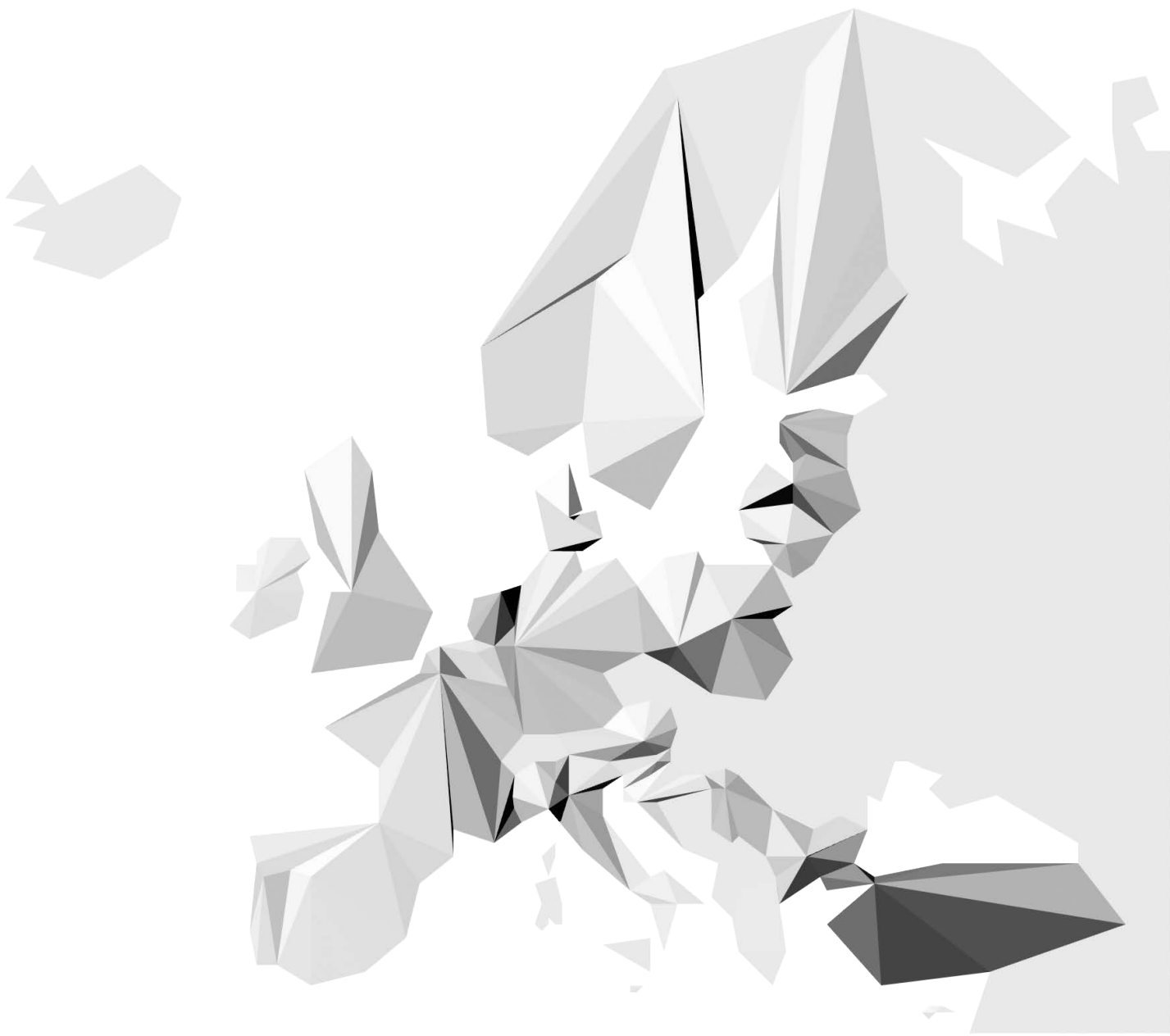




Architecture and city. Learning from European Capitals of Culture



Edited by: Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo and Adriano Venudo

What happens when culture becomes a tool to rethink the city?
How can architecture, urban design and cultural policies converge to transform the city?

This volume explores forty years of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Programme as a critical lens through which to read, design and imagine the contemporary city. Beyond celebratory narratives, the volume analyses ECoCs as complex devices of cultural diplomacy, civic imagination, participation and morpho-functional regeneration of urban space.

Through the investigation of 40 case studies, thematic essays and comparative mappings, the thesis of the “city as a cultural project” explores the possible combinations between architecture, temporary and ephemeral events and short, medium and long-term urban strategies, as a vector of new city paradigms. From Athens 1985 to Nova Gorica/Gorizia 2025, the book traces the evolution of the European Capitals of Culture from symbolic events to political and structural projects for the city.

The volume is the result of the study and design activity carried out within the RRR Lab - Integrated Design Studio of Architecture and Building in the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25, thanks to the work of the student Collectives COLGO! and VAGO, the teachers of the Laboratory and the partners who in these two years have accompanied and supported the teaching and research activities carried out. Written by architects, scholars and designers involved in these paths, between local and global, the book proposes an interdisciplinary approach, which claims the city as a space of collective authorship, as a field of experimentation for the future of Europe and its communities.



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This book is the result of a didactic and research journey developed by the RRR Lab – Integrated Design Studio for Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Trieste.

Over the past two academic years (2023 - 25), the Design Studio has systematically explored the urban and architectural impact of the European Capitals of Culture, initiating collective design experiences through two student groups – COLGO! Collective and VAGO Collective – and involving numerous faculty members, researchers, teachers, and institutional partners.

The volume brings together contributions from both teaching and research: comparative analyses, critical essays, thematic maps, and case studies. It represents the first organic attempt to systematize the urban projects generated by the ECoC programme over the past forty years.

Edited by Thomas Bisiani, Sonia Prestamburgo, and Adriano Venudo, with contributions from faculty and researchers affiliated with the RRR Lab (Alessio Bortot, Luigi Di Dato, Michela Lupieri, Giulia Piccinin) at the Department of Engineering and Architecture, the book documents an experimental teaching experience and, at the same time, a research project developed in dialogue with institutions, territories, and communities involved in the GO!2025 Nova Gorica - Gorizia European Capital of Culture initiative.

The **COLGO! Collective** is composed of the following students from the Integrated Design Studio for Architecture and the Built Environment RRR Lab, academic year 2023 - 2024:

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The **VAGO Collective** is composed of the following students from the Integrated Design Studio for Architecture and the Built Environment RRR Lab, academic year 2024 - 2025:

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The contents of this book are one of the outcomes of the teaching and research activity carried out within the Institutional agreement RRR Lab 2022-25 between the Department of Engineering and Architecture (University of Trieste), the Municipality of Gorizia, the EGTC-EZTS, the ATER of Gorizia, and the CONSUNIGO.

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Pending between the reality of evaluation and the magic of dreams, analysis of assessment methodologies for European Capitals of Culture

Sonia Prestamburgo

The sky is full of stars, always the charm of man in search of infinity.

This is the tension towards mystery, the drive towards knowledge, which is the basis of human action, a horizon, which tends to break down the rigid cage of discretionary analysis to push beyond the border line in search of new challenges, new goals. The panorama that characterizes today's operative scenario moves between the study and experimentation of new paths of economic growth, environmental sustainability objectives and implementation of territorial management models based on widespread participation and social inclusion.

The efficient allocation of resources aimed at optimizing production performance, at the basis of the evaluation of the convenience of an investment, imposes a result of positive profitability, as the only vector of economic operation.

Nowadays, alongside this consolidated operating method, new models of interpretation of economic action are found, which intend to take into account not only or exclusively the net financial result, but rather the ex post evaluation of direct and indirect benefits, not necessarily and only measurable in money deriving from complex economic operations, whose worth judgment covers a medium and/or long-term reference time horizon and involves natural, semi-natural and anthropic resources; quantifiable material inputs; social components; environmental goods and services and intangible elements whose direct and indirect benefits are of uncertain identification in the immediate.

It is in this perspective that we can read the experience of the European and Italian Capitals of Culture, which in recent years has marked the European panorama by bringing to the attention of citizens the varied artistic and cultural wealth of the cities elected in a calendar of events and celebrations lasting an annual period, as complex scenarios of urban and territorial redevelopment gen-

erating value in terms of positive externalities, advantages and/or negative externalities in the sense of impacts.

The European Capitals of Culture, ECoC and the Italian Capital of Culture are initiatives aimed at the development of cities through the promotion and enhancement of their cultural heritage. The European Capitals of Culture, managed by the European Commission, were launched in 1985 by the then Council of European Ministers, now of the European Union¹.

The Italian Capital of Culture initiative was established in 2014. The title is awarded annually to a city by the Council of Ministers upon proposal of the Minister of Culture². As of 2025, the title of European Capital of Culture has been awarded to 79 cities across Europe. The Italian cities awarded so far are: Florence (1986); Bologna (2000); Genoa (2004); Matera (2019); Nova Gorica with Gorizia (2025).

The analysis of "profitability" linked to the investment operations underlying the events of the European and Italian Capitals of Culture reveals the need to carefully identify and evaluate the origin and characteristics of the various components involved. This presupposes a dual reading key: one exquisitely territorial, which places the role, expectations and problems of the various initiatives in the overall local economic and social structure and the other of broad scope projecting the same actions of promotion and exploitation of the cities in a logic of visibility both nationally and internationally.

This is a complex context, in which the value-generating capacity of the various components involved is combined with the objective of satisfying a demand for environmental enrichment and territorial protection, through the supply of goods and services, in a perspective of long-term global interdependence between economic growth models and systems of rational use and protection of actual and potential resources.

According to this logic, the evaluation of a complex environmental system cannot ignore the construction of a model consistent with an interpretation of the concept of environment³, within which the relationships existing between the natural, territorial, anthropic and socio-economic-cultural dimensions are appropriately highlighted in an action of dynamic evolution and continuous adaptation of the balance of

power between them, as a response to the continuous modifications that occur at an environmental level.

This is an evaluation exercise that combines the pure economic-financial consideration of plans and projects with the evaluation of the effects of such interventions, understood in terms of quantification, perception and control of the effects produced by them at the level of the environment and its resources, natural, semi-natural, anthropic and landscape over time.

As regards public goods and services, within which those of an environmental nature are placed, the problem of evaluation is connected to the impossibility of expressing this value on the basis of mere market prices, as a condition of equilibrium in a free trade market. This is based on two orders of reasons: in some cases, there are no markets directly linked to goods and services of environmental origin; often the price expressed by the market turns out to be insufficient to fully represent the value that this good/service expresses for the community. This leads to the need to use different theoretical models and evaluation tools, multi-criteria specific to environmental economics.

These analysis and evaluation methodologies prove to be suitable for use in research and comparison between alternative solutions and also in mediation processes, negotiation between different interests and values, in the management choices of manufactured/cultural capital (Fusco Girard L., Nijkamp P. 1997).

To date, the theme of evaluation plays a significant role, also and above all in order to guarantee the correct management of territorial resources, in the light of an updated interpretation of the theoretical principles and operational tools of integrated and sustainable planning and development strategies of environmental ecosystems at different scales. And this also in order to allow the reactivation of entrepreneurial capacities inherent in the territory with a joint action of regeneration of the urban fabric, redevelopment of the existing, recovery of degraded and/or abandoned, disused and underused areas, without a new appropriate intended use.

It is necessary to implement a support system for the collection and validation of information to optimize the programming and intervention activity in the management of space in order to combine the typical objectives of land and land-

scape planning, with the construction of economic-territorial development scenarios, with alternative methods of use and enhancement of the constituent elements of the same, also and above all as an aid to public decisions in the construction of strategies aimed at enhancing the environmental heritage and the built environment of competence in a perspective of greater participation and responsibility.

The European Union has represented in the various historical phases since its establishment as the European Economic Community back in 1957, which later became the European Community in 1993, conceived as the first pillar of the European Union's action in force since 2009, understood as a unity of dreams, intentions and knowledge, experiences and variety of forms and actions, citizens of a common space, singular and homogeneous at the same time, a kaleidoscope of cultures, languages, uses and customs, religions and traditions, who recognize themselves in the common project, a dream of peace, brotherhood and security expressed by its "founding fathers", which today aspires to confirm the expectations of the past by looking to the future as a guiding star in the uncertainty of the time to come. In this light, the ECoCs present themselves as a positive strategy to strengthen the sense of belonging of the countries adhering to the Union platform, protagonists in the challenge of maintaining the compatibility between economic development and environmental enhancement in terms of extended cooperation at an international level.

These cities are nodes that intertwine virtuous paths through which people orient themselves in an infinite journey to discover that common treasure made of history, events, food and wine traditions, lifestyles, spaces, landscapes and architecture, which despite the inevitable diversity have the power to unite in a sense of security, which comes from finding and feeling always and in any case at home, anywhere in the territory of the Community.

As the stars for an expert observer mark the safe route of the return, in the same way the European Capitals of Culture trace a new constellation in continuous evolution in the sky of the European Union, a path of culture and brotherhood; stars that although different from each other retain a common matrix, that material origin of people, thought, action and primordial design, which marks their belonging to the great project of common enhancement.

L'Infinito

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,
E questa siepe, che da tanta parte
Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati
Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani
Silenzi, e profondissima quiete
Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco
Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento
Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
Infinito silenzio a questa voce
Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,
E le morte stagioni, e la presente
E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa
Immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

Source: G. Leopardi, *L'infinito*, Canti, Firenze, Piatti, 1831.

1: Alex Gotting, *High-Bruecke*, Petöfi Bridge, Budapest.

2: <https://european-union.europa.eu/index_it>.



Notes

1 The aims within the borders of the European Union, set out in Article 3 of the Treaty of Lisbon, are aimed at: promoting peace, its values and the well-being of its citizens; providing freedom, security and justice without internal borders, while taking appropriate measures at the external borders to regulate asylum and immigration and prevent and combat crime; establishing an internal market; achieving sustainable development based on balanced economic growth, price stability and a highly competitive market economy, with full employment and social progress; protecting and improving the quality of the environment; promoting scientific and technological progress; combating social exclusion and discrimination; promoting social justice and protection, equality between women and men and the protection of the rights of the child; strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among EU countries; respecting the richness of its cultural and linguistic diversity; establishing an economic and monetary union with the euro as the single currency.

2 The European Capital of Culture action was born in 1985 at the initiative of the Greek government with the aim of highlighting the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe and celebrating their common characteristics, promoting the importance of the contribution of culture to the development of cities. Since then, the initiative has assumed importance, becoming one of the most prestigious and high-level cultural events in Europe. The title of European Capital of Culture is awarded to cities that exemplify the richness and diversity of European culture, but the designation occurs not only by virtue of their intrinsic characteristics, but first and foremost for the work program that they intend to implement during the year of selection, aimed at enhancing the multiplicity and richness of cultures present in Europe, strengthening the cultural ties that keep Europe united, encouraging contact between citizens from different European areas in order to promote mutual understanding and strengthen European citizenship. Being awarded the title of European Capital of Culture together with the implementation of the proposed work programme also represents a unique opportunity for the city to raise its international profile, receive visibility, increase local tourism, and give new vitality to cultural life. At European level, the institution responsible for the management and implementation of the initiative is the European Commission – Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC). At national level, the contact point for the initiative is the Ministry of Culture – General Secretariat, responsible for coordinating activities of European

and international relevance. The Italian Capital of Culture initiative was established in 2014, with the decree-law of 31st May 2014, n. 83, converted with amendments by law of 29th July 2014, n. 106 (article 7, paragraph 3^{quater}), following a proposal by the Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, in the light of the large participation of Italian cities in the selection for the European Capital of Culture 2019. The aim of the event is to promote projects and activities for the enhancement of Italian cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, through a form of comparison and competition between the different territorial realities, thus encouraging the growth of tourism and related investments. The title of Italian Capital of Culture is awarded annually on the basis of the discipline relating to the selection procedure defined in 2016 by the then Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism in agreement with the Unified Conference, and updated in 2019. The winning city, thanks also to the contribution of €1 million up for grabs, will be able to showcase, for a period of one year, its original characteristics and the factors that determine its cultural development, intended as a driver of growth for the entire community.

3 The environment is the set of physical-chemical and biological conditions that allow and support the life of living beings, but also the set of cultural, historical-social and economic conditions in which man can develop his qualities and progress” (Reho, 1997).

4 Among these methods, those in which the possibility/necessity of including the economic dimension of environmental goods emerges with particular evidence are: a) the Social Planning Balance method in the Community Impact Evaluation version (PBS/Cie). This method, which has its origins in the Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) (Lichfield N. 1970 and 1996; Munda G. et al. 1994), aims to bring out the distribution of benefits and costs for each of the subjects involved in alternative investment projects. In particular, the method allows taking into account the multiplicity of objectives of individual projects (economic, social, environmental and even political objectives), thus overcoming the limit of the Cost-Benefit Analysis which, with its typical aggregate approach, ended up losing a whole series of quantitative/qualitative aspects of the individual projects being evaluated; b) the Regime Analysis method. It is a method developed by Nijkamp and Hinloopen (1988). The data needed for the application of the method, for example a recreational area, concern the “objectives”, the “alternatives” and the “criteria”; c) the Evamix method. In the context of multi-criteria methods that use qualitative/quantitative data, the Evamix approach (Nijkamp P. et al. 1990; H Shefer D. and Voogd. 1990;

Voogd H. 1993) presents aspects of particular interest especially from an applicative perspective. Like other multi-criteria methods, Evamix has as its starting point an evaluation matrix E formed by "alternatives" and "criteria" with the variant that elements of the matrix (exy) can be expressed on an ordinal or cardinal scale depending on the chosen criterion; d) the Vimda method. Developed by Karthonen and Laakso (1993), it is an interactive tool useful for solving multi-criteria problems with few "criteria" and many "alternatives"; e) the Analytic Hierarchy Process (A.H.P.) method. It was developed by Saaty in 1970 and subsequently developed and expanded (Saaty T. L. 1980; Saaty T. L., Vargas L. G. 1991; Saaty T. L. 1996). The fundamental principles of the A.H.P. method can be summarized as follows: a) deduction of priorities among the objectives; b) hierarchical articulation of the elements characterizing the decision problem; c) identification of the priorities; d) verification of the logical coherence of the priorities.

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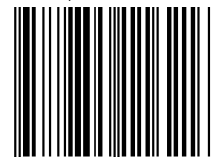
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All the authors have been dealing for years, in an interdisciplinary way through teaching and research, with urban culture and the relationship between architecture, city and politics. Their work develops in the wake of Pierre George's thought on the urban milieu, a concept introduced in French geography already in the 1950s to describe, in a geographical-environmental key, the structural relationship between society, man and the urban environment.

What if culture could redesign the city?

This volume explores forty years of the European Capital of Culture Programme as a tool for urban transformation and regeneration. Through case studies, essays and mappings, the text tells how architecture, temporary events, art, happenings and cultural strategies can generate new urban futures. A collective and interdisciplinary journey, which explores the image of the city and imagines and designs its reality in progress.

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