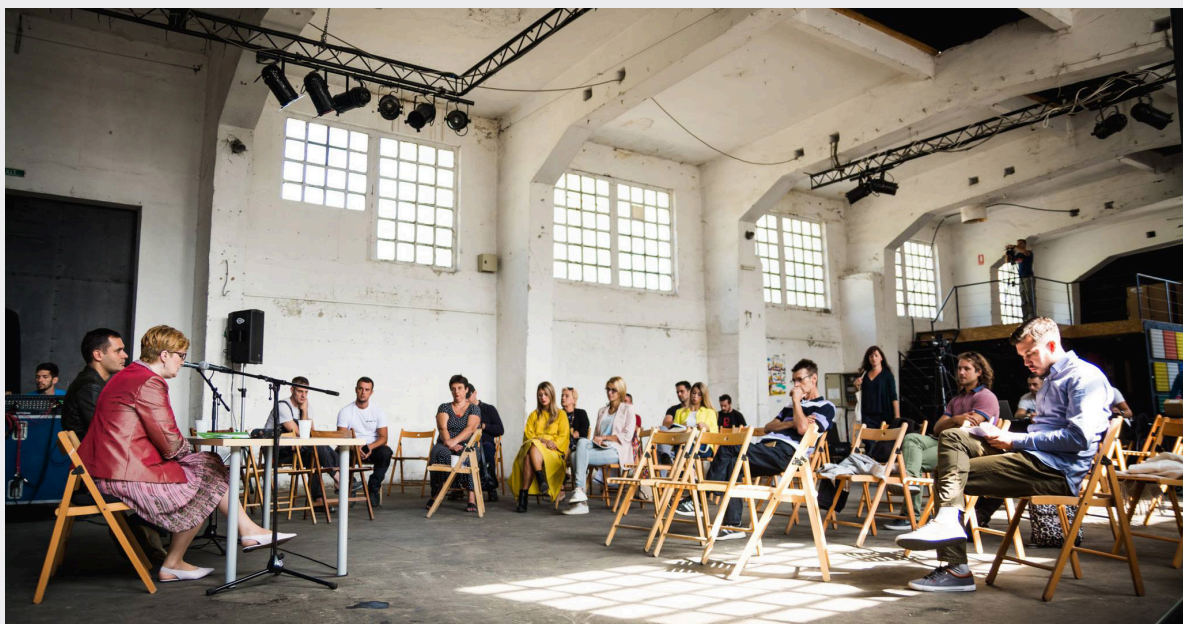


# CULTURAL POLICY REGENERATION OF URBAN HERITAGE THROUGH THE CULTURE OF DIALOGUE



## AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



## CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
7. CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE
9. GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

COMMUNITY, LEADERSHIP, BOTTOM-UP, GOVERNANCE,  
PARTICIPATION, PUBLIC SPACE, RENEWAL, IDENTITY,  
HERITAGE, TRUST



## 1. Novi Sad and culture

With almost 400,000 inhabitants, Novi Sad is one of the fastest-growing cities in the region. The city has experienced nine state formations and various social systems in the last century. The long-standing rule of a single-party communist regime ended in a civil war, resulting in an influx of refugees to Novi Sad at the end of the 20th century, altering its social landscape. Economic hardships led to the decay of urban heritage, climaxing in 1999 when Novi Sad became a city without bridges after extensive bombing. However, in the 21st century, Novi Sad did not surrender. It has a multiculturalism based on European values, with 23 national communities speaking four official languages, and holds status as a cultural and educational centre and a vibrant non-institutional scene.

The main local cultural policy framework is the Culture Development Strategy (CDS) of Novi Sad 2016-2026. Developed through a participatory model, it identified the main priorities, including the revitalisation of devastated cultural and urban heritage sites. The City government initiated the project to establish a culture of dialogue and address the lack of citizen involvement in decision-making, transforming decades-long distrust into trust. The Model was derived from the CDS and Sustainable development strategy of Novi Sad 2016-2020, which resulted in the adoption of the Development Plan of Novi Sad 2023-2030.


**THE CITY GOVERNMENT SEEKED TO ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE AND ADDRESS THE LACK OF CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING, TRANSFORMING DECADES-LONG DISTRUST INTO TRUST.**

## 2. Objectives and implementation of the project

### 2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The general aim of the Model is to revitalise urban heritage by fostering a culture of dialogue between decision-makers and stakeholders based on the bottom-up principle, thereby redefining the city's identity, preserving culturally and historically significant zones, renovating devastated areas, and creating new functional value from the renovated urban heritage. Its specific goals are:

- » Reviewing the city's identity.
- » Establishing a culture of dialogue (bottom-up approach involving citizens).
- » Determining four zones of urban heritage culturally and historically significant for the city's identity.
- » Renovation of the devastated four zones of urban heritage: SDPF, AA, CD and CSN.
- » Creation of new functional value for the renovated urban heritage.



**THE MODEL AIMS TO REVITALISE URBAN HERITAGE BY FOSTERING A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN DECISION-MAKERS AND STAKEHOLDERS BASED ON A BOTTOM-UP PRINCIPLE.**

### 2.2. Development of the project

The main actions carried out were:

- » Initiating dialogue between local government and local residents, community groups, and stakeholders to understand their perspectives, needs, and aspirations for urban heritage regeneration through more than 80 surveys, focus groups, stakeholder workshops, site visits, observations, etc.
- » Identification and assessment of 4 urban heritage places through more than 20 different surveys, research, and assessments to identify culturally and historically significant urban heritage sites and assess their condition and potential for regeneration.
- » Physical interventions and regeneration projects to restore, rehabilitate, and activate urban heritage sites. This included infrastructure improvements, landscaping, and adaptive reuse of historic buildings. 22 hectares of the authentic neighbourhood were renovated. These revitalised spaces began to acquire new functional value for cultural and creative industries.
- » Artists and other creative workers started organizing art festivals and events on the renovated premises.
- » Monitoring and evaluation of the regeneration projects impact on urban heritage, community engagement, economic development and cultural vitality, also adjusting strategies as needed.

#### Phase One (2015–2016)

- » Initiative by the City Government of Novi Sad to create the first CDS.
- » Identification of four decentralised urban heritage zones and creation of a ten-year timeframe for implementation.
- » Adoption of the CDS at the City Assembly.





### **Phase Two (2017–2018)**

- » Adoption of legal protection for the AA and CD and initiation of dialogue on development and future use.
- » Commencement of regeneration of units and completion of restoration of individual objects within them (still ongoing).
- » Commencement of the first cultural programs (Doček and Kaleidoscope of Culture) within the urban heritage framework.

### **Phase Three (2019–2023)**

- » First results in the development of the Model - positioning on the European and world cultural map through prestigious awards and titles.

### **Phase Four (2024–ongoing)**

- » Completion of the restoration of all objects in the four zones of urban heritage.
- » Successful and award-winning cultural programs become legacies of the city's cultural policy.
- » Expansion of knowledge and application of the successful model to other cities in Serbia and worldwide.



The involvement of various actors was key in the successful implementation of the model. More than 300 NGOs, civil society organizations, private companies, and citizen groups played crucial roles, contributing their expertise, resources, and perspectives to the process. Their involvement helped to foster a culture of dialogue, inclusivity, and collaboration, ensuring that the Model reflected the diverse needs and aspirations of the community.

More than 110,2 million euros have been allocated for urban regeneration and the restoration of defined urban heritage areas in the past few years. Additionally, through the implementation of the Novi Sad European Capital of Culture, over 30 million euros have been invested in cultural programs that took place in these regenerated urban zones.

## 3. Impacts

### 3.1. Direct impacts

- » Impact on the territory: enhancement of the physical and social fabric of the city, stimulating economic development and strengthening social cohesion and local identity, contributing to the overall citizen wellbeing and sense of belonging.
- » Comprehensive response to local issues and challenges: facilitating the participation of marginalised groups in cultural activities by improving the accessibility of reconstructed facilities and introducing bottom-up decision-making processes.
- » Cultural transformation through the revitalisation of heritage sites and support to local artists and creative industries.





- » Changes in the local government of the City of Novi Sad triggered by the pioneering implementation of the model of citizen involvement in decision-making: greater transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.
- » Empowerment of local government to become a more effective and dynamic agent of local positive change.

### 3.2. Evaluation

The methodology emerged from ongoing evaluations of the CDS and the European Capital of Culture project, with an evaluation team composed by experts from the UNESCO chair, and an independent team of experts from the Novi Sad University. The Model involves annual reporting by an independent evaluation team.

Research is conducted through quantitative and qualitative analyses, and some of the key indicators are: community engagement, heritage preservation, dialogue initiatives, creative economy development, tourism impact, environmental sustainability, enhancement of destination competitiveness, and perception and reputation.

As proof of the successful implementation of the Model from the adoption of the strategy until today, Novi Sad has received a significant number of prestigious awards: European Youth Capital, European Capital of Culture, Best European Trend Brand in the Field of Culture 2021 and UNESCO title in new media in 2023.

### 3.3. Key factors

The success of the Model can be attributed to:

- » The implementation of a culture of dialogue has facilitated a new decision-making system in the City, fostering democratization and participation among citizens and decision-makers. This inclusivity has empowered the community and ensured that initiatives align with local needs.

- » The protection and restoration of urban heritage zones have redefined the city's identity, positioning it as a cultural hub and enhancing its attractiveness to tourists and investors.
- » The decentralisation of cultural programs in revitalized areas has spread out the cultural offerings all over the city, promoting community engagement and revitalizing neglected spaces.
- » The recognition through prestigious awards validates the Model's impact, bolstering confidence and attracting further support.
- » Its inclusive governance approach, strategic heritage preservation efforts, and recognition-driven momentum, all contributing to the transformation and revitalisation of Novi Sad.

### 3.4. Continuity

To ensure the continuity of the project, the local government plans to adopt a multi-dimensional approach. Organisationally, some activities have already begun, such as the establishment of a working group for the implementation and monitoring of the Model. Also, technical continuity involves documenting Model methodologies, best practices, and lessons learned to guide future endeavours.

The City government is already prioritizing stakeholder and citizen engagement to maintain momentum and collect data on their needs. This information will be used to create annual investment plans, a basis for financial allocation and prioritized activities in the upcoming period.

Moreover, in accordance with the annual Evaluation results, the City of Novi Sad government allocates budgetary resources to maintain and further develop the Model.



**THE INVOLVEMENT OF VARIOUS ACTORS WAS KEY IN THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODEL, ALSO ENSURING THAT THE MODEL REFLECTED THE DIVERSE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE COMMUNITY.**

## 4. More information

Novi Sad was selected as Special Mention for the sixth edition of the UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (November 2023 – March 2024). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June 2024, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

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