-learning and capacity-building on culture and local sustainable development among European cities. Alongside self-assessment, policy innovation and participatory governance activities implemented in each city, peer-learning activities enabling bilateral and multilateral exchanges are organised on a regular basis.

In this context, a delegation from Gabrovo conducted a peer-learning visit in Timișoara on 25-27 June 2018. Aims of the visit included to become familiar and explore the cultural landscape in Timișoara, the city's cultural policies (including its **Cultural Strategy 2014-2024**), activities conducted within Timișoara's participation in the Pilot Cities programme, and preparations for the 2021 European Capital of Culture programme. Furthermore, the visit sought to provide the Gabrovo delegation with ideas and examples to reflect on its own cultural policies and activities, and was an opportunity to discuss possible partnerships and collaborations with cultural actors and public authorities in Timișoara.

To facilitate the learning dimension, the Pilot Cities experts working with Gabrovo (Catherine Cullen) and Timișoara (Ivor Davies) also took part in the visit. A representative of CAE, as one of the organisations promoting the programme, was involved as well.

This report summarises the activities conducted and highlights some of the lessons learned in the visit. It has been written mainly by Martina Grueva (Chief Expert Protocol and Public Relations Department, Gabrovo), who coordinated the Gabrovo delegation, with additional input by Catherine Cullen, Expert of the Pilot Cities programme.

For further information, please visit the pages of **Gabrovo** and **Timișoara** in the Pilot Cities website.



DESCRIPTION OF THE VISIT

Timișoara is a larger town than Gabrovo, but we found many similarities between the two cities that could be the basis for a future partnership. The aim of Gabrovo is, apart from being a capital of humor and an industrial city with an emphasis on new technologies, to establish itself as a place with rich and quality cultural life. A goal that Timișoara has also set itself and is achieving.

Timișoara will be the European Capital of Culture in 2021 and we were interested in its strategy in this direction, where we found many similarities to our goals at the moment, including the following:

- »»» the development of the area around the Bega canal as a place for walking routes, meetings and cultural events. Gabrovo is situated along the banks of the Yantra river and we are going through the same process;
- »»» bringing cultural events from the city center towards other areas, increasingly involving the city's neighbourhoods;
- »»» increasing the capacities of the people;
- »»» dealing with culture in both the municipality and the non-governmental sector, and encouraging non-governmental organizations to be active in creating cultural products;
- »»» attracting artists and mentors from abroad, engaging citizens and businesses in the process.

An interesting opportunity to explore is the possibility for Gabrovo's artists to be part of the programme of Timișoara 2021 - European Capital of Culture. A call will be launched in the autumn of 2018 to gather proposals for cultural activities.

Gabrovo is a town with many old factories, and it was useful for us to visit the Ambasada Cultural Center in Timișoara, as our goal is to turn our factories from empty buildings into spaces for modern art, co-working spaces, galleries and youth centers. We were interested in the management of this space, how it is supported and what the concept for its creation is.

During the visit, we met curator Andrea Fuine of the Timișoara Art Gallery, who is preparing an exhibition for women artists in Timișoara and Eastern Europe. We gave the contacts of "Hristo Tsokev" Art Gallery in Gabrovo, where an exhibition of Gabrovian women artists is organised every year.

There could also be an interesting connection between the Museum of Humour and Satire in Gabrovo and the Art Encounters Foundation in Timișoara. Both successfully manage to translate art into an accessible language - for example, parallel workshops for children and adults in which they can create art. Similar initiatives were organized



DESCRIPTION OF THE VISIT

in the House of Humour and Satire for Christo and Jean Claude (Christo was born in Gabrovo) and also for the sculptor Todor Tsonev, who made caricature sculptures.

The Bulgarian community in Timișoara is also of interest to us. We understood that they organise an annual Carnival (the Carnival in Gabrovo is the biggest and most expected event in the city) and they are also familiar with the “tradition” of cutting the cat’s tail, so it can enter quickly into the room – a tradition and a registered trademark of the town of Gabrovo.

We consider our visit as successful and we want to thank organisers for the time we spent and the people we met in Timișoara. We look forward to welcoming you in Gabrovo and to having the opportunity to present you our town.

Martina Grueva

Gabrovo



OBSERVATIONS BY CATHERINE CULLEN

In the context of the visit, the City of Gabrovo was particularly interested in comparing and exchanging on cultural projects and policies that it is implementing or planning to implement in Gabrovo and that Timișoara has already set up or is going to in the context of its cultural strategy and Timișoara 2021, European Capital of Culture. Both cities also being involved in the Pilot Cities programme, the work programmes and pilot measures of each were also discussed.

The first meeting was hosted by the Timișoara Deputy Mayor for Culture, Dan Diaconu, who very generously took the time to provide the visitors with an extensive overview of the history, social context, cultural policy and vision for Timișoara 2021 and its expected legacy. This was much appreciated by the Gabrovo team, as it gave them important background information and a helpful introduction to understanding the City.

The visit to different infrastructures and venues in Timișoara enabled the Gabrovo visitors to learn about specific artistic projects and their implementation and compare some of them with projects being developed in Gabrovo. Both cities, for example, have launched an important new policy and development plan for their river, based on sustainable mobility, cultural events and renewed quality of life. The Gabrovo team was particularly interested in the newly reclaimed and landscaped banks of the Bega canal within the context of the upcoming European Capital of Culture and its legacy, since Gabrovo is also working on a rehabilitation plan for the banks of the Yantra river that crosses its town centre.

Mindful of its post-industrial sites and strong engineering culture, one of **Gabrovo's Pilot Measures** within the Pilot Cities programme is to develop the city as a destination for creative industries and art residencies and establish partnerships with other creative cities, cultural centres, universities and creative networks. The representatives of Gabrovo were particularly interested in the visit to the Timișoara Ambasada Cultural Centre, an ex-industrial site turned into a cultural venue with its specific cultural programme and style of management. The team was also able to ask questions related to another of Gabrovo's Pilot Measures concerning cultural economy and the transformation of an existing space into a new cultural area for the creative industries, smart innovation labs and co-working spaces.

During a visit to the Timișoara 2021 European Capital of Culture team, the Gabrovo visitors had a good discussion on other aspects of the Gabrovo Pilot Measures, as they exchanged with their Timișoara colleagues on the development of partnerships between enterprises and cultural venues, events and activities, and the implementation of a governance of culture involving the city, the cultural institutions and actors, and civil society.

Gabrovo has a very original institution, the Museum of Humour and Satire, and a renowned annual Carnival, and the visiting team was very interested in the work being



OBSERVATIONS BY CATHERINE CULLEN

carried out by the Timișoara Arts Encounters Foundation in terms of the quality of its educational workshops, as Gabrovo also has children's and adults workshops in different cultural disciplines, supported by some well-known Bulgarian artists, and its first Pilot Measure is to set up a cultural management training programme to build capacities in the cultural sector and stimulate exchanges between publicly-funded and independent cultural operators.

To sum up, all the exchanges and visits were relevant to the currently planned policies and activities of Gabrovo and its commitment to the Pilot Cities programme. The different questions, comparisons and exchanges of information discussed with the personalities and cultural teams of Timișoara during the two-day visit will no doubt be fruitful for the further enhancement and development of sustainable cultural policies and actions in the city of Gabrovo.

Catherine Cullen

Expert, Pilot Cities programme

CONTACT

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