

The EU Capital of Culture 2025 in the framework of cross-border cooperation

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What is the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) initiative?

Introduction - 1

- Introduced by Greek Culture Minister Melina Mercouri, the “European Capital of Culture” initiative was created to emphasize the diversity and richness of European cultures, celebrate common cultural traits, highlight Europe’s cultural wealth, and underline the impact of culture on city development.
- The inaugural European Capital of Culture was Athens, awarded the title in 1985. Over the years, it has evolved into one of Europe’s leading cultural programs.

Introduction - 2

- Cities receive the “European Capital of Culture” title for showcasing the richness and diversity of European culture. However, the designation is not only based on their inherent characteristics but primarily on the cultural program they plan to implement during the designated year.
- The European Commission (EC, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture) is in charge of overseeing and executing the initiative at the European level.

'GO!2025': Europe's first
borderless Capital of Culture

GO!2025: European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica - Gorizia 2025

- The European Capital of Culture title for 2025 has been granted to a Slovenian city, Nova Gorica, and a German city, Chemnitz.
- Nova Gorica's bid centers on fostering cross-border cooperation with its Italian twin city, Gorizia, in order to fully exploit the potential of their unique transnational region. The title entails the implementation of an innovative and high-standard cultural program for an entire calendar year.
- Nova Gorica and Gorizia were officially named European Capitals of Culture for 2025 on December 18, 2020.

A circular mosaic artwork. In the center is the European Union flag, a circle of twelve gold stars on a blue background. To the left is the Italian flag (green, white, red vertical stripes). To the right is the Slovenian flag (white, blue, red horizontal stripes with a blue shield containing a white mountain and blue waves). The mosaic is surrounded by decorative patterns in gold, blue, and white, all set within a circular frame of multi-colored tiles.

**In 2025, Gorizia and Nova Gorica will
come together as the first ever
transnational European Capital of Culture**

Historical background

Gorizia: a multicultural community

- The County of Gorizia has always been home to a variety of ethnic groups and nationalities, such as Friulans, Slovenians, Tyroleans, Carinthians and a vibrant Jew community.
- This resulted in a marked multilingualism, in which the three major spoken languages were Friulian (in the urban area), Deutsch and Slovenian (in the countryside).
- When the last Count died without an heir, the County of Gorizia went to the Habsburgs (1500), who ruled until 1918.

Nationalisms and first quarrels

- In the mid-1800s, Gorizia was inhabited mainly by the Italian community - representing the core of the local bourgeoisie -, with a minoritarian Slovenian Community - prevalent in the province but increasingly present in the city -, and a small percentage of Austro-German citizens - impressively influential in socio-economic terms. These communities lived in harmony and conflicts were not ethnically-based.
- The conquest by the Kingdom of Italy of the neighbouring regions of Veneto and Friuli ignited the nationalism of the Italian community.
- To tackle it, the Austrian authorities decided to increase the political weight of the Slovenian community. This led to the first rifts between the two communities.

WWI and Fascism

- The victory of the Triple Entente against Austria-Hungary in the WWI brought Gorizia and its territory into the Kingdom of Italy (officially in 1921->Treaty of Rapallo).
- The rise of fascism marked the beginning of the forced Italianisation and policies against the Slovenian minority.
- Slav toponyms and surnames were italianised, while the use of Slovenian was banned not only from official documents and schools, but also from daily use.
- Over the 'ventennio', the Italian authorities committed several crimes and intimidations against the slav minorities and the jew community. Some were internated and then eliminated in Italian and German lagers.

WWII and the SFR Yugoslavia

- The fall of fascism in Italy (1943) led Gorizia and part of Friuli under the direct control of the Nazis.
- The newly formed National Liberation Army, led by Tito, proclaimed the annexation of Gorizia and other territories to the future Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
- At the conclusion of and after the war, the Yugoslav partisans begun a political and ethnic cleansing of a great part of Italian territories, with the aim of annexing them.
- Several atrocities were perpetrated and as of today the number of people killed or forced to flee from their homes is debated.

The Paris treaty and the Wall

- At the end of the WWII, the Paris treaty assigned $\frac{3}{5}$ of Gorizia' territory (and, consequently, 15% of its population) to Yugoslavia. The new border did not merely cross the province of Gorizia, but it split the very heart of the city, dividing it between Gorizia and Nova Gorica.
- The railway line, the train station and part of the square in front of it (Piazza della Transalpina/trg Evrope) were allocated to Nova Gorica. The Yugoslav authorities, in 1947, erected a barrier across the newly-formed border.
- The 'Gorizia' Wall' was thus build before the Berlin Wall and outlasted it, since the last part of the barrier passing through Piazza della Transalpina/trg Evrope was removed only in 2004.

From the Cold War to today

- Tito ordered the expansion of Nova Gorica under the direction of Edo Ravnikar (one of Le Corbusier' pupils). The two cities weren't connected, except for via San gabriele/Erjavceva.
- During the Cold War, the border was heavily guarded on both sides and transit permits were not easily granted.
- With the fall of Yugoslavia, Nova Gorica became part of the newly formed Republic of Slovenia.
- On the 11th of February 2004, with the accession of Slovenia into the EU, the Wall was definitely torn down. To see the end of border controls, however, we will have to wait for the entry of Slovenia into the Schengen Area (2007).



Issues and challenges in cross-border cooperation

Administrative and bureaucratic issues

Most of the issues that may arise in the governance of the event on a cross-border perspective are related to the bureaucracy and administrative structures of Italy and Slovenia:

- The cross-border nature of the project poses difficulties in **monitoring** and **evaluation**, especially in **collecting data** effectively.
- There have been significant difficulties in developing a solid **governance framework** capable of **attracting funding from pertinent public authorities**.
- Balancing the representation of interests from both Nova Gorica and Gorizia within the **organizational framework** has proven to be challenging.

An **enhanced cross-sectorial collaboration** is required to promote **transparency** and **openness**.

Linguistic barriers

An additional challenge comes from the particular nature of the region where the event will take place, where Italian, Slovene and other minority languages are spoken.

- **Linguistic diversity** poses obstacles to the development of a transnational audience.
- The project should guarantee **language accessibility** for cultural offerings and events (delivering information in both local and other prevalent languages, etc.)
- **Multilingualism** and **cultural integration** should be the goal for the whole event, instead of being subject to any kind of political manipulation.

Cultural differences

The history of antagonism and division that has affected the region in the past century may impact on the cooperative purpose of the event.

- Occasions of **distrust** and **skepticism** have emerged between different groups of people.
- It is a necessity to understand the **different views** regarding the significance and function of **independent culture** within cities and the broader region. These differences can be reconstructed as valuable viewpoints.
- This initiative should focus on the purpose of **fostering a sense of unified identity** as a **legacy for future generations**.

Logistical and transportation problems

Among the problems identified, those of a practical nature have to do with the physical accessibility of the initiative.

- People with disabilities could suffer the **inadequacy of the mobility service** and the **presence of physical barriers**.
- An urgency to **improve transportation systems** to support the accessibility of the event.
- A **general improvement of the infrastructure** in the area must be taken into account.

Challenges in digital connectivity

There have also been identified issues in digital connectivity that the **Borderless Wireless** project aims to solve.

- A **single access point** for all the GO! 2025 activities to facilitate cooperation is needed.
- The Borderless Wireless project should ensure **free internet access** to citizens and visitors in the whole urban area.
- The platform has to be **transparent** in the management of **user data**.

Ideas and Possible Solutions

How to Handle Bureaucratic and Administrative Challenges

- Enhanced **cross-border cooperation** (CBC) framework and joint administrative structures. Create collaborative task groups or cross-border commissions with representatives from both Italy and Slovenia to improve decision-making and address administrative conflicts.
- **Harmonization of Regulations**
Mutual Recognition of Standards: Strive for mutual recognition of product standards, corporate certifications, and professional qualifications. This would lower bureaucratic barriers for enterprises operating on both sides of the border.

Ways to Overcome Linguistic Hurdles

- **Translation Services**

Official translations of documents: Translating crucial government documents, legal contracts, permits, and forms into both languages would help to prevent misunderstandings and bureaucratic delays.

- **Collaborative Cross-border Media and Information Sharing**

Joint Media Initiatives: Establishing joint media channels (TV, radio, and online platforms) that broadcast news and information in both Italian and Slovenian helps develop a common cultural identity while also raising awareness of cross-border opportunities and laws.

Acknowledging and Addressing Historical Trauma

- Addressing the region's history of antagonism and division while building a cohesive identity requires a deliberate and strategic approach.
- **Truth Telling and Reconciliation:** Begin by addressing the region's past divisions and traumas. This could include organizing truth-telling initiatives, public talks, and historical exhibitions that highlight traumatic historical events. Acknowledging past grievances promotes empathy and trust.

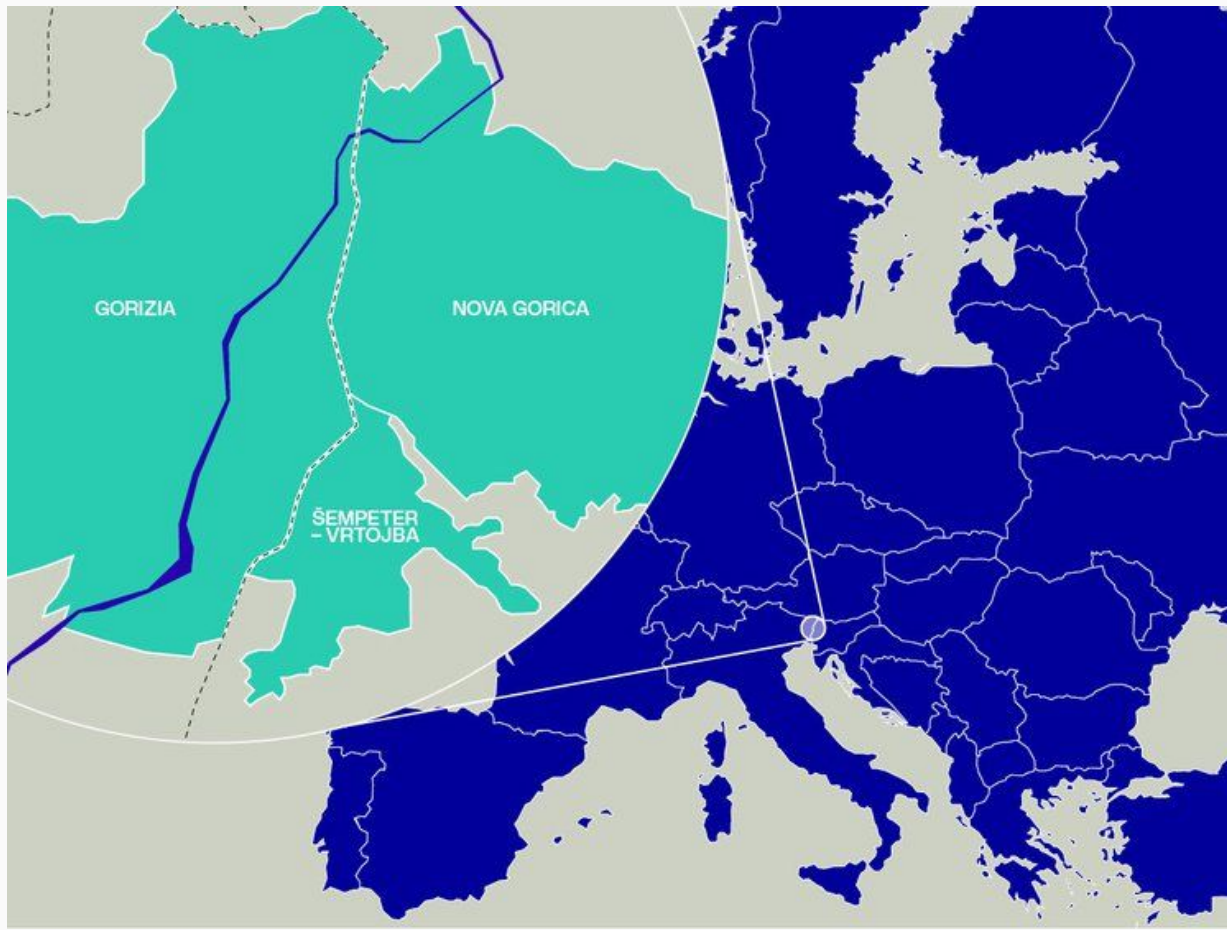
How to deal with Transportation and Logistical Issues

- Addressing the logistical and transportation challenges will not only improve the efficiency of cross-border travel and trade but will also strengthen the cooperation between Italy and Slovenia.
- Infrastructure and capacity expansion.
- **Upgrading border crossings:** Improve the physical infrastructure of border crossings, such as adding lanes and updating facilities. This would reduce congestion and provide smoother transitions for both passengers and freight.

Strategies for addressing the Challenges of Digital Connectivity

- Sustainability of the Project depends on:
 - ❖ **Long-Term Funding:** To ensure that free access is sustained, the project should consider sustainable funding models, such as partnerships with local businesses, government funding, or sponsorships, which can help cover operational costs. **Maintenance and Upgrades:** Plan for the maintenance and periodic upgrading of network infrastructure to keep up with technological advancements and the growing number of users.
 - ❖ **Ensuring High-Quality Internet Connectivity**
- Implement technologies like traffic shaping or load balancing to ensure fair usage and high-quality connectivity for all users. This is particularly important in areas with high demand, such as during large events or peak tourism seasons.

Interview with EGTC GO



What is EGTC GO?

- EGTC GO is the acronym of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, in force since 2011 (Reg. 1082/2006 and IT Law 88/2009).
- It includes 3 municipalities: Nova Gorica, Gorizia and Šempeter-Vrtojba.
- Special attention by the EC because of historical point of view, geomorphology of territory, matching of different cultures and because of its transnational nature.

Candidacy to EU Capital of Culture 2025

- In 2019 the city of Nova Gorica (SI) applied for the award of Capital of Culture 2025.
- For the first time ever, a European Capital of Culture was proposed at a cross-border level, inviting also the city of Gorizia (IT).
- The impressive symbolic candidacy coming from the border region convinced the EC to assign the award to the municipality.
- IMP: the award has been assigned to Nova Gorica, but the municipality decided to extend it to the Italian part!

EGCT GO and Go Borderless 2025

- EGCT GO is one of the two bodies/entities, together with GO BORDERLESS 2025, which will cooperate together with the two municipalities.
- EGCT GO is an operational body formed under Italian law which can work cross-border due to the EU Reg. and the Statute approved by the two municipalities, together with Italian and Slovenian Foreign Affairs Ministers.
- GO2025 is the public entity created in view of the award assigned to the municipalities, to manage directly the official program as Capital of Culture.
- The two entities cooperate to manage also the financial flows coming from their governments and to improve communication.
- Other aspects of cooperation: marketing, promotion, engagement.

EGCT GO: challenges

- Put together different stakeholders, from private to public ones (regions, municipalities, etc.), in accordance with the principles of loyal cooperation and partnership.
- Each project has partners from both sides of the border.
- Management of 14 million euros in new grants and funds.
- Requalification of Piazza Transalpina, the Europe Square, the railway station based in Slovenia; construction of new sites and projects in the area.
- Access to the Slovenian hospital to Italian citizens in Gorizia.
- Administrative, legal and bureaucratic problems during projects, such as the organization of the concert for Europe.

EGCT GO: legacy of this experience

- EGCT is a pilot experience to find the difficulties and limitation to be confronted with new Regulation: the new Reg. on administrative harmonization in the EU was found after the implementation of works in Transalpina Square.
- Enhanced cooperation between the two municipalities/entities, which enabled to overcome transborder problems, always in line with transparency.
- New projects are being put into reality and new territories are being linked to the cooperation.
- Two regions that can be united again thanks to democracy and cooperation!

Interview with the Managing
Authority of the Interreg VI-A
Italy-Slovenia 2021–2027 Program

The Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia Programme

- The programme has been approved by the European Commission with the Implementing Decisions C(2022) 5745 of August 3rd, 2022.
- With a financial allocation of more than 88.6 million euros, the Interreg Italy-Slovenia Programme implements its strategy on the basis of three Policy Objectives (POs) concerning
 1. A more competitive, innovative and smarter Europe (Policy Objective PO1),
 2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy, a resilient Europe (Policy Objective PO2)
 3. A more social and inclusive Europe (Policy Objective PO4)
 4. For an efficient public administration (Interreg Specific Objective ISO1).

Financed projects

- The Programme covers the seven-year European **2021-2027** programming period and develops with a view to continuity and capitalization of the previous results, achieved during the 2014-2020 programming period, which financed 63 projects in the sectors of competitiveness, research and innovation, protection and enhancement of cultural and natural resources and cross-border services.
- In order to **ensure transparency** on the use of the resources of the Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia Programme, the Managing Authority publishes, pursuant to art. 49 paragraph 3 of Regulation (EU) 1059/2021, a list of projects selected for support by the Programme, including the name of the operations, a short description and relevant financial data. The list is published on a four-monthly basis.

Overcoming Historical Divides: Fostering Cross-Border Cooperation between Italy and Slovenia

- *"The biggest challenge in this region has been overcoming the historical burdens of the past, especially the aftermath of the World Wars. Our project focuses on rebuilding the community by **learning from past mistakes**, especially in terms of cross-border cooperation. Historically, there was mistrust between Italians and Slovenians, but through our efforts, we've managed to **build trust and work together**, especially in the management committees. Today, the European Interreg program plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation since national funds aren't sufficient for small-scale cross-border projects. These initiatives are key to enhancing cohesion and improving relationships between citizens on both sides of the border. Our work, including a small project fund for cultural exchange, helps **bridge this gap and create stronger ties.**" - Laura Comelli*

The current projects under the Interreg Italy-Slovenia VI-A Programme

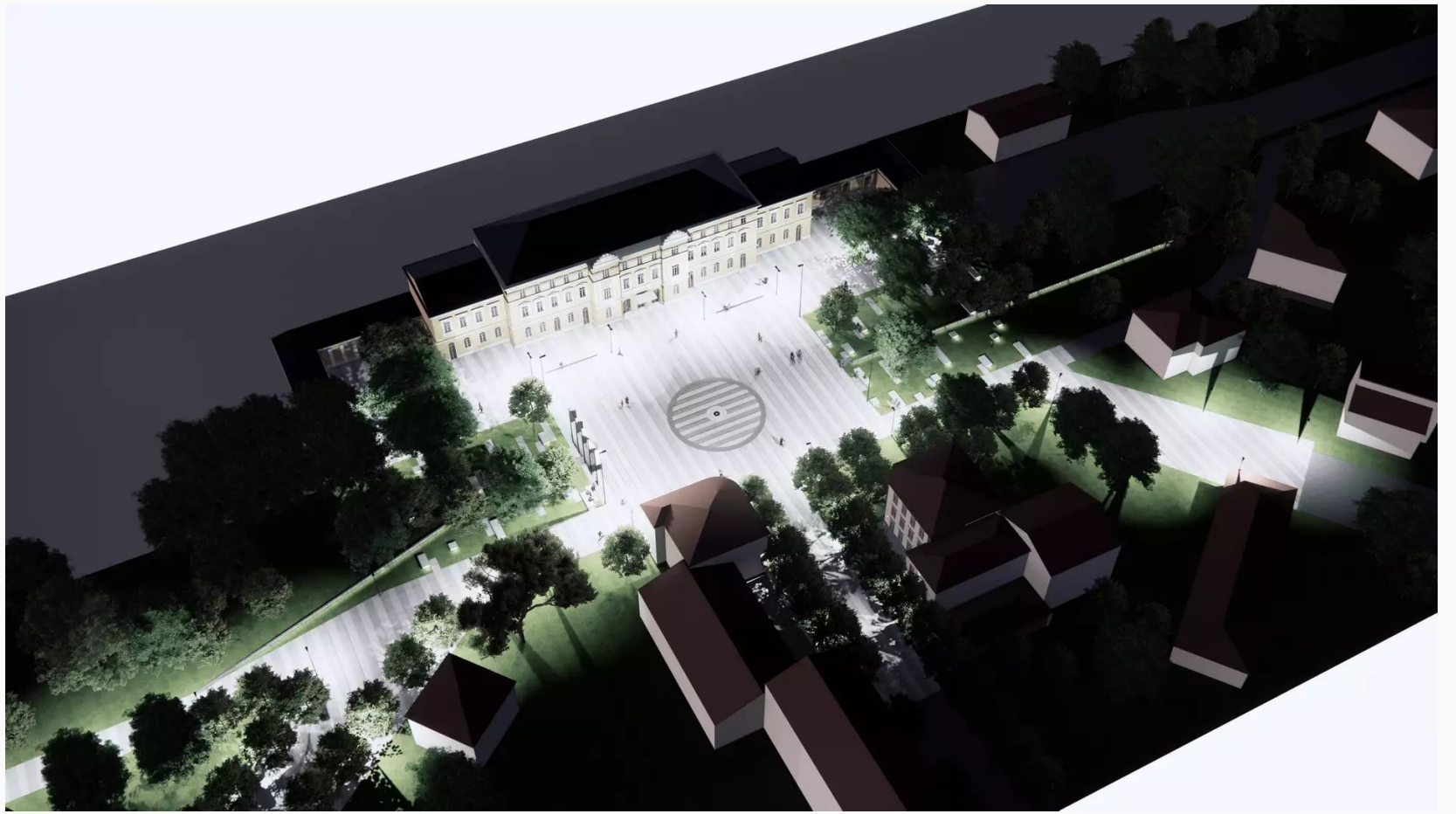
- **COHERENCE:** This project aims to develop an open platform guiding researchers in regulatory compliance, particularly through a pilot clinical study focused on treating difficult wounds. The lead partner is the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, along with five other partners.
- **DANTE:** Inspired by Dante Alighieri, this initiative creates a cross-border literary trail comprising five interactive cultural trails. It aims to merge cultural storytelling with tourism, led by the Municipality of Izola in collaboration with multiple partners.
- **BeWoP** (Building on WALKofPEACE): Building upon a previous award-winning initiative, this project focuses on strengthening tourism in rural and peri-urban areas by developing an integrated cultural tourism offer. It is led by Ustanova Fundacija Poti miru v Posočju, partnering with 17 organizations

GO 2025: Fostering European Cohesion Through Culture, Tradition, and Youth Engagement

- *"Our guiding principles for the GO 2025 initiative focus on themes like **'Go Share,' 'Go Green,' 'Go Europe,'** and capacity building. The program highlights cultural traditions such as music, dance, literature, and local customs in food, drink, and religion—**shared aspects that connect both communities.** These elements aim to engage both locals and attract tourists, strengthening cross-border ties. One of our key events is a two-day conference at the end of March, featuring high-level political discussions on Europe's future, along with a **focus on young people**, with 2500 youth participating. This will further promote European cohesion and the value of cross-border cooperation through our projects."* - Laura Comelli



Piazza della Transalpina, one of the most important renovation recipients in the area. [Retrieved here](#)



Project for the renewed Piazza della Transalpina. [Retrieved here.](#)

THANK YOU!

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