

STRATEGY 2017–2027 document. This has now been completed, discussed widely within the sector, and was approved by Kaunas City Municipality Council on 7 February 2017.

The Cultural strategy document corresponds to previous strategic documents of the City, but goes far more deeply into the analysis of the current cultural situation. It reveals the aims and objectives to be developed through the period until 2022 and five years beyond. The impact of the ECoC preparation period plays a key role in the document. The strengthening of community participation, outreach, capacity building for cultural sector and youth, the emphasis on European partnerships and networks, and regular evaluation of CCI in order to boost the sector, which are main goals in our ECoC strategy, are also significant in the document. The Cultural strategy also ensures that the urban development plan and infrastructure projects are correlated with cultural needs, challenges, and services.

Kaunas City Cultural strategy is expressed as a clear vision: Kaunas – city of inclusive culture, contemporary art and innovative design. The goals of Cultural Strategy are: to strengthen conditions for cultural and creative industries' development and stimulate the growth of the design sector in the development of innovative products and services aimed at public welfare; to promote collaboration between the cultural sector and professionals from research, education, and social spheres in order to implement common projects; to promote participatory culture, decentralisation of culture, and ensuring accessibility of culture in each district of the City; to ensure sufficient quality and diversity of services provided by local cultural institutions; to collect and analyse data on the CCI sector, community and civic initiatives on a regular basis and strengthen citizens' participation in the evaluation of cultural services.

As mentioned before, one of the key elements settled in Kaunas City Cultural Strategy (2017–2027) is to revitalize the recreation potential of the rivers. It is also central in Kaunas 2022 final program, with the ambition to use rivers for creation of a new myth of Kaunas, especially through the activities developed by the Community program as the event Let's celebrate the rivers organised twice.

The Cultural strategy is already in the process of implementation from the beginning of 2017 and it will ensure the cultural sector's growth until 2027. Thus, the Cultural strategy will be revised and reconfirmed in 2022 together with the new strategic development plan of Kaunas City Municipality 2023–2030. In this schedule, the legacy of Kaunas 2022 will become one of the main drivers in the upcoming 2030 vision and, in case of approval, the pilot action River Festival could also play an important role to better address the river development.

By organising the River Festival in 2022, involving Kaunas City Municipality and the District, we intend to prove the interest of developing river tourism and confirm the River Festival as an annual event. The aim is to gather the local stakeholders, communities, etc. to advocate for river tourism development since there are many groups engaged already. Also it is crucial part in this process to invite policy-makers to take part in the event, raising awareness on river development and community engagement and showing that leisure and cultural activities should be better taken into account in riverside management.

Usually the events organised of the municipality are located in city squares and parks, but not the rivers. The River Festival is a possibility to show that it is possible to change or update the concept of the events, a real experience and action would testify that the concept of the events can change, and that the rivers and the banks are also interesting for local people and tourists to take part in the city events.

Moreover, the good practice of the Summer in the Canals Festival can lead to the creation of new tourism products, provide new tourism offers by organising culture and leisure events. The key success of this practice is the partnership between public bodies and local institutions as well as economic and cultural operators. The support of public institutions in terms of funding and resources is also a critical issue.

Durability

To ensure the legacy of the ECoC as well as River Festival and therefore implementation of The Kaunas City Cultural Strategy 2017-2027, Kaunas 2022 established and run long-term projects, which are being implemented on local and international partnership-based programming. In 2021, the Community Programme of ECoC, directly responsible for the River Festival implementation, has set up the new Public Institution "Bendruomeninės iniciatyvos" [eng. Community Initiatives]. This organisation will take over Kaunas 2022 public institution activities after 2022. The Community Initiatives organisation will apply for national funding (<https://www.ltkt.lt/en/>) to ensure the continuation of the project activities beyond 2022 and being as a legacy project of ECoC that will give an input for the new strategic development plan 2023–2030.

Also, the Ministry of Transport and Communications has recently launched the "Long-term Nemunas navigation renewal program (study)" which aims to create a sustainable, non-loss-making, competitive tourist and freight water transport system in the entire inland waterway network from the upper reaches of

the Nemunas to the lower reaches. This will evaluate the resources needed to reach the aims. If the resources will be allocated for smaller cultural touristic actions the dates would not fit as they would be after the River Festival. But could be considered for further upcoming years after 2022 River Festival event. The Ministry is implementing an infrastructural project now to improve navigation conditions, is installing river flow regulating boats these will ensure the required depth and width of the fairway (under the EU financial support). No financial resources for soft tourism measures are allocated at present.

Thanks to the **confirmed pilot action funding**, the 1st edition of the River Festival will take place in 2022 in order to gather all chances possible to ensure financing for forthcoming editions. Based on 2022 event, the content, organisation, etc. will be improved and learnt from the Summer in the Canals Festival experience. In brief, the policy relevance of this pilot action request can be summarised in 2 points :

- Test the Summer in the Canals transfer of good practices during a one-day event in 2022, to be further develop in the next years.
- Convince local authorities in particular Kaunas City Municipality to include the River Festival in the next revision of the strategy and provide funds for its implementation after 2022.
- Take the opportunity of Kaunas 2022 visibility to advocate for a better riverside development through culture and leisure in general, to be addressed in the strategic documents implemented by Kaunas local authorities.

Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

ACTION 1 / River Festival in Kaunas

1. **The background** (please describe the lessons learnt from the project that constitute the basis for the development of the present Action Plan)

Until the middle of the 20th century rivers were an important part of second largest city in Lithuania - Kaunas economic and social life: almost all the earliest industrial sites of the city were located by the river. Kaunas also hosted two river ports. River was important mean of communication as well. However, after the waterpower plant was built in 1956 the role of the river gradually decreased. Now the biggest challenge is to revitalize this important element of our city. Instead of industrial purposes, **Kaunas looking for an opportunity for natural and cultural tourism as new possibility**. On the bank of the river new concert hall will be built, also at the moment there is a new huge project started to build in the The Nemunas Island park – Science Island. In this way the infrastructure are developed gradually. However, **we still need the content and strategy**.

Another important dimension is our aspiration to revitalize the recreation potential of the rivers. It is closely related with the history. Between the WWI and WWII, the biggest concentration of wellness “hotspots” in Lithuania were situated around the temporary capital of Kaunas. The development of the riverbanks for local and international transportation and shipping as well as for cultural and recreational needs was determined by two factors. The first of these was the implementation of the town’s overall policy of cleanness; the second was cultural hygiene as a forming basis for a modern, Western lifestyle and foreign examples. So there are many links with the European dimension, which could be important starting to **create the new narrative of the Riverside Cities and new events based on it**.

Now we are in the process of building up the final program for ECoC 2022. Rivers as the unique geographical position of the city and its natural resources will be a crucial part of this program. Starting from usual practices such as bicycle infrastructure and ending with our aspiration to use river for creation a new myth of Kaunas. Moreover, in the context of ECoC it is especially important to highlight that river is a part of the program. The primary actions were taken by a community program, which is a platform that promotes the sense of community through culture. Creating a community labs in Kaunas (also close to the rivers) helps to unite local residents, artists, creators, activists, entrepreneurs, educators and everyone else wishing to contribute to the creation and enablement of their residence through artistic and creative activities. Since 2017 communities are brightening the riversides, their own courtyards and living environment, developing initiatives that reflect the local identity, seeking to create a safe and creative environment for their neighbors and much more. Such bottom-up initiatives as “UPYNĖS” is the evidence that issues related to rivers are potentially correspondent for the majority interests of citizens.

During the second learning session, held from 20th till 22nd of October, 2020, the LP (Val-de-Marne Tourism Board) of the project presented the Good Practice (GP) **Summer in the Canal Festival** and the organisation of it based on participatory model, inclusions of municipalities as well as their active role in creating the program. According to the nature of the action planned - **The River Festival is directly related to good practices learnt from other project partners and / or local stakeholder group**. During the good practice exchange sessions,

the transferability of the good practices to Kaunas city were analysed considering different levels of possible testing and implementation.

The Summer in the Canals Festival, organised in France since 2007, is taken as an example to complement and expand existing small scale events in Kaunas. During this pilot action these components that are organised as the activities of the Summer in the Canals Festival will be tested in Kaunas, May 2022: floatable concerts, bike-rides, open-air cinema, workshops, walks, excursions, and water-based leisure activities. These will be incorporated into the program of the River Festival which will be organised during the period when one of the biggest events of Kaunas ECoC will be organised. It is expected that a big number of participants will attract from European countries, other cities of Lithuania, and city/district residents of Kaunas. That would be a good opportunity to test the pilot action at a very big scale with different type of participants.

The key indicator to measure the success of the Summer in the Canals Festival they highlight the partnership of different stakeholders and financing by private companies. This is an important issue for Kaunas River Festival to learn this key good working practice, as well as involvement of local community members and artists, pricing of the events. It is expected to learn these already implemented and working aspects of the festival during the 4-days visit at place (France).

2. Action (please list and describe the actions to be implemented):

The STAR Cities project partner Kaunas 2022 would like to transfer and test some key aspects of this festival. It is important to highlight that one of the key elements mentioned in Kaunas City Cultural Strategy (2017–2027) is to revitalize the recreation potential of the rivers.

In 2022, due to the intensive Kaunas 2022 ECoC program, there is a unique opportunity to test the chosen key components from the Summer in the Canals Festival. With the 2022 ECoC program it is expected to welcome many visitors of different target groups in Kaunas so it would be a good opportunity to test these components: floatable concerts, bike-rides, open-air cinema, workshops, walks, excursions and water based leisure activities. The River Festival would be included into the ECoC program as a bigger event, which would ensure broader communication and involvement of target groups. And the most important is that it would be a possibility to test which components are attractive for the citizens and tourists, involved local stakeholders and partnerships for further expansion of the Festival in the future.

While the Summer in the canals Festival lasts one month and a half and is implemented in more than 10 different spots, the idea is to test this transfer of good practices by organising a 1-day event in 4 different spots of Kaunas. This River Festival in Kaunas will be organised the 21 May 2022. In the long term, the idea is to expand the event to broader levels for further years, after 2022 (e.g. connecting city with more districts through the rivers, organising a festival in a longer period, etc.).

Kaunas 2022 team would like to focus this testing on 2 key aspects of the Summer in the canals Festival:

- Activities on the riverbanks in Panemune, Vilijampole, Šančiai or Petrasiunai neighbourhoods (4 spots). The purpose of these activities is to connect the City and its surrounding Districts by organising cultural and leisure activities along the rivers, the program is inspired by the Summer in the Canals Festival in Paris – Seine-Saint-Denis: organising walks, excursions with local guides (up to 2 different routes); workshops lead by local artists and communities (DIY crafts, singing/dancing). On average 10 different workshops are planned; locating open-air cinema sessions in public space on the riverbanks (one location); offering water-based leisure activities, esp. for those who are not taking part in a river route.

- Activities connecting Kaunas District and City through the rivers. A river route will connect the different spots of Kaunas city through activities organised on and along the rivers. This will be offered for those going by kayaks, floatable rafts and other water vehicle, but will be reached also from the coasts of the rivers. The activities will be scheduled: organising bike-rides along the rivers Nemunas, Neris and/or Nevezis (in collaboration with initiative "Like Bike"). It is planned to make one route, connecting two rivers of Kaunas; 3 floatable concert sessions on the floating platform and other water vehicles (in collaboration with music/ art school students and professional artists); 1 excursion on the water (in collaboration with local guides and communities); workshops on the water lead by local artists and communities.

This pilot action and the provisional program of the River Festival are drafted consulting with local stakeholders, heads of elderships, local communities and initiatives (e.g. "Like Bike", "Let's Celebrate the River", and others) that are key actors of organising the festival.

2.1. Preparation phase:

- Involvement of local stakeholders organising 3 meetings: with state and municipal level governmental agencies, municipal initiatives "Like bike", "Nemunas road", culture, tourism and business institutions

established by central, city and district governments, etc.; with business enterprises working in the field of tourism, local communities, cultural and arts organisations, culture operators, artists, etc.; with private companies, esp. located on a riverbanks (e.g. real estate companies);

- Concept development of the River Festival.

2.2. Implementation phase:

- 4-days visit to the partner organisation in Paris (to get deeper understanding of organising the Summer in the Canals Festival, building partnership, financing, involvement of local artists and communities, pricing of the events, other already implemented and working practices, pitfalls and successes);

- 1-week workshop for local partners in Kaunas (to directly involve different stakeholders in building a program of the River Festival transferring best practice components of the Summer in the Canals Festival, also considering possibilities expansion of this festival during later years after 2022);

- 1-day River Festival event in Kaunas in May 2022: to organise an event to test the best practice components (types of activities) transferred to Kaunas. For example: bike-rides, open-air cinema, walks for the 1st part of program, floatable concerts, workshops, excursions and water based leisure activities for the 2nd part of program of the River Festival.

2.3. Dissemination phase:

The reflection will be done after the end of the 1-day River Festival examining the successes of the components transferred of Summer in the Canals Festival, potentials of the River Festival and components, the possibilities of continuation in the future. The participants of the Festival, local stakeholders, creators, artists and others involved are questioned depending on the responsibility level of involvement: questionnaires for the participants, interviews with direct involved organisations and a meeting with the key stakeholders.

The River Festival concept is updated up to the results of this reflection. Information about the River Festival is disseminated after the event through local communities and social partners (social media, etc.). This interregional partnership and practice adaptation at the River Festival is presented during the Kaunas Community conference in the river thematic session, organised in September 2022.

3. Players involved (please indicate the organisations in the region who are involved in the development and implementation of the action and explain their role)

Local community members from different areas of the city; local and international artists and architects; initiative "UPYNĖS"; OSTRALE Bienanale: <https://ostrale.de/de/Projekte/floc.html>; private and public partners.

4. Timeframe:

Preparation phase: December 2021 – April 2022;

Implementation phase: May 2022;

Dissemination phase: May 2022.

5. Costs (if relevant): 28 000 eur (Interreg EU Pilot Action funding); 10 000 eur (Staff costs, Kaunas City Municipality)

6. Funding sources (if relevant): Kaunas City Municipality, Interreg EU