



Veszprém-Balaton 2023  
European Capital of Culture

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A Region's Dream or  
a Region of a Dream?



## A REGION'S DREAM OR A REGION OF A DREAM?

Regional Cooperation in the European  
Capital of Culture 2023 Programme Series

When the winners of the European Capital of Culture 2023 title were officially announced in December 2018, the winning team from Veszprém celebrated the fulfilment of a dream that had been a decade in the making. The city had competed in the first bid for the title in 2010, but was eliminated in the first round. That is why the team led by Gyula Porga was determined not to miss the second chance and put together a bid that impressed the jury with both its sophistication and novelty.



## WHY VESZPRÉM?

Although the European Capital of Culture title has enjoyed unbroken popularity throughout the European Union since its inception, Veszprém's particularly strong interest in the title is due to three main factors. The city, partly because of its potential and partly because of the opportunities offered by the title, considered it crucial to achieve its medium- and long-term plans and, perhaps more importantly for our topic, for the region as a whole.

Therefore, the main argument in favour of the European Capital of Culture title was that the title, and the distinctive European attention it would bring, would start to reposition the city itself and the

integral Bakony-Balaton region. Veszprém is at the same geographical distance from Lake Balaton and the Bakony. Its historical links – partly for economic reasons and partly because until the middle of the last century the northern shore of Lake Balaton, extending to Káptalanfüred, belonged to Zala County – and economic reasons meant that until the mid-nineteenth century the town was clearly more closely linked to the Bakony, but the rise of tourism and cultural life in the Lake Balaton region over the last two hundred years has made the county seat one of the hinterland settlements of the Lake Balaton region.







Interestingly, this gradual shift in its role has not been reflected in the colloquial language and public consciousness at all, and in today's Hungarian speech we find the equivalent of Veszprém much more often as 'the county seat of the Bakony' or 'Bakony city', while the term 'county seat of Lake Balaton' or 'city of Lake Balaton', referring to the lake at a similar distance, never occurs. At the same time, citizens are increasingly living a 'Balaton' and less a 'Bakony' life in their everyday, as Lake Balaton has become more fashionable and transport conditions have improved. For families in Veszprém, the shore of Lake Balaton is not primarily a holiday destination, but a place of attraction where family, relatives and friends live, or from where they commute to work.

Thus, the repositioning of Veszprém for the outside world has been both a process of raising awareness of the city and a beneficial one, both economically and in terms of tourism. The world of the 1990s left the county seats in a golden cage by excluding them from the life of the county as they became municipal cities. They were granted the long-sought right to be on an equal footing with the counties (as used to be the case with the historic towns with jurisdictional rights in past centuries), but at the price of being excluded from the life of the county, thus surrendering their power to organise the region.



It was clear to Veszprém that it could return to the region as European Capital of Culture by organising cooperation with a positive purpose. This was also necessary because, on the one hand, the Bakony and Lake Balaton, although geographically very close to each other and complementary in profile, had never actually ‘found’ each other. In fact, in bad times, they defined themselves in opposition to each other and tried to maintain or even improve their own position at the expense of the other’s.

Veszprém’s emergence as a regional player was an attempt to do what tourism and regional economy experts have been calling for for years. As undoubtedly the largest city in the region and also European Capital of Culture, it should create and try to manage a cooperation between municipalities which could also form the basis of a future regional economic model.

The second reason is the European dimension. The European Capital of Culture initiative has enjoyed almost unparalleled popularity in the four decades since its launch. Perhaps only the Erasmus programme can be compared with the European Capital of Culture programme in terms of popularity and positive impact. Both have the same appeal: they promote the European ideal by drawing attention

to the similarities between the nations of Europe, bringing a friendly note to their differences.

As envisaged by its founders, the European Capital of Culture programme is primarily intended to raise public awareness of the major cities and centres of shared European cultural heritage. However, after the success of the first few years, cities with a significant cultural heritage of European relevance also emerged relatively quickly, but they wanted to use the title to develop the future rather than simply commemorate the past. The pioneer in this role in 1990 was Glasgow in the United Kingdom, which used the Year of Culture both to redefine the city as a traditional industrial centre and to use abandoned industrial buildings for cultural purposes, with great success.

It took 20 years after Glasgow’s innovation before the European Capital of Culture title opened a new chapter in its history, this time an era of regional cooperation. In 2010, the city of Essen won the title, along with Pécs in Hungary and Istanbul in Turkey, and opened up its programme to other cities in the Ruhr region, creating a tradition. Three years later, Marseille followed suit with the Provence region, the city’s natural geographic and economic backdrop, hosting its programmes in 2013.







It was these examples that motivated the people of Veszprém to take part in European competition. The possibility of regional cooperation increased the chances of winning for Veszprém, which is a small town at the European level. The beauty of the region, combined with the fact that it was unknown to the European public, was almost a compelling force for the people of Veszprém to make an attempt to enter the European stage in the interests of the region's future. Veszprém's role in the cultural history of Hungary and Europe has earned it a place among the European Capitals of Culture, and the applicants knew it. At the same time, regional cooperation could give the whole region the opportunity to present itself to the professional communities of European tourism and culture.

Finally, and thirdly, winning the title of European Capital of Culture was also of particular importance to the people of Veszprém because the sociological characteristics of the city itself almost obliged them to do so. Veszprém is not only the administrative, transport and economic centre of a county and a region, but also a traditionally prominent player in Hungarian cultural and intellectual life. It is also the seat of the oldest diocese in Hungary, the first university seat in Hungarian history, the place where tradition has it that the coronation robes were

embroidered, and the traditional seat of queens, to mention only the most significant events of the first centuries of the Hungarian state.

However, the county seat remains an intellectual centre in addition to its historical significance. As a university centre, the city has a nationally high number of graduates, patents and innovations per capita. Its cultural institutions, festivals, theatres, concert halls and magazines are renowned and respected throughout the country. The title of European Capital of Culture has played a significant role in formalising this position, which is widely respected yet somehow informal in the Hungarian public mind.

In Hungarian cultural life, we have become accustomed to the fact that events considered to be significant take place in Budapest, or perhaps, on occasion, in a big city – Debrecen, Győr, Pécs or Szeged. The people of Veszprém knew that this was not true, but in order to prove that Veszprém was in fact the cultural capital not only of Hungary, but of the whole of Central Europe, and even, as it turned out, of Europe, it was necessary to win this title. Thus, winning the title was a great opportunity for the city, but also for the region, not only to present itself, but also to prove itself.



## WHY THE BAKONY-BALATON REGION?

It is clear from what is said above why the European Capital of Culture title was particularly important for Veszprém. However, the implementation of the 2023 programme year did not only take place in Veszprém. The municipalities and civil society organisations of the region were also active holders of the title, as they were the venues for many of the events and participants in the developments. For this reason, it is worth reviewing the arguments in favour of participation by the regional players in the future strategy.

The most overwhelming argument was obviously the publicity that participation would provide. Although there are municipalities in the region that are well-known in Hungary and even in the wider European region, for most of them, participation in the events of 2023 was an irreplaceable opportunity to present themselves. For the better known, the opportunity to be part of the European Capital of Culture was simply a matter of prestige, and for the less well-known villages and towns, it was a new opportunity to become known to a wider audience through a programme.

An important argument in favour of participation was the presentation of the local cultural programme offer and its wider context. The municipalities of the Bakony-Balaton region are proud of the fact that they are not only places to live, work or even spend a holiday, but also centres or sub-centres that potentially make them the basis of a creative region. Given that most of these settlements have also been resorts over the last

century, their cultural and gastronomic offer has grown gradually and has become increasingly important in their image. The demand and desire for leisure and relaxation of the citizens who visit, spend their holidays or live in the area have added to the diversity and vitality of cultural life.

Obviously, this statement is mainly true for the settlements on Lake Balaton. However, this likewise was the motivation for the villages and towns in the Bakony region, further away from Lake Balaton. Just as they could see that in the last thirty years not only the villages and towns directly on the shores of Lake Balaton, but also some of the hinterland settlements – for example the settlements of the Valley of Arts in the Eger stream valley – have successfully based at least part of their local economy on cultural programmes, so the more remote settlements were motivated to try and join the cultural region by participating in the European Capital of Culture programme.

The economic argument was based on the first point. For a significant number of municipalities in the Bakony-Balaton region, participation in the cultural programme was not simply an opportunity to showcase their existing programme offer to the wider world. It has also provided an opportunity for them to carry out developments with the financial support of the programme series, or simply with marketing support, which can also have an economically stimulating role.







This could involve renovating neglected buildings that had lost their function and putting them on a new operational basis. It can also mean introducing new festivals and events, reviving old traditions and creating new ones. All this not only enhances the reputation of the region or the locality concerned, but can also create jobs and attract investors to the area, thus boosting the economy and regenerating the settlement.

We know that this process is not without controversy, as the increased interest in the area can lead to rising property prices and the arrival of newcomers can bring with it a revival of the defensive reflexes of traditional local society and the potential for municipal conflict. Yet, for many settlements that feel themselves in decline, participation in the programme has also provided an opportunity to break out.

Although it may not have played a spectacular role in the decision to participate, the issue of regional identity may be an important factor for further cooperation. In this part of the country, the Balaton identity has traditionally emerged as a common point of cross-county identities. In this respect, the Bakony is less specific, since the self-definition linked to the range of hills, due to the fact that the Bakony is predominantly located in Veszprém county, is, with

few exceptions, identical to county identity. In fact, it could be said that historically, Bakony identity formed the backbone of Veszprém county identity.

However, Balaton identity is a form of self-identity that not only exists across the borders of the county, but also from time to time emerges as a force for regional organisation. For example, the fact that the area around the lake is divided into three counties, that historically the settlements on Lake Balaton have never belonged to a single county, and that there has never been a Balaton County, is often raised as a problem. Likewise, neither the administration nor the organisation of transport is conducive to the strengthening of a unified Balaton identity, as it is difficult to travel by rail and road, not only around the lake, but also from one point to another, if the settlements are located on different shores.

The regional cooperation within the framework of the European Capital of Culture 2023 also provided an opportunity for the partners to test the regional organising power of the Balaton and Bakony identities in practice. The experiment proved successful: a total of one hundred and sixteen municipalities in the Bakony-Balaton region, from Inota to Hollád, from Siófok to Bakonybél and Hévíz, decided to join the initiative in response to Veszprém's call.



## RESULTS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

After the eventful days of 2023, it is time to review the results. Not primarily to be proud of them – although that is no bad thing – but primarily to identify the success points on which to build our cooperation in the years to come for the strategy of the future.

In fact, the first and most obvious result of regional cooperation was achieved before cooperation between municipalities had even begun. Veszprém was able to rise above its competitors by formulating a regional strategy, rather than a city strategy, in the competition for the title of European Capital of Culture. Mayor Gyula Porga and his advisers were brilliant in recognising that, while the city itself might not be able to compete successfully with its fellow finalists, given its population and financial strength, a regional approach was a novelty that its rivals did not have.

The advantage of Veszprém over its rivals in this respect was already evident in the first round.

However, this aspect became even more decisive when Veszprém had to compete with Debrecen and Győr for the title in the final round. While Veszprém's place in Hungarian history places it among the most distinguished cities, the advantage of the other two cities in terms of financial strength and population is undeniable. However, the programme and the regional approach of Veszprém proved to be an important and decisive novelty and advantage both in the Hungarian and international arena. Whether we look at the European Capitals of Culture of the previous year, 2022, which included Esch, Kaunas, Novi Sad, or the European Capitals of Culture of 2023 – Elefsina and Timișoara –, Veszprém stands out from the rest by having implemented a regional programme.

It is thanks to this regional programme that the Bakony-Balaton region appeared as a programme region for the first time in Hungarian history.







Its value is further enhanced by the fact that it did not enter as an administrative unit planned from above, but as a community built from the bottom up, whose cohesive force was culture and whose dynamism came from the will of its members to cooperate.

The bid programme envisaged merely the possibility of a regional partnership. After the award of the title, the development of the principles of a community of applications and programmes, based on shared risk-taking, co-financing and close cooperation, started in 2020.

To prepare for the 2023 season, as well as to deliver the programmes and co-finance infrastructure improvements, a consortium led by Veszprém was set up to complement the available budget support with contributions from its members. The amount of the contribution was two Euros per inhabitant per year

per district municipality and one Euro per inhabitant per year for non-district municipalities. Two thirds of the municipalities in the region took advantage of this opportunity, thus creating a total of one hundred and sixteen municipalities which cooperated within the geographical boundaries of the region during the programme year.

The resulting community was eligible to participate in the annual infrastructure tenders from 2020 onwards. The aim of the infrastructure development projects was – learning from the example of Pécs – to allow for the renewal of old buildings where possible, rather than the construction of new ones. An important selection criterion in the evaluation of the bids was that the renewed buildings should serve community purposes in the future and that their business model should be based on sustainability.



The selection criteria have resulted in a focus on regenerated buildings that fulfil functions that are important both for the life of the municipality and for the whole landscape. Whether it is the ActiCity Movement Centre in Veszprém, the Káli Fecske Cultural Centre, Modern Art Gallery in Balatonfüred, the renewed Jesuit monastery in Balatonalmádi or the rebirth of the Synagogue in Várpalota – to name just a few of the major investments – all of these emerged and have since existed as regional centres on the cultural map of Hungary – and thus of Europe.







The very fortunate combination of infrastructural developments and the renewal of the programme offer has brought innovations to the life of individual settlements and the region as a whole, which has significantly repositioned the image of the region in the eyes of the public. The opening of Veszprém's Gyárkert (Factory'ard) is certainly one of these. For decades, Gyárkert had been a disused site of Balaton Furniture Factory on the edge of the county seat city centre. By buying it back from its owner and redeveloping the brownfield site as a leisure park and concert venue, the city succeeded in creating one of the most fashionable and visited concert and meeting venues in Hungary and even Central Europe by the summer of 2023.



Similarly, although with minimal intervention on private property, the former 7th November Thermal Power Plant site in Inota was given a new function. Vacant and decaying for over three decades, the industrial buildings became home to Inota Festival, one of the most internationally acclaimed events of the European Capital of Culture, thus paving the way for possible future development.







A third example is Kőfesz, Kál Basin's high quality multidisciplinary arts festival. Drawing partly on the aforementioned cultural centre in Salföld and partly on the infrastructural improvements made as part of the European Capital of Culture's Pajta (Barn) initiative, the festival programme has enriched the image of the Kál Basin, offering a high-quality programme for both residents and an increasing number of visitors.

Finally, it is worth taking a look at some of the investments made in Ajka, in the northern part of the programme area. Here, the renewal of Krypton House, a site of great importance from an industrial history point of view, has provided a new regional meeting place through the programmes carried out there, in keeping with the tradition of the industrial town. Alongside this, the creation of a reading cabin in Csinger Forest offers a unique cultural and natural experience, while also tangibly implementing sustainability, one of the key horizontal principles of the European Capital of Culture programme.





In addition to the festivals and major events mentioned as examples, smaller-scale infrastructure developments have also made a large contribution to the community spirit of the area and enriched the community life of its inhabitants. In smaller towns and cities, new and renewed community spaces were created under the Pajta (Barn) programme, supported by the European Capital of Culture. In addition, the CultNet programme set up a network of cultural events based on renewed buildings and community spaces, also with a regional dimension.

It is understandable, however – and a lesson to be learnt from the previous list – that the series of infrastructure improvements alone could not have fulfilled their regional mission without the programmes that they were built on. In preparing for

the European Capital of Culture event and in setting the internal proportions of the budget, clear priority was given to supporting programmes and events, primarily local but potentially regional in scope.

As mentioned above, this was partly due to the experience of Pécs. For all its success, the 2010 cultural season remains a bittersweet memory for posterity. Contrary to expectations, Pécs was unable to re-emerge as a regional centre, and many even felt that the city made poor use of the opportunities available. While the cultural programmes were basically successful, bitterness was due to the delay in infrastructure investment. The delays tested the programme year's budget and prevented Pécs from building on the new institutions to achieve wider cultural and economic reach.



Therefore, starting with the preparatory years, the 2023 European Capital of Culture year focused on cultural events. Regional festivals were a key element of the programme, forming the backbone of the main season. The importance of the festivals for the programme was not only due to the rich and popular festival offer of the region. Festivals have a much greater community-building power than

one-off cultural events because of their duration, the range of participants and, above all, their recurring nature. The role of festivals in organising the region, strengthening identity and creating jobs is now well established in creative and cultural industries literature. As a result, festivals that not only entertain visitors but also help to build community were given particular attention in the promotion of events.







The inclusion of traditional and high-profile festivals in Veszprém, such as Veszprémfest, Utcazene (Street Music) Festival and Auer Festival, or the regional ones like Valley of Arts and Paloznak Jazz Picnic, seemed to make sense. In previous years, these events had already done a lot to create a positive and attractive public image of the city and its region, and their positive economic impact on the region should not be underestimated.



At the same time, the establishment and consolidation of new festivals is an important result of the European Capital of Culture programme and the preparatory years. This is certainly the case with the Hungarian Motion Picture Festival, which brings regional and even national importance not only because of its size, but because its venues contribute to the realisation of regional cohesion. The three venues of the Hungarian Motion Picture Festival – Balatonalmádi, Balatonfüred and Veszprém – are key players in the region. Strengthening their cooperation through the joint programme is an important development for the future of the region as a whole.







The network of new regional festivals created and strengthened through the support of the programming series is also a major achievement.

The aforementioned Kőeszt has added a new meeting point to Kál Basin, and its twelve-month programme of events based on the festival has had a significant community-building and economic stimulating effect. Boronclassic in Marcali, at the southern tip of the programme region, and the aforementioned Inota Festival in Inota, at the eastern tip, are events that offer entertainment both for locals and for tourists visiting the region.

As a result of the regional partnership, 2023 saw each of the municipalities involved in the work of the programme area benefit from varying degrees of development. Some municipalities renovated buildings and community spaces. Some were able to make their traditional events richer in programme or more robust. And there were municipalities that added new events and programmes that could be springboards for the future.

All this was made possible by cooperation between municipalities. The well-understood interest and altruism of Veszprém meant that the city dared and was able to use its potential leadership role in the region in a way that would be seen as a partnership by the other municipalities. The willingness of the municipalities in the region to cooperate, based on the recognition of a shared interest, finding one's own interest within the common interest and undertaking to work together to achieve it.

The results of 2023 are a good basis for continuing our work together. To ensure that the European Capital of Culture is not just a memory of a successful year for the citizens of the region, we need to make cooperation sustainable. The economic and spatial potential of the work that has begun can only be fulfilled if we can lay down the foundations for defining the Bakony-Balaton region as a creative region and for a corresponding development curve in the coming years.





## HOW TO MOVE AHEAD?

A fundamental reason for the declining acceptance of once popular large-scale programme series is the issue of legacy, which has become increasingly acute in recent decades. The question of what to do with the sub-elements of the event and the architectural legacy built up for the event itself. The Olympics, in particular, but also other world sporting events, have recently provided many sad examples of cities or regions failing to make use of the infrastructure built for the event, which slowly fell into disrepair.

The earlier popularity of large-scale events was born out of the desire to make the event itself a dynamic force for development in the city, region or country, and the increased attention that the event attracted, together with the optimal use of the infrastructure that was built for the event, could give a boost to the community after the event. Indeed, the annals record successful examples from the history of world exhibitions, the Olympics and World Cups.

The European Capital of Culture programme is also keen to draw attention to the successful afterlives of the period for which the title was awarded. In addition to Glasgow, which boasts the success of its European Capital of Culture – then City – title in transforming the urban fabric and public image of the city from a declining industrial town into a robust and dynamic cultural centre, many other cities and regions have also enjoyed a successful post-Capital of Culture period.

Veszprém and the Bakony-Balaton region planned their programmes and investments for the 2023 season so that these would be, as far as possible, sustainable beyond the year of the title. Sustainability, which is a key horizontal principle that ran through every programme and every decision, was thus not only conceived in terms of environmental impact, but also as an ongoing sustainability of programmes, buildings and facilities for communities.



However, despite all caution, the participants in the European Capital of Culture programme must also take into account that while the facilities may well be able to continue to operate in the longer term for the benefit of the community without becoming a significant burden on local authorities, some of the programmes – hopefully as few as possible – may disappear at the end of the season. What remains, however, is a web of collaboration in addition to the memory, which we hope will provide an opportunity for longer-term sustainability by building a creative region based on the collaborative work that has been established.

The birth of a region is not a matter of course. Many previous holders of the European Capital of Culture title have been content to remember the season as a very nice memory. While retaining a significant part of its events and facilities, they do not want to develop a new economic or operational model based on the season. However, I believe that the success of regional cooperation under the leadership of Veszprém gives us the opportunity to at least try to establish the first creative region in Hungary, and indeed in Central Europe.







## THE BAKONY-BALATON CREATIVE REGION

When discussing the chances of starting a creative region, one must first of all clarify the sense in which I am using the term creative region. There is increasingly large literature across Europe on the debate around the definition of cultural and creative industries and creative regions. Without wishing to take a position on this issue, it is nevertheless useful to introduce a working definition, if only to provide a common basis for interpretation for the argument that follows.

I will therefore call a creative region a landscape unit in which the cultural and creative industries play a significant, even dominant, role in the total output and income of the region. I will use a similarly broad definition of cultural and creative industries. It includes all activities that are either economic activities linked to the cultural sphere or creative activities whose products are or can be protected by intellectual property rights.

This definition makes it easy to see that the programme region, a grouping of one hundred and

sixteen municipalities set up to implement the European Capital of Culture programme, could eventually emerge as a creative region. However, in order to explore the possibility of this, it is worth clarifying what type of creative region this might be.

As mentioned above, creative regions are those regions whose economic fabric is strongly or predominantly made up of cultural and creative industries. In terms of the structure of a region, it can be of two types: one type is where a large city is the predominant player in the creative region and its associated municipalities, often the municipalities of the metropolitan catchment area, are effectively just serving this centre. In Western Europe, Manchester in the UK or Clermont-Ferrand in France are examples of this. Here, it is the creative industries that play a dominant role, while the cultural industries are only complementary, and the university, which is the engine of innovation in the region, is the driving force behind the creative region.



Another example of a different structure of creative regions is a region where innovation is not so much the basis of the economy as cultural heritage and the wider industry based on it, including tourism, gastronomy and services. In this case, the settlement structure is also different: the region has a central municipality, but its size does not mean that it is as dominant as in the previous case. Therefore, cooperation between municipalities on an equal footing is an important condition for the viability of the regional model. Examples of this type of creative region in Western Europe are the areas around Florence or Bruges.

Make no mistake: a metropolitan creative region is no more a one-way industrial focus than any other region without creative industrial activity or a strong, high-quality university. The differences are more to be found in changes in settlement structure and emphasis.

Using this somewhat simplistic but realistic grouping as a starting point, it can be concluded that the region of Veszprém, which is a cooperation between Veszprém and the Bakony-Balaton region, clearly belongs to the latter group. Veszprém is the leading but not dominant city in the region. Its leading role is based partly on its geographic and partly on its cultural and educational importance. At the same time, the settlement structure of the region is evenly balanced between small towns and villages, and in terms of indicators, rural areas do not appear as internal peripheries.







The most important higher education institution in the region is the University of Pannonia, which has a university base not just in Veszprém but also in other towns outside the region, such as Ajka, Kőszeg, Nagykanizsa and Zalaegerszeg. The university's internationally renowned faculties can all be useful assets for the growing role of the creative industries in both research and training.

In addition to Veszprém, the cooperation for the year 2023 also includes several medium-sized and small towns. District seats include Ajka, Balatonalmádi, Balatonfüred, Fonyód, Hévíz, Keszthely, Marcali, Siófok, Sümeg and Tapolca, clearly having a regional organising power in the sub-regional area. At the same time, the municipalities that are not district seats are also important players in this cooperation area with a tangibly decentralised structure.





The boundaries of the future creative region may be a question. I am convinced that, in order to adapt to reality, the region must be made up of a network of cooperation with different layers – and perhaps different intensities. The most internal and obvious circle could be the group of municipalities belonging to the urban area of Veszprém. Veszprém itself is a relatively large city in Hungary, with over 60,000 inhabitants, but by European standards it is a lower middle-sized city. Its profile is more similar to Florence or Bruges than to Manchester or Clermont-Ferrand. The territory of the urban area itself, however, is rather small: to the east, Várpalota is already closer to Székesfehérvár, to the north Zirc is still part of the urban area, as is Balatonalmádi to the south, and to the west the limits are Nemesvámos and perhaps Nagyvázsony.

All this means that the radius of Veszprém is a circle of about fifteen to twenty kilometres, which is small even in the competition between the northern Transdanubian county seats. Consequently, when organising the inner circle of regional cooperation, we cannot stop at the city-region boundary, but must extend it both to the west and to the east. In order to make the region viable, it is essential to involve the Balatonfüred and Várpalota areas in the closest possible cooperation.





Várpalota, which until recently was clearly economically dependent on Székesfehérvár, has now been given a significant chance to become an independent industrial centre, including a creative industrial centre, through innovation, with the re-establishment of the defence industry. The presence of the University of Pannonia in the town and the establishment of the closest possible cooperation between the university and the town could be crucial for the future of Veszprém and the entire creative region.





The inclusion of the Balatonfüred region in the inner circle could be an important boost for the region, especially in the field of cultural industries. Veszprém, Balatonalmádi and Balatonfüred are towns located at a short distance from each other, with destinies that are intertwined in everyday life and in the history of the families living there. At present, the only practical manifestation of this community between the three towns is the Hungarian Motion Picture Festival, a summer event organised as part of the European Capital of Culture programme.



However, the future may hold many more opportunities for cooperation between the three municipalities. From enhancing the role of the University of Pannonia in vocational training to building a regional transport community to a mutually supportive programme and tourism community based on the tourist attractiveness of the municipalities, there are many ways to strengthen the cohesion of the heartland of the creative region. Before anyone sighs resignedly, most of these steps do not require more money, just a willingness to cooperate.

The next territorial layer of the creative region is the municipalities of Veszprém County participating in the European Capital of Culture cooperation. Their

geographical and cultural distance from the county seat makes a more relaxed cooperation more realistic, but this should not be an obstacle to intensive and mutually fruitful cooperation. This area includes the north-western basin of Lake Balaton, the Tapolca Basin, Sümeg and its surroundings, the villages of the Eger stream valley, Ajka and the High Bakony area, Zirc and the foot of the Bakony Hills area (Bakonyalja). The strong links between the latter and the county seat make future intensive cooperation natural, which is further strengthened by the highly successful training already taking place on the University of Pannonia campus in Ajka.







In order to strengthen the cohesion of the creative region, strong links need to be built both with Ajka and Zirc and with the recently established Bakony Charta municipalities. This could also mean reducing the considerable cultural distance between the settlements of the Bakony and Lake Balaton, despite the small geographical distance, and providing opportunities for the Bakony settlements, which also have a significant cultural heritage, to present themselves and their products in the Lake Balaton resorts. It also means that the significant creative industrial and cultural heritage of the Bakony settlements – from the glass-manufacturing traditions of Ajka to the still highly successful Herend porcelain production heritage – should be preserved and further developed, and should be given increased prominence in the economic image of the region.



The western and south-western part of this area is still a successful tourist area thanks to its natural and gastronomic assets and its cultural and historical heritage. Efforts to establish a creative region here must be accompanied by increased protection of heritage. Sümeg, which has played a prominent role in Hungarian cultural history for centuries, could gain a multiplier effect on its tourist appeal by joining the cooperation. At the same time, it should be noted that the development and investment intentions that appear from time to time in the Lake Balaton area must not be allowed to upset the unique balance of life and lifestyle of the local inhabitants. This is why we must work very closely with Balaton Development Council, one of the most important political players in the region.







This does not mean, of course, that there should be any reservations about transport investment in the region. Getting to Tapolca by rail today takes just as much time, or more, than it did a hundred years ago. The underdeveloped state of rail transport is particularly striking on the northern shore of Lake Balaton past Balatonfüred. And the fact that, more than a hundred years after the mass development of spa tourism on Lake Balaton, it is still not possible to travel around the lake by train is in itself a good indicator of the low level of transport infrastructure from which the region's development must start.

Unfortunately, the same can be said of road infrastructure. Major stretches of roads No 8, No 77 and No 84 are of particularly poor quality and are particularly unsafe, while road No 71 shares the same quality problems as its counterparts mentioned above and is also particularly unsafe due to congestion. Making these roads, but also the minor roads safer would be essential to improve regional links.

The third geographical group of municipalities to cooperate in the European Capital of Culture programme are the municipalities of Somogy and

Zala Counties, which also include a large number of towns and villages with a high added value in terms of beauty, history or local economy. At the same time, however, the neglect or underdevelopment of the region's transport infrastructure makes intensive cooperation with these settlements more difficult because of their geographical distance.

Nevertheless, despite all their geographical distance, two decisive factors link these municipalities closely to the Veszprém region. The first is Lake Balaton and the second is their participation in the European Capital of Culture programme. If the idea that there is a single identity in Lake Balaton is to be believed, the regional link should be sufficient for these municipalities to participate in the work of the creative region. As in 2023, the principle of openness should be the guiding factor for contacts and cooperation. In other words, the municipalities of Somogy and Zala will find open doors for their willingness to cooperate, but it will be necessary to develop, in consultation with them, how and to what depth they will commit to cooperation within the region.



## REALITY OR DESIRE?

As you can see above, thanks to the results of the cooperation for the European Capital of Culture 2023, the Bakony-Balaton creative region is already more than just a wish. It has genuine foundations, which have not only developed over the past four years, but have also been strengthened, creating a real community framework for the municipalities from the southern slopes of the Bakony to the southern shores of Lake Balaton.

Veszprém has been the organiser and driving force behind the cooperation so far. Far beyond its regional reach, it has provided a perfect example of how a municipality, drawing on the wise insight of its leaders, can multiply its own strength and that of its peers through cooperation based on equal rights.

The biggest challenge of the current period is whether to be content with the successes of the previous year, with the fact that Veszprém, together with the Bakony-Balaton region, was able to become European Capital of Culture for one year, or to make an attempt, new in Hungary, to make our presence on the cultural map of Europe permanent by establishing a creative region that will remain one of the cultural capitals of Europe for a long time to come.

Success is not guaranteed. But that is no reason not to try. To turn a region's dream into a region of dreams.





