

un)rest

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Liepāja
2027
European Capital of Culture
Candidate City



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Liepāja. Status: (un)rest

In 2025 we will celebrate the city's
400th anniversary

Population

68,945 in the city

In the surrounding **8 counties**
36,500 inhabitants

In total in the region more than **100,000** residents

National breakdown

Latvians 59,1%
Russian 27,8%
Ukrainians 4,4%
Belarusians 3%
Lithuanians 2,9%
Other nationality 2,8%

Education

8 higher education institutions
and branches
21 kindergarten
12 general education schools
5 children's sports schools
79 sports associations
and organizations

Sports

5 outdoor stadiums
1 Olympic centre
1 tennis hall
1 ice hall
1 Athletics arena
3 swimming pools

65% of the territory is occupied by **Liepāja Special Economic Zone**

Culture life

1 concert hall

Great Amber

1 open air concert hall in Liepāja and
4 open air event arenas in the region
13 event venues with 100+ seats

32 cultural centres in the region
18 museums in Liepāja and 9 in the region
4 art galleries
6 theatres (2 professional, 4 amateur)
7 libraries in Liepāja and 35 in the region
2 craftspeople houses in Liepāja and 6 in the region
70 amateur creative teams in Liepāja and 140 in the region
74 Cultural NGOs
18 architecture and design offices

Confidence*

83% of Liepāja residents are
convinced that becoming
European Capital of Culture will **promote**
the city's **international recognition**
and tourism

80% believe that being designated as
the European Capital of Culture will
promote the further development of cultural
infrastructure and the creation of new cultural objects

81% of Liepāja residents believe
that the European Capital of
Culture will have a **positive impact on the**
city's economy

73% are convinced that ECoC will
promote local patriotism and
a sense of belonging to their city

Introduction

Q1

Why does Liepāja wish to be European Capital of Culture?

They say the wind is born in Liepāja. With wind come rest and unrest. The disruptive power of creativity and the soothing power of comfort. They live side by side here in our quietly bustling and loudly sleeping city.

Is it the rest or the unrest that drives us to take part in this competition? A bit of both, really. The clash of the two, perhaps. Rest and unrest being out of synch, certainly. But also the two providing a creative tension which we can harness to create the Liepāja of the future.

In time we have been exposed to the unrest of the wind, but also forced into the rest of a motionless city – closed up and isolated as a military space during Soviet times.

For decades Liepāja is the city of (un)rest, the rebel city on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Freedom is born in a closed city, and so is rock music. A city with an independent spirit, almost like an independent republic. Disconnected and proud. Self-sufficient and stubborn. Creative and crazy.

It feels as if we have only acquired our independence again yesterday. But how do we fit into the Europe of today, now, 30 years after the system change and with our (un)rest shifted from something that used to instill pride to something that instills a sense of imbalance and impatience? Something that seems to block the city and prevents a sense of community among its people.

Just to be clear: since the last time we tried to become ECoC ten years ago, Liepāja has changed a lot and developed rapidly. We paved the streets, built a modern concert hall and an airport, and bought new trams. We know how to do all that. But we still have not found out how to make our communities grow together and create a city that feels as one. 60% of the citizens in Liepāja are Latvians, almost 30% are Russians as well as Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians and more.

All the urban development plans and strategies, funds and projects have still left a gap.

A part of our citizens lives in rest – isolated, disconnected and in a state of “social sleep”. Living busy lives. But completely retired into their own world, not very interested, not feeling that anything out there is meant for or with them.

Another part lives in unrest – engaged and active in the hustle and bustle of the city and its cultural, social, political, and economic texture. But the unrest tears, causes stress and calls for rest as a counterbalance.

And how can there be a healthy balance when only 15% of the citizens engage in cultural and sporting events and in participation processes while 85% just mind their own business? If Liepāja was a rowing boat it would be difficult to move it forward in a straight line because only part of its crew would be rowing.

This is the first of three reasons: We want to take part in this competition in order to involve all of the rowers to help moving the boat ahead. Not to create complete balance between rest and unrest in the city. That would just be stagnation and make the city boring and unexciting. But to create a good balance of rest and unrest in rowing the boat.

With the help of European Capital of Culture, we rather want to bring more (un)rest to all parts of our society. So that we can share rest and unrest more evenly throughout communities, distribute more equally responsibility and engagement and representation.

We are not afraid to look honestly in the mirror. What we see is a city that needs to take a leap in catching up its community development to its urban, economic and digital progress. What we also see in the mirror is a lack of international networking and connections. So this is the second reason why we think competing for ECoC is important for Liepāja.

And there is a third reason. We want to find out what the European Dream is. Anyone in Europe can probably describe the American Dream in a few words. (Funny enough the American Dream started in Liepāja for many as they emigrated to the US through our part in the 19th and 20th century.) But can any of us describe the European Dream? This is something we want to contribute to Europe.

Given our unique location and historical events we create a new navigation map on the quest to find the European Dream. As the sailors we are, we are ready to take on the challenge of (un)rest. Our heritage, knowledge, daring and experimentation in mapping the future of our city in Europe and to build an active society will hopefully help us and others like us find their way in the constant sea of change.

For our journey of (un)rest we define these goals:

Reset mindset – from inertness to meaningful action!

Even 30 years after the withdrawal of the occupying forces and the elimination of the closed border area, the ruins of mindset still remain in our attitude, thinking, understanding and action. Liepāja is a typical Latvian “lonely farmer” and local patriot, who likes his neighbours best when they are far away.

We want to learn to promote mutual cooperation, to involve the residents of the districts, including speakers of different languages, who make up almost 30% of the population, to get to know each other, put aside the shy Latvian introverted nature and open our eyes, ears and minds.

Keep your identity – from Latvia with Love!

Keep your identity fluid is surely good advice in Europe today when we are becoming more diverse. But having a sense of belonging to a specific place, language and traditions can help building self-confidence and resilience – and maintains cultural diversity. We will be challenged by seeing ourselves from the sidelines, reviewing our paradox history in the light of Europe and re-learning openness towards the world while keeping our Latvianism.

Co-create your habitat – from mental to environmental!

Whether it is untouched nature or a built city – natural and man-made processes must be able to coexist and co-develop. The surrounding nature of the Baltic Sea, Lake Liepāja, the city with its meadows, canals, forests and dunes are affected by climate change and the consequences of human economic activity. We see an opportunity for culture to create a smart, green and innovation-based environment in symbiosis with (creative) industries. Circular economy is not only a theory in Liepāja, but a potential reality.

Learn to cooperate – from provincial to European centre stage!

Although we have been calling ourselves a free, democratic country for more than 30 years, we have not yet been able to establish successful and well-functioning, sustainable international relations. Or even cooperations among each other within the city or region! We are still very self-centered. Liepāja is a western and European city, now we also need to start thinking European. It's high time for networking with international partners for practical cooperation.

Build a smart future – from human to digital and back!

As we keep pace with global and European developments, technological advancements and new challenges, the fight against pandemics and climate change, we need to realize more than ever that the future is not always predictable.

Smart and intelligent local production, in close cooperation with universities, science and research centres throughout Europe and the operation of Digital Innovation Centres will create an attractive space that encourages skilled, educated and smart people to stay and return to Liepāja.

Q2

Including our surrounding South-Kurzeme region

Since the Danes trembled at the sight of us with the prayer "God, protect us from the plague and from the Curonians!" a long time has elapsed.

But what is left of that Curonian spirit after the region has been broken up into eight smaller counties ten years ago? Well, we are just now experiencing a new territorial reform going on as we speak. We are merging back into one – South-Kurzeme region (Dienvidkurzemes novads). And perhaps some of the Curonian roughness will come back as the family that has been split into separate households is reuniting under one roof.

Liepāja is the big sister in this family. Every day, 25% of the residents of the surrounding counties come to their workplaces in Liepāja. The city, as the centre of the region, provides practical needs – jobs and education for children, as well as emotional needs – recreational, entertainment, cultural and sports opportunities.

But many from Liepāja also go to work every day in the surrounding areas. Many of our family members, relatives, and friends live there. The surrounding area is also the place for mushroom picking (it's our national sport), swimming, enjoying nature, walking in the woods, as well as participating in events, enjoying cultural heritage, creating projects and implementing crazy ideas.

The participation for both of us – Liepāja city and the South-Kurzeme region in bidding for the European Capital of Culture feels only natural. Liepāja has always played a pivotal role for the wider region. Latvia needs strong regional centres outside of Rīga and the perspective looking from Liepāja is including a much vaster territory. We feel a responsibility towards the surrounding area and the surrounding area feels

the consequences – both in the positive or negative – depending on whether Liepāja is thriving or not.

European Capital of Culture is a real blessing in strengthening interconnections, fostering identity and setting examples. It challenges, prioritizes, changes the view of potential processes before they take place in reality, it accelerates development, encourages bold decisions.

As a reunited region we will also strategically work together – this time not so much to defeat the Danes. As city and region we are developing common strategies and cooperation models in 12 different sectors, including culture, education, social, tourism, governance and economy.

This joint cooperation for ECoC is a win-win situation for the city and region. It is a chance to create a sense that our regional cultural heritage is making an invaluable and unique contribution towards European diversity. And it can nurture a sense of belonging to Europe, an understanding that being Latvian and being European are just faces of the same coin.

South-Kurzeme and Liepāja cooperation within the ECoC will be based on two major areas:

- Sea and nature: Environmental protection issues and preservation of natural values, their smart development.
- Cultural and military heritage: Exploring, preserving and putting the traditional cultural and military heritage into a contemporary context, creating rest in the unrest of memories.

Sea and nature

The coast of Kurzeme has always been active in trade and migration, which was also the basis for the development of the western part of Latvia.

The blue flag flies on the central beach of Liepāja, Beberlīni and the marina, but Karosta, which is a former military part of the city, still has the dirtiest beach in Latvia. On the one hand, the greatest value of our region is pure and untouched nature. But the Baltic Sea is one of the most polluted seas in the world after both world wars (phosphorus emissions from bombs deteriorating under water). It also suffered from industrial activity in the 20th century. Pollution is also an issue in Lake Liepāja and many other reservoirs around the region, as well as abandoned military heritage.

It is time for us to bring together the attention of locals, Latvia and Europe, to find solutions to these issues. The European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus pick up some of the issues we will be working on jointly with South-Kurzeme region. The plan is – and ECoC could become an accelerator in this process – to create a common model of coastal ecosystem management. This will be the groundwork for further activities.

Cultural and military heritage

In the wider area around Liepāja several complexes of manors and castles survive as well as strong cultural traditions in the whole region. Currently Grobiņa Archaeological Ensemble is making first steps towards inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Viking heritage of the 7th to 9th century and the Viking Festival have become a must in the Destination Viking Association at the latest since the TV series "Vikings" created a world-wide buzz.

A great and invaluable wealth of our region are the living traditions and traditional culture, which are nurtured and maintained. Even the people of Liepāja have to some extent adapted some of the regional traditions to their own, created a Folk Costume Centre and actively promote the popularity of folk art. However, people are leaving the countryside and average age is rising, so that we are at risk of losing the special cultural identity, knowledge and maintenance of living traditions, the character and origin of the region. With ECoC we want to tackle the challenge of transporting our traditions into the 21st century and beyond. Not only for ourselves, but also as a hidden treasure that Europe has not yet explored and that would promote undiscovered gems in Europe's diversity.

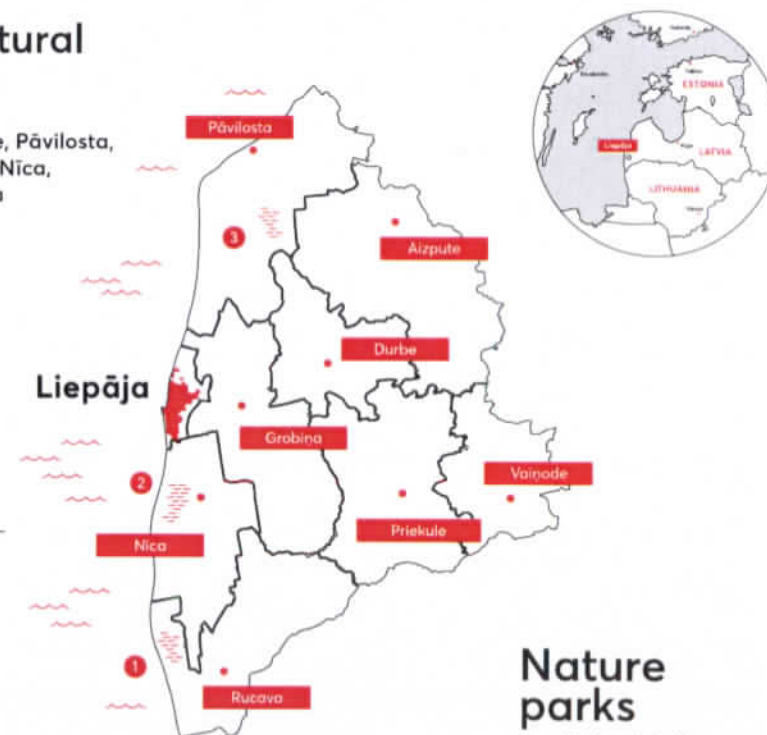
Our military heritage of the closed city, but also the front of WWII passing back and forth several times over parts of our region, have left us with a lot of dark memories like the destruction of whole villages and a cemetery of 23,000 soldiers. It is time to approach these memories and find artistic and cultural means of healing as a European family that shares similar experiences.

South-Kurzeme region

Main cultural centers

in counties:

Grobiņa, Aizpute, Pāvilosta, Priekule, Durbe, Nīca, Vaiņode, Rucava



Beach line length –
103 km

Nature parks

Pape Nature Park (1)
Bernāti Nature Park (2)
Grīņu Reserve (3)

Q3

Liepāja's cultural profile

Our common cultural map is quite paradoxical, because we ourselves are quite a variegated audience – everyday cultural life is formed by Latvians, Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians. We are footballers, marathoners, choir singers, poets, directors, doctors, welders, skaters, swimmers, dancers, we are seniors, chess players, students, travellers, we are sailors, politicians, scientists, bartenders, bus drivers. We are also performers and spectators, critics and ticket buyers.

As the typical European city that we are, we have gone through all kinds of changes in history. No surprises there. Liepāja was a part of the Russian Empire, then the capital of the newly established Latvian State, then a closed military zone of the Soviet Union, as well as the place where the idea of regaining independence was born. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the army was withdrawn, and Liepāja lost half of its population.

We are a city of contrasts – on the one hand Liepāja is a delicate, elegant lady who enjoys the morning brunch in a gorgeous restaurant in an Art Nouveau building, on the other hand we are like a hardened fishing boat captain, blown by the wind, rough and harsh.

We have the most modern concert hall in Latvia, where artists from 60 countries perform every year, but just across the street there are Soviet era block houses, where part of the population lives below the subsistence level and cannot even agree on building insulation.

You will ask why in the evenings Liepāja city centre is almost empty. But if you try to find parking near Liepāja Latvian Society House, Liepāja Olympic Centre (LOC), Great Amber Concert Hall, LOC tennis halls or other cultural or sports buildings, then you know. The calendar of various events, trainings and amateur groups is quite tight. But only for the tiny group of 15% of citizens who make use of such offers. This small but very active part of the population of 15% cultural users is like a tractor and a locomotive for all the other inhabitants, because it is their unrest that makes us move, act in all winds, moving the less active and even passive. This is and was true both in the times when the city was under Soviet rule and now that we are free in our thoughts and actions. This is simply the natural Latvian modus operandi.

For example, we have a great story about the conductors of Liepāja Orchestra and the inner unrest and perseverance of the entire music industry, which in 2015 won the incredible investment of millions of euros to build the symbol of Liepāja's cultural life – the acoustic concert hall Great Amber. With almost 1,000 seats and fascinating architecture it is also home to the music department of Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School and Liepāja Symphony Orchestra.

With the opening of the concert hall, Liepāja gained new breath and vigour – the city literally flourished. The hotel and tourism segment felt it first, new restaurants opened, and the best hotels were often unable to meet high demand.

The traditions of Liepāja Theatre, Liepāja Museum, Liepāja Folk Art and Culture Centre, Liepāja Central Scientific Library are also rich, where professionals from various fields play an important role also at the regional and national level, regularly winning various awards, especially Liepāja theatre company.

Liepāja University is the largest university in Kurzeme. Although it is experiencing its organizational challenges in the field of education and the number of students has decreased by 43% over the last 20 years, it is possible to study in 34 study programmes, several of which are culture-related – among them acting, writing, and new media art.

The segment of event organizers is also developing, which enriches cultural life by creating new forms and places of events.

Amateur arts and sports

There are some very active people in the field of amateur arts followed by thousands of people in choirs, dance groups, clubs, interest education groups. These are not just narrow activities that only interest seniors. It is the age group from 25 to 61 that are the most active members of traditional art groups.

The largest number of enthusiasts and real rebels is related to our other "religion" of the city – sports. Why do we mention sports here at all? Because the people of Liepāja perceive sport as a cultural industry, not just as physical movement. It is not for nothing that Liepāja was the first city in the Baltic region to receive the title "European City of Sports" four years ago for the development of infrastructure and the sports industry. NBA Club The Dallas Mavericks player Kristaps Porziņģis, high ranking tennis player Anastasija Sevastova, the Junior WRC Vice Champion Mārtiņš Sesks have grown up in Liepāja's sports and cultural atmosphere and the opportunity to become the world-class athletes whose talent developed directly with us.

Music traditions and anniversaries

Unofficially Liepāja is considered the Latvian capital of music. Not only talented musicians and Latvian rock music were born here, but also educational institutions, new music projects and the professional music institutions are strong.

During the actual ECoC year as well as in the run up there are several anniversaries that will be celebrated in our cultural institutions and which we will combine with the ECoC plans: In 2026, the Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School will celebrate its 100th anniversary, and Liepāja Symphony orchestra its 145th.

In 2027 the Liepāja Library will celebrate its 250th anniversary, and the Liepāja Theatre its 120th birthday.

So what is missing?

All these organizations have in common that they lack cooperations. It is very much a "my farm, my corn" mentality. Consequently, cultural organizations, their development, operational capacity, and functional provision differ greatly. Some already use high-level technological solutions, while others are at an elementary level, some use the principles of circular economy, but others still do their work like 30 years ago.

Within the framework of the European Capital of Culture project, one of the acute needs is to analyze, challenge, address, attract and engage in dialogue on cooperation between cultural organizers in the city and the region.

Audience development is another field where our cultural organizations need to step up their game and work together. We meet the same people at every event, while the 85% never leave their neighbourhood for cultural or sports activities.

The city has activities in a wide range of genres – music, theatre, visual arts, folk art and writing. Unfortunately, contemporary dance and cinema are almost non-existent. What is also weak is contemporary visual art, we lack a large and modern library, where not only to indulge in literature, but also to meet the creative minds of Liepāja in various workshops, seminars and to build new projects and collaborations.

As we describe in Q6, there is a lack of connections between businesses and creative industries. In this context we plan a Digital and Creative Industries Centre D10 for the IT sector and creative industries in close proximity to the Craftsmen's Quarter and LIAA Business Incubator.

Over the last 20 years, by improving Liepāja's cultural and sports infrastructure, we have experienced significant changes in society, so with well-defined challenges within the European Capital of Culture, we are convinced that culture in its broadest sense can be a catalyst for serious change for society as a whole.

10 most important annual cultural events in Liepāja:

- **Liepāja Art Forum** – Contemporary Art Festival
- **Sea Festival** – Celebration of fishing traditions
- **Līva Village Festival** – Intangible cultural heritage festival, gathering craftspeople from the whole region
- **Illuminated Liepāja** – Light festival
- **National holiday torchlight procession** with more than 10,000 participants
- **Liepāja International Stars Festival** – Classical, jazz, modern and vocal music
- **Summer Sound** – Festival for young people with up to 20,000 spectators
- **Autumn Days of Poetry**
- **Liepāja Organ Music Festival**
- **Karosta Festival** – A week-long open air of local and foreign artists and writers

Q4

The concept of the programme



Our concept is (un)rest. We repeat it just in case you missed it the 250 times we mentioned it before.

It fits the story of our city and citizens really well. The city where the wind is born. The city of inertness. What is in rest has to be shaken up and what is in unrest has to become more peaceful and accessible. We think (un)rest can be a relevant story that creates access from very different angles for many different people.

It is a universal concept that fits us as humans in terms of what (un)rest means for (mental) health and personal development. It fits us as societies and communities in Europe on how we envision life in our cities and rural areas, how we work together on integrating arts, technology, green infrastructure, circular economy and climate change, how we recover from the Covid pandemic.

The pandemic has rather accentuated our view that (un)rest is a story that – at the latest after being stuck at home in the unrest of the lockdowns – almost everyone can relate to. Even 7-year old Elza who said: "Mom, it is horrible that I cannot even complain about having to go to school anymore!" Unrest comes in many forms.

Liepāja, as a port city, has had (un)rest in its veins for generations and we don't perceive these words as static nouns, but as active verbs. It has to be regained as a concept that includes all our citizens.

It is the gap between communities and energies that makes this city feel disconnected and fragmented. Some of us are too sleepy, inert and discouraged, others too hectic, restless and impatient.

Is it the constant presence of wind and change that make us so restless? And is it the long-term effects of the occupation and suppression that make us so quiet, inactive and withdrawn? Generations of people who were deprived of the right to dream, to be free, to fly?

We don't know if it is so easy and so black and white. What we know is: Until a few decades ago the demarcation between rest and unrest was very clear. What we need now in this city is that rest and unrest become fluid entities that are there contemporaneously and present for all of us. Not 15% of the citizens stuck on unrest and 85% stuck on rest.

That is why we see the need for a roadmap – a way to translate, forecast and guide the development of our society as healthy and active individuals and communities. In order to offer ourselves, as European cities and communities, the opportunity to find a way to navigate haste, speed, stress, global processes, rapid technological development, constant flow of information – and counterbalance it with relaxation, mental health, inclusion, cooperation, smart solutions, and the skills to handle the choices we are given. That is the new cultural competence.

(Un)rest is the roadmap.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

Q5/Q7

The cultural strategy and its synergies with Liepāja 2027

Whilst the world is currently experiencing the worst pandemic in 100 years and forecasting the future has become even more problematic, we have put this indefinite period of unrest into good use. Our current Cultural Strategy included in the "Liepāja City Long-Term Development Strategy for 2015–2030" runs until 2030 and the cultural action plan derived from that is valid from 2021 until 2027. Building on this, we have started work on developing a strategic vision for the city until 2035. This means that a strategy for culture is currently in place until 2030 and one running until 2035 will be approved in early 2022.

Until 10 years ago, we were a city where development strategies were shaped by each industry separately. To be honest, this wasn't a very effective system. So since 2015, in Liepāja we have been planning the development of the city according to the Latvian national system. Culture is one of the key strands of overall city planning and development along with education, the social sphere, economic development and tourism.

The existing long-term document "Liepāja City Long-Term Development Strategy for 2015–2030" shows how cultural planning processes can work as part of a broader strategy document. The cultural component delivers culture itself, but also uses culture to connect with other agendas – such as education and community development.

And both the current and the future long-term planning documents of Liepāja contain the long-term vision of Liepāja culture:

"Liepāja is a centre of culture and creativity! Liepāja has an important place in the Latvian cultural environment. Liepāja's rich cultural heritage, cultural education and creativity promote the formation of bright, original and diverse talents, which promote the international recognition of Liepāja and the whole of Latvia."

In the creation process, we went through big waves of unrest, because specific action plans must be developed on the basis of the Latvian National Medium-Term Development Plan. The process seems complicated and incomprehensible, but in reality it enables Liepāja to be a full participant in common National level planning, without losing our city identity and vision.

And, for the first time, the new strategy document is being drafted in close contact with the public ("bottom-up"). The result has been to promote active participation from cultural and other related fields in key urban and social development processes.

The cultural strategy that has emerged identifies three core objectives. In keeping with Winston Churchill's expression "However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results." – we have mapped those three cultural strategy core objectives against ECoC actions.

Cultural Strategy

To implement a new process for cultural, artistic and creative industries and public involvement

To maintain and develop the cultural infrastructure

To ensure the European dimension of Liepāja artistic and cultural processes and the ability to attract external resources

European Capital of Culture Liepāja 2027 Contribution

Creating an artistic programme which provides an opportunity to develop bold ideas through interdisciplinary cooperation

Developing new cultural traditions, ecodesign and accessibility principles for events

Revising and emphasizing cultural heritage, promoting it through digitization and giving greater access to the general public (including projects with the IT sector – the augmented realities of heritage, digital concert hall)

Cultural education projects – establishing Ukstiņa Education and Innovation Quarter, culture-related education and lifelong learning programmes

Communication with the local and international community on the importance and power of culture in shaping the future of the city

Creating an audience research and development programme

Establishing programmes specifically designed for minorities, ethnic groups and segregated communities

Increasing the capacity of creative industries including the D10 centre (see Q6)

Capacity building for the cultural NGO sector including an NGO incubator

Building a new Library

Revitalising areas around the city not yet used for cultural events, including untouched nature, regenerating spaces in the former Liepājas Metalurģis and Karosta District

Reviewing operating models for cultural institutions to the highest standards of environmental protection and climate change and energy efficiency

Formation of creative quarters in urban areas with a high population density

Significantly increasing cooperation projects with international partners

Updating environmental protection and mitigation of climate change on cultural events

Developing an ecosystem management model for the Baltic Sea coastal zone

Implementing an international exchange of experience for cultural professionals

International promotion of Liepāja as a cultural city

Q6 Strengthening the cultural and creative sectors

The history of creative industries in Liepāja is quite interesting, because the original economic development of Liepāja as a port city was mostly built through what we think are creative industries. Alongside heavy metallurgy, ship repair and food production, Liepāja's strongly fashion-linked textile industry developed rapidly. In turn that gave rise to the rapid growth of cultural organizations and various architectural initiatives, which became to a large extent the basis for the growth of Liepāja's prosperity. We therefore feel that creativity is in our genes.... even our jeans.

In today's Liepāja, the creative industries are once again marked out in our long-term vision as having a key role in shaping the direction of Liepāja's economic future. There are currently 207 creative industry companies operating in Liepāja (7% of the number of active companies in Liepāja) with a total annual turnover of 18 million euros. In fact, the number of companies has increased by 25% and turnover by 127% over the last five years. We feel we are on to something here.

And yet, another paradox: We think our entrepreneurs will bounce back quickly after the economic damage caused by the Covid pandemic. After all, for decades we have had to find makeshift solutions to survive. We think of ourselves as very "elastic". Stretching wide before we break... But (here comes the paradox) in our entrepreneurship we have a tendency to think small – relying on ourselves because we don't trust others. And while relying on ourselves fosters entrepreneurship, our reluctance towards cooperating often hinders us to score in the European and global league.

We see the creative future of Liepāja being built around the following components.

"Core" creative industries

As indicated above, Liepāja has over 200 independently operating companies in the creative sectors. In turn, they successfully cooperate with traditional industries, forming relationships with IT and other sectors. One example is the Digital Innovation Park and the IT cluster created in 2020, which has already brought together 40 IT companies, earning millions of euros for products and services worldwide. The European Capital of Culture project will not only strengthen business development

for this key sector, but will also create the Digital and Creative Industries Centre D10 and promote cooperation with traditional industries.

European Capital of Culture developments will focus on three core creative segments:

- New emerging creative companies which use the ECoC connections to participate in pre-incubation and incubation programmes at the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA) Liepāja Business Incubator and Kurzeme Business Incubator.
- We want to continue our long history and special story of textiles and fashion – especially our design and production of women's underwear, which we think might be an ECoC first. There are almost 100 companies in Liepāja developing Europe's undergarments! Over the years they have been a great source of jobs and income for the city, but are largely developing on their own. ECoC can give a big boost to this area through an innovative and fun look at fashion and textile innovation.
- "Creative craftspeople" – individuals, often homeworking, who realize their creative unrest in productive activities – sewing, knitting, spinning, weaving, candle-making, producing local dishes, creating bags and new design objects. These local craft heroes and heroines are greatly loved. We buy their goods individually or at markets, but we also see the need to strengthen the business skills of this unheralded outlet of personal creativity. We see ECoC as a big driver to develop our talent as part of an initiative with other European cities to strengthen the visibility and profitability of the craft sector (e.g. through the 10 measures further below)

Developing Liepāja's cultural system

Liepāja's urban, cultural and sports infrastructure hosted around 2,000 different events or around 160 events per month before the pandemic. In addition to national organizations and NGOs, Liepāja City Municipality, through an annual funding round significantly supports the city's independent cultural sector to the tune of around 350,000 euros. We have identified several opportunities to reshape and improve our cultural model through the ECoC process.

Capacity building for local cultural operators and producers

Relatively few in number, but on an upward trend, especially between 2017 and 2020. A number of energetic young people with previous experience in cultural organizations or educational institutions are now developing as independent culture, sports and event management organizations, creating added value through new ideas and events, also offering production services to existing cultural institutions. However, we need to support and encourage an overall improvement in quality and content, and to diversify income sources

to reduce the need for financial support from the city. European Capital of Culture offers an outstanding platform to encourage the development of creative entrepreneurship, encouraging more organizations to see themselves as full-fledged creative businesses.

National level producers

More and more national level producers are looking in the direction of Liepāja, but still too few to promote the growth of the quality of Liepāja events. European Capital of Culture will promote Liepāja to become a major regional player for quality cultural events, attracting not only national, but also international level producers to move us away from business-as-usual-mode.

Cultural institutions

Liepāja's cultural institutions – crucial to ensuring a vibrant cultural life – still operate in a relatively closed way, as we described in Q3. Improving mutual communication between cultural and also sports professionals and organizations can help promote a stronger and more balanced city calendar, attracting cultural tourists in different seasons, a wider local audience throughout the year and opportunities to synchronise with other strategic services in the delivery of Liepāja's cultural strategy.

Better connections to Europe

Overall, however, we believe that Liepāja is moving on an upward growth curve for its cultural and creative players, but we need to move faster, and be more outward looking. Since 2016, we have been full partners in two Creative Europe projects initiated by "Future DiverCities – Creativity in an Urban Context" and "CHIC – Cultural Hybridization in Common". These are aimed at creating artistically sustainable ecosystems both in our city and in Europe. This has been an exciting process, but we need to do much more to have a long-term impact on the creative industries in the city. The following list summarises the range of initiatives planned in the framework of the European Capital of Culture project.

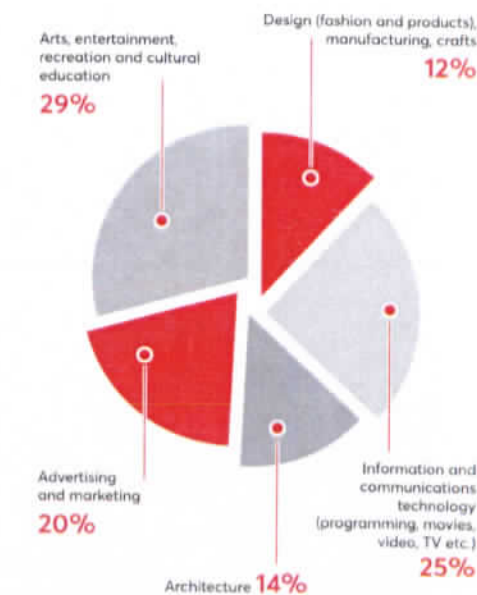
- Establish Digital and Creative Industries Centre D10 – development and jobs for IT and creative industries – in the historical centre of Liepāja, just a few steps from the Craftspeople's Quarter and LIAA Liepāja Business Incubator
- Support cooperation and networking activities across the cultural and creative sectors
- Increase opportunities to make better use of the creative use of new technologies and to establish cooperation with the growing IT sector
- Help creative industries gain access to EU funding for culture and innovation and support potential

participation in EU creative industries projects

- Encourage mutual contacts between sectors through training and capacity building
- Increase the number of creative industries companies, also using the city support instruments (project competitions) which would be given an added ECoC focus
- Initiate and motivate representatives of creative industries to form clusters, communities and form international cooperation platforms
- Strengthen the capacity of creative industries companies, to promote education and acquisition of new skills, and to share information
- Involve creative personalities and home producers in capacity building to promote long term business development
- Promote Liepāja as a place to implement your creative ideas and events.

But in the meantime, while the world is getting back on track, the municipality announced the support of the cultural sector and creative industries through various project funds – e.g. through the cultural project competition, small business project competition, and the NGO project competition.

Creative Industries sectors (2019)



Data by Register of Latvian companies

Q8

Long-term impacts on Liepāja

The process we described earlier, through which culture is connected to Liepāja's joined-up strategic planning framework, gives us confidence that becoming European Capital of Culture would create a long-term impact across a number of areas of city development:

- Culture
- Civic engagement
- Education
- Public health
- Environment and urban development
- Economics

Why don't we just use the classical divisions of social, urban, economic and cultural for our long-term impacts? Because we are deeply aware of our biggest challenge: creating an active, healthy and educated society for everyone in Liepāja. And so we want to define how participation in the European Capital of Culture project will also affect education, the physical and mental health of the population, as well as public involvement and cultural development.

If we had already invented a time machine to travel 10 years into the future, we would end up in Liepāja of 2032. Five years after the Liepāja 2027 European Capital of Culture projects and changes have been implemented. We would see that ECoC 2027 has had a real impact on Liepāja's urban environment and our society has also changed.

The urban environment of our future has become much greener. Many more cyclists and pedestrians are visible in the city centre. Fewer cars are on the streets. Former brownfields are filled with creative industries based on circular economy principles. Liepāja residents are much more involved in cultural and community life and are in a much better rhythm between rest and unrest. Citizens have learned to trust and engage in civil society initiatives. People have become more understanding and friendly to their peers.

We believe that we can make it happen and that vision can become a reality. Here is a more detailed picture.

	Impact on the city and the region	Impact on people and communities
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A modern and multifunctional public library has been created. Finally! - Artists deliver exciting contemporary art and Liepāja's history is displayed in the library and in the IT and creative industries centre D10 - The cultural offer is much more widely available to all groups of society, both in physical and digital formats - Modern, public spaces and accessible available cultural infrastructure in line with best practice have been created, including an outdoor concert Pūt, Vējiņi and Liepāja Theatre Studio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Societies and interest groups (minorities, people with disabilities, seniors, young people, etc.) are much more engaged in cultural and artistic life - The maintenance of international relations has become a way of life. Stable cooperation partners have been established throughout Europe - Cultural heritage in various forms has been presented more widely and made more accessible
Public Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The D10 Centre is fully operational and includes a well designed and equipped meeting place for a wide range of community and creative groups - A platform for public participation and civic activism has been set up (including educational issues, etc.). - Liepāja municipality has become much more friendly to its residents – more convenient, open and accessible - Municipal services have been created in both face-to-face and digital formats - A specially adapted place for young people to spend their free time has opened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active community groups operate and develop independently and have established a strong network of cooperation - Diverse communities address issues and initiate changes in urban development processes. - Media literacy and understanding has increased - Improved mutual communication between the society and the city municipality, resulting in meaningful projects that improve city life - As a result of regular international cooperation, the best practices of European NGOs have been adopted in Liepāja - The number of volunteers has increased - Improved neighbourly relations between the city's inhabitants have led to new initiatives that improve life in the city's neighbourhoods
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A powerful and energy-efficient Ukstiņa Education and Innovation Quarter, for pre-school and primary school children has been expanded. At the same time it involves other community groups, including seniors in adult education - The range of cultural education has been improved. New cultural education programmes have been created at the higher education level (bachelor, master) - In cooperation with foreign partners, a strong STEAM education centre has been established in the Nature House in the NATURA 2000 area. It is expanded with a hydroecology school for children and young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different groups in society regularly update their knowledge in diverse lifelong learning programmes - The demand for cultural education and interest education opportunities in Liepāja has increased - Young people are regularly involved in the organization and preparation of an annual youth forum

	Impact on the city and the region	Impact on people and communities
Public health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperation with the University of Liepāja and international experts has led to the establishment of a programme of mental health specialists based on cultural elements – music, drama therapy, etc. Expanded infrastructure for maintaining physical health, including natural areas available for recreation, improved access to the sea and water reservoirs, specially created ECoC nature trails Alternative mobility in the city, such as a public bicycle rental has been ensured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public is actively involved in physical and mental health promotion activities In Liepāja, locals and guests choose to use a bicycle as the most convenient means of transportation Residents actively use the extensive sports infrastructure and participate in sports-related activities, including folk sports
Environment and urban development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Territories in Karosta and the former Liepājas Metalurģs have been made available for commercial, recreational and cultural use A new Open Theatre Quarter brings theatre out into the city life A Baltic Sea coastal ecosystem management model has been developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society has changed its attitude towards environmental protection in general, including the impact of climate change on the region and natural resource use habits Liepāja's society participates more actively in the improvement and cleaning of the environment Increased interest in environmental education activities Observe ecodesign principles in event management
Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT and Creative Industries Centre D10 are established. Creative industry and IT companies have made a significant contribution to the economic development of Liepāja In Liepājas Metalurģs the basic infrastructure for (partly) commercial use has been created A sustainable tourism offer has been created, with new, eco friendly hotels established in Liepāja and our region Liepāja is recognized as an exciting new destination for cultural tourism by international target audiences The number of international flights from Liepāja airport and port has been expanded, the road network has been improved and regional bicycle lanes have been added 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member companies use Liepāja circular economy principles Families with children and various specialists, using the Liepāja human resources attraction programme, move to Liepāja and successfully enter the labour market More people have become economically active and create products and services that are attractive to the market The average salary in Liepāja has increased Competitive products and services have been created not only nationally, but also internationally

Q9 Monitoring and evaluation plans

Our biggest hope for the future is that we would very much like to see a change in the way that in 2028 people from Liepāja have – even without measuring and counting – built a successful European Capital of Culture into their everyday stories. "Only less than 10 years ago we could not have imagined that..."

However, we also want to have tangible and measurable changes that will give us more objective evidence that we have made good things happen. So evaluating the ECoC process is important to us not only at the start and end of the project, but also throughout the process. We want to assess as accurately as possible the long-term impact of ECoC, but also to be able to learn and adjust as we go along.

How?

We will undertake basic research in several rounds. Even when we were still thinking about the potential preparation for the ECoC, back in 2019, in cooperation with the Latvian Academy of Culture, we carried out a study on the social and economic impact of the cultural and creative industries of Liepāja. We will do a similar amount of work after the ECoC in the spring of 2028.

Following the 2028 ECoC results and impact assessment, we will continue to carry out a similar study every seven years. This is in line with the development of national and city medium-term strategic work plans. These future evaluations will be based on ECoC indicators, which would also help to assess the long-term effects seven, fourteen or twenty-one years after the ECoC. In the interim, from 2022 to 2027, we will carry out annual monitoring and compile basic data on ECoC activities, as well as what we believe are the key indicators to measure long term impacts. This will help not only for the final impacts assessment, but also for the independent analysis of our progress as we build towards 2027.

Given that ECoC activities cannot be seen in isolation from other areas of the economy, we will assess indicators related not only to culture, but also to public participation, education, public health, the environment and urban development, as well as the economy. In fact, as the table below demonstrates, we will use indicators connected with our plans for long term impact (Q8).

Who?

Our key partners in the research and data compilation will be a range of Liepāja's educational institutions, especially Liepāja University, as well as independent

market researchers Latvian Facts and the research centre SKDS. Also, changes in performance indicators will be coordinated in close cooperation with the Culture and Development Boards of Liepāja and South-Kurzeme municipalities, which coordinate the collection of statistical data at the city and regional level.

The Liepāja 2027 team's role will be to ensure that all activities are measured in detail, data is collected. In order for the data collection to be of high quality and to reflect the real situation, we have defined further work:

- According to the need, we will conclude a contract with a reliable research partner
- This organization will work with the main partner (Liepāja University) to establish cooperation on research on specific topics, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ECoC impact on tourism), Latvian Institute (ECoC impact on city and state image), The Civic Alliance – Latvia (ECoC impact on public involvement)
- Employ a range of information and data collection methods – official statistical data, information on events and their course, public opinion polls, mobile phone location maps, media monitoring
- Establish internal cooperation networks for collection of ECoC data
- Should our ECoC Application be successful, goals will be set for each major event of the artistic programme – audiences, media coverage, ticket sales, etc.
- Regular cultural sector and creative industries mapping
- In cooperation with the IT sector, we will create a unified system in order to more efficiently list events and their visitors, as well as data on tickets sold and artists involved
- Similarly we will periodically conduct socio-economic surveys of the general public and separate groups of the society. These surveys will be implemented in cooperation with the national survey by Latvian Facts and will provide information on citizen well-being
- Improve the quality of data submitted to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. We know the saying that 'there are lies, there are big lies and then there are statistics' and we want the quality of our statistics to be beyond reproach!
- Increasing the availability of open data in Liepāja.

The overarching goal of our ECoC evaluation is not only to assess the impact of the ECoC on Liepāja. We also want to see the evaluation of Liepāja in the context of European cities, raising our profile in the European Commission's Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor.

In the 2019 edition evaluating Cultural Vibrancy, Creative Economy and an Enabling Environment in cities from 50,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, Liepāja ranks 61st of 79. For comparison: Tartu (Estonia) is number 5, Klaipeda (Lithuania) – 24. With ECoC participation, we want to improve all indicators so that in seven years we will be in the top 20. We will not rest (!) until we are.

Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal funding for culture per capita • Number of cultural events • Number of visitors to cultural events • Liepāja residents in amateur collectives and cultural groups • Number of new or renovated cultural artefacts • Number of international projects
Public involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population participation index • Amount of open data in the total open database of the state • Awareness of the work of the municipality – website visitors, followers on social networks • Number of active NGOs and their members • Number of registered volunteers • Public consultations • Public opinion poll – quantitative research • Project competitions
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children who have participated in STEAM training • Number of children in cultural education programmes • Number of students who study culture-related courses in Liepāja University and other higher education institutions • Number of lifelong learning programmes / number of participants, number of graduates

Public health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities, publicly available measures to improve physical and mental health • Numbers of specialists in mental health related to culture disciplines (music therapy, drama therapy, colour therapy) • Bicycle users
Environment and urban development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy consumption in cultural infrastructure MWh / year • Well-maintained residential yards (number) • Renovated cultural heritage objects • Availability of cultural infrastructure (description, number) • Revitalized and landscaped spaces
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of creative industry companies • Number of new jobs in creative industries • Cultural and related industries in the total net turnover of the city enterprises in net sales (%) • Number of passengers through the airport • Number of overnight stays • Average length of stay of tourists



Cultural and Artistic Content

Q10 Artistic vision and strategy

Our artistic vision is to make those who join our journey navigators in the ever-changing world of rest and unrest. With the Liepāja 2027 cultural programme we want to create a navigation map of an active society – a sensitive orientation plan for understanding the world, promoting adaptation, resilience, activity and healthy doses of both rest and unrest. We want to understand, feel and articulate time and space not only in Liepāja and Latvia, but as a part of Europe and the world. To understand where we come from, to understand the time we live in now, and to anticipate change. Becoming skilled guides and an important point of networking in Europe.

Liepāja, as a port city, is blown and shaken by the harsh west winds, dreaming big dreams and keeping the (un)rest. Liepāja opens up and looks proudly at the horizon – aiming high, dreaming big. Historically, we have been border guards between sea and land, gatekeepers between East and West. Between archaic and modern, between traditional and innovative, caution and courage, foreign and local. Between renewal and stability. Between rest and unrest. Our strategy is to navigate new seas and worlds. But to do that, we have to understand how to achieve balance without standing still and how to react to what is happening around without being confused. How to secure the right tools to work on shaping the future and activating citizen involvement.

Art and culture have always been a seismograph and a mirror of their time. Looking for new creative solutions by offering alternative narratives, articulating positions, not always giving concrete answers, but providing skills to deal with the reality of the moment and allowing for unexpected solutions for future possibilities.

Our artistic programme will ask questions, it will stimulate conversations, creating closer contact both with the neighbour here and with people we have not met yet around the world.

Our vision is that this programme of cultural events will help to understand and articulate healthy and sustainable human – nature relationships and promote critical thinking. And for it to help avoid confusion in an increasingly globalized world of information technology, science and artificial intelligence. It will help us all navigate the creative foresight of the future.

Q11 Programme structure and planned projects

Under the concept of (un)rest we have created a structure of five programme lines to talk about key issues relevant to Liepāja and many of our European partners. We look at these issues from different perspectives that will boldly and creatively address the artistic vision and strategy. Not only in 2027 but also in the ramp-up and legacy years.

The five programme lines – European Dream, Port Paradox, New Eyes, Deliberate Modesty and Creative Foresight – each tell a story that is closely related to Liepāja and its European context.

The projects are designed by our partners in the city and region, by cultural institutions, independent artists and NGOs together with partners and contacts from different parts in Europe and the world – all of them confirmed. Together with the cultural strategy and the plans for European cooperation and Outreach, our projects are intended to make those impacts described in Q8 on the city's and Kurzeme region's cultural and urban development. And especially the projects are designed to make an impact on those who experience them: citizens and visitors.

European Dream

Probably everyone in Europe knows what the American dream is all about. But could any two Europeans agree what the European dream is? We think it is high time to dream a European dream together.

The interdisciplinary projects in this line are based on the conviction that solidarity, diversity, cooperation, and a dignified coexistence are values that constitute the European Dream. And that these values are worthwhile to be sought and protected throughout the world. But whilst the American Dream focuses on the individual, the European Dream might be more difficult to buy into for the individual person because it is more community oriented. Perhaps through this programme line we can break the –isms down to make them more accessible and make the European Dream connect to individuals as well as to the community at large.

No. 27 Dream Machine

/ Agora of Values

Artificial intelligence and democracy. Big data and freedom. Genetic engineering and equality. Social media and privacy. Attitudes towards life and death, human suffering and euthanasia. Issues of democracy and information.

There are innumerable opportunities for the European dream and democracy in the digital development which races ahead. And at least as many threats.

By attracting the brightest minds from Latvia and Europe, we will develop five cycles of forums in different places and neighbourhoods of the city on the topic of the European dream in 2027. The forums will include innovative formats of discussions, seminars, forums and debates. Experts, activists and dreamers from different European schools of thought will exchange their perceptions and views. This is not meant as an expert forum only. Rather through new and agile methods of involvement (and there will most likely be more cutting edge ones by 2027) like World Café, Fishbowl, Appreciative Inquiry etc. we will welcome a wide audience, including students, citizens of all ages to fully immerse themselves in the European Dream design.

Partners: University of Liepāja, University of Latvia, Rīga Stradiņš University, Rīga Technical University, Association Digital Innovation Park, Association Ascendum, Google, The Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia, cities of the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC), Microsoft, Aveiro 2027 and Braga 2027 Candidate Cities

The Shape of the Dream

/ Art in Public Space

If the European Dream had a physical or virtual shape what would it look like? Five of the best Latvian sculptors in partnership with five sculptors from the Americas, Africa, the Arab world, Australia and Asia will create 10 large-scale site-specific objects – kinetic art, installations, digitally enhanced sculptures – in different residential areas around the city focussing on the theme of European Dream. Installation of the objects will be accompanied by performances and public activities.

Partners: Association Mākslas mēnežmenta un informācijas centrs (Sculpture Quadrennial Riga), Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School

Europe Sings Liepāja

/ International Choir Music Festival

Our national Latvian code and therapy is to come together and sing. As the pandemic has made it even more obvious: Singing together is breathing together. Europe will come together in one breath when we will be honoured to host the international Europa Cantat Festival in Liepāja in 2027.

The event brings together more than 4,000 participants from all over Europe and the world to share their passion for singing and discovering mutual culture. We have initiated negotiations with the European Choral Association on bringing this festival to Liepāja and the nearby region. Additionally we will expand the festival to include folk dance ensembles and other folk-art artists to join the main events.

Partners: Latvian Song and Dance Festival Association, Liepāja Folk Art and Culture centre, cultural centres of South-Kurzeme region, envisaged cooperation with the European Choral Association (DE)

Stars in Amber

/ Cycle of Concerts

Some artists and artistic experiences have the potential to inspire our own artistic or cultural dreams. We are proud that our singers perform in the world's best concert halls – the New York Metropolitan, the Vienna Opera or the Salzburg Opera Festival. Latvian conductors lead the most brilliant musical bodies, such as the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, or the Komische Oper Berlin. In Liepāja, there is a unique concert hall that surprises not only with its flamboyant contemporary architecture shaped and coloured like a piece of amber, but also through its excellent acoustics created by the world's best sound experts. Indeed, this is acknowledged both by music grands like the Berlin Philharmonic musicians and the happy audience.

In the context of the European Capital of Culture, we will bring Latvian music excellence and the most prominent performing arts musicians worldwide to Liepāja (e.g. conductor Andris Nelsons, Opera diva Elīna Garanča, and others).

We will broadcast it on several outdoor screens across the Liepāja residential areas and deliver it as a special screening also in the Liepāja nursing homes – as well as in the major European cultural broadcasting platforms like Arte, Mezzo.

Partners: Great Amber Concert Hall, major worldwide music management agencies and orchestras, international artist and project management agency HarrisonParrott (UK/DE/FR), etc.

Nordic Solstice

/ International Traditional Culture Festival

Cultural diversity is a secret ingredient in the European Dream. The Baltic and Nordic countries add the flavour of solstice celebrations to this diversity. For the first time we will celebrate Solstice in a week-long event together with our neighbouring nations – thus uniting and linking Nordic and Baltic cultures. It will be a celebration of life and light for citizens of all ages together with our guests from Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

The programme will include both mobile Finnish saunas on the fine beach sand, night swims, Lithuanian straw sculpture burning, national dress catwalks, the chanting of Nordic folklore groups, traditional folk dances, jumping over bonfires, traditional dishes and authentic festival decorations. It will be a true hot-tempered Nordic event!

Partners: Liepāja Folk Art and Culture centre, amateur choirs and folk-dance groups, cultural centres of South-Kurzeme region, City of Klaipėda (LT), Tampere 2026 and Oulu 2026 Candidate Cities

Urban Dreams Liepāja

/ Design and Architecture Days

Dreams of the new European city and green infrastructure are emerging everywhere – reflected also in the initiative of the European Commission New European Bauhaus. Distinctive Liepāja features shaped the city in the second half of the 19th century. Today our streets reflect Art Nouveau as well as aristocratic wooden architecture, port warehouses, sacred buildings, Soviet type architecture and the legacy of the city chief architect Paul Max Bertschy.

For the wider audience as a first step we will develop a self-guided route revealing yet undiscovered architectural gems of Liepāja and the urban environment of the region's small towns. We will also create a special route to visit old manors located in the nearby region, which will allow anyone to get a deeper understanding of the area.

Building (figuratively and literally) on the urban development strategy of the city (2022–2035) we will join the movement of modelling the European dream city. We will organize a series of cultural heritage workshops, lectures, architectural and design walks guided by urban experts, adding the architectural gems of Liepāja to the urban diversity of Europe.

Partners: Liepāja City Construction Board, Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, Association Urban Institute, Design Company H2E, Riga Chapter of the Society of Experiential Graphic Design (SEGD), art, architecture and design faculties of Latvian universities, Latvian professional associations of architects and urban planners, manors of South-Kurzeme region, Bad Ischi-SKGT2024, Aveiro 2027 Candidate City

Kino Sapis

/ European Film Days

Once there were 11 cinemas in Liepāja, now only one. Movies were filmed in Liepāja, the world famous director of photography Eduards Tišē grew up and gained his first cinematographic experience in our city.

During the ECoC year we want to breathe new life into Liepāja's cinema traditions by hosting the Rīga International Film Festival (RIFF). This high quality film programme kicks off a series of activities around the revival of cinema as an internationally accessible cultural expression.

As part of this project we invite active participation from schools and amateurs and initiate thematic and cooperation programmes with different European partners and NGOs.

Partners: Association Rīgas Starptautiskais kino festivāls (Rīga International Film Festival), envisaged cooperation with foreign embassies in Latvia

Port Paradox

Liepāja is a city of paradoxes – (un)rest being one of them –, which over time have driven urban development and cultural life. Circumstances have kindled the identification with the local as strongly as they have sparked the longing to go far away. These antipoles and contradictions coexist and often the friction between them constitutes the particular identity of Liepāja, which we are keen to celebrate. Actually, in our standardized world we should learn to cherish paradoxes as something that forces us to make bold decisions about spectacular forms of expression. Port Paradox will discover the paradoxes of Liepāja and identify the city heritage through them. The stories of this heritage have neither been valued much among ourselves nor have they been

brought to the attention of our fellow Europeans. May we take this opportunity.

Rock the Rock

/ Music Festival

The closed city became the rebel city. A true paradox of the 20th century. Liepāja became the rock music capital of the entire Soviet Union. Rock music was what propelled the Baltic States' freedom spirit. This free spirit was born in Liepāja with brave musicians, songwriters, who carried the idea of freedom so that we can now celebrate our freedom and have been doing so for 30 years! Those carriers of the freedom spear of the 80s are now ladies and gentlemen in their best age.

To establish a link between different eras and as a tribute to the power of music, we will create the World Rock Festival all around the city. On a stage at the beach, in the legendary outdoor concert garden Pūt, vējīņi! at the Seaside Park, and on stages in all residential districts. We will unearth the roots of Liepāja rock, celebrate it with new rock music from all over Europe, encourage new talent. Welcoming 20,000 people to join this celebration in person and millions more through digital resources around the world.

There will be a real rock festival in Liepāja again at last!

Partners: Summer Sound Festival, local event producers and venues, like Julianna's Courtyard, cultural centre Wiktorija, rock club Fontaine Palace

Inside – Out

/ Art Exhibitions

During 2026 local residents and visitors will have an opportunity to attend two amazing exhibitions – displaying Liepāja as a Port Paradox. The artworks of Latvian classics in the Liepāja Museum, and the contemporary art exhibition Locus Mundi by the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art in the industrial hangar on the territory of the former steel plant Liepājas Metalurģs. The challenge will be to curate those two exhibitions in a way to exhibit classics and specifically commissioned contemporary works alongside each other in both places. Possibly using some of the classics in gigantic reproductions to look at them from a paradox angle in the unfamiliar environment of the former steel plant and using the contemporary artworks in a dialogue with the classic works.

As part of the ECoC year, we will also organize mini-exhibitions in the city environment, shop window displays and city art galleries, telling a story that started 100 years ago with the foundation of the Liepāja Arts School. The 20s then and the 20s now.

Partners: Liepāja Museum, Latvian National Museum of Art, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary

School, Art Gallery Romas dārzis, Art Gallery Promenade, Art Gallery Ludvilis, cultural centres of South-Kurzeme region

upWIND downWIND

/ Wind Celebration

There is a saying that badminton is a one person sport in Liepāja. You hit the shuttlecock and... seconds later it is back on your racket. Saying that Liepāja is the city where the wind is born is entirely accurate! In cooperation with local, Latvian and international artists, we will create a festival of wind. Wind sculptures, wind music instruments, wind performances. And we will create a new therapeutic and fun competition: The shouting contest on the beach. Shouting upwind and downwind. Blow off steam and be loud!

The upWind downWind project is launched in 2025 with an installation called Wind Observatory in the concert hall Great Amber. A special device placed on the roof of the concert hall will measure the Liepāja wind and the collected data is instantly translated through light beams projected into a large, specially designed water pool in the concert hall, creating unique art phenomena, shapes, ripples etc. changing with the force of the wind. Science and art coming together in real time.

Partners: Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), Estonian Academy of Arts New Media Arts programme (EE), experimental sound and recording studio Dirty Deal Audio, local event producers and international partners

The Karosta Paradox

/ Mixed Media XR/AR Game

Karosta is a unique territory within walking distance of the city centre. It was developed during the Russian Empire as an independent military town and later on continued to serve as a huge USSR military base and is still largely inhabited by the Russian-speaking community.

Now, as an integrated part of the city, Karosta still brings along its paradoxical stories. The tsarist time fortifications, the army tunnels, bunkers, ruins, neglected blockhouses, the splendid Officers' Meeting Palace, the abandoned buildings and golden cupolas of the Cathedral give plenty of room for imagination.

For Liepāja 2027 we will create an onsite game which will be enhanced with AR and XR means as well as online elements. It is an engaging and meaningful way of experiencing our city's history. An interactive and engaging opportunity for learning through modern technology. Liepāja residents and visitors will be able to "act out" a military operation in the Karosta fortifications. We will specifically try bringing together the older (who have experienced the Soviet time) and younger generations in creating the content and storyboard.

Partners: University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), Association ASTE, Art, Science, Technology, Education, E-Lab - Electronic Arts and Media Centre, Karosta Prison, Aveiro 2027 Candidate City

Karosta Has Balls!

/ Reviving Baltic Heritage

With Karosta has Balls! we reclaim the heritage of ball culture and couture in Liepāja, by reviving the breathtaking Officers' Meeting Palace. A pearl of 19th century's Karosta, beautifully restored but until today located in the restricted territory of the Ministry of Defence.

Four seasonal and thematic balls will be organized in 2027. The corresponding costumes and attributes will recall and reinterpret our cosmopolitan and multicultural society and tell the stories of Russians, Germans, Jewish, Latvians living side-by-side.

We will organize accompanying dance sessions for everyone interested in learning to dance where all of our different communities are brought together, especially our Russian-speaking ones. During every ball we hold a charity event – an auction of works by Liepājan and Latvian artists to raise money to make culture accessible for seniors in nursing homes e.g. through technical equipment.

Partners: Liepāja Museum, Liepāja Theatre, local event producers and fashion artists, Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia

Opera on the Beach

/ Opera Festival

Liepāja voices have always been audible from the far distance and the strong wind has tuned them not only to rock music but also into opera. By 2027 we want to restore the tradition of opera in Liepāja, which will celebrate 105 years in 2027. We will let it be reborn not in the concert hall, but by the sea – in the legendary concert garden Pūt, Vējiņ!

In 2022, we will announce a competition for Latvian writers to create the legend of Liepāja (perhaps we will finally reach the legend of how the wind was born in Liepāja :)), which will be turned into a beautiful opera work by one of the most talented opera music authors of the new generation – Jānis Ķīrsis.

In 2024, the well-known Latvian composer of popular music, Uldis Marhilēvičs, will create an opera for a young audience – "Latvian Odyssey" about Latvians who travel around the world via the Trans-Siberian train through Vladivostok in the 20th century and return to Latvia. In 2025, the Latvian sacred music composer Rihards Dubra will create a new work, the plot of which is based on the story of the Turaida Kaupo called the "King of Livonia", the Livonian leader at the beginning of

the 13th century, (a tiny minority still living in Latvia and fast fading in front of our eyes).

Partners: Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, The State Choir LATVIJA, Latvian composers – Jānis Ķīrsis, Uldis Marhilēvičs, Rihards Dubra and Latvian writers

Tell Me a Story, Liepāja

/ Pop-up Story Book and XR Routes

City paradoxes and incredible tales yet unknown to many remain to be told. We want to create a giant history pop-up book for everyone in the city and region, no matter the age or background.

The story unfolds as people wander through the streets of the city to the different "chapters" of the book designed as oversized objects.

We will invite a team of writers and historians to work with citizens, schools and kindergartens to study and write stories and recount events in Liepāja from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st century. Additional XR, VR and AR elements along the streets between the book objects will invite participants for immersive experiences to learn about the twists of history in Liepāja. Making historical layers visible in the existing environment will allow everyone to feel transported into the city's forgotten memory. With tales to identify the legacy of the past and build a more humane future through this experience – assisted by modern technology. Performances, 3D games, virtual tours, oral memory of locals and migrant communities presented in the pop-up book will enable anyone to share their own stories of the city and explore the rapid city development. Telling about the complex events that changed the lives of hundreds and thousands of people will become accessible stories for everyone. Take a stroll along Liepāja's streets through the centuries, and dive into the feeling of a multicultural nation finding its place in Europe.

Partners: University of Liepāja (incl. New Media Art and IT Study programme), Liepāja Chapter of the Latvian Writers' Union, Liepāja Theatre, Uniting History Foundation, Association Digital Innovation Park

New Eyes

"The real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."
"In Search of Lost Time" – By Marcel Proust

We will travel in Liepāja with the new eyes of Proust. We will dive deep, looking for a greater understanding and appreciation of our surroundings. But also of each other. Neighbours with neighbours, colleagues with colleagues, residents of Karosta with residents of Jaunliepāja district, young Liepāja residents with old ones. Learning together about co-responsibility and co-creation for our city, our region and the wider European community. How to contribute and engage in building and developing the space we inhabit. How to promote the development of creative industries and encourage urban debate away from the city centre. How to have fun nearer to home!

A Festival of Friendliness

/ Community Project

Our Festival of Friendliness will be a year long programme of events which open up our neighbourhoods to good ideas. Collective volunteering days to improve our areas. Community hiking expeditions in nature or falling star-watching nights, family breakfasts. Meetings with ethnic communities to learn their culture and traditions and to share their food. It's a festival of co-creation, too. Perhaps some neighbour or employee plays an unusual musical instrument. Someone else is a martial arts expert. In different places of the city, we will connect to the existing "garage culture" and create (inspired by Chemnitz 2025 Eastern State of Mind project) open public creative spaces where people can gather, exchange views, discuss, talk and chat, set up mini-exhibitions. Communities will encourage people to share their time and energy as volunteers. The neighbourhood project will promote a sense of belonging to Liepāja and Europe, which is important for the part of the Russian-speaking audience that partly lives in isolation.

A monthly contest will celebrate the "best neighbour", voted in by their fellow community members. Working and creating together will break down barriers and prejudices between different groups. Our districts will flourish through friendliness and fun.

Partners: NGOs, tourism entrepreneurs and cultural organizations of Liepāja and South-Kurzeme region

The Residents' Restaurant: Come In, Let Me Treat You!

/ Food and Local Culture

On the first Saturday of every month, in Liepāja and the small towns and villages around the region, local people will open their doors to visitors and treat them with their favourite homemade dishes. Freshly baked rye bread, cod fish pot "Liepājas Menciņi", smoked flounder, white butter. A homebrewed beer, even wine, or some stronger liquids will be an integral part of this delicious project. This project gives an opportunity not only to get acquainted with Latvian cuisine, but also with dishes from our neighbours and minorities – Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Lithuanian. Borsch, zeppelins and solanka have long been a part of our daily lives.

Partners: Liepāja House of Craftsmen, Liepāja Folk Art and Culture centre, tourism entrepreneurs and cultural centres of South-Kurzeme region

Skill Exchange Market

/ Capacity Building

"You gain when giving, you gain receiving, no one can take away the given" told Latvian famous writer and poet Rainis. This is our inspiration for the Skill Exchange Market.

Our city is full of craftspeople. Their inspiration, support and enthusiasm will drive a series of "Laboratories of Competence". Here people will learn life-transforming skills. Either through face-to-face workshops or digital labs (e.g. Ms Alda's jam-cooking webinar or masterclass with the Kalniņš family about smart ways with family finance). This will be a great way for communities to share their skills and life experience and give practical "lessons for life". Knitting, stitching, calligraphy, cooking.

Retired school teachers will return to share their experience and run classes. And, together with the University of Liepāja and further education organizations, we will improve access to lifelong learning across the city. They will help us set up the digital platform for the Skill Exchange Market to barter skills. The platform will also be the go-to place for upcoming activities, courses and other training.

Partners: Liepāja Folk Art and Culture Centre, Liepāja House of Craftsmen and Craftsmen Quarter, Association Digital Innovation Park, Liepāja City Education Board, Liepāja NGO incubator, University of Liepāja, Microsoft

Liepāja Celebrates!

/ Light Art

It all started with a pandemic that forced us to search for solutions to make people happy on dark autumn

evenings. The municipality quickly made a small route, lit up individual houses, and couldn't believe how the townspeople reacted to it, what crowds were on the streets.

We found a way to look at the city in a completely different way, to show the architecture, to involve the residents (Imagine – they had hooked up the spotlights themselves to light their homes!). This will remain as a project of Liepāja's annual birthday forever, which we celebrate on March 18. In 2025, 2026 and especially in 2027, the festival will become international! We will invite foreign partners not only to bring bright works to Liepāja, but also to visit Liepāja in advance, to explore the potential, to offer solutions for lighting the city in the future, an offer to lighting a park or, for example, our tram rails – why not!

Within the framework of Illuminated Liepāja in 2027, we will open the doors to closed spaces where Liepāja residents have not set foot before.

Partners: Latvian Event Producers Association, THEORIZ Studio (FR), Anastasia Isachsen (NO), LUCION (CA), Onianlab (ES)

Open Theatre Quarter

/ Theatre Projects Platform

Liepāja on summer evenings is a very special place. We want to share and enhance this atmosphere by creating an open theatre space across the street from the theatre. It will also be a place of learning about new theatre formats, creating events for people of all ages, families with children and enabling young people to show their talents on the "Open Stage". Our Liepāja Puppet Theatre will create a special performance cycle for children, arranging modern creative workshops which study Latvian traditions and fold them together with Polish and Lithuanian traditions resulting in the "Toy" trilogy.

The international visual theatre festival Wigwag will show 10 preselected high-quality theatrical performances for adults and children, with puppets, objects, motions and circus from countries around Europe.

Partners: Liepāja Theatre, Liepāja Puppet Theatre, Independent theatre Goda teātris, Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, Liepāja Central Scientific Library, University of Liepāja, ASSITEJ Latvia, The Museum & Theatre of Magic MYSTERO, Theatre Centre Vaba Lava (EE), International Puppet Theatre Union UNIMA (FR), international visual and puppet theatre festivals

Inclusive Mono Theatre

/ Theatre Festival

Together with Liepāja Theatre, we plan to create an international mono-performance festival. Mono performances allow live stories to be passed on to the audience in a very personal way. They also provide

an opportunity to involve the audience, creating a special link between the actor, the viewer and the urban environment. The audience is most frequently involved in the developments on stage, both physically and mentally, as the main weight of mono theatre rests upon personal engagement and compassion. This is also our opportunity to co-create with our minorities, involving various Russian-speaking playwrights and actors, including well-known stage director Dmitry Petrenko.

Partners: Liepāja Theatre, Liepāja Puppet Theatre, Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, Klaipėda Theatre (LT), Nova Gorica 2025

UPDATE

/ New Media Arts Week

In 2027 the yearly International Week of New Media Arts will have a special theme: It will challenge participants to rethink the paradigm of contemporary life – changes to the world, the city and the local urban environment, that are caused by the impact of technology, migration, globalization and continuous communication.

UPDATE will be an experimental platform with formats like creative seminars, hands-on workshops, show & tell events, performances and concerts. Artists, scientists, researchers, students and coaches from different countries, cities and schools will be invited to contribute their visions and views on the world's ongoing changes and their echoes in our urban development.

Partners: University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), Association ASTE, Art, Science, Technology, Education, E-Lab - Electronic Arts and Media Centre, Public Art Lab (DE), Seconde Nature (FR), Aveiro 2027 and Braga 2027 Candidate Cities

Everyone is Welcome!

/ Inclusive Culture

Welcome to kids, grownups, locals and foreign visitors, including – perhaps especially – welcome to those who live next to us and yet remain invisible.

Inspired by discussions with local NGOs who represent people with disabilities, Everyone is Welcome! will work with best practice European organizations who support and showcase artists with disabilities. Our aim is to provide opportunities – including especially created events and shows – for Liepāja's artists with disabilities to develop and display their talents. Led by a team of people with special needs, the project will be a long term capacity building project for Liepāja to become a centre of European best practice. Developing ideas like Tartu's Hidden Worlds Expanding and showcasing the hidden talent we are uncovering in our city.

This will be a bold step in promoting a more inclusive Liepāja including theatre for the visually impaired and blind people, contemporary dance for those with motion

disabilities, and music for people with hearing disabilities.

Partners: Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja Society of the Blind, The Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability Organization Sustento, Kaunas Artists' House (Kaunas 2022), technology company Tilde

From Karosta to Radosta

/ Shaping a New Creative Quarter

Karosta is an absolutely unique residential district in Europe. The community of Karosta is very diverse, including a large Russian-speaking community. We want to turn Karosta, meaning War Port, into Radosta – the Creative Port. Providing the opportunity for local residents to participate in shaping their own living environment in this iconic part of the city.

On the site of the former military barracks, we will create a Creative Quarter with a community garden and a variety of exhibitions, performances, a cosy cafe and plenty of activities for children and young people.

The main event will be the Karosta Festival – a set of events in Redan, the Lāčplēša Park, the Northern fortifications and in the Water Supply Tower, where we will invite residents and artists to paint large format murals. Visitors and locals are welcome to spend a romantic night in a double cell of the Karosta Prison (whatever your sense of "romantic" may be!). This will be a renaissance of a neighbourhood like nowhere else in Europe. Don't miss it!

Partners: Karosta Prison, Karosta Festival, The Liepāja Special Economic Zone, Art Academy of Latvia, local artists, tourism and catering businesses, Kaunas Artists' House (Kaunas 2022), Tampere 2026 and Aveiro 2027 Candidate Cities

The Return of a Tower

/ Religious and Spiritual Culture

Holy Trinity Cathedral in Liepāja is home to a unique musical instrument. The world's largest mechanical unaltered historical organ with more than 7,000 pipes. This enigmatic yet thrilling story will be integrated into an immersive exhibition in the cathedral tower, where thousands of guests climbing to observe the city panorama will have an opportunity to learn this story in a unique way.

We will also take the opportunity to unite more than 40 of Liepāja and the region's churches in a series of spiritual music concerts and performances of our most prominent Latvian and European musicians. And in September 2027, we will celebrate the annual Liepāja Organ Music Festival by welcoming a galaxy of national and international organists.

Partners: Liepāja Holy Trinity Church Renovation Fund, Churches of Liepāja and South-Kurzeme region, Liepāja Organ Music Festival

A Day in the Life

/ Photography

July 27th of 2027 will be just another normal Tuesday in the life of the city. Only on this day we'll freeze the snapshot! It will be an open air photography project in Liepāja and 27 other cities throughout Europe.

We will welcome both professionals and amateurs with modern digicams, smartphones and analog cameras. Every resident of Liepāja, together with dozens of Liepājan, Latvian and European photographers, will capture a single day's events in Liepāja.

Weddings, laughter, victories, funerals, sea, close-ups, landscapes, adventures. At the same time, professional and amateur photographers will be involved in 27 cities in Europe. For each second and each minute of the day of the 27-07-2027 there will be several pictures from Liepāja and the same instant snapshot for example from Aveiro, Malmö, Lublin, Matera and Brighton. A moment frozen in time of our common life in Europe.

A travelling version of the exhibition to tour the cities of Latvia and Europe is possible as well as a digital exhibition.

Partners: Association Vienadiena.lv, Association FOTast, envisaged cooperation with Latvian embassies abroad and partners from other ECaC and Liepāja Twin cities

Deliberate Modesty

Being embraced by the Baltic Sea, Lake Liepāja, untouched wilderness of the forests, bogs and meadows we feel like a safe haven here in Liepāja. However, all this beauty has been deeply affected by climate change and the consequences of human economic activity. Although the Blue Flag flies over the city central beach, the Baltic Sea is currently experiencing its challenges. It still sends us reminders of the Soviet Army's activities in the form of washed ashore explosive phosphorus lumps. Our Lake Liepāja becomes overgrown, meadows are having less and less wild flowers that are such a beloved part of our folk songs. Neglect has not only affected our nature. It has also affected our body and mind, drawing us in consumption, losing physical and mental balance. Deliberate Modesty looks to rebalance our way of being. Thinking about the role of art in green innovation. Including smart and innovative business principles based on circular economy. Coming back to our healthy common sense.

No More Heavy Metal

/ Circus, Contemporary Art, Avant-Garde, Alternative Music, Street Art

This project is not about banning heavy rock. It is about reclaiming a 130 years old heavy metal industrial site. Now, under city ownership, this 120-ha territory of the former Liepājas Metalurģs steel plant is opening up for new uses.

Step by step, fences will be removed. A network of streets will be created and people will have access to this unique location that was closed to the public for so many decades. European Capital of Culture is driving focus to encourage the opening of this area. Setting up green zones on the lake bank, creating public spaces for events, allowing art to thrive in the ECoC year and creating a long term legacy.

Wouldn't it be great to listen to experimental and avant-garde music among abandoned giant metal-processing hangars at the Sound Forest Festival? This vast area will provide a unique experience. Wandering around, experiencing the surreal nature of the site and enjoying extensive contemporary art exhibitions (Inside – Out). Let's bring the circus here too! Let's use the charm of the industrial environment to brush up a pop-up exhibition hangar, activate street art, arrange lectures, and regular movie screenings.

Partners: The Liepāja Special Economic Zone, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Contemporary Circus and Street Arts Festival Re Rigol, Sound Forest festival for adventurous music, Zollverein Foundation Essen (DE), Kaunas Artists' House (Kaunas 2022), Aarhus (DK), Tartu 2024, Tampere 2026 Candidate City

Shine Silently

/ Detox and Mental Health Rebalancing

It makes sense to find long-term solutions for maintaining mental health and balance here in Liepāja, a city located between the lake and the sea and a large surrounding region with unspoiled natural resources. In the "age of distance," as we will probably remember this pandemic, nature is always the first place to escape to, to find refuge, to regain balance. But there is one more "secret ingredient" for well-being – it's vitamin D! And here we have a solution – according to meteorological observations, Liepāja is the sunniest city in Latvia with 283 sunshine days per year!

We will put together natural resources and the sunshine and we will create 27 re-balancing routes in Liepāja and the surrounding region. These routes will provide an opportunity to enjoy nature's artwork, the sound of a nature's concert hall complete with good literature and poetry readings. Our task is to raise a new generation of "rebalancing" mentors who will be able to lead groups along unknown and lonely paths, show and teach to recognize various edible berries and mushrooms. And how about handing in your phones for the duration of

the event? And spending time without talking? How about challenging yourself, meeting yourself?

Partners: Liepāja City Environment, Health and Public Involvement Department, Liepāja Regional Tourism Information Office, wellness and tourism entrepreneurs of Liepāja and South-Kurzeme region.

Face to Face With the Natural

/ Green Thinking and Sustainability

In cooperation with local and international partners, we will elaborate a programme of eco-design events together with the Laba Daba Festival, the first eco-design-based event in the Baltics. During three summer weekends we will organize the green thinking get-together. The project will highlight and outline sensible and practical new ideas for making your life eco-friendly and promote moderate consumption.

Participants will enjoy a unique symbiosis of natural and artistic experiences, such as watching sunrise on boats in the Lake Liepāja with meditative live music. Or experiencing contemporary music, theatre, dance and even circus performances in the pine forest at the seashore.

We will conclude Face to Face with the Natural with a unique sustainable fashion show on the Horse Island's big "catwalk" stretching into the lake. It will be presented by professionals and Liepāja textile industry entrepreneurs, as well as students from different schools.

Partners: University of Liepāja, organizations and municipality of South-Kurzeme region, event agency Parelzō ķīmija and radio NABA (Laba Daba Festival), Association Rādī Vidi Pats, University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), Latvian Event Producers' Association, Jeroen Strijbos and Rob van Rijswijk project "Signal at Dusk" (NL), Oulu 2026 Candidate City, Aarhus (DK)

An Island Adventure of Nature and Science

/ STEAM

For professionals and grown-ups this project is called STEAM Education at Horse Island Nature House. But for our primary audience – kids and school students – this is The Island of Adventure!

The Horse Island, once a city waste dump, will in future be the epicentre of curious science. Its main value is everything that is right there – in the environment and nature. Just like the different characters from island adventure books, our young explorers will become astronomers, entomologists. Musicians will create music from reeds. Physicists will study the impacts of electric fields on fabric. In fact, you don't even need to study, conclude or inquire. You just need to be present, observe, hear, and dive into adventure.

Nature House will be equipped with a permanent, interactive exhibition and environmental sciences laboratory. A new generation of hydro-ecologists will be raised by its inspiration.

Science, technology and arts events for children and young people will promote an exciting awareness of synergies between technology and the arts sector through talks, demonstrations, exchanges of experience, creative masterclasses. Field expeditions will take you through undiscovered locations on the island together with research trips to the lake.

Partners: Liepāja City Education Board, Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, Liepāja textile industry companies, The Nature House of Liepāja Science and Education Innovation Centre (ZIIC), Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, Klaipeda University Marine Research Institute (LT), Jaermuseet Regional Museum (NO), Trondheim Science Centre (NO), Oulu 2026 and Aveiro 2027 Candidate Cities

The Other Sea Festival

/ Marine Awareness

In 2027 the yearly Other Sea Festival will be a week of marine themed events designed as a fun and meaningful way to raise ecological awareness and public education about the critical state of the Baltic Sea. The awareness-raising is combined with popular sports competitions (beach volleyball, rope pulling, boat competitions, seaside shouting competitions!) and a wide range of cultural events. These include a sea symphony, and an exhibition of maritime art.

Our long term aim is to protect the Baltic Sea from pollution and to raise awareness about how we can all contribute to the preservation and protection of marine life. We will celebrate a clean and healthy sea together with our regional cities and active citizen co-creation.

Partners: The Nature House of Liepāja Science and Education Innovation Centre (ZIIC), Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, The Liepāja Special Economic Zone, municipalities and cultural centres of South-Kurzeme region, University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), Klaipeda University Marine Research Institute (LT), Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC), Tampere 2026 and Aveiro 2027 Candidate Cities

Creative Foresight

Following the processes of technological development and the fight against the pandemic worldwide we understand more than ever that we must be ready for the future. Social innovation movements and creative communities are and will be a powerful driver of sustainable urban renewal along technological innovations. Even in cities like ours. Tackling education is

key, empowering the new generation to make informed choices. Reconciling the online and offline world and adjusting to silently disruptive technology like artificial intelligence.

We are eager to start a lively discussion about what legacy we want to leave not only in this city, but around the world.

Liepāja Art Forum

/ Contemporary Art and Technology

The annual international contemporary art festival, the Liepāja Art Forum, will be tailored to the topic of new technologies. By attracting exceptional European contemporary artists, we will bring new artistic expressions to Liepāja.

For example, we will contract composers to create new musical pieces using algorithms and different digital composing techniques. We intend to cooperate with the Dutch leading figures Strijbos & van Rijswijk and composer Michel van der Aa on immersive music and audio-visual art. We will encourage artists to create special contemporary art works in cooperation with teenage local pupils of the School for Art and Music, exploring an artistic angle of the impact of new technologies on society and the world.

We are excited to introduce yet unexplored theatrical expression, which opens a window to the up, close and personal view of Europe and the world right at your door. Together with Rimini Protokoll and involving Liepāja residents, we will offer plays in the private space and show that everyone can enjoy co-creating contemporary art.

Partners: Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), New Media Art students, experimental sound and recording studio Dirty Deal Audio, Rimini Protokoll (DE/CH)

D10 United

/ Capacity Building

The former Liepāja Milicia (ex-police) House, presently empty, in 2027 will be transformed into a lively city IT and creative centre for emerging creative industries, young people from schools and an NGO Incubator. D10 will be a dynamic hub for creative energy, a magnet for joint cooperation and for youth leadership development. D10 is located across the street from the House of Craftspeople and the LIAA Business Incubator, which will result in a strong fusion of IT and creative quarters in Liepāja.

A core element of D10, will be a youth leadership school, bringing together both IT and business competences, together with cultural and sports development to

encourage our young leaders to be creative, motivated and inquisitive.

Together with the Public Art Lab from Berlin, the Latvian embassies in the European and Eastern Partnership countries and the Liepāja IT sector and NGO Incubator we will implement a project with digital calligraphy, inviting diaspora representatives to contact their relatives in Liepāja and the region through visual projections. In addition, the D10 backyard will be transformed into an outdoor cinema in the summer, showing a series of films which address big European topics including many films from former ECoC cities. Our young creative minds will be empowered to see Europe through different eyes, broadening the range of opinions and voices which shape their future perspectives.

Partners: Local artists, NGOs and creative and IT entrepreneurs, Latvian diasporas abroad, Public Art Lab (DE), Bad Ischi-SKGT24, Aarhus (DK), Aveiro 2027 and Braga 2027 Candidate Cities, Europe Transit Films (ES)

Ukstiņa Education and Innovation Quarter

/ Lifelong Learning

In honor of Kļāvs Ukstiņš an experimental lifelong learning project will be created in Liepāja. Ukstiņš was one of the first carriers of the Liepāja intelligentsia. From a simple shepherd boy he became the founder of the first Latvian library and a respected public figure. The Soviet-era kindergarten and ex-vocational school buildings on K. Ukstiņa and Veidenbauma streets will be turned into a modern education quarter for different generations, with lessons planned for the pre-school, primary school kids and senior generation. Building up to 2027, we will set up a Science and Education Innovation Centre (ZIIC) in the quarter, which will offer exciting exhibits and experiments. We will also create an experimental inclusive education programme, helping children with disabilities, children returning home from abroad and non-Latvian children, talented children and children from socio-economic risk families to integrate into the school system. Also, within the framework of the study, we will discuss aspects of a multicultural environment, para-sports activities, as well as organizing a broader discussion on reducing inequality and enhancing a socially inclusive, innovative and reflecting society.

Partners: Liepāja City Education Board, Liepāja Science and Education Innovation Centre (ZIIC), Association Digital Innovation Park, Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)

Into the Future

/ Liepāja Animation Days

Liepāja's creative industry is marked by the development of animation. Animations created by Liepāja creatives also appear in Google and Netflix productions. In 2027 we will organize Animation Days in Liepāja. The main

goal will be to bring professionals and spectators together. Each public event will create an opportunity for professionals to get to know and learn about the audience as well as for children and young talents to explore the genre in depth.

Creative workshops, exhibitions, meetings with film and VR makers, lectures, film screenings, as well as innovative installations in Liepāja offer a fun art form to everyone. Imagine animated films shown on smoke, fog or other natural elements.

Partners: Latvian Animation Association, University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), New Media Art students, audio-visual design studio Sense media, Animation Festival Animist (EE), Animation, XR and video games festival BLON (LT)

Digital Concert Hall

/ Platform for Digital Cultural Content

2027 will be a year when audiences from all over the world will be able to fully enjoy the European Capital of Culture remotely. Digital Concert Hall will be a digital platform, but it will not only be a site where we will mechanically store everything that has been created or produced. It will be a communication and event in itself not only for Liepāja ECoC events, but also for other future ECoC. At the moment, to follow the events of different ECoC cities, you have to visit dozens of websites and FB pages, but we will go a step further and offer content in one place.

Also, with the help of the Great Amber Concert Hall, we will create high-quality content not only in the physical, but also in the digital space. These will be both live broadcasts of concerts and specially designed products of the digital environment – immersive 360° concert experiences, concerts, talks, interviews with artists, composers and other representatives of creative fields in a series of educational lectures. Innovation, modernity and reaching a wide audience around the world are the core values of the project.

Partners: Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja Symphony orchestra, The State Concert Agency Latvijas Koncerti, Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, The State Choir LATVIJA

Circulation of Creative Forces

/ Capacity Building

The initiative is meant to use ECoC events as a platform for sharing experience – the Liepāja Art Forum, the Update Festival, the Karosta Festival, etc. and connect it to international projects, such as the Kontejner festival in Zagreb. In the capacity building we will include artists, photographers, musicians and other culture stage personalities, but also producers, technical staff and the young student generation of culture professionals for international exchange.

One important part of the project is the circulation of local cultural professionals within our internal system to create better understanding and cooperation across art fields and cultural institutions. Connecting theatre actors with museum exhibitions, concert hall staff with the organization of folk art activities, tourism specialists with the latest performances, puppet theatre technicians with concert hall solutions, etc.

Partners: Karosta Prison and Karosta Festival, "Future DiverCity" Project partners, Kaunos Artists' House (Kaunos 2022), Kontejner (HR), Seconde Nature (FR), The Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia, Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)

The Future of Amber

/ Experiments with a Baltic Sea Gem Stone

Amber is a very common visitor washed ashore the vast beach of Liepāja, especially after spring and autumn storms. We have threaded the longest amber beads (123 metres of over 17,000 pieces of amber donated by the townspeople), we have amber soap, candles, teas, we even have amber gin, scarves from amber thread. You name it – we've made it! We have named our concert hall Great Amber. It's time to move on.

The ancient Greek word for amber is "Elektron". The ancient Greeks observed the electromagnetic properties of amber, and the name of electricity was formed due to the study of the properties of this material. Liepāja is special both as a coastal city, the symbol of which is amber, and as a centre of electronic art and music in Latvia. The exhibition ElektrON in the Great Amber Concert Hall organized by the new media art research laboratory MPLab, will reveal that "technological progress" does not mean that the best of many ideas and patents survive.

Humans forget that technology is not detached from nature. The artists of the exhibition ElektrON, will work as historians, geologists, inventors, engineers, and ingenious storytellers, studying the electromagnetic properties of amber and creating innovative devices for both functional and aesthetic purposes.

We commit to continue the bold ideas launched by Riga 2014 to shape the future of amber and celebrate Amber Day on 4 September 2027.

Partners: Liepāja House of Craftsmen, Liepāja Folk Art and Culture centre, University of Liepāja Art Research Laboratory (MPLab), Vilnius Academy of Arts (LT), The Baltic Sea Cultural Centre in Gdańsk (PL), Kaliningrad district in Russia, tourism entrepreneurs and cultural organizations of Liepāja and South-Kurzeme region.

The Phantom of the Library

/ 250th Anniversary

We will celebrate European Capital of Culture in Liepāja with the opening of a new, bright, modern, accessible library. It has long been our dream – to move on from an old, limited building with steep stairs and unsuitable conditions. Instead to exchange books, meet the public in a building where all generations find a place and broaden their horizons. 2027 coincides with the 250th anniversary of the Liepāja Central Scientific Library, so we invite the residents of Liepāja to read 250,000 books a year! (Between them, of course!) Challenge accepted! Knowing that someone is not a reader at all, but the others are book-worms, we should read an average of three books a year. You say not much? But maybe to someone it is more than in the last 10 years together! Our common goal together with the current candidate cities in Latvia (eight of them) and other European countries is reading one million books in 2027! It's possible!

In 2027 literature will take to the streets with events and expanded Poetry Days, guest authors from around Europe, strengthening Liepāja as a writing centre of national significance.

Partners: Liepāja Central Scientific Library, Latvian National Library, Latvian Writers' Union, University of Liepāja, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia and Greifswald University (DE), Šiauliai City (LT), Aarhus (DK)

Youth FORUM

/ Creativity Week and Closing Symposium

With a Creativity Week we will encourage the development of new creative initiatives among kids and young people here in Liepāja and partner cities around Europe. Main authors of the ideas will be kids from the preschool age to the senior year school students. By organizing, planning and implementing the events on their own, young people will develop important life skills – teamwork, decision-making, communication and management skills, creativity and other knowledge needed for the "coming of age" period. The final event of the Creativity Week will be the Youth Forum – school students from 12 general education schools, children from 21 kindergarten, students from Liepāja University and another 7 branches of higher education establishments located in Liepāja, Liepāja Music, Arts and Design Secondary School, Liepāja State Technical School, together with the regional municipality schools and children from partner cities in Europe, will forecast the future of the city and Europe.

Partners: Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, Liepāja City Education Board and Liepāja Youth House, Education Company Lielvārds, Tampere 2026 Candidate City, The Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia, Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC)

Q12 Combining local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions

Living in a city full of paradoxes at every step, the (un)rest within us is also reflected in art and culture, naturally connecting the sometimes seemingly incompatible.

Respect for cultural heritage and traditional culture is an integral part of our identity, which in Liepāja has evolved from folk songs and handicrafts to the Music, Art and Design Secondary School, the Symphony Orchestra and Creative Writing at Liepāja University, several choirs, the Great Amber Concert Hall, our professional theatre, as well as an integral tradition – the celebration of various holidays.

The rich heritage as a source of rest against the unrest of a changing world, and the fresh breeze of unrest that contemporary arts, technology and international connections bring. Ultimately the constant interaction of the two enriches our lives.

Traditions in a new form

Picking up the tradition of celebrating folklore together we try shifting the focus towards more meaningful contemporary issues. For example in the programme line New Eyes projects like A Festival of Friendliness, the Skill Exchange Market and the Residents' Restaurant will provide an opportunity for a wide range of people to get involved and address the notorious distrust towards neighbours and foreigners as well as building pride in their own skills by passing them on. The same goes for choral music, which has a huge role in the canon of Latvian culture. We will invite the peoples of Europe to participate in a contemporary spin on singing traditions in the unique Europa Cantat festival.

Digital and virtual content as a means of artistic expression

The digital world gives us the opportunity to discuss traditional architecture, historical events through virtual, augmented, immersive realities like in our projects

Urban Dreams Liepāja, the XR Liepāja walking route in Tell me a Story, Liepāja or our LARP and XR game The Karosta Paradox in the residential area of the former military base and port – and who knows, possibly in 7 years with the help of an even further expanded reality. Further examples include the study of city history presented in a pop-up book in the urban environment, an opera on the beach, experimental music in a former industrial area, light installations in castle ruins or a mono theatre performance in a city yard.

The crucial point in the digital world is accessibility – whether we are creating a live skills transfer or a world-class concert. Therefore one of the main features of the programme is to create a digital platform accessible to a wide audience around the world, where we can gather the events of Liepāja 2027.

Let us also break some previously unbroken boundaries. We will enhance traditional communication between people with an artist's digital solution in the style of calligraphy (D10 United), we will dress environmental and climate issues in a marine symphony (The Other Sea Festival) and a lake sonata (Face to Face with the Natural), combining the research of local scientists and the obtained data with the artists' creative vision.

New traditions

In 150 years, when Liepāja will be the European Capital of Culture the second time, our descendants will look back at what was new in the twenties of the 21st century. When the management of the Symphony Orchestra, Liepāja Theatre, Liepāja University after 150 years is looking for facts about the past, they will ask and study what we have done and created during this time. Therefore, we deliberately give the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra the opportunity to create new operas, the concert hall Great Amber to create digital content, local writers to create new exciting content for the library's 250th anniversary celebration, and new media art to manifest itself in various forms.

We are not only responsible for the traditions of our ancestors, but also for those we are creating right now.

Q13 Involvement of local artists and cultural organizations

The Liepāja 2027 cultural programme has emerged and will be implemented in close connection with all cultural organizations operating in Liepāja and its surroundings, as well as individual artists, representatives of creative fields and various NGOs. They are the backbone of our programme and we want to have their support and give them support as they get back on their feet post Covid!

During more than 200 individual and collective meetings and thematic working groups, we have discovered the dreams, visions and paths of Liepāja's organizations, performers, artists and creative industries to pursue both in the city and in the European context. The ideas of the events of the programme are based on the proposals, interests and wishes of the creative people of Liepāja, which will be implemented directly by these partners and in cooperation with the Liepāja 2027 organising body.

In several cases, the specific institution that initiated the project described in Q11 is indicated in the category "Partner" but is actually the team of potential project managers, implementers or curators. For example, the concert hall Great Amber proposed the project Stars in Amber, the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra suggested Opera on the Beach, Liepāja Theatre developed the idea for the Open Theatre Quarter and Inclusive Mono Theatre, etc. But we also appreciate the ideas that were left up in the air and during the development of the bid book found their landing place with another organization or individual artists, such as The Shape of the Dream (sculptor Egons Perševics), yard concerts in A Festival of Friendliness (Irita Kalēja and Lake Music), community gardens in From Karosta to Radosta (Association Radi Vidi Pats), etc.

As we have already mentioned, the ECoC would strengthen horizontal cooperation between cultural organizations, so we initiated that larger institutions, curators and artists join forces in interdisciplinary projects. For example the XR walking route in Tell me a Story, Liepāja, where the New Media and IT study programmes of Liepāja University will cooperate with the Digital Innovation Park and the Liepāja Jewish Society. In connection with the project Tell me a Story, Liepāja, Liepāja University will also create content to be shown by Liepāja Theatre (e.g. in the Mono Theatre project) and Liepāja Museum (exhibitions) and others.

Cultural organizations will also be direct partners in a number of activities aimed at achieving ECoC objectives:

- Increasing and diversifying audiences;
- Data collection and compilation;
- Creating an international dimension;
- Implementation of experience exchange programmes;
- Cultivation of the volunteers sector;
- Promotion of NGO activities;
- Development of creative industries;
- Generating ideas and finding creative and fun ways to engage audiences in tackling city-specific issues.

There is a positive synergy between this and many of our proposals in the Outreach section.

European Dimension

Q14 Promoting European diversity, intercultural dialogue and current themes

And now let's stop for a moment. While we are celebrating 30 years since the country's independence, liberating the city from the Soviet army and having joined the European Union almost 20 years ago, we are following developments in two of our neighbouring European countries, Belarus and Russia. If it had not been for the courageous people who made decisions in favour of our country's European integration in the chaos of the 1990s, the development scenario for Latvia could have developed in any direction – and looking at our neighbours we have something to compare it with. Especially now that we can call ourselves a European city, not only an EU city.

Europe's cultural diversity is no stranger to us. 100 years ago, Latvians, Germans, Jews, Belarusians, Russians, Lithuanians lived in dignified relations in Liepāja. The story of a 50-year life in a semi-closed city after the Second World War is a bit different. If we take into account that Europe geographically extends to the Ural Mountains, then we had to find a common life with brother nations from Eastern Europe, whose tens of thousands were brought to Liepāja as workers in large factories and serving in a military base.

Currently various international projects are being implemented in Liepāja together with many of our cultural and business friends in Europe, but at the same time a large part of the society is still living in prejudice, looking with suspicion at foreign ERASMUS students when they enter a store.

Therefore, when we talk about multiculturalism and try to find a place in it as a fully-fledged European city, it must be understood that the people of Liepāja are

still recovering from deep injuries. We also understand that "identity" is becoming an increasingly problematic term in the context of cultural diversity. And yet: Some people really have a longing to be allowed to identify as Latvians and Liepājans before identifying as Europeans and members of a globalized society. It takes time and also help from the sidelines. Yes, and these are really the projects of the European Capital of Culture, which will help us to open the pages of our identity and shape the future – to become more open, bolder in the international arena and to make everyday values for every European a solid basis of thinking and action.

We need to put the issue of Europe's cultural diversity on our regular daily agenda. Foreigners visit Liepāja often enough, often they are athletes or artists. We enjoy their performances but we don't have the opportunity to get acquainted with diversity on a daily basis. And precisely because of this we will be building this navigation map that we mention in our artistic vision. We need to discuss the diversity of Europe in the society of Liepāja, to find out about Europe (programme line European Dream) and our identity (programme line Port Paradox). If we will have a chance to experience the European diversity of artists and cooperation partners from around the world in Liepāja, then in 2027 we will have looked at our city with new eyes (programme line New Eyes), defined boundaries and reviewed habits (programme line Deliberate Modesty), and inspired the new generation through connecting of art and technology and inclusive education STEAM programmes in schools (programme line Creative Foresight).

Our city does not have refugees like most larger EU cities, but our big challenges are still related to those of other European areas: migration (not only from Liepāja to big cities of the world, but also from the rural areas to urban centres while the countryside remains empty), struggle to preserve our cultural heritage, quality education, providing for the older generation, the involvement of Russian-speaking people, the need for scientific and technological progress and the promotion of tolerance in society.

Other topical issues we share with others in Europe are the development of the city on the shores of the Baltic Sea, the protection of natural values, the change of habits in relation to the use of environmental resources. Our challenge is also an inactive civil society – in the last five years there have been only a few insignificant pickets in the city with a composition of about five people. Citizens often do not know how to represent

their interests in public. During this pandemic, the issue of mental health has become important, too, as people begin to lose emotional balance.

But we know that we are not alone in these current topics. At least eight more countries and numerous cities are located on the shores of the Baltic Sea, and related issues of climate change, environmental aspects, urban development alongside protected natural resources are on the daily agenda. Similarly, healing scars still need to be carefully cared for by cities that were on the front lines in World Wars, and that may have lost their intellectual capacity through brain drain or that are close to losing valuable cultural heritage.

The European dimension of small languages and the preservation of the associated cultural heritage are particularly important. We are honest with ourselves and will address these topics in various events, involving partners from different European countries. It is interesting that because we share so many topics, almost all the activities are easy to connect to partners from European countries, both those to the West of us and those to the East. Europe still extends all the way to the Ural Mountains and we will never forget it!

Here are some projects addressing European themes and topics:

Common values, equality, diversity, mutual understanding, acceptance:

- No. 27 Dream Machine – Agora of Values
- Kino Sāpnis – European Film Days in Liepāja
- Inclusive Mono Theatre – Theatre Festival

Preservation of identity, celebration together:

- Nordic Solstice – International Festival of Traditional Culture
- Europe Sings Liepāja – International Choral Music Festival
- Preservation of the Latvian language as a small language in cooperation with the language technology company Tilde both in the No. 27 Dream Machine and by providing live text translations both in face-to-face and online events. Nelson Mandela once said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart." We want the Latvian language to keep up with the times and not disappear in the digital age
- Library building 250th anniversary celebrations as a celebration of literacy, language use

Cooperation, mutual learning:

- Circulation of Creative Forces – Experience exchange programme (Art of Berlin, Kontejner Zagreb)
- D10 United – Digital and Creative Industries Centre
- Exchange of experience and education in the activities

of the Union of Baltic Cities (UBC), including 72 cities from 10 countries

European green transformation, circular economy:

- The Other Sea Festival (Union of Baltic Cities – UBC, Klaipėda, Tampere, Oulu)
- Face to Face with the Natural – Green Thinking and Sustainability Festival
- Revitalization of the territory of the former Liepājas Metalurģis. Cooperation with the Essen Zollverein Centre
- Basic principles of ecodesign in organizing events in cooperation with the Latvian Association of Event Organizers, as well as exchange of experience with the teams of Aarhus, Tartu ECoC and Tampere

Common history, its painful questions:

- Jewish history and heritage of Liepāja (in projects like Tell me a Story, Liepāja a.o.)
- The Karosta Paradox – Occupation and military history

Architectural heritage, New European Bauhaus:

- Urban Dreams Liepāja – Design and Architecture Walk

International connections and partners

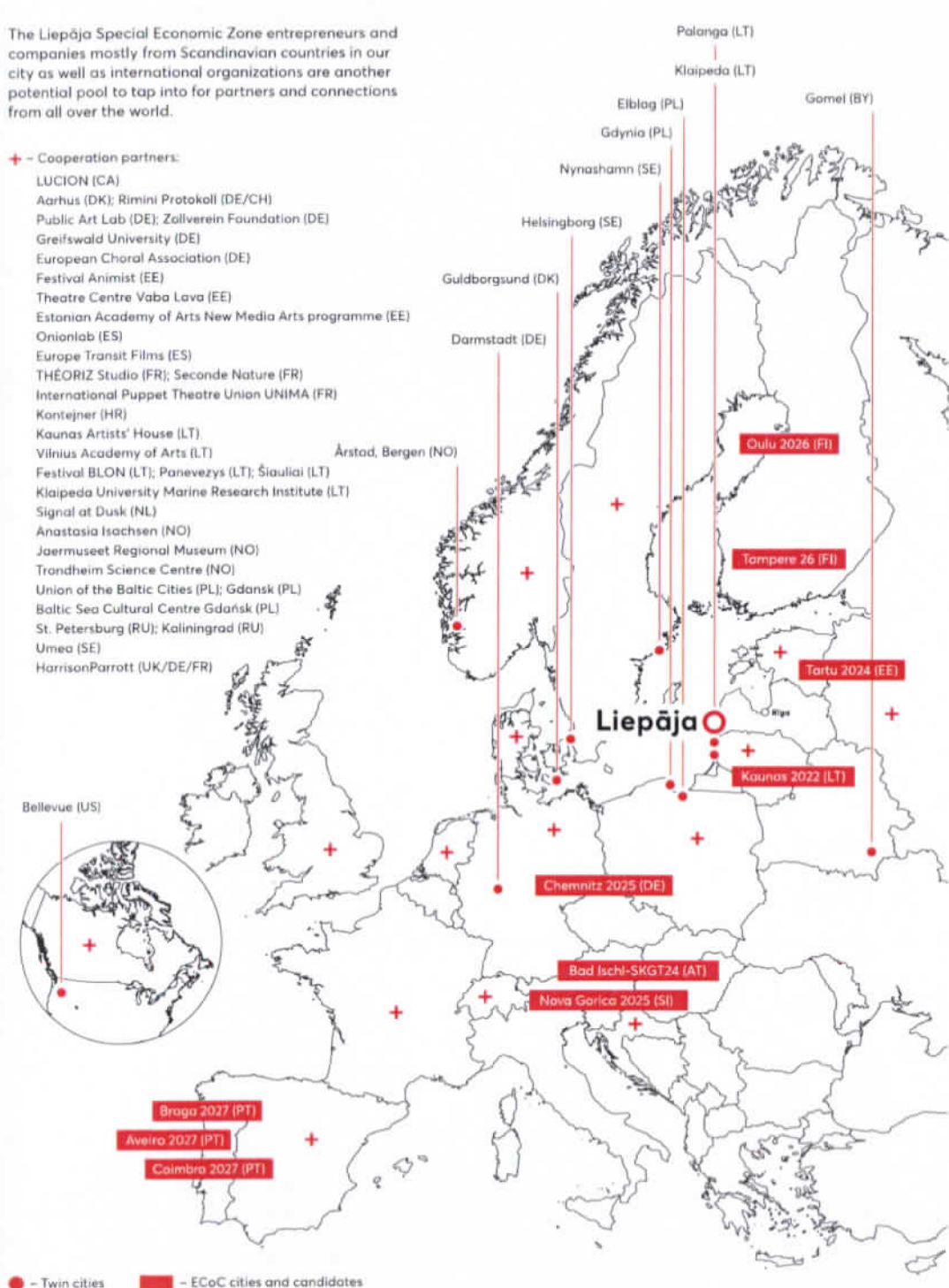
During the preparation of the Application, we have noticed that when mentioning the name of the ECoC, the response from partners and artists in Europe is relatively high – the invitation to participate is a matter of prestige, also the opportunity to enter the international community. But although we are very open to cooperation, we keep in mind our biggest challenges and a purposeful programme, attracting artists and partners in a responsible and thoughtful way, so that the result is real and useful for both parties.

As part of the ECoC project, we will establish cooperation with the 11 existing official twin cities of our city and, taking into account the Baltic Sea as a unifying factor, we have found valuable friends for projects in the Union of Baltic Cities (UBC), which includes 72 cities from 10 countries. We have also established new international contacts and started negotiations on cooperation in various projects with several European cities in order to involve neighbouring countries outside the EU more widely, and we have also addressed partners in Kaliningrad, Belarus and Russia. Our cultural institutions and university are also in contact with some cooperation partners around the world – a network which we will be able to add to ours. But it is – as we mentioned – not as developed as we would wish for and by 2027 will be significantly expanded and more of a day-to-day phenomenon.

The Liepāja Special Economic Zone entrepreneurs and companies mostly from Scandinavian countries in our city as well as international organizations are another potential pool to tap into for partners and connections from all over the world.

+ - Cooperation partners:

LUCION (CA)
 Aarhus (DK); Rimini Protokoll (DE/CH)
 Public Art Lab (DE); Zollverein Foundation (DE)
 Greifswald University (DE)
 European Choral Association (DE)
 Festival Animist (EE)
 Theatre Centre Vaba Lava (EE)
 Estonian Academy of Arts New Media Arts programme (EE)
 Onionlab (ES)
 Europe Transit Films (ES)
 THÉORIZ Studio (FR); Seconde Nature (FR)
 International Puppet Theatre Union UNIMA (FR)
 Kontejner (HR)
 Kaunas Artists' House (LT)
 Vilnius Academy of Arts (LT)
 Festival BLON (LT); Panevezys (LT); Šiauliai (LT)
 Klaipeda University Marine Research Institute (LT)
 Signal at Dusk (NL)
 Anastasia Isachsen (NO)
 Jærmuseet Regional Museum (NO)
 Trondheim Science Centre (NO)
 Union of the Baltic Cities (PL); Gdansk (PL)
 Baltic Sea Cultural Centre Gdańsk (PL)
 St. Petersburg (RU); Kaliningrad (RU)
 Umea (SE)
 HarrisonParrott (UK/DE/FR)



● - Twin cities ■ - ECOC cities and candidates

Q15

Making Liepāja 2027 attractive for a European and international public

In our restless nights we dream European dreams on a trip in the Time Machine we introduced in Q8. In the Liepāja of the future our airport is nicely busy with flights bringing the "right kind of tourists". Of course they arrive for their sustainable visits on eco-friendly aircrafts. The same aircrafts that send our locally-based creative entrepreneurs to Europe's main creative hubs, and bring them back here where they live and create in a city that has the balance just right.

Then we wake up and today's reality hits home. Because if we draw concentric circles around Liepāja on the world map, we could quickly draw the area where the name of Liepāja is known or has at least been heard of, and the (considerably larger) part where nothing is known about Liepāja. But even where Liepāja, Latvia and the Baltic States are mentioned in one breath, it often has to be explained that Latvia and Lithuania are not the same. That the Baltics are not the Balkans. However, there is a small possibility that the name of Liepāja has meaning when we mention the NBA basketball player Kristaps Porziņģis.

In fact we have stood by for 30 years and watched the route of culture and tourism marking only the capitals of the Baltic states: Vilnius-Riga-Tallinn and back. If we look at current international visitors, we get plenty from our Lithuanian neighbours because we have a lot more coastline than their 35 kms, but very little from Estonia. Much of the rest of Europe would struggle to find their way here.

But that combination of our European dream and today's reality drives our strategy to attract the interest of the international audience. Below are some of its main building blocks:

- Creating tailored events for each audience: An exceptional art festival in military fortification – check. Exclusive concerts of world stars in the concert hall with the best acoustics in the Baltics – check. Enjoyment of a warm summer day on the beach with the finest and whitest sand in the world – check. Meaningful and personal developmental discussions – check. Unforgettable for children – check. Specially selected best European cinema programming – check. Concert in a charming courtyard for passers-by – check. Our programme is full of exceptional layers for all audiences. That will give every reason to come here.

- Geeks and adventure seekers: Check out the XR and live action role playing game The Karosta Paradox in the coolest military base remnants – including a real military prison experience for those with a refined taste for suffering (only half joking).
- Music aficionados: Experience world-renowned Stars in Amber in our concert hall and see the wind create art in the foyer with The Wind Observatory.
- 40+ Rock music rebels: Miss real music as it was back in the days? Come join Rock the Rock event and enjoy the sounds that led Latvia to freedom. Art lovers of the world unite... 2027 in Liepāja: See, touch, explore classics and contemporary art in the former heavy industry site for the Inside – Out exhibition. Or join the Liepāja Art Forum with contemporary expressions of immersive audio-visual art Strijbos & van Rijsweik, and composer Michel van der Aa.
- Together with Kaunas 2022 and Tartu 2024, we will create an exciting alternative Baltic cultural route, diverting traffic from the main Baltic highway "Vilnius-Rīga-Tallinn". The diversity of our cities and regions, especially enhanced with European Capital of Culture events, is strong enough to compete with our capitals. And even more! Joint cooperation, especially developed online and on digital platforms, will make it possible to mark the location of the Baltic States as an exciting cultural space between Poland and Finland.
- We build some of our programme around themes that speak to big European topics and turn them into attractive projects. For example environmental protection, revitalized cultural and military heritage, innovative public involvement, identity explorations. Engage in the discussion and offer your solution. We are united in Europe, through exploring our shared history.
- Special experiences are at the core of our programme including the unusual and the paradox. Deep in the Karosta fortifications we will listen to the sounds of soft music, create a beautiful garden in the abandoned factory area, invite local NGOs to cooperate with Microsoft, enjoy fishing on rough fishing boats and eat your catch in a sophisticated restaurant, experiment with electronic music in nature reserves.
- We will create a programme so balanced and well-thought-out that when you come to Liepāja at any time of the year and on any day of the week, from anywhere in the world, everyone can enjoy part of the paradox-filled 5 artistic line programme throughout 2027. Even if on that date, the concert hall will not play world-class masterpieces and the theatre will not hold performances, the urban environment will provide a full cultural experience.

Perhaps our European Dream is not so far-fetched after all.

Q16 Connections to European Capitals of Culture

In the process of creating this Application, we were overwhelmed by a pleasant feeling, as if we had been admitted into a previously unknown sisterhood. An invisible network that unites people and teams, even if they are only in the first stage of the competition. This initially invisible cooperation seems to secretly join hands to complement each other, find common ground and highlight each unique nuance in Europe's already rich cultural life. It feels a bit like opening a huge chest of treasures full of fine and diverse gems.

Our primary joint connection with the other ECoC cities has been with those still planning their post 2021 ECoCs, or who are still waiting for the results of the competition from 2026 and 2027. We shared our experiences about how to keep culture relevant during the time of the pandemic. The development of new social networks and their trends. Similar concerns about the future and the impact on future ECoC plans. Also how we can move into a time of recovery for culture and tourism.

Greater public involvement, the preservation of cultural heritage and the strengthening of city and community identity were challenges for almost all the European cities we were in touch with.

We also recognised that amongst designated and candidate ECoCs, many are in quite close proximity around our beloved Baltic sea. We are keen to develop an especially closer joint ECoC cooperation, perhaps working through the Union of Baltic cities to really push our region as a joined up cultural and sustainable tourism area. Our specific and common topics include migration, language preservation, identity strengthening issues, traditions, common history and current reality.

That said, we have no intention to limit our collaboration to our closest neighbours. Set out below, to complement the information in Q14, are some of our collaboration ideas for other ECoCs and candidates.

Despite the fact that it has been impossible to meet any of the teams in person, we have virtually moved through Europe with ease and had a lot of conversations electronically. Here are some of the things we talked about:

Tartu 2024. We will cooperate within four of our programme lines:

European Dream – by inviting Tartu to represent Estonia in our Nordic Solstice project. New Eyes – by continuing Tartu's ideas of Beetroot Washing Machine's Sharing Generations and Men's Shed projects within our Festival of Friendliness and Skill Exchange Market. Learning from their experience with music projects in churches within our The Return of the Tower project and potentially continuing their wonderful initiative of Hidden Worlds Expanding project within our Everyone is Welcome! project in Liepāja.

In Deliberate Modesty we will gain valuable insight from the team's experience with their Stand Up For Your Mind project addressing mental health for our Shine Silently project. Our Face to Face with the Natural festival will emphasize ecology and sustainability by learning from their Revogue project ideas. Creative Foresight – Liepāja is eager to participate in Tartu's European Student's Opinion Festival as Liepāja is also a small University city and could continue this festival in 2027.

Kaunas 2022. Kaunas 2022 is the geographically closest European Capital of Culture, from which we learned a lot and have a lot in common. Taking into account the time distance between ECoC 2022 and ECoC 2027, we have agreed on closer cooperation directly with the Kaunas Artists' House. We have discussed cooperation in five different projects, including educational programmes, the project Everyone is Welcome!, as well as monitoring of event impacts. We have also agreed to invite Kaunas artists to our artists' residences and will encourage our local artists to participate in the residences organized by Kaunas. Together with the city of Kaunas, we will continue cooperation within the framework of Baltic Sea projects and marketing activities.

We have had conversations with three Portuguese cities which might share the ECoC title with Latvia in 2027.

Aveiro. We share issues around maritime and military heritage sites, and Art Nouveau architecture. We will cooperate within Aveiro 2027 Tech programme with special attention to Art & Tech and New media initiatives. Aveiro's strong IT cluster and experience in STEAM education can enrich our projects The Karosta Paradox and D10 United, and our artistic contribution will complement their flagship project European Neighbourhood (Bairro da Europa).

Braga focuses on civic involvement which we can connect well to through projects targeted at local communities in our New Eyes programme line. We also agreed to cooperate on projects like No. 27 Dream Machine and Update Festival. Braga is UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts which the New Media Arts department of Liepāja's University wishes to earn for our city, too, which gives us another link.

Coimbra. It has been interesting to meet another city of paradoxes! We discussed cooperating on projects involving our IT sector and those focusing on education.

We have been inspired by the **Chemnitz 2025** project Eastern State of Mind where we share the idea of opening up the isolated garage culture to involve people in cultural activities.

Cooperation with **Bad Ischl-SKGT24** is envisaged around inviting curators of their project Perspectives to the Urban Dreams Liepāja project – organising site specific film nights. We would also like to continue their Real Reels festival at our D10 hub.

GO!2025. Together with the Nova Gorica / Gorizia team we have discussed cooperation with the Nova Gorica Theatre during our Inclusive Mono Theatre project.

Aarhus 2017 has offered to share their experience of the bidding process with consultations and advice and would be happy to be involved in projects that focus on civic involvement, creative industries and sustainability. Their Next Library Network and experiences with the DOKK1 library will provide us with valuable input for our new library ambitions.

We have a lot in common with Finland, too. The Baltic sea coast, involvement in the World Wars, we have similar mentality and share the love of sauna!

Oulu 2026 team is happy to participate in the Nordic Solstice festival. Their Cultural Climate Change is a topic we share. We plan to cooperate in projects focusing on youth e.g. learning from their Agent026 project which trains culture ambassadors in schools. Oulu's Go With The STREAM project could be a model for Liepāja Nature House creating a culture centre for children where science and technology meet the arts.

Tampere 2026 team would like to bring the Moomin theme to our Nordic Solstice. We agreed on inviting Liepāja's artists to get involved in their Rebel in Me project that together with communities from Ireland, Spain and Serbia explores rebellion as a process to create change and sustain democracy. We plan to continue their Clean Games project which is a tournament for children collecting as much waste as possible in different cities and surrounding regions in our Deliberate Modesty line.

Tartu-Tampere-Liepāja. Other Cities – Forgotten Spaces is a project that Tartu will start in 2024, Tampere could continue in 2026 and Liepāja would take over in 2027. The idea is that teams of artists reinvent the abandoned and forgotten spaces like Liepāja's Metalurgs territory and Karosta through artistic laboratories and arts projects.

Outreach

Q17

Local population and civil society involvement

Q18

Opportunities for the participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups

1,327 hours of Zoom talks later...

Had we prepared the Application at a time without a pandemic, large meetings would probably have followed a familiar course. The usual suspects acting as the same outspoken leaders and the quiet ones not having much of a chance to share their ideas. With the help of online meetings, we literally entered people's kitchens, bedrooms, workshops and living rooms. We met those who are usually too shy to express their opinions out loud in public discussions. We dug much deeper and came to many valuable insights which we might have missed in more normal times.

This will be our paradox. When the world stopped and we could not meet each other physically, we still needed to create an Application for the European Capital of Culture together with the people of Liepāja and the surrounding counties. On the face of it it seemed impossible! However we surprised ourselves. Involving hundreds of people in creating our Application, listening to thousands of opinions, creating surveys, organizing discussions, creating new platforms.

During this remote time, we used the time to pull out notes and conclusions from discussions that took place

in 2019 and in the winter of 2020. That's when we created long-term city documents with public involvement, as well as the discussions in 2019, when we evaluated tourism attractiveness and a new city marketing plan and identity. We also took into account the experience made during those consultations, and this ECoC Application was made in long negotiations, putting it together from the bottom up.

Surveys and studies

With the help of digital questionnaires, we asked about the most important city development priorities, and Liepāja's values in Latvia and Europe, to suggest which European values or initiatives might be binding and relevant. The ideas and suggestions made it much easier for us to prepare this Application and find ways to tell others about our paradoxes and define what we want to change and improve in our city with the help of the ECoC. We also approached the residents of the city with a sociological survey, which was helped by an independent organization – the market and social research centre Latvian Facts. As a result, we learned that the public is very supportive of Liepāja's participation in the project and sees several real benefits – both economic and (surprisingly!) emotional.

(Un)rest platform

In an information-rich digital environment, we have chosen to create a special citizens platform for ideas about what is rest and what is unrest. We will definitely continue this experiment in the future, implementing the opportunity to participate in it also for people outside Latvia (Q34).

Gathering ideas

It soon became clear to us that meaningful and goal-oriented communication between people could be the real key to the trend towards a more active society. Issues related to climate change and green lifestyle are becoming more and more important both in the world and in Liepāja, and Liepāja residents are also starting to pay attention to it. On these two topics – fellow human beings and green thinking we announced a call for project ideas. Some of the residents' ideas are included in the programme. One example within the framework of the Liepāja Wooden Architecture Foundation found residents ready to promote the preservation, restoration

and development of the existing wooden architecture in the city, whilst Face to Face with the Natural will invite everyone to go to nature to get acquainted with our wildlife neighbours. Liepāja residents are also ready to create a community garden, reality shows and invite their nearest neighbours to create joint exhibitions and improve the surroundings.

Involvement of residents in the future

Although in general our cultural offer is available to rockers, academic music lovers, theatre fans, there are several groups of society for whom the offer is very small or even non-existent. The Application for European Capital of Culture is a real reason for us to bring this issue to light.

In order to involve socially excluded or hitherto passive groups in society, we will ensure accessibility and reduce self-built barriers in order to include and support all citizens, rather than promoting isolation through individual activities. Our strategic plan to reduce barriers is built around creating local leaders who can connect with and engage people in their peer groups and communities. They will be our "culture champions". We will look for them among young people, professionals, seniors, people with disabilities and other groups. We know very well that peer encouragement is what makes the greatest contribution. Leading by encouragement and example can really change views, breaking down barriers and obstacles, and is the best way to involve those who have been passive so far.

Some other ideas include:

- Several project calls with the aim of creating a two way process of getting new ideas for the artistic programme and also to find ways for communities to help to implement projects – for example the Skill Exchange Market, The Residents' Restaurant, D10 United.
- Until now, we have become so accustomed to seeing our seniors as a "problem": a socially excluded and supportive group. We now know that many retirees are really active and are ready to engage vigorously and share their experience or competencies. The best example is the example itself, so we will give the most active pensioners' associations the opportunity to act as barrier breakers.
- We will be the first city where belonging to the city and its cultural field will not depend on the physical location. Our untapped opportunity is to use technology not only to attract the younger generation and gain international attention, but also to offer these opportunities to people with mobility impairments. With ECoC we will go further using technologies and will use them to involve people who are unable to leave their homes, not just in what is happening in Liepāja, but also developments in the surrounding counties – walking on the manor route, local rye bread master class, poetry readings, opera, etc. With the help of virtual reality technologies

a person tied to their bed in their nursing home room, has the opportunity to enjoy "being" on the stage of the concert hall Great Amber, "ride" by tram, "go" to the market, etc.

• Russian speakers and other minorities. At least 41% of us in Liepāja are Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians and other nationalities. We realistically see that the historical gap, language and experiences between people of different nationalities, cannot be repaired in a period of 5, 7 or 10 years. However we can find a common language on universal topics. Therefore, in negotiations with the representatives of national minorities, we have gathered important findings to form a programme together. This reflects that:

- A large part of our minority community is perfectly integrated into Latvian society, therefore we must not treat all members of national minorities equally, applying the same recipe. Minority NGOs do not always represent the national interests of the group or point of view, often taking more of a heritage curator function.
- Minorities' still struggle with patriotism towards Latvia as a country, but their attachment to living here allows the possibility of a variety of projects which enhance the sense of belonging to Liepāja.
- If we want events to see Latvians, Russians and other minorities together, the range of conversation topics should be universal topics – love, friendship, forgiveness, emotional experiences, etc. The last thing the representatives of national minorities would like to hear more about is the coexistence of "Latvians and Russians".
- Taking into account national characteristics, the means of communication expression need to be adapted to have maximum impact.

In summary, we want to address the representatives of national minorities in projects which invite residents to take individual action – to exchange skills, prepare to eat, participate in neighbourhood projects, etc. Neighbour with neighbour, person to person. Also, in cooperation with the Latvian technology company Tilde, we will develop and test speech-text systems and machine translation technologies in order to provide translation titles at major events, allowing those who communicate in other languages to understand what is happening in Latvian.

Volunteering for ECoC

An important way to feel a sense of belonging not only to ECoC but also to the city is to strengthen people's involvement through volunteering. We have to admit that we have not been so strong in this area so far. In 2014, when Riga was ECoC, a platform for organizing volunteer work was developed in Latvia. This platform is still active, although not in its original form and functionality. Liepāja is one of the few cities in Latvia that

still maintains up-to-date information on volunteering opportunities on this platform. In connection with participation in the ECoC, Liepāja will establish a system of volunteering in the city and surrounding region. We will:

- Set up a wide-ranging programme of events with the opportunity to participate as a volunteer. Addressing the local residents of Liepāja and the residents of the surrounding region, we will give the opportunity to change the future of Liepāja and the region with their proposals and suggestions. Projects in which we expect active involvement of the audience are also projects where we will give volunteers the opportunity to participate, for example – people from neighbourhoods – A Festival of Friendliness, From Karosta to Radosta, – culture lovers – Open Theatre Quarter, Europe sings Liepāja, – nature supporters – Face to Face with the Natural, The Other Sea Festival and countless other events and actions.
- In potential cooperation with the Austrian ECoC Bad Ischl-SKGT24, we will set up a Voluntary Friends of Culture programme and create a system that will make it easier for people from socially excluded and disadvantaged groups, people with mental illness, physical disabilities or ex-prisoners to participate in every ECoC event. The "Friends" will be volunteer companions who will meet their partner person during the concert or any other cultural event, tell them about the programme, what is happening and make it easier to feel at ease.
- Improve and expand the existing Volunteer Work Days, for which we will expand the target audience and encourage active people both in the city and counties.

NGO sector

The NGO sector is our high hope. By investing energy and resources, we are ready to raise a new generation of NGOs by 2027. This will be a major transformative tool to drive public involvement, an information medium and also a meaningful group of key partners.

A revitalized NGO sector can be a huge asset in order to deliver the necessary changes and influence the urban development we talked about in our impacts question. In total, about 1,000 different associations and foundations are registered in Liepāja. But only a small part are related to active citizenship. Other organizations bring together people with a variety of interests, from cultural activists, young people, those interested in sport and health promotion, support for socially vulnerable groups and charities, and a variety of other interests. To get to know this diverse NGO sector, we conducted several surveys. We were very enthusiastic until we encountered a reality that a very small number of all officially registered organizations are active, responding and sharing their goals, intentions, challenges and needs.

The survey allows us to formulate a plan for meaningful and comprehensive public involvement and activation –

a topic much felt around Europe as we heard from our partners. We believe that the path to the ECoC will be an excellent starting point and a great motivator for society to become more meaningfully involved in the overall life and development of the city. We plan to:

- We will create an NGO capacity building programme. Through our D10 hub we will establish an NGO incubator. Like the two existing business incubators, this organization will help those interested to form their own organizations, provide advice to achieve their operational goals, as well as network and attract independent funding.
- During the development of the programme and its implementation, we will involve non-governmental organizations, which represent not only creative industries, but also education, youth care, minority associations, a wide range of cultural genres, even sports and science.
- Successful cooperation ensures communication with NGO representatives and is an opportunity to convey the ECoC message to their outermost representatives, who may not otherwise be aware of the opportunities associated with the European Capital of Culture.
- Ensure that part of the existing artistic programme will be implemented by local residents and is designed to include and provide an opportunity for everyone to participate. Create educational cycles of seminars and workshops for different groups (children, young people, young parents, seniors, representatives of associations / NGOs, etc.).

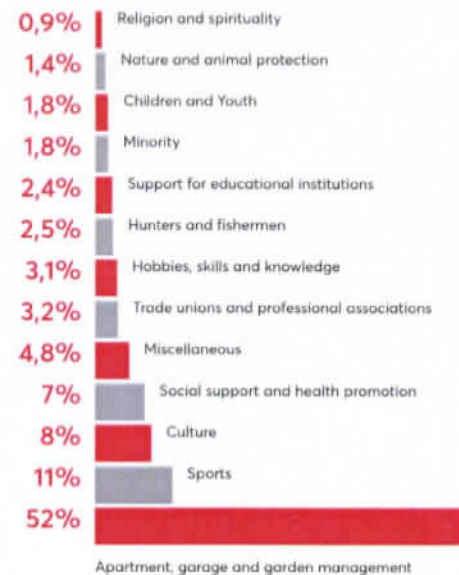
Further opportunities

Ensuring digital accessibility. Our programme includes various digital solutions (including live webcasting of concerts and events, reconstruction of Liepāja and county history events in virtual games and other activities in the digital environment).

Reducing the economic barrier. We will create special ECoC annual discount programmes and free events for various socially excluded groups, and we will encourage other private and NGO sector cultural operators to follow this practice as well.

Including people with disabilities and functional impairments. Sign language interpretation for people with hearing impairments is already available on the city's website and at major events, but the European Capital of Culture year must be proof that cultural infrastructure is physically and psychologically accessible to everyone. Through our project Everyone is Welcome! we will develop guidelines for ECoC event organizers, which will include guidelines for providing an inclusive and accessible environment for people with disabilities. There will also be a person in our team – the inclusion coordinator, who, in cooperation with the experienced non-governmental organization Sustento, will help the developers to choose the most appropriate solutions and implement them in the events.

NGOs in Liepāja



Data by Register of Latvian companies

Q19 Strategy for audience development, link with education and schools

We have noticed that cultural events in Liepāja are more or less attended by the same audience. Even similarly dressed with similar expressions. We can definitely notice if the audience from Riga has arrived. But that's another story.

We very vividly remember the time when the concert hall Great Amber was opened in 2015. Suddenly we met a new audience of event visitors, always beautifully turned out, actively participating and expressing their admiration for the artists' performance. Diligently paying attention to the goings-on of the lobby and, especially, the buffet offer. This was most noticeable in the pauses of the orchestra's multi-part symphonies, when loud applause was heard instead of the usual silence. This fact gives hope that if we make positive changes to the cultural offer, the location and quality of venues and great content, we can bring new and enthusiastic audiences to our cultural life.

Increasing the audience is one of the main reasons why we need to be part of the European Capital of Culture. Intensive and diverse cultural events during the preparations and activities in 2027 will attract not only national and international attention, but also parts of our community that is indifferent to culture at the moment. We need to (un)rest ourselves! As we described in Q17/18, we cannot talk only about young people, seniors or people with low incomes to increase the audience for culture. We are aware that every age, gender and solvency group in society has fans of cultural events. Yet there also are many who do not think about cultural activities as a first priority when it comes to choosing between entertainment, leisure, self-education or mental health.

The first strategic step is to study the audience of Liepāja as accurately as possible. Yes, we know how many people attend events and participate in cultural processes every year, but we can only estimate the rest. Everything we wrote about in our monitoring question also applies to audience research. We want to know not only gender, age, place of residence, regularity of cultural consumption, occupation, nationality, but more precisely the reasons for involvement or non-involvement. We will draw a map of cultural consumption and we also want to draw a profile of non-cultural consumers. Let's not speculate at the moment. Here is our plan.

Process	Action	Facilitated by
Final bidding and preparation years	In cooperation with researchers and cultural organizations, we will carry out a detailed study of the existing and potential audiences.	Integration into the assessment mechanisms described in monitoring and evaluation. When implementing the Circulation of Creative Forces, we will learn from the experience of other European organizations.
	Not only professionals will participate in the audience research, but we will also involve local people creating focus groups including young people, seniors and other ambassadors of social groups.	Cooperation with Liepāja schools and university, NGO sector (Q17-18) and ECoC Messengers programme (marketing).
	Both in the ECoC team and with the involvement of cultural organizations, we will create an agile approach to increasing the audience, adjusting the activities according to identified needs. When creating the artistic programme, we have taken into account the opportunity to be flexible, innovative and adaptable so we can flex the programme to meet new audience needs.	Within the framework of capacity building activities, including the organizations of the South-Kurzeme region. Several artistic events include project competitions.
Communication and marketing	We will speak clear and understandable language in both communication and events, without complicating texts, simply explaining processes, events, even helping in awkward situations.	For example, ECoC Messengers and Voluntary Friends of Culture programmes.
	We will use sporting events and the spirit of competition to reach audiences who are passionate sports fans, distributing vouchers and using various marketing tools to engage a cross-over audience.	Develop mechanisms for synchronizing calendars of cultural and sporting events so that they do not compete but complement each other. Create "culture fans".
Implementation 2027	The programme will include measures for the "passer-by" to promote belonging and openness. The artistic programme is built so that everyone in the city notices the range of activities that interest them.	Liepāja celebrates! and other urban art events – sculpture and wind festivals, virtual and augmented reality games and walks, art exhibitions in the city's shop windows.
	We will go to all districts of the city with yard concerts, taking art to the outskirts of the city and nearby counties.	Liepāja residents and county home restaurants and neighbourhood developments. We even have an idea to invite people to come with their musical instruments to neighbourhood activities. Similarly, in the artistic events, which include calls for proposals, special attention will be paid to supporting activities outside the usual cultural places.
	We will take the events to the city's factories to people, men and women who work hard and produce the economic added value of Liepāja.	Inclusive Mono Theatre, Liepāja Art Forum and Digital Concert Hall.
Support for future solutions, innovation and legacy	Let's use the rapid development of digital and virtual technologies to improve communication and support existing and potential audience groups.	Let's become a testing ground for the technology company Tilde (Q17-18). We will train the virtual assistants developed by them to be translators and ambassadors of the ECoC programme. ECoC's first Bot Messengers!

Education and youth participation

An enviable source of unrest in Liepāja is children and young people! Their vitality, liveliness, power and joy of life are not always noticed. Children and young people make up a significant part of Liepāja society or about 13% of all city residents.

In the European Capital of Culture, this audience will be placed on the main podium and not at the back of the concert hall. In 2027, we will create a programme within which Liepāja schools will have their own event line "Youth Paradox". Every month, a particular school will organize events throughout the city, such as singing and dancing competitions, orienteering games in the urban environment etc. They themselves told us when we asked what works best for them: "It works best when you trust us and let us do it." Let's do it – let's let it go!

We will turn the Nature House on Horse Island into a STEAM education centre, where in cooperation with Jaermuseet Regional Museum and Trondheim Science Centre (both in Norway) we will promote the popularity of the environment among young people, attract young specialists, while positioning Liepāja as a modern, technology-oriented city. The Nature House will be equipped with an interactive exposition and a laboratory of environmental sciences, where interactive classes, environmental and ecotechnology research will take place, together with the educational process "close to nature" exploring Lake Liepāja and other nearby natural resources. One of our biggest ECoC ambitions is to create a Ukstiņa Education and Innovation Quarter, which will combine the fields of education and culture. The existing pre-school educational institution will be designed as a meeting place for several generations, not only with the STEAM education in a symbiosis of science and art, but it will also be one for exchanging experiences, where everyone will find something new to learn.

Youth leadership camp. Lack of motivation is often mentioned by young people when asked about why they don't take more care of their mental health. Our youth leadership camp will serve as a test field for development of young creative leaders who can support other young people in the city. It will be organized by forward thinking NGOs for children and young people from different social groups and geographical locations. In collaboration with international partners, an exciting programme will be developed that will connect with similar projects for young leaders in other ECoC and our partner cities. Creativity Week is about promoting and developing the involvement of young people in civic and cultural life. Involving all general, vocational and pre-school institutions with the aim of strengthening the link between creativity and education and promoting new creative thinking. Additional educational elements will be integrated into school curricula, emphasizing four audiences – children and young people with disabilities, children coming home to Latvia from abroad with their families and non-Latvian children, talented children and socio-economically at-risk families with children.

We will encourage representatives of Liepāja's creative industries to create informal leisure places for young

people with different themes. It will be part of the content of the D10 project, with the potential to be implemented in the Karosta and Lauma areas, where these centres will operate independently and potentially become stable community cultural and education centres.

We will also create a pilot project in the field of culture in one of the general education schools, which will be based on the education programme Wind Orchestra. It will be integrated into the curriculum, closely linked to the goals and objectives of music education for children and young people. It includes the development of students' musicality, the playing of wind and percussion instruments and the acquisition of collective music skills. The programme is planned to be implemented in one general education school, initially as an optional, long-term thinking about the school's specialization in the field of cultural education.

We plan to close the ECoC year with an ambitious Children and Youth Forum. Young people themselves will be the ones who create the content. They will be the ones who will determine the range of topics. They will be the ones who will also create ideas for the future. We are absolutely convinced that what 12 general education school students, children from 21 kindergartens, students from Liepāja University and 7 other university branches in Liepāja, Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School, Liepāja State Technical School, plus other school districts will be able to offer will be a powerful jolt in the future development of the city. They are our future – this is not an empty slogan!



Management

Q20 City budget for culture



- Annual budget for culture in the city (in euros)
- Annual budget for culture in the city (in % of the total annual budget for the city)

Data by Liepāja city council

Additionally the city attracts annual state funds for some of the larger cultural institutions like Liepāja Symphony Orchestra, Liepāja Secondary School of Music, Art and Design to the amount of more than 4m euros.

It is also worth mentioning the annual open calls announced by the State Culture Capital Foundation from which the creative sector in Liepāja attracts more than one million euros annually.

For the refurbishment of the façade and tower of the Trinity Cathedral and the historic building complex which will house a new museum, the city attracted additional EU and state funds to the amount of 5m euros for 2018-2020.

Q21 Funds from annual budget for culture to finance the ECoC

The European Capital of Culture is like sails for a ship, they are never hoisted in the hull of the ship, but on the masts. They help to navigate, catch winds and help sailors to reach the required destination. This means that we have allocated the operating budget as an independent expense planned for ECoC purposes only.

Q22 Intended city spending for culture post 2027

The city's cultural budget must definitely be seen in the context of the overall city budget, its strict principles of formation, growth and also change with legislation. However, to demonstrate that the importance of culture in the development of the city is taken seriously, after 2027 the culture budget will be linked to an amount of about 10% of total city budget. The budget for culture post 2027 also depends on how the ECoC events will have affected the common field of culture in Liepāja and its region, and what new initiatives and traditions will have developed during that time.

Creating new cultural infrastructure calls for maintenance requiring additional funding, which will increase the cultural budget as a whole and its share in the total city budget by another 1-2%, reaching 11-12% per year.

Q23 Overall operating budget

Total income to cover operating expenditure (in euros)	19,954,000
From the public sector (in euros)	18,344,000
From the public sector (in %)	92%
From the private sector (in euros)	1,610,000
From the private sector (in %)	8%

Q24 Income from the public sector to cover operating expenditure

Income from the public sector to cover operating expenditure	In euros	%
National Government	9,900,000	54%
City	7,200,000	39%
Region	-	-
EU (with exception of the Melina Mercouri Prize)	1,244,000	7%
Total	18,344,000	100%

Q25 Financial commitments by public finance authorities

Liepāja City Council approved the city contribution and the overall budget for the European Capital of Culture 2027 on May 20, 2021.

Taking into account the course of regional reform, merging eight municipalities into one administrative territory, South-Kurzeme municipality will vote on financial obligations after the establishment of South-Kurzeme municipality in July 2021 – if Liepāja proceeds to the selection phase.

To a joint request from the candidate cities, including Liepāja, the Ministry of Culture responded that it is planned to allocate the budget in 2024 within the framework of medium-term budgeting to ensure co-financing. The letter also states that the co-financing amount for the period from 2025 to 2027 will be up to 10 million euros, not exceeding 50% of the overall operating budget.

Q26 Fundraising and sponsoring strategy

It is really gratifying that during the preparation of the Application we have received positive answers about potential involvement in the ECoC project from the largest companies with great experience in creating cultural support: the largest telecommunications company LMT, the milk processing company Food Union, and the confectionery company Orkla Latvia. Aspects of cooperation have also been acknowledged by the largest Liepāja Special Economic Zone companies, the IT sector and the hospitality industry.

However: "There is a lack of cultural sponsorship and patronage in Latvia," say those working in the field of culture, while acknowledging that there have been minimal but positive trends over the past decade. There are two opposing messages here. One fact is that sponsorship and patronage have fallen sharply in recent years, as national legislation and bureaucratic hurdles make it very difficult for local authorities and the cultural institutions connected to them to attract private funding. But on the other hand – let's be honest, we have not been looking enough for opportunities of cooperation

with the private sector. Therefore, we see the ECoC as an opportunity not only for both parties to sit at the same table, but also to lay the foundations for long-term cooperation in the future, using the basic principle of "Relationship first, business will follow".

Organization and strategy

We plan to create a separate and strong sponsorship strategy, the development of which will also involve entrepreneurs themselves. Defining mutual goals, benefits and main risks, as well as points of contact within the goals set out in this Application. The sponsorship strategy will be developed in close contact with the marketing and communication strategy, ensuring that the joint collaboration is not only a logo on a poster support, but also brings added value to cultural events and citizens. We will also make sure that sponsorship projects do not lose the true meaning of the cultural event, so that cooperation does not turn into serving the private interests of a company. This boundary is very fragile, it must be strictly defined.

As part of the sponsorship strategy, each collaborative project will be tailor-made. We see an opportunity to address both large telecommunications and technology, food, hospitality and IT companies, as well as retail chains and textile companies.

We will work to attract one to three main sponsors with support of 200,000 euros each and more, giving the opportunity to companies that want to support as second level sponsors (2-5 companies) contributing 100,000 to 200,000 euros each, as well as several smaller supporters with different amounts to support specific projects. We will also develop partner programmes, in which we will invite entrepreneurs to provide in-kind sponsoring for the implementation of projects, such as Europe sings Liepāja, Karosta has Balls, The Residents' Restaurant etc. We are grateful to our ECoC partners, i.e. cultural organizations and NGOs, foundations and associations that have proven to work together reaching out to sponsors and other partners. Strong festival teams such as European Film Days, Rock the Rock, Face to Face with the Natural and others plan to collaborate independently and directly with sponsors.

Shared responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is another key cornerstone of our sponsorship strategy. Together, the public and private sectors have a responsibility to improve the well-being of people. Companies are also a direct link to reach employees' ears and eyes – cooperation on communication is therefore key and beneficial for both sides. Special cooperation will be established with companies operating in the Liepāja Special Economic Zone. Most of them are from Scandinavia, which provides an opportunity to attract additional support and finances for ECoC events, but also to reach out to employees at the company's headquarters in their countries as well as thousands of Liepāja's employees.

Capacity building

In cooperation with the IT sector, business incubators, leading advertising and sponsorship project agencies in Latvia we will create a platform where we will talk about public and private sector cooperation in the field of culture. We will implement a regular exchange of information and experience between the public and private sectors. We will provide companies with the opportunity to engage in environmental and community projects to enhance their CSR profile. In turn, for cultural organizations and the independent sector there will be insight into the mechanisms of business decision-making, organization of daily marketing processes. The joint learning will help experienced companies, cultural organizations, producers, and creatives understand that sponsorship is not just the appearance of a logo on the event poster.

Cooperation with patrons

Foundations. The Uniting History Foundation has already expressed its willingness to cooperate, which could not only provide financial but also practical help in attracting the world's best artists to the programme. Together with Latvian Rotary clubs, we will create various campaigns to raise funds, for example charity balls, painting auctions, where the collected donations will be directed to the implementation of a creative initiative.

Diaspora. We will mobilize the broad Latvian diaspora abroad with a call to support the programme and engage in raising funds to implement specific cultural programme activities.

Donations. By donating a certain amount, it will be possible to become the patron of an event and receive privileges.

Crowdfunding. And sometimes ideas are born that need to be submitted for public evaluation, including crowdfunding platforms.

Q27 Breakdown of operating expenditure

Programme expenditure (in euros)	12,100,000
Programme expenditure (in %)	61%
Promotion and marketing (in euros)	3,000,000
Promotion and marketing (in %)	15%
Wages, overheads and administration (in euros)	3,200,000
Wages, overheads and administration (in %)	16%
Contingency and M&E (in euros)	1,654,000
Contingency and M&E (in %)	8%
Total	19,954,000

Q28 Income from the public sector for capital expenditure

Income from the public sector to cover capital expenditure	In euros	%
National Government	3,057,380	10%
City	7,626,420	25%
Region	tbc	tbc
EU (with exception of the Melina Mercouri Prize)	19,772,200	65%
Total	30,456,000	100%

Q29 Financial commitments by public finance authorities for capital expenditure

The infrastructure projects listed in Q38 and Q28 are currently at different stages of preparation. For some of them the city council has voted to prepare the first technical plans, some of the projects have all the technical documentation ready to be submitted for EU financial support instruments. And some of them are new ideas which have passed the most important stage: a city council vote. All of the projects are included in the joint investment plan of the city of Liepāja, which has been voted on and officially approved by the deputies as important and forward-looking projects for the city.

Q30 Fundraising strategy for Union funds to cover capital expenditure

The implementation of the infrastructure developments planned for the European Capital of Culture and raising the planned finances is the responsibility of the Development Department of Liepāja City Municipality in cooperation with the South-Kurzeme Regional Development Board.

The planning of the programme and capital investments took place in close cooperation with the city and county development administrations, including and strengthening the infrastructure via projects set out in the Cultural and Artistic programme and in Q38.

In terms of specific support from EU funds, over the past eight years, the Development Board has attracted more than 200 million euros in investments from EU and state funds. Professional co-operation with ministries and foundations, together with exploring new financial sources will continue to be the basis of success in securing EU funding.

As an additional strategic step there will be specific training for creative industries and cultural organizations on the possibilities of attracting funding from European Union funds and programmes. Whilst some of this will focus on sources for programme funds, there are also some potential capital funding opportunities we can encourage partners to think about. This will also support our wider strategic goal of making our cultural players more outward looking and better connected across Europe.

Q31 Spending on new cultural infrastructure to be used for Liepāja 2027

Liepāja Public Library	6,000,000 euros
IT and Creative Industries Centre	3,800,000 euros
Total	9,800,000 euros

Q32 Planned governance and delivery structure

The aim of the European Capital of Culture 2027 project is to create an organization that would operate as efficiently as possible, take decisions independently and flexibly in accordance with the circumstances and the public interest, ensure the objectives set by the ECoC 2027 – and to develop the best possible artistic programme. The organization will operate from 2022 to 2029.

Evaluating the best possible types of organization, in conjunction with colleagues from Liepāja City Council, city management and those responsible for culture in the city, we have decided to establish the Foundation Liepāja 2027.

It would be an organization founded by Liepāja city, designed so that it can operate independently whilst flexibly linking to specialist support – such as EU funding, investment and infrastructure – from Liepāja City Council and county structures.

Precisely because we are exposed to constant changes on a daily basis, technological solutions, personnel and partners, sudden pandemics and a completely new generation that has grown with the implementation of the ECoC plan, the organization will be based on Agile Management methods. In a constantly changing

Foundation Liepāja 2027

Founder (Liepāja city)



Supervisory Board



Mayor, deputies, South Kurzeme and civil society representatives e.g. University, Chamber of Commerce etc.

CEO



+ Evaluation and monitoring
+ Advisory board



Artistic Programme Team

- Programme line project management and production
- Regional programme coordination
- Community involvement, capacity building
- Volunteering, educational projects
- International relations and international project coordination



Communication and Marketing Team

- PR
- Social Media content
- Website content
- Marketing
- Merchandise
- Ticket sales
- Fundraising and Sponsoring
- Partner project development



Administrative and Finance Team

- Budget planning and control
- Accounting
- Legal issues
- Human resources
- IT
- Technical
- Logistics

situation, we must be able to make decisions and act quickly, so the work will be planned in small sprints, implementing them as efficiently, accurately and according to the situation.

Attracting specialists will take place via an open process, involving both local cultural and creative professionals and also attracting the attention of professionals from elsewhere in Latvia and internationally.

One of the most important tasks is to ensure the continuity of the projects, so that after the liquidation of the foundation its impact will continue the ECoC legacy for many years.

Q33

Strengths, weaknesses and mitigation plans

Strengths	Weakness	Mitigation
Liepāja residents support the city's participation in the ECoC bid and see significant benefits for both the city's economy and the cultural sector.	Part of our society is inactive and does not participate with real involvement. There are still problems with connecting to non-Latvians who have historically lived in their own "bubbles".	Find strong opinion leaders among key groups to communicate the ECoC programme. Develop good participatory projects until 2027.
Clear and unanimous support of local politicians.	As elections are held every 4 years throughout Latvia, the support situation may change as political leadership changes.	Strengthen the ECoC project in long-term documents as a priority project, regardless of the political situation.
A strong concept.	For one section of society, (un)rest can lead to negative associations.	To confirm (un)rest as a basis for creative power through a strong artistic programme and good Outreach activity.
High-quality, balanced and diverse artistic programme.	Insufficient international dimension for cultural content. Liepāja society can be conservative. Concerns that the genre of contemporary art is still poorly represented in the city.	Strengthen cooperation with international partners. Explain the content of the planned programme to the public in innovative and engaging ways. Mark the year of the ECoC from 2023 with high quality "warm-up" projects.
Capacity of the city's hospitality industry.	We need to develop a better quality service in the regions.	Provide quality improvement training for tourism entrepreneurs of the region.
Balanced and stable municipal funding and support programmes.	The decision on Latvia's state funding is still unclear.	Attract funding from European funds. Establish a strong sponsorship programme and conclude long-term cooperation agreements. Clarify the situation regarding Latvian state aid.
A clear and precise plan for public involvement, especially of local NGOs.	Inactive representatives of associations who do not understand the essence of the NGO sector.	Capacity building for NGO members, explaining the principles of participation and possibilities of cooperation.

Strengths	Weakness	Mitigation
Many existing local cultural operators.	Only a small number are able to implement large and unusual projects with high quality. Weak implementation of international projects. Need to improve management of the cultural sector in the region.	Attract the best Latvian producers. Training and capacity building for existing producers creating an exchange of professional experience as part of a 2027 capacity building programme.
Knowledgeable, capable and active young people who are able to implement quality initiatives themselves.	A small number of active young people.	Involve the most active school children and student parliaments in the planning, development and implementation of the content of the ECoC programme. Initiatives to embrace less involved groups of young people e.g. the Young Leaders programme.
The projects included in the ECoC programme are coordinated with the city development documents and are not detached from the overall strategic development vision of the city.	May be influenced by local and international political or practical situations and processes (pandemics, conflicts, etc.).	Strengthen the ECoC project's influence in long-term documents as one of the priority projects both at city and county level.
The influential role of the city of Liepāja in promoting the development of the whole region.	Poorly managed processes can also be a factor hindering development.	Establish a strong ECoC office with professionals who are present in the process from the very beginning – thus better understanding of all the nuances of the ECoC. Also in the long run strengthen international, regional and national cooperation.

Q34

Outline of the intended marketing and communication strategy

We know what the American dream is – people living better and richer lives, giving everyone the opportunity to grow. But do we know what the European dream is? Paradoxically, it is not yet clear. We want to explore and involve the people of Europe and beyond in our adventure.

Given that Liepāja originated in the (un)rest which is our eternal driving force, we want to put the (un)rest on the right track to encourage people to find their real European dream – an understanding, smart, responsible and inclusive society with a strong sense of solidarity.

We want to show how, in the constant state of rest and unrest, it is possible to turn the inertness of society into meaningful activities of fellow human beings both here in Liepāja and elsewhere in Europe. It is equally important for us to receive a response from Europe since a lot of what we are talking about is not limited at all to Latvia.

Through the prism of rest and unrest and our marketing and communication activities we encourage "lonely farmer" (a typical Latvian mentality) who spend their days by the sea and in the usual environment to raise their heads higher, open their eyes more and join in when Liepāja becomes a strong European city. We encourage everyone in Liepāja and South-Kurzeme to become navigators prototyping and modelling how to move from inertness to active and meaningful action.

A conversation with Europe

Within ECoC marketing and communication are more than just plans, news, videos, photos, social networks, etc. Our goal is to create a two-way conversation – to tell the story of Liepāja and hear the response of Europeans. We will use precise visual language, a simple and clear way of expression, so that communication is based on human and personal relationships. It will be a fundamental tool in our communication.

Our communication will be based on the stories of (un)rest and the five programme lines that tell European stories related to Liepāja: How we are on a quest for the European Dream, embracing the paradoxes that make life puzzling, longing to see our neighbours and our city with new eyes, the need to be deliberately modest with our planet's resources and finally the creative foresight to leave a good legacy for our children and theirs.

Our plan is to follow the principle from local to global and from physical to digital, communicating information in four languages – Latvian, English, Russian and Lithuanian. As already mentioned in the monitoring section, with sociological surveys and questions to the public, we will regularly measure whether people feel involved, how the programme is evaluated, or whether there is a change of opinion on specific issues that are important to society.

Our main communication goals

- To strengthen the image of Liepāja at the national and international level as an unprecedented and unique venue for activities with rich traditions and a modern vision of the future.
- To raise public awareness of the importance of culture as a wider sector, including economic, environmental and public participation issues.
- To strengthen the image of Liepāja as a paradoxical city by depicting opposites and including the theme of (un)rest in all stages of communication.
- To promote the sense of belonging in the population to Liepāja, Latvia and Europe.
- To encourage society to change thinking and attitude towards the environment by actively participating in public life activities and changing daily habits.
- To facilitate feedback from partners in Europe, citizens of different European countries.

Full spectrum from physical to digital

Knowing that much is known about Liepāja in the immediate area, but very little in Europe, we will use full spectrum marketing communication opportunities and use available information channels in Liepāja and Latvia, as well as in Europe:

- Outdoor tools (advertising in urban environments both in Liepāja and other cities, also in Riga, public transport, airports, etc.);
- Digital communication tools (website and Application with digital event platform, social networks, news, cultural portals both in Latvia and Europe);
- Direct contacts (events in districts, twin cities, Latvian embassies, tourism exhibitions, open office in the city centre, etc.), cooperation with regional and national level media information channels, politicians, influential persons, opinion leaders;
- Print media (flyers, booklets, programmes, etc.);
- Cooperation with airlines and tour operators;
- Liepāja residents themselves and cooperation partners.

Europe in Liepāja is available to everyone!

Thanks to digital opportunities, we can reach millions of audiences around the world, which could not be done by attending physical events alone. But above all, let us keep in mind and set an example that all communication is based on mutual relations and respect between people. In order to reach the widest possible audience and reach people in remote countries, we will mix the physical environment with the help of digital tools. In the project of the Digital Concert Hall, we will make the events of the ECoC programme available to the whole world, and not only the events of Liepāja, but, as we have already mentioned in our artistic programme, also events of other ECoC. This platform can become the central communication platform where audiences will find a style of contemporary communication that allows information, (user and provider generated) content and interaction all at the same time.

Local and national level

Liepāja messengers. The best urban messengers are Liepāja's inhabitants themselves. We will invite the residents of Liepāja to become ambassadors of one of the five programme lines. Some are closer to the topic of climate change, others to the introduction of new education models, again others to the internationalization of Liepāja and Latvia, or to the European diversity in Liepāja. Residents but also passionate Liepājans living elsewhere will have the chance to share their ECoC with their networks.

Community Whisperers. 2027 will be the year of our pilot project for accessibility! Everyone is Welcome! means that we will make activities available and accessible to all who want to take part. Whether it is providing physical accessibility in forms of sign language or Braille or whether it is creating the opportunity to even understand that "This is also for me!". As part of our neighbourhood projects in New Eyes we want to use the well-loved garage culture to create a system of communication that reaches out to those who don't feel that information on events and cultural activities is for them. As we said in the outreach section, we will connect to community leaders who can help us develop a system of Community Whisperers – letting people know, actively and personally inviting them to participate. This is resource-intensive but the best investment we can make to connect our communities.

All residents of Latvia. We have a saying that every Latvian would like to be a resident of Liepāja once in a lifetime. ECoC is an opportunity for all Latvians! Therefore, as an ECoC city, we will involve the residents of other Latvian cities as much as possible, not only by inviting them to Liepāja physically or digitally, but we will also take parts of our artistic programme to the largest Latvian cities (Riga, Jūrmala, Bauska, Cēsis, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Ventspils, etc.) We will also participate in and seek communication partnerships with national level cultural festivals and events as an opportunity to promote and represent the Latvian people and culture in Europe.

Residents of the World – Unite in Liepāja

European media and bloggers. In cooperation with the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA), which has a network of representative offices and tourism industry partners in many parts of Europe and around the world (USA, UK, Netherlands, Norway, Germany, Sweden, South Korea, Japan, Russia, China, etc.), we will organize acquaintance events for the media in the big European cities. Media representatives will be able to enjoy a cultural performance, combined with traditional cuisine.

Nothing tells about a foreign place more than a visit to it, so we will invite foreign tourism professionals, journalists and bloggers to Liepāja to give a personal and paradoxical story, and invite them for special programmes, which are not normally covered in tourism reports.

Latvians abroad. Official statistics show that around 200,000 Latvians live abroad (among them c.a. 75,000 in Great Britain, c.a. 21,000 in Ireland and c.a. 20,000 in Germany). We will use cooperation with the Latvian and Liepāja communities to disseminate information about ECoC activities, organize performances by Liepāja artists e.g. in London, Berlin, Dublin and other cities where there are strong Liepāja representations. Within the framework of several projects, we will also establish cooperation with Latvian embassies.

International exhibitions and events. Together with the Kurzeme Tourism Association, LIAA Tourism Department, the national airline airBaltic and the largest Latvian travel agencies we will bring Liepāja to those who do not know us yet. We will continue participating in international tourism fairs and conferences in Berlin, Tallinn, Hamburg, Vilnius, Stavanger, Oslo, Copenhagen. We will also address travellers at events where the potential target audience of Liepāja's cultural tourism gathers, including the Open Air Museum Fair, Klaipeda Sea Festival, Riga Festival and elsewhere.

Cooperations with partners

In cooperation with Tour Operators and hospitality entrepreneurs, we will create cultural tourism offers. These will be both two-day short trips and five-day programme packages. For lovers of contemporary and classical art, families with children, those who are passionate about active lifestyles, gourmet cuisine aficionados etc. In cooperation with Riga Airport we will run full service Blind Dates with the opportunity to allow a surprise visit to Liepāja without knowing the programme.

Liepāja has twin city agreements with Nynäshamn and Helsingborg (SE), Elbląg and Gdynia (PL), Bellevue (USA), Darmstadt (DE), Guldborgsund (DK), Klaipeda and Palanga (LT), Gomel (BY) and Årstad (NO). Together with these cities, we will organize exchange trips, conferences, concerts and other projects. We will participate in city festivals and invite citizens to Liepāja in person.

We have cooperation with the Latvian national airline airBaltic, and from Liepāja, with a connecting flight in Riga, you can fly to more than 60 destinations around the world. We will create an extensive campaign on ECoC in aircraft logs. Articles in on-board magazines and Cultural Packages' will be negotiated also with other airlines.

Liepāja is not the number one destination when Europeans think about travelling and culture, but we are pretty sure that by transforming our "lonely farmer" mentality into that of Community Whisperers we can win the hearts of those who want to listen to our stories of **(un)rest**.

Q35

Plan to highlight the ECoC as an action of the European Union

About 30 years ago, we were separated from the west by a heavy iron curtain of the Soviet Union. Literally. We secretly listened to foreign music, watched foreign films in the dark with our neighbours – we were afraid that the people next to us would not tell on us just for reading in English. We did not even dare to dream of a trip to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower in person or a trip to Berlin to pass through the Brandenburg Gate. Thank God this kind of unrest is now a thing of the past. But regardless of ideological and political circumstances, we have always been free in spirit and thought, so it has been much easier for us to adapt and absorb European values in a fairly quick way and to take them completely as a natural part of our identity.

With Latvia's accession to the European Union in 2004, the introduction of the euro, and the free opportunity to travel, educate, work and create, we are full members of the European team. Thanks to Europe, we, as a city, in these less than 20 years have gained greater social and economic, military and economic security. Today, we have a lot in common with Europe on a daily basis: we are an open, modern city based on democratic values, and so is our culture. Participation in the ECoC will allow us to make it much more visible and direct that we are a full part of Europe.

We will invite representatives of EU institutions and ECoC before and after 2027, former and future ECoC cities, as well as all Latvian candidate cities to participate in the extensive ECoC programme – both as guests, co-creators and advisers. One of the cornerstones of our European Dream programme line is the No. 27 Dream Machine agora of values, in which we will invite EU representatives on European values to speak as experts,

promoting the ECoC impact on urban and societal development.

We will cooperate with the European Union House in Riga (the main communicator in Latvia on European Union issues: the European Parliament office and the European Commission Representation) to promote a common understanding of EU values and the ECoC programme. Using the media and other regional, national and international information dissemination networks to cover the programme.

On 9 May 2027 we celebrate Europe Day. There will be stages with music and performances as well as information points about the EU, and on the role of Liepāja in the EU. At the same time, concerts of local minority cultural associations will take place, thus providing an opportunity to get to know a small part of the EU's common culture and minorities throughout Europe. We will also invite representatives of the Portuguese ECoC of 2027 to participate in this Europe Day.

On European Language Day on 26 September 2027 we will pay special attention to European languages, their diversity and learning in the context of the ECoC programme.

Together with the University of Liepāja European languages department, language training and translation companies we invite people to learn different European languages. Knowledge of languages is an added value for any professional, providing huge opportunities in the labour market and personal growth. This activity will be a great opportunity to have a discussion with other European citizens about foreign language skills and their benefits. We will also involve technology companies that are closely involved in the development of machine translation.

The visibility of the European Capital of Culture as an EU initiative will be ensured by including the EU logo in all communication materials – programmes, presentations, billboards, posters, city festivals, etc.

Capacity to Deliver

Q36

Political support and sustainable commitment from the public authorities

Clear and unanimous support of local politicians in both the city and the region is one of the strong foundations on which we were able to build and create this Application. And to be honest – the support also strengthened us and helped us to believe in ourselves.

Liepāja's participation in the competition for the European Capital of Culture 2027 has been stated in all the most important short-term and long-term documents of the city's development and planning, starting from 2015! In 2022, the next long-term document until 2035 will be approved, where tasks related to the implementation of ECoC activities are also planned. All we need is the title!

Support of the City and Regional Council

The support by the management of Liepāja city and eight counties for the preparation of the Application were obtained unanimously. By concluding a protocol of common intentions, creating a vision of the future with the South-Kurzeme region, the political support network extends far beyond the city limits.

Political support was reconfirmed when the deputies of Liepāja City Council voted on the content of the Application – both ideas and financial aspects – in May 2021.

Open doors

Strong political support also makes it much easier for us to open doors in various ministries, national and international organizations, universities, and cooperation partners. This gives confidence not only

to the Application preparation team, but also allows representatives of various city and county municipality departments to broaden their vision in their field, taking into account ECoC processes and activities.

Guarantees for the future

With the submission of the Application, regional elections will take place in Latvia. In Liepāja, three leading political parties have included support for the ECoC process in their party programmes – both for events and infrastructure facilities. This means that we can count on strong political support over the next four years, irrespective of the outcome of the elections.

We also received a confirmation signed by the Minister of Culture that the implementation of the European Capital of Culture initiative in Latvia is included in the draft Cultural Policy Guidelines for 2021–2027.

Q37

Infrastructure to host the European Capital of Culture

Ten years from now we would like to look at the city just as we look at old photographs of it now: Seeing that the city has retained its charm and feel, but has a completely different look and feel in terms of infrastructure quality and accessibility to all.

The venues we talk about in our cultural profile section are the obvious infrastructure we will base our programme on. The spotlights will be the Concert Hall Great Amber, Liepāja Theatre, Liepāja Latvian Society House, LOC sports infrastructure. Our challenges are to establish and develop venues for culture on the beach (Other Sea Festival, upWIND downWIND), neighbourhoods (A Festival of Friendliness) in forests, and meadows. Ten years from now we want to look back and see that the creative power of culture will have broken its way through to public places that were previously closed or inaccessible. The territory of the former Liepājas Metalurģis might not yet be finished in 2030, but

with 2027 we will make an impact to turn it into a place where people like to go, where green spaces, events and exhibitions attract people, and hopefully also creative industry and artist's studios have discovered the appeal of the space. Similarly with the help of the Ministry of Defence we want to establish Karosta Officers' Meeting Palace as a publicly accessible new venue for culture, as well as initiating the changes that will make the whole Karosta former military area into an attractive neighbourhood with places like the garages and other traditional leisure spaces used for cultural and social activities. The new cultural infrastructure which is currently being discussed is the building of a new library which should open its doors for the 250th anniversary in 2027.

Regional, national and international accessibility

Air traffic

- Since 2016, Liepāja has its own airport, which is located only 10 km from the city centre. After the pandemic, when the normal operation of the airport will be restored, it will be possible to reach more than 60 European destinations through transit flights via Riga. The airport accepts charter flights as well.
- 64 km from Liepāja is Palanga (LT) Airport, where regular flights with WizzAir, airBaltic, SAS and other airlines are provided. We can definitely count on Riga (200 km), Vilnius (400 km) and Kaunas (300 km) airports, through which the largest flow of passengers reaches Liepāja.

Maritime traffic

- Stenaline freight ferries, which are also used by tourists and camper owners, take passengers from Travemünde (DE) to Liepāja, from Nynäshamn (SE) to Ventspils 120 km away, or from Kiel (DE) to Klaipeda (LT).
- Every year about 400 private yachts arrive in Liepāja. Travellers are usually Germans, Poles, Lithuanians, and gradually increasing also from Finland, Sweden and Norway.

Roads and public transport

- Although Liepāja may seem like the farthest corner of Latvia on the map the road network is designed to quickly reach the capital (200 km) and other regional centres in Kurzeme and Lithuania (border is 50 km south of Liepāja). Intercity bus traffic between big cities are regular and in demand, the biggest challenge is small cities and some cultural sites.
- Within the city, public transport is vital and meets the demand. This year we caught up with the trams' accessibility for people with disabilities and with prams.

- In Liepāja, car sharing services, car rentals and ride sharing are easily accessible as are taxis.
- Bicycle paths. Liepāja is included in the European bicycle route network with routes directly through the city and region – EuroVelo 10 and EuroVelo13. In the South-Kurzeme region, bicycle paths are also developing every year.
- Train traffic is not yet on the European standard. With the construction of RailBaltic unified train network from Scandinavia, through the Baltic States to other European destinations, train traffic around Liepāja will hopefully improve.

Absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation

Liepāja is the only city in Latvia outside Riga and Jūrmala, where we can provide both economy class hotels, hostels, guest houses and comfortable apartments, as well as 5-star service. In recent years, experiencing the growing popularity of Liepāja as a holiday destination and the impact of the airport on the city's economy, local hotels have made significant investments. Anticipating the interest of foreign guests in Liepāja, we have already started negotiations with potential investors on the construction of hotels until 2027.

In Liepāja, as in many European cities, the segment of Airbnb.com and Booking.com apartments has grown rapidly. During the summer season, there are about 400 apartments available in Liepāja, and we estimate that during the year there are exactly as many city guests as in all hotels together – which makes an additional 100,000 tourists.

In the surrounding region of Liepāja there is a wide range of campsites, traditional country houses, guest houses, hotels. Guests often choose to stay closer to nature in the surrounding area and enjoy the content the city has to offer.

The little paradox of our city is the catering segment. There are more than 100 catering companies in the city and region, including around 30 restaurants, and in this time of pandemic, while it is a huge challenge for many companies to remain in business, new companies in the catering sector continue to appear. At least we can promise that none of our guests will have to go hungry!

Hospitality

20 hotels

25 guest houses | 29 holiday houses

8 hostels | 22 campsites

400 apartments | 4200 beds

Catering

27 restaurants

105 cafes

4 of them directly on the beach

7 pubs and bars

12 canteens and bistros

Q38

Plans for cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure projects

City and regional urban development projects that will improve cultural and urban spaces by 2027. Projects marked with * are included in Q28 and public finance authorities have voted on financing the projects.



Infrastructure project	How it serves the community and ECoC	Foreseen finish date	Budget
Liepāja City Library *	Newly built, comfortable and accessible public space, a place for exchanging books, knowledge and opinions. Foreseen opening during 250 th library anniversary in 2027. / ECoC project: The Phantom of the Library	2027	6,000,000
Liepāja D10 Centre *	New construction of a development base for Liepāja IT sector, creative industry companies and NGOs incubator. / ECoC project: D10 United	2026	3,800,000
Education Centre Ukstiņš *	Establishment of experimental lifelong learning centre incorporating existing institutions and providing space for the to be established Science Centre (ZIIC). / ECoC project: Ukstiņa Education and Innovation Quarter	2027	10,000,000
Studio of Liepāja Theatre	In the vacated Bank of Latvia, building across the street from the Liepāja Theatre a dream comes true with a studio theatre, an open stage, a theatre festival and cooperation with the Liepāja Puppet Theatre. / ECoC project: Open Theatre Quarter	2023	1,000,000
Liepājas Metalurģis	This project is not a cultural investment per se but a first step in reclaiming this former off-limits industrial site for the citizens. It brings basic infrastructure (streets, civil works) to create accessibility for commercial use, for the construction of a park at the lake and pave the way for future cultural use of this significant industrial heritage site. / ECoC project: Inside – Out, No More Heavy Metal	2026	20,000,000
Liepāja Museum Branch *	The refurbishment of a branch of Liepāja Museum will create a space to present traditional cultural heritage and historical exhibits in a contemporary way. / ECoC project: The Karosta Paradox	2023	346,000
Museum of Interior Design *	The historical Mrs. Hojjer's Inn will feature a Museum of Interior Design and a courtyard with indoor space for culture and events. / ECoC project: Urban Dreams Liepāja	2025	1,500,000
Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School *	Extension building for art studies. / ECoC project: The Shape of the Dream, Urban Dreams Liepāja, Youth Forum	2024	2,210,000
K. Zāles Square and Pedestrian Bridge to Horse Island *	Complete regeneration of a major city square and creation of a promenade along the canal. / ECoC project: Urban Dreams Liepāja, Face to Face With The Natural	2024	4,300,000
Horse Island Nature Territory *	Landscaping of natural territory for recreation. / ECoC project: An Island Adventure, Face To Face With The Natural	2027	1,300,000
South-Kurzeme Region Projects			
Nīca Klēte	Traditional Culture Centre is being refurbished to exhibit cultural folk traditions of the region. / ECoC project: Nordic Solstice, Skill Exchange Market	planned	tbc
Nature Trails	Establishment of nature trails for recreation and mental health. / ECoC project: Shine Silently, Face to Face with the Natural	planned	tbc
Visitor centre of Grobiņa Archaeological Ensemble	The new building of the archaeological ensemble proposed in the UNESCO Heritage Application provides an opportunity to present history in a modern format. / ECoC project: Nordic Solstice, The Other Sea Festival, Skill Exchange Market	planned	tbc

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