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Introducing our European cultural capital

Richard Raši
Mayor of Košice

In 2013, Košice became the first Slovak city ever to be designated as the European Capital of Culture (ECOC). With the successful Košice Interface 2013 project, the city of Košice has proven that the prestigious title was well deserved. We managed to win over the European Commission, visitors, and especially the inhabitants, who are the ones to enjoy the benefits of the project and its positive impact on the development of the city in the first place. The European Commission even awarded Košice with the Melina Mercouri Prize in recognition of sound preparations for the Capital of Culture year. We also passed the test of attracting attention worldwide, as tourists are invited to visit Košice by prestigious world media and tourist guides like CNN, BBC, Lonely Planet, and BudgetTravel.com. Our city is currently rated among the top world tourist destinations.

The city's inhabitants have by now recognized the potential of the ECOC 2013 project, which has substantially changed the city's appearance, made life more dynamic, and the metropolis of Eastern Slovakia more attractive. Tourists and artists from nearly all continents have already discovered Košice as well. Our city may have been called multicultural and multinational before, but in 2013 it became a world city – not only due to the fact that in its center English, German, Hungarian, and other languages are heard more often than Slovak, but especially because of world events organized thanks to the ECOC project. The Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, Jordi Savall, Jamiroquai, Tony Gragg, Dan Graham, and Gyula Košice are only a few of the many artists of world importance who performed and exhibited their works of art in Košice in 2013.

The visit rate in Košice has increased significantly semi-annually especially due to great interest shown by tourists from Hungary, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, and Poland. After finalizing twenty investment projects within ECOC 2013 in the value of 60 million Euros, inhabitants have started feeling increasingly proud of their city and understand that without the ECOC title, Košice would not have managed to turn a derelict swimming pool into the first "Kunsthalle" in Slovakia or reinvent former barracks into the unique cultural center "Kasárne/ Kulturpark". We can also pride ourselves on the revitalized City Park, which now serves as a gate to the city for those arriving to the train and bus stations.

Our long-term goal, based on the success of the European Capital of Culture 2013 project, is not only to attract more tourists to the city, but first of all to create conditions that would convince young creative people to stay in Košice. We have begun, in cooperation with top international experts in the development of creative industries, to transform Košice into a creative city. We plan to form a cluster, incubators and hubs for imaginative people from all possible creative branches. In the EU budgetary period 2014 – 2020 there is the amount of 1.8 billion euros earmarked to support the cultural and creative sectors. In the region of Central Europe, Košice is prepared to acquire a sufficient amount of money to substantially and efficiently support creativity, so that also in the future, not only today, the city will be considered the most dynamically developing city in Slovakia.

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