

ECoCNetwork project

Recommendations



Interreg
Italia-Slovenija



Cofinanziato
dall'Unione europea
Sofinancira
Evropska unija

Fondo per piccoli progetti GO! 2025
Sklad za male projekte GO! 2025

GO
EZTS GO

Primorski
Tehnološki
Park.

SDGZURES
Nemoteno Obstoječe Gospodstvo in Pridelava
Unione Regionale Economica Slovenia

ECoCNetwork

A network of business support institutions, green, digital and creative SMEs, and young people for dynamic and innovative European Capitals of Culture.

The ECoCNetwork project



The project is a transnational collaboration designed to enhance the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) programme by fostering connections between past, present, and future ECoC cities. Supported by the GO! 2025 Small Project Fund under the Interreg Italy-Slovenia programme, the initiative aims to integrate lessons learned from previous ECoCs while developing innovative strategies for engaging youth, businesses, and communities in ECoC activities. By leveraging cross-border cooperation and shared expertise, the ECoCNetwork strives to cultivate a more dynamic, inclusive, and impactful cultural landscape across Europe.

Through networking, knowledge sharing, and events such as workshops and a hackathon, the project supports the implementation and long-term impact of ECoC 2025 Nova Gorica–Gorizia, while also developing recommendations that will benefit future European Capitals of Culture and other interested institutions.

ECoCNetwork Knowledge Alliance



The **ECoCNetwork project** brought together past, present, and future European Capitals of Culture to explore how young people, businesses, and business support organisations can be more effectively engaged in the ECoC journey. Through online exchanges, collaborative sessions, and field-based insights, a clearer understanding was developed of how to connect the productive sector, institutions, and new generations within a cross-border, digitally informed framework.

The activities enabled the gathering of:

- Key lessons from the experiences of the ECoCs involved;
- Perspectives from businesses, business support organisations, and other local actors;
- A set of practical recommendations to strengthen cooperation between young people, the productive sector, and institutions.

These recommendations offer **practical, applicable guidance** for everyone involved in preparing and implementing European Capitals of Culture, helping future editions build stronger partnerships and engage communities more effectively.



Europe's Cultural Capitals Working Together to Exchange Knowledge

- **Matera, Italy — ECoC 2019**
- **Bodø, Norway — ECoC 2024**
- **Bad Ischl - Salzkammergut, Austria — ECoC 2024**
- **Tartu, Estonia — ECoC 2024**
- **Chemnitz, Germany — ECoC 2025**
- **Nova Gorica with Gorizia, Slovenia — ECoC 2025**
- **Oulu, Finland — ECoC 2026**

Empowering Businesses and Youth: Insights and Recommendations from Europe's Capitals of Culture

European Capitals of Culture demonstrate that strong, lasting impact emerges when collaboration with businesses and young people is **structured, open, and designed for the long term**.

Engaging businesses is a crucial component of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) initiative, contributing to the economic and cultural vibrancy of host cities. By fostering collaborations with local SMEs, leveraging business expertise, and integrating technology and innovation, ECoCs build strong partnerships that amplify their cultural impact.



Recommendations for Engaging Businesses and Business Support Organisations

- **Look beyond sponsorship:** move from isolated, one-off contributions to thoughtful, medium-term partnerships built on shared goals and clear commitments, creating relationships that deliver lasting cultural and economic value.
- **Value local SMEs:** involve local small and medium-sized enterprises alongside major brands, allowing their authenticity and craftsmanship to enrich the ECoC experience while strengthening the local economy.
- **Create co-branded experiences:** collaborate with businesses to co-design products, services, and experiences that reflect the identity of the ECoC, raising the visibility of both the city and its entrepreneurial community.
- **Embrace digital innovation:** integrate digital tools, such as storytelling platforms, AR experiences, user-friendly booking systems, or cultural-route apps to enhance visitor engagement and ensure a contemporary, accessible cultural offer.
- **Connect through networks and hubs:** use the momentum of the ECoC to engage with creative hubs, innovation centres, clusters, and European networks, opening pathways for collaborations that continue long after the ECoC year.

Engaging youth is a vital aspect of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) initiative, aiming to nurture creativity, foster inclusivity, and ensure a lasting cultural impact. By empowering young individuals to contribute to decision-making, building robust networks, and actively involving them in cultural production, ECoCs create opportunities for youth to shape the cultural narratives of their regions.

Recommendations for Strengthening Youth Participation

- **Create youth governance spaces:** establish youth councils, forums, or boards formally linked to the cultural programme, giving young people real opportunities to propose ideas and take part in decision-making, ensuring their perspectives genuinely shape the ECoC.
- **Offer training and mentoring paths:** provide short, hands-on training in cultural project design, event management, digital communication, and creative entrepreneurship, supported by tutors and professionals, so young people can build valuable skills and confidence for the future.
- **Support initiatives designed by young people:** offer small grants or simple, low-barrier calls for projects created by youth groups, associations, collectives, or informal teams, encouraging their creativity and making participation accessible to all.
- **Involve young people in content production:** engage them in producing blogs, podcasts, digital archives, social media campaigns, artistic residencies, and co-created events, giving them ownership of the narrative and a platform to express their talent.
- **Take care of follow-up beyond the event:** plan meaningful follow-up and continued support after activities, ensuring the enthusiasm and skills developed do not fade but instead grow into long-term involvement.



“Looking beyond the ECoC year”

For these recommendations to be effective, it is essential to think **long term**. Close collaboration with local businesses, through co-branded initiatives, digital tools, and wider networks, helps cultural programmes continue to benefit the territory. At the same time, involving young people in decision-making, offering practical training, supporting their ideas, and inviting them to create content ensures their skills and creativity keep growing. Together, these efforts extend the impact of the ECoC well beyond the celebration year and leave lasting value for the community.

SMART CITY HACK

- **Participants from European Capitals of Culture, together with businesses, institutions, and young people, co-created innovative solutions for smart and sustainable cities.**

The SMART CITY HACK was a two-day innovation event dedicated to developing smarter, greener, and more sustainable urban solutions. Hosted at Xcenter in Nova Gorica, it showcased how cultural, technological, and entrepreneurial perspectives can meet to address real challenges; from energy-efficient buildings to smarter urban systems and green public spaces.

The programme of this international event blended expert insights, collaborative work sessions, a public round table on culture and entrepreneurship, and final presentations assessed by an international jury. It also featured a cross-border study visit that highlighted the shared cultural and innovation vision of Nova Gorica–Gorizia as the European Capital of Borderless Culture.

By fostering cross-sector collaboration and encouraging creative problem-solving, the SMART CITY HACK demonstrated the power of innovation to support climate-neutral cities and strengthen long-term cooperation across the region.





Key Challenges & Directions for Future ECoCs

- Encourage a more balanced sponsorship model that combines the contribution of major sponsors with the creative potential of local SMEs.
- Look for opportunities to streamline administrative processes to support more flexible and accessible collaboration.
- Foster sustained youth involvement by offering meaningful roles, skills development, and opportunities that extend beyond the ECoC year.
- Design partnerships with long-term potential, allowing successful initiatives to grow after the cultural year concludes.
- Adopt targeted communication practices that share relevant and useful information through trusted networks.
- Promote capacity-building for cultural operators and SMEs to enhance skills, confidence, and cross-sector cooperation.
- Promote international cooperation to share learning and develop long-term cross-border partnerships.

Learn more about ECoCNetwork and ECoC2025



Project website: primorski-tp.si/ecoc-network/

Download the full report

Empowering Youth and Businesses:
successful practices from and for European Capitals of Culture



The ECoCNetwork project is funded by the European Union under the GO! 2025 Small Project Fund of the Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia 2021–2027 Programme, managed by EGTC GO.



www.ita-slo.eu



www.euro-go.eu/spf