



Supplement

to the Lower Austrian
Strategie for Art and Culture





European Capital of Culture 2024

St. Pölten's Bid for ECoC 2024

The Resolutions Passed by the City of St. Pölten
and the Province of Lower Austria

The Culture Region St. Pölten

European Capital of Culture
and the Strategy for Art and Culture

Innovation in Art and Culture –
The Focus on Children

St. Pölten – A Hub of History
and of Stories

The Culture Region St. Pölten
and the Cultural Legacy

European Capital of Culture
as a Historic Opportunity for the
Provincial Capital St. Pölten, the Culture Region
and Lower Austria



European Capital of Culture

When the Lower Austrian Provincial Government passed its Art and Culture Strategy on 5 July 2016, the bid by a Lower Austrian city for the title of European Capital of Culture 2024 was not yet on the table, at least as far as the Province of Lower Austria was concerned. Judging by what can still be seen more than three years later, there was not even the vaguest mention of such a bid at the conception phase of the province's culture strategy. This conception phase was overseen by Lower Austria's Department of Art and Culture and included several rounds of discussion involving the province's Culture Senate and the most significant stakeholders in cultural institutions affiliated to Lower Austria's government in one way or another. Of decisive import for the creation of the culture strategy was the participation of a great number of different exponents of the creative industries – artists, cultural managers, cultural initiatives and other relevant actors – in the public discussion held on 19 May 2015 at the Donau Universität in Krems, where ten working groups jointly defined the focal points of the strategy. Comparable in importance for the genesis of the strategy were the public presentations of interim results in collaboration with the Lower Austrian Culture Network (NÖ Kulturvernetzung) in the autumn of 2015, events that took place in Lower Austria's four regional culture centres – Kulturszene Kottlingbrunn, Tischlerei Melk, Kunsthaus Horn and MAMUZ Mistelbach. They produced valuable feedback and additional suggestions and successfully tied up any loose ends.

So, to repeat this point once more, no mention was made of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) at the time when the culture strategy was still in the making, even though all these stakeholders were taking an active part in the process. It was only when news about that European Union initiative began to kindle interest in civil society and people became aware of the opportunities that could attend a bid that the situation changed. In contrast to procedures that had governed the European Capitals of Culture scheme since its inception in 1985, the amended version, laid out in the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014, explicitly offered the possibility of including regions adjacent to the candidate city in the application, as can be seen for example in Article 11 (4). This has created significant opportunities that go beyond urban planning into the fields of regional development and regional cultural work.

St. Pölten's Bid for ECoC 2024

As a "typical mid-size city", the provincial capital St. Pölten boasts a great number of cultural institutions thriving on lively exchange such as the Festspielhaus St. Pölten, the Bühne im Hof, the Landestheater Niederösterreich, the Museum Niederösterreich in conjunction with the Haus für Natur and the Haus der Geschichte, the Provincial Library and the Provincial Archive. Additional significant contributions come from municipal institutions such as the Municipal Museum St. Pölten, the Municipal Archive, the Research Library St. Pölten and from other civil society initiatives especially in the field of youth culture. There is a general feeling that, at least up to the present day, this broad offer of high-class cultural fare has been largely under-reported and under-reviewed by the supraregional media. St. Pölten's location in the immediate vicinity of metropolitan Vienna with its world-class attractions is both a challenge and an opportunity. St. Pölten size and autonomy make it ideal as a kind of laboratory – an experimental cauldron site where new developments and initiatives can be put to the test. It has a potential that would be difficult to realise for the relatively cumbersome machinery of a metropolis. New benchmarks provided by the network of European Capitals of Culture will help St. Pölten to make a realistic assessment of both its strengths and its weaknesses, enabling it to claim its rightful and autonomous place alongside such established cities as Vienna, Linz, Graz, Brno, Prague, Budějovice and Bratislava, and to do its own thing

The Resolutions Passed by the City of St. Pölten and the Province of Lower Austria

The bid for the title of European Capital of Culture has given a powerful stimulus to Lower Austria's capital. It has, among other things, spurred the city on to develop the Culture Strategy 2030 (Kulturstrategie 2030), a powerful initiative that attests to the city's awareness of the leading role it plays in Lower Austria. Actors working for the city and of the province have significantly stepped up both the frequency and intensity of their collaboration in developing various projects in the field of culture. The first important step in this direction was the joint foundation of the Bewerbungsgesellschaft NÖ Kulturlandeshauptstadt St. Pölten GmbH (Office St. Pölten 2024), with the City of St. Pölten funding one half, and the Province of Lower Austria the other; 35% of the province's half will be contributed by NÖKU and

15% by Niederösterreich Werbung. This LLC will oversee the selection phase. Its agenda includes instigating and monitoring a public debate in a way that involves the largest possible portion of the population in the process. Proof of an equally clear commitment are the two coordinated resolutions unanimously passed by the relevant boards of the Province of Lower Austria and the City of St. Pölten that provide both a sufficiently dimensioned programme budget and a cultural infrastructure budget focused on St. Pölten. The latter is exclusively aimed at reinforcing and updating existing infrastructure, with the exception of only one major new construction, the Children.Art.Lab, a dynamic venture that goes to the very heart of what the city's Capital of Culture project is all about.

The newly developed understanding between city and province extends to the guarantee that the better part of the jointly developed projects will be realised even if St. Pölten fails to be nominated ECoC 2024.

The Culture Region St. Pölten

When the bid is viewed from a regional perspective, even though the focus must always be on St. Pölten, the many cultural highlights in the city's vicinity – Melk, the Schallaburg, Krems, Grafenegg, some of which receive support from the Province of Lower Austria – quite obviously strengthen St. Pölten's position. It is important to link St. Pölten firmly to this region. Rich as it is in historical treasure and the dynamism of contemporary art, the region needs to be reconceived in international, decidedly European terms if it is to gain the appreciation it deserves. It is perhaps Europe's patchwork structure with its many different languages that creates the impression that there is still a great deal waiting to be brought to light about our continent, an enormous wealth of material begging to be made the subject of research and development. This is particularly true where exchange and dialogue with artists and cultural workers is concerned. Encounters with Europe's cultural diversity across demarcation lines separating special fields and disciplines cannot but create exciting scenarios which will enrich all those involved.

On top of this, an orientation towards Europe rather than towards local or regional themes must be seen as a creative decision that ought to have a stimulating effect on existing institutions. It may well be that integ-

ration into the network of European Capitals of Culture leads to a new orientation whose emphasis on cultural work is both compatible with the agenda of the ARGE Donauländer and a valuable addition to the network of European mid-sized cities.

It is important to give due weight to the interaction between St. Pölten as the centre and its environs, the Culture Region St. Pölten. There is a great potential here that has remained largely untapped to date and that can be used to activate and intensify artistic, cultural and social life in a mutual exchange. The centre and the region need each other and complement each other. The stimulus they will receive by St. Pölten being nominated ECoC 2024 will, it is hoped, invigorate the sense of community, belonging and neighbourliness.

European Capital of Culture and the Strategy for Art and Culture

Linking local and regional cultural creativity to European partners is clearly the most conspicuous new development in Lower Austria's Strategy for Art and Culture. Realising the programmatic commitment outlined in Bid Book I to make Europe present on the ground ("Europa daheim" – Europe at Home) and to scaling down social, spatial and temporal distances ("Rescaling Distances") will open up paths leading both to a new understanding of Europe and to a new and deeper self-perception.

It is the added value expected to be gained from these links to European experiences and practices, manifold and different as they are, that makes the process all the more rewarding. Part of this added value will be channelled back to the Culture Region St. Pölten. This is the second great ECoC related gain: the creation of a Culture Capital region as an artistic and cultural hotbed in the heart of Lower Austria, an ambitious venture that is sure to eventually transmit invigorating stimuli to the entire province. In addition to the stimulation of artistic creativity in the Culture Capital region, with all the social benefits that come with an active cultural life, it is hoped that this will result in a powerful shakeup of the region in the field of cultural tourism, finally putting it on the map of European cultural hotspots. The continued cultural development of the region is designed to – and will – make it a catalyst for economic dynamism, enhancing its attraction for cultural tourists of all kinds.

Innovation in Art and Culture – The Focus on Children

Bid Book II, on which the European Union's twelve-member jury will base its decision, provides for a multitude of projects aimed at the two general themes, "Europe at Home" and "Rescaling Distances".

One of the most spectacular projects both in basic conception and realisation is the creation of the Children.Art.Lab. The all-out commitment to children, a focal group especially deserving such commitment, under a perspective that is not in the first instance concerned with teaching coincides on many levels with Lower Austria's Strategy for Art and Culture. The focus on contemporary art and its central role in terms of content and the participation and involvement of children from all kinds of background coupled with the diligent elimination of all sorts of barriers make the Children.Art.Lab a visionary beacon project and a future template for similar projects in other European countries. Substituting "education through art" for "education for art" puts the societal aspirations embodied in the Children.Art.Lab in a nutshell. At the same time there is the hope – the very real hope – that the creation of the Children.Art.Lab will prepare the ground for a host of new creative activities.

St. Pölten – A Hub of History and of Stories

So everything is being put in place to create a boost for cultural activities in contemporary art and related fields. But what about research into the city's cultural legacy? What about the scientific processing and presentation of that legacy? How will they benefit from the nomination of St. Pölten as Capital of Culture?

The finds made during the years-long excavation campaign in St. Pölten's Cathedral Square (Domplatz), a project ranking at the very top of any list of Austria's current archaeological digs, will obviously feature prominently. The discovery of the Roman nucleus of Aelium Cetium, as St. Pölten was known two thousand years ago, will be playing as significant a role in the realisation of the Culture Capital as will the former St. Pölten monastery of the Augustinian Canons, currently the seat of the bishopric, which will surely be continuing its long association with music into the future. Another focal point is the former St. Pölten synagogue, which will also be given a new lease of life. The history of the Jews of St. Pölten, their contribution to the development of the city

and the commemoration of the crime of their expulsion and destruction, an atrocity which spelt the end to the local community, will be addressed in detail.

The Culture Region St. Pölten and the Cultural Legacy

In the Culture Region St. Pölten, a region closely associated with the genesis of today's Austria, the legacy of culture is omnipresent, articulated as it is in abbeys and monasteries such as Lilienfeld, Herzogenburg, Göttweig and Melk. The world-heritage site Wachau is an archetypal cultural landscape shaped by the Danube, viticulture and by its many other assets, material and immaterial. These assets represent both fertile ground and a source of friction for avant-garde formats such as the Donaufestival in Krems, the Europäische Literaturtage and discussion events like the Europaforum Wachau at Göttweig Monastery and the Symposium Dürnstein. Part of that cultural heritage is the new Landesgalerie Niederösterreich in Krems, which in conjunction with the Kunsthalle Krems serves as a venue for a comprehensive presentation of art, ranging from the masterpieces of the past to cutting edge avant-garde works.

Cultural legacy, however, is more than just a stroll through the sunlit uplands of the past. It includes as downsides such political aberrations as totalitarianism, dictatorship and murderous group-related misanthropy. The Melk Memorial, a former subcamp of the concentration camp at Mauthausen, raises many questions that the young generations must confront, especially in the face of the current resurgence of xenophobia, if they are to base their future on new and better premises.

European Capital of Culture as a Historic Opportunity for the Provincial Capital St. Pölten, the Culture Region and Lower Austria

When all is said, the simple act of St. Pölten bidding to be nominated European Capital of Culture has already paved the road to the realisation of many projects outlined in Lower Austria's Strategy for Art and Culture. In the event of the bid being successful, all the goals detailed in the Culture Strategy's ten guidelines will be realised, with the tailwind created by European Union sponsorship speeding up the process. The European Capital of Culture initiative will span all ten pillars of the guidelines and add a European dimension to the support



structure of the Cultural Strategy.

Nomination as European Capital of Culture would be proof positive for the Culture Region St. Pölten and for Lower Austria as a whole, with its capital St. Pölten as spearhead, that the path they have chosen is the right one. It would transform what started out as an application process into a broad movement oriented towards Europe, based on the participation and active involvement of as many actors as possible. The Province of Lower Austria and the City of St. Pölten have made a binding commitment to support the venture, which is seen as a truly historic opportunity in a unified, future-oriented Europe

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