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The European Capital of Culture Programme and Sustainable Development in a Cross-border Region Case Study: Timişoara 2021, Novi Sad 2021

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I. Introduction

At the present moment, the European Union is a complex construction, if we consider the economic, political, and social dimensions. Despite that complexity, culture is the fabric that brings together all the member states.

Starting with 1985, the European Commission, in order to celebrate the cultural diversity inside the European Union, managed and designated the title of European Capital of Culture (ECoC). Until now, over 40 cities had been awarded this honorary title. Before 2007, the programme aimed to link the Western and Central-Eastern European space by choosing yearly a city from Western Europe and another one from Central and Eastern Europe to be designated the European Capital of Culture.

For the year 2021, the winners of this prestigious prize are Eleusis from Greece, Timişoara from Romania and Novi Sad from Serbia. For the first time in the history of the programme, two winning cities (Timişoara and Novi Sad) are so close from a geographical point of view. Between Timişoara and Novi Sad, the distance is only 146 km. Both cities are in the same historical region and have the same historical legacy.

In the created cross-border context of the ECoC programme, there is a need to identify the cultural mechanisms, tools and models that

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support sustainable development. In this paper, we intend to connect the relevant literature on sustainable cross-border cooperation (see the studies of Blatter[2] or Perkmann[3] from 2007) with studies on the management of cultural diversity and diverse identities (Verkuyten[4] or more recently Cong Lin[5]), the measurement of the place vibrancy and touristic attractiveness of a region (research conducted by Delconte[6] and Goldberg-Miller[7]) and the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage (study of Vecco[8] and Shimray[9]).

A. The relevance of the research in the cross-border context of Timișoara 2021 (Romania) and Novi Sad 2021 (Serbia) ECoC

The topic of this research is relevant considering that the ECoC programme is a useful tool for boosting cooperation at the European and international level. In a cross-border cooperation region, under the framework of the European Capital of Culture programme, both countries should develop a common strategy regarding cultural events and promotion of cultural heritage in the region and find together financial mechanisms to sustain them.

We start our inquiry from the following statements:

- Both cities will be European capitals of culture in 2021;

[2] J. Blatter, "Cross-border Regions: A Step Toward Sustainable Development?" in *Cooperation, Environment, and Sustainability in Border Regions*, ed. Ganster P. (San Diego, 2001), 33-59.

[3] M. Perkman, "Construction of New Territorial Scales: A Framework and Case Study of the EUREGIO Cross-border Region," *Regional Studies* 41(2007): 253-266.

[4] M. Verkuyten, *Identity and Cultural Diversity What social psychology can teach us* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[5] L. Cong, "Understanding Cultural Diversity and Diverse Identities," in *the Springer Encyclopedia of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Quality Education* (New York: Springer, 2019).

[6] J. D. Delconte, "Place Vibrancy and Its Measurement: Construct Development, Scale Development, and Relationship to Tourism," *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally* 6 (2017).

[7] G.-M. D. Shoshanah, *Planning for a city of culture: Creative urbanism in Toronto and New York* (Rutledge: New York, 2017).

[8] M. Vecco, "A definition of cultural heritage: From the tangible to the intangible," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 11(2010): 321-324.

[9] S. R. Shimray, "Ways to Create Awareness on Cultural Heritage: An overview*", Library Philosophy and Practice* (2019): 4-26.

- Timişoara and Novi Sad have been twin cities since 2005;
- The Timiş County (Timişoara being the county seat) and the region around Novi Sad are part of the DKMT Euroregion and the historical region of Banat;
- The geographical distance between the two cities is only 146 km, although there is no direct transport connection between them;
- The Romanian border with Serbia is, for the moment, an external border of the European Union, consequently, herefore, there are specific transit security measures applied;
- There are particular cross-border practices between Romania and Serbia regarding cooperation on programmes, Romania being a member state of the EU and Serbia in the pre-accession process.

B. Research methods

The main hypothesis of this paper is that the ECoC title offers a great opportunity for Timişoara and Novi Sad to shape, to set and to adjust together a region of culture, through efficient and sustainable cultural cross-border cooperation.

The research methods are mostly qualitative analyses of the bid books (Novi Sad[10] and Timişoara ECoC 2021[11]), official papers and documents from different institutions responsible with cross-border cooperation, documents from regional development agencies, thematic web sites and media reports and, in a lesser extent, a quantitative approach using Voyant software. Voyant performs quantitative text analysis and helps us read and visualize the texts or corpus of text.

The starting point of this documentation has been the author's PhD research on cross-border cooperation between Romania and Serbia, when we interviewed the main actors and stakeholders in the cultural field from Timişoara and Novi Sad. We collected empirical data through participatory observation[12] in workshops, cultural events, cafes and conferences before the selection of The European Capital of Culture city

[10] Novi Sad 2021 European Capital of Culture Candidate City Bidbook*,* Novi Sad*,* City of Novi Sad, 2016.

[11] TM2021 Bidbook, Timişoara – European Capital of Culture Association, 2015.

[12] M.-Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, 4th Edition (Sage Publications, 2014).

in Romania and after 2016. As we have mentioned before, we intend to connect the relevant literature on sustainable cross-border cooperation, cultural studies and place making.

II. The Borderland between Romania and Serbia in the context of the cultural cooperation

We start our analysis with a short review of the historical events that took place in the region designated by Timişoara and Novi Sad (see Fig. 1).

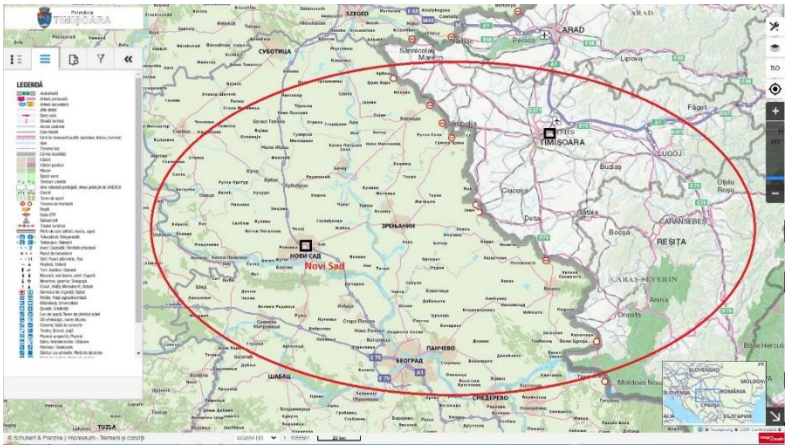

Fig. 1. Region of Culture. Case study: Timişoara and Novi Sad 2021

Until 1918, the two cities belonged to the same region, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, so we can assume that they have a shared historical identity. After the end of the World War I, the Habsburg Empire collapsed and began formation of the nation-states. As Markusse[13] states, "history and culture can provide potent cognitive and discursive sources for construction of regions". Regions that share a common history and the "ethnic populations are split by international boundaries," have the potential, from structural point of view, to develop viable Euro regions.

[13] J. Markusse, "Transborder Regional Alliances in Europe: Chances for Ethnic Euroregions?" *Geopolitics* 9 (2004): 649-673.

In this context, it is very important to approach the border between Romania and Serbia from socio-cultural perspective. A similar approach on borders we find at Passi[14], where borders should be understood from a socio-cultural perspective, not as statically territorial lines. Moreover, Van Houtum[15] refers to borders as human or mental constructions, resulting from a historical experience and a cultural heritage. In opposition with the previous statements, the study of Hansen[16] suggests that the border area is affected by a disadvantage caused by a peripheral positioning compared to the rest of the country. Ricq[17] differentiates, related to borders and border effect, among the following features: the dynamic in time and t historical context, the level of similarity of the neighbouring countries and level of permeability of the border.

The border between Romania and Serbia had been ratified in 1924, on ethnic criteria, and has remained unchanged until nowadays. The entire border measures 546 kilometres, more than 200 kilometres of it being along the Danube River. On the entire lengths of the border, there are established 12 border crossing points. The last one had been opened in 2019, between Moldova Nouă (Romania) and Golubac (Serbia) to facilitate the bi-lateral transit.

In the '60s, an impressive institutional cross-border cooperation project started between the two countries, namely the building of the Iron Gates dam, one of the largest dams in Europe. Over the time, the Danube River functioned both as a barrier and as a bridge between the two countries. In the next decades, diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and Romania started to deteriorate and thus, the dividing border became militarized. In the same time, that border became a gateway to freedom for thousands and thousands of Romanians, which dreamt to start a life in the Western Europe. Most of them succeed to cross the border illegally, but a few found their end shot by border guards

[14] A. Passi, "Reconstructing Regions and Regional Identity", Nethur lecture, Nijmegen, (2000): 2-9.

[15] H. van Houtum, *The Development of Cross-Border Economic Relations* (Amsterdam: ThelaThesis Publishers, 1998).

[16] N. Hansen, "Border Regions: a critique of spatial theory and a European case study," *Annals of Regional Science* 15 (1977): 1-14.

[17] C. Ricq, *Manual de cooperare transfrontalieră pentru uzul colectivităţilor locale şi regionale în Europa* [Handbook of cross-border cooperation for the use of local and regional authorities in Europe] (Bucharest, 2000).

or drowned in the Danube waters, hence the name the Bloody Danube, that the River had at that time.

In the first years after the fall of the communism in the Central and Eastern Europe, Romanians and Serbians were crossing the border in the neighbouring country for the small traffic of goods. Later on, the embargo period on gas products imposed to Serbia during the civil war (1993-1996) was an "opportunity" for the Romanians with "entrepreneurial spirit", which lived in the villages near the border, to supply the neighbours with gas and some other goods. With money gained from the contraband trading, the villagers from the Danube shore bought cars, agricultural equipment and built huge houses. The locals gave parties, with food and musicians, and some lyrics of the local songs were "inspired" by the contraband trading: "I pray to God long live the Danube, to take me to Serbia with a boat full of gas, to gain more Deutsche marks" [ţine Doamne Dunărea să mă ducă-n Sârbia, să trec benzina cu o barcă, să mai fac şi eu o marcă][18].

After 2007, when Romania became a member state of the EU and entry visas were no longer required between the two countries, the border area became again a socio-economic ventilation area. However, being the external border of the EU, it is necessary to meet specific security requirements. In the cross-border region created between Romania and Serbia, cooperation takes place at the institutional level through Interreg funding mechanisms managed by Timişoara Regional Office for Cross-border Cooperation (RO CBC Timişoara)[19].

III. Cross-border region: Timișoara 2021 (Romania), Novi Sad 2021 (Serbia)

Europe is a relatively new reality. It reached its deepest meaning only at the beginning of the 18th century. Politics and history have shaped Europe's geographical acceptance. Europe's borders have been flexible. The same Europe throughout history has had religious, cultural and

[18] I. Rădoi, *Cooperarea transfrontalieră România-Serbia: tradiţii, priorităţi de dezvoltare, impact socio-teritorial. Studii de caz în arealul transfrontalier: Valea Cernei-Defileul Dunării-Valea Timocului* [Romania-Serbia cross-border cooperation: traditions, development priorities, socio-territorial impact. Case studies in the cross-border area: Cerna Valley-Danube Gorge-Timoc Valley] (Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2020).

[19] RO CBC Timişoara, http://www.brct-timisoara.ro/en/ (accessed September 2, 2019)

political attributions, which have changed and continue to change. Western civilization, just like Christianity, had an influence that went beyond the borders of Europe. In some contexts, there is a sign of equality between Europe and the EU. For Central and Eastern European countries, a "return" to Europe meant joining the EU in particular. However, these countries have never left Europe, and Norway or Switzerland would never see a "return to Europe" in EU membership[20]. Besides the attempt to return to Europe through membership in the EU construction, former communist countries aimed also to reconstruct their unwanted past identities in a contemporaneous European context[21].

European Capital of Culture programme started in the year 1985. The "City of Culture" event, established by the no. 85/C 153/02 European Council Resolution[22] aimed to bring "peoples of the Member States closer together". In the beginning, the City of Culture initiative applied to cities which had already a name in the cultural sphere, for example: Paris, Madrid, Athens, Florence, etc. Starting with 2007[23], new selection criteria had been added to highlight the richness of the European culture (European dimension, City and citizens). The title of European Capital of Culture had been awarded to a finalist city, selected in an internal competition.

When we analyse the cultural programmes for the European Capital of Culture year in cities located near the border area, we observe that they try to "give new meanings to their geographical locations," a more favourable one, related to the present European context[24]. The border generates the following effects in a border area: "separation, contact,

[20] M. Dauderstädt, *The tower of the church and its horizon. Identity and the borders of Europe* (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1999), 20-40.

[21] C. Turşie, "The unwanted past and urban regeneration of communist heritage cities: Riga 2014, Pilsen 2015 and Wroclaw 2016," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 2(2015): 122-138.

[22] Official Journal of the European Communities Resolution concerning the annual event 'European City of Culture' (85/C 153/02 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:1985:153:0002:0003:EN:PDF (accessed September 2, 2019)

[23] European Parliament and of the Council, Decision No 1622/2006/EC, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006D1622 (accessed Sept. 2, 2019)

[24] C. Turşie and N., Popa, "Cross-border issues of future European Capitals of Culture Timisoara 2021 and Novi Sad 2021," in collective book, Institut für Kulturpolitik, University of Hildesheim, 2019.

differentiation and affirmation" [25]. Cultural similarities between countries, as in our case study, assure a long-term positive effect. In the case of Timişoara and Novi Sad, we can speak about the same regional identity, as we have stated in the previous section.

The regions are constructs where we have the same issues and they are trying to solve the problems together.

Extrapolating the RO CBC slogan, "at borders we develop together", the ECoC title for Timişoara and Novi Sad have the potential to transform the region. This new region of culture[26] designated by Timişoara and Novi Sad covers a circular area, with a radiant of approximately 200 kilometres around each city (Figure 1). The title might transform the region in a key destination[27] for different type of tourism and cultural events.

IV. Sustainable development in the ECoC framework: Timişoara 2021, Novi Sad 2021

The cultural programmes of Timişoara and Novi Sad for 2021 have been selected through a competition in 2016. In Romania 14 cities participated in the competition and the selection process had two rounds. Novi Sad, participant from a candidate country to the EU membership, won the competition against the city Herceg Novi from Montenegro. The preparation phase of the two European capitals of cultures has been monitored since 2016. Until now, they presented to the panel of juries two monitoring reports. The third monitoring visit will take place in the fall of 2020, as planned by the European Commission.

Concerning the sustainable cultural development in the region, there have been taken several actions and measures by the municipalities and the two newly formed cultural organisations (Timişoara 2021 Association and Novi Sad 2021 Foundation) in charge of preparation and implementation of the cultural programmes. Cultural aspects of

[25] C. Sohn and J. Licheron, "The multiple effects of borders on metropolitan functions in Europe," *Regional Studies* 52 (2018): 1512-1524.

[26] I. Rădoi, "European Capital of Culture, Urban Tourism, and Cross-Border Cooperation between Romania and Serbia," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 22 (2020): 547-559.

[27] P. Campbell, "Creative industries in a European Capital of Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17 (2011), 510-522.

sustainable development are connected with an increase in the number of cultural events, emergence of new spaces for cultural production and promotion of cultural heritage.[28] In the design of public policy at different levels, the cohesion between cultural policy actions and sustainable enlargement is very important.[29]

First of all, there is a need to explore the concept of sustainable development, whose meaning evolved since 1972, from that of "growth", reaching the acceptance of an equilibrium between the "economic and social progress with the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources" in 1995 and acquiring new significance in 2002 in the field of "social justice and the alleviation of poverty". There is an inter-relation between culture and sustainable development.[30] We searched in the bid books of Timişoara and Novi Sad references made to sustainable development and the context in which it has been used (Table 1).

Table 1. The sustainable development concept in Bid Books of Novi Sad and Timişoara 2021 ECoC. Source: Bid Books Novi Sad and Timişoara 2021 ECoC

Novi Sad	Timişoara
sustainable development strategy	sustainable Urban Mobility Plan
commitment from the relevant local, regional and national public authorities	sustainable measures focused on the tourism
long-term cooperation with sector organisations	a sustainable legacy for TM2021
sustainable relationships with this audience	sustainable development of local communities
sustainable and realistic sources of funding	sustainable cultural education

[28] M. Pink, "Cultural aspects of sustainable development," *Economic and Environmental Studies* 18 (2018): 323-339.
[29] A. Kangas, N. Duxbury and C. De Beukelaer, "Introduction: cultural policies for sustainable development," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 23 (2017): 129-132.
[30] M. Robinson and D. Picard, *Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development* (UNESCO, 2006).

On a first glance to Table 1 we observe that both cities focus on strategic planning that is part of a sustainable development. Timişoara and Novi Sad target a long-term cooperation with different cultural sectors and a sustainable legacy after the ECoC year. From this analysis we can see the future development directions of both cities, starting with culture. Culture represents a context with a determinant role for future sustainable development of Timişoara and Novi Sad and the cross-border cooperation region. Both cities are urban poles in the area, the engine of this territorial part of Romania and Serbia and could become models for small communities, in search for models to redefine themselves.

A broad definition of culture refers to both ways of life, as well as different forms of cultural heritage. We find these dimensions of culture when we talk about tourism. In 2017, the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization held in China referred to cultural tourism as an activity through which a visitor is motivated "to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination". The cultural attractions cover a wide range of features, such as: "arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures". [31]

In the application files of the two cities, culture and tourism provide resources for increasing their visibility and result in economic prosperity by attracting a large number of tourists/participants in cultural events. Cultural tourism is an important sector for the future sustainable development of the cities with impact on the surrounding regions. Below, in Table 2, we highlighted several form of tourism from the application files of Timişoara and Novi Sad. Expecting an increase in the number of tourists for 2021, it is necessary for Romania and Serbia to improve the infrastructure connections between the two cities. At the beginning of 2019, there were some articles in the online media in Romania, informing that the National Road Infrastructure Management Company initiated an application call for companies to make a feasibility study for the highway between Timişoara and Belgrade. The construction of the highway it is a partial solution, reducing only the time

[31] World Tourism Organization, https://www.unwto.org/fr/tourism-and-culture, (accessed September 2, 2019)

and costs of the transportation, but do not provide a permanent transport connection.

Table 2. Forms of tourism in the Bid Books of Novi Sad and Timişoara 2021 ECoC. Source: Bid Books Novi Sad and Timişoara 2021 ECoC

Novi Sad	Timişoara
Youth and destination tourism, branding Exit festival	Local tourism through culture
Eco-tourism in Area 21	DKMT tourism, regional tourism, Bega Chanel tourism
Destination for cultural tourism Cult Tour	Collaborative tourism
Tourism like cultural experience	Community-based tourism

In the context of ECoC programme in a region of culture, the cultural sustainability covers: the cultural variety, the cultural effervescence of a place and the cultural heritage, with the purpose to brand a city. In a similar way, researchers observed a transferable effect of culture on cultural tourism and the other way around. There is an interdependence between the economic and social objectives in a policy for a sustainable development (see Fig. 2).

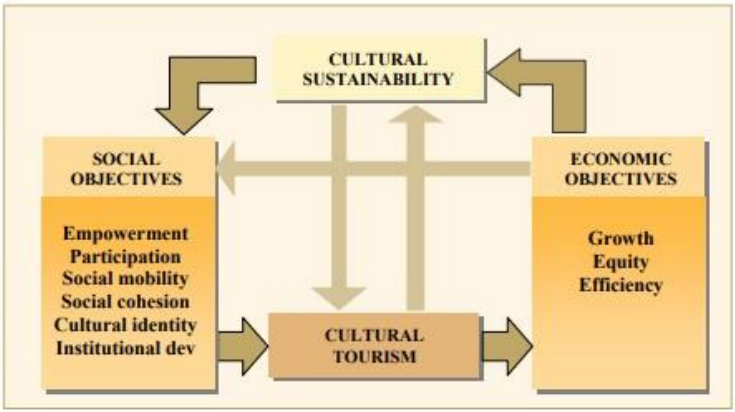

Fig. 2. The dimensions of sustainability. Source: Khalid S. Al-Hagla 2005

A sustainable development for a city pursues also a culture-led regeneration[32], to create new cultural facilities and renovating the existing ones[33]. Renovation projects for the cultural infrastructure are registered in the area of sustainable built environment[34] . Timişoara makes a vague reference to the renovation of city's infrastructures, setting the intention to put the people in the centre of the infrastructure, which is "open, inclusive and friendly". Novi Sad targets "small improvements, renovations and adaptations of infrastructure", as well as a larger investment project for the Petrovaradin Fortress. Lack of current money and bureaucracy were the main problems emphasized by the monitoring panel, for both Novi Sad and Timişoara. According to the bid book of Novi Sad and the strategic planning of the municipality, the city launched new procedures for the management, investment in culture and the application of the cultural policy to obtain realistic and quantifiable results with measurable effects. In Romania, to adapt the European legislation to the local context the Government gave an emergency ordinance, establishing financial measures to support the development of the National Cultural Programme Timişoara 2021 European Capital of Culture.

The second part of the present research consists in a text analysis, where we performed reading and interpretation of texts or corpus of texts from the Bid Books with Voyant software. Using Voyant tools, we visualized in cirrus mode the most frequent used words in the corpus of text. It is not important the colour of words or their position in the representation.

A search in the text corpus after the "sustainable development" concept, in both Novi Sad and Timişoara bid books, shows the connection with the future planning and activities of the cultural programme.

[32] L. Yi-De Liu, "Event and Sustainable Culture-Led Regeneration: Lessons from the 2008 European Capital of Culture, Liverpool," *Sustainable Cultural Management* 11 (2019).
[33] R. Florida, *The rise of the Creative Class and how it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday life* (New York: Basic Books 1992), 20-120.
[34] A. Opoku, "The Role of Culture in a Sustainable Built Environment," *Sustainable Operations Management* (2015): 35-52.

Fig. 3. Representation of Timişoara 2021 Bid book in Cirrus mode

Fig. 4. Representation of Novi Sad 2021 Bid book in Cirrus mode

Fig. 5. Connections of Sustainable Development in Timişoara 2021 bid book

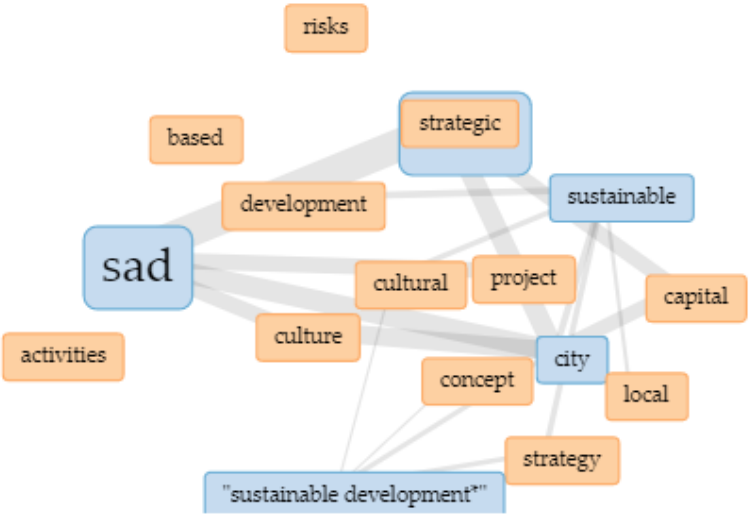

Fig. 6. Connections of Sustainable Development in Novi Sad 2021 bid book

V. Conclusion

To sum up, the ECoC programme in the context created by Timişoara and Novi Sad, for the year 2021, supports sustainability in a cross-border region through the goals assumed in the bid books. The cultural strategic planning in the studied cross-border region is multilevel layered: actions and decisions are taken at municipality, region, cross-border cooperation, national, European or transnational level. The bid books and sustainable development strategies of Novi Sad and Timişoara are more concerned with economic growth, based on cultural revitalisation of both the city and its surroundings. The development of the cultural sector will be made in the region by strengthening the cultural institutions, boosting cultural participation, preservation of the cultural heritage, development of the cultural and creative industries in a natural way, decentralisation of institutions and cooperation between sectors. The region around Novi Sad and Timişoara need to grow in an organic way, through natural collaboration, to compensate the inevitable bureaucracy generated by institutions.

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TM2021 Bidbook, Timişoara – European Capital of Culture Association, 2015.
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