

## CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP FOR AN OPEN AND DIVERSE CITY



### AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



### CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
2. HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY
3. CULTURE AND EDUCATION
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
7. CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC SPACE

**CULTURAL , SOCIAL, EMPOWERMENT, WELLBEING,  
CARE, CITIZENSHIP, NETWORK, CULTURAL RIGHTS,  
PUBLIC SPACE, COMMON GOOD**



## 1. Matera and culture

Matera is a city in the South of Italy with 62.000 inhabitants. It has a compelling story of reversals over the last 60 years: from being the “Shame of Italy”, declared in the 50’s due to the poor living conditions of the inhabitants overcrowding the rock-cut neighbourhoods, to one of the first Italian cities in 1993 to enter the “World Heritage List” because of the perfect adaptation of its vernacular architecture to its geomorphological ecosystem. Yet, before launching the programme of “cultural citizenship” with the bid to the title of European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2014, the city faced a number of challenges: the citizens of Matera were not yet aware of the peculiar value of its heritage and lacked trust in their capacity to transform the city. In addition, like many small-medium sized cities, Matera imported culture delivered mostly in big cities.

The “cultural citizenship” challenge launched with the ECoC bid was to prove that also small cities can produce culture by adopting a horizontal and participatory model, based on a growing mobilisation of citizens, in a region marked by a low cultural participation.

The cultural citizenship programme covered all the process conducting to the year of ECoC (2012-2019) and was led by the city of Matera along with the most important institutions regionally-wide through the Foundation Matera Basilicata 2019. Its priorities and methods are part of the ongoing development policies of the city of Matera that puts their emphasis on openness, accessibility, integration and cultural citizenship.

**THE OBJECTIVE IS TO ENSURE A BROAD ACCESS TO CULTURE TO  
ENCOURAGE AN ETHOS WHEREBY CITIZENS CAN BECOME SHAPERS,  
MAKERS AND CO-CREATORS OF THEIR EVOLVING CITY.**



## 2. Objectives and implementation of the project

### 2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The primary objective is to promote cultural citizenship, ensuring a broad access to culture to “encourage an ethos whereby citizens can become shapers, makers and co-creators of their evolving city”. The programme placed emphasis on the active role that citizens can play contributing to change and rethink the city. In this sense, Matera adopts the open culture model stemmed from the open-source movement, based on the principle of sharing, peering, openness that can generate new forms of culture.

Specific objectives are:

- » Promoting the “right to the city”, as “the right to take part in the change of the city” by fostering participative practices;
- » Ensuring cultural rights by stripping away barriers to access culture and civic participation, especially for people socially and culturally excluded;
- » Enhancing well-being and empowerment at individual and collective level;
- » Promoting a new model of cultural production based on co-creation and participative practices and strengthening the local cultural scene.

### 2.2. Development of the project

The involvement of the largest number of citizens is the embedded objective of this programme, with a focus on minorities and vulnerable people (i.e. people living in the peripheries, migrants, Neets, fragile women, people with diverse abilities, LGBTQ+). The main actions of the ECoC process were developed according the following strategic lines with a crucial role played by the local cultural scene:



- » Co-creation and community engagement: over 57.000 citizens took an active part in the creative or cultural production process, like for example those who co-wrote the libretto and music and codesigned the sets and costumes of a lyrical opera (Silent city-produced by l'Albero);
- » Diversity as the method: activities were brought to the places where people live or work: hospital, jail, senior residences, calls centres, schools, factories, social houses, peripheral commercial centres, abandoned gardens or rural villages, etc. The aim was to encourage people with different stories, abilities, skills, origins, ages to interact and to intermingle. For instance, migrants whose invisible skills were unveiled through "haute couture" workshops with local tailors (Silent Academy led by il Sicomoro). Another example is given by the Museum of Matera, which brought art conservators and 18th century paintings to social houses, teaching residents (many of whom had never entered a museum) restoration techniques. Participants also opened their houses to their neighbours for this activity;
- » The right to the city: people were encouraged to take part in the local transformative process and to build public spaces and commons. The activity of the Open Design School (a research, design and production factory embedded in the city where all learn and teach) was crucial to collectively map 400 underused venues that could be turned into public spaces; or to design a festival during the pandemic exploring new rituals to be closely together in spite of the distance. Equally, through artistic interventions, citizens were invited to build commons, as for instance transforming public abandoned areas into community gardens (Gardentopia).

After the year of the European Capital in 2019, the values and methods of the ECoC programme have cross-fertilized a number of policies conducted by the city of Matera evolving along the same threads:

- » Access to culture and community engagement: the Urban regeneration Strategy ("Abitare Culture") gives centrality to the investment on culture stressing its close relationship with social well-being and urban sustainability and planning to amplify the provision of cultural and social infrastructures in its peripheral areas.



- » Creative placemaking: as for instance, in mobilising local inhabitants in the placemaking process of a neglected neighbour of Matera (Agnà) through workshops and ethnographic walks. This process involved public and private organisations from health, welfare, culture and education sectors, and led to the definition of a programme aimed to transform the neighbour in a hub specialized in culture and health.
- » Peer-to-peer networking as the method to face complex social issues, like for instance the inclusion and empowerment of Neets (Not in education, employment and training youth) or the fight against gender-based violence. Rete donna (Women Net) has been created to sustain a permanent education and awareness campaign against gender-based violence and discrimination. The ratio is to create a peer-to-peer network bringing together institutional partners (like police, judges, schools) and informal partners (like doctors, lawyers, activists, charity organization). Likewise, to approach and engage the Neets, a large network has been built, including barbers, bars, commercial centres alongside schools and emphasis has been placed on informal training, street education, theatre and games. In this citizens-engagement process, the alliance with grass-root organisations, informal group of citizens and institutions is of paramount importance.

**THE STRATEGIC LINES WERE: CO-CREATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, DIVERSITY AS A METHOD, AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY.**

## 3. Impacts

### 3.1. Direct impacts

After the year of ECoC, the programme engendered some heritage communities: an example is represented by the ECoC volunteers that founded a legacy association to promote cultural citizenship, considered as a precious heritage to preserve.



Evaluation studies give evidence of a considerable impact of the ECOC programme on the population. A survey conducted at the end of the ECoC year (Datacontact 2020) show that a high percentage of the interviewees affirms to be prouder, more open towards people with different abilities and willing to be engaged in civic activities. A research conducted in 2022 ("Co-creating Matera") showed how the impact of culture in increasing the level of well-being, in close relationship with welfare and cognitive growth, was significant. Co-creation and active participation practices had positive effects in terms of increased confidence, improvement of their skills, greater ability to collaborate and understand others. Another study showed that the impact of culture in increasing the level of well-being was particularly evident in the low-income citizens, highlighting the positive impact on cultural divide ("Investigating the audience", 2021).

### 3.2. Evaluation

All the results of the robust monitoring and evaluation work are visible on [www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/report-2019.html](http://www.matera-basilicata2019.it/en/report-2019.html).

A monitoring report also offers a detailed outline of the main deliverables and results yielded by the ECoC programme. It is complemented by the Open data platform. The datasets in open format are thus transformed into digital commons that can engender new information and practices for the local, national and international communities of analysts, data journalists and policy-makers, consistently with the open-culture approach.

### 3.3. Key factors

Key success factors are:


- Creating a safe and transparent context that encourages trust and participation;
- Bringing culture and participation where most of the people live and work;

- Weaving alliances not only with institutions but also with informal groups, grass-root organisations and the cultural scene;
- Breaking some rules: there is no substitute for experience and collective intelligence for community cohesion and city progress.

### 3.4. Continuity

Matera has been delivering public policies in close continuity with the ECoC program. The values and methods of Matera 2019 program have cross-fertilized policies concerning different sectors, such as social inclusion, gender equality, urban planning, commons, cultural policy.

The key success factors above listed could be scaled in other small-medium sized cities that would like to invest on cultural production or in other cities where scepticism and lack of self-confidence is widely diffused.



**THE MUSEUM OF MATERA BROUGHT 18TH-CENTURY PAINTINGS AND CONSERVATORS TO SOCIAL HOUSES OF MATERA, TEACHING RESIDENTS RESTORATION TECHNIQUES, AND TURNING THEIR HOMES INTO SHOWCASES FOR THE ART.**

## 4. More information

Matera was a candidate for the sixth 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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