

Wolfgang Schneider, Kristina Jacobsen (eds.)

TRANSFORMING CITIES

Paradigms and Potentials of Urban Development
Within the „European Capital of Culture“

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Running for the European Capital of Culture

The German candidate cities for 2025 at a glance

Jonas Lendl and Thomas Matthias Schmitt

As process-accompanying monitoring, our research project, “The European Capital of Culture programme between local and international cultural policies: an observation and analysis of debates and strategies employed by German cities when applying to be European Capital of Culture 2025”, aims to enrich comparative research on the ECoC programme, which is mostly retrospective. The diverse efforts of, and in, interested cities offered a “valuable window on current ideas about what culture can do for cities” (Griffiths, 2006, p. 417) many years before the designation of the European Capital of Culture, and, especially in the present case, even years before the formal beginning of the two-stage bidding process. The following brief glance at the eight cities which are currently intending to submit their bid books by 30 September 2019, reveals amongst others that most of the candidates were already in full preparation when the call for submission of applications was published on 24 September 2018.

As required by our research design, we are committed to an impartial, unbiased attitude towards all candidate cities. For this reason, in the following reports we remain deliberately cautious with assessments and valuations of the programmes and activities of the candidate cities during the bidding process.

Chemnitz

In the Saxonian city of Chemnitz, the idea of applying for the European capital of culture was first formulated in 2014 by Christoph Dittrich, the general director of the municipal theatre of Chemnitz. After the participants at an assembly for the preparation of a municipal urban cultural strategy voted unanimously for the idea, the city council resolved to support the initiative in January 2017 and agreed, by a large majority, to the main features

of the planned application in March 2019. Under the motto “AUFbrüche—Opening Minds, Creating Spaces”, the application focuses on three key topics. Firstly, the background of Chemnitz as an historical industrial city will be used for inputs on the future transformation of labour (similar to the concepts of Nuremberg and Magdeburg). Secondly, the striking ruptures in the history of the city (including destruction in the Second World War, renaming of the city as “Karl-Marx-Stadt” in the period of the German Democratic Republic, mass unemployment and population loss in the 1990s), but also contemporary societal conflicts within the city, will be taken up. The latter became patently clear in the violent mass protests organized by members of the political (far) right in summer 2018. Thirdly, the application focuses on the transformation of urban spaces in the inner city, such as the development of a cultural area and the redesign of at least 25 public spaces to be completed by 2025, and the opening of vacant buildings for artists and the creative industry. In 2018, 24 surrounding towns and municipalities declared their intention to contribute to the Chemnitz application. The “Chemnitzer Modell”, a specifically coupled regional train and tramway system, will play a crucial role in the dynamic interchange between the city and the surrounding area; a common regional cultural strategy will strengthen regional collaboration. Should Chemnitz win the title, the city reckons with an overall budget of 60 million euros.

Dresden

The city of Dresden is the second largest city in Saxony and the regional capital. Compared with the other candidate cities, it leads in terms of the number of overnight stays. In 2014, the city council voted to examine the chances of a bid. Based on a concept developed by the department of culture, the city council decided to apply for the title of European Capital of Culture in June 2016, emphasizing the greatest possible involvement of the citizens. After a citizen consultation and visits by the bidding office to city district festivals, “places of togetherness” were selected by means of a post-card campaign. On a Sunday in August 2018, these places were used by different local initiatives, associations and artists, according to their proposed concepts. The kick-off for the bidding process was scheduled for 3rd October 2016. On that day, the city of Dresden hosted the national celebration of the anniversary of German unity, and it was hoped that the Dresden bid might attract nationwide attention. However, reports on protests by right-wingers dominated in the media. The local confrontations involving the anti-Islamic Pegida movement which occurred in Dresden were seen and analysed as striking examples of conflicts which are virulent in the

whole of Europe. The declared aim of Dresden’s application is not to extend the highly developed cultural infrastructure, but to use culture to depolarize the social fronts. This is mirrored in the motto “Neue Heimat Dresden 2025” (New home Dresden 2025), and in dialogue formats such as “Streitbar!”, which have attracted nationwide attention, at least in the cultural and literary sections of the media. The city of Dresden also initiated an open letter by German bidding cities, protesting against the exclusion because of Brexit of British candidate cities for 2023 (cf. Fuchs, 2017).

Gera

The city of Gera in Thuringia is the only candidate city from a federal state that has already hosted a European Capital of Culture, or rather European City of Culture. In 1999, Weimar as a symbol of German unity was successful against candidates such as Nuremberg (Mittag, 2008, pp. 73ff). Gera’s application is mainly driven by a private citizens’ initiative, the “Kernteam Gera2025” (Core team Gera2025). After the failure of an artistic initiative in August 2017, the activists took up an appeal from the city in which further inputs from the citizens were desired. At the end of September 2018, with assistance from the Free State of Thuringia, the city council agreed to support the application by a large majority. At the beginning of 2019, a professional cultural manager was recruited. Gera’s application focuses on the ongoing population decline, a golden past around the end of the 19th century, and the artistic and architectural testimonies from that period, and expresses the intention of making the local cultural life more visible. The image of the outsider is taken seriously in the city of Otto Dix.

Hanover

Hanover, the capital of Lower Saxony, is the candidate city with the second highest population after Dresden and before Nuremberg. The idea for the bid was born in 2014–15 during the preparation of the urban development concept “My Hanover 2030”, which was based on a status quo report by the city administration and an intensive city dialogue. Based on the positive results of a preliminary project phase, in which, among other things, a public participation campaign with the provocative slogan “Hannover hat nichts” (Hanover has nothing) was initiated, the city council unanimously approved the candidature in February 2018 in a cross-party petition. The designated overall theme was “Nachbarschaft” (neighbourship). Picking up Hanover’s remarkable kiosk landscape and its function in promoting

neighbourhood cohesion, a pop-up ECoC kiosk was created as a participatory instrument. In March 2019, the guiding theme of the application was sharpened to “HIER JETZT ALLE für Europa” (here now everybody for Europe). This slogan means that Hanover is a special and central place in Europe, where urgent social and ecological challenges can be discussed and responded to by an open European network. By the end of June 2019, the three components are to be further accentuated and combined with showcase projects. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the European Capitals of Culture, the ambitious goal is to establish a new phase of the ECoC programme in which cities strengthen Europe.

Hildesheim

Less than 30 kilometres from Hanover as the crow flies lies Hildesheim, another Lower Saxony candidate city. In Germany's second smallest major city, home of the World Heritage Sites Hildesheim Cathedral and St. Michael's Church, the initiative to bid was inspired by the celebrations surrounding the city's 1200th anniversary in 2015. Local stakeholders saw an opportunity to build on the positive dynamics of the jubilee and approached the city council. In April 2017, the council unanimously decided to prepare an application, and the approval of the district council followed in June. In the second half of the year, the project office started its work. Hildesheim's application is limited financially by a future contract between the indebted city and the State of Lower Saxony. The local population was involved by a photo competition on individual understandings of culture and public participation formats on future issues. The project office has used Hildesheim's potential as an important location for cultural studies and arts education in a reflective manner. To underline the joint application with the district and to highlight mobility as an important topic, the project office decided to visit all 17 other cities and communities by public transport. With the “Tour de Landkreis” (Tour de district), a relay lasting twenty hours and twenty-five minutes was organized, combining sport and culture. Only one rural municipality has refused to sign an intercommunal agreement on cultural cooperation.

Magdeburg

In Magdeburg, the regional capital of Saxony-Anhalt, the city council decided to apply as early as 2011, as it was assumed that Germany would host a European Capital of Culture in 2020. However, the decision was renewed in 2015. Magdeburg, self-proclaimed City of Otto since 2010 (referring to

Emperor Otto the Great, as well as the inventor and politician Otto von Guericke), was also the first candidate city to publish a conceptual framing of its application in January 2018, which resulted from the work of five thematic advisory committees. The guiding theme “Responsibility!” covers the key aspects “Lost and Found”, “Read and Rights—Magdeburg's humanistic heritage”, “Made in Magdeburg”, “Colours—Diversity”, and cross-sectional topics such as urban development, digitization and Magdeburg's relation to its rural surroundings. The dialogue with the eventful history of the repeatedly destroyed Magdeburg is thus complemented by a consideration of the structural change from heavy industry to science and technology, as well as putting social and ecological topics on the agenda. The further elaboration of these themes was conducted by monthly discussion committees on various focal points, the call for projects and participation under the heading “MACHEN!” (make), and a poll. The opening of the glass pavilion “KUBUS 2025” in April 2017 created a permanent contact point for interested people, as well as a place for the organization of public and internal events.

Nuremberg

Since the city of Kassel, which was interested in bidding, quit before the call for applications was published, Nuremberg, the biggest city and cultural and economic centre in northern Bavaria, is the only remaining city that had already applied for the title. In December 2016, a large majority of the city council voted in favour of the candidacy. In the following spring, the first evening events were initiated under the motto “Let's Talk”. Originally fed by seven themes (migration, digitization, remembrance, Europe, transformation of work, urban space, cultural history), which were dealt with at the workshop “Let's Think!” in November 2017, and in line with a large online and offline survey, Nuremberg's three guiding themes were announced in October 2018. With “embracing humanity—Menschlichkeit als Maß” (humanity as measure), the second largest city in the Free State of Bavaria focuses on dealing with Nuremberg's role in Nazism. The second topic, “exploring reality—Welt als Aufgabe” (world as task), relates to the spheres of work and knowledge, and more specifically toys, with reference to the great innovations in the city's history. Among other things, a House of Games is planned. Finally, with “evolving community—Miteinander als Ziel” (coming together as a goal), the diversity of the urban population is put on the agenda, with special attention being paid to the socio-cultural centres in the quarters created in Nuremberg from the 1960s onwards. Beside various discussion rounds, another focus was on visiting participation. The application office was present at festivities with a mobile micro office, and in Sep-

tember 2018, for the “Boulevard Babel” action day, a busy street in a diverse city district was closed to traffic for one day and used for cultural activities.

Zittau

Zittau, the third candidate from Saxony, with about 25,000 inhabitants, is by far the smallest German city in the race for the ECoC 2025. The core of Zittau’s application, however, is that the shrinking city is not bidding for itself alone, but for the three-country region of Upper Lusatia. Structural change, a negative population development and a lack of social optimism are not limited to the border town of Zittau, but are also virulent in the rest of the district of Görlitz, the neighbouring district of Bautzen, the Polish part of Upper Lusatia and the Liberec region in the Czech Republic. The fact that the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War falls in the European Capital of Culture year 2025 is also of great symbolic significance. Another argument is that European integration in the Euroregion of Neisse-Nisa-Nysa is not only a visionary goal, but part of everyday life in politics, public authorities and leisure activities. Due to overlaps in content, even at this early stage it was agreed to cooperate closely with the twin city of Nova Gorica in Slovenia, which is also applying for the ECoC title in 2025. Local lighthouse projects being discussed include the development of the industrial wasteland of the former VEB Robur-Werke Zittau, the Mandau barracks, and the construction of a foot and cycle bridge over the border triangle. Parallel to the European elections and local elections in Saxony, a referendum on Zittau’s application will be held in May 2019. From the participatory process, Zittau has already been given the self-designation “Kulturherzstadt” (city with a cultural heart).

This brief look at the eight candidate cities has clearly shown the versatility and patience with which the applications have been initiated and developed over the years. Whether the long duration of the preparation process is specific to the German applicants, or whether it reflects a general tendency in the ECoC competition, is certainly a point that is worth further examination. In the coming months, it may be possible to observe how successful high-profile events and small-scale project work are translated in the bid books and presentations. Finally, we will see whether the early launches will pay off, or whether late entrants will also have a chance in the race for the German ECoC in 2025.

It remains to be noted that this overview cannot grasp the complexity of the unique configurations of urban cultural policy in the cities presented here. We have not referred to the micro projects that have been implemented differently by, and in, many candidate cities, or local peculiarities such

as active citizens’ initiatives. We have also not discussed the series of constructive encounters which the applicants experienced, with conferences and workshops in the bidding cities of Dresden, Chemnitz and Magdeburg, as well as in Hildesheim and Berlin, initiated by the ECoC LAB and the Federal Cultural Foundation, which is organizing the selection process. While the latter point has been taken into account in this publication, the other points of interest must be postponed for future research.

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