

ŽILINA BESKIDS 2026

EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

CANDIDATE CITY

EUROREGION BESKIDS

Area 6.343 km²
 Population 1.385.000
 295.500 in SK
 246.000 in CZ
 843.500 in PL

PL

- A Kysuce Gallery
- B Kysuce Museum
- C Museum of the Považie region
- D Strečno castle
- E Museum of Transport
- F Folk architecture objects Čičmany
- G Exposition Jánošík and Terchová
- H Bytča Wedding Palace
- I Vychylovka – open air museum and historical railway
- J Orava Museum
- K Orava Gallery



CZ

SK



WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITIES



INTRO DUCTION

[A] CULTURE AS A DRIVING FORCE OF POSITIVE CHANGE

20 years ago, hardly anyone would have expected Žilina to run for the title of a European Capital of Culture. In the 1990s, the city was going through a decade of difficult political and economic transition, existing cultural institutions were striving to find their new place, extremism was on the rise, and local democracy in deep crisis.

However, in those challenging times, many civil society organisations and cultural institutions arose. Together with active locals, they kept changing their communities for the better, one step at a time. Among them were a group of young activists from the newly set up independent cultural centre Stanica, and later Nová synagóga, or volunteers from the Land of Harmony Foundation, a creative platform for people with and without disabilities, and others. Their stories – the stories of cultural resistance and the rise of civil society – show how culture can drive the imagination of an urban community and stir it to build a better future for itself.

We consider our ambition to become the European Capital of Culture as a culmination of these long-term efforts of the local civil society and the public institutions to inspire the community to a greater togetherness and cultivation of European and democratic values. We believe that actions are sustained by the ideals they are born of, and we are seizing this opportunity as true believers in culture as a driving force of positive change.

When the opportunity came up, we joined forces with all key regional leaders, public institutions and non-governmental organisations to give the project a robust European, regional and transnational dimension. We take part in the ECoC competition as a transnational consortium, together with our longtime partners, the cities of Bielsko-Biała in Poland and Frýdek-Místek in the Czech Republic. The name of the project, ŽILINA BESKIDS 2026, derives from the Beskid Mountains, the geographic area which connects us.

[B] ŽILINA BESKIDS 2026 – CROSS-BORDER DIMENSION

Žilina's location at the junction of three national borders means it has unique economic, cultural and innovation potential. By joining forces with longtime partners across the border, we want to fully take advantage of that potential. We believe that through the exchange of know-how, ideas and experience, the mobilisation of all stakeholders in the region, we can enhance the city's European profile, create a cross-border region of European significance, and give it a new centrality, in the joint Beskids brand.

Despite strong economic ties existing in the region, there is still a lot of untapped potential in the field of culture, creative industries and tourism. We have realised that we need to tear down the remaining mental barriers. Moreover, the completion of the missing part of the E75 European route, scheduled by 2026, will significantly shorten the distances between Žilina, Bielsko-Biała and Frýdek-Místek, and change our relationship. This new infrastructure will reinforce and further drive our economic and cultural cooperation.

Last but not least, we consider the ECoC an opportunity for the deepening of regional cooperation. By now, more than 30 municipalities (e.g. Rajec, Rajecké Teplice, Bytča, Kysucké Nové Mesto, Námestovo, Dolný Kubín, etc.) from rural areas of northern Slovakia such as Kysuce, Orava, and Rajec agreed to work together on a common vision. While such regional cooperation may seem obvious, in the mountainous Žilina region, where each valley has its own cultural tradition, collaboration does not always come easy.

In short, more than a way of self-presentation, we see the candidacy as an opportunity for greater cross-border and regional cooperation, an opportunity to symbolically open up and redefine our European and regional profile, and to build a common Beskid brand.

ARTISTIC CONTENT

05

There are three elements that define and connect us across the region: industrial tradition, beautiful mountains, and strong identities. Let us introduce to you three programme lines derived from them: Flow of Nature, Future's Factory, and Borderless Identity.

≈ FLOW OF NATURE

OUTDOOR CULTURES

Take your culture out for a walk! With this in mind, we will bring art to where locals spend most of their free time – in the mountains, hiking, on cycling routes or in ski resorts, connecting nature and environmental issues with art.

Seasons of Extreme Sports Culture will bring together several mountain film festivals from the region and expand their offer by extreme cultural experiences. Sports clubs will join forces with artists, e.g. paragliding as a means to observe land art from above, geocaching to discover artworks placed in nature, climbing as an experience of vertical dance. **JIB Lines Winter City Festival** will bring snowboarding and music to the Farské Stairs in Žilina city centre. Together with the Slovak Hiking Club, we are in talks to host a **European meeting of rambblers**, bringing together walkers from all over Europe with a cultural programme at mountain chalets, with presentation of cultures of walking. Finally, the **Summit of Culture** is an ambitious project of a touring art show, a combination of classical music and visual experience of the unique beauty of the Beskids in the context of regional ski resorts.

FLOW – BACK TO THE WATER

Žilina is surrounded by three rivers and two large water dams, yet water in the city centre is practically absent. **Flow Festival** is an opportunity to reconnect the city with water and recreate the community experiences that once took place along riverbanks. **Flow Festival** will bring light and art installations to the Váh riverbanks, in cooperation with the international contemporary art and light festival **Biela Noc**. Art installations such as

the **Floating Gardens**, an artistic project by local artist Juraj Poliak at the Žilina Reservoir, will provide a space for community activities, gardening, and contemplation. Events that will connect art and sports will be part of the programme. **Rajčanka Riverbanks**, one of our investment projects, will revamp the river's surrounding areas for cultural and community activities. Playful, interactive, immersive exhibitions will allow visitors to explore water and water management in the city in our new **Bôrik Environmental Centre** set up in one of the oldest water reservoirs in the city.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

In order to increase the overall quality of community and cultural life in the suburbs and city districts in the outskirts, we will set up a network of **Community Art Centres** that will consist of workshops and education spaces, exhibition spaces and a stage for events. We will mobilise the local residents to build and cultivate their neighbourhood. The same goes for **Community Courtyards**, which will revamp green infrastructure in the concrete neighbourhoods (mobile greenery, composters, community gardens). City parks are ideal for culture and community meetings, and so we will support activities aimed at their renewal. We refer to, for example, the **SNP Park** in the city centre, the **Frambor Park**, a peculiar place with historical value and natural resources located under a labyrinth of highways, which a local activist group wants to revive and turn into a community park, or the **Freedom Park**, where cultural centre **Hájovňa** revived an old orchard and plans to install community facilities to host regular cultural events. Finally, we plan to transform the popular woodland area on the outskirts of the city into a full-fledged **Urban Forest – Dubeň & Straník**. Through biological mapping that respects local fauna and flora and the forest's history, we will create edu-trails and activities for schools, accompanied by art installations.

TRADITIONS FORWARD

Traditions forward explore the traditional culture and its contemporary reinterpretations. **Festival of Shepherd Culture** will be a two-day festival centred around a “salaš”, the Slovak traditional mountain farm, temporarily built in Žilina’s main square. The festival will include degustation of shepherd culinary specialities, folk music and dance programme, presentation of mountain farming traditions, and showcase of crafts. The highlight will be a procession of sheep through the city back to the mountains. We will also welcome shepherds from around Europe and discuss with them the preservation of mountain farming in Slovakia and in Europe, at a conference. In 2026, the 20th annual edition of the **Slovak Gathering of Fujara Players** will take place in the village of Čičmany, famous for its original log houses with typical white ornamentation. Fujara is a long wooden pipe with three-tone holes, originating in central Slovakia. This four-day event usually consists of an exhibition of handmade traditional instruments and crafts and a rich musical programme. In 2026, we will invite players on other traditional wind instruments from European cultures, such as the alphorn or the Great Highland bagpipe, to join the fujara and create a site-specific concert in nature. In cooperation with Savonlinna 2026, we will organise a musical dialogue between the traditional **folk music** of Terchová and the traditional Finnish instruments “kantele” and “jouhikko”.

»» FUTURE'S FACTORY

PASÁ.Ž – PLATFORM FOR ARCHITECTURE AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

PASÁ.Ž will be a forum for temporary exhibitions, creative workshops and lectures on urban development. It will be a platform for dialogue about architecture and urbanism, between experts and the city’s inhabitants. We will offer educational programmes, such as **Architecture for Kids**, but also a chance to breathe new life into the city’s neglected areas in **City Acupuncture**. PASÁ.Ž will also be the venue for **Creative Bureaucracy**, a professional growth programme for civil servants that will search for creative and participative solutions to improving public services

HANGAR – ARTISTIC MAKERSPACE

After the communist era, when public space was subject to political control, the Slovak art scene stopped engaging with it. But today, artistic interest in it is on the rise. Art production for public space, however, often lacks suitable production infrastructure, whether in performing arts, or large-scale installations and sculptures. We intend to fill that gap by setting up **HANGAR – Creation Centre for Art in Public Space**. Apart from focusing on public space in particular, it will be an artistic maker space for all sorts of art with production and technical equipment and support. It will also be the seat of the **Animation Hub**, the **CC: Circular Culture** and the venue for large city events such as concerts and expos. It will also serve for the production of outdoor projects within the ECoC, such as the **Urban Scenography Festival** that explores the intersection between scenography, architecture, visual arts and music, or the annual **4x4**

All **Terrain Art** workshops that deal with dance and physical theatre in the urban landscape.

WIRES

The “Drotárstvo” permanent exhibition on “wirecraft”, a local UNESCO intangible heritage item, at Budatin Castle, will be revamped. To promote and further develop this unique technique and tradition, we will organise **WIRE School** – international workshops and will offer residency programmes aimed at the modern reinterpretation of the art for artists, designers and wirers. We will connect the craft with other traditional techniques from around the world, e.g. the Japanese kintsugi art of fixing broken pottery with powdered gold, the subject of our **Kintsugi Art Exhibition**. To promote the tradition in the city, we want to install a specially commissioned wire sculpture in the public space as part of our Public Art programme. Another event will be the Strings open-air concert tour with the Slovak Sinfonietta, recomposing motifs of traditional tinker songs for string and chord instruments.

PLATFORM(A)

Platform(A) is a forum for exploring intersections between art, technology, science and industry. It will consist of **STE(A)M LAB** – a laboratory for cooperation between the technical UNIZA and Slovak art universities on their research and innovation activities; but also of workshops, studios, seminars and trainings. To increase artistic participation in innovation and research we will set up the **Art and Science Residency Programme**. Artists will be invited to explore new materials and technologies in UNIZA labs and local innovation companies. **STE(A)M Biennale** will run a bi-annual presentation of art and curatorial research on the intersection between art, technology, science and industry. **Arsenal Gallery** will focus on contemporary art and design in IT, AI, biomedicine, genetics, future mobility and smart materials.

∞ BORDERLESS IDENTITY

COMMUNITY MUSEUM

To challenge the notion that history is a narrative of war victories, succeeding governments, and technological inventions, we will set up a museum of “small” history, a **Community Museum**. It is a museum of objects, stories, and craft techniques, collected and curated by members of the community themselves. In the museum, we will tell the story of Czechoslovakia through everyday objects, family photographs, and personal memories. We will study the particular knack of Czechoslovaks for solving practical problems vis-a-vis material hardship through resourceful craft techniques in this Do-It-Yourself Museum and education platform.

VRBA-WETZLER

In April 1944, two escapees from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler arrived in Žilina after a 130-km undercover run through the Polish-Slovak Beskids. In the following days, holed up

in the basement of the seat of the Jewish Community of Žilina, they secretly wrote up a report informing the world about the mass killings in Nazi concentration camps. The **Vrba-Wetzler Trail** retraces their steps and turns them into a year-round “secular” pilgrimage with checkpoints, symbolic stops, information boards, and works of art that explore questions of our collective memory, identity but also personal courage. The project builds on the existing Vrba-Wetzler Memorial. On arrival in Žilina, participants will have a choice of cultural events to further reflect on their experience: **A Tiny Teardrop**, a showcase of music by Central European Jewish composers silenced by WW2, accompanied by readings from Agata Schindler’s namesake book. A **Vrba-Wetzler Commemoration Room** is currently being set up by the city and the local Jewish Community in the basement where Vrba and Wetzler wrote their report. It will also host literary residencies.

THE CAPITAL OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In February 2018, Christophe Deloire of Reporters Without Borders stood at the Freedom Square in Bratislava at one of the mass events after the murder of the investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, and said: “Bratislava is the capital of media freedom.” In 2026, we will move that capital to Žilina, the region where Ján Kuciak was born and raised. Our **Media Lab** with Reporters Without Borders seeks to become a European platform for exploring freedom of expression in all journalistic and artistic work. We also want to become members of ICORN, the network of cities that offer refuge to persecuted writers, journalists and artists, and protect their stories by offering outstanding artistic and journalistic residencies. In conversation with emerging journalists and media activists from Germany and Serbia in the **Media Labyrinth**, we will become a forum for debunking fake news.

INTERMOTION

Slovaks have an ambiguous relationship to highways – on the one hand, they stand for a possibility of economic development and intercultural dialogue; on the other hand, the failure to finalize them makes them a symbol of a failed promise. Exploring the impact transportation has on our identity, both as a highway junction and a railway hub, is the focus of our Intermotion project.

E75 – A Highway to Art is a community festival that will take place at one of the not-yet-opened sections of the E75 highway with concerts, circus performances and a big picnic. In collaboration with the Brno-based organisation VlakFest, we will connect the cities of Bielsko-Biała, Frýdek-Místek, and Žilina by a special train line called the **Train to Beskids** with an offer of concerts and exhibitions onboard. A similar line will connect German cities to Žilina and bring tourists to the ECoC. In 2026, a special edition of **VlakFest Goes to Finland** will take participants on a train trip from Slovakia, through Poland, Belarus, and Russia to Finland, making cultural stops along the way to explore the topic of democracy.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

[A] CREATIVE ŽILINA 2035

We see Žilina's candidacy for the European Capital of Culture 2026 as a unique opportunity to improve the cultural and creative ecosystem of the city. Along with the ECoC preparations, the city has started to work on its new cultural strategy Creative Žilina 2035.

In 2021 we are planning: in-depth interviews and focus groups with cultural operators, and a public opinion poll. The strategic goals mentioned below are hypotheses that emerged from the initial research and may change before the completion of a possible second bid book in 2021.

Long-term strategic goals and issues identified – Creative Žilina 2035

Creative Action Plan 2027

Audience development and improvement of visitor services and experience

- Better infrastructure and visitor services, strategic marketing, enhancing artistic experiences by new technologies and gamification
- Expanding the cultural offer for senior citizens, young families and low-income audiences; ensuring accessibility

Public space development: the public poll showed that most locals consider the bad quality of public space the city's biggest problem.

- Expanding cultural offer beyond the city centre and into the suburbs
- Renewal of parks, squares, greenery and access to water - their employment for community and cultural functions
- Using art to raise the quality of public space
- New green freetime zones in the city surroundings, more cultural events in nature
- Raising awareness of architecture and urbanism; citizen participation in defining public space

A culture of collaboration

- Creation of tools for data collection and better information-sharing between institutions
- Growing capacities of the public sector, cultural operators and their cooperation
- Encouraging cross-sector and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Enhancing the city-cultural sector dialogue

Creative education

- Setting up a postgraduate/lifelong learning educational platform for creative workers and graduates of the local high school of art and design,
- Connecting STEM studies with creative studies, masterclasses, expert training, etc.

Sustainable working conditions for creative workers

- Increase the city's culture budget towards 5% of the city's total expenditure by 2027
- Create an arm's length body to administer financial support and development of the city's cultural activities
- Improve working conditions, raise the sector's attractiveness in the city
- Offer affordable ateliers and studios, specialized workshops, technical equipment, and rehearsal premises

European profile of the city

- Improve European cooperation of cultural operators, involvement in
- European programmes and membership in European networks
- Increase cross-border cooperation and the city's participation in Euroregion Beskids
- Drive new city communication aimed at international public; create strategy for cultural tourism

[B] OTHER LONG-TERM GOALS

The European Capital of Culture is not a year-round festival in 2026. On the contrary, it is a **movement for an overall transformation of the city, a redefinition of its profile and its European connections**. In our long-term goals, we also focus on social, economic and urban impact:

ECONOMY

- Reverse brain-drain from the region
- Increase percentage of creative workers in the city and creative industry's contribution to the local economy
- Support intersectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation to innovate in socio-economic issues; connect art with industry and business

TOURISM

- Market and communicate the city offer in the framework of the new cross-border Beskids tourist brand, with joint destination management
- Offer new tourism packages, such as industrial heritage, nature and culture tourism
- Set up innovative tools for tourism that support projects of local communities

SOCIETY

- Boost social cohesion, support marginalised groups and communities
- Mobilise cultural potential in the city and steer it towards greater openness
- Support European mobility and intercultural skills

EUROPEAN DIMENSION

The European Capital of Culture is also a forum for discussion about the most acute social and environmental challenges in Europe. We see art as a language that facilitates that discussion.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY

We accentuate the need to change our ways and lifestyles as the climate emergency grows by bringing art to nature in **-SCAPE Festival**, reflecting forest and mountain cultures, promoting a more sustainable city and championing a circular economy with creative upcycling techniques in **CC: Circular Culture**.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In our **RSF Media Lab**, we address the future of freedom of expression in all sorts of artistic and journalistic expression in Europe in the digital era, in a region shaken by the murders of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. A wider discussion about the future of freedom of expression in Europe is urgently needed, we believe.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY

With Democracy Festivals Association, Forum 2000 and the Pontis and Polis Foundations in our **Democracy Festival**, we focus on the issues of local democracy in the 21st century in a participative, bottom-up, community-driven multi-stage festival, seeing the city with its direct impact on citizens' everyday lives as a battleground for democracy in the 21st century.

WORKING CONDITIONS IN CULTURE

In **Culture of Culture**, we seek to explore working conditions and values in the creative sector and define cultural models of the future, also in light of the Covid crisis. A new approach to building sustainable cultural scenes and cultural business models is needed.

EUROPEAN MOBILITY

We want to map the seemingly inconspicuous impact of youth and young adult mobility on European integration by bringing all former EU volunteers who travelled to or from Žilina, to exchange experiences about how EU mobility changed their lives and outlook on the world in a **European Voluntary Service Reunion 2026**.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMY, EMPLOYMENT AND INNOVATIONS

To lead the way in how industrial regions can diversify their economy and draw closer to the creative sector, we are setting up a **Cross-Border FabLab** and **Platform(A)** that merges art and tech. It allows artists to use state-of-the-art technology and engages engineers in creative work, in joint pursuit of solutions to our society's most pressing problems.

RISE OF NATIONALISM

We respond to the rise of nationalisms across Europe by setting up our own imaginary nation in the **Argillia** project, drawing on the work of Žilina-born visual artist Alex Mlynárčik from the 1970s. Our goal is to deconstruct the tools, methods and symbols used to build nations, and reflect the challenges currently faced by nation-states, looking for ways forward.

To achieve that, we have struck partnerships with other European cities, cultural and civic organisations and artists. Among them are: Oulu / Tampere / Savonlinna (Finland, ECoC candidates 2026); Nova Gorica-Gorizia (Slovenia, Italy, ECoC 2025); Chemnitz (Germany, ECoC 2025); Nuremberg and Magdeburg (Germany, ECoC candidates 2025); Novi Sad (Serbia, ECoC 2021); Bodø (Norway, ECoC 2024); Faro (Portugal, ECoC candidate 2027); Clermont-Ferrand (France, ECoC candidate 2027), and others.

We also cooperate or are currently setting up cooperation with these international institutions: Reporters Without Borders (France); Neue Unentd_ckte Narativ (Germany); Institute of Reportage (Poland); Projekt Zavod Atol (Slovenia); V2_Lab for the Unstable Media (The Netherlands); FairBnB (Italy); Lusto Finnish Forest Museum (Finland); and around 60 other international partners. We are also seeking membership in several European networks and are preparing a number of joint projects with them.

OUTREACH: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The following art and culture projects aim to involve diverse groups from the region into the ECoC.

COMMUNITY ART CENTRES – INVOLVING SUBURBAN AND SATELLITE COMMUNITIES

We will transform the old heat exchange stations in Žilina suburbs and cultural centres in surrounding villages into modern community art centres. The goal is to expand cultural life from the city centre into the peripheries and involve inhabitants from these areas in the project. The centres will become sustainable fora for the cultural, artistic and community self-realisation of the local residents well beyond 2026, with the support of professional cultural mediators.

CHILDREN'S CULTURAL CENTRE – INVOLVING YOUNG FAMILIES

One of our main investment projects for young families. The Centre will be equipped with interactive exhibitions and experiential, educational facilities. Currently, options for meaningful indoor free time activities for families with children are lacking in the city. The project seeks to fill the gap.

ART CARAVAN – INVOLVING SOCIALLY MARGINALISED GROUPS

Through this community art project by artists Daniela Krajčová and Oto Hudec, we seek to enter into a dialogue with the predominantly Roma community in the Bratislavská neighbourhood, and, together with the local kids build a new playground. Another output will be a series of videos using experimental visual art techniques, and drama performances, which will be presented at the end of the project in 2026.

ABSYNT PRIZE FOR YOUNG CRITICAL THOUGHT – INVOLVING YOUTH

Absynt Prize seeks to foment critical thinking, reading and argumentative skills in young people. High schoolers read and reflect on a number of non-fiction books with current and historical issues, through literary critique, speech-writing, reportage-writing and, in 2026, academic debate. Students are guided by professionals from the respective fields, such as journalists from the Slovak daily SME and professional literary critics. The project currently comprises high schools from the Žilina Self-Governing Region; by 2026, we want to expand it to the whole country.

EUROPEAN FAMILY PHOTO ALBUM – LOCAL AND EUROPEAN CULTURES IN DIALOGUE

Locals will be able to share their family photos at special workshops in the Community Museum, at schools or in elderly people's care homes, as well as at various points around the city and online. A series of exhibitions focused on different life events and experiences – such as family ski trips or first days at school – as well as a book will be compiled. In the first phase, we will look at the Beskids identity; in the second, we will expand the focus to the whole Europe. The European Photo Album will be a collective image of the everyday life of Europeans, revealing similarities and differences in lifestyles and historical experiences across the continent.

WANDERING BOOKS – CULTURE IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Participants will be able to write their own books and join creative writing workshops supervised by experienced writers. Similar workshops will be organised for book illustration and book-binding. They will take place in the regional library, and in a mobile book "manufacture" – a bus, specially equipped for this purpose, that will tour the Beskids. In small villages, local libraries are often the only forum for cultural activities. This project seeks to revive them and diversify their cultural offer.

MOBILE DOCUMENTARY THEATRE – STORIES FROM REMOTE AREAS

Performances will be developed by professional European theatre companies in partnership with local communities through a process of community research. Thematically, they will explore the region's brain drain and emigration culture, strong pride in working-class identity, and regionalist tendencies, which influenced the mentality and the everyday reality in the north of Slovakia and the Beskids. In 2026, the project will coalesce around 10 site-specific plays that will be presented at cultural houses or in our mobile theatre hall in small towns, villages, and remote parts of the Beskids. We will attract centre-based audiences to these remote communities through a special cultural Beskids bus programme.

ACCESSIBLE ECoC

The ECoC strives to be accessible to all. We will have a diversified offer of cultural activities for people with hearing and visual impairments, such as regular drama performances with sign language interpreting and closed captioning, or materials in the Braille alphabet or visual art shows using touch. For those with special sensory and cognitive needs, we will prepare multimedia exhibitions using e.g. visual and perceptual displays that allow people with special hearing needs to feel the music through vibrations or visualisation.

INTERGENERATIONAL UNIVERSITY – INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

In cooperation with the University of Žilina's Lifelong Learning Institute, we will bring together seniors and young people in activities that encompass art and culture, European issues, oral history, and art curation. Participants will write blogs and reports from the ECoC, or act as curators in the Community Museum.

MOMENTUM VOLUNTEER PLATFORM

Locals will be able to take part in the ECoC also as volunteers. They will act e.g. as guides, accommodation providers or liaison officers for visitors and artists; they will be the project's communicators or as event promoters; or technical and production support. They will also co-create the programme. We will put in place a reward system consisting of, e.g. free entry to events, access to promotional materials or special training programmes.

[A] TIMELINE OF PAST ACTIVITIES:**FEBRUARY 2020**

- We introduced the intention to run for the ECoC to cultural operators in the city and the city council, which approved it unanimously.

MARCH — APRIL 2020

- In spring, we launched an online poll on cultural needs and expectations of the ECoC for local citizens.
- We collected ideas on how to improve public spaces from the citizens on our online platform City Interventions. We plan to carry out several of them.

MAY — JUNE 2020

- In cooperation with architects and urbanists, we identified investment opportunities for culture and public space. We also used data from the Sensitive Maps platform.
- In June, we launched our Accelerator 20<26, a six-week intensive development program. Applicants could submit their ideas in the initiation phase and, with the help of mentors, develop them into full-fledged project proposals. The projects ranged from culture, social work and education, to sports and the environment.

AUGUST 2020

- Our Žilina 2026 Open Call for Projects closed for proposals on the 9th August 2020. 20 of the 60 projects submitted (and later incorporated into the artistic programme) had previously participated in the Accelerator.

SEPTEMBER 2020

- We held the City Conference, the culmination of months of preparations, bringing together over a hundred stakeholders involved in the project from the city, the region and the partner cities. We presented the Žilina Beskids concept and the programme outline to them. Subsequently, partners from Frýdek-Místek and Bielsko-Biała could contribute their project proposals in a cross-border open call until 15th September.

[B] PLAN FOR 2021

- ↳ Mapping cultural needs in the city's suburbs and satellite villages
- ↳ Interactive exhibitions in the newly set up PASÁ:Ž – platform for architecture and citizen participation – and at the refurbished open-air marketplace, with a presentation of projects from the City Interventions platform, as well as the cultural strategy, with discussions and other interactive elements
- ↳ Small Talks – presentations of the ECoC for small groups on their own premises
- ↳ Accelerator Beskids – development programme for projects between the three partner cities

BUDGET

The budget for the preparation and the running of the European Capital of Culture comes from various sources:

- ∨ The main contributor is the City of Žilina.
- ∨ The EU contributes 1,5 million € one year before the realisation year, via the Melina Mercouri Prize. Projects within the ECoC can apply for funding from other EU funds too.
- ∨ The Slovak government has already pledged 40 million € (from available EU funds) for the future Slovak ECoC to cover investment activities (i.e. capital expenditure). The government will also support the development of the artistic programme through the Slovak Arts Council.

Partner cities Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek, as well as the Žilina Self-Governing Region, are expected to contribute to the budget too.

The ECoC budget covers costs related to the operation of the organisation, the programme and marketing and communication (i.e. operational expenditure), managed by a newly created ECoC-running organisation; and costs related to investments into cultural institutions and the public space (i.e. capital expenditure), managed directly by the city.

All the sums stated below are in the planning and pre-approval phase. They will be subject to further debate and approval by the relevant authorities.

OPERATING EXPENDITURE

Total expected income to cover operating expenditure	in €	in %
National government	9 000 000 €	36 %
City of Žilina	6 000 000 €	24 %
Žilina Self-Governing Region	4 000 000 €	16 %
Partner cities and regions	1 500 000 €	6 %
EU (Melina Mercouri Prize + fundraising from other EU programmes)	3 000 000 €	12 %
Private sector	1 500 000 €	6 %
Total	25 000 000 €	100 %

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

Total expected income to cover capital expenditure	in €	in %
National government (from EU funds 2021 — 2027)	39 278 500 €	42,0 %
City of Žilina (own planned investments + co-financing from EU funds)	6 339 000 €	6,8 %
Žilina Self-Governing Region (own planned investments + co-financing from EU funds)	1 822 500 €	2,0 %
Partner cities and regions (own planned investments + co-financing from EU funds)	31 550 000 €	36,4 %
EU (with exception of the Melina Mercouri Prize)	11 220 000 €	12,0 %
Other	750 000 €	0,8 %
Total	90 960 000 €	100 %

LIST OF INVESTMENTS

CITY OF ŽILINA PROJECTS

HANGAR is a large bus depot, used by the City's transport company to repair trolley-buses. The depot will move in 2024 to a new location and this city-owned facility will be refurbished and become a multipurpose artistic production facility.

PASÁŽ is currently an unused building owned by the City of Žilina, where the Chief City Planner's Department moved recently. In case we advance to the 2nd bidding phase, we plan to move our headquarters there in 2021. The investment comprises a reconstruction of the interiors and their transformation into a gallery, small design shop, info point and a café on the ground floor; and offices, studios, workshops and conference rooms on the other floors. The building's full reconstruction is planned for 2023.

Bôrik Environmental centre will be the outcome of a complex transformation of the city's two oldest underground water reservoirs from 1908, currently owned by the private water distribution company SEVAK, into an immersive audiovisual exhibition space exploring water cycle and water management in the city. The exteriors will be turned into water and musical artist playgrounds, a botanical corner, and community gardens. A smaller building located on the premises will be reconstructed too and turned into a visitor centre, a cafe, and a workshop space.

Community Art Centres, the transformed heat exchangers at the Solinky and Vlčince housing estates, will consist of a workshop and community spaces, with a capacity of 60 people. We will also revive and transform four traditional cultural centres in the satellite villages owned by the city, namely in Budatín, Žilinská Lehota, Trnové and Zástranie, into modern cultural and community premises.

The 5-km long, currently neglected, **Rajčanka Riverbanks** are planned to be transformed into a new space for community activities in the city district of Závodie. This newly created park with a molo will contain community meeting places and street furniture, mobile greenery, artworks, space for cultural events, and a cycling path.

We strive to create an **Urban Forest – Dubeň & Straník**, reconstruct the existing footpaths in the area and invest in quality service infrastructure, such as a self-service information centre, access to water and toilets, refreshments, nature-friendly outdoor artworks and spaces for leisure activities. The forest will be connected by cycling routes with other recreational locations in the city.

The projected **reconstruction of the SNP park** and the **Andrej Hlinka Square** involves mainly a revitalisation of greenery, new street furniture and space for art installations, and gazebo for outdoor concerts. The Andrej Hlinka Square will get new paving and a fountain, street furniture, and sculptures. The project also includes the refurbishment of the city's main tourist office located in the square, and basic infrastructure for regular outdoor farmers' markets.

The national cultural heritage building of the **Žilina's Old Town Hall** is used as the city's ceremonial headquarters

today. We plan to refurbish the outdated interiors and adapt them for new functions, such as an exhibition room, a small event hall, or accommodation capacities for official visitors of the city and the ECoC. **Mariánske Square**, the city's main square, has been awaiting reconstruction for years; it will comprise new paving, mobile greenery, and street furniture.

UNIVERSITY OF ŽILINA PROJECT IN COOPERATION WITH THE CITY

Áčko, the iconic historical building from the beginning of the 20th Century owned by the University of Žilina, has been empty since 2009 and quickly deteriorating. The ECoC will use a part of the building for the art and science hub **Platform(A)**, as a space for training and residencies. It will also host a gallery, the FabLab and a co-working space.

ŽILINA SELF-GOVERNING REGION PROJECTS

Ciachovňa is the building (National Cultural Heritage) of an old steam-electric power station built in 1908, unused for many years. The Art Gallery of Považie plans to expand its activities and create a new intermedia museum with exhibition spaces, media library, spaces for workshops and cultural events, and a small permanent technical exhibition covering the industrial history of the region.

Strečno Castle interactive exhibition will use new technologies to take the audience on a playful journey through the history of Slovakia and the castle.

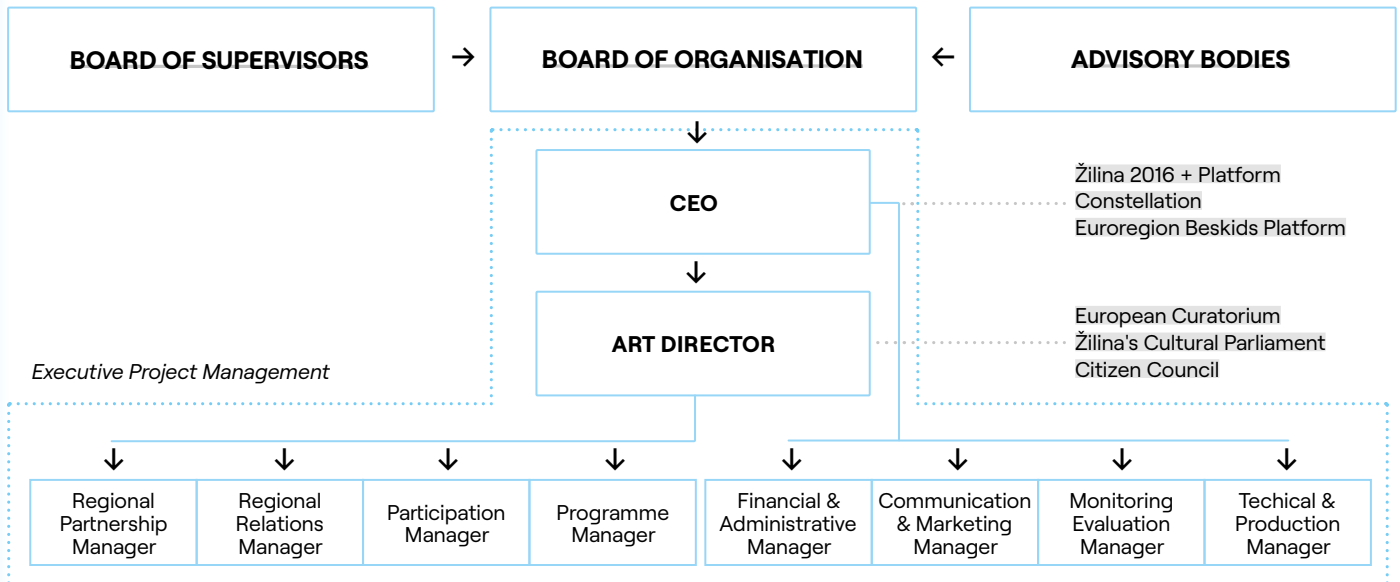
The **Vychylovka Forest Museum & Beskids Forest Railway** project will encompass construction of a new forest museum, including exhibition, workshop, and residency spaces. Three new eco-friendly wooden buildings located at the entrance of the existing open-air museum will offer modern museum services, an interactive family-friendly experience, as well as technical production facilities for artists and artisans working with wood. In addition, we will invest in the reconstruction of the historical forest railway between Orava and Kysuce.

The **ARTboretum** will create new working and accommodation spaces for artists-in-residence from Slovakia and abroad, focusing on outdoor sculptures in particular. They will be able to stay and create year-round in this unique environment of the Kysuce Museum park in the town of Oščadnica.

PROJEKTY PARTNERSKÝCH MIEST

- ↘ **Moravia Bank** (Frýdek-Místek)
- ↘ **Interactive Centre for Cartoons and Animation** (Bielsko-Biala)
- ↘ **Cross-border FabLab and Creative Development Centre** (Bielsko-Biala)
- ↘ **Ecological Education Park "AQUA"** (Bielsko-Biala)

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



The body that will run the Žilina Beskids 2026 project will be a non-profit organisation with its headquarters in Žilina, and branches in Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek. Decisions at the highest level will be taken by the Board of Organisation composed of the representatives of the City of Žilina and the partner cities, as well as the Region and the expert and control bodies. The organisation will be headed by a CEO, selected in an international open call. A separate Art Director will be in charge of the programme, assisted by the programme team and a European Curatorium.

There will be a number of advisory bodies with an advisory voice in the organisation’s Board: the Žilina’s Cultural Parliament, representing the cultural scene; Žilina 2026 + Platform, representing the business sector; associated towns and villages from the Euroregion Beskids in the Euroregion Beskids Platform; and a representative from the Citizen Council.

The Citizen Council will consist of 10 citizen representatives pooled from the Momentum volunteer platform. It will exercise public control over e.g. financing and transparency of selection processes. It will also have a co-deciding and programme co-creation function. The political opposition will be able to exercise public control over the project in the Board of Supervisors.

In this way, the organisation’s operation and decisions will be overseen by cultural operators, associate towns and villages, the business sector, the political opposition, researchers, and citizens.

MONITORING AND IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Constellation, a research-based evaluation platform in cooperation with the University of Žilina, will continuously monitor the organisation's work, and provide recommendations. In addition, the platform will organise an annual conference on its recent findings and best practice, with international experts. The ECoC impact evaluation between 2022 and 2026, and subsequently in 2027, will study economic, cultural, social and environmental impacts on the city and the region.

BID BOOK ŽILINA BESKIDS 2026 PRE-SELECTION STAGE

APPLICANT

City of Žilina in partnership with the cities of Bielsko-Biala and Frýdek-Místek and support of the Žilina Self-Governing Region

LIST OF MUNICIPALITIES THAT SUPPORTED OUR BID

Bitarová, Bobrov, Breza, Bytča, Bziny, Divinka, Dolný Kubín, Dunajov, Ďurčiná, Gbeľany, Hôrky, Horný Hričov, Horný Vadičov, Kotešová, Krásno nad Kysucou, Kunerád, Kysucké Nové Mesto, Lysica, Maršová-Rašov, Námestovo, Predmier, Rajec, Rajecké Teplice, Rudinka, Strečno, Teplička nad Váhom, Turzovka, Vysoká nad Kysucou, Zázrivá, Zborov nad Bystricou, Zubrohlava

CITY OF ŽILINA

Peter Fiabáne, Vladimír Randa, Barbora Birnerová, Michal Berger, Ingrid Dolníková, Katarína Gazdíková, Štefan Vančík, Veronika Tabačková

CITY OF BIELSKO-BIALA

Jarosław Klimaszewski, Adam Ruśniak, Przemysław Smyczek, Jolanta Gilman-Gałuszka, Anna Zgierska

CITY OF FRÝDEK-MÍSTEK

Michal Pobucký, Pavel Machala, Rostislav Hekera, Michaela Kocourková

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PRINT

i+i print, Bratislava

& SPECIAL THANKS TO

Soňa Holúbková, Martin Hromada, Rudolf Chodelka, Pavel Choma, Michaela Jakubíková, Andrea Kovaľová, Zuzana Mičíková, Lucia Stredánská and all the people who participated and contributed in workshops, discussions, open calls and meetings during the preparation of this bid.

BOOK FILE

Hand-crafted sheets by Collective ALTELIER from the experimentally developed biodegradable material based on local cellulose & food components.

FEBRUARY 2021

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