



Veszprém-Balaton 2023
European Capital of Culture

Veszprém-Balaton 2023
European Capital of Culture
Final Evaluation Report



Programme Book
VEB2023 ECoC



Settlements
of the Region –
VEB2023 ECoC



Horizontal Guidelines
in the VEB2023 ECoC



Cultural Infrastructure
VEB2023 ECoC



How Veszprém and
the Region Became
European Capital of
Culture –
Mayor Gyula Porga



A Region’s Dream or
a Region of a Dream?
– Minister Tibor
Navracsics



HELLO VESZPRÉM-
BALATON! Interviews
from the ECoC Region
(HU)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture was conceived as a strategic instrument to move Veszprém and the wider Bakony–Balaton area beyond charm, seasonality and cultural isolation. The programme did not aim simply to deliver an exceptional cultural year. Its deeper ambition was to create a more connected regional cultural ecosystem: one in which cultural participation, public space, community initiative, tourism, music and institutional cooperation could reinforce one another beyond 2023.

The programme was implemented at a scale that exceeded the original bid assumptions. It mobilised 117 municipalities, more than 500 organising entities and a broad network of cultural institutions, civil society organisations, municipalities, businesses and international partners. According to the aggregated partner reports and monitoring data, the programme generated 5.75 million visitor and participant occasions, involved 1,363 civil society organisations, mobilised 6,579 volunteers, and delivered strong overperformance in media visibility, music-related outputs, visitor-friendly programming and international partnership-building. Its 32 calls for proposals and 1,092 applications show that the ECoC operated less as a centrally delivered event programme than as a distributed regional mobilisation platform.

The impact evidence shows that this mobilisation translated into visible social and spatial change. The population surveys comparing 2017 and 2024 indicate stronger place attachment, greater regional belonging, higher satisfaction with local community life and a clearer perception of Veszprém as a more attractive, lively and culturally active city.

Veszprém's historic centre attracted more than 1.6 million visitors in 2023 and around 1.9 million in 2024, suggesting that the title year did not produce only a one-off tourism peak, but contributed to a more durable pattern of city-centre use.

The programme's most important legacy lies in the capacities it created. Qualitative interviews and regional stakeholder research confirm that the ECoC strengthened trust, cooperation and institutional openness, while also making clear that these achievements will not sustain themselves automatically. Continued coordination, proportionate funding instruments, stronger fundraising capacity, shared communication, data-informed planning and support for lower-capacity settlements remain essential legacy tasks.

For this reason, the institutional legacy of VEB2023 is not a matter of preserving memory alone. Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. has become the programme's key legacy instrument: alongside operating venues, recurring programmes, digital platforms and visitor-facing systems, it is expected to keep the wider cultural ecosystem capable of renewal. This includes helping partners find resources, maintaining regional cooperation, supporting evidence-based planning and preventing the network created during the title year from fragmenting as extraordinary public funding recedes.

Several continuing frameworks strengthen this role. The UNESCO City of Music designation provides a long-term thematic anchor for musical participation, creative education and community-based cultural practice. The regional office of the Hungarian Development Promotion Office (MFOI) in Veszprém creates a direct channel toward European Union funding opportunities. The Veszprém–Balaton European Region of Sport 2026 title extends the cooperation model developed through ECoC into active lifestyles, community health, inclusion and sport-based regional development. Together, these frameworks show that the ECoC year was not a closed chapter, but the starting point for a broader, culture-led and evidence-informed regional development trajectory.



1. SETTING THE STAGE: FROM STRATEGIC AMBITION TO REGIONAL ECOC PROGRAMME

From Local Ambition to Regional Strategy

The Veszprém–Balaton region’s successful bid for the title of European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2023 was the outcome of a systematic, multi-stage strategic planning process. An earlier, unsuccessful attempt to secure the title for 2010 encouraged the city to embark upon a gradual yet purposeful process of internal development. Culture was elevated to a key instrument of urban regeneration: the municipal leadership conducted extensive research into demographic and economic trends and identified the region’s most pressing challenges, including the outmigration of young people and university graduates, as well as the gradual decline in the vitality of the historic city centre among others. A long-term urban development strategy was subsequently devised, in which the ECOC title was conceived not as an end in itself, but rather as a catalyst for achieving the city’s broader objectives for 2030.

By the time the official application process for the 2023 title opened in 2017, Veszprém was able to present an entirely new methodological approach. The most significant strategic insight was the recognition that the city, on its own, was too small to establish itself as a distinctive cultural powerhouse with genuine European visibility. Consequently, the Mayor and his team personally approached the leaders of municipalities across the region and proposed a partnership based on equality and shared responsibility — an approach that was unprecedented in Hungarian regional development practice at the time.

The alliance brought together three territories with markedly different identities: Veszprém, renowned for its historical

and cultural heritage; the shores of Lake Balaton, with their strong tourism appeal; and the Bakony Hills, rich in natural assets. While the Balaton region’s principal challenge lay in its pronounced seasonality — characterised by overcrowding during the summer months and relative inactivity in winter —, Veszprém faced the task of sustaining a vibrant year-round cultural offer. The partnership proved mutually beneficial: the wider region gained cultural dynamism and an all-season attraction, while Veszprém benefited from a broader territorial framework and a greater scale of operation.

Building the Governance Model for a Cross-County Cultural Region

Following the award of the title in 2018, the Municipality of Veszprém established a dedicated, multi-layered institutional and organisational framework to deliver the programme. These entities, directly or indirectly linked to the local authority, were either created or restructured specifically to advance the strategic objectives of the ECOC initiative.

One of the most distinctive features of this system was its ability to **transcend conventional administrative boundaries**. The ECOC region did not correspond to a traditional territorial-administrative unit; rather, it extended across the borders of three Hungarian counties — Veszprém, Zala, and Somogy. As a result, innovative and flexible organisational arrangements were required to ensure that regional cooperation could be institutionalised and effectively sustained.

Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Joint Stock Company (Zrt.) became the programme’s official lead organisation and implementing

body. Rather than establishing an entirely new company, the municipality opted to transform an existing dormant municipally owned enterprise, Bakony Korona Jsc., in 2018. This solution enabled a rapid and cost-effective start-up phase. The distribution of share capital among key regional, micro-regional and municipal stakeholders both symbolised and institutionalised the principle of shared responsibility.

From 2021 onwards, **Veszprém 2030 Technical Infrastructure Development Ltd** was responsible for overseeing infrastructure investments and urban renewal projects. While Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. concentrated on the programme’s cultural content and operational delivery, the development company focused on creating the programme’s physical legacy through new cultural venues, public spaces and tourism-related investments.

The **Veszprém–Balaton Region Foundation for Culture**, originally established in 1991 as a public foundation, underwent significant restructuring in 2020 to fully integrate the strategic objectives of the ECoC programme. It served as the umbrella organisation for the ECoC Volunteer Programme and assumed a longer-term role in safeguarding the programme’s sustainability beyond 2023.

Although not founded by the municipality, the **University of Pannonia** constituted an indispensable component of the overall governance framework. As the region’s leading knowledge institution, it contributed to the programme through research projects, data collection and impact assessments, thereby supporting both the professional quality of programme delivery and the long-term evaluation of its outcomes.

Ownership Structure of Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc.

Shareholder	Ownership Stake (%)
Municipality of Veszprém	72,59%
Municipality of Balatonfüred	8,90%
Municipality of Balatonalmádi	8,90%
Veszprém Programme Office Ltd	4,27%
Association for an Invigorating Balaton Uplands (an alliance of local producers and small-settlement initiatives)	1,78%
Association of Balaton Municipalities	1,78%
Balaton Circle (a network of entrepreneurs operating primarily in the wine and gastronomy sectors)	1,78%

National Support and Strategic Institutional Partnerships

The programme’s strong governmental support was reinforced by the appointment of Dr Tibor Navracsics as Government Commissioner in November 2019. Drawing on his experience as former European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, he ensured effective interministerial coordination, facilitated budgetary negotiations and enhanced the programme’s international visibility.

As a strategic partner, the Hungarian Tourism Agency played a significant role in the programme’s success, particularly through the promotion of the region’s cultural and tourism offer both domestically and internationally, as well as through the provision of measurable visitor data via the National Tourism Data Supply Centre (NTAK). The Ministry of Construction and Transport established the framework for cooperation with transport service providers, significantly contributing the environmental goals and accessibility of the programme.

In the field of film culture and moving image heritage, strategic cooperation with the National Film Institute Hungary (NFI) played a particularly important role. Within this framework, Veszprém-Balaton 2023 and the NFI jointly established the summer festival of Hungarian moving image, which became one of the most important film events in the region and in Hungary both during and after the title year.

The National Cultural Fund (NKA) provided complementary grant-based support for cultural community-building initiatives and civil society projects across the region. From the preparatory years onwards, the Ministry of Culture and Innovation undertook, under a cooperation agreement, to provide continuous international promotion of the region’s cultural, tourism and gastronomic values through the network of Liszt Institutes. This commitment was further reinforced in January 2024 by a new cooperation agreement supporting the legacy communication of the ECoC programme. In the same year, the Ministry of

Regional Development established the first regional office of the Hungarian Development Promotion Office (MFOI) in Veszprém, directly connecting the local ecosystem to European Union funding opportunities and facilitating the region’s accession to the ERRIN network.

Among the forms of government support, the reconstruction of Veszprém Castle deserves particular attention. Although it was not part of the direct budget of the ECoC programme, it nevertheless had a significant impact on the attractiveness of the destination and on visitor flows. Veszprém Castle is one of the city’s most important tourist attractions, with the vast majority of its buildings (82%, or 18 buildings) owned by the Archdiocese of Veszprém. The Government provided substantial financial support for the reconstruction of the historic ecclesiastical castle district between 2020 and 2026.

While this large-scale investment was implemented outside the formal framework of the ECoC programme, it was closely aligned with the programme’s tourism and heritage objectives both during the title year and beyond. Infrastructure works commenced in 2021 and continued throughout 2023, while certain phases of the reconstruction in subsequent years necessitated temporary closures and restrictions on visitor access. In the longer term, however, the project is expected to significantly enhance the appeal of Veszprém Castle, expand the areas accessible to visitors and offer a higher-quality visitor experience. As such, it contributes indirectly to the region’s tourism performance and supports the sustainable utilisation of its built heritage.

Financing the Transformation: From Bid Projections to Secured Resources

The financing of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme underwent a substantial transformation between the original bid phase and final implementation.

What had initially been conceived as a comparatively modest programme budget evolved into a significantly larger investment framework, reflecting both the increased strategic ambition of the project and the exceptional external circumstances that shaped the 2018–2023 period.

This transformation was primarily driven by the exceptional macroeconomic shocks that affected the entire implementation period. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the finalisation of the funding framework and created significant uncertainty in both cultural programming and investment planning. In the years that followed, the inflationary wave, the energy crisis and the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine further increased both construction costs and operating costs. As a result, the original financial assumptions set out in the bid book were no longer sufficient to cover the actual scale and cost environment of implementation.

In this context, the programme's financial viability depended on the mobilisation of substantial national resources. For a city the size of Veszprém, even with the contribution of regional partners, the original municipal financing capacity would not have been sufficient to absorb the cumulative impact of these external shocks. The Government of Hungary therefore became the decisive funding actor, ensuring that the programme could be implemented despite the radically changed economic environment. Under two grant agreements, the Government provided a total of EUR 184.12 million, of which EUR 109.28 million was allocated to infrastructure investments and EUR 52.29 million to the cultural programme.

As a consequence, the final financing structure differed markedly from the assumptions set out in the bid book. The planned municipal contribution of EUR 11.16 million,

representing 35% of the original budget, could not be maintained in full. This was partly due to nationwide fiscal measures introduced by the Hungarian Government under the COVID-19 state of emergency, including the temporary centralisation of certain local tax revenues and an increased solidarity contribution imposed on municipalities. As a result, the city's actual contribution was reduced to EUR 5.08 million, or 2.58% of the final budget.

Inspired by Marseille-Provence 2013 the participating municipalities paid a population-based contribution between 2021 and 2023, creating a symbolic but important regional co-ownership model. The partner municipalities contributed to a common fund on a population-based basis, paying €1 per inhabitant per year, while district-centre municipalities contributed **€2 per inhabitant annually** between 2021 and 2023. Between 2021 and 2023, regional contributions amounted to **€1.34 million**.

Additional supplementary funds were available by the National Cultural Fund in support of civil, community and international networking projects, while the National Film Institute contributed to the annual film festival. At the same time, the funding model was not based exclusively on government support.

Particular mention should be made of the European Union's **Melina Mercouri Prize**. This award, which may be used specifically for legacy-building activities, contributed to the operation of the legacy institutions managed by Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. and supported the operational activities of the post-title legacy period in addition to private-sector income streams, such as ticket sales and merchandise revenue.

Evolution of the Financing Structure Compared with the Original Bid Book Projections

(Calculated using the exchange rate of 30 June 2025: HUF 399.60/EUR)

Source of Funding	Bid book (m.€)	%	Secured Funding (m.€)	%
Municipality of Veszprém	11,16	35%	5,08	2,58%
National Government	12,70	40%	184,12	93,71%
Region	2,79	9%	1,34	0,68%
EU *	1,25	4%	0,11	0,06%
Private Sector Contributions	3,80	12%	5,82	2,96%
Total	31,70	100%	196,47	100%

(* excluding the Melina Mercouri Prize)

One of the most significant lessons of the financing model is that the combination of strategic overcommitment by central government and a decentralised regional funding approach created a resilient system. This framework proved capable of managing the uncertainties caused by the pandemic while simultaneously laying the foundations for the long-term development of cultural and community capacities across the Bakony–Balaton region.

The expenditure structure also changed significantly compared with the bid book. In the following expenditure overview, the resource utilisation of Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc., the Foundation and Veszprém 2030 Technical Infrastructure Development Ltd has been consolidated.

While the original application was dominated by programme costs, the final financial framework placed far greater emphasis on infrastructure. This shift should not be understood as a departure from the cultural objectives of the programme, but rather as a strategic extension of them: investments in cultural venues, public spaces,

tourism facilities and community infrastructure created the physical conditions for long-term cultural use and regional competitiveness.

Whereas programme expenditure accounted for the majority of planned spending in the bid file (63%), infrastructure investments ultimately became the dominant expenditure category, representing 55,62% of total spending. In absolute terms, infrastructure investment increased to €109.28 million, resulting in the creation of new cultural venues and public spaces, all of which contribute to the region's long-term competitiveness. Programme expenditure also increased significantly in absolute terms, rising from €19.97 million to €52.29 million. However, as a proportion of the overall budget, programme expenditure declined to 26.61%, reflecting the substantial growth of the total budget rather than any reduction in cultural ambition.

The share allocated to promotion fell from 20% to 4.57%, owing in part to more effective and integrated communication strategies, as well as to the inherent attractiveness of the newly developed infrastructure itself. Administrative expenditure increased in absolute terms, from €5.39 million to €23.19 million. This trend reflects the professionalisation of project management within a programme of significantly greater scale and complexity and also includes promotional services delivered in-house. The implementing team reached 40 people by the end of 2020. In the title year, employment peaked at 111 people. During the legacy period the organisation employed a total of 62 staff members as of 30 June 2025.

Operating expenditures	Bid book (m.€)	%	Final (m.€)	%
Programme	19,97	63%	52,29	26,61%
Promotion	6,34	20%	8,98	4,57%
Administration	5,39	17%	25,92	23,19%
Infrastructure developments	0,00	0%	109,28	55,62%
Total	31,70	100%	196,47	100%

Infrastructure development was the largest expenditure category in absolute terms, amounting to €109 million. The developments affected **112,600 m²** and resulted in **71 completed projects**, including 52 in Veszprém and 19 in the surrounding region. The significance of this spending lies not only in its scale, but in the principles guiding its implementation. Rather than pursuing greenfield development, the programme followed a strategy of heritage-led regeneration, revitalising vacant, underused or dilapidated buildings, industrial sites for long-term cultural, community and creative use.

The investments were based on three core principles: preserving the identity-bearing character of the existing built environment, applying sustainability standards, and ensuring long-term community-oriented use. As a result, infrastructure spending became an integral part of the programme's cultural logic: it created the physical conditions for future cultural participation, contributed to the renewal of urban districts, and strengthened the region's long-term cultural and tourism capacity.

The professional quality of this approach was confirmed by several recognitions. Ruttner House received an **ICOMOS award** in 2024, while the Garden of Communities installation in Gyárkert CulturePark, designed by Hello Wood, won the **Big See Wood Design Award 2023** and the **ArchDaily Building of the Year 2024** award. These achievements show that the programme delivered not only functional infrastructure, but also high-quality architectural and heritage-led interventions with lasting social and cultural value.



Activating the Region: Partnership Networks and Competitive Funding

One of the fundamental pillars of the successful European Capital of Culture bid was the **collective presentation of the values**, cultural diversity and community strength of the Veszprém–Bakony–Balaton region. For this reason, the regional partnership strategy during the preparatory years focused on building direct relationships with municipalities willing to participate openly and actively in the initiative.

Together with Veszprém, a total of **117 settlements** jointly implemented the VEB 2023 European Capital of Culture programme. Cooperation was established through formal agreements with local governments, civil society organisations and economic actors from the three counties involved – Veszprém, Zala and Somogy. Partners were eligible to participate in the various grant schemes and could also provide venues for programmes organised either directly by Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. or in co-production with local stakeholders.

Extending the bid to the Balaton and Bakony regions required an exceptionally complex approach to financial planning. The participating small settlements and larger towns possessed very different economic capacities, making it essential to strike a careful balance: while Veszprém remained the financial and organisational centre of gravity, regional partners were able to access meaningful development resources and visibility in return for their invested effort and symbolic financial contribution.

To achieve this, Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. developed an **entirely new, transparent system for grants and resource allocation**. The model made it possible to involve the most suitable partners, support long-term regional capacity- and capability-building, and monitor projects throughout their full lifecycle, including the submission of sustainability reports.

Transparency in the use of funds was continuously ensured both for programme partners and for the wider public. Partners were able to participate actively in programme

development and evaluation through formal regional workshops, roadshows, online consultations and in-person meetings.

Key Figures of the Grant Funding System

- 32 calls for proposals were launched, several of which included multiple sub-components.
- A comprehensive horizontal guidance framework and targeted training programmes were provided to project implementers to support the effective integration of horizontal priorities and cross-cutting objectives.
- A total of 1,092 applications were submitted.
- 779 grant agreements were concluded.
- The total value of funds successfully accounted for amounted to €147.45 million.

The official closure of the government-funded period—dedicated to the preparation, implementation, and the sustainability of the post-ECOC phase—concluded on June 30, 2025. This deadline facilitated the auditing and financial settlement of projects supported under the sub-granting scheme, while enabling VEB2023 Jsc. to undertake the requisite structural and operational transitions for the legacy period. Subsequently, the company's operations are sustained through project-based financing, proprietary revenues generated from operated cultural attractions, and municipal funding.



2. CREATING CAPACITY: CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE, INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES

The development of the cultural capacities of Veszprém and the wider region constituted one of the most significant, albeit less publicly visible, areas of achievement within the European Capital of Culture programme. Situational analyses conducted during the preparatory years made it clear that the qualitative expansion of cultural provision required more than the creation of new events and programmes. It also necessitated the preparation of host institutions, the enhancement of visitor-oriented services, improvements in both digital and physical accessibility, and a closer integration of cultural infrastructure with related urban services.

For this reason, the ECoC programme deliberately combined “soft” and “hard” development measures. Training programmes, mentoring schemes, audits and management systems were introduced alongside the creation and renewal of community and cultural spaces, transport connections and visitor services. Through this integrated approach, the programme not only delivered new cultural experiences but also generated lasting improvements in the operating conditions of the regional cultural ecosystem.

Preparing Cultural Institutions for Larger and More Diverse Audiences

The Institutional Capacity-Building Programme responded directly to the strategic recognition that the city’s cultural institutions needed to prepare not only their cultural content, but also their services and organisational practices for larger and more diverse audiences. Rather than providing simple supplementary funding, the programme sought to encourage a broader shift in institutional culture. Support for the development of English-language interfaces, language training, communication mentoring, international study visits and visitor-oriented service improvements collectively aimed to help institutions operate in a more professional, open and inclusive manner. A particularly important aspect of the programme was its focus on accessibility and inclusivity. Improvements were designed not only for tourists, but also for families, cyclists, international visitors and people with visual or hearing impairments. As a result, the programme’s contribution extended well beyond the immediate needs of the title year. It reinforced operational standards that align closely with the cultural strategy’s objectives relating to audience development, equal opportunities and service quality.

Making the City Visitor-Ready: Services, Accessibility and Orientation

The Welcome Veszprém Programme was a comprehensive initiative aimed at enhancing the city’s services and preparing it to welcome both domestic and international visitors. The project was preceded by a thorough assessment and review process through which we identified areas requiring improvement, the tools necessary to support these developments, and the organisations to be involved, both in the preparation and delivery of training programmes and among the participating stakeholders.

The project was implemented through two principal modules.

1. Preparation and awareness-raising training for front-office staff working in tourism service establishments, complemented by general European Capital of Culture programme and local knowledge training. The awareness-raising component focused on the needs of people with disabilities, families with young children, older adults, and visitors who do not speak Hungarian.
2. The development and expansion of visitor-friendly public amenities and services throughout the city, including accessible maps, public toilets, drinking fountains, family rest areas, bicycle service points and related equipment, wayfinding tools to support urban navigation, installations and digital tools promoting the ECoC 2023 programme, environmentally conscious winter protection of public sculptures, the procurement of ticketing kiosks, the creation and publication of a children's travel guide, and the modernisation of the reception area of the Tourinform office together with the digital enhancement of its operations.

Preparing Regional Partners for High-Quality Project Delivery

To engage and prepare regional partners, Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. launched an interactive roadshow series across the region during the spring and summer of 2021, visiting locations including Keszthely, Zámárdi, Városlőd, Zánka, Balatonboglár, Nagyvázsony, and Balatonkenese.

The objective was to provide direct information to local leaders and representatives of municipalities that had already joined, or were considering joining, the VEB2023 programme. Participants received detailed guidance regarding the conditions of participation, available funding opportunities and the professional support that the programme could offer. Through presentations and small-group consultations, programme experts addressed practical questions concerning the benefits of participation, available forms of support and the ways in which the programme could assist local event delivery.

The preparation of partners was structured around three complementary programme series:

- **VEB WITH YOU (VEB Veled) – 2021**
A seven-stop roadshow organised in locations across the region, including Zirc, Hévíz, Berhida, and Veszprém. The initiative was designed to familiarise potential partners with the details of the ECoC programme and encourage their active involvement. The thematic meetings fostered horizontal cooperation between civil society organisations, cultural institutions and business actors, while laying the foundations of trust and shared identity required for the subsequent application and implementation phases.
- **Smarter Together! (Együtt okosabb!) – 2021**
A thirteen-session workshop series focusing primarily on practical skills in grant writing and project management. Participants gained knowledge in sustainable event management, communications, digital visibility, budget planning, and the integration of equal-opportunities considerations. The programme reached almost 160 organisations, as well as numerous individual participants, contributing significantly to the development of high-quality and feasible project proposals during the preparatory years.
- **Common Denominator (Közös Nevező) – from November 2021**
A four-part knowledge-sharing series showcasing good practices from previous and current European Capital of Culture cities through presentations delivered by invited representatives of ECoC host cities. Particular emphasis was placed on volunteering, audience development and crisis management. The series placed Veszprém's preparations within an international context while providing inspiration and valuable professional networks for local stakeholders.

These three foundational programmes were complemented by consultation services linked directly to the various sub-granting calls. These consultations provided targeted, project-specific assistance for applicants preparing funding proposals. In addition, horizontal mentoring

sessions supported successful applicants in implementing environmental sustainability measures, accessibility standards and visitor-friendly approaches in practice.

Diagnosing Visitor Readiness: The Tourism Audit as a Development Tool

The tourism audit conducted across Veszprém's key cultural institutions became a crucial element of the ECoC preparation process because it demonstrated that cultural content alone does not guarantee a high-quality visitor experience.

The audit revealed that factors such as visitor readiness, information provision, online presence, cross-promotional cooperation, digital development, the quality of partnerships and accessible and sustainable operations all play a decisive role in determining how effectively a city can translate its cultural offer into a compelling visitor experience.

Consequently, the 2021 audit evolved from a diagnostic exercise into an intervention programme through the initiative entitled 10 Months – 10 Challenges. Participating institutions received targeted professional support, development resources and practical tools enabling them to improve their operations systematically and incrementally.

One of the programme's most important achievements was the integration of visitor-oriented thinking into mainstream institutional development. Rather than being perceived as an external expectation, visitor-friendly operation became embedded within the culture of organisational improvement itself.

International recognition of this approach followed when the associated methodology was included among the Green Destinations TOP 100 Sustainable Tourism Good Practices in 2023.

Several participating institutions also received prestigious national and international awards. These included Family-Friendly Museum certification, while House of Arts Veszprém was selected by the European

Art Museum Award in 2023 as one of Europe's eight leading art exhibition venues. Laczkó Dezső Museum received the Museum of the Year Award in 2024, and Kabóca Puppet Theatre was honoured with the Hungarian Theatre Society's Grand Prize for Marketing in 2024.

Creating a Shared Digital Backbone for Programmes, Tickets and Data

The Tourism Management System (TMS) represented a systemic response to the digitalisation and coordination shortcomings identified through the tourism audit and may be regarded as one of the most significant information and communications legacies of the European Capital of Culture programme. The TMS was not merely a technological development; rather, it constituted an integrated digital infrastructure connecting programme recommendations, ticket sales, discount schemes and monitoring functions. In doing so, it simultaneously reduced the administrative burden on organisers, enhanced the visitor experience, and generated valuable monitoring data.

Fully operational following the title year, the development made it possible to share data-driven decision-support tools with external partners, thereby creating added value for cultural institutions across the region. Importantly, the system did not cease operation with the conclusion of the ECoC year. It has remained the foundation for the region's programme calendar, the operation of the Veszprém Card and forthcoming regional tourism cards, as well as the continuous measurement of the visitor economy, thereby contributing to the long-term enhancement of the region's tourism competitiveness.

The TMS also generates direct revenue through ticketing commissions, card-based services and promotional activities. Magnifying the region's tourism appeal, it can contribute to longer visitor stays and increased visitor expenditure and therefore exerts a multiplier effect on the local economy.

Embedding Inclusion, Sustainability and Visitor-Friendliness in Delivery

The horizontal objectives of the European Capital of Culture programme were of particular importance because success was not measured solely in terms of the number of events delivered or the scale of investments undertaken, but also by the extent to which the cultural offer became more inclusive, sustainable and socially responsive. In this context, visitor-friendly, family-friendly, equality-focused, volunteer-based and environmentally sustainable approaches were not supplementary elements of the programme but fundamental operating principles. This was especially significant from the perspective of the city's cultural strategy, as objectives such as audience development, community participation, accessibility and improvements in quality of life can only be pursued credibly when programme delivery and related services genuinely reflect these principles. ECoC achieved a dual impact in this respect. Firstly, these principles were embedded within its own events and activities. Secondly, the programme provided knowledge resources, mentoring and practical tools to its partners, ensuring that these approaches became a lasting part of the region's cultural practice.

Environmental sustainability went hand in hand with ecological responsibility and green thinking. Consequently, one of our principal aims throughout the ECoC programme was to minimise unnecessary environmental impacts wherever possible.

Public transport, selective waste collection, reusable cups, waste-reduction measures and merchandise produced from recycled materials were only a few examples of the many opportunities available for promoting sustainability. Our objective was to provide guidance for more environmentally conscious programme development, event management and organisational practice, the benefits of which we hope will continue to be felt across the region for many years to come. We also offered mentoring opportunities to our partners, presenting available solutions and sharing proven good practices. In addition, we supported investments in green event technologies that continue to contribute to the sustainability performance of regional events beyond 2023.

Visitors were actively encouraged to make use of public transport. Through strategic cooperation with public transport operators, timetable improvements and service enhancements were introduced at both local and regional levels. Those travelling to major events were able to purchase fixed-price return rail tickets from anywhere in Hungary for HUF 2,023 throughout the title year.

With regard to accessibility and equal opportunities, we sought to ensure that people with disabilities and their family members, older adults, families with young children and international visitors who do not speak Hungarian could all find suitable opportunities for recreation and cultural participation within our programme offer.

The family, youth and child-friendly dimension was based on the principle that a "child-friendly" approach should not be limited solely to dedicated children's programmes. Wherever possible, all events were encouraged to provide family-oriented services, such as baby-care facilities, family lounges and play areas.

The use of reusable festival cups became increasingly widespread at events, while organisers also introduced selective waste collection facilities at a growing number of festivals and cultural programmes.

An additional priority was the participatory and volunteer dimension, through which we sought to ensure that those living, working and studying in the region would regard the European Capital of Culture programme as their own and become active participants in its delivery. The number of our volunteers – known as Ragyogók ("The Shiniés") – exceeded five hundred individuals.

To support the implementation of these objectives, we established a set of standards and requirements that were applied across all ECoC-related events and venues during the VEB2023 programme period. Programme partners were actively encouraged to incorporate these principles into their own events and projects. We also considered it a priority to create, together with our partners, a shared knowledge base and practical toolkit capable of shaping attitudes and professional practice throughout Veszprém and the wider region.

Continuous feedback on the practical implementation of our horizontal objectives, and on potential areas requiring adjustment, was provided by our monitoring groups, known as Experience Commissioners. Drawn from across Hungary, they were given opportunities to attend programmes, gain behind-the-scenes insights and share their perspectives as visitors. Their observations enabled organisers to refine events and services in ways that were increasingly responsive to audience needs and expectations.

Putting Horizontal Principles into Practice

- 1) Visitor-Friendly and Equal Opportunities Dimension. Within this area, we focused on the needs of people with disabilities, older citizens, and international visitors speaking foreign languages, ensuring that everyone could participate in events on an equal footing. Sign-language interpreters at concerts, subtitled film screenings, tactile exhibition models for visitors with visual impairments, the use of icons in programme descriptions and venue signage, ramps to facilitate accessible mobility, and noise-reducing ear defenders for children are just a few examples of how this objective was put into practice.
- 2) Child-Friendly and Family Dimension. The child-friendly approach encompassed the family and youth dimension, with the aim that it should extend beyond the provision of dedicated children's programmes. Accordingly, baby-care rooms and changing facilities were established at numerous venues. In art exhibitions, for example, we sought to view works from a child's perspective and offered opportunities for younger visitors to enjoy exhibits by standing on viewing platforms, while some venues also provided restroom facilities designed for children's height and needs.
- 3) Volunteer Dimension. The principal objective of our volunteer programme was to bring local residents closer to cultural activities, the international community and visiting artists. Our partner in delivering the volunteer programme was the Veszprém–Balaton Region for Culture Public Foundation, which, as a non-profit organisation, became one of the region's leading actors in this field.

- 4.) Environmental Sustainability Dimension. In the spirit of environmental sustainability, we sought to strengthen the ecological responsibility of both visitors and event organisers. To this end, we placed particular emphasis on selective waste collection, the use of reusable cups, and access to drinking water and modern, sustainable sanitary facilities at events. Several of our merchandise products were made from recycled materials, and we published practical guidance and recommendations for event organisers on how to deliver environmentally sustainable events.

As travel to and from events is generally one of the most environmentally impactful aspects of event attendance, it was important to encourage as many visitors as possible to choose less environmentally harmful modes of transport. The ECoC transport strategy supported not only environmental sustainability objectives but also our visitor-friendly principles, as ensuring access to events without the need for private vehicles simultaneously promotes broad social participation and reduces environmental impacts.

Within the framework of a strategic partnership, we established a transport working group involving representatives of the Ministry of Construction and Investment, the MÁV–Volán Group and V-Busz.

As a result of this cooperation, both local and regional timetable improvements were implemented, while the introduction of two new ticket products facilitated access to our events and supported programme promotion. The 24-hour transport pass allowed unlimited travel within a single day on trains serving the Veszprém area, Volánbusz services and local V-Busz routes throughout the year. In addition, visitors travelling to flagship events could purchase return rail tickets from anywhere in Hungary at a fixed price of HUF 2023.

Unfortunately, our international public transport ambitions could not be realised. Neither the planned international coach service linking Vienna, Győr and Veszprém, nor the proposed railway connection between Bratislava, Győr and Veszprém were realised.



VOLUNTEERING IN FIGURES

501 registered
volunteers
(in total from 2021)



90 international
volunteers from
23 European countries
(in 2023)



122 active
volunteers
(in 2023)



3,243
volunteer hours
(in 2023)



27 events
(in 2023)



Building Social Infrastructure Before the Title Year

One of the most significant strategic achievements of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was its treatment of community building and public engagement not as supplementary activities, but as central components of the cultural strategy. During the preparatory years, a deliberate effort was made to establish the social infrastructure that would enable the programme to extend beyond city-centre institutions and festivals and develop into a genuinely regional and neighbourhood-based community process. This approach directly served the strategy’s objectives relating to community building and audience development, while simultaneously generating long-term social capital and a stronger sense of place attachment.

The foundation of community engagement was the **development of a volunteer base**. The Ragyogók (“Shinies”) volunteer programme was launched in 2020 during the preparatory period and operated in a structured form until the end of 2023. The initiative aimed not only to support events operationally, but also to actively involve local residents, strengthen the culture of volunteering, and establish a volunteer management system capable of operating sustainably in the long term. The programme was built upon two pillars: domestic volunteering, which by the end of 2023 comprised 501 registered volunteers, and an international dimension, which brought 85 short-term and 5 long-term foreign volunteers to the region through the European Solidarity Corps. In 2023 alone, volunteers contributed a total of 3,243 hours across 27 events. The Shinies played a key role in major events organised by the company and also supported programmes delivered by grant-funded partners. Particularly in settlements located further from Veszprém, project partners relied primarily on local volunteers to assist in the delivery of community programmes. This extensive volunteer network provided not only practical support but also the human face of the programme, making a substantial contribution to strengthening social cohesion and regional identity.

The first truly large-scale and exemplary initiative in community engagement was **the community planning project undertaken on the Jutasi Road housing estate**. During the six-month process (May–October 2021), planned infrastructure developments in the city’s most populous district—home to approximately one-third of Veszprém’s residents—were prepared with the active involvement of local inhabitants, with particular attention given to the running track and the renewal of neighbourhood centres. Through a three-stage process involving discussions, workshops and on-site consultations, residents and park users jointly shaped the future vision for the area’s green spaces. The investments were ultimately implemented on the basis of plans refined through public feedback, ensuring that the developments genuinely reflected community needs. The project delivered not only tangible infrastructure outcomes—including the 3,278-metre-long Jutasi Running Circuit, inaugurated in June 2023—but also acted as a catalyst: the experience and methodology developed on Jutasi Road subsequently inspired and initiated further community planning processes in other districts of Veszprém.

Opened in February 2022 on the Jutasi Road housing estate, the Jutasi Community Hub (Jutasi KözTér) became one of the programme’s most significant and innovative socio-cultural investments. Rather than functioning as a conventional, top-down cultural institution, it serves as a living model project for community participation and sustainable community development. Its operation is based on the principle that culture should not be delivered as a finished product from outside, but should emerge from the internal needs of the local community itself. The space functions as a civil society incubator, providing infrastructure and a secure operational framework for local associations, civil organisations and micro-communities, while a substantial proportion of its activities are organised by local residents themselves. In this way, the community becomes both the creator and the consumer of cultural content.

One of the greatest achievements of the **Jutasi Community Hub** has been its ability to break down generational barriers. The youngest age groups and families with young children

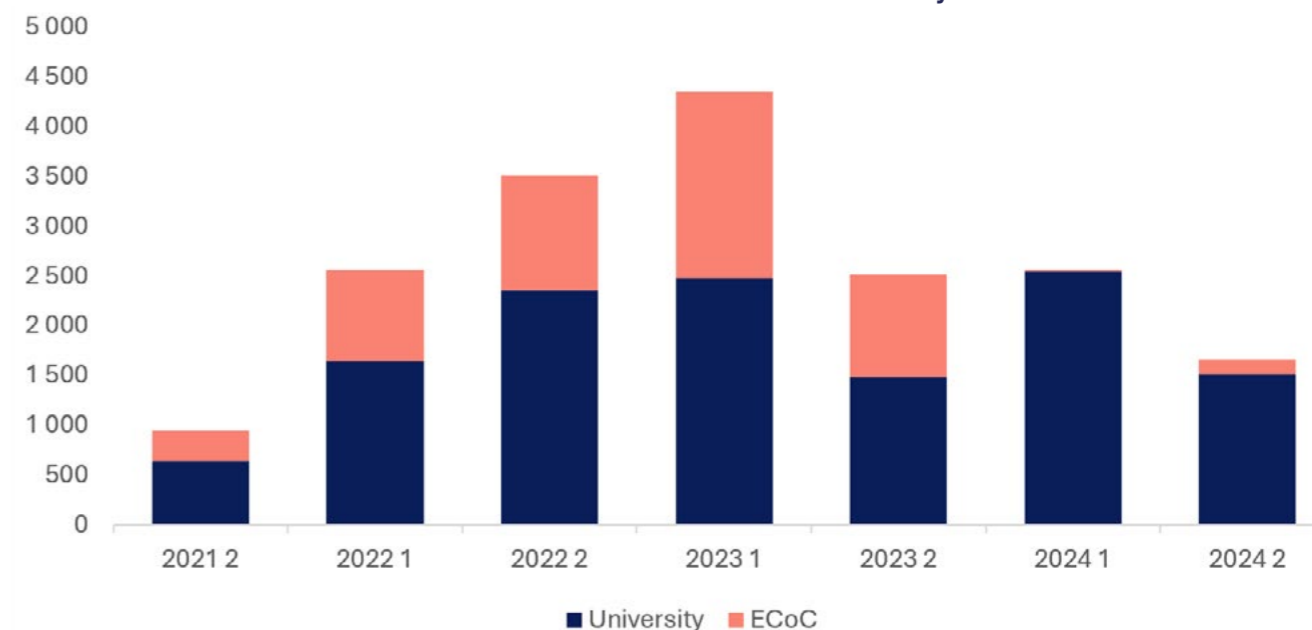
are attracted by programmes such as the music kindergarten and the creativity-focused Lego Club, which also provide valuable opportunities for parents to connect with one another. Middle-aged residents and those seeking intellectual enrichment are engaged through family workshops, public lecture series, foreign-language activities and local history discussions, all of which strengthen local identity and attachment to the neighbourhood. At the same time, the space responds with remarkable sensitivity to more challenging social issues. Dementia-prevention activities and trauma-support groups provide an essential mental health safety net for older generations and individuals experiencing personal crises, offering forms of support that are indispensable to the existence of a truly resilient community.

Jutasi Community Hub delivers ECoC’s community-engagement ambitions in three distinct ways. Firstly, it democratises culture: its free-of-charge access and location within a residential estate remove both financial and geographical barriers. Secondly, it creates opportunities

for local reflection: local history discussions enable the community of the housing estate to explore and interpret its own past and present. Thirdly, it leaves a sustainable legacy, as the community-organising knowledge and human relationships developed through the initiative can continue to sustain its operation over the long term.

Another outstanding element of the network of formal community spaces is Pannon Community Hub, established through a strategic partnership between the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme and the University of Pannonia. Opened on the university campus in September 2021 as a permanent, free-of-charge cultural and community hub, its primary objective was to bridge the divide between the university “ivory tower” and the wider local community. Whereas Jutasi Community Hub mobilised the social fabric of a residential district, Pannon Community Hub channelled intellectual and youthful energies into the everyday life of Veszprém. It also became home to the secretariat of the UNeECC network.

Share of Events at the Pannon Community Hub



The two spaces share a number of fundamental principles. Both are based on bottom-up models: in the case of Jutasi Community Hub, content is shaped through the active participation of local residents and civil society groups, while at Pannon Community Hub students and civic organisations play a similarly formative role. Both are intergenerational in nature: Jutasi offers programmes ranging from families to older residents, while Pannon builds bridges between generations through its “Generational Bridges” project, intercultural workshops, and board game clubs. Both emphasise sustainable legacy: Jutasi relies on the intrinsic motivation of local civic actors, while Pannon is built upon credited volunteering schemes and the university’s long-term commitment.

The creation of more informal outdoor community spaces likewise followed a participatory methodology. Through the VeszprémGeneration project, four uniquely designed meeting points were established with the support of mentors and coaches and through the active involvement of Generation Z. These spaces were primarily intended to encourage active recreation, physical activity, and healthy lifestyles. They are informal, spontaneously used environments where the emphasis lies on self-directed community experiences shaped by the needs of young people and local residents alike (such as picnicking, playing games and relaxation). Developed in accordance with the principles of bottom-up placemaking, these locations have become organic elements of everyday urban life, complementing the more formal indoor community venues.

In every case, the methodology behind the creation of community spaces was rooted in participation and local needs. In the Jutasi Road housing estate project, residents were directly involved in the planning process; the visual concepts for the Pannon Community Space were developed by students as part of the university’s ECoC course; while in the case of VeszprémGeneration, young people actively participated in shaping the concept itself. This ensured that the resulting spaces genuinely reflected the needs of their users rather than imposing externally conceived solutions upon them.

Finally, participatory elements and the **Experience Commissioners** programme completed the framework for social engagement. On several occasions, co-creation and open innovation methods drawn from the creative industries were employed: branding, naming and slogan competitions, alongside drama-writing and poetry-writing contests, enabled local residents and creative practitioners to play an active role in shaping the programme, thereby strengthening a sense of shared ownership. The Experience Commissioners programme provided a unique quality-assurance and feedback mechanism. Through an open recruitment process, ordinary members of the public were invited to attend and anonymously evaluate ECoC events according to a predefined set of criteria, including visitor-friendliness, organisation and overall quality of experience. This immediate and authentic feedback provided valuable input for the internal evaluation of pilot events and festivals during the preparatory years, while simultaneously involving audiences in shaping the cultural year and deepening participants’ attachment to the programme.

The City of Veszprém is divided into fifteen districts, each characterised by distinct population sizes, historical traditions, and civic organisations. Within the framework of the VEB2023 ECoC programme, a unique system of symbols was developed for these districts with the aim of strengthening local identity and fostering community cohesion. Heraldic experts, historians and graphic designers worked in collaboration with local opinion leaders to create visual emblems that both reflected the distinctive characteristics of each district and reinforced a shared sense of belonging to the city.

The symbols made their first public appearance during the 2022 Gizella Days and were subsequently featured at all major city events, including the official opening ceremony of the programme. On these occasions, district communities were represented by flags and scarves bearing their own distinctive symbols. This initiative was particularly significant because it increased the visibility of long-established and already active civic communities. These groups have long served as the natural driving force of district life and

continue to play a vital role in organising and sustaining local communities both before and after the ECoC year. Their regular representation throughout the ECoC programme and the introduction of a shared visual identity provided them with a level of public recognition that may have contributed to their further strengthening and to the long-term sustainability of their activities.

This multifaceted engagement framework, spanning volunteering, community planning, the creation of community spaces and participatory tools, represents one of the most significant legacies of the ECoC programme: a form of social infrastructure capable of operating independently and continuing to evolve long after the programme year has ended.

Aligning ECoC Delivery with Long-Term Cultural and Urban Strategy

The Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was not conceived as a standalone series of cultural events, but rather as the principal implementation framework through which Veszprém’s long-term cultural and urban development strategy could be accelerated and made visible. The city’s Cultural Strategy for 2018–2030 identified six overarching objectives: enhancing Veszprém’s attractiveness as a place to live, strengthening heritage preservation, developing the creative industries, increasing the competitiveness of tourism, fostering cultural community-building, and promoting audience development and arts education. In addition, the strategy established two horizontal priorities: the creation of a year-round cultural offer and the extension of the city’s cultural influence across the wider region. The European Capital of Culture programme was directly aligned with these ambitions. Through institutional, infrastructural, community-based and network-oriented interventions, it not only reinforced the strategic objectives but translated many of them into tangible and measurable outcomes.

The contribution of the ECoC programme can be understood across three closely interconnected dimensions.

First, it strengthened Veszprém’s cultural position. The programme introduced new artistic genres, activated new venues and engaged new audiences in both the city and the wider region. At the same time, its commitment to year-round programming substantially mitigated the seasonality that had previously characterised the cultural offer.

Secondly, the programme reconfigured the spatial framework of cultural activity. Underutilised locations in the historic city centre, housing estates and former industrial areas were revitalised; new community spaces were established; and cultural infrastructure development became increasingly integrated with tourism, transport and digital services.

Thirdly, ECoC significantly enhanced the social and community capacities of both the city and the region. It broadened opportunities for cultural participation, created new networks of cooperation, and established culture as one of the principal vehicles for local identity, civic engagement and regional cohesion.

In this sense, the European Capital of Culture programme did not constitute a parallel development trajectory; rather, it served as a concentrated implementation instrument for the city’s strategic objectives. The programme addressed many of the challenges previously identified within the cultural strategy, including the uneven temporal distribution of cultural activities, the limited involvement of peripheral urban districts and smaller settlements, the fragile position of the creative sector, the difficulties associated with retaining young people and the need to strengthen social cohesion and community engagement.

The cooperation model encompassing 117 municipalities, the creation of new cultural and community spaces, the implementation of creative and digital development projects and the continued operation of legacy institutions all demonstrate that the ECoC programme successfully transformed strategic intentions into a sustainable framework for long-term development and operation.

The same strategic logic was reinforced by the city’s music strategy and its successful designation as a UNESCO City

of Music in 2019. The foundations of the music strategy were developed alongside the preparation of the European Capital of Culture bid and were finalised in 2019. Its ambitious vision was that, by 2030, Veszprém would become the Hungarian city with the highest proportion of residents actively playing a musical instrument. Following Budapest, Veszprém became only the second Hungarian city to join UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network under the title of City of Music, and this musical vision became closely intertwined with the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme.

The strategy was not based solely on the city’s internationally renowned music festivals. Instead, it deliberately focused on the community-building and quality-of-life benefits of music, as well as on strengthening grassroots participation. Within this framework, widening access to musical participation, promoting early music education, supporting contemporary and popular music training, and developing creative infrastructure were not treated as isolated musical initiatives. Rather, they became integral components of the broader cultural strategy, contributing directly to audience development, the strengthening of arts education, the retention of young people, and the reinforcement of Veszprém’s cultural identity.

The following table assesses how the VEB2023 ECoC programme contributed to the implementation of Veszprém’s Cultural Strategy 2018–2030. Instead of listing the strategy’s objectives one by one, it groups them into broader strategic fields and evaluates the extent to which the ECoC accelerated implementation, created lasting capacities, or left further legacy tasks open. The assessment focuses not only on completed projects, but also on the operating systems, partnerships, audience-development tools and institutional capacities that support the city’s 2030 cultural ambitions.

The assessment shows that the ECoC functioned as the main implementation accelerator of Veszprém’s cultural strategy. Its contribution was strongest where it combined infrastructure, programme delivery, community participation and institutional coordination. In areas such as sponsorship, creative-sector retention, equal access and lower-capacity regional participation, the programme created important foundations, but continued legacy work remains necessary.



Strategic objective area in the Cultural Strategy	ECoC contribution and evidence	Assessment of contribution to 2030 objectives
Cultural asset mapping and heritage-based identity	The ECoC helped activate Veszprém’s cultural value base rather than merely document it. Strategic preparation, the tourism audit, institutional surveys, community planning and programme development contributed to a more operational understanding of heritage, built environment, neighbourhood identities and creative assets. Projects such as Castle-related developments, Street Management, Private Veszprém, district symbols, Jutasi and Pannon Community Hubs, House of Arts programmes and local history initiatives connected cultural values to everyday use and public visibility.	Substantially fulfilled. The ECoC turned cultural asset mapping into an active development method. The next task is to maintain this knowledge as a living cultural inventory linked to programming, visitor information and community identity.
Cultural quarter, creative infrastructure and urban regeneration	The renewal and activation of former industrial, institutional and underused spaces produced new cultural infrastructure, including CODE, CODE Creator, Dungeon Visitor Centre, Hangár Popular Music Centre, FOTON, Ruttner House, ActiCity, Gyárkert, renewed public spaces and parks. The Street Management programme added a further layer by supporting multi-purpose hospitality venues with extended opening hours, helping to keep the historic centre active beyond event times and strengthening everyday street-level cultural life. The opening of university sports fields toward the city park also broadened the cultural-quarter logic by connecting recreation, student life, public space and active urban use.	Strongly fulfilled. The cultural quarter concept was implemented as a network of renewed cultural, digital, music and community venues rather than as one bounded district. The legacy task is to ensure coherent programming and audience flow between these sites.
Modernising cultural financing and support systems	The programme introduced a large-scale transparent grant and resource allocation system: 32 calls, 779 grant agreements. It supported institutions, municipalities, civil actors, creative communities and smaller settlements. The mini-grants scheme created an accessible micro-funding model with simplified application, pre-financing and community-based jurying. International cultural partnerships also added project-based financial support: EUNIC and EU-Japan Fest collaborations brought targeted resources to specific artistic, residency, mobility and cultural diplomacy projects, while the related proposal-writing seminars, Creative Europe Desk and MFOI cooperation and professional networking workshops strengthened local actors’ capacity to identify, apply for and manage European funding opportunities more effectively.	Strongly fulfilled during the programme period. The main legacy challenge is maintaining smaller-scale funding tools, sponsor development and EU project-generation capacity after extraordinary public funding recedes.

Veszprém brand, cultural profile and professional marketing	The ECoC clarified Veszprém's cultural profile around creativity, music, heritage, digital culture, public-space renewal and regional cooperation. The Spark/Shine identity, international communication, roadshows, media work, flagship events and coherent visual language strengthened the Veszprém brand. Population research shows that residents increasingly associated the city with culture, visibility, pride and liveliness.	Strongly fulfilled. The city's image shifted from a primarily historic or tourism-oriented profile toward a more recognisable cultural and creative identity. The "Keep Shining" legacy narrative should continue to provide coherence.
Digital communication, audience development and data infrastructure	The ECoC created a shared digital ecosystem: VEB2023.hu, HelloVEB, CMS, digital programme calendar, Veszprém Card and future regional card logic. These tools supported programme visibility, cross-promotion, returning-audience analysis, cultural access and monitoring. CODE, CODE Creator, Fixir, and FOTON also contributed to the city's digital creative profile.	Substantially fulfilled. Digitalisation advanced significantly, but platform fragmentation and incomplete comparability remained challenges. Legacy work should focus on simplification, interoperability and shared use of visitor and audience data.
Institutional synergies, cultural governance and cooperation between sectors	The programme strengthened cooperation between cultural institutions, public services, civil organisations, creative actors, economic partners and municipalities. The tourism audit, 10 Months – 10 Challenges, institutional capacity-building, common ticketing and cross-platform promotion, Agóra's housing-estate work, the University of Pannonia partnership and the post-title role of Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. all contributed to a more networked cultural system.	Substantially fulfilled. The ECoC reduced institutional isolation and created new cooperation routines. Long-term fulfilment depends on maintaining coordination through the Jsc. and other legacy structures.
Creative industries, creative enterprises and professional artistic communities	The ECoC supported creative enterprise, artistic production and professional networks through CODE, CODE Creator, Hangár, DEMO Association, independent studios and rehearsal spaces, Próbatere Centrum, residency programmes, EU-Japan Fest collaborations, Ways of Earth, contemporary art projects, design and branding competitions, and creative-industry methods in public participation.	Partially to substantially fulfilled. The foundations of a stronger creative ecosystem were created, especially in music, digital culture, visual arts and design. Further support is needed for business development, retention of artists and sustainable creative-sector employment.

Festivals and events based on local cultural values	The ECoC strengthened and expanded locally grounded festivals and events, including Street Music Festival, Gizella Days, Kabóciádé, VeszprémFest, Balaton Wine & Gourmet, Hungarian Motion Picture Festival, Baroque Festival, district events, Long Table Picnic, Pajta events and mini-grant initiatives. Many programmes connected local heritage, gastronomy, music, public space and community participation.	Strongly fulfilled. The programme broadened the year-round and region-wide event offer while linking festivals more clearly to local identity and visitor experience. The legacy task is to maintain quality and avoid post-title contraction.
Intellectual workshops, artistic life works and accessible cultural knowledge	The programme supported artistic and intellectual production through House of Arts exhibitions, contemporary collections, Ways of Earth, publications, In Progress and programme book series, HelloVEB interviews, professional conferences, international knowledge exchange, CODE LAB, University of Pannonia cooperation and cultural research outputs. It also made cultural content more accessible through multilingual publications and digital platforms.	Substantially fulfilled. The ECoC created significant documentation, publication and knowledge-sharing outputs. A remaining task is to ensure long-term archiving, access and continued publication of artistic and intellectual legacies.
Regional cultural and educational centre role	The programme operationalised Veszprém's role as the centre of a wider Bakony–Balaton cultural region. It involved 117 municipalities, created grant systems and regional cooperation routines, supported Pajta, Kultháló, VEB Veled, mini-grants, regional workshops and stakeholder networks, and deepened the University of Pannonia's role in cultural and knowledge-based development.	Strongly fulfilled but uneven. The regional model was effective where local capacity and identity were strong. Lower-capacity settlements need simpler entry points, mentoring, small-scale funding and shared communication tools.
Local identity, community-building and cultural participation	The ECoC strengthened local identity through district symbols, Jutasi and Pannon Community Hubs, VeszprémGeneration, Ragyogók volunteers, Experience Commissioners, Long Table Picnic, community planning, housing-estate programmes and participatory formats. KRAFT findings show increased attachment to Veszprém and the region, stronger perceptions of civic vitality and higher satisfaction with community life.	Strongly fulfilled. The programme created social infrastructure and new civic rituals that can continue beyond the title year if supported by community spaces and coordination.

Equal access, youth, older audiences, subcultures and minority cultures

The programme embedded visitor-friendly, family-friendly and equal-opportunity principles through horizontal guidelines, Welcome Veszprém, accessible services, family facilities, low-threshold and free events, youth projects, child-friendly programming, VeszprémGeneration, Kabóciádé, SoundPlay, Jutasi and Pannon Community Hubs and community-based activities. Subcultures and alternative scenes were supported through Gyárkert, Hangár, DEMO, popular music, street art and youth-oriented cultural spaces.

Openness to Europe, twin cities and international cultural trends

The ECoC strongly expanded European and international openness through InterUrban, ECoC family cooperation, twin-city relations, Liszt Institute roadshows, EU-Japan Fest, EUNIC, European cultural institutes, international press trips, study visits, Creative Europe and Erasmus+ projects, UNESCO City of Music cooperation and international conferences. The programme also imported and adapted international good practices, such as community festivals, visitor-readiness tools and participatory methods.

Substantially fulfilled.

Access improved through services, programming and low-threshold formats. Further work should focus on consistent accessibility standards, affordability and outreach to groups with lower cultural participation.

Strongly fulfilled.

Veszprém became more integrated into European cultural networks and more capable of applying international trends locally. The legacy task is to convert visibility and contacts into sustained partnerships and EU-funded projects.

Having reviewed the strategic objectives and the shortcomings identified in the cultural strategy, it is equally important to examine the programme's specific intervention logic. One of the distinguishing features of the European Capital of Culture programme was that it was not conceived solely in terms of high-profile cultural events. Equal emphasis was placed on background developments and enabling measures designed to strengthen the long-term cultural functioning of both the city and the wider region. To this end, the programme organised its projects into nine thematic clusters. Beyond these clusters, however, a wide range of additional initiatives were implemented with the explicit aim of enhancing cultural capacity, institutional preparedness, audience development, partnership-building and service infrastructure. These also included programmes designed to deliver the programme's horizontal objectives. Collectively, these interventions laid the foundations for the successful delivery of the artistic and cultural programme.

In addition to the thematic clusters, a wide range of programmes and projects aimed at **strengthening the cultural capacities of both the city and the wider region**

were also implemented. These included initiatives specifically designed to **fulfil the programme's horizontal objectives**. In practice, these measures served as preparatory and enabling interventions, laying the foundations for the successful delivery of the artistic and cultural programme.

The nine thematic clusters were structured as follows:



MUSIC/CITY

We have an elusive goal: we want Veszprém to be the city with the highest proportion of people making music and singing. We don't want to measure it so much as feel it. Because, according to many surveys, cities with more musicians are happier.

Veszprém was awarded the UNESCO City of Music title in 2019, and since then, every day, it has been working to be worthy of this title. Veszprém is Leopold Auer's hometown – and this is a source of pride and also a responsibility.

We believe in building from the bottom up. Starting with musical experiences that appeal to the youngest, training professionals, providing inspiring venues for amateur orchestras and bands, offering unique educational and community opportunities for young and old, beginners and newcomers, breathing new life into choral traditions, and providing musical curiosities for the discerning and demanding Veszprém audience. Music here is not only something for us: it happens to us.



THE BUSY WORLD OF VESZPRÉM

No more boring Tuesdays! Veszprém has always been famous for its big festivals, when for days on end the city is filled with lively activity. But let's face it, weekdays were much less full of artistic encounters – until now! By finding partners in local institutions, enterprising young people and civil communities, we are creating big-city opportunities for cultural hustle and bustle, naturally adapted to Veszprém, preserving and enhancing the spirit of the place. New places and spaces open up that are not just about consumption – but create real community experiences, opportunities, conditions and models for all of us. Old and new public spaces are collectively designed, transformed and occupied. Institutions that previously seemed distant are opening their doors wide and we intend to make them a key part of city life beyond formal occasions. New opportunities for knowledge transfer and exchange are opening up in community spaces, where young people and adults alike can experience and learn through play and experience, whether it's drama, musical instruments, digital skills or media arts.

By rewriting and enhancing the everyday life in Veszprém, it is our unconcealed intention and hope that more and more young people choose to live in Veszprém, stay here or return. Because the city where it is good to be on a Tuesday night has something for every day.



REGION, ALIVE

The Bakony-Balaton region: an unusual density of unexpected good things. A landscape in constant motion, where stories, destinies, hidden treasures and cultural treasures await visitors at every turn. Joining our programme, not only the well-known places but also the hitherto quieter villages are making their voices heard – putting their preservative traditions and future-shaping aspirations into a new and exciting perspective.

The Lake Balaton shore emerges as a meeting place and a hidden backdrop for contemporary art outside the peak tourist season, and the villages of the Bakony region are brought closer to us by unleashing the creative energies of local communities. By 2023, we hope that the new regional networks and cooperation based on authentic and recognised communities of interests and values will be even more characteristic of the people living here. A fully-fledged network could be able to reposition the whole region, opening up new perspectives beyond 2023 and offering the specificity and uniqueness of a high-quality and vibrant cultural life.



FRAGILE LAKE BALATON

The well-being of Lake Balaton is a common concern. There are very few people who are not emotionally attached to this in many ways unique natural and social phenomenon, landscape and culture. Central Europe's largest lake is undeniably one of Hungary's most important regions, whose reality is shaped by countless factors and lies at the intersection of countless interests. In our programme, we address the extremely complex and fragile system of Lake Balaton and its surrounding ecosystem in relation to Lake Balaton and its catchment area.

Do we really know our lake and the landscape to which we are so attached? Are we capable of understanding and recognising our common interests, the interests of the lake, alongside our individual interests? Our projects on the local impacts of climate change, land use change, the unique landscape heritage of the monadnocks, or even the landscape damage caused by quarrying, all invite us to dialogue and thinking together. We want to raise awareness in our own communities that the health of the region's economy and society depends on the health of the ecosystem, and we offer opportunities and knowledge to transform landscape users into responsible guardians of the landscape.



OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY

Veszprém and the region's spaces are particularly suited to serve as a venue for special artistic actions, and to give a unique emphasis to the interconnection of nature – man – art. What is unusual for art can be the most ordinary space in our everyday lives. An experimental performance on a bus No 4, a play in the depths of a forest, street theatre on a beach, a contemporary literary festival in a Zala County village, modern puppet theatre for adults: artists performing in unusual places, working in unusual ways – where there is always a twist in the structure of the encounters!

The invitation to break out of traditional forms is of course extended to the audience: spectators become active participants in the experiments, and new connections are created between landscape, spectator and creator, while the audience becomes a community. By setting an example, these unconventional spaces also open up new horizons for local cultural operators, keeping the arts-infused everyday life of Veszprém and the region in a state of constant renewal.



BRIDGES

From the very beginning, our programme has aimed to connect people and strengthen the culture of coexistence: building bridges between the city and the region, between people who live here, people who work here and their friends from far away, between traditions and cultural environments of the most diverse social groups. Our aim is to promote through our programmes a better knowledge of each other, a fragile understanding and a sense of wonder. We want to live in a community where we can find words – or go beyond words – even when confronted with sensitive and difficult issues.

We believe that it is through personal experience that we can best discover the value of a small community within a majority culture that can preserve its own culture and traditions. It is not just coexistence, but real connection – whereby we are able to change our worldview by imbibing each other's ideas and amplifying each other's values.



REFLECTION

It is no coincidence that artists like to come to Lake Balaton, to the embrace of the monadnocks or the forests of the Bakony to find inspiration. The landscape and the built environment, the culture, traditions and rich heritage that can be found here not only strengthen our own local identity, but through the creative communities and through art, can also show the stories and values that have shaped the city and the region over the centuries and continue to do so today. We would like to show that tradition, the historical memory of a place, is not necessarily an object of nostalgia for the past, but rather a living heritage, a vital force for identity, and an integral part of our everyday lives and our personalities. With a contemporary eye, we look into the mirror, or rather, the multitude of reflections, in which we see our region's role in the history of European art, public life and politics. We recall the sometimes forgotten histories and faces of families, characters and micro-communities who could still be an inspiration, whose traces still have relevance in shaping messages today. We are learning to recognise our natural and cultural gifts through the historical mirrors and interpretations of the artists who come here, and we hope that motifs and domains that we have not yet been aware of will take shape before our eyes.



CELEBRATION

For us, bearing the ECoC title and celebrating the ECoC Year is a joyful occasion, a unique and unrepeatable opportunity to express the pride we feel and to experience the many things the region has to offer. It is a year-long programme that celebrates not only Veszprém and the Bakony-Balaton region, but also Europe – in some cases even bringing distant continents closer to us.

Because we believe that unique and unrepeatable experiences are not just for one city or one region, but for all of us. Everyone will take away something different; some will take away a lifelong concert experience, a dance until dawn, a meeting or a defining professional experience, while others will be sucked in by a spectacle almost out of the future.



BEYOND

Although the title of European Capital of Culture is officially awarded only to 31st December 2023, our programme is structured to help the intensive, innovative community of Veszprém and the region to change scale and develop, creating a solid foundation for the future beyond 2023. We would like Veszprém and the Bakony-Balaton region to be an attractive tourist destination on the mental map of the Hungarian and international public, not only in 2023 but also beyond, enriched with new horizons, mindset-shaping power and viable cultural achievements in the long term. And last but not least, we would like to create new points of reference and new perspectives for ourselves, for the people who live here: to bring to life places, spaces and model events that can give a new dimension to the everyday life of professional and lay communities. This is perhaps the most tangible expression of our initial aim: to launch a creative rural region with Veszprém as its cultural hub. To create a vibrant, inspiring, new yet long-standing cultural space that is unmistakably recognisable and attractive to European eyes.



3. MAKING THE REGION VISIBLE: BRANDING, COMMUNICATION AND INTERNATIONAL REACH

A coherent visual language was provided by the visual identity designed by Hidden Characters during the first half of 2020 and selected through an anonymous competition by a distinguished professional jury. The visual identity was built around the themes and symbolism of attracting attention, creativity, enlightenment and interaction. In doing so, it expressed the principal objectives of the programme: revitalising the cultural life of the city and the region and disseminating the values embedded within it. At the heart of the visual identity lay a layered symbolic system built around the interconnected concepts of the Spark and Shine. The Spark symbolised the starting point, the idea, inspiration and the catalyst. Within the visual identity, it appeared not as a single fixed form but as a continuously pulsating and expanding geometric system.

- **Intellectual enlightenment:** it symbolised the intellectual, cultural and creative renewal associated with winning the ECoC title. It represented the transition from darkness (obscurity) into light.
- **Local and historical references:** the geometric form of the Spark simultaneously symbolised, in abstract terms, an opening book (cultural knowledge), the propagation of sound and light in physical space and a crown in homage to Veszprém as the City of Queens.

- **Central and regional expansion:** within the logo, the branches of the Spark visualised the centre (Veszprém) and the cultural network radiating from it and connecting the Bakony–Balaton region.

While the Spark represented the initial energy, the slogan “Shine!” embodied the realised and continuously radiating cultural presence and the imperative of a lasting legacy. This concept transformed passive reception into active participation.

- **A celebration of creativity: the slogan** (“Shine! The Celebration of Creativity!”) conveyed the idea that the region’s hidden cultural and innovative potential should be brought to the surface and made visible to Europe.
- **Human dimension (the Shinies):** the act of shining was not presented as an abstract concept but as something that emanated from the people behind ECoC. For this reason, the programme’s volunteers were officially named the Shiners, emphasising that they themselves provided the light and energy of the events.
- **Temporal dimension (“Keep Shining!”):** following the conclusion of the ECoC year, the symbol evolved into the concept of “Keep Shining!”. This signified that the flame ignited by the Spark would not be extinguished

but would continue to illuminate the region through accumulated knowledge and institutional culture well into the future.

The communications strategy of the VEB2023 European Capital of Culture programme was founded upon a profound shift in both mindset and methodology. Rather than relying on the traditional model of one-way information dissemination, it embraced co-creation, integrating branding and the renewal of physical spaces into a single, cohesive approach. Within this framework, residents, civil society organisations and local creative actors became not passive recipients of communication messages, but active shapers and co-authors of the project’s visual and infrastructural identity. This process of co-creation unfolded on two mutually reinforcing levels: the development of symbolic elements and the revitalisation of public spaces, which together defined both the visibility and the internal narrative of the programme.

At the heart of the communications strategy were a series of ideas, naming and visual design competitions that created opportunities for community stories and local values to be directly embedded within the official brand. Rather than imposing externally developed agency concepts upon the region, the symbolic cornerstones of the programme were established through open competitions and broad public participation. Thus, the visual identity competitions of both the ECoC programme and Kunszt developed the foundations of their respective brands in collaboration with professionals and the wider public. Similarly, the naming competitions for Acticity and the Digital Knowledge Centre drew directly upon the linguistic creativity and local knowledge of residents, giving distinctive character to these flagship developments. At the same time, the volunteer programme’s slogan competition and the design of reusable festival cups incorporated the principles of everyday sustainability and community engagement into tangible branded elements. These initiatives employed co-design methods widely used within the creative industries, whereby participants contributed simultaneously as users and creators to the programme’s visual identity. This significantly strengthened both the sense of place attachment and the

feeling of collective ownership, as several key elements of the programme genuinely became symbols created by the community itself.

This symbolic layer of communication also left a visible and tangible imprint upon the urban fabric through the integration of public street art and university-level creative thinking. One of the most innovative pillars of this process was the unique talent development programme established jointly by ECoC and Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design within the framework of the City of Light course. Its most popular and iconic outcome became the mural of the long-eared owl in the historic city centre, designed by university students and drawing inspiration from the illustrative style of the 1950s, thereby bringing a contemporary aesthetic into the urban environment. Parallel to this, the international street-art competition organised by House of Arts Veszprém situated public-space communication within an even broader context, inspired by Italo Calvino’s notion of the city as a repository and bearer of desires and memories. The competition encouraged artists to explore the historical heritage of Veszprém and the Bakony–Balaton region and to respond to the hidden dimensions of place. As a result, surfaces offered by the city and local businesses were transformed by acclaimed Hungarian and international artists and collectives, including Alice Lotti and Matteo Ceretto Castigliano from Italy, Meyso Art from France, as well as the Hungarian collectives ALL CAPS Collective and Color Brigade. Previously neglected grey firewalls and concrete surfaces within the city centre were thus transformed into vibrant contemporary visual statements, providing a compelling example of how street art became a tool for the regeneration of obsolete urban spaces, the enrichment of collective visual culture, and, at the same time, one of the programme’s most dynamic and effective channels of communication.

The communications strategy of the VEB2023 ECoC programme—and, within it, the entire spectrum of communication channels—functioned not merely as an informational tool but as an active catalyst for regional transformation. In line with the priorities articulated

during the bid phase (the repositioning of the region as a European cultural and creative hub, the strengthening of local communities’ distinctiveness, and the overcoming of seasonality), the strategy employed the following channels in support of the narrative of “beyond charm and isolation”:

– **Community and volunteer channels (“The Shinies” programme):**

the volunteer network of over 500 people provided the communications effort with an authentic and approachable human face, overcoming perceptions of isolation by involving local residents as initiators of ideas and organisers. This channel directly supported the networking dimension of the programme’s pillar objectives, making cultural initiatives visible as projects owned by the community itself, while strengthening regional cohesion and rural revitalisation.

– **Multi-channel digital and traditional media (social media, local and national press, outdoor advertising):**

during the programme year, the strategy placed particular emphasis on intensive event- and project-based communication, highlighting the region’s year-round, high-quality cultural offer and thereby explicitly moving beyond both seasonality and the stereotype of a “charming holiday destination”. Digital channels and traditional public relations tools together created a narrative of internationalisation and networking, connecting Veszprém with the Bakony–Balaton region, as well as with audiences in neighbouring countries (Vienna, Graz, Bratislava, and Zagreb) and across the ECoC family.

– **International and tourism PR channels:**

study trips, ECoC partnership collaborations and the targeted engagement of foreign media reinforced the programme’s “European dimension”, demonstrating that the region was not isolated but rather an active participant in the continent-wide cultural dialogue.

The communications strategy of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme deliberately embraced a multi-channel presence. The objective was to reach the widest possible audience and ensure that different target groups could access programme content through the

platforms most relevant to them. Accordingly, alongside the central bilingual website (veb2023.hu), the online magazine HelloVEB.hu was launched, while the VEB2023 mobile application (for both iOS and Android) was developed, offering personalised search functions, calendar and map features, and online ticket purchasing. The central multi-site webmotor also operated the websites of a few key flagship projects.

Cumulative Web Traffic by Google Analytics (2022–2024)

Website / Platform	Total Users	Views
VEB2023.hu	353 600	2 200 000
ECOCpontok.hu	216 200	45 700
Mozgokepfesztival.hu	81 400	542 700
HelloVEB.hu	69 800	294 800
HelloRagyogok.hu	51 000	149 600
InterUrban.hu	49 200	3 400
Balatorium.hu	9 900	32 000
Tajteka.hu	2 200	30 800
Kulthalo.hu	1 300	5 800

Digital Reach and International Online Visibility

International attention was primarily reflected in the traffic to the central website (veb2023.hu). In line with the target audience of the international communication strategy, one third (33–35%) of foreign views originated from the German and Austrian markets (approximately 68,000 views in total), followed closely by Southern and Central European regions:

Geographical Distribution of International Views (veb2023.hu)

Rank	Country	Views	Share of total international traffic (approx.)
1.	Germany	~37 000	18 – 19%
2.	Austria	~31 000	15 – 16%
3.	France	~12 000	6%
4.	Romania	~11 500	5,7%
5.	United Kingdom	~11 000	5,5%
6.	Indonesia	~10 500	5,2%
7.	United States	~9 500	4,7%
8.	Slovakia	~7 000	3,5%
9.	Netherlands	~6 500	3,2%
10.	Italy	~6 000	3%
11.	Switzerland	~5 500	2,7%
12.	Poland	~4 500	2,2%
13.	Belgium	~4 000	2%
14.	Slovenia	~3 500	1,7%
15.	Spain	~3 000	1,5%
16.	Japan	~3 000	1,5%
17.	Türkiye	~2 500	1,2%
18.	Croatia	~2 000	1%
19.	Brazil	~2 000	1%
-	Other	~78 000	38 – 40%

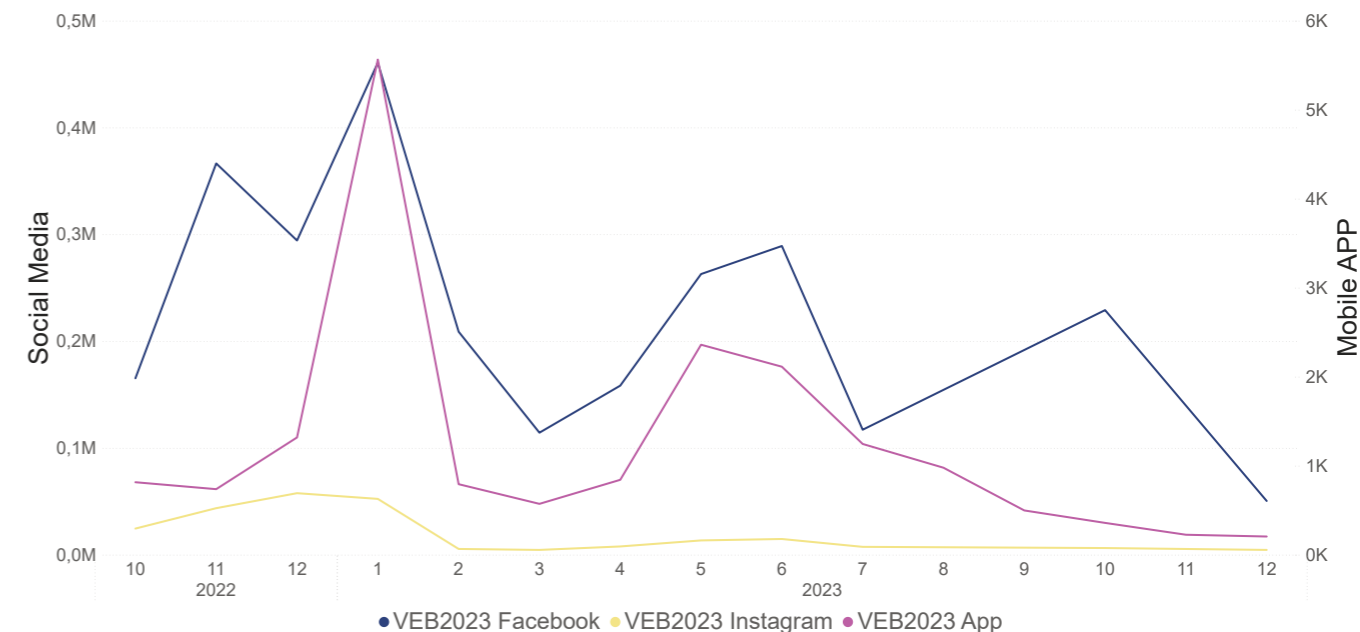
In addition, the programme operated a wide range of further digital platforms. Alongside the central VEB2023 and HelloVEB Facebook pages, several flagship projects maintained their own social media channels, while the programme was also present on YouTube, LinkedIn and TikTok. This diverse digital presence enabled the programme to communicate in a targeted manner with the broadest range of audiences—including local residents, regional visitors, international tourists and professional stakeholders—and to present content in the formats best suited to each platform.

At the same time, this extensive digital ecosystem created significant challenges in terms of measurement and interpretation. As not all platforms were operated directly by Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Ltd, and external project partners also communicated through their own channels, the implementation of comprehensive and standardised data collection (via GA4 and Meta) was not fully achievable. Consequently, the precise and comparable measurement of total reach and user behaviour was only partially possible. Moreover, the fragmented platform structure may have required visitors and interested audiences to navigate between an excessive number of separate channels, which in certain cases could have reduced the coherence of the user experience and diminished the effectiveness of communication messages.

Digital Engagement: Social Media Performance and App Uptake

To illustrate patterns of digital engagement, the reach of the central VEB2023 Facebook and Instagram accounts — which served as the programme's primary and most representative social media presence — was compared with the number of downloads of the official mobile application. While the app was originally conceived as a key channel for audience engagement and information delivery, download figures remained considerably below expectations. By contrast, the central social media channels attracted significantly higher levels of attention and interaction, indicating a clear audience preference for these platforms over the dedicated mobile application.

Social Media vs Mobile APP



Reaching Diverse Audiences Through Print and Physical Media

Printed publications were essential in ensuring multi-generational reach, as they constitute the primary, reliable source of information for digitally less active or older age groups, while premium image publications increased visitor engagement as physical souvenirs.

- General tourism materials: the image publication Flavours, Experiences, Moods, published in three languages (Hungarian, English, German), positioned the region's gastronomic and cultural appeal.
- **Project- and programme-level publications:** the comprehensive In Progress volume covering the entire process, as well as individually designed publications presenting specific projects and flagship programme elements in detail, e.g. the Half-time and closing Programme Book series.

- **Programme booklets:** monthly and bi-monthly booklets published during the 2023 programme year, **ranging between 96 and 126 pages**. These contained not only Veszprém's but the entire region's integrated offer. The publications were distributed in **outstanding print runs of between 20,000 and 50,000 copies**, delivered to the letterboxes of residents in Veszprém and to visitors arriving in the destination; during the peak summer season they were also produced in fully bilingual (Hungarian and English) versions, supporting orientation in beaches, hotels and Tourinform offices alike.

Multilingual printed publications

Title	Year of Publication	Language
In Progress	2021	HU, ENG
Moods, Flavours, Experiences	2022	HU, ENG DE
Monthly, bimonthly Programme Booklets in 2023	2023	HU, ENG
ECoC Programme Book Album (5 volumes)	2024	HU, ENG

Physical visibility was enriched, among other things, by selfie points installed in Veszprém's city centre, pop-up installations, welcome signs in the participating settlements, bespoke ECoC sails on Balaton yachts, as well as the full branding of the ferries operating between Szántód and Tihany.

The sale of sustainable merchandise made from recycled event banners was realised through the ECoC information point in the city centre (where students of the University of Pannonia provided duty service), via an online webshop, as well as through a roaming pop-up “merch truck” operating across the region.

The physical visibility of the ECoC brand and experiential consumer engagement (experiential marketing) was ensured by an extensive BTL and event deployment strategy. Its aim was to ensure that the brand addressed potential domestic and international visitors not only through passive advertising surfaces, but also through interactive, physical spaces.

Bringing the Brand to Life Through Festivals and Experience Zones

Mobile stands branded with the VEB2023 logo and the “spark” identity were systematically integrated into the most significant national and regional mass events.

Deployment locations included, among others, **Sziget Festival, Strand Festival, Valley of Arts Festival**, as well as wine and gastronomy festivals around Lake Balaton. In addition to their informational function, these stands operated as experience zones: through interactive games, VR presentations, and smaller concert and performance spaces, they brought the spirit of ECoC closer to festival audiences.

Positioning the Region in Tourism and Professional Markets

Access to domestic and international trade and press target groups was ensured through independent pavilion-based presences. The programme was presented at key professional forums, including:

- In Budapest, as guest of honour at the Hungary Travel Exhibition (2022).
- At the One with Nature World of Hunting and Nature Exhibition (2021) and Educatio International Education Expo (2023).

Internationally, at ITB Berlin tourism fair (2023), where multilingual brochures, digital presentations and direct professional consultancy supported the acquisition of international visitors.

Flagship events – Protocol, International Cooperation and Community Mobilisation in the VEB2023 Programme Year

One of the key factors in the success of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was that, alongside large-scale cultural content, it was also able to ensure broad social engagement and European-level visibility. The key communication and community pillars of the programme year—the official programme announcement, the ceremonial opening and the mid-term review—served this multi-layered objective: they strengthened the sense of ownership among local communities, demonstrated international partnerships and protocol significance, and created substantial visibility.

Official Programme Announcement and the 100-Day Countdown

One of the most important lead-up events of VEB2023, the **programme announcement**, was held in October 2022. This large-scale event no longer served purely communication purposes but was explicitly designed to engage local residents and future visitors. As part of the “100-day countdown” to the opening of the 2023 ECoC year, the event provided a comprehensive overview of the main programmes, projects and partner collaborations for the coming year.

Throughout the day, main stage performances and a street ball created a festive atmosphere. In addition, an interactive community installation and a **PechaKucha tent** were set up, where applicants and local creators could present their plans in short, dynamic presentations. On the same day, the VEB2023 information point on Kossuth Street was officially opened, which became one of the programme's central information hubs throughout the year. The event simultaneously demonstrated commitment to local communities and established the programme's continuous presence in the city centre during the year.

“Shine!” – Ceremonial Opening, Protocolary Weight and European Dimension

The official launch of the VEB2023 programme year took place between 19 and 21 January 2023. **The ceremonial Shine! Opening Event** and the programmes linked to Hungarian Culture Day began several days earlier, attracting audiences to the city centre of Veszprém with a diverse offer of music, dance, fine art, local history and regional gastronomy.

On 21 January, the highlight of the opening was an almost one-hour, grand-scale cross-arts production, composed of several consecutive music and dance segments, light projections, large-scale building projections and striking visual effects. The performance evoked the past and present of Veszprém in a magical, at times dreamlike, at times grotesque and humorous “urban fantasy” form – a symbolic gesture of rethinking and celebrating the city. The electronic music programme, running from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m., continued the experience in Óváros Square.

The VEB2023 Opening Ceremony won a Silver Award at the Eventex Awards 2024. Founded in 2009, Eventex Awards is now the most prestigious international awards platform in the world of events and experiential marketing. Two members of the jury awarded the Shine! Opening Ceremony 92 points out of a maximum of 100: Judith Wilson, Events Director at EVENTSBASE: “A fabulous integration of different art forms, technology, and different parts of the city. The logistical challenges were brilliantly overcome, and a great show was performed, with incredible results.”

On the same evening, the official protocol grand opening held at Hangvilla was attended by high-level international and domestic delegations: President **Katalin Novák** and President **Zoran Milanović** of Croatia were present and delivered speeches. Also in attendance were **Mátyás Maksi**, Acting Head of the European Commission Representation in Hungary, representatives of the main implementing partners, sister cities of the ECoC programme, and mayors from the region. This event clearly demonstrated the programme's European dimension and the highest level of protocolary support.

As the closing moment of the opening weekend, on 22 January, a sold-out lecture entitled The Great Hymn Story in the auditorium of the University of Pannonia, celebrated Hungarian Culture Day and the 200th anniversary of the national anthem.

Many of our bidding partners joined the opening with additional accompanying events, making the programme tangible across the city and region from the very first days.

Half-Time Festival – Five-Day Celebration, Community Activation and Wide Visibility

Between 14 and 18 June 2023, a five-day celebration was held in Veszprém to mark the first half of the European Capital of Culture programme year and to prepare for the remaining period. The Half-Time Festival simultaneously provided international artistic visibility, activation of local

communities, and free, broad accessibility. Participants arrived from all parts of the country and even from abroad.

Each evening, international stars performed on the stage of **Gyárkert (Factory'ard) CulturePark (Tom Odell, Meute, Morcheeba, Chet Faker)**; the concerts were free to attend, thereby maximising the programme's social accessibility. One of the largest community music experiences of the Half-Time Festival took place at Gyárkert: the mass flashmob entitled **City Rocks Veszprém**. Nearly 400 musicians played and sang together, with an audience of approximately 3,000 people attending the concert. The event clearly demonstrated the community-building power of amateur music-making and contributed to Veszprém becoming one of Hungary's centres of everyday music-making.

As the closing event of the Half-Time Festival, VEB2023 Jsc. organised the **Long Table Picnic**, inspired by the Kaunas2022 European Capital of Culture Courtyard Festival, where nearly **3,000 local and regional civil participants** sat at one table to spend Sunday afternoon together. This event particularly strongly demonstrated the involvement of civil communities and neighbourhood circles, as well as the commitment to post-programme sustainability; the event was also held in the years following the title year.

Shine On, Veszprém–Balaton! International Closing Conference – Lessons of a Season and the Future Vision of the Region

The official closure of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was marked by the two-day international conference entitled **Shine On, Veszprém–Balaton! Europe's Cultural and Creative Region: Lessons of a Season, the Future of a Region**. This event was not merely an exercise in stocktaking but also served to ensure the long-term sustainability of the processes initiated during the programme year and to strengthen the cultural and creative identity of the Bakony–Balaton region. The conference was organised by the University of Pannonia and VEB2023 Jsc., in broad partnership with the region, and brought together key stakeholders of the entire ECoC ecosystem.

The focus of the event was the evaluation of the direct social, structural and economic impacts of the ECoC programme year. Based on the monitoring research conducted by the University of Pannonia and the Institute for Advanced Studies, the main research findings and the social reception of the programmes were presented in detail. Particular emphasis was placed on how Veszprém and the 116 participating small settlements were successfully

Event	Delegation	Total attendance	Date
Opening Ceremony	ECoC Family representatives	79	2023. January 21.
	Twin cities from Germany	20	
	Ambassadors representing the EU Member states, Japan, Switzerland, Norway, the UK and Azerbaijan	30	
Long Table Picnic (part of the Half-time event)	Austrian Cultural Forum Budapest	4	2023. June 17.
Half-time event	ECoC Family representatives	23	2023. June 14-18.
	Visit of the Tartu regional team	27	2023. June 15-19.

shaped into a single integrated cultural and creative zone – creating a model regarded as exemplary in both national and international practice.

Among the participants of the conference were mayors and municipal representatives of the participating settlements in the Bakony–Balaton region, leaders of civil organisations implementing the programmes, cultural institutions and festival organisers, as well as Hungarian and international experts: urbanists, representatives of the creative industries, the European Commission and the ECoC family.

The keynote speakers and panel discussions of the two-day programme ensured a high-level professional discourse. Charles Landry, the world-renowned British originator of the “creative city” concept, delivered an inspiring lecture on the city-shaping power of culture. Vladimír Šucha, expert of the European Commission, placed the results of Veszprém–Balaton in an international context through an analysis of the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor indicators. Throughout the conference's additional presentations and panel discussions, participants gained a comprehensive overview of the impacts of more than 3,500 implemented programmes, the achievements of regional cooperation and the post-programme legacy. The discourse focused on the long-term strategy of cultural and creative region-building, the sustainability of funding models and the future role of culture as both an economic driver and a community-forming tool. The conference clearly demonstrated that Veszprém–Balaton 2023 is not a closed chapter, but the beginning of a new, long-term regional identity and cooperation model.

The lectures are available to watch on the YouTube channel.



International Communication

The international communication of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture was built upon the programme's overall marketing and communication strategy, as a complementary element aimed at strengthening international visibility and cultural cooperation. The strategy was based on the ambition for Veszprém and the Bakony–Balaton region to become Hungary's new cultural and creative hub in 2023, which we sought to promote prominently on the international stage, with particular emphasis on the flagship ECoC projects, the presentation of Hungarian culture and traditions, the international positioning of the region's creative industries and the enhancement of the region's tourism appeal.

Our geographical focus was primarily a 400 km radius, with priority regions such as the Carpathian Basin, Central Europe, V4 countries, Austria, Slovenia, Romania, Croatia, and Serbia, as well as major cities including Vienna, Graz, Linz, Bratislava, Ljubljana, Novi Sad, and Zagreb, with a particular emphasis on the Austrian and South German markets, where pilot projects and adaptable PR strategies supported targeted cultural and tourism positioning.

Our international communication strategy was developed in alignment with the horizontal messaging of the Hungarian Tourism Agency's brand wheel as applied in the Austrian market. In order to ensure effective international relationship-building and presence, we engaged tourism and cultural professionals for representation and established contact with the Hungarian Tourism Agency as well as numerous travel and inbound tourism agencies.

Throughout 2022 and 2023, we organised the following Austrian and South German visits, during which the presentation of the ECoC programme year was in most cases complemented by cultural and gastronomic content.

Presentations In 2022: Austria and South Germany

22 January Vienna	Cultural Capitals in the Region – Novi Sad 2022 and VEB2023 ECoC lecture and presentation Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst – Institute for Cultural Management
2 February Vienna	VEB2023 ECoC briefing for the leaders of Hungarian organisations in Austria
23–25 February Budapest	Central European Tourism Forum for Austrian and German travel agency executives
21 March Munich	South Germany Road Show I
7–8 April Stuttgart	VEB2023 ECoC InfoPoint opening, press event
28–29 April Linz	ÖRV Congress B2B presentations for tourism professionals
8–10 May Ulm	VEB2023 ECoC presentation and participation in the “Cultural Cities in the Danube Region” workshop
20–21 May Vienna	VEB2023 ECoC pop-up stand at the Acht Ungarn Festival, two-day B2C presentation
24 May Vienna	VEB2023 ECoC InfoPoint opening and press conference
6 July	Sommerstage der Destinationen, VEB2023 presentation for travel agencies, TOs and the professional press
1–10 July Ulm	VEB 2023 stand, presentation, games and concert as part of the International Danube Festival
17 September Vienna	VEB2023 InfoPoint opening, ceremonial start of the academic year, Association of Hungarian Schools in Austria
16–25 September Vienna	VEB 2023 podium, presentation opportunity and possible exhibition within Vienna Design Week
23–27 November Vienna	VEB 2023 cultural-literary podium and continuous VEB 2023 promotion within the Buch Wien Donau Lounge programme

In 2023 the following key international appearances were realised in Austria:

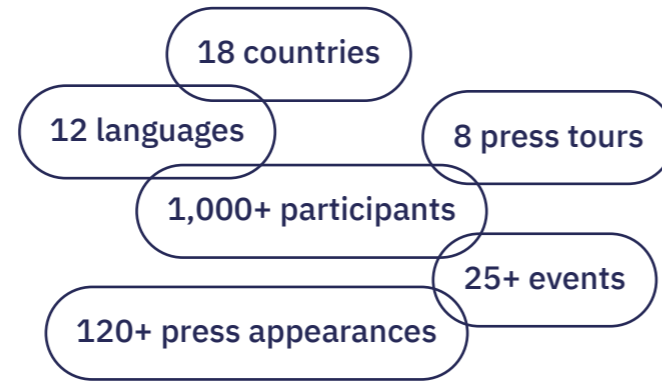
Date and city	Topic	Partner(s)
4 July 2023 Krems	Opening of the VEB2023 InfoPoint with regional government and ambassadorial presence	Lower Austrian cultural councillor; Collegium Hungaricum Vienna; Embassy of Hungary in Vienna
9 July 2023 Austria	VEB2023 presentation and prize draw for Corps Touristique Austria members, press and trade audience	Corps Touristique Austria; Visit Hungary
13–20 August 2023 Veszprém–Balaton region	ECoC press trip acquisition	Travel Continental
31 August 2023 Belgrade	South Slavic press conference	Liszt Institute Belgrade; Serbian Journalists' Association
5 September 2023 Vienna	Closing event of the Balaton Retro exhibition and Bujtor evening	Embassy of Hungary in Vienna; Collegium Hungaricum Vienna
8–9 September 2023 Vienna	VEB2023 InfoPoint and presentation at the Acht Ungarn cultural festival	AMAPED; Roundtable of Hungarian Associations in Austria; Embassy of Hungary; Collegium Hungaricum Vienna
22 September 2023 Vienna	VEB2023 presentation at Vienna Design Week	Vienna Design Week; Collegium Hungaricum Vienna
6–7 October 2023 Bad Ischl	VEB2023 presentation at the Skal Club and SKGT24 meeting	City of Bad Ischl; MEP Hannes Heide; SKGT24 programme office
18–21 October 2023 Austria	Participation and presentation at the ÖRV Congress	ÖRV
8–12 November 2023 Vienna	Participation, presentation, prize draw and SKGT24 / Timișoara dialogue at Buch Wien	Buch Wien; SKGT24 programme office; Collegium Hungaricum Vienna; Romanian Cultural Institute in Vienna
9 December 2023 Vienna	Gizella Choir performance at Vienna City Hall and VEB2023 presentation	City of Vienna Cultural Office; Gizella Women's Choir Veszprém
12 December 2023 Linz	SKGT24 meeting and presentation at the joint Skal Salzkammergut and Skal Linz session	Linz Tourism; SKGT24 programme office; Skal Salzkammergut; Skal Linz

Between November 2022 and July 2024, the programme successfully hosted twelve structured international delegations, complemented by several smaller ad-hoc visits, bringing journalists, editors and media professionals from twelve countries to experience the ECoC programme on site.

In quantitative terms, the initiative demonstrated solid reach and organisational capacity. Over 95 media professionals participated in the documented visits, with total hosted participant days exceeding 39. The programme achieved particularly strong activity in 2023, while targeted follow-up visits in 2024 extended its impact into the legacy phase. The geographic spread was well-balanced, with notable representation from Austria, Germany, Italy, Croatia, and several other Central and South-Eastern European countries.

Beyond the numbers, the programme proved highly effective in generating credible, diverse, and high-quality international media coverage. Outputs ranged from reports by major national public broadcasters (such as Deutsche Welle, ARD, RTV SLO, and TVR) to in-depth features in quality newspapers, including The Telegraph, as well as widely syndicated content from news agencies such as Adnkronos. Coverage consistently highlighted Veszprém's urban transformation, its cultural programme offer, architectural heritage and the long-term regenerative impact of the ECoC title. Several articles reached wide audiences through syndication, significantly amplifying the programme's international visibility.

In terms of legacy, the study tours produced lasting media assets that continue to support destination promotion beyond the title year. The follow-up visits organised in 2024, particularly the Croatian-led delegation, demonstrated the programme's successful extension into the post-ECoC period. The documented outputs and established media contacts represent valuable capital for the region's ongoing international positioning.



International Roadshow in Figures

During the 2022–2024 international roadshow, we presented in 19 Liszt Institutes. The Brussels launch event of the roadshow was preceded by presentations in Stuttgart and Berlin, followed in chronological order by Zagreb, Ljubljana, Vienna, Belgrade, Bratislava, Paris, Prague, Warsaw, Tokyo, Sfântu Gheorghe, Helsinki, London, Tallinn, New York, and Rome, and concluded in Istanbul as part of the Turkish–Hungarian Cultural Season.

As a result of the cooperation agreement signed with the Ministry of Culture and Innovation in 2024, we were once again able to appear in a locally tailored manner as part of the post-communication of the ECoC programme in Japan, Rome, Vienna, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Bratislava, Berlin, Belgrade, and Turkey.

As part of our in-person appearances in individual countries, our own colleagues, project managers, and in some cases cultural partner organisations delivered the presentations, structured as follows:

- moderated roundtable discussion or presentation supported by striking images and videos (the main focus of the presentations was always defined in a place- and interest-specific manner, with the assistance of staff from the local cultural institutes)
- opening and presentation of the HelloVEB photo exhibition showcasing the region

- as a complementary element, a cultural performance, where possible by artists connected to the region (e.g. folk dancers, small-scale musical performances)

finally, a reception and networking event featuring regional products and wines from local producers.

All presentations were open to the press, and in many cases accompanied by dedicated press events, which later enabled us to organise international press trips to our region. For each event, institutes also compiled guest lists from their own visitor networks, in most cases publicly promoting the events as well. Depending on venue capacity, attendance ranged from 40 to 150 participants.

Thanks to interpretation services, audiences were ultimately able to engage with our programmes and attractions in 12 languages.

Owing to significant media interest, a considerable number of articles were published internationally about our programme, alongside interviews, resulting in 127 press appearances.

The cooperation did not end with the roadshow events, as we were subsequently invited back to several locations; for example, in Stuttgart, Vienna, Bratislava, Paris, and Zagreb we received further opportunities to present, including at tourism conferences, book weeks and other relevant professional events, to mention only a few examples of continued collaboration.

International Relations

From the outset, the international strategy of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was built on a comprehensive and long-term approach. Its aim was to place the cultural life of the city and the region within a European context, and to integrate local stakeholders into international professional networks. The core idea of the strategy was that strengthening the European dimension is not a separate project, but a horizontal element of the entire programme, permeating all areas of work – from artistic

and creative teams through community engagement and capacity-building to operational and communications departments.

Implementation took place in two spheres: online and offline; for both tourism and capacity-building purposes. From the outset of the COVID pandemic, video-conference consultations, best-practice sharing webinars and international professional forums were continuously held. In parallel, study visits at home and abroad, guest speaker invitations and the international travel of VEB2023 staff ensured the development of direct professional relationships.

Following the established tradition of the “ECoC family”, the VEB2023 team participated on several occasions in the opening ceremonies of sister cities – such as Kaunas, Esch, Novi Sad, Timișoara, Bodø, and Tartu – as the opening event is a shared, key element of every cultural capital programme, where on-site experience and direct professional dialogue simultaneously supported the transfer of good practices and the development of Veszprém's own events and projects.

The programme consciously built on the internal network of the “ECoC family”. Regular professional consultations and project meetings were held with previous and future cultural capitals; to mention only a few examples, the teams of Kaunas, Esch, Novi Sad, Elefsina, Timișoara, Salzkammergut, Tartu, Nova Gorica, and Chemnitz were all close partners in experience-sharing and joint initiatives. In addition, with candidate cities such as Savonlinna, Oulu, Nitra, Trenčín, Žilina, Daugavpils, and Bourges, numerous experiences and best practices were shared, thereby making VEB2023 not only an active participant of the present, but also of the future ECoC network. In the monthly online consultations initiated by us, colleagues responsible for international relations within the ECoC family continue to regularly exchange programme and application experiences, significantly strengthening the shared knowledge base.

An important pillar was participation in international professional projects. VEB2023 Jsc. participated as a partner in programmes such as School of Participation (Erasmus+) and Libertalia (Creative Europe), while also initiating new partnerships that laid the groundwork for future joint professional work. In the Erasmus+ project “Youth creatives going digital”, for example, we worked with teams from Kaunas, Tartu, and Timișoara, while in the Libertalia programme international artistic labs were organised with British, Austrian, Finnish, and Swedish partners. In the field of volunteering, cooperation with the Tempus Public Foundation and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) enabled the hosting of international volunteers, as well as regular online coordination meetings among ECoC volunteer coordinators, ensuring knowledge exchange and international community-building.

Structural Deepening of Twin-City and Partner-City Relations

Through weekly operational coordination with the Municipality of Veszprém, the level of twin-city relations moved beyond rigid protocol frameworks and catalysed practical cooperation.

- InterUrban 2023: An intensive, bi-weekly alternating cultural showcase of Veszprém’s twin cities (and the regions linked to them). Priority focus cities: Sfântu Gheorghe (Romania), Tartu (Estonia), Bottrop (Germany), Rovaniemi (Finland), Tirat Carmel (Israel), Nitra (Slovakia).
- Gisela Days 2023: Active participation by artistic groups from five twin cities (e.g. Kunnan Pojat ensemble – Rovaniemi). Invited delegations: Tartu, Rovaniemi, Passau, Nitra, Tarnów, Sfântu Gheorghe.
- Outbound mobility and roadshows: Independent VEB2023 promotion at the Sfântu Gheorghe roadshow, participation in the Gladsaxe City Days in Denmark (the main prize of the competition draw was a trip to Veszprém), and at the European Weeks in Passau, Germany (where a former award-winning performer of the Veszprém Street Music Festival appeared).

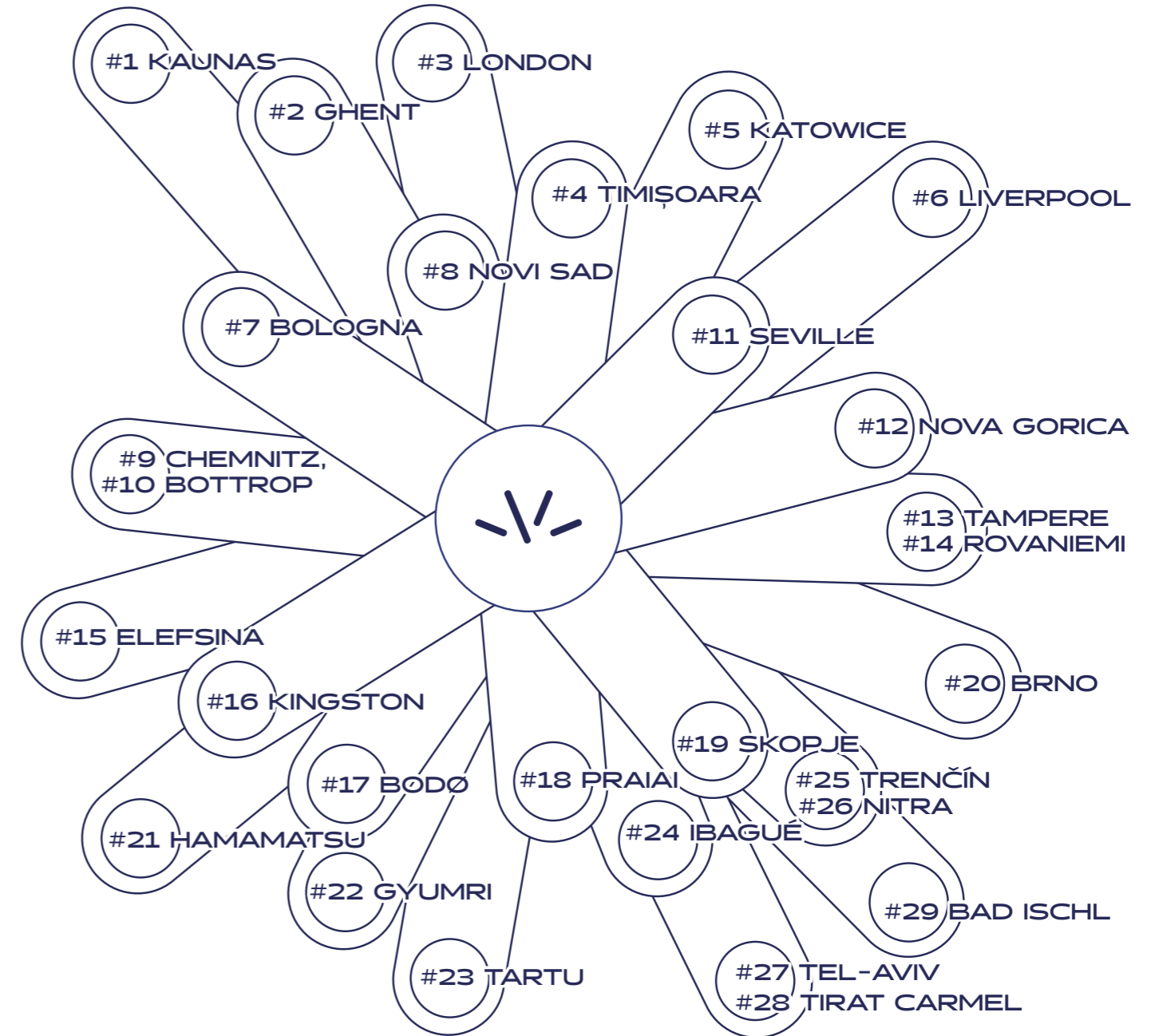
Key New International Partnerships and Networks

The network of relations was further strengthened by cooperation with EUNIC – the European Union National Institutes for Culture – Budapest cluster, within the framework of which 23 cultural diplomats from 15 countries visited Veszprém. In addition, ambassadors of France, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States, among others, also personally visited Veszprém and the region, bringing numerous joint projects and funding opportunities to local cultural organisers.

Through cooperation with the French Institute in Budapest, the Goethe-Institut, the Cervantes Institute, and further European cultural institutes, Veszprém professionals were able to present the programme at prestigious international events, and these relationships also enabled the implementation of several joint cultural collaborations and programmes within the framework of the ECoC programme (e.g. Night of Literature, Street Music Festival).

International EU Funding Partnerships (Capacity Building)

The strategy concerned not only representation but also capacity building. The School of Participation (Erasmus+), joint proposal-writing seminars with the Creative Europe Desk in Budapest, and international networking professional workshops all enhanced the preparedness of local institutions and professionals to become long-term active participants in the European cultural scene.



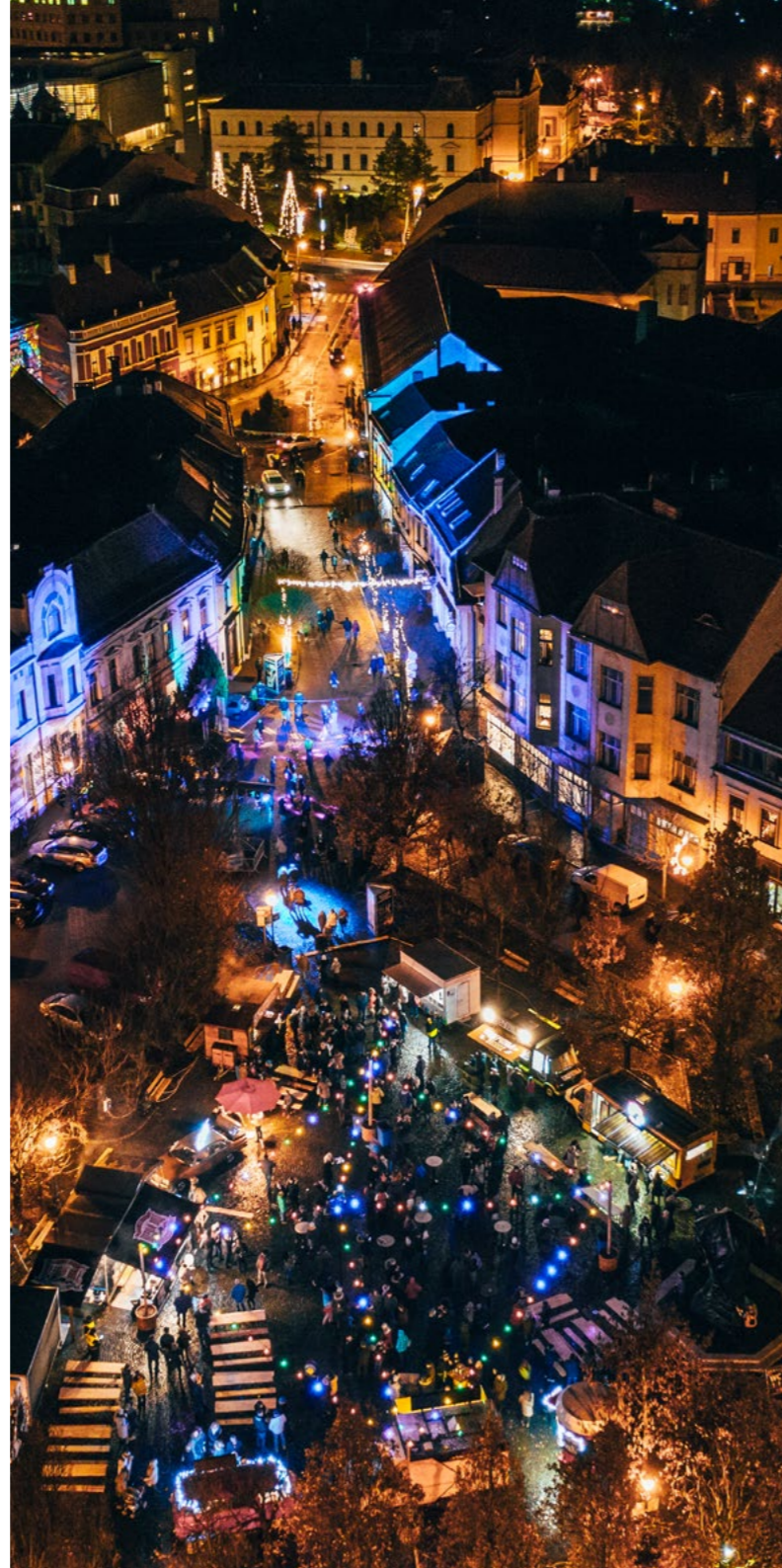
International Visibility

International visibility was strengthened by appearances at European cultural forums and festivals, such as the ECoC presentation in the Italian pavilion of Expo Dubai, participation in the Cratère and Avignon Theatre Festival in France, as well as Austrian tourism events, all of which contributed to the cultural and tourism promotion of the region. A key to international presence was foreign-language publications and continuous activity on international communication channels. In the second half of 2023, nearly two thousand subscribers followed our English-language newsletter, while outlets such as Bauwelt, Der Tagesspiegel, and Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun also published articles about our programme. In addition, VEB2023 specifically targeted the Austrian and South German markets with PR and marketing materials, presentations at Liszt Institutes, and participation in the Buch Wien/Donau Lounge literary programme.

The VEB2023 ECoC programme presentation held in Brussels before the European Parliament's Committee on Culture, as well as the Cultural Diplomacy Conference, enabled the involvement of further European Union partners.

As a result of these efforts, in 2023 more than one thousand official international guests were received in Veszprém and the Bakony–Balaton region, including ambassadors, cultural attachés, staff of Liszt Institutes, and journalists from numerous countries.

The VEB2023 established a particularly close relationship with the EU-Japan Fest organisation, within the framework of which Japanese artists and curators participated in exhibitions and residency programmes in Veszprém, while Hungarian artists were invited to Japanese cultural events and artist-in-residence programmes, thus initiating a two-way, long-term exchange process between the two countries.



Project Name	Partners Organisations	Year	Significance / Professional Content
Balaton Wine & Gourmet – Japanese module	Japanese Ambassador to Hungary, EU-Japan Fest	2022	At the inaugural edition of the premium gastronomic festival, Japan was the official guest country, with cultural and culinary presentations.
Sakura project	Minerva Alternative Learning, Réka Tóth-Vásárhelyi, EU-Japan Fest	2023	Exhibition of Réka Tóth-Vásárhelyi's Japanese Kokeshi dolls (titled The Cycle of Life), traditional Japanese garden construction, and cultural cherry tree planting.
Dance Festival – Contemporary dance	Pannon Várszínház, Hiroaki Umeda, EU-Japan Fest	2022	Successful Veszprém presentation of world-renowned contemporary dancer and choreographer Hiroaki Umeda's Accumulated Layout + Intensional Particle.
MusiColours – European Youth Music Festival	Fény Children's Choir (from Tokorozawa), EU-Japan Fest	2023	Travel support and major participation of the Japanese Fény Children's Choir in European youth music festival concerts in Veszprém and the region.
Contemporary Ceramics Exhibition	House of Arts Veszprém (MHV), Júlia Néma, EU-Japan Fest	2023	Júlia Néma's Ways of Earth I. + Liquid Earth exhibition, presenting intersections between contemporary Japanese and Hungarian fine ceramics.
InterUrban Hamamatsu cultural week	Hangvető, Haruhiko Koketsu, Shingo Wakaki, Yasuhiro Suzuki, Mendelssohn Chamber Orchestra, EU-Japan Fest	2023	A complex cultural week presenting Hamamatsu (a UNESCO City of Music like Veszprém): WAKEI project, Furoshiki workshop, Urasenke Tankokai tea ceremony, film screening, street installation, and joint concert with the Academy of Music.
Out-of-the-Ordinary Spaces interdisciplinary arts project	Forte Company, Akemi Takeya, EU-Japan Fest	2023	Co-production presentation of Akemi Takeya's progressive site-specific movement performance Lemonism.
Cultural promotion in Tokyo	Liszt Institute Tokyo (Japan), EU-Japan Fest	2023	Hello VEB exhibition and the 4th Hungarian Festival in Tokyo, promoting the Veszprém–Balaton region as a European tourist destination.
EU-Japan Fest sustainability legacy	House of Arts Veszprém, Kabóca Puppet Theatre, VVVokál / Fény Choir	2024+ -	Sustainable utilisation of the 2023 framework, professional research scholarships, and preparation of future exchange visits between the Fény Choir and Veszprém's VVVokál as well as the Kyoso festival co-organized with the Japanese Center and the House of Arts in 2025.

International Recognition and Awards

The outstanding international and domestic professional success of the programme series and the associated regional development initiatives is well illustrated by the recognition the project achieved across a wide range of industries – from architecture through sustainability to event management.

The flagship, monumental Shine! opening show of the programme year won a silver medal at the Eventex Awards 2024, one of the world's most prominent international competitions in experiential marketing, where its complex visual world received an exceptionally high score of 92 out of 100 from the professional jury.

VEB2023 ECoC placed particular emphasis on sustainability, also positioning the region as a green model. The joint “10 months, 10 challenges” awareness-raising programme with the City of Veszprém was selected among the global TOP100 sustainability success stories of the international organisation Green Destinations, recognising the complex urban project aimed at involving local communities and tourists alike, and encouraging a long-term sustainability commitment among both local service providers and visitors.



Implementation and Results of the Communication and Marketing Strategy

A three-wave, nationally representative (n=400) quantitative survey with booster subsamples (Balaton region, Veszprém county, Zala+Somogy) conducted by Insight Lab (CAWI methodology) tracked perceptions and impacts of the programme between 2022 and 2024.

The baseline wave (April–May 2022) showed a low level of awareness: nationally, only 11% were aware of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme, its

objectives and timing. In the regional and county subsamples the figures were somewhat higher, but the brand had not yet entered public consciousness, with associations reflecting rather general images of Veszprém and Lake Balaton.

The second wave (February–March 2023, during the first quarter of the programme year) recorded a significant, statistically meaningful increase: national awareness rose to 26% (a 15 percentage-point increase). In Veszprém county it increased from 44% to 65%, and in the Balaton region from 18% to 32%. In parallel, the attractiveness of the city improved at both national and regional level, reaching or exceeding the average of the cities under comparison. Spontaneous associations shifted in a positive direction, with stronger references to “cultural diversity”, “festivals”, “regional cooperation” and “developments”. Expectations regarding the programme's impact also increased: respondents were more likely to agree that, as a result of the ECoC title, the city would “become more attractive”, “become more vibrant”, “offer better programmes”, and “have a more dynamic community life”.

The third, closing wave (Q1 2024) found that after the programme year, brand awareness had further increased: 30% in the national sample, 44% in the regional sample, and 77% in the county sample. Associations further strengthened and positive perceptions continued to improve slightly. The final wave assessed not only awareness but also the programme's long-term impact and public perception. Public satisfaction was outstanding: a significant majority of respondents were able to identify concrete, personally experienced benefits (primarily the expansion of cultural offerings), and a very high proportion (89–95%) agreed that ECoC strengthened local communities, improved cooperation, and delivered long-term sustainable results.

The research waves show a dynamic, positive trajectory of change, and although the national-level results did not reach their maximum potential, the programme was clearly successful at regional and local level – in terms of awareness, image, and public impact alike. While the figures alone do not fully reflect it, the qualitative indicators within the research are particularly strong. The programme achieved clear success at regional and local level; the city's attractiveness (preference

index) improved significantly at both national and regional level, reaching or exceeding the average of the major cities under review. Image associations shifted from a previously general, tourism-oriented perception towards a more positive and specific direction: stronger associations emerged with “cultural diversity”, “festivals and programme offer”, “regional cooperation”, and “urban development”. A particularly valuable outcome is that the programme's long-term impact proved strongly positive among residents, with a significant majority of respondents able to name personal, tangible benefits.

Dimension	National level	Regional / county level	Overall
Raw awareness	Medium	Excellent	Mixed
Image & attractiveness improvement	Good	Very good	Successful
Shift in associations	Positive	Strong	Successful
Resident satisfaction & legacy	–	Excellent	Very strong
Overall impact	Acceptable	Successful	Regionally successful, nationally moderate

Media Communication and Media Coverage

The 37,679 mentions obtained from the Imedia media monitoring database, following relevant keyword filtering (removal of non-ECoC-related police, governmental, political and sports news), attest to the outstanding Hungarian press coverage of ECoC. Although monitoring capacity was limited to domestic media, this also included English-language news published in Hungary on platforms such as BudapestBusinessJournal.hu, HungaryToday.hu, and DailyNewsHungary.com.

Press coverage – annual breakdown (2019–2024)

Year	Number of relevant press mentions
2019	396
2020	2 043
2021	5 034
2022	7 291
2023	21 674
2024	1 241
Total	37 679

A mixed-methods media analysis confirms a consistently stable and positive media narrative. Between 92–95% of ECoC-relevant articles carried a positive tone, while the proportion of negative coverage remained below 2%. During the peak programme year (21,674 articles), the average ECoC sentiment score reached +4.2 (compared with +0.8–1.5 in the preparatory years), and even during the 2024 wind-down period it remained firmly in positive territory at +2.8. Qualitative coding identified six main thematic frames across domestic and international reference media (MTI, Index, 24.hu, Papageno, Turizmus.com, Kultúra.hu, regional press):

- 1. Success story and community building (~38%):** the programme presented as a successful, identity-strengthening process.
- 2. Legacy and future-oriented continuation (~27%):** strong focus on sustainable cultural life after the ECoC year.
- 3. Tourism and attractiveness enhancement (~19%):** moving beyond seasonality and positioning the region as an all-year destination.
- 4. Tourism and attractiveness enhancement (~19%):** moving beyond seasonality and positioning the region as an all-year destination.
- 5. Arts and new venues (~11%):** presentation of infrastructural investments (e.g. ActiCity, FOTON) and artistic legacy.

Logistical/practical side effects (~5%): marginal, neutral or mildly negative operational news (traffic arrangements, parking), which did not affect the core ECoC image.



4. UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT: DATA, EVALUATION AND LESSONS LEARNED

The impact of Veszprém–Balaton 2023 cannot be understood solely through event numbers, visitor volumes or media reach. Its significance lies in how these outputs translated into new cultural capacities, stronger regional cooperation, broader participation, improved visitor infrastructures and a more evidence-based approach to cultural development. This chapter therefore assesses the programme not only as a delivered event year, but as a learning process and as a catalyst for a more connected regional cultural ecosystem.

The chapter follows a layered impact logic. It begins with resident-level perceptions, because these provide the broadest indication of whether the programme period coincided with deeper changes in how people experienced the city and the region. It then moves step by step from social perception to operational evidence: what was delivered, how audiences participated, where visitor flows were concentrated, how specific projects generated impact, and what implementers and regional stakeholders considered sustainable or vulnerable.

This structure reflects the nature of the evidence base. No single dataset can explain the impact of the ECoC on its own: visitor numbers show scale, ticketing data reveal participation patterns, geolocation data capture spatial

use, partner reports document delivery, and surveys and interviews explain how residents and stakeholders interpreted change. The purpose of the evaluation is therefore not to privilege one method over another, but to connect these forms of evidence into a coherent picture.

The Research and Evaluation Centre originally envisaged in the bid book was realised through a network of time-bound expert partnerships rather than a single permanent unit. Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc., HÉTFA Research Institute, the University of Pannonia, the Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg, the Foundation for the Culture of the Veszprém–Balaton Region and Veszprém 2030 Ltd together provided baseline evidence, implementation feedback and ex-post analysis. This distributed model mirrored the programme itself: impact assessment was built from multiple perspectives, combining social, cultural, tourism, spatial and organisational evidence.

The table below therefore functions as a map of evidence for the chapter. It shows which research strands underpin the later arguments and how different methods complement one another: baseline population studies, visitor and festival surveys, sustainability research, media and awareness tracking, spatial and tourism data, and qualitative stakeholder evaluation.

Research / Study Title	Research Method	Partner	Year/period
Creative City, Sustainable Region – Population Survey 2017	Sample size: 1,200 completed questionnaires. The sample is representative by age, gender, and city district. The sampling population consists of Veszprém residents aged 16 and older who have a permanent or temporary address in the studied city.	Institute of Advanced Studies	2017
Cultural and Community Habits and Needs of the Ju tasi District in Veszprém in Light of the ECoC Programme – Residential Mobility	A representative urban sample of 5×300 people with proportional composition, based on the street register prepared by the Veszprém District Office, covering the population aged 18 and older.	Foundation for Publicity and Civil Society	2018
EVENT CARBON FOOTPRINT REPORT – Analysis of the Climate Impacts of Events in Veszprém-Balaton 2020	Questionnaire survey of festival organizers, suppliers, and visitors conducted on the occasion of 3 festivals.	Lehtonen – Sustainability Consulting	2020
Tourism Audit of Cultural Institutions in Veszprém City	Expert institutional survey, managerial interviews, and mystery shopping covering 9 institutions.	Innotime Hungary Kft.	2021
Sustainable Festivals and Events – Organizer Attitude Survey in the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 ECOC Region	Structured interviews and focus group interviews involving four festivals in 2022.	University of Pannonia	2022
Questionnaire Surveys Among Visitors of Festivals Organized in the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Region in 2022	Questionnaires covering festival visitor attitudes and sustainability issues; 875 questionnaires completed at 4 festivals in 2022.	University of Pannonia	2022
Exploration of Public Opinions Related to the Implementation of the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 ECOC Program	10+1 focus group discussions to explore the public reception of the program's first half-year.	HÉTFA Research Institute and Analytical Center	June–September 2023
Tracking Survey on the Awareness, Perception, and Impact of the ECOC Programme and Veszprém	Online self-administered CAWI questionnaire – nationally representative base sample (400), with a supplementary booster sub-sample from the Balaton region and Veszprém County population (210).	InsightLab, Mindshare Hungary	Q1 2022, 2023, Q1 2024

Research / Study Title	Research Method	Partner	Year/period
Quality of Life and Cultural Attitudes of Veszprém's Population	Online self-administered questionnaire.	University of Pannonia	2023
Gyárkert Visitor Questionnaires	Online questionnaire survey of Gyárkert concert visitors; 1,290 completions.	University of Pannonia	Summer 2023
Quality of Life and Cultural Attitudes of Veszprém's Population – Veszprém Neighborhood Friendly Circles	Online self-administered questionnaire.	University of Pannonia	2023
Sound Game Research: Musical Habits in Veszprém and Its Surroundings	Representative questionnaire sampling of 1,000 people in Veszprém and its labor market catchment area; 42 interviews with key actors in the regional music scene.	HÉTFA Research Institute and Analytical Center	2024
Workshop Series Titled 'Experiences, Results of the VEB2023 Program and the Future of Regional Cooperation'	Public workshop series announced for regional implementing partners; 5 occasions.	University of Pannonia	May–August 2024
Impact Evaluation of the VEB2023 ECOC Program	Expert in-depth interviews with implementers (6 people). Focus group interviews with implementers (3 occasions, 14 people). Online self-administered questionnaires with municipal leaders.	Institute of Advanced Studies	June–September 2024, May 2025
Creative City, Sustainable Region – Population Survey Kraft 2024	Sample size: 1,200 completed questionnaires. The sample is representative by age, gender, and city district. The sampling population consists of Veszprém residents aged 18 and older who have a permanent or temporary address in the studied city.	Institute of Advanced Studies	2024

Within this evidence map, the KRAFT population surveys play a particular role. They offer the broadest social baseline, comparing how Veszprém residents perceived quality of life, cultural opportunity, place attachment and the city's image in 2017 and again in 2024. This makes them an appropriate starting point for the analysis: before examining outputs, visitor behaviour or project-level mechanisms, the chapter first asks whether residents experienced a wider change in the city's social and cultural atmosphere during the period in which the ECoC became Veszprém's main cultural and urban development framework.

Population Survey Findings: Resident Perceptions, Quality of Life and Social Impact

The KRAFT Centre of the Institute of Advanced Studies Kőszeg (iASK) conducted two large-sample representative surveys among residents of Veszprém to assess how social, cultural and quality-of-life perceptions changed between the pre-bid period and the post-title legacy moment. The 2017 survey provided a broad socio-economic baseline for the Creative City – Sustainable Region concept, while the 2024 survey repeated and updated this approach in order to examine residents' perceptions after the VEB2023 European Capital of Culture programme.

Both surveys used approximately 1,200 completed questionnaires and representative samples weighted by age, gender and city district. Their shared KRAFT framework covered economy, governance, social vitality, culture, education, networking, and the natural and built environment. This makes the comparison valuable for tracing changes in residents' perceptions, even though the two studies should not be treated as a perfectly equivalent longitudinal panel.

The comparison requires methodological caution. The 2017 survey covered residents aged 16 and above, while the 2024 survey included those aged 18 and above; the later questionnaire also introduced some changes in wording, response scales and additional questions. The 2024 sample contained a higher share of employed

respondents and respondents reporting more favourable financial circumstances. These factors may explain part of the improvement in satisfaction and trust indicators, so the changes cannot be attributed mechanically to the ECoC programme alone.

For this reason, the KRAFT findings are best read as evidence of a broader transformation process rather than as a direct causal measurement of ECoC alone. They are nevertheless highly relevant where they overlap with the programme's intervention logic: urban image, cultural offer, place attachment, community life and the perceived vibrancy of the city.

Local pride and attachment strengthened markedly

In 2024, respondents gave 2,800 answers to the open question of what they feel proud of when Veszprém is mentioned, an average of 2.33 responses per person. The built environment was mentioned most often, with 824 mentions, or nearly 29.4% of all responses. Residents referred to the Castle, the Viaduct, the Fire Watchtower, the Monasteries and Gardens, Óváros Square, the Gizella Statue, Heroes' Gate, the Old Town, renovated squares and buildings, and the city's distinctive historic atmosphere.

The natural environment was the second major source of pride, with 579 mentions, or approximately 20.7%. Lake Balaton, the Bakony Mountains, good air, Gulyadomb, Laczkó Spring, the Séd Valley, Jerusalem Hill, Benedek Hill and Aranyos Valley were all named as character-defining assets. Culture ranked third, with 448 mentions, or around 16%, including museums, theatre, the zoo and the expanded programme offer. The pattern suggests that residents increasingly perceive Veszprém through the combined value of heritage, landscape, culture and everyday liveability.

Attachment indicators moved in the same direction. In 2017, 91% of respondents said they were rather or fully attached to Veszprém and 83% to the wider region; by 2024 these shares had risen to 98% and 99% respectively. The increase in "fully attached" responses was especially strong: +11 percentage points for the city and +28

percentage points for the region. Satisfaction with the local community also rose from 82% to 91%, while the share of respondents not planning to live in Veszprém in the long term fell from 11% to 3%. The proportion of those who said they "feel completely well in the city" increased from 53% to 71%.

Residents perceived a more dynamic, open and culturally active city

Several indicators suggest a stronger perception of local dynamism and civic vitality. In 2024, 90–91% of respondents described local residents as entrepreneurial, proactive, creative and innovative, compared with 83–84% in 2017. More than one hundred respondents explicitly linked this dynamism to young people, visible development and the abundance of programmes, which the ECoC year helped bring into everyday urban experience.

Environmental awareness and perceptions of mobility also improved. In 2024, residents attached around 10 percentage points more importance to environmental factors such as air quality, natural waters and groundwater, noise, waste management, protected natural areas, flora and fauna, and the condition of streets and pavements than in 2017. Satisfaction with public transport also shifted positively: the share of respondents fully satisfied with local transport increased from 17% to 42%, and with long-distance transport from 21% to 44%.

Cultural opportunities became more visible and personally relevant

The cultural dimension shows some of the clearest shifts. In both survey waves, more than 80% of respondents considered cultural and leisure opportunities important or very important. By 2024, more than three quarters were satisfied with Veszprém's cultural and leisure programme offer, especially theatre performances, high-quality music events, and historical monuments and memorial sites. The perception of gastronomic events and historical monuments improved particularly strongly: the share of dissatisfied respondents fell from 23% to 14% for gastronomic events and from 14% to 7% for historical monuments and memorial sites.

Open-ended responses provide the clearest indication of how residents interpreted the ECoC year. In 2024, 87% of respondents, or 1,046 people, identified mostly positive factors through which they considered the programme beneficial for Veszprém. The most frequently mentioned benefits were developments (520 mentions), programmes (328), increased visitor numbers (173), funding opportunities (151) and enhanced visibility (143). Further benefits included increased revenue, international visibility, a more vibrant city and stronger tourism attractiveness. Only six respondents stated unequivocally that the programme had not been beneficial.

The personal relevance of the programme is also important: 72.4% of respondents could name a specific personal benefit. The most frequent answer was the cultural programme offer of the title year, with 589 responses, or 49.08%, often expressed through comments about the abundance of events or the feeling that "culture came to us locally". Others referred to renewed urban atmosphere, city development, beautification, vibrancy and visibility. Residents also noticed the international dimension: international recognition received 35 mentions among perceived benefits, and agreement that the university enhances the town's international profile was higher in 2024 than in 2017.

What the KRAFT findings add to the impact assessment

The KRAFT results, read with the necessary methodological caution, strengthen the programme's broader impact story. They suggest that residents perceived not only more events, but a more confident, attractive and culturally active city. The ECoC period coincided with stronger place attachment, greater regional belonging, higher satisfaction with local community life, improved perceptions of cultural and leisure opportunities, and a clearer sense that Veszprém had become more visible beyond Hungary. In residents' own interpretation, the city was not only physically renewed; it became more lively, more recognisable and more strongly associated with culture, identity and local pride.

This resident-level evidence sets the social frame for the rest of the chapter. The following sections examine the operational, behavioural and spatial evidence behind these perceived changes: how the programme was monitored, what was delivered, how audiences participated, where visitor flows concentrated, and how specific projects and stakeholders experienced the programme in practice.

From Monitoring to Learning: how Impact Was Measured

The evaluation database of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 programme was built on four major groups of data sources, which together enabled a reliable and multi-layered exploration of both subjective perceptions and attitudes, as well as objective processes and behavioural patterns.

Primary research data comprised original empirical material collected using purpose-designed instruments. This included various survey-based data collections—such as representative population surveys, visitor questionnaires, CAWI-based image surveys, as well as festival audience and organiser questionnaires—alongside focus group discussions conducted among residents, university students, civil society actors, public service providers, and cultural organisations. These data primarily focused on participants’ perceptions, attitudes, levels of satisfaction, and subjective experiences.

Administrative and programme monitoring data derived from the internal institutional records and mandatory reporting systems of programme implementation. This category included administrative registers, reports on re-granted funding and mini-grants (covering, inter alia, attendance figures at funded events, volunteer hours, media appearances, and partnership activities), as well as ticketing data from programmes and cultural institutions. These sources provided an objective account of actual programme delivery and outputs.

The third pillar of quantitative analysis consisted of **official statistical data sources**. These included socio-economic and cultural statistics from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), accommodation and overnight-stay data

from the National Tourism Data Service Centre (NTAK) for the period 2021–2024, and census data. The latter were particularly important as stable reference points for measuring long-term structural changes, such as shifts in the proportion of the population with tertiary education or broader demographic trends.

Finally, **objective behavioural and big data sources** encompassed information derived from digital systems and sensors. These included mobile-cell-based visitor tracking data, analytics from online platforms, and crowd- and weather-related data collected via sensors. These datasets captured real-time, large-scale spatial behaviour and movement patterns, and thus proved particularly valuable for assessing the programme’s objective economic and visitation impacts.

The following table brings together the programme’s most important quantitative indicators. These figures should not be read merely as output data. Taken together, they show how the programme translated strategic ambition into regional mobilisation, expanded participation, international visibility, volunteer engagement, tourism flows and new forms of cultural access.

Table of key indicators

Group	Indicator (English)	Value	Source
1. Overall Programme Reach	Number of visitors/participants	5,749,285	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
	Number of performers at music events	9,679	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
	Number of visitors at music events	205,458	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
2. Music Programme	Number of standalone music programmes	1,972	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
	Number of international partners	436	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
	Participants at international Media Study Tours	107	Internal data collection
3. International Engagement	Individual members of international delegations	1,123	Internal data collection
	Total press coverage	37,679	Media report by Imedia
	Number of domestic media appearances	8,727	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
4. Media & Communication Reach	Number of international media appearances	3,158	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
	Website total views	3,304,800	Google Analytics
	Social Media total views	4,463,770	Meta

Group	Indicator (English)	Value	Source
5. Volunteering & Civil Society	Number of civil society organisations involved	1,363	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
	Number of volunteers	6,579	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
	Volunteer hours	41,475	Internal: Grant Management Platform (final evaluation reports)
6. Tourism & Visitor Statistics	Downtown visitor numbers in Veszprém (2023, full day)	1,582,439	Mobile network data (Hungarian Telekom), extrapolated to total population based on market share
	Year-to-year change in downtown visitor numbers (2024 vs 2023)	+20%	Mobile network data (Hungarian Telekom), extrapolated to total population based on market share
	Domestic visitors in Veszprém (2023)	40,933	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)
	Domestic visitors in the Region (2023)	2,216,074	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)
	Domestic visitor nights in Veszprém (2023)	115,328	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)
	Domestic visitor nights in the Region (2023)	6,016,833	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)
	International visitors in Veszprém (2023)	14,191	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)
	International visitors in the Region (2023)	647,073	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)
	International visitor nights in Veszprém (2023)	49,567	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)
	International visitor nights in the Region (2023)	2,304,325	Hungarian Tourism Agency (NTAK)

The overall picture is one of broad overperformance and strong regional mobilisation. Visitor and participant numbers, media visibility, music-related indicators, volunteer work and civil society involvement all exceeded the original targets. At the same time, the figures also reveal the limits of numerical evaluation. High outputs demonstrate the scale of mobilisation, but the programme's deeper impact becomes visible only when these figures are interpreted together with behavioural data, qualitative feedback and project-level evidence.

How Participation Was Measured: Events, Visitors and Mobility

The determination of the number of events delivered within the ECoC programme series and the measurement of visitor traffic involved considerable methodological complexity. The more than 500 organising entities exhibited highly heterogeneous organisational forms and administrative capacities, ranging from grassroots self-organised communities and civil society organisations through educational institutions, municipalities and churches, to commercial enterprises, established cultural institutions, and large-scale festival organisers.

Programme announcements were supported by the communication department of the operating company (Ltd), while monitoring system data were collected through several parallel channels: on the one hand, via the online programme calendar on VEB2023.hu, which ensured continuous tracking capability; and on the other, through detailed outcome data provided by grant partners—including visitor numbers, volunteer hours, media appearances, and partnership activities—which were accessible primarily through final evaluation reports.

The programmes were delivered in highly diverse formats, including free events, registration-based activities, and ticketed programmes. Although a unified online ticketing system for Veszprém, recommended by the tourism audit, was developed by May 2023 and led several local partners to adopt online ticket sales, many organisers continued to operate independent ticketing systems. External ticketing platforms typically provided only aggregated data and did not allow for granular analysis, such as visitor origin or return frequency.

Accordingly, during the preparatory years, Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. tested several pilot methodologies in order to develop adaptable visitor measurement solutions tailored to heterogeneous programme types and locations, with particular focus on free events.

Measuring Small-Scale Indoor Events

Within newly established community spaces where regular programming takes place, yet where data recording would otherwise impose a significant administrative burden on organisers, a low-cost and relatively reliable solution was identified in the form of a pressure-sensitive mat–based automated counting system. This method was introduced on an experimental basis at the opening of Jutasi Community hub. The sensor mat installed at the entrance registers every passage, with data transmitted in real time to a central system. By treating repeated crossings within a five-second interval as a single visit, the system achieved an approximate accuracy rate of 90%, while also providing real-time

traffic time series and peak-period analytics. However, due to its technical limitations, the resulting datasets were not suitable for final evaluative analysis.

Measuring Large-Scale Outdoor and Free Events

For open-air events of a larger scale, a more complex spatial methodology was required. One of the most comprehensive approaches employed was the use of mobile network cell data. By defining geographical polygons, this solution made it possible not only to estimate visitor numbers, but also to analyse origin, modes of arrival (car, bus, rail, bicycle), and temporal dynamics. The method proved particularly suitable for assessing the composition of regional and international audiences and the socio-geographical attractiveness of events, while also enabling estimates of transport-related CO₂ emissions. Owing to cost constraints, however, such datasets were available exclusively for pedestrian-accessible areas of Veszprém's city centre; consequently, suburban and district-level events could not be examined with comparable granularity.

In non-central areas, infrared gate systems were also tested for visitor counting, for instance at Film picnic and Jutasi Picnic. These paired sensors, installed at physical entry points, provided real-time flow data; however, their deployment required considerable human resources, and their accuracy proved limited. Following the two pilot applications, the method was not extended to further outdoor events.

At Jutasi Picnic, the counting gates were further enhanced with gamification functionalities: visitors passing through three adjacent gates were simultaneously able to participate in a voting exercise, selecting the gate corresponding to a specific development objective.

Moreover, the infrared gate system used at Film picnic effectively demonstrated the value of combining sensor data with meteorological information. In the case of the four-day summer open-air festival, a clear correlation was observed between attendance and weather conditions: colder or rainy evenings consistently produced significantly lower visitor numbers than favourable weather conditions. This

finding highlighted that apparent underattendance may not necessarily reflect programme quality but may instead be strongly influenced by external environmental factors.

Learning to Measure Sustainability: Carbon Footprint Tools and Data Partnership for Green Mobility

One of the key horizontal objectives of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was the advancement of environmental sustainability. Within this framework, a multi-stage learning process was undertaken to develop a practical approach and toolset for reducing carbon footprints, without imposing excessive administrative burdens on implementing partners.

In the initial phase, quantitative measurements were conducted. In 2020, the Event Carbon Footprint Tool was used on a pilot basis to assess the carbon footprints of three major festivals: the Veszprém Street Music Festival, Filmpicnic, and Kőfesz. The assessments were based on questionnaires completed by organisers, suppliers and visitors, covering categories such as transport, accommodation, catering, energy consumption and waste management. The results indicated that 60–70% of total environmental impact was attributable to participant travel and accommodation, while contributions from organisers and suppliers were significantly lower. At the same time, the study demonstrated that a fully comprehensive supply-chain-level measurement would entail a level of administrative burden that the programme did not wish to impose on stakeholders.

Two studies conducted by the University of Pannonia in 2021 (Sustainable festivals and events – development of visitor and organiser attitudes) clearly showed that both visitors and organisers demonstrated positive attitudes and a high level of environmental awareness regarding sustainability objectives. However, the research also highlighted a significant gap between intention and actual practice: among visitors, convenience often outweighed conscious behavioural choices, while among organisers, financial, logistical and knowledge-related constraints hindered the full implementation of green measures. The

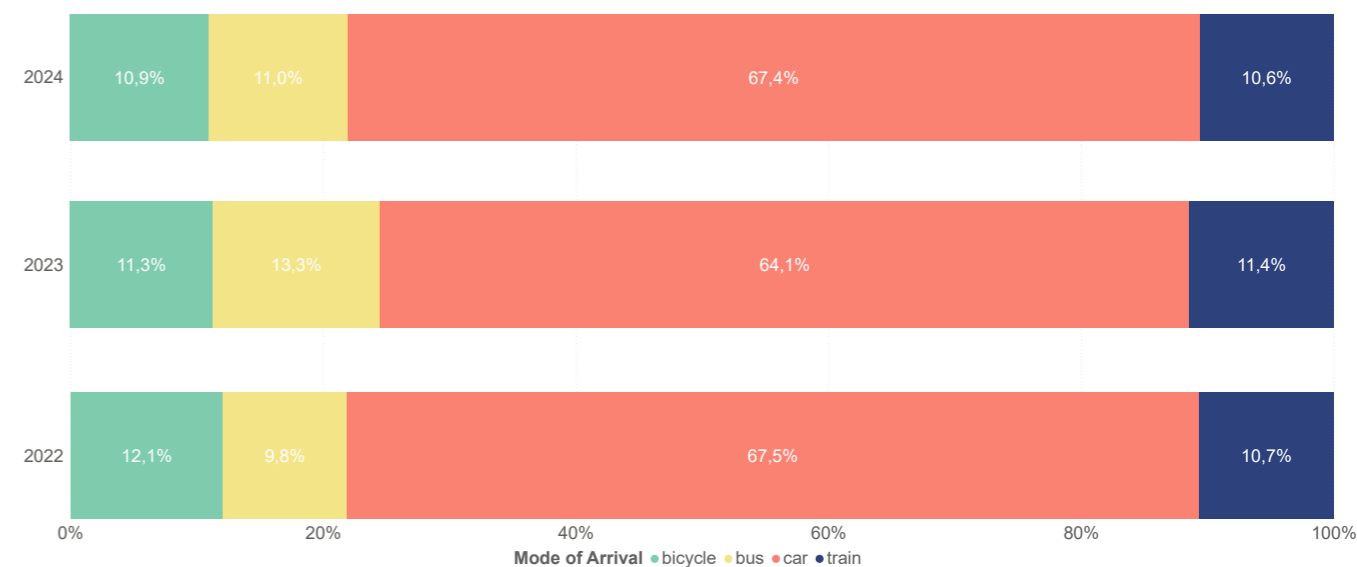
studies concluded unequivocally that awareness-raising and education—through training, simplified procedures and targeted incentives—are essential for effective implementation and for the creation of a long-term green legacy.

On the basis of these findings, the programme shifted away from fully comprehensive, event-by-event carbon footprint measurement. Instead, detailed guidelines and a structured set of criteria were developed for project partners, alongside the creation of a sustainable event management handbook, supported by mentoring sessions. In parallel, capacity-building among organisers and the introduction of practical tools became increasingly central.

The use of cultural instruments for awareness-raising and education proved particularly successful. In 2022, an interactive installation composed of colourful cubes, created by a local artist, was introduced, enabling visitors to estimate their own travel-related carbon footprint in an engaging, playful format. In addition, cultural programming was launched on local buses in Veszprém and on trains arriving in the city, thereby increasing the attractiveness of public transport while establishing a direct link to the ECoC programme.

In 2023, twelve flagship events received national-level public transport support. Furthermore, through the introduction of an ECoC transport day pass, the operation of shuttle services between venues and railway stations, and the deployment of additional capacity-enhancing services, the programme actively promoted sustainable mobility and provided a tangible example of linking cultural participation with environmentally responsible behaviour. Based on the departure stations of the ECoC transport ticket purchasers, interest in the programme was nationwide. In support of the programme, a total of 303 additional interurban services were operated during the year, which were used by 5,403 passengers. The highest levels of service occupancy were recorded during the Opening, the Gizella Days, and the Street Music Festival. At regional level, the Balatonalmádi BEAT, Zirc Ikon, and Inota Festival events also generated particularly high passenger numbers.

Share of Arrivals



A particularly significant data partnership was established to address the largest emission source—participant mobility—through a transport working group coordinated by the Ministry of Transport. This group included the Institute for Transport Sciences, transport operators and representatives of the ECoC programme. Its activities played a crucial role in ensuring accessibility of events. Through regular expert consultations and documented decision-making processes involving the responsible ministry and transport providers, national operators became active stakeholders in the programme’s mobility solutions, thereby strengthening both regional and national embeddedness.

This was the first full-year cultural programme in Hungary to receive such a high level of attention in transport planning terms, requiring an innovative approach to mobility design. Advance ticketing data from major festivals and flagship events enabled estimation of visitor origins, directly supporting the planning of targeted capacity increases. As a result, public transport services were spatially and temporally aligned with

expected demand, contributing to reduced congestion and an improved visitor experience. Car-free accessibility not only enabled leisure travel for guests staying at Lake Balaton accommodation (including evening leisure activities that may involve alcohol consumption) but also facilitated the inclusion of households without access to private vehicles.

The post-hoc analysis of Magyar Telekom’s cell network data confirmed the effectiveness of the applied approach: between 2022 and 2023, the number of visitors arriving in Veszprém by public transport or bicycle increased by 5% within a single year, accounting for 38% of total visitor traffic during flagship events. This shift clearly indicates that the data-driven transport management measures implemented during the ECoC period contributed to a higher share of sustainable mobility modes and improved accessibility of the programme. Following the programme year, with the end of the cooperation, the proportion of public transport users declined again in terms of modal choice.

What Was Delivered: Outputs, Reach and Indicator Performance

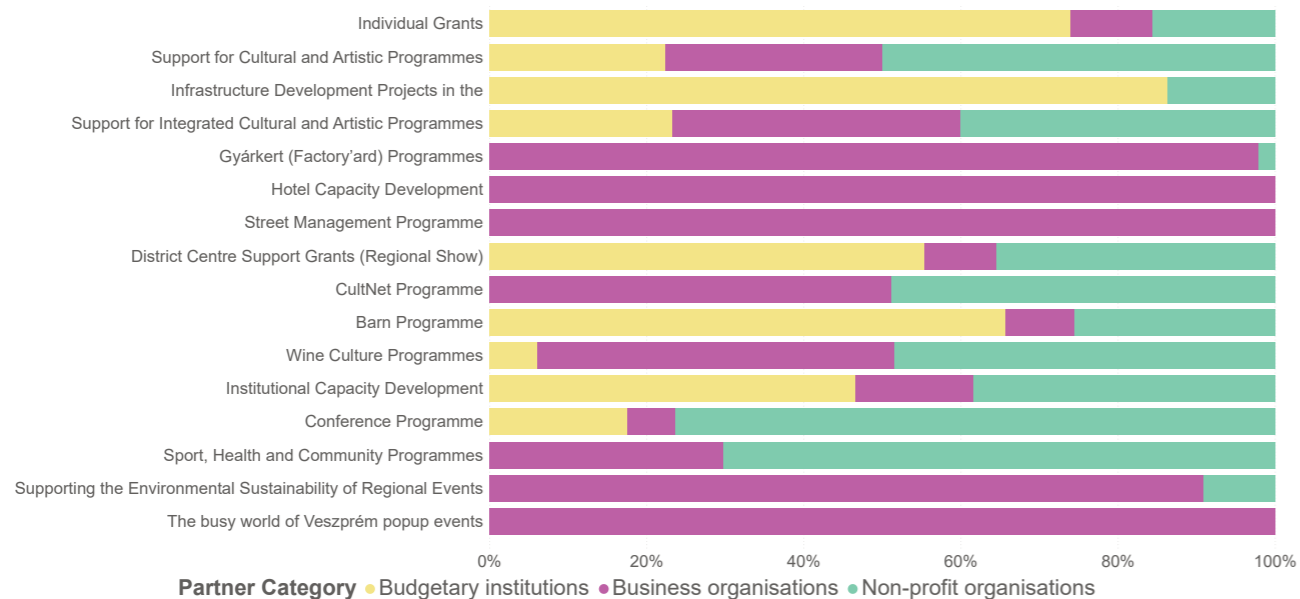
Programme delivery relied on a newly established, transparent grant and resource allocation system. Between 2019 and 2023, Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. launched 32 calls for proposals, attracting 1,092 applications and enabling a wide range of municipalities, public institutions, civil society organisations and enterprises to contribute to the programme. The system combined formal funding regulations with a digital grant management platform, making it possible to track projects from application to final reporting and sustainability follow-up.

Project partners reported on their committed indicators in final project reports. At the application stage, organisations selected relevant indicators from a predefined list and set target values; in the final reports, they compared actual results with these targets and explained any major deviations. The aggregated results therefore provide a useful overview of programme delivery, while the accompanying narratives help explain why certain indicators over- or underperformed.

The overall pattern is one of strong overperformance. This was driven by the catalytic effect of the ECoC year: intensive cooperation between projects, a positive and celebratory public atmosphere, committed local organisers, and an extensive domestic and international partnership network. These factors helped many projects exceed their original targets, especially in participation, media visibility, music-related outputs and volunteer engagement.

Concrete examples show how this overperformance materialised across different programme types. Music-related indicators were supported by large-scale and community-based initiatives such as Gyárkert concerts, the Street Music Festival, CityRocks Veszprém, Hangjáték, MusiColours and Mini Carnegie Hall. Child- and family-friendly outputs were strengthened by programmes including Kabóciádé, Jutasi Community Hub activities and the wider family-oriented offer embedded in the horizontal guidelines. Regional participation was driven by schemes such as the Pajta Programme, Kultháló, VEB Veled and the mini-grants system.

Granted Popsals by Type of Organisation



Performance Against Key Output Indicators

Indicator	Target	Result	Deviation from target (%)
Domestic media appearances	5,910	8,727	+47.7%
International media appearances	203	3,158	+1,455.7%
Social media followers	2,032,933	2,378,599	+17.0%
Information materials in foreign languages	10,219	12,168	+19.1%
Visitors/ participants	1,786,204	5,749,285	+221.9%
International visitors/ participants	49,784	53,164	+6.8%
Performers at music events	6,624	9,679	+46.1%
Visitors at music events	118,550	205,458	+73.3%
Standalone music programmes	1,404	1,972	+40.5%
International partners	383	436	+13.8%
Child-friendly programmes	2,867	4,050	+41.3%

Explaining Performance: Participation, International Reach and Volunteer Capacity

Final reports show that visitor performance was shaped by a combination of programme quality, communication, weather conditions, local embeddedness and wider economic circumstances. Underperformance was most often linked to adverse weather, insufficiently targeted communication, inflation-related caution in cultural spending, or difficulties in reaching intended audiences. Overperformance, by contrast, was usually associated with high artistic quality, strong word-of-mouth, effective social media visibility and partnerships with local organisations, schools and civil communities.

International visitor targets were harder to achieve for smaller projects, particularly where applicants lacked established foreign-language communication channels or access to international tourist networks already present in the region. Strong international performance was concentrated mainly in larger festivals, co-productions and programmes with international artists, partners or themes, including Gyárkert's international concert line-up, VeszprémFest, Balaton Wine & Gourmet, InterUrban, MusiColours, EU-Japan Fest collaborations and projects supported by European cultural institutes. In these cases, existing networks and the presence of foreign performers acted as important audience-development drivers.

European Cultural Institutes as Catalysts for International Reach

Among European cultural institutes, the Italian Cultural Institute, the Austrian Cultural Forum, the Cervantes Institute, as well as the Government of Flanders and Wallonie-Bruxelles International, emerged as active partners. The involvement of European cultural institutes proved to be an effective model for building international relations, particularly for organisations without their own extensive international networks. Their participation enhanced the professional credibility and visibility of the programmes and provided access to European professional networks that facilitated collaborations with international artists and productions.

Volunteer Engagement and Community Capacity

Indicator	Target	Result	Deviation from target (%)
Number of civil society organisations involved	1,158	1,363	+17.7%
Number of volunteers	5,745	6,579	+14.5%
Volume of volunteer work (hours)	28,055	41,475	+47.8%

Volunteer engagement was one of the clearest signs of the programme's community embeddedness. Both the number of volunteers and the volume of volunteer work exceeded the original targets, while the involvement of civil society organisations also outperformed expectations. This indicates that the ECoC programme was able to mobilise not only audiences, but also residents, students, local associations and informal community networks as active contributors to delivery.

Final reports suggest that volunteers added value in three main ways. First, they provided essential operational support at events. Second, they strengthened local ownership by making programmes feel less like externally delivered initiatives and more like community-led activities. Third, in several projects, especially those involving young people or university students, volunteering became a form of informal skills development and succession-building.

The strongest volunteer performance was typically found where tasks were clearly defined, locally meaningful and connected to creative or community-building processes. Projects working with schools, universities or local civil organisations were particularly successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Examples include the Ragyogók volunteer programme, Jutasi Community Hub activities, Pannon Community Hub, VeszprémGeneration, CityRocks Veszprém, the Long Table Picnic, Kabóciádé and festival-based volunteer roles at Gyárkert and other large-scale

events. International students and foreign volunteers also contributed to selected festivals and cultural programmes, mainly through language skills, audience support and liaison with international participants.

Explaining Volunteer Performance: Drivers of Over- and Under-Achievement

Differences in volunteer performance reveal an important implementation lesson. Projects that exceeded their targets usually combined strong local embeddedness with conscious recruitment and meaningful tasks. Volunteers were more likely to remain engaged when they could contribute creatively, interact with communities or see the direct social value of their work, as was visible in neighbourhood-based initiatives, university-linked programmes and large communal events such as the Long Table Picnic or CityRocks Veszprém.

By contrast, projects that underperformed tended to rely on routine or long-duration tasks where motivation was harder to sustain. Festival-type projects often performed well because they offered short, clearly structured and socially engaging roles. The evidence therefore suggests that future volunteer strategies should focus less on numerical recruitment alone and more on task design, training, recognition and pathways for continued involvement.

Sponsorship and Local Support: Achievements and Constraints

Indicator	Target	Result	Deviation from target (%)
Number of other sponsors and supporters	694	600	-13.5%

Sponsorship was the main output area where partner performance remained below target. While participation, volunteering and civil society involvement frequently exceeded expectations, many projects struggled to secure external sponsors or supporters. This underperformance

reflected both the difficult economic environment and the limited fundraising capacity of smaller cultural and community organisations.

Final reports indicate that local organisers often found it difficult to identify and convince potential sponsors, particularly larger companies. Businesses were cautious in the inflationary post-pandemic context, and smaller community projects were often perceived as too limited in scale to attract conventional financial sponsorship. As a result, several beneficiaries described their sponsorship targets defensively: they did not fully meet the planned figures, but were nevertheless able to implement their programmes successfully.

Where support was secured, it was most often provided in kind rather than as direct financial contribution. Local hospitality businesses, craft producers, printing houses, technical suppliers and smaller service providers contributed catering, equipment, venue support, printing, communication assistance or logistics. Such support was especially important for community festivals, settlement-level programmes, mini-grant projects and locally embedded events, where informal cooperation and trust-based partnerships were more realistic than classical sponsorship contracts.

This pattern should be interpreted in the context of the programme's unusually strong governmental backing and the difficult market environment of the implementation period. Because the ECoC programme was largely secured through substantial public funding, private-sector actors had less pressure—and in many cases less incentive—to assume a decisive financial role during the title year. At the same time, the many forms of in-kind and local support show that the programme generated goodwill and recognition among businesses. In the legacy period, as extraordinary government support recedes, a higher level of dedicated sponsor engagement may become both more necessary and more realistic, provided that cultural organisations are supported in developing clear value propositions and long-term partnership models.

Taken together, the partner-delivered results show that the ECoC operated less as a centrally delivered event programme than as a distributed mobilisation platform. Its main achievement was not only the number of outputs produced, but the way in which hundreds of local actors were activated, connected and supported to deliver cultural activity across the region. The same evidence also points to the areas where future capacity-building remains necessary: targeted audience communication, international outreach for smaller organisations, sponsorship development and sustained volunteer management.

Event Attendance and Ticketing Patterns Analysis of the Central CMS System and Online Event Data

The central Content Management System (CMS) became the programme’s shared digital backbone for event visibility, coordination and monitoring. Its importance lay not only in communication, but also in the gradual creation of a common regional programme calendar and a structured data environment. Over time, the CMS helped connect programme recommendations, event publication, audience orientation and post-event analysis, thereby supporting both visitor access and programme-level learning.

The system also reflects the programme’s organisational learning curve. In 2020, only 36 events were recorded, mainly community-building and ECoC brand-promotion activities, alongside early pilot events such as Film Picnic, the Music Hungary conference and the first Paper Dog concerts. In the ECoC years, regional events were slightly underrepresented in the system because uploads were managed centrally by Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. and

selected key partners, while many smaller organisers continued to communicate through their own channels and submitted only selected highlights to the joint CMS.

By the end of 2024, the CMS had evolved from a centrally edited programme database into a community event calendar. Partners were able to register as content editors, and the system continued to operate as the region’s central programme guide on the HelloVEB platform, while the official ECoC legacy site remained available under the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 domain. This transition is important because it turned a title-year communication tool into a reusable digital infrastructure for the region.

The event offer also shows a deliberate shift in access logic. While ticketed programmes dominated during the preparatory years and immediately after the title year, 2022–2023 brought a stronger emphasis on free and low-threshold events. This was not only a programming decision, but an audience-development strategy aimed at broadening participation and reaching groups with lower cultural consumption habits.

Event types



The Common Ticketing System as a Monitoring and Audience Development Tool

Based on the recommendations of the tourism audit, a joint ticketing and cross-promotion module was launched in May 2023 with the opening of FOTON Audiovisual Centre. The system was subsequently adopted by several major cultural institutions, including House of Arts, Kabóca Puppet Theatre, the Dungeon and CODE, as well as by large-scale one-off events such as the Felező Gyárkert concerts, the BalkanMost concert with Manu Chao and the Hungarian Ballet Grand Prix.

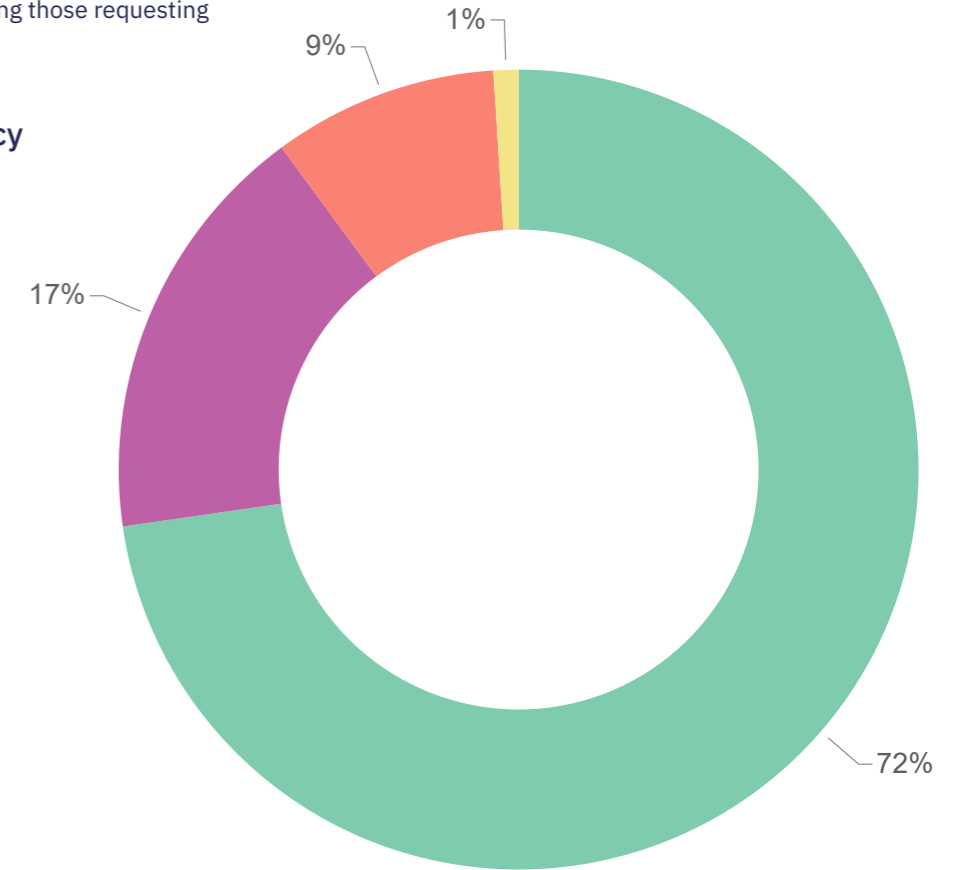
The ticketing system represented a significant step forward in measuring visitor behaviour. In 2023, it processed 37,930 ticket requests, 74% of which related to free events, from 9,242 unique e-mail addresses. Among those requesting

tickets for free events, return rates were particularly high: 75% attended two to four events, while 15% requested tickets for five or more occasions. After removing requests linked to free major festivals and purchases without an e-mail address, the cleaned dataset still showed strong loyalty: only 17% of purchasers made a single purchase, while 72.5% purchased tickets on two to four occasions and a further 10.5% on five or more occasions.

Ticket Purchase Frequency Among Returning Buyers

Purchase Frequency

- 2-4 occasion
- 1 occasion
- 5-9 occasion
- 10-15 occasion
- 16+ occasion



International purchaser data were also informative, although necessarily partial. Ticket requests with foreign addresses were submitted for 347 events from 35 countries. The most popular programmes among international purchasers included the Felező series and international classical music festivals. However, the dataset covers only events using the joint ticketing system, and origin data are available only where tickets were purchased through a registered account. One-time international tourists may therefore be underrepresented, especially where they used anonymous payment options.

Country	Percentage of international visitors
Romania	17,1%
Slovakia	10,9%
Austria	10,5%
France	6,2%
United Kingdom	5,8%
Germany	5,8%
Croatia	5,0%
Poland	3,1%
Bulgaria	2,7%
Slovenia	2,7%
Other	32,9%

Spatial Patterns of Ticket Purchasing Across Hungary

The 2023 joint ticketing data also made it possible to analyse spatial patterns of interest across Hungary. The analysis covered ticket purchase data from 700 Hungarian settlements for which both population figures and ticket indicators were available.

While Veszprém stood out in both absolute and relative terms, with 242.9 tickets per 1,000 inhabitants, the highest per-capita purchase rates were predominantly recorded in smaller settlements around Veszprém and in the Balaton Uplands, including Barnag, Bánd, Sóly and the proximity of Veszprém.

The data therefore suggest that interest in the programme series was not strongest in large cities, but rather in smaller, regionally connected communities, particularly in the Veszprém–Balaton area. At the same time, interest was also detectable from the most distant parts of the country.

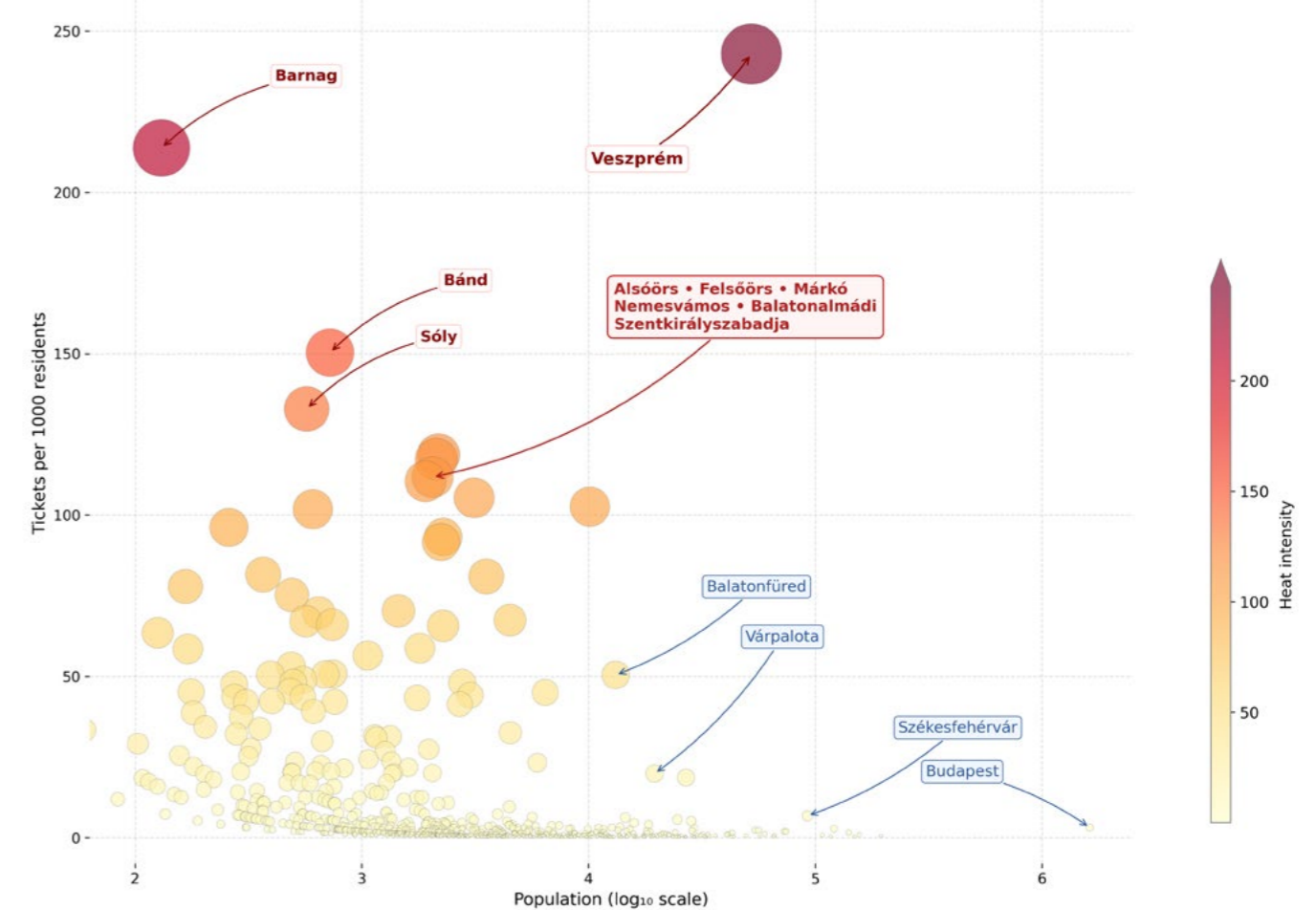
The Veszprém Card: From Local Discount Scheme to Cultural Access Tool

The digital ecosystem created around the Tourism Management System, the programme guide and the joint ticketing platform also laid the groundwork for longer-term cultural access tools. It supports cross-selling, combined ticketing, returning-purchase analysis and the future development of institutional or thematic passes. In this respect, the system became more than an operational tool: it created the basis for a more data-informed approach to audience development.

The integration of the municipal Veszprém Card into this system in 2024 illustrates this legacy potential. From March 2024, the digital 365-day Veszprém Card became available to residents aged 16 and above for a subsidised fee of HUF 3,000. In its first year, more than 6,000 cards were issued, making it one of Hungary's more successful city card schemes. Because the card combines cultural discounts with everyday benefits such as reduced access to the community e-bike system, local public bus transport and parking, it creates a practical incentive for residents to enter the digital cultural access ecosystem and discover new programmes, venues and genres over time.

Taken together, the CMS, ticketing platform and Veszprém Card show how the ECoC programme moved from event communication toward a more integrated audience-development infrastructure. Their most important legacy is not simply the number of tickets processed or cards issued, but the capacity to understand repeat participation, support cross-promotion, reduce access barriers and maintain a shared regional programme calendar beyond the title year.

Origin and Relative Intensity of Ticket Purchases



Where the Impact Happened: Visitor Flows, Tourism and Spatial Patterns

Geolocation and Accommodation Data as Evidence of Spatial Impact

A central objective of the ECoC programme was to revitalise Veszprém's historic centre and make it a living cultural space beyond occasional flagship events. For this reason, the evaluation used Hungarian Telekom geolocation data to measure how visitor flows changed

in the city centre and how these patterns related to programme activity, time of day, visitor origin and mobility behaviour. This evidence is particularly important because it captures actual presence in public space, including free events and informal visits that are not visible in ticketing or accommodation statistics.

The geolocation dataset covered the years 2021–2024 and was based on anonymised, aggregated mobile and tablet device presence within a narrowly defined historic-

centre polygon extending from the Castle District through Óváros Square to Kossuth Street. Devices were included only if they remained in the area for at least 30 minutes, helping to filter out short administrative or transit movements. Based on Telekom's market share, the data were extrapolated to estimate total visitor numbers.

The deliberately narrow measurement zone means that the data should not be interpreted as total ECoC attendance. Major venues and green areas outside the historic core, including Gyárkert, VeszprémFest and Kabóciádé locations, were excluded in order to avoid distortion from institutional, hospital, university or large-scale festival traffic. The dataset is therefore best understood as an indicator of whether the historic centre itself became more active, attractive and functionally alive during and after the title year.

Accommodation Data

Accommodation statistics from the National Tourism Data Supply Centre (NTAK) complemented the geolocation evidence by showing registered tourism performance in Veszprém and across the ECoC region. NTAK was introduced in Hungary as a mandatory national tourism data reporting system from 2019, with its data coverage and reporting practice becoming progressively more comprehensive in the following years. For this reason, the pre-2021 period is not treated as a fully comparable baseline for the ECoC years. Earlier accommodation statistics were collected under a different reporting logic and were affected by changes in data coverage, methodology and the gradual adaptation of accommodation providers to the new system. A long-term comparison with the pre-NTAK period would therefore risk attributing methodological breaks to real tourism growth or decline.

Accordingly, the evaluation focuses on the 2021–2024 period, when NTAK data provide a more consistent basis for comparison and when the ECoC implementation period can be assessed against the combined effects of post-pandemic recovery, the 2022 rebound, the 2023 title year and the first legacy year in 2024. Unlike mobile data, NTAK captures overnight stays and guest profiles in commercial

and private accommodation. Together, the two sources make it possible to distinguish between event-related presence in public space and tourism demand expressed through accommodation use.

Overview of Tourism-Related Visitor Numbers (2021–2024)

Tourism-related results between 2021 and 2024 must therefore be interpreted within two overlapping methodological and market contexts. First, because NTAK became the reliable reference system only after its gradual implementation, the ECoC years are not analysed as part of a continuous pre-2021 development curve. Second, the period itself was highly volatile. The years 2021–2022 represented an exceptional rebound period for Hungarian and regional tourism. After two years of restrictions, postponed travel and constrained leisure consumption, households released accumulated demand in what may be described as post-Covid “revenge travel”. This produced unusually high domestic and regional tourism figures and created a strong, but partly temporary, baseline. Consequently, the comparison between 2022 and 2023 cannot be read as a simple linear trend: part of the 2022 performance reflected pent-up demand and a recovery surge rather than a stable level of tourism demand.

The title year unfolded in a markedly different context. In 2023, inflation, declining real wages, higher travel and hospitality costs, and the continued uncertainty linked to the war in Ukraine restrained domestic tourism demand. This meant that the ECoC programme operated against a market environment that was considerably less favourable than the 2022 rebound year. From this perspective, the programme's tourism impact should not be assessed solely by whether it generated immediate year-on-year growth compared with the exceptional post-Covid baseline, but by whether it helped stabilise demand, increase international visibility, activate public spaces and strengthen the destination's longer-term appeal.

Seen through this lens, the two main data sources point to a differentiated but positive picture. NTAK accommodation data show that Veszprém performed relatively resiliently in 2023 compared with the high 2022 baseline: domestic visitor numbers declined moderately, while international arrivals increased, indicating that the ECoC year was particularly effective in strengthening external visibility and attracting foreign guests. At the same time, Magyar Telekom geolocation data showed very strong public-space activity in the historic centre, with more than 1.6 million visitors in 2023. This suggests that the programme's strongest tourism-related effect was not necessarily overnight-stay growth, but the activation of day visits, event-related city use, cultural mobility and the everyday attractiveness of the historic centre.

The 2024 data help separate the temporary attention of the title year from changes that began to settle into everyday urban use. According to Telekom geolocation data, city-centre visitor numbers increased further from approximately 1.6 million in 2023 to around 1.9 million in 2024. This suggests that the historic centre did not simply benefit from a one-year programme peak; it continued to attract people after the title year, supported by renewed cultural and public-space infrastructure, stronger destination image, improved visitor services and easier cultural access. The growing vibrancy of the historic centre was also helped by the hospitality venues developed through the Street Management programme. With the exception of two venues that later closed, the city-centre cafés, bars and restaurants launched or strengthened through this initiative continued to operate successfully after the title year, adding to the street-level life and everyday attractiveness of the downtown area.

Another important 2024 signal came from accommodation data: among age groups, the only segment showing significant growth in Veszprém was the 0–18 group. This points to a visible increase in family and school-age tourism. The change appears to reflect several factors working together: improving household purchasing power after the inflationary peak, the opening of accommodation capacity

specifically designed for school-age groups, and the ECoC programme's deliberate expansion of child- and family-friendly cultural offers.

This is important because it shows a gradual broadening of Veszprém's visitor profile beyond its traditional business-tourism base. Interactive exhibitions, creative workshops, family-friendly events, improved visitor services and more suitable accommodation and hospitality capacities helped make short visits more complete and easier to organise for families and school groups. In this sense, the 2024 increase in children's accommodation data can be read as a delayed legacy effect: the city offered more reasons for these audiences to come, stay and return.

Taken together, the spatial and tourism data do not point to a simple one-year tourism spike. They show something more gradual: the historic centre became more used, more visible and more attractive; day-visitor flows were strong; international tourism proved more resilient than domestic demand in the title year; and family- and school-age tourism gained momentum in the first legacy year. The ECoC programme therefore appears to have worked less by producing a single peak, and more by changing the conditions under which people use, visit and return to Veszprém.

Detailed accommodation and geolocation visitor charts are provided in the Annex.

What Changed in Communities: Case Studies and Mechanisms of Impact

The programme's community impact cannot be captured by aggregate indicators alone. The following case studies therefore serve as mechanism-based evidence, showing how impact was produced in practice: the Barn/Pajta Programme illustrates rural cultural capacity-building through local ownership; the mini-grants scheme demonstrates participatory micro-funding and bottom-up initiative; Gyárkert shows how temporary urban regeneration can become shared civic infrastructure; and SoundPlay examines behavioural change in musical participation. Project-level evidence combines qualitative findings from final reports, survey data from participants and organisers, and quantitative analysis of registration and ticketing datasets, allowing the evaluation to assess not only how much took place, but how and for whom individual projects generated impact.

The Pajta Programme: Rural Cultural Capacity-Building Through Local Ownership

The **Pajta (Barn) Programme** is a strong example of how the ECoC sought to decentralise cultural capacity beyond Veszprém and the main Balaton towns. It aimed to strengthen cultural life in peripheral rural settlements by bringing high-quality cultural services closer to smaller communities, while also enabling local actors to shape content according to their own needs, assets and traditions.

The Pajta Programme was implemented in two funding rounds: in 2022, 14 settlements were awarded support, and in 2023 a further 23 settlements (across a total of 29 Pajta venues) joined the scheme. The core principle was flexible, locally responsive programming tailored to specific community needs and assets. Participating settlements organised cultural, artistic and community-based events—including children's theatre performances, craft workshops, musical concerts, literary walks and festivals—across community venues such as cultural houses, churches and

outdoor locations. The programme placed strong emphasis on community-building, intergenerational cohesion, the preservation of local identity, and the combination of innovation with tradition.

The impact of the programme was evaluated between January and March 2024 through semi-structured interviews coordinated by the University of Pannonia with local implementing partners (municipal and civil stakeholders). Conducted in a hybrid format (in-person and online), the interviews explored motivations, implementation experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and future plans. Respondents included representatives from Alsópáhok, Balatoncsicsó, Kapolcs, and Nagyvázsony, among others, with anonymised processing of the material.

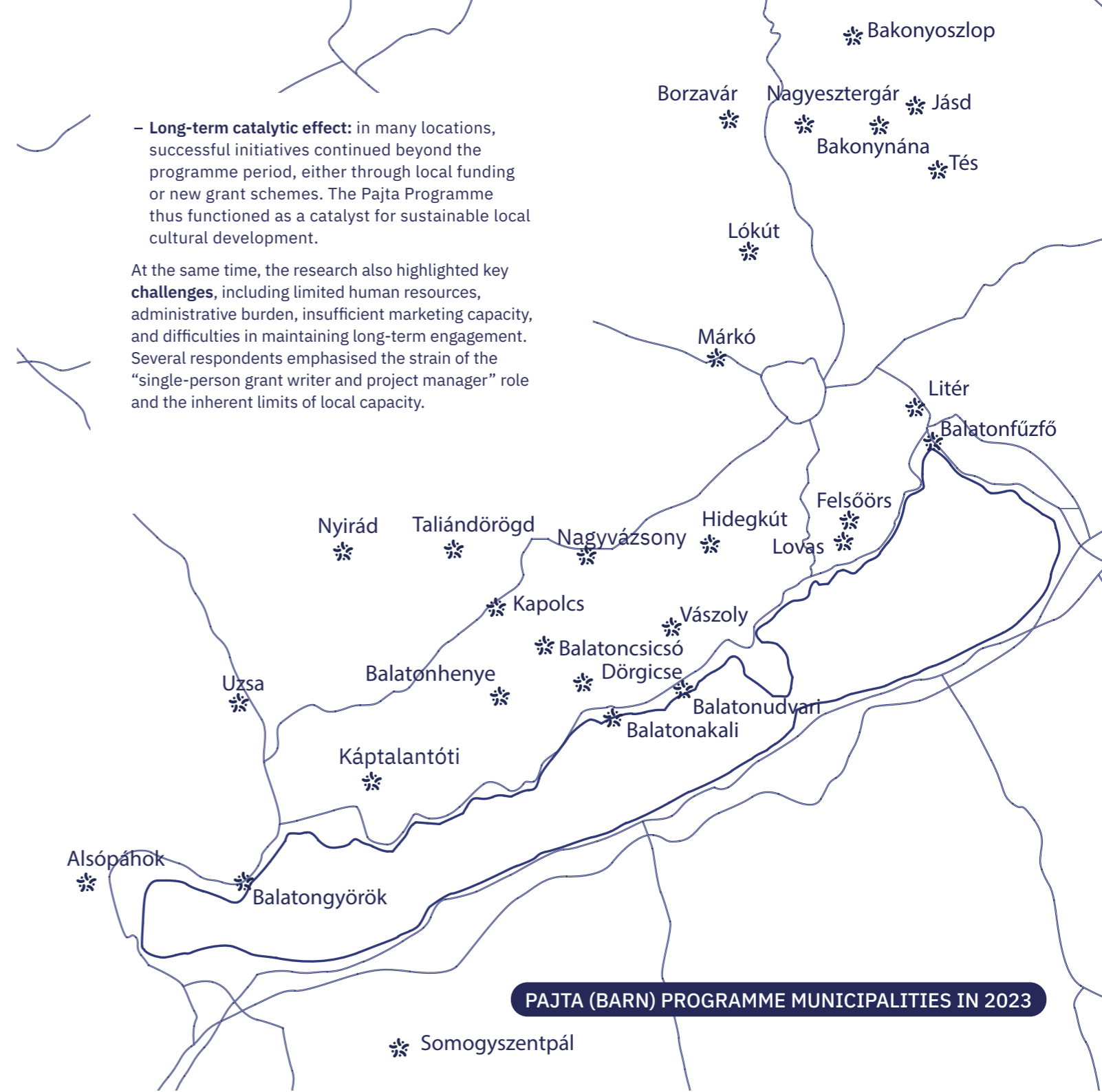
Impacts of the Programme on Rural Cultural Life

According to the research findings, the Pajta Programme had a positive influence on the cultural and community life of participating settlements. It reinforced existing processes, opened new opportunities for community engagement, and contributed to the strengthening of local identity. The most significant impact mechanisms were as follows:

- **Expansion of cultural offer:** the programme introduced regular, diverse and accessible events for all age groups. Alongside new formats, local heritage and traditions also received greater emphasis, creating predictability and quality in the cultural offer.
- **Community-building and cohesion:** it significantly increased active participation among residents, created new opportunities for social interaction, and strengthened intergenerational ties. In several settlements, cooperation between neighbouring communities also intensified.
- **Strengthening of local identity and attractiveness:** the programme improved the image and appeal of settlements among residents, neighbouring communities and visitors alike. Its contribution to quality of life through cultural engagement was particularly notable.

- **Long-term catalytic effect:** in many locations, successful initiatives continued beyond the programme period, either through local funding or new grant schemes. The Pajta Programme thus functioned as a catalyst for sustainable local cultural development.

At the same time, the research also highlighted key **challenges**, including limited human resources, administrative burden, insufficient marketing capacity, and difficulties in maintaining long-term engagement. Several respondents emphasised the strain of the “single-person grant writer and project manager” role and the inherent limits of local capacity.



Gyárkert CulturePark: Temporary Urban Regeneration as Shared Civic Infrastructure

Gyárkert (Factory'ard) CulturePark, located in central Veszprém, shows how a temporary intervention can become a lasting urban and cultural asset. The site of the former Balaton Furniture Factory—an industrial zone dating back to the late 19th century, long closed off from the public and subsequently left derelict for more than a decade—constituted a significant urban scar in the heart of the city. Although it was not part of the original ECoC bid, the economic and temporal constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a radical policy shift: instead of costly and slow construction projects, the city leadership opted for a rapidly deployable, cost-effective, pop-up multifunctional community and concert venue with a capacity of 5,000 people.

As a result, Gyárkert became an accessible, inclusive and vibrant urban space at the heart of Veszprém, simultaneously serving high-quality cultural programming and everyday urban recreation. Following the conclusion of the programme year, the municipality retained the venue's event function, extending its operation into a four-season cultural space through year-round programming, thereby demonstrating its long-term sustainability.

Success and Social Embeddedness

Gyárkert rapidly became one of the most popular event venues in Veszprém and the wider region. During the summer season of 2023, it generated substantial visitor numbers and played a key role in shaping perceptions of the “radiance” of the ECoC year. The scale of its success is evidenced by the fact that what was originally conceived as a temporary project came to be regarded by both residents and visitors as a shared collective asset. By 2023 it had become a regular meeting point, with strong public demand for its continuation. As a result, the municipality extended its operation in 2024 and 2025 as well, granting it enhanced status and support through to 2026.

Data from the 2023 online ticketing platform indicate Gyárkert's strong nationwide appeal. Buyers with identifiable Hungarian settlements represented nearly one third of all municipalities in the country (1,419 settlements). When adjusted for

population size, the most strongly represented settlements were overwhelmingly located within the immediate region, confirming the strong engagement of local and regional communities.

The 2023 online visitor survey (nearly 1,300 respondents) similarly demonstrates high levels of social embeddedness and a strong sense of place attachment. 91% of respondents arrived in groups (family, friends or colleagues), and 56% were non-residents of Veszprém. Overall evaluations of the venue were exceptionally positive: the vast majority reported maximum satisfaction, with Likert-scale ratings (transport, safety, cleanliness, atmosphere) dominated by scores of 4 and 5.

Open-ended responses clearly reveal the symbolic significance of Gyárkert. Many described it as “the best thing that has happened to Veszprém in recent years”, frequently emphasising that “Veszprém is finally alive” or that “something good is always happening here”. Respondents repeatedly mentioned world-class performers (including Iggy Pop, Kraftwerk, Tom Odell, Chet Faker, Lost Frequencies, Morcheeba, Franz Ferdinand, among others). A significant proportion explicitly associated Gyárkert with the city's 2023 renewal and strongly advocated for its preservation: “Keep it for the city!”, “Veszprém needs this!”, “Never close it down!”.

Open-Ended Responses Enthusiasm (most characteristic quotes)

- “At last, Veszprém also hosted events on both weekdays and weekends, with international stars such as Iggy Pop and Kraftwerk.”
- “A beautifully developed area that had been neglected for many years! It would be wonderful if it could continue in the coming years with a rich variety of programmes.”
- “I loved everything. Iggy Pop was a very pleasant surprise... Cooler than Budapest Park — Veszprém really needed this!”
- “The best thing that has happened to Veszprém in recent years.”
- “Everything was fantastic... I hope it stays next year as well!”
- “At last, Veszprém felt alive!”
- “The Symphony of a Thousand in the open air was a wonderful experience.”

Criticism and suggestions (less frequent, but important)

Some respondents complained about noise disturbance affecting nearby residents due to sound amplification.

- “The right of residents in the city centre to rest is not being taken into account...”

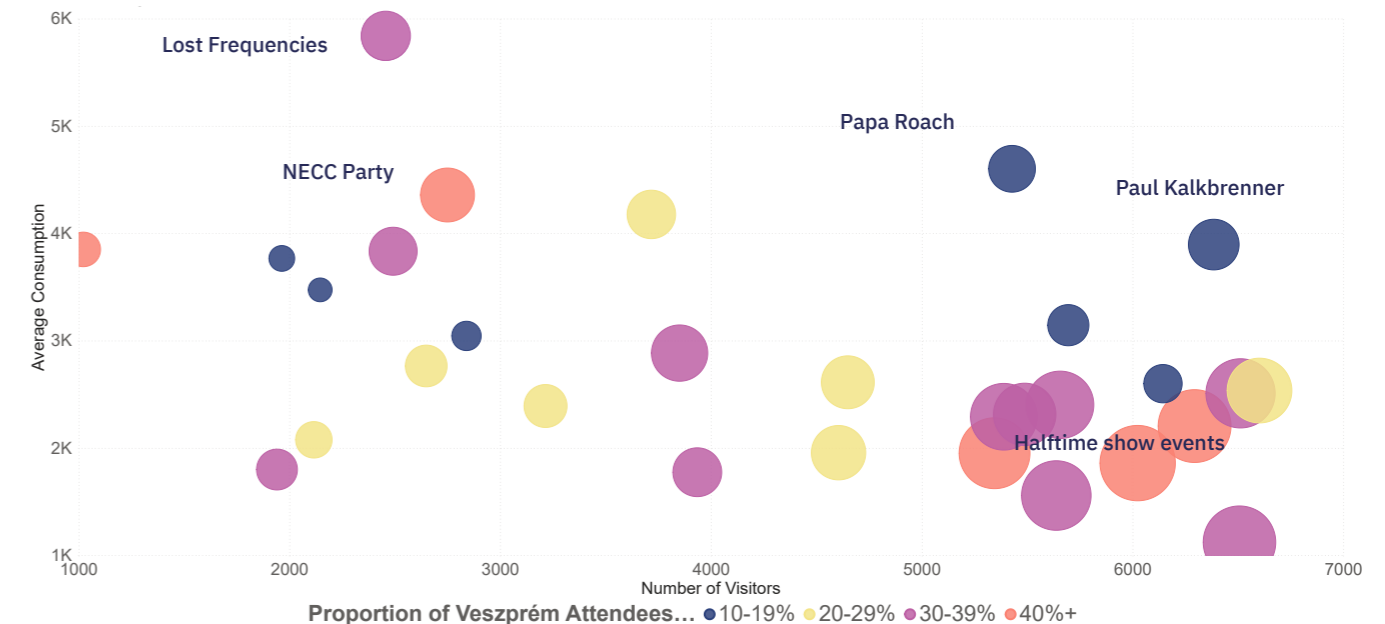
On social media platforms (primarily the Gyárkert Facebook and Instagram pages, as well as local community groups), a rich body of user-generated content is visible. The comments are overwhelmingly positive and emotionally charged: expressions such as “the best place in the heart of Veszprém”, “our Gyárkert”, and “may it last forever” are typical. This sense of ownership reflects a characteristic ECoC effect: a previously neglected industrial site was transformed within a matter of months into a collectively owned and deeply cherished community space.

In 2025, within the framework of the “NONA” project supported by the Interreg Danube Region Programme,

the University of Pannonia conducted an online survey of residents to inform the functional development plans for Veszprém's city centre. The survey, involving nearly 2,200 respondents, confirmed that Gyárkert remains one of the most successful legacies of the ECoC programme. 64% of respondents were residents of Veszprém, with a significant proportion coming from surrounding districts. The venue is widely known and frequently used: most respondents had attended concerts, the Winter Gyárkert programme, and other community events between 2023 and 2025.

In the evaluations, cultural services and community events received the highest scores (above 4.5), while parking provision and summer heat (lack of shade) were identified as the weakest aspects. The open-ended responses reveal a clear community consensus: residents do not envision a purely residential or commercial function, but rather a multifunctional green community park where summer festival atmosphere and everyday recreation can coexist.

Share of Veszprém Residents Among Factory'ard Visitors



An examination of ticket purchases in 2023 reveals substantial variation in both overall and locally based interest across the different concerts, as well as notable differences in associated consumption patterns at local hospitality venues. The programme featured a heterogeneous line-up that combined international headliners with a diverse range of Hungarian acts. These acts typically appeal to distinctly different demographic and cultural segments, varying in terms of age group, social background, and consumption behaviour.

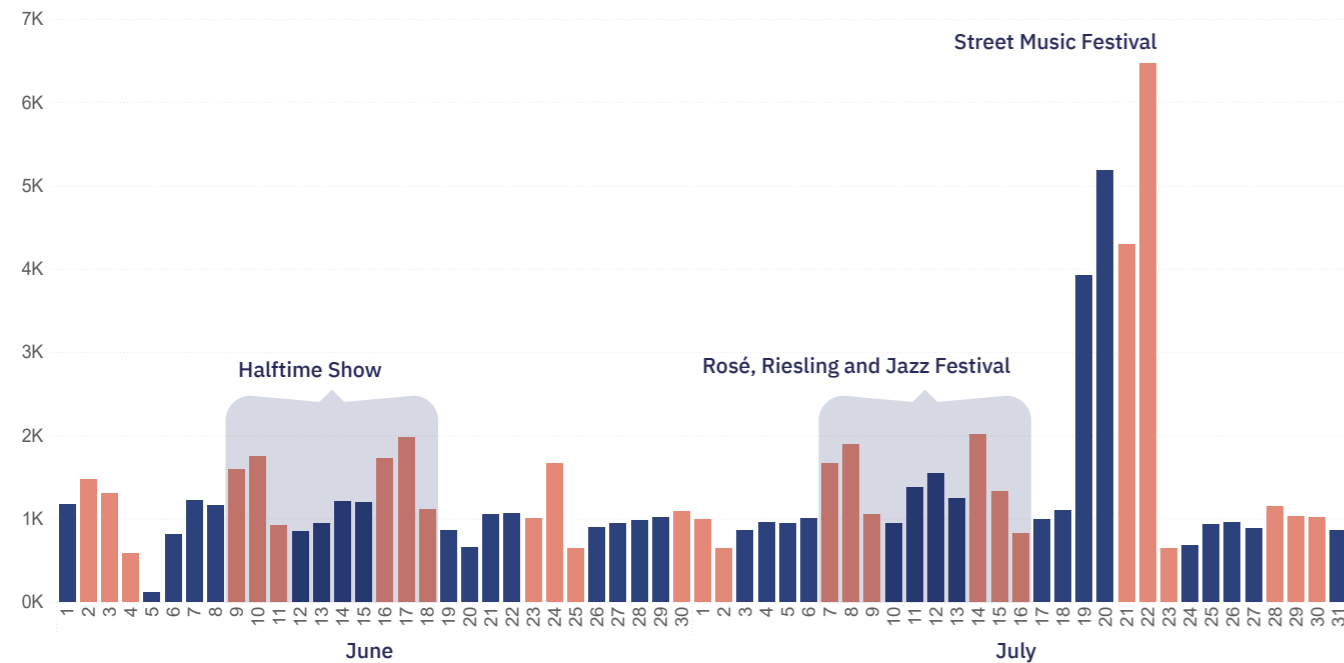
The resulting diversity in musical offerings was reflected in markedly different levels of attendance and local economic impact across the individual events.

Since the Gyárkert area fell outside the geolocation measurement zone defined for the historic centre, only those visitors to Gyárkert events who also visited the historic centre

before or after the concert could be captured in the visitor flow analysis. In this regard, the concerts by Paul Kalkbrenner and Lost Frequencies stood out as particularly significant.

The Gyárkert case therefore demonstrates a different mechanism of ECoC impact from the rural and micro-grant examples. Here, the key change was spatial: a closed industrial site was rapidly converted into a recognisable cultural landmark, while repeated use, emotional attachment and municipal continuation turned a temporary title-year solution into part of the city's longer-term civic infrastructure.

Evening visitors Downtown Veszprém



SoundPlay: Musical Participation, Community Engagement and Behavioural Change

The SoundPlay case study examines a further type of impact: behavioural change in cultural participation. A representative study was conducted in 2024 under the leadership of Hétfa Research Institute to evaluate the impact of the SoundPlay programme series implemented within the framework of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture initiative. The combined methodology—comprising a 1,000-person territorially representative questionnaire survey and 42 expert in-depth interviews—offers an exceptional insight into the region's musical life and attitudes towards amateur music-making.

One of the study's most significant findings is that, while openness and affinity towards music among the adult population of the region are strong, active and regular music-making remains confined to a relatively small segment. Thirty-four per cent of adults sing regularly, whereas only 4% play a musical instrument on a regular basis. The vast majority of the population—90%—have not touched a musical instrument at all in the past year. It is noteworthy that regular singing shows a positive correlation with overall well-being: respondents who sing frequently reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction.

The examination of musical education backgrounds presents a similarly nuanced picture. Thirty-six per cent of adults have previously studied music or singing; however, 94% of this group subsequently discontinued their studies. At present, only 3% are engaged in active music learning. Motivations are clearly dominated by social factors: 64% of respondents cited family members making music, 57% their own personal interest, and 51% their peer group as key drivers. At the same time, communal music-making remains a rare experience: only 17% of respondents have a community in which they can regularly sing or play music together.

The impact of the European Capital of Culture year on music consumption is clearly measurable. Attendance at musical events increased significantly during the programme year: half of the region's residents attended a pop or rock concert

or festival, while one in five respondents also attended a classical music concert during the same period.

Regarding children's musical education, families overwhelmingly regard music learning as important; however, only around one-third of children in households with children are currently engaged in music studies. Traditional institutional frameworks (music schools and school-based extracurricular groups) remain dominant.

As for the specific effects of the SoundPlay programme, 92% of participants stated that it is well suited to bringing amateur music-making closer to a broader audience. The programme's low-threshold, community-based format received particularly positive feedback, successfully engaging not only younger age groups but also previously less-involved cohorts (middle-aged and older participants). Overall, the findings suggest that the SoundPlay series has not only increased music consumption, but has also contributed meaningfully to broadening the region's musical ecosystem and enhancing the social acceptance of amateur music-making.

As an impact mechanism, SoundPlay is significant because it links Veszprém's UNESCO City of Music ambition to measurable changes in attitudes and participation. The findings show that while active music-making remains limited, low-threshold, community-based formats can broaden acceptance, create new entry points and support the long-term goal of making music a more everyday form of cultural practice in the region.

Implementation Perspectives: Cooperation, Capacity and Legacy Risks

The qualitative component of the programme evaluation was conducted by researchers from the Kraft Centre of the Institute for Advanced Studies Kőszeg (iASK). In spring and summer 2024, six expert in-depth interviews were carried out with key stakeholders in Veszprém, alongside three focus group interviews involving civil organisations, public service providers and cultural institutions. Rather than simply confirming the quantitative results, these discussions show how the programme was experienced by those

who implemented, hosted or continued its activities: as a process of cooperation-building, institutional opening and community mobilisation, but also as a system whose future depends on coordination, funding and human capacity.

Three themes run through the interviews and focus groups. First, ECoC strengthened trust and horizontal cooperation between institutions, municipalities and civil actors. Second, it created new spaces, practices and organisational capacities that changed how culture is produced and accessed in Veszprém. Third, stakeholders repeatedly emphasised that these achievements will only remain meaningful if the legacy period preserves the coordination structures and resources that made them possible.

Selected qualitative comments from the KRAFT research further illustrate this lived experience of change. Residents and local stakeholders repeatedly described the programme not only through institutional outcomes, but through a renewed urban atmosphere, more frequent encounters, stronger visibility and the sense that cultural life had become more present in everyday routines. These voices are included here because they complement the stakeholder interviews: they show how cooperation, capacity-building and urban renewal were translated into personal and community-level perceptions.

“There was always something happening in the city.” “Culture came closer to us.” “Veszprém became more visible and more alive.” “The programme gave people reasons to meet, participate and feel proud of the city.” These comments summarise a recurring perception across the qualitative material: the ECoC was experienced not only as a programme series, but as a change in the everyday rhythm and self-image of the city.

Cooperation and trust as implementation outcomes

The operational delivery and coordination of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was entrusted to Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. During the programme period, the company functioned as the central institution holding the initiative together within a unified framework: it translated strategic objectives into programme

content, coordinated regional partners, managed delivery systems and supported the development of long-term legacy structures. Its role went well beyond administration. It acted as a content developer, partnership builder, managerial coordinator and catalyst for a level of regional cooperation that would not have been possible through loose project-based coordination alone.

Following the conclusion of the title year, the strategic role of Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. changed fundamentally. The company is no longer responsible for delivering an exceptional one-year programme, but for sustaining the conditions that made the ECoC model work. The evaluation evidence presented in the previous chapter points to the same legacy requirements across several research strands: continued coordination, proportionate support instruments, stronger fundraising capacities, shared communication, data-informed planning and the maintenance of cooperation routines across municipalities, institutions, civil organisations and private-sector partners. These are not secondary tasks after the title year; they are the institutional conditions under which the capacities created by the ECoC can remain active.

In this sense, Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. has become the programme’s most important institutional legacy instrument. Alongside its direct operational responsibilities — including the management of legacy venues, recurring cultural programmes, digital platforms and visitor-facing systems — the company is also expected to keep the wider ecosystem capable of renewal: helping partners find resources, connecting initiatives across the region, supporting evidence-based planning and preventing the cooperation network built during the title year from gradually fragmenting.

Within this framework, the company operates three flagship institutions: the Dungeon Visitor Centre, CODE Centre of Digital Experiences and CODE Creator digital creative workshop. In addition, the CODE building houses Hangár Popular Music Centre, the community workshop of DEMO Association, as well as a hub for independent artistic studios and rehearsal spaces. Collectively, the revitalised former

Dimitrov building complex provides the infrastructural foundation necessary for the long-term strengthening of the city’s musical, digital and creative sectors.

CODE also positions Veszprém on the international stage. Through its cooperation with the University of Pannonia and CODE LAB, it sustains international knowledge exchange and professional network-building. Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. also oversees the Hungarian Motion Picture Festival, which strengthens the regional presence of the Hungarian film industry, as well as Planet Lens International Nature Photography and Film Festival, which links sustainability with visual culture. These programmes provide the region with a durable, annually recurring cultural offer and a sustainable professional network.

The company also plays a strategic role in generating international project collaborations. Through its participation in the Interreg Europe ECOC Echo project, it works alongside other European Capital of Culture cities to share knowledge, expertise and experience gained through the ECoC programme and to promote their wider application.

Several continuing frameworks strengthen this institutional role. The UNESCO City of Music designation provides a long-term thematic anchor for musical participation, creative education and community-based cultural practice. The regional office of the Hungarian Development Promotion Office (MFOI) in Veszprém creates a direct channel toward European Union funding opportunities and can help local and regional actors turn project ideas into viable international partnerships. The Veszprém–Balaton European Region of Sport 2026 title extends the cooperation model developed through ECoC into the fields of active lifestyles, community health and sport-based regional development.

The viability of this culturally grounded, bottom-up development model is demonstrated by the fact that the accumulated experience of cooperation and the extensive partner network directly laid the foundations for further international recognition of the region. In the summer of

2024, the City of Veszprém commissioned Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. to prepare and deliver the European Region of Sport 2026 title programme. With the award of this title, Veszprém and its associated 99 municipalities are now applying the momentum and methodology developed through the 2023 ECoC programme to a new shared strategic objective.

For the participating municipalities, the European Region of Sport title represents an opportunity to continue the intensive regional cooperation established during the ECoC year, while broadening its focus from cultural participation to community wellbeing, active lifestyles and health promotion. It can also contribute to extending tourism and visitor activity throughout the year, strengthening social inclusion, encouraging visitors attending major sporting events to engage with cultural institutions, and continuing the use of shared communication and data-collection platforms already established during the ECoC period.

In this way, the ECoC legacy remains not a static remembrance, but a living and evolving framework. Its institutional foundation lies in the ability of Veszprém–Balaton 2023 Jsc. to operate venues and programmes, but also to sustain the less visible capacities that the evaluation identified as decisive for long-term impact: coordination, trust, funding development, data-based learning and cooperation across the Bakony–Balaton region.

The public service providers’ focus group confirmed this interpretation from a regional perspective. Participants described it as “very positive that this regional presence was genuinely achieved”, highlighting the Bakony region, Zirc’s strong local reception of previously unavailable cultural events, the visibility generated by Inota Festival for Várpalota, and the strategic importance of the Füred–Almádi–Veszprém triangle. They also noted that cooperation within this triangle will be essential for the 2030 livability goals, even though Hungary’s administrative structure does not strongly encourage collaboration beyond municipal boundaries.

Institutional and community capacity created through implementation

At institutional level, the interviews show how ECoC support helped organisations open new functions and reach new audiences. Tamás Baranyai, Head of the Eötvös Károly County Library, described the transformation of the library’s once-infamous “smelly storage room” into ZUG, a multifunctional community space, as a success story. “They guided us, made suggestions, while also giving us autonomy in decision-making,” he recalled in relation to the involvement of young people and civil actors. Today, ZUG hosts a Silent Book Club, Okuláré events, a chess club and a podcast studio, and has become a clear example of bringing culture closer to everyday neighbourhood life.

Agóra Community Centre played a similar bridging role between public cultural services and everyday urban cultural life. Amália Néveda, Director of Agóra, emphasised the importance of community ECoC projects in housing estates, where the institution provided spaces, supported programme delivery and helped connect civil actors with public institutions. In this respect, Agóra’s experience shows that the ECoC did not simply add events to the city calendar; it helped public cultural institutions become more networked, responsive and community-oriented, especially in districts beyond the historic centre.

Civil sector representatives also saw the programme as a source of practical capacity-building. They highlighted the participatory planning of the Jutasi–Haszkovó housing estate, the active involvement of residents, the development of a significant volunteer network, and improvements in civil organisations’ skills in fundraising, project management and community organisation. Several housing-estate and socially engaged artistic initiatives launched during the ECoC period have continued independently since the title year, suggesting that some of the social infrastructure created by the programme has remained active beyond direct ECoC support.

Cultural institutions, including Petőfi Theatre, Kabóca Puppet Theatre, VeszprémFest, Laczkó Dezső Museum and Agóra Veszprém, similarly reported stronger sectoral position and operational capacity. Respondents pointed to higher-quality and more international programming, larger audiences, deeper inter-institutional cooperation and the introduction of new formats. Taken together, these examples show that implementation capacity grew not only inside the ECoC organisation, but across the wider local cultural system.

The University of Pannonia experienced a similar opening process. Rector András Gelencsér assessed the strategic partnership between the university and the city as a major shift in the institution’s urban role. The ECoC programme enhanced international visibility and student engagement, while the volunteer network, the international Solar Boat competition and infrastructure developments strengthened the university’s connection to the city’s cultural ecosystem. “The symbolic and practical dismantling of the wall around the university made us more open towards the city,” he observed.

Legacy expectations and sustainability risks

Across stakeholder groups, the primary future objective was the preservation of the programme’s achievements, together with the maintenance and further development of international networks established through ECoC. Respondents considered it essential that Veszprém should continue to function as a significant cultural centre after the programme’s conclusion, with a rich and diverse cultural offer, sustained international engagement and continued attractiveness to foreign partners. At the same time, several concerns were raised about whether these standards—both in the quality and quantity of programming—can be maintained without sufficient funding.

Veszprém stakeholders therefore saw the ECoC year as both a milestone and a rehearsal for the city’s 2030 urban vision. The new spaces, partnerships and working methods created during the programme give the city a stronger cultural base, but the interviews are clear

about one condition: momentum will not be maintained by reputation alone. It requires continued coordination, realistic funding and enough professional capacity to keep institutions, civil actors and international partners connected after the exceptional title-year resources have disappeared.

Regional Stakeholder Perspectives: Uneven but Meaningful Regional Activation

In 2024, iASK researchers also examined how the regional dimension of the programme was experienced outside Veszprém. In-depth interviews were conducted with municipal leaders, key opinion-formers and cultural stakeholders across the programme area, alongside three focus group discussions involving cultural and artistic projects, small-scale regional integrated programmes and the Pajta Programme. The findings point to a nuanced regional legacy: the programme did create real activation across the Bakony–Balaton area, but its effects were uneven and depended strongly on local capacity, existing cultural assets and the ability of settlements to connect ECoC resources to their own identity.

The interviews can be read along two lines. In several settlements, ECoC was described as a catalyst for local identity, cultural visibility and cooperation with neighbouring communities. In others, the assessment was more cautious, pointing to perceived Veszprém-centredness, uneven access to resources, limited planning capacity and uncertainty about what would remain once dedicated funding ended.

Success narratives: local identity, visibility and regional cooperation

- Jásd, Uzsa, Sümeg, Várpalota and the Tihany Benedictine Abbey all viewed the programme as a clear success in strengthening local identity, increasing cultural visibility and encouraging cooperation with neighbouring settlements.
- In Jásd and Uzsa, programmes built directly on local assets and traditions. Examples included “Danewort”

traditions, Marian pilgrimage sites, Blue Trail routes, mining heritage and nature tourism, as well as Bodza Days, Via Calvaria across 14 settlements, UzsaART, Basalt Trail and gastronomic clubs. These initiatives primarily served local communities, strengthened volunteering and fostered cooperation with neighbouring settlements.

- Sümeg successfully combined city branding with the positioning of a “Pannon Mediterranean genius loci”, building on Kisfaludy heritage, Ramassetter House and the Baroque Festival. According to local stakeholders, this contributed to increased tourist flows and a more vibrant town centre.
- Várpalota highlighted the cultural momentum generated by the programme, including the synagogue, Rock Palota and the international cello competition, and perceived a relatively balanced distribution between the Balaton, Bakony and Veszprém areas.
- The Tihany Benedictine Abbey emphasised that the ECoC did not create entirely new value, but strengthened an already robust cultural and tourism offer through concerts, exhibitions, lavender-related events, free or discounted access, increased visitor numbers and greater European visibility.

Other successful regional project examples point in the same direction. In small-scale regional projects such as Value Circles, Nothing Special?, Balatorium and EGER–VÍZ, participants emphasised that the 2+1-year preparatory phase and ECoC support enabled the exploration of local values, community building and interdisciplinary collaboration, including themes such as water ecology and Bakony heritage. Within the Pajta Programme, projects such as Bakony Window Opener and Colourful Barn showed how inter-village cooperation, shared programming and small-scale infrastructure investments, including community spaces and signage, could deliver tangible results: local communities became more cohesive, and enduring relationships were established between neighbouring settlements.

Critical and mixed assessments: regional disparities and sustainability concerns

- The Mayor of Balatonalmádi argued that peripheral settlements remained relatively underfunded and that some programme flows tended to channel local residents towards Veszprém rather than fully decentralising cultural activity.
- The Mayor of Keszthely argued that ECoC initiatives were “absorbed” into an already strong local cultural offer, while major developments remained concentrated in Veszprém.

The mixed regional assessments were complemented by a small survey of settlements that had not joined the ECoC cooperation. Within the Kraft research framework, an online survey was conducted in May 2025 among 98 non-participating municipalities; 14 responses were received, all from independently elected mayors. In 12 cases, respondents reported no engagement with the ECoC programme, while two noted that residents had attended some events and gave positive feedback, even though these settlements also appeared in project implementation listings.

The responses mainly point to the limits of regional reach rather than active rejection. Most mayors reported no perceived change in local relations, cooperation with neighbouring municipalities, civil organisations, district centres, Veszprém or the wider region, and new partnerships were almost absent. At the same time, initial associations with the programme were mostly positive, including “2023”, “Gyárkert”, “culture”, “opportunity”, “success” and “experience-rich”. In retrospect, six mayors said they would now choose to join the programme, and three expressed willingness to support the Veszprém–Balaton European Capital of Sport 2026 bid. This suggests that non-participation was often linked less to lack of interest than to limited capacity, weak information links and uncertainty about whether the EUR 1 per inhabitant contribution model would return sufficient value for settlements with little capacity to compete in ECoC calls.

Non-participating settlements and the limits of regional reach

As part of the 2024 impact evaluation, iASK also collected evidence from settlements that had not participated actively, or had only marginally participated, in the ECoC programme. This strand of the research was based on online self-administered questionnaires completed by municipal leaders, complementing the expert interviews and focus groups conducted among active programme stakeholders. Its purpose was to understand why some settlements remained outside the programme’s active cooperation network, and what this reveals about the practical limits of regional reach.

The responses show that non-participation was rarely a matter of rejection or lack of interest. More often, it reflected limited administrative and human capacity, the absence of dedicated cultural staff, weaker information flows, uncertainty about application procedures, or the perception that the ECoC opportunity was easier to use for Veszprém and for better-prepared partner settlements.

A further barrier was the settlement contribution model based on the principle of EUR 1 per inhabitant: some municipalities were reluctant to commit to this membership-fee arrangement because they were unsure whether the contribution would return sufficient value locally, especially if they lacked the professional capacity to compete successfully in ECoC calls for proposals.

The findings therefore add an important corrective to the regional success narratives: the cooperation model was open, but not all municipalities were equally equipped to turn that openness into concrete projects.

For legacy planning, this evidence is useful because it identifies what lower-capacity settlements would need in order to become more active participants in future regional programmes: clearer information, simpler entry points, small-scale funding, mentoring and shared communication tools. In this sense, the experience of non-participating settlements reinforces a practical lesson of the regional

evaluation: regional cooperation does not become genuinely region-wide simply because participation is formally open; it has to be continuously enabled.

For non-participating or only marginally involved settlements, the main barriers were typically not opposition to the programme, but limited administrative capacity, lack of dedicated cultural staff, uncertainty about application procedures, weaker communication links, or the perception that the ECoC remained more relevant to Veszprém and the better-prepared partner settlements. In this sense, the data add an important corrective to the success narratives: the regional model was open, but not all settlements were equally able to use the opportunity.

This finding is useful for legacy planning. If the regional network is to remain active beyond the title year, it will need not only flagship partnerships and strong cultural centres, but also lighter forms of support for lower-capacity settlements: clearer information, simplified entry points, small-scale funding, mentoring and shared communication tools. The experience of non-participating settlements therefore reinforces one of the central lessons of the regional evaluation: cooperation does not become region-wide simply because an invitation is open; it has to be continuously enabled.

However, every focus group also highlighted a pronounced **“cooling-off effect” following the programme** and a lack of sustainability.

- The project-based nature of regional funding meant that, at the end of the programme year, most initiatives stalled or became dependent on voluntary effort and external financing.
- Limited human and institutional capacity in smaller settlements frequently hindered continuity; leadership fatigue and changes in municipal administrations further complicated the preservation of legacy outcomes.
- Several participants noted that the predominantly Veszprém-centred programme calendar did not always allow for genuine regional balance or full alignment with local needs.

Participants consistently emphasised that ECoC was not a one-off festival, but rather a potential systemic transformation in regional cultural and community thinking. However, its realisation depends to a significant extent on local “catalysts”, trust, and continued support. While the softer elements—trust, cooperation, identity—have clearly been initiated, their long-term sustainability requires structural reinforcement.

What emerges from these regional voices is not a simple success-or-failure story. The ECoC clearly opened doors for many settlements: it gave local initiatives a wider frame, helped smaller places become more visible, and strengthened cooperation where there was already local energy to build on. But the interviews also make clear that this regional momentum will not continue by itself. The trust, routines and visibility created during the title year remain vulnerable where local capacities are uneven, where centre–periphery tensions are still felt, or where dedicated funding disappears too quickly. The task for the legacy period is therefore practical rather than symbolic: to keep the channels of cooperation open, maintain smaller-scale funding opportunities, and preserve a shared regional communication platform so that the network built during the ECoC year does not gradually cool down.

5. KEEPING THE MOMENTUM: LEGACY, SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ROAD AHEAD

As an online memory book of the Veszprém–Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme, the key digital channels are maintained and remain available for future online visitors.

Sustained Digital Presence

Veszprembalaton2023.hu and the HelloVEB Portal System

Following the conclusion of the programme year, the Veszprém–Balaton region's key communication platforms not only remained in operation but continued to evolve, becoming effective instruments for preserving the programme's legacy and maintaining ongoing cultural engagement. The VEB2023.hu portal and its joint social media profiles, operated by the company, continue to serve as the official archive and legacy communication hub of the European Capital of Culture programme, while the HelloVEB magazine has evolved from a traditional event-listing platform into a comprehensive umbrella platform for the region's cultural life.

The enhancement of the Tourism Management System integrated into the platform through the addition of a discount card scheme represented a significant step in strengthening the experience economy. Examples include the jointly coordinated Veszprém programme offer for

the annual Night of Museums event; the introduction of the Veszprém Card for residents in spring 2024; and subsequently the launch of the regional tourism card, the Veszprém–Balaton PASS.

One of the most significant professional challenges in the period following the European Capital of Culture title year has been the preservation of the cultural momentum and dynamism generated during the programme. The HelloVEB platform plays a pivotal role in this regard: following the closure of the programme year, it adopted an open membership and content-contribution model available to all cultural stakeholders across the region, while continuously expanding its network of partnerships.

ECoC Value Repository

The ECoc Value Repository – the digital legacy collection of the VEB2023 European Capital of Culture programme – was launched in September 2024 on the occasion of the Closing Conference. Its purpose is not merely to preserve the programmes realised during the title year as memories, but also to ensure that, in the long term, all the value catalysed by VEB2023 across the Bakony–Balaton region remains visible, accessible and usable. Throughout 2024, programme organisers were invited to submit content, resulting in the compilation of a rich collection of the many assets and achievements generated by the ECoc initiative throughout the region.

The website allows users to browse and filter content across six categories (including Tradition / Local History, Nature, Artistic / Intellectual Creation, Community, and Event / Festival), while a map-based search function enables visitors to explore the European Capital of Culture digital heritage of the Bakony–Balaton region geographically.



Podcast

One of the most significant audiovisual legacies of the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme is the Veszprém 2023 podcast series (99 episodes), followed after the programme year by its successor, Veszprém 2030. Both series were produced by the same editorial and presenting team and form an integral part of the ECoC programme's strategy for social engagement and long-term follow-up. Together, the two series provide continuous, authentic and widely accessible documentation of both the programme itself and its enduring legacy.

The primary purpose of the podcasts is to foster a deeper understanding of the ECoC programme and to present the cultural and community processes unfolding across the region to a broad audience. The Veszprém 2023 series explores the events and projects of the ECoC year, as well as the creative communities and local initiatives behind them, through in-depth interviews and on-location reports. As a continuation of this work, Veszprém 2030 follows the programme's long-term impacts and the development trajectory of the city and the region through to 2030, with particular emphasis on elements of sustainable legacy, such as community spaces, cultural infrastructure and the strengthening of local identity. Both series communicate the programme's complex themes in an accessible, narrative-driven format, helping to ensure that ECoC remains transparent and meaningful not only for direct participants but also for the wider audiences of Veszprém and the region.

The distinctive value of the two series lies in their provision of continuous chronological and thematic documentation: Veszprém 2023 accompanied the programme from its preparatory phase through to the peak of the 2023 ECoC year.

Veszprém 2030 remains active following the conclusion of the ECoC programme and documents the legacy period, demonstrating how the spirit of the programme continues to live on in the everyday life of the city, in community initiatives and in long-term development projects.



VEB2023 – Best Of: A Film About the ECoC Programme

The film VEB2023 ECoC – Best Of recounts the complete story of the 2023 European Capital of Culture year, from the moment the bid was submitted through to the conclusion of the programme year. Through interviews and reflections from colleagues and partners, the nearly 60-minute documentary revisits the unforgettable moments, flagship events, achievements and impacts of a unique and unrepeatable cultural year for the region. Its purpose is to preserve the programme's legacy: to capture and carry forward these experiences so that the “shining moments” of 2023 remain not merely the memory of a passing season but serve as a lasting source of inspiration for the cultural and community life of the Bakony–Balaton region.

The film premiered in autumn 2024 at FOTON Audiovisual Centre in Veszprém, itself one of the significant infrastructural outcomes of the ECoC programme. Prior to the complimentary screenings, visitors were offered a 30-minute guided tour of the building, followed by the film presentation.



The Institutionalised Legacy of the ECoC Year and the Role of VEB2023 Jsc.

The operational delivery and coordination of the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture programme was entrusted to Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Jsc. This organisation served as the central institution that held the entire programme together within a unified framework—from defining strategic directions and developing programme content to establishing its long-term legacy. The company functioned not merely as an administrative body, but also as an active developer of content, builder of partnerships and managerial coordinator and catalyst, without which the unprecedented scale of regional cooperation and the complexity of the programme would have been impossible to manage.

Following the conclusion of the title year, the strategic role of Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Jsc. underwent a fundamental transformation. The organisation is now responsible for the long-term stewardship and active development of the intellectual and physical assets created through the ECoC initiative. Within this framework, the company operates three flagship cultural attractions: the **Dungeon Visitor Centre**, the **CODE Centre of Digital Experiences** — opened in March 2025 and representing the largest legacy project of the programme — and the **CODE Creator** digital creative workshop.

In addition, the CODE building houses Hangár Popular Music Centre, the community workshop of DEMO Association, as well as a hub for independent artistic studios and rehearsal spaces. Collectively, the revitalised former 'Dimitrov' building complex provides the infrastructural foundation necessary for the long-term strengthening of the city's musical and creative sectors.

CODE also positions Veszprém on the international stage. Through its cooperation with the University of Pannonia and CODE LAB, it sustains international knowledge exchange and professional network-building. Furthermore, Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Jsc. oversees the **Hungarian Motion Picture Festival**, which strengthens the regional presence of the Hungarian film industry, as well as **Planet Lens International**

Nature Photography and Film Festival, which focuses on sustainability and visual culture. These programmes provide the region with a durable, annually recurring cultural offer and a sustainable professional network.

The company also plays a strategic role in generating international project collaborations. In particular, through its participation in the Interreg Europe ECOC Echo project, it works alongside other European Capital of Culture cities to share the knowledge, expertise and experience gained through the ECoC programme and to promote their wider application.

The viability of this culturally grounded, bottom-up development model is demonstrated by the fact that the accumulated experience of cooperation and the extensive partner network directly laid the foundations for further international recognition of the region. In the summer of 2024, the City of Veszprém commissioned Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Jsc. to prepare and deliver the **European Region of Sport 2026** title programme. With the award of this title, Veszprém and its associated 99 municipalities are now applying the momentum and methodology developed through the 2023 ECoC programme to the fields of active lifestyles and community health promotion.

For the participating municipalities, this title represents an opportunity to continue the intensive regional cooperation established during the ECoC year around a new shared strategic objective. The European Region of Sport programme is expected to contribute to extending tourism and visitor activity throughout the year, further strengthening social inclusion, and encouraging visitors attending major sporting events to engage with cultural institutions as well. It will also enable the continued utilisation of the shared communication and data-collection platforms already established and bring the region closer to achieving its long-term liveability objectives.

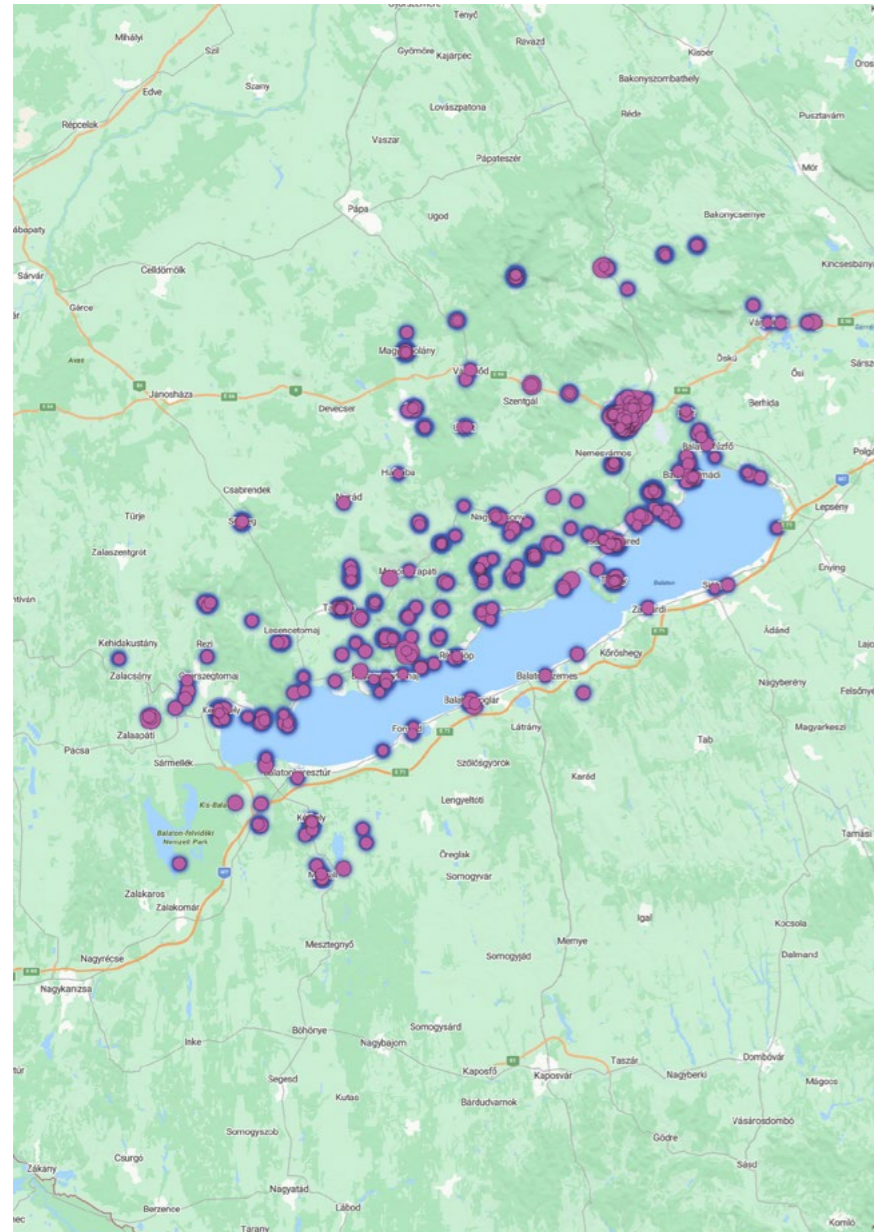
In this way, the ECoC legacy remains not a static remembrance, but a living and evolving framework that, beyond cultural vibrancy, continues to create lasting value for the Bakony–Balaton region in the fields of community wellbeing and active lifestyles.

6. APPENDIX



PUBLISHED EVENTS

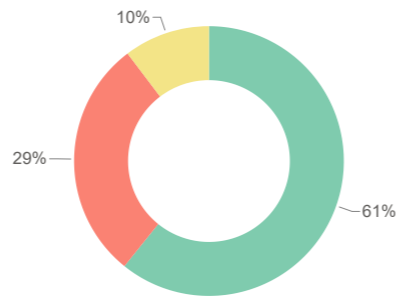
Datasource: Online Event Calendar



Location ● Region ● Veszprém



Nature ● Free to attend ● Tickets ● Registration

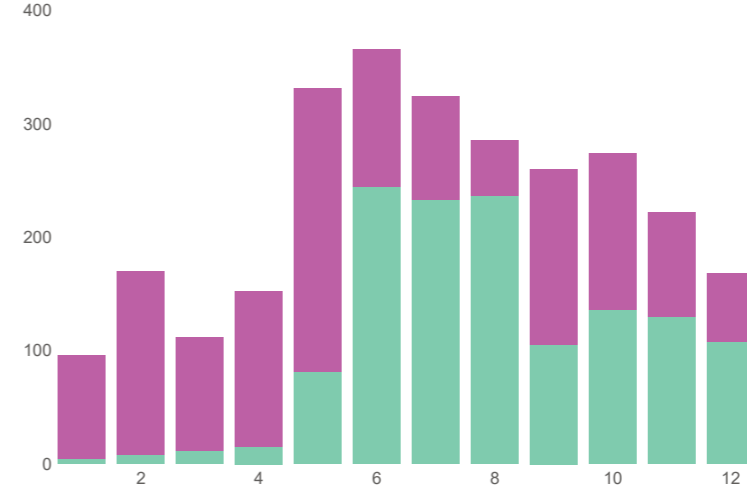


BREAKDOWN OF EVENTS (2023)

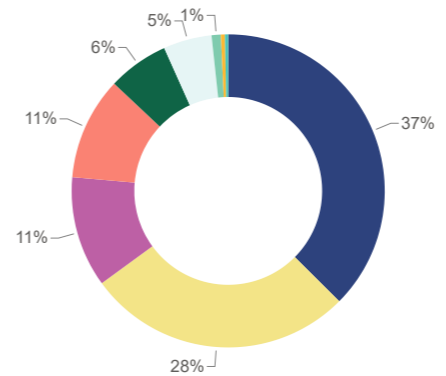
Datasource: Online Event Calendar

Month and Location

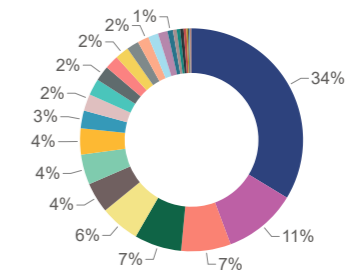
● Region ● Veszprém



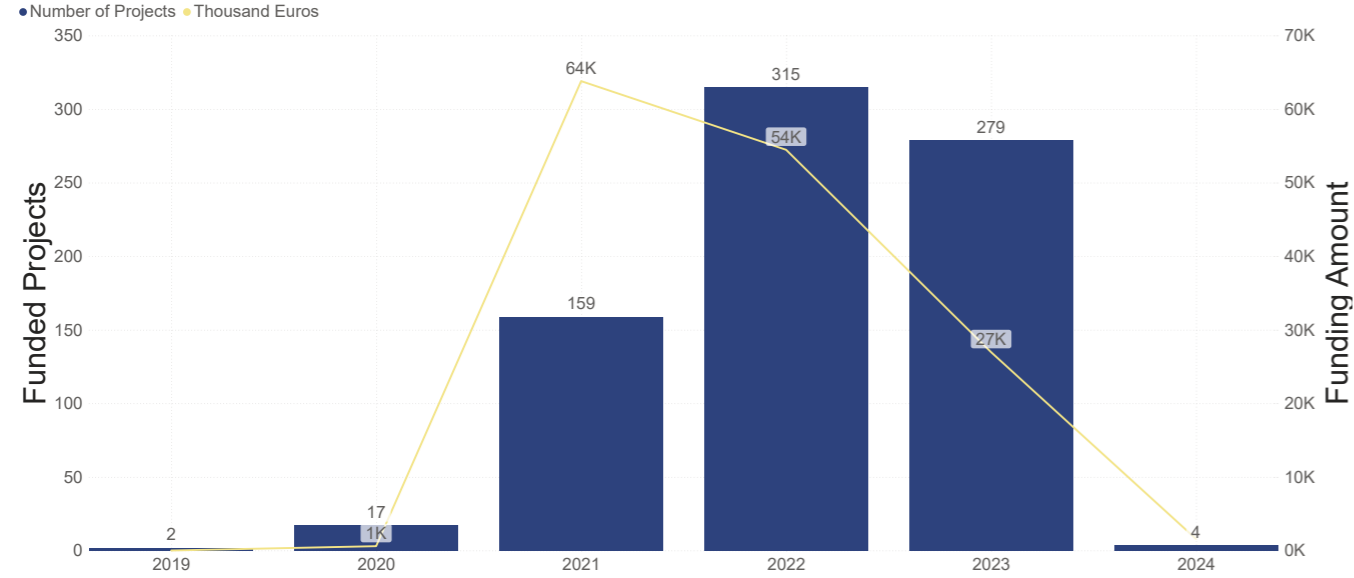
Cluster
 ● Music/City
 ● The Busy World of Ves...
 ● Celebration
 ● Bridges
 ● Reflection
 ● Beyond
 ● Region, Alive
 ● Fragile Balaton
 ● Out-of-the-Ordinary



Genre
 ● Music
 ● Community Progra...
 ● Literature
 ● Visual Arts
 ● Film
 ● CultNet (KultHáló)
 ● Theatre
 ● Children and Youth
 ● Barn Program
 ● Ecology
 ● Science and Educ...
 ● Dance
 ● Interdisciplinary Arts
 ● Local History
 ● Gastronomy
 ● Health and Mental ...
 ● Wine Culture
 ● Photography
 ● Design
 ● Folklore
 ● Digital Art
 ● Sport
 ● Urbanism
 ● Religion and Spirit...
 ● Community Program
 ● Exhibition
 ● Hiking / Excursion
 ● Workshop
 ● Poetry



BREAKDOWN OF GRANTS AWARDED TO PARTNERS



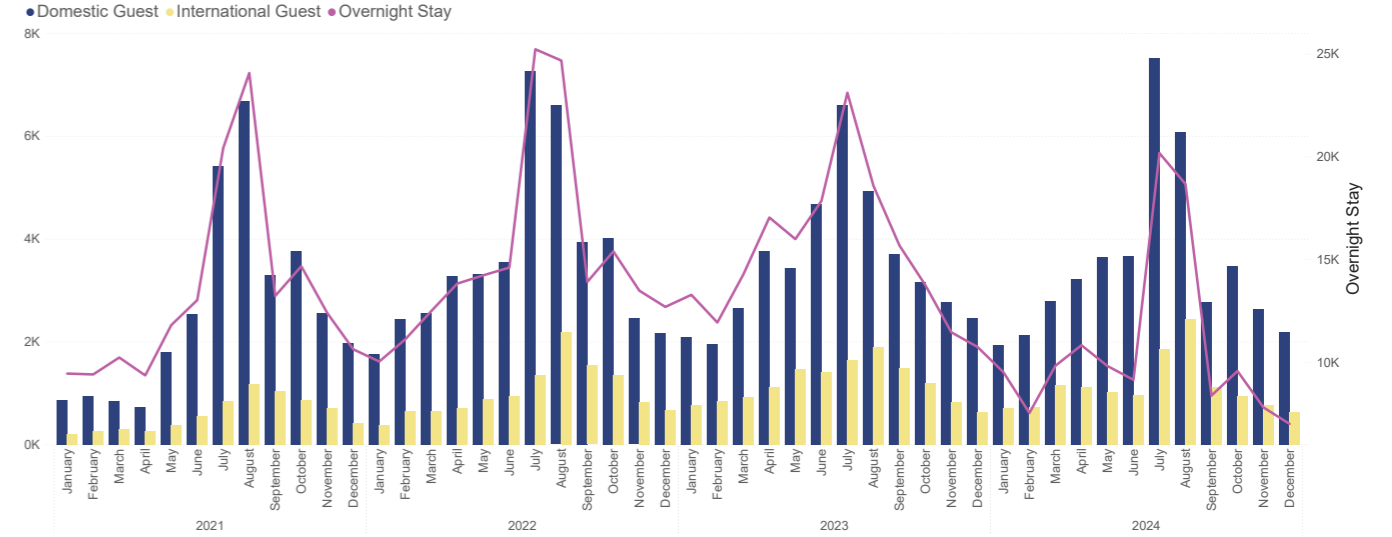
Distribution by Clusters



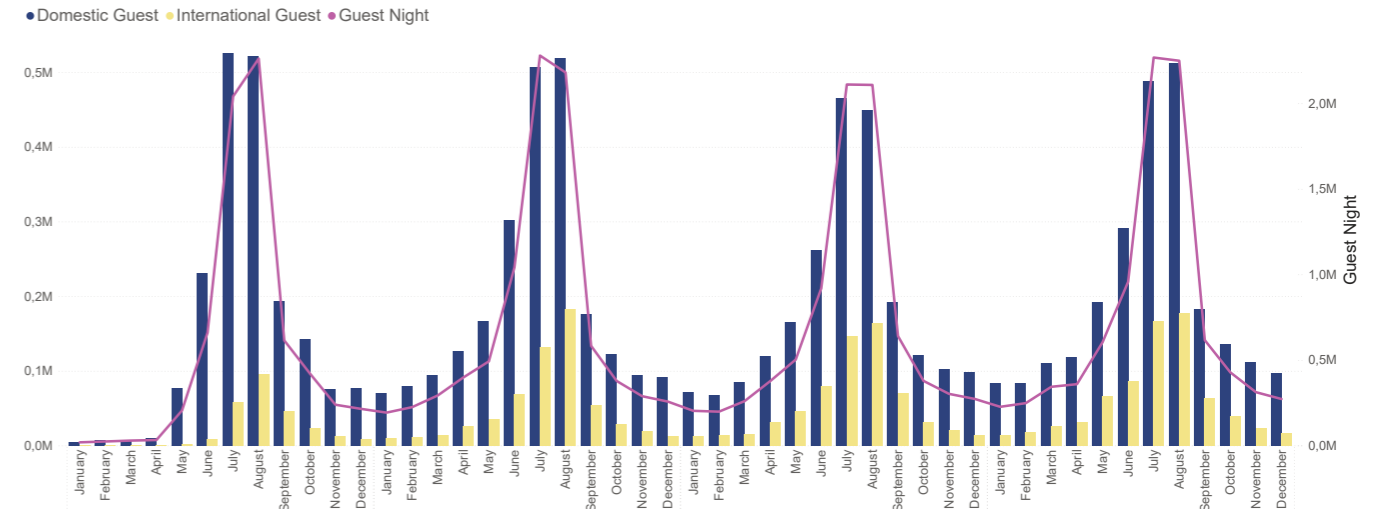
DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL GUESTS AND GUESTNIGHTS (2021-2024)

Datasource: Hungarian Tourism Agency, NTAk

VESZPRÉM

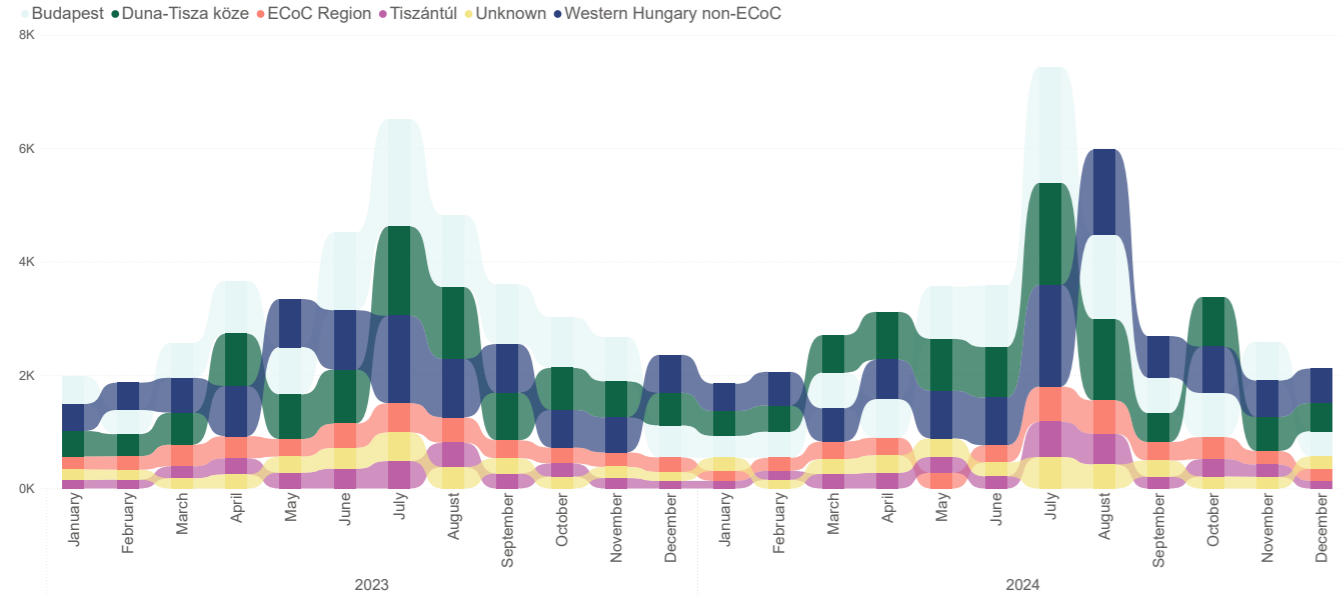


REGION



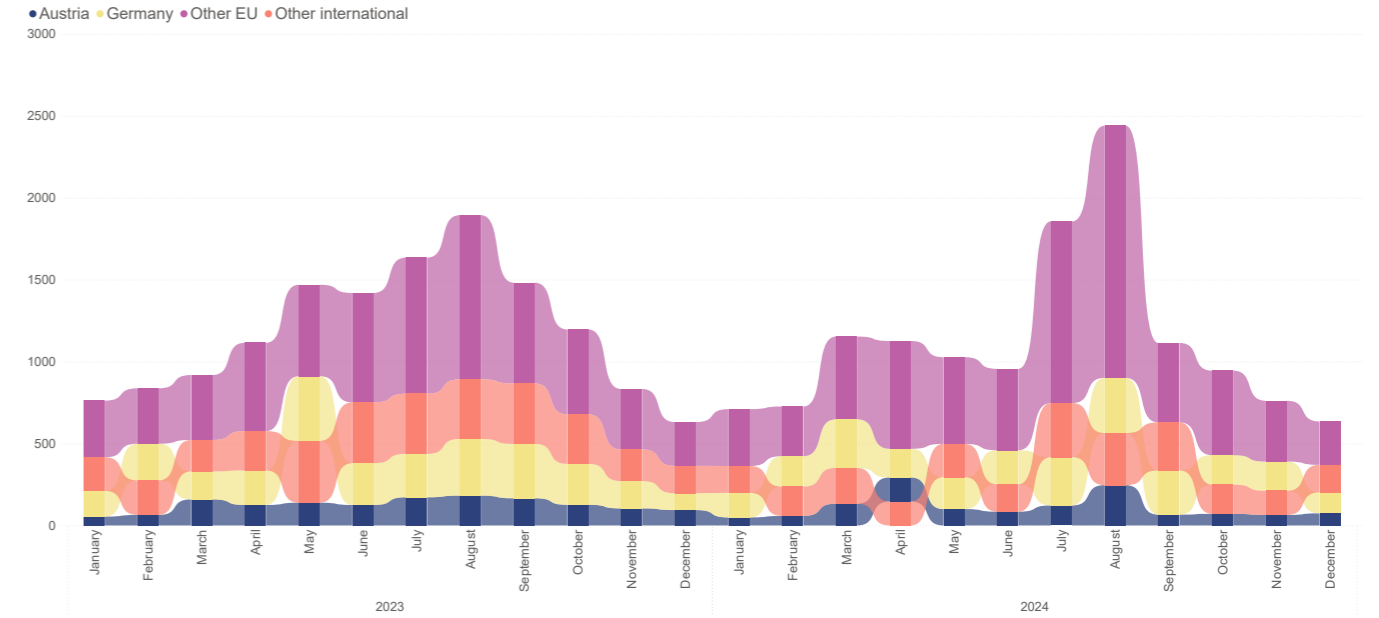
DOMESTIC GUESTS VESZPRÉM

Datasource: Hungarian Tourism Agency, NTAK

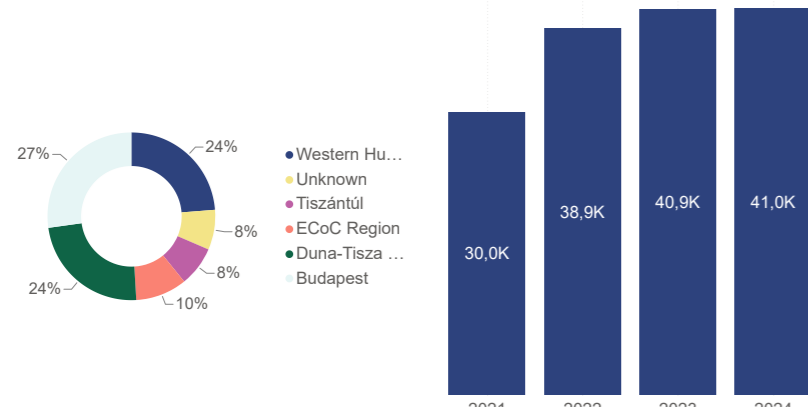


INTERNATIONAL GUESTS VESZPRÉM

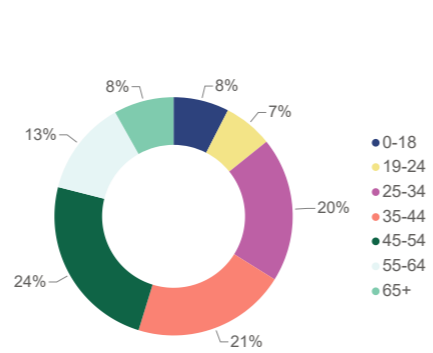
Datasource: Hungarian Tourism Agency, NTAK



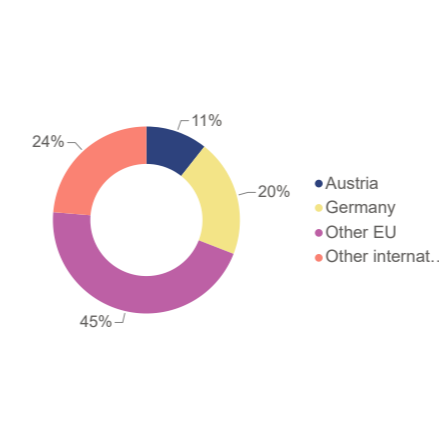
2023 by Sending Region



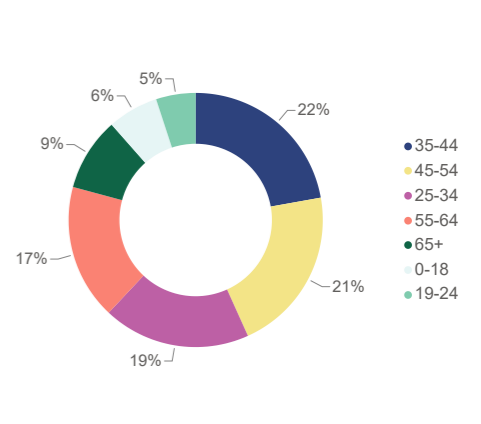
2023 by Age Groups



2023 by Sending Region



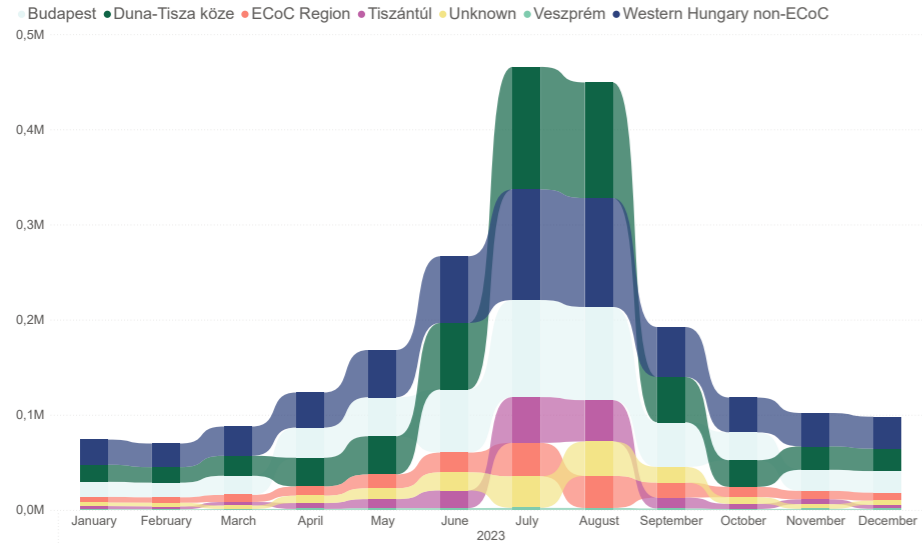
2023 by Age Groups



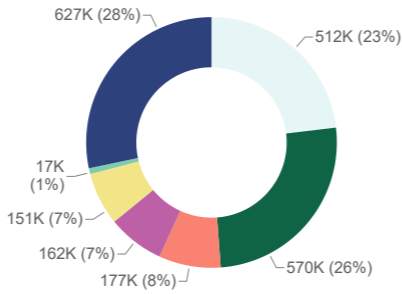
DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL GUESTS REGION (2023)

Datasource: Hungarian Tourism Agency, NTAK

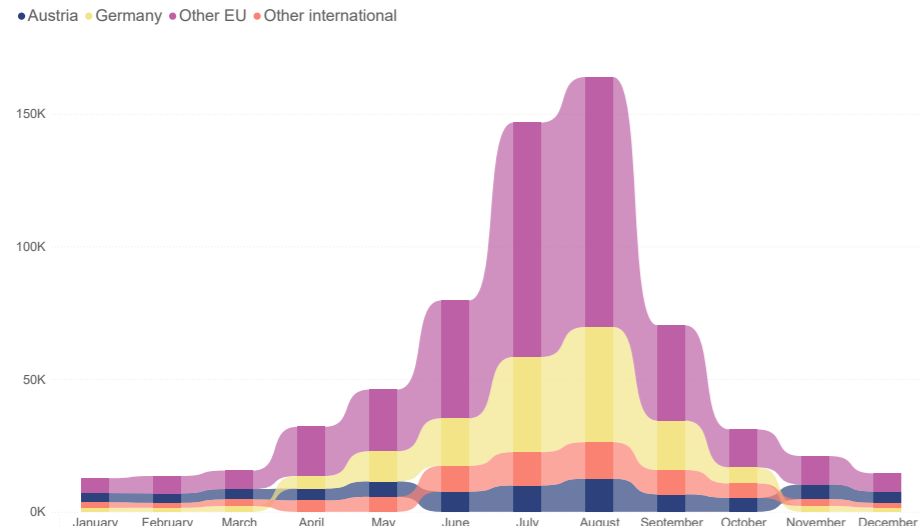
DOMESTIC GUESTS



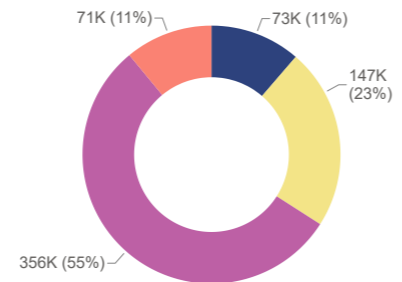
2 216 074
Total domestic guests



INTERNATIONAL GUESTS



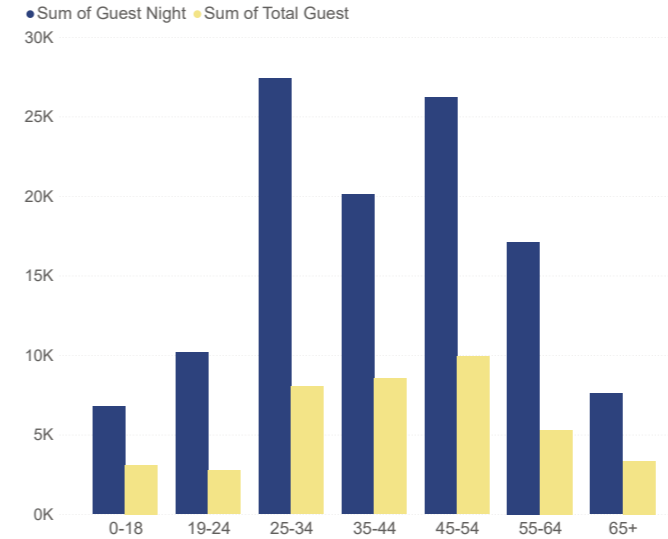
647 073
Total international guests



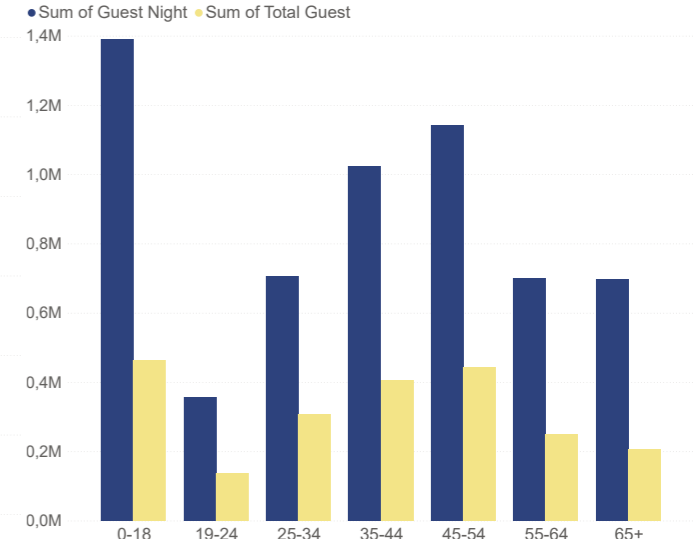
DOMESTIC GUESTS AND GUEST NIGHTS BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUPS

Datasource: Hungarian Tourism Agency, NTAK

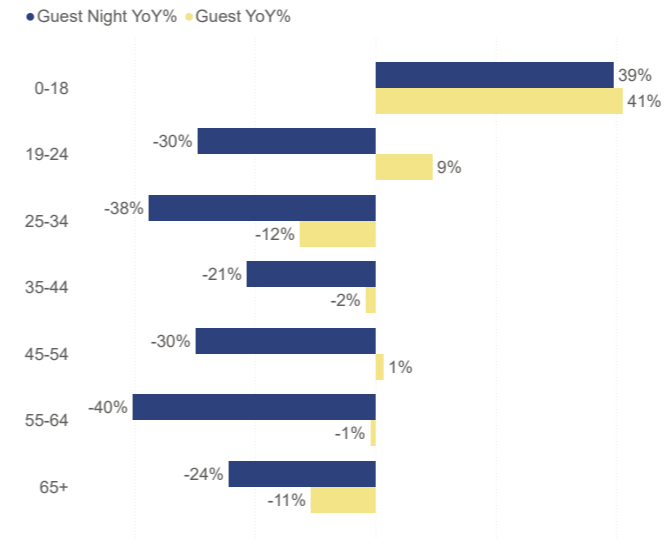
VESZPRÉM, 2023



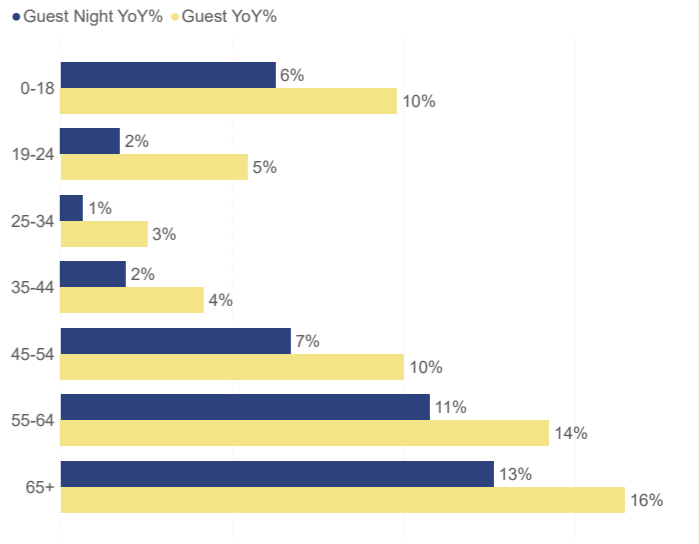
REGION, 2023



VESZPRÉM 2024 vs 2023



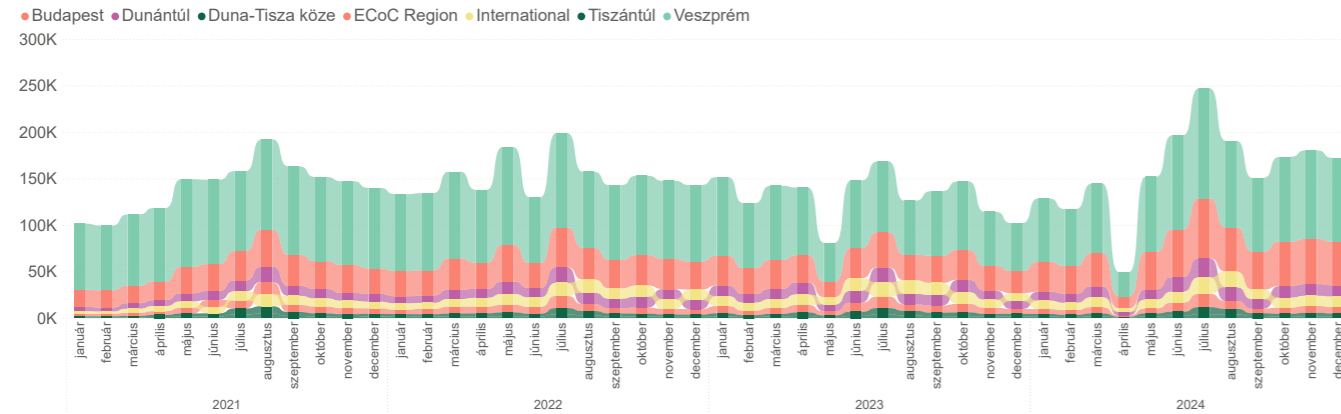
REGION 2024 vs 2023



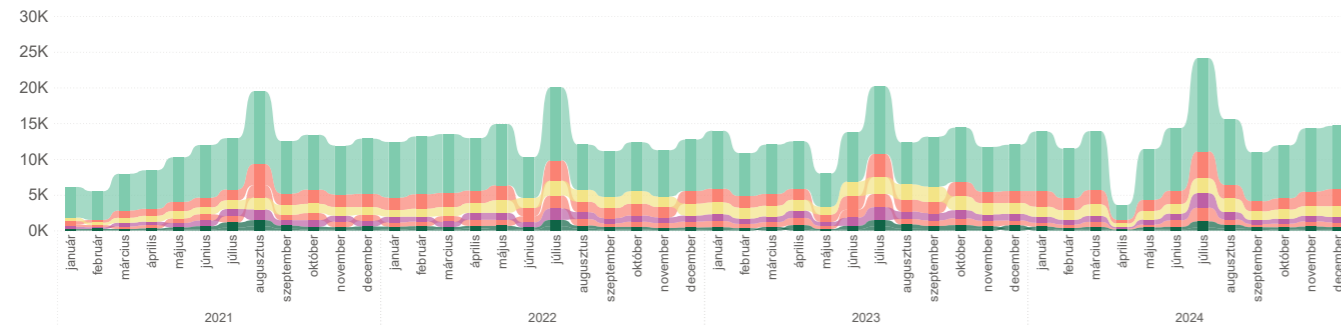
VESZPRÉM HISTORIC CENTRE VISITOR NUMBERS BY ORIGIN (2021-2024)

Datasource: Hungarian Telekom

Visitors 2023: **1 582 439**
 Visitors 2024 vs 2021: **+ 13%**
 Share of Veszprémers, 2023: **21%**
 Share of Veszprémers 2024 vs 2021: **+ 21%**



EVENING ONLY



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total	1 682 494	1 820 907	1 582 439	1 904 536
Veszprém	1 026 381	1 029 378	808 838	980 249
Tiszántúl	21 684	22 990	24 680	25 100
International	85 216	125 114	133 997	130 374
ECoC Region	326 989	385 458	347 091	498 761
Duna-Tisza köze	41 148	41 919	43 344	43 159
Dunántúl	105 649	130 731	134 947	144 172
Budapest	75 427	85 317	89 542	82 721

NOTE: The charts show monthly visitor flows to Veszprém's Historic Centre across four years, broken down by region of origin. The upper shows entire days, while the lower only the evening hours (6pm to midnight).

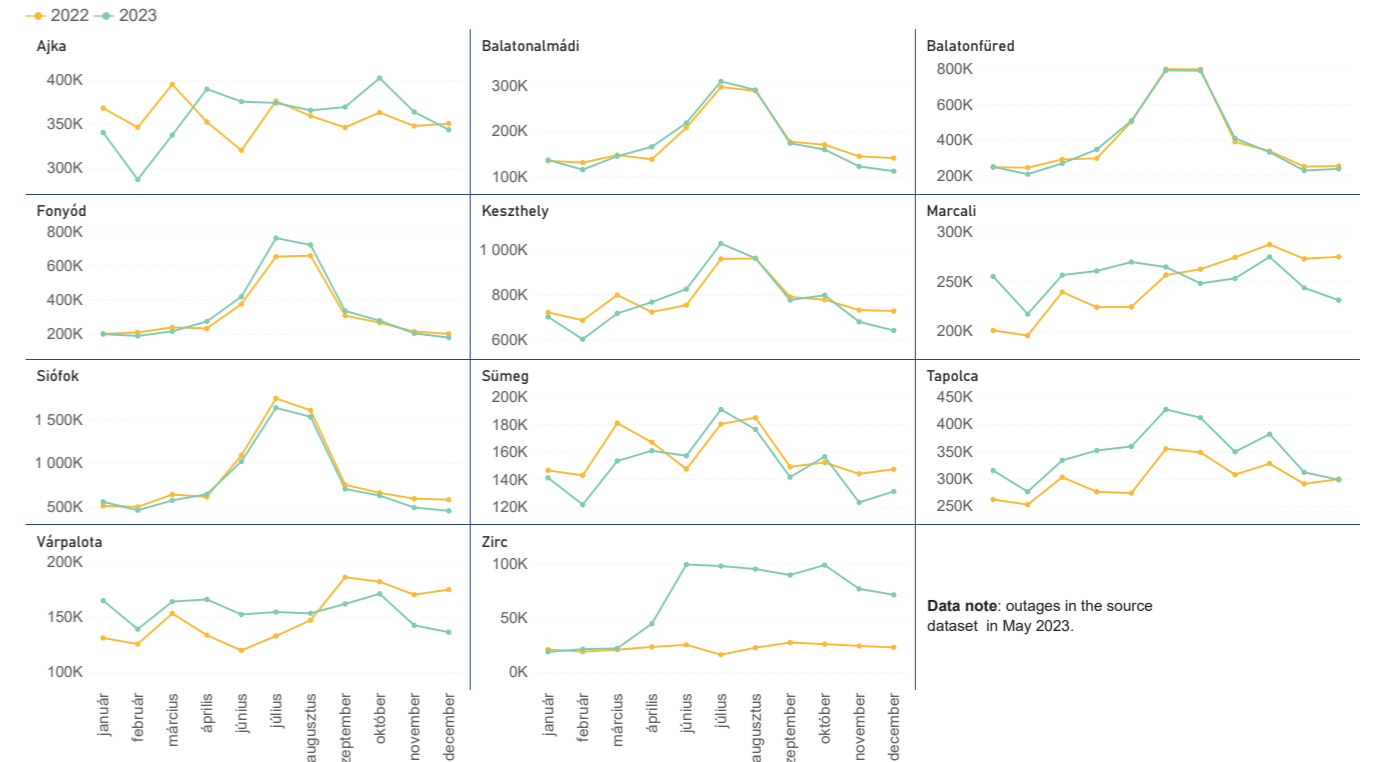
Key highlights

- The visualisation demonstrates both recovery after 2021 and growing local engagement, with Veszprém residents forming the largest single group every year.
- Two of Veszprém's characteristic annual large-scale downtown festivals are clearly visible in the data series: the Gizella Days in May and the Street Music Festival (typically held in July, held in August in 2021 due to COVID restrictions). These events generate the most pronounced peaks especially in the evenings.

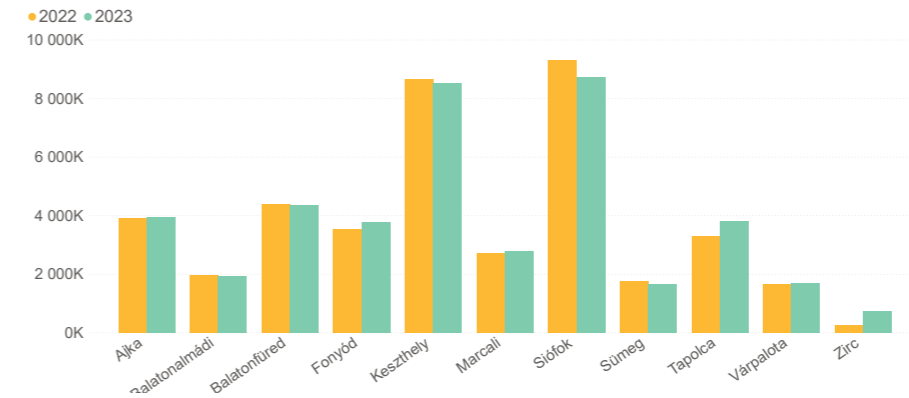
Data note: outages in the source dataset caused lower recorded visitor numbers in May 2023 and April 2024.

ANNUAL VISITOR NUMBERS IN THE REGION'S DISTRICT CENTRES 2022-2023

Datasource: Hungarian Telekom



Data note: outages in the source dataset in May 2023.

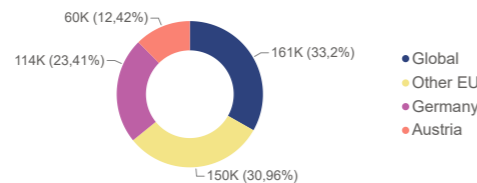
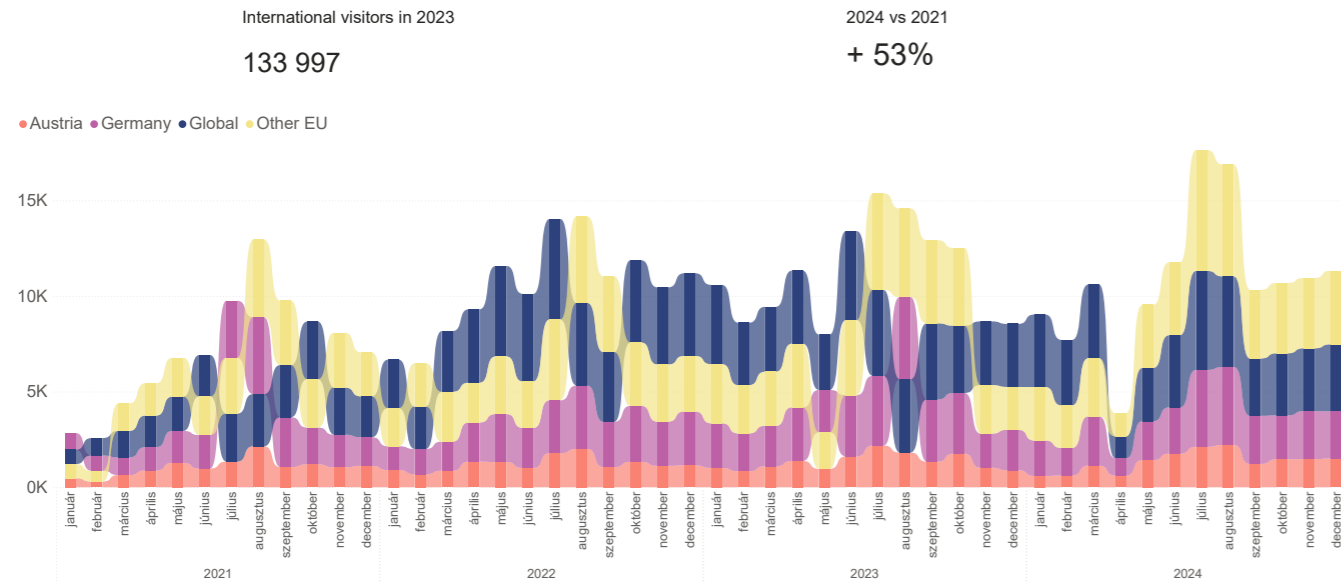


41 618 298
Domestic Visitors, 2023

2 631 807
International Visitors, 2023

VESZPRÉM HISTORIC CENTRE INTERNATIONAL VISITOR NUMBERS BY ORIGIN (2021-2024)

Datasource: Hungarian Telekom



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total	85 216	125 114	133 997	130 374
Global	24 236	47 011	44 658	41 753
Other EU	26 540	36 312	40 499	43 376
Germany	21 988	27 227	32 923	29 112
Austria	12 452	14 564	15 917	16 133

NOTE: Austria and Germany were analysed as separate categories, as they represent Veszprém's primary international target markets. Austria and Germany were analysed as separate categories because they represent Veszprém's primary international target markets; in 2023, they accounted for 37% of all international visitors. The marked increase in visitors from outside the EU during 2022–2023 can be attributed to the European Capital of Culture effect, which substantially expanded the city's international visibility and appeal.

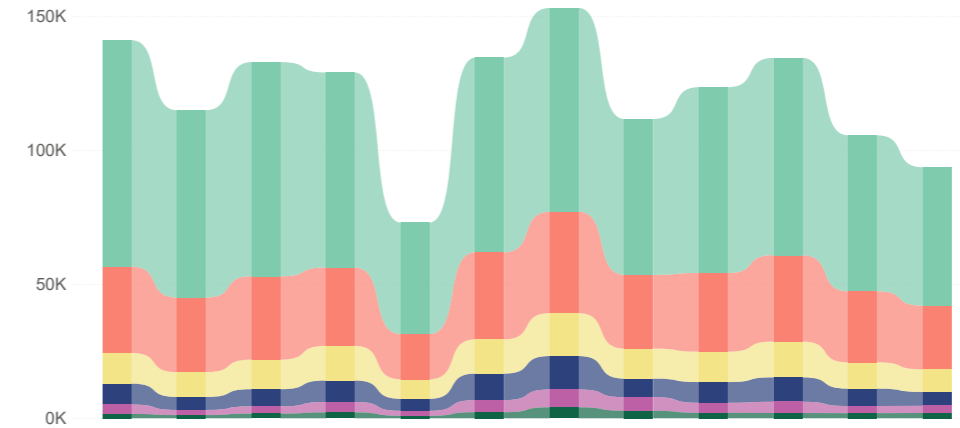
Data note: outages in the source dataset caused lower recorded visitor numbers in May 2023 and April 2024.

VESZPRÉM HISTORIC CENTRE VISITOR NUMBERS BY ORIGIN (2023)

Datasource: Hungarian Telekom

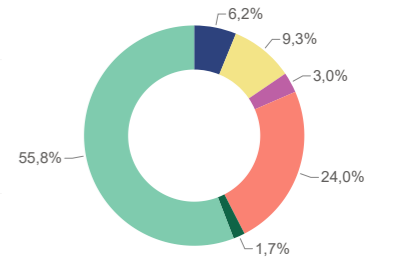
Domestic

Legend: Budapest (dark blue), Dunántúl (yellow), Duna-Tisza köze (purple), ECoC Region (red), Tiszántúl (green), Veszprém (light green)



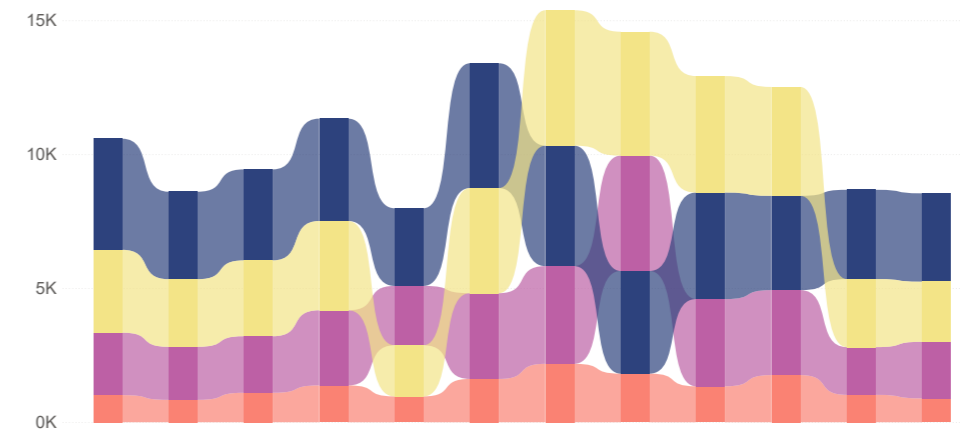
Domestic visitors in 2023

1 448 442



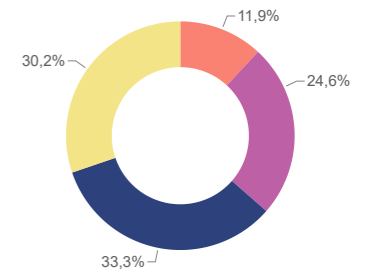
International

Legend: Austria (red), Germany (purple), Global (dark blue), Other EU (yellow)

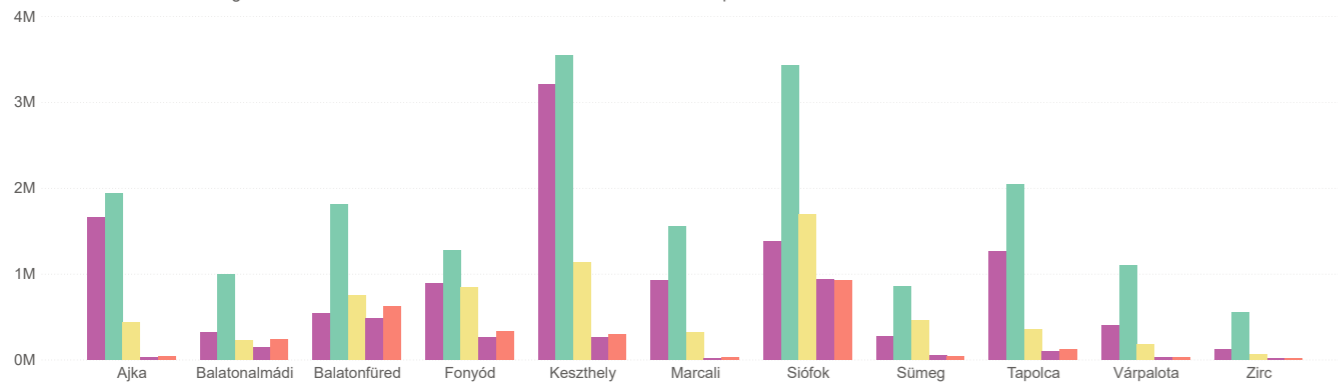


International visitors in 2023

133 997

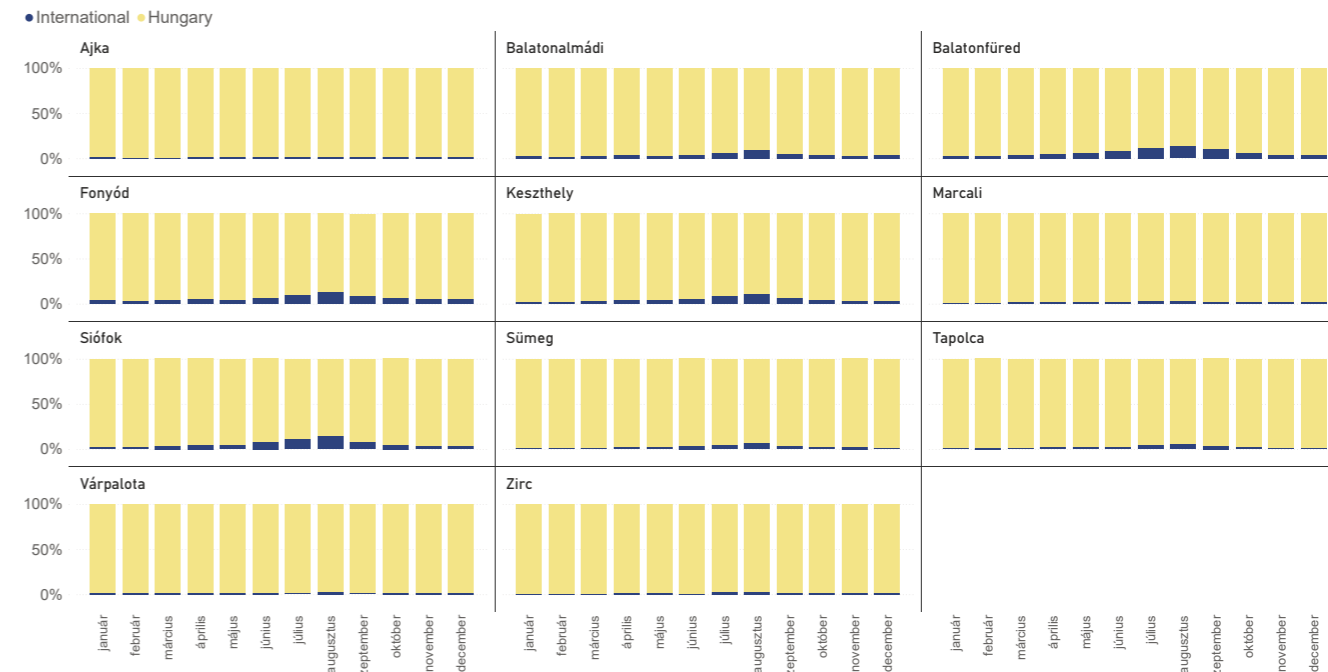


VISITOR NUMBERS IN THE REGION'S DISTRICT CENTRES BREAKDOWN OF DOMESTIC VISITORS BY MONTH AND ORIGIN, 2023 Datasource: Hungarian Telekom



Domestic visitors from other Hungarian regions arrived in markedly different proportions and volumes across the county seats. **Balatonfüred** attracted non-local visitors consistently throughout the year, with a balanced presence of regional origins visible in every month. **Keszthely** and **Siófok** recorded the highest total visitor volumes, driven by strong inflows from other regions (especially in summer), alongside significant local activity. **Várpalota** and **Zirc** (along with some other inland centers) had much lower overall visitor numbers, where the **vast majority of visitors were local residents** (Saját

VISITOR NUMBERS IN THE REGION'S DISTRICT CENTRES SHARE OF INTERNATIONAL VISITORS Datasource: Hungarian Telekom



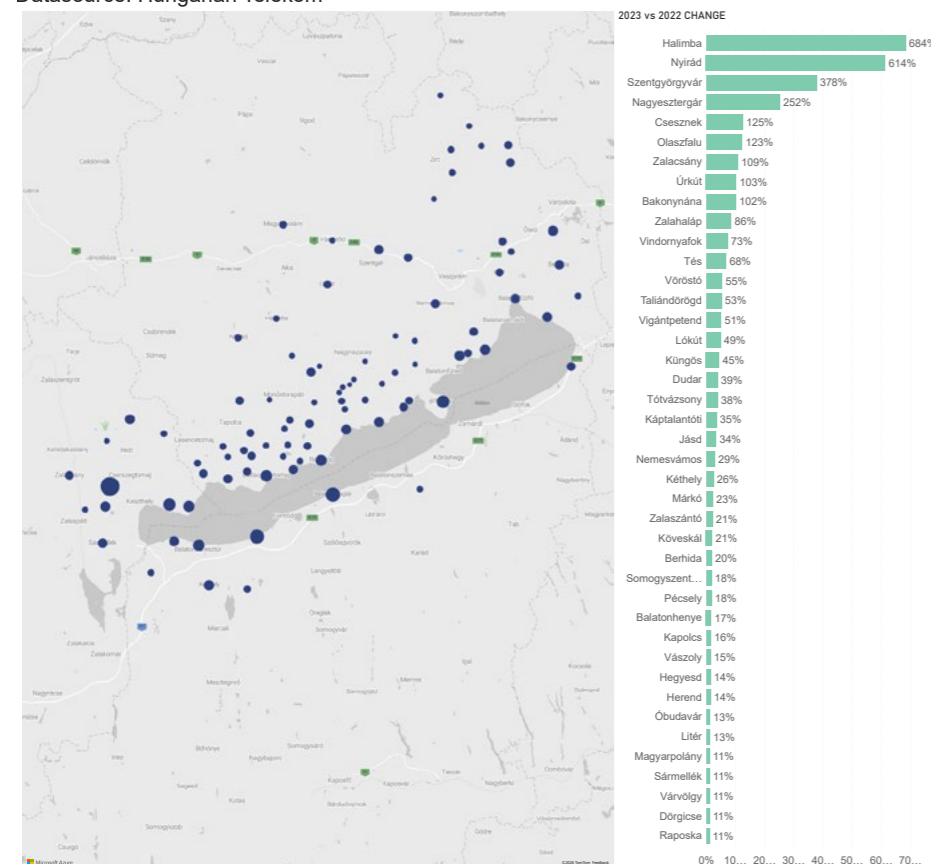
	2023	2022	YOY Change
Zirc	13 422	7 299	83,89%
Tapolca	133 541	89 215	49,68%
Fonyód	347 214	237 910	45,94%
Balatonalmádi	119 480	87 638	36,33%
Keszthely	520 629	395 138	31,76%
Balatonfüred	438 538	351 027	24,93%
Marcali	64 274	51 616	24,52%
Várpalota	37 869	31 068	21,89%
Süveg	66 192	56 472	17,21%
Siófok	820 991	709 769	15,67%
Ajka	69 657	67 984	2,46%
Total	2 631 807	2 085 136	26,22%

NOTE: International visitors represented a significant portion of tourism in the region, with notable differences between locations. The region recorded a solid overall growth of **+26.22%** in international visitors compared to 2022. **Zirc** saw the strongest growth in international visitors with an impressive **+83.89%** year-over-year increase. **Tapolca** and **Fonyód** also showed strong growth, with international visitor numbers rising by **+49.68%** and **+45.94%** respectively. **Balatonfüred** and **Siófok** had the highest share of international visitors during the peak summer season (15.9% and 17.2% in August). Domestic visitors continue to dominate in most towns, particularly in **Ajka**, **Várpalota**, and **Marcali**. August remained the peak month across all locations, with the highest visitor volumes and international shares.

VISITOR NUMBERS IN THE REGION'S SETTLEMENTS

TOTAL VISITORS IN 2023 vs. 2022

Datasource: Hungarian Telekom



Key international partners of selected projects

Project	International partners	Countries	Support / collaboration type
Artists in Residence – Literature	RECIT - European Network of International Literary Translation Centres; HALMA - European Network of Literary Centres; EUNIC cluster; ECoC cities; Veszprém sister cities	European / multiple countries	International cultural cooperation / residency partner.
Balaton Eye – Fine art residency programme	British Council Hungary; Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Budapest; Austrian Cultural Forum; EU-Japan Fest; Japan Foundation; French Institute; Embassy of Germany in Hungary; Embassy of Denmark in Hungary	United Kingdom; Netherlands; Austria; Japan / EU; France; Germany; Denmark	Institutional cooperation with international cultural institutes, foundations and embassies.
Balaton Eye – Fine art residency programme	„EU-Japan Fest, Austrian Cultural Forum, Fotogalerie Wien Claudia Küssel, Eric Kessels (Netherlands), Thomas Mailaender, Noémie Goudal (France), Dafna Talmor (GB)”	Japan / EU	International cultural cooperation / residency partner.
Balaton Wine and Gourmet 2022	Cervantes Institute Budapest; Embassy of Spain in Hungary; Embassy of Japan in Hungary; EU-Japan Fest, French Embassy in Budapest	Spain; Japan; Japan; France	International guest-country and culinary-cultural programming.
Balatorium (Balatorium Ecology Week)	Bad Ischl - Salzkammergut 2024 ECoC	Austria	Artist residency / open call cooperation; exhibition travels to Bad Ischl and onwards.
BALKAN:MOST Festival in cooperation with WOMEX	Piranha Arts / WOMEX; EXIT Foundation; BOZAR; Songlines Magazine; Bulgarian Music Association; European Music Council; Password Production; JV Production; AD Management; WMCE / Polish Radio Centre for Folk Music; Czech Music Office; Mosaic Beats / Pannonica Festival; Prishtina Music Conference & Rave Festival; We Move Music Croatia; Serbia Creates; Sabs Booking & Music Management; Charmworks UK/Turkey; R.O.K. Booking & Management; Glitterbeat Records; Balkan Trafik; World Music Festival Todo Mundo; Believe Hungary; Music4You / World Music Lab; Sofia Live Festival; Etnofest / Malomfesztivál; Creative Europe Desk Bulgaria; Eenlarge Europe; University of Lodz	Germany; Serbia; Belgium; United Kingdom; Bulgaria; EU; North Macedonia; Estonia; Poland; Czechia; Kosovo; Croatia; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Turkey; Slovenia; France; Hungary; Italy	Conference preparation and communications; MOST project participation and communications; mentoring for showcase performers; conference speakers and moderators.

Project	International partners	Countries	Support / collaboration type
Chaconne Festival	Flemish Representation; Italian Cultural Institute; French Institute; Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Hungary	Belgium; Italy; France; Netherlands	
Climbing over Veszprém	Le Petit Cirque du Monde; Eleusis 2023 ECoC; Timișoara 2023 ECoC; French Institute in France	France; Greece; Romania	Grant support won by Kabóca Puppet Theatre through the French Institute in France; international circus / ECoC cooperation. Financial support amount: 7,000 EUR.
Common sense	Carla di Grazia; Mayumi Taniguchi; Adela Galova / Czech Centre; Kató Csilla; Perrine Deltour and Obay Al Bitar	Italy; Romania; Czechia; Belgium	Lectures and exchange of experience.
CultNet	Austrian Cultural Forum	Austria	Cultural cooperation.
Encounters in the City of Music	UNESCO Creative City of Music network	International / UNESCO	International guest performers
Gisela Days 2023	Zonta International; Passau; Kraków; Sfântu Gheorghe; Tartu; Rovaniemi; Gladsaxe	International; Germany; Poland; Romania; Estonia; Finland; Denmark	International community and cultural participation supported by event infrastructure and presentation opportunities.
International Volunteering	„European Solidarity Corps ASOCIATIA GEYC; Pistes Solidaires; ASOCIATIA DE TINERI DIN ARDEAL; INZENJERI ZASTITE ZIVOTNE SREDINE UDRUZENJE; TYPA MTÜ; Escola de Tempo Libre Don Bosco; Fundació Catalunya Voluntària; NGO Actio Catholica Patria; Voluntary Service International; Stranaidea Società Cooperativa Sociale Impresa Sociale; Stowarzyszenie Aktywne Kobiety”	Romania; France; Serbia; Estonia; Spain; Lithuania; Ireland; Italy; Poland	International volunteer sending and support organizations.

Project	International partners	Countries	Support / collaboration type
InterUrban	Kaunas 2022 ECoC; City of Ghent; Katowice City of Gardens; City of Liverpool; Chemnitz 2025 ECoC; Novi Sad 2022 ECoC; Bodø 2024 ECoC; Tartu 2024 ECoC; Password Production Skopje; City of Ibagué; Austrian Cultural Forum; Bad Ischl - Salzkammergut 2024 ECoC; FinnAgora; Trenčín 2026 ECoC; Nova Gorica - Gorizia 2025 ECoC; Cervantes Institute Budapest; Embassy of Spain in Hungary; British Council Hungary	Lithuania; Belgium; Poland; United Kingdom; Germany; Serbia; Norway; Estonia; North Macedonia; Colombia; Austria; Finland; Slovakia; Slovenia / Italy; Spain	Entire project based on international cooperation with ECoC cities, municipalities, cultural institutes and embassies.
LandART Festival	ArchDaily; Dezeen; designboom; Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania; Martial Marquet Studio; SARP; Bethel Woods Center for the Arts; Groupe École Supérieure du Bois	International / USA; United Kingdom; Italy / international; Romania; France; Poland; USA; France	Communication and press support; newsletters and media coverage; recruitment/delegation of participants; visitor and group-leader involvement.
Libertalia - Collective Moves	SAFE Regeneration Ltd.; Gathenhielmska Foundation; City of Turku; Salzkammergut 2024; Limerick City and County Council	United Kingdom; Sweden; Finland; Austria; Ireland	Creative Europe partnership. Financial support amount: 19,000 EUR.
MusiColours European Youth Music Festival	European Music School Union; Association of Music Schools of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	European network; Luxembourg	International music education network cooperation.

Project	International partners	Countries	Support / collaboration type
Night of Literature	Austrian Cultural Forum; Flemish Representation; Bulgarian Institute; Korean Cultural Institute; Embassy of the Netherlands; Embassy of Israel / Merkaz; Japan Foundation; Italian Institute; Slovak Institute; Czech Centre; French Institute; Scandinavian House; Polish Institute; Embassy of Lithuania; Camões Portuguese Institute; Cervantes Institute; Embassy of Switzerland; Slovenian Embassy; Estonian Institute; FinnAgora; British Council; Goethe-Institut; Norwegian Embassy; Romanian Cultural Institute; Yunus Emre Institute; Embassy of Ukraine	Austria; Belgium / Flanders; Bulgaria; South Korea; Netherlands; Israel; Japan; Italy; Slovakia; Czechia; France; Nordic countries; Poland; Lithuania; Portugal; Spain; Switzerland; Slovenia; Estonia; Finland; United Kingdom; Germany; Norway; Romania; Turkey; Ukraine	Coordination by the Czech Institute; translations and copyright clearance if needed; personal presence of 19 out of 25 institutes; representation, presentation and book donation.
Off-Season Literature Festival	SepsiBook; Tartu 2024 ECoC; Austrian Cultural Forum; Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI)	Romania; Estonia; Austria; Belgium	Invitation of French, Belgian and Austrian creators; Tartu band and SepsiBook program participation; international concerts at TEREM.
Out of Ordinary Places	French Institute; Tamási Áron Theatre, Sfântu Gheorghe; Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI)	France; Romania; Belgium	International performances and artists included in the 2023 season.
Street Art Veszprém	Cervantes Institute Budapest; Czech Centre; Austrian Cultural Forum; Meyso and Tete; Alice Lotti	Spain; Czechia; Austria; France; Italy	Czech Centre participation at own cost; artist participation supported through the Street Art Veszprém / House of Arts grant context.
Street Music Festival 2022	StreetMusic Festival Satu Mare; Dr. Carsten Gerhard / Festspiele Europäische Wochen Passau; Yiannis Tsiatsianis, Eleusis; Ms Tetiana Kovalevska / Anshlag CA	Romania; Germany; Greece; Ukraine	Volunteer delegation; jury participation; festival-prize performance opportunity.

Project	International partners	Countries	Support / collaboration type
Street Music Festival 2023	French Institute; Festival Maraton hudby Brno; StreetMusic Festival Satu Mare; Polish Institute; Dr. Carsten Gerhard / Festspiele Europäische Wochen Passau; ECoC professionals from Wrocław, Maribor, Kaunas and Tartu	France; Czechia; Romania; Poland; Germany; Lithuania; Estonia; Slovenia	International jury and producer participation; volunteer delegation; exchange of experience; potential workshops and instrument demonstrations; next-festival performance opportunity.
Timecircus - Landschip Project	Eleusis 2023 ECoC; Timișoara 2023 ECoC; Flemish Institute	Greece; Romania; Belgium / Flanders	Landschip journey and ECoC route cooperation from Antwerp to Eleusis via Hungary and Timișoara. Financial support amount: 1,000 EUR.
Valley of Songs	Csemadok Galanta District Organization; Hungarian Cultural Association / Hungarian Cultural Institute of Vojvodina; Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Institute; Sfântu Gheorghe Mayor's Office; Covasna County Cultural Centre; Hungarian National Cultural Institute Lendava; Burgenland Hungarian Cultural Association; Alsóőr Hungarian Media and Information Centre; Partium Christian University Choir; St Cecilia Choir; Laudate Chamber Choir; Óbecse Schola Cantorum; Zurich Hungarian Ecumenical Golarits Choir; Galánta Kodály Zoltán Choir; Zobor Hangja Mixed Choir	Slovakia; Serbia; Ukraine; Romania; Slovenia; Austria; Switzerland	Organizational assistance; lectures; choir participation in workshops, concerts, gala concerts, open rehearsals and commemorative events.
Vallis Musicalis - A valley full of music in the heart of the Bakony	Flemish Representation; British Council Hungary; French Institute; Italian Cultural Institute	Belgium; United Kingdom; France; Italy	Direct financial support for the Odhecaton ensemble's September concert in Bakonybél.
Veszprém Early Music Days	Flemish Representation; Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI); Embassy of Spain in Hungary	Belgium; Spain	Direct support for the Spanish ensemble Tasto Solo for both concerts at Veszprém Early Music Days.

International delegations in 2023

Event	Country / Region	Group	Date	Participants
Street Music Festival 2021	Greece	Elefsina and Tartu ECoC delegations	August 25–28, 2021	6
Street Music Festival 2021	Estonia	Tartu ECoC delegation	August 25–28, 2021	5
EUNIC meeting	Italy, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Lithuania, Switzerland, France, Romania, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Israel	EU National Institutes for Culture representatives	November 17, 2021	15
Interarts Academy Camp workshop	Austria, Spain	Project participants	November 24–26, 2021	2
ECoC family meeting	Romania, Norway, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Serbia, Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Estonia, Japan, Czech Republic, Croatia, Greece	ECoC representatives	September 21–25, 2022	54
Glas Focus exhibition opening	Denmark	Diplomatic delegation	January 19, 2023	2
Opening Ceremony	ECoC network	ECoC representatives	January 21, 2023	79
Opening Ceremony	Germany	Twin city delegations	January 21, 2023	20
Opening Ceremony	EU member states, Japan, Switzerland, Norway, United Kingdom, Azerbaijan	Diplomatic delegations	January 21, 2023	30

Event	Country / Region	Group	Date	Participants
Liszt Institutes and Ministry of Foreign Affairs		Liszt Institute representatives	January 21, 2023	4
Brazilian delegation	Brazil	Diplomatic delegation	February 1, 2023	2
InterUrban	Belgium (Flanders)	Flanders representative	February 10, 2023	2
Nova Gorica infrastructure visit	Slovenia	GO! 2025 infrastructure team	February 25, 2023	3
Rzeszów 2029 candidate city	Poland	City delegation	May 3–6, 2023	5
EU Presidency visit	Not specified	Diplomatic delegations	April 13, 2023	24
Vienna cultural management student visit	Austria	University students and lecturers	April 21, 2023	22
Szél Street Cemetery inauguration	Israel	Diplomatic delegations	May 18, 2023	2
Music Colours Youth Festival – Fény Choir performance	Japan	Performers and diplomatic delegation	May 28, 2023	44
Gizella Days	Poland	Twin city performers	May 11–13, 2023	72
Libertalia – Collective Moves lab	United Kingdom	Creative Europe project partners	May 14–21, 2023	7
International Contemporary Dance Festival – Miet Warlop	Belgium (Flanders)	Flanders representative	May 20, 2023	3
European Parliament Youth Hubs conference		Students	June 2, 2023	250

Event	Country / Region	Group	Date	Participants
FOTON opening	Greece, Japan, Austria	Diplomatic delegations	June 6, 2023	5
Early Music Festival cooperation	Belgium	Flanders Music Centre and Alamire Foundation Leuven	June 8, 2023	1
Long Table Picnic	Austria	Austrian Cultural Forum representatives	June 17, 2023	4
Halfway event	Austria	ECoC network members	June 14–18, 2023	23
Tartu regional team visit	Estonia	Tartu 2024 delegation and regional partners	June 15–19, 2023	27
Europe Archive exhibition opening	Netherlands, France	Diplomatic delegations	June 22, 2023	5
Balaton Eye exhibition opening	France, United Kingdom	Diplomatic delegations	June 29, 2023	5
Hungarian Cultural Institutes meeting	Hungary	Hungarian cultural institute and MFA representatives	July 7, 2023	51
Hungarian EU Presidency	Hungary	MFA site visit team	July 12, 2023	6
VeszprémFest	Argentina	Ambassador visit	July 15, 2023	1
Early Music Festival	Denmark	Gladsaxe residents	July 26, 2023	2
United States Ambassador visit	United States	Diplomatic delegation	August 25, 2023	2
Solar Boat international competition	Netherlands	Diplomatic delegation	August 26, 2023	2

Event	Country / Region	Group	Date	Participants
German-Hungarian Youth Office annual meeting	Germany	University students and association members	August 31, 2023	22
Kurt Klagsbrunn exhibition opening	Brazil	Diplomatic delegation	September 1, 2023	2
Minoi International Porcelain Expo visit	Japan	Minoi Expo staff	September 1, 2023	3
Júlia Néma exhibition	Japan	Gifu prefecture delegation	September 2, 2023	30
MOST Balkan Festival	EU countries, Japan	Performers and conference participants	September 7 and 9, 2023	50
Kortrijk 2030 candidate city	Belgium	Project manager	September 7 and 9, 2023	1
International journalists press tour I	Serbia	Journalists	September 8–10, 2023	16
Timiș County Council delegation	Romania	Timiș County Council delegation	September 13, 2023	3
SKGT 2024 ECoC Wohlstandsparty	Austria	Artists and journalist	September 14–17, 2023	3
Nova Gorica 2025	Slovenia	Infrastructure development team	September 16–17, 2023	21
Balaton Wine & Gourmet	Argentina, France, Croatia, Slovakia, Estonia	Diplomatic and city council delegations	September 21–24, 2023	15
Budva delegation	Montenegro	Candidate ECoC leadership	September 21–24, 2023	4

Event	Country / Region	Group	Date	Participants
Norwegian delegation	Norway	Journalists and cultural specialists from Oslo and Bodø	September 22, 2023	10
St. Pölten delegation	Austria	Parliament and city council members	September 27, 2023	4
Dortmund Foreign Affairs Institute	Germany	Study group	September 29, 2023	15
Bundestag delegation	Germany	Bundestag CDU/CSU Tourism Committee members	October 4, 2023	4
Lost in Veszprém and Timișoara – Flight Festival	Romania	Artists and journalist	October 5, 2023	4
InterUrban – Hamamatsu	Japan	Performers and diplomatic delegation	October 8, 2023	4
Chaconne Festival: Lower Austrian concert	Austria	Performers and diplomatic delegation	October 17, 2023	1
Balatorium exhibition	United Kingdom	Diplomatic delegation	October 19, 2023	2
Ambassador Julia Gross visit	Germany	Diplomatic delegation	October 19–20, 2023	3
Timiș County delegation	Romania	Timiș County Council president and colleagues	October 20, 2023	8
Jewelry exhibition opening	Brazil	Diplomatic delegation	October 21, 2023	2
Chaconne Festival: La Cetra d'Orfeo and Orlando concert	Belgium (Wallonia)	Performers and diplomatic delegation	October 22, 2023	3
Estonian Embassy reception for Tartu delegation	Estonia	Diplomatic delegation	October 26, 2023	4

Event	Country / Region	Group	Date	Participants
Tartu 2024 team – InterUrban Tartu	Estonia	Artists, Tartu team and city council	October 25–28, 2023	4
Foreign journalists press tour II	Slovenia	Journalists	October 26–29, 2023	13
Music as Our Boundless European Heritage	Italy	Progetto Musica Association president	November 4–6, 2023	2
Night of Literature – EUNIC Hungary	EU member states	EUNIC cultural institute representatives	November 9–11, 2023	25
InterUrban – Ibagué Colombian Folk Dance Evening	Colombia	Performers and diplomatic delegation	November 11 and 15, 2023	4
Trenčín 2026 ECoC	Slovakia	ECoC team	December 1, 2023	1
MCC Cluj student visit	Romania	University students and association members	December 2, 2023	20
InterUrban farewell party	Austria	Performers and diplomatic delegation	December 30, 2023	2
Total members of delegations 1092				



