

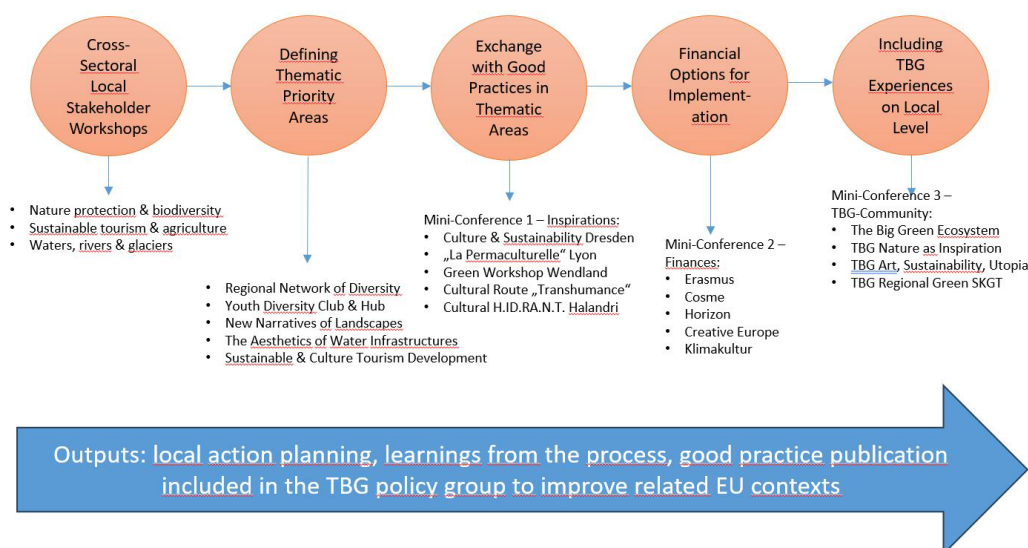
# With Culture for Ecological Change in European Regions

**Lessons learned from the European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl-Salzkammergut 2024 local implementation activities in the framework of the THE BIG GREEN (TBG) project.**

The European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl – Salzkammergut 2024 encouraged the ecological transformation by the means of art and culture with a considerable range of different actions. These included for example the “[Open Water Dialogues](#)” - a Water Culture Conference as well as the “[Gravity and Growth](#)” project which deepened reflexions on biodiversity.

The activities targeted in the framework of the Creative Europe project “[THE BIG GREEN \(TBG\)](#)” – in which the European Capital of Culture is a project partner - are more strategic. By the means of specific stakeholder processes, networking, training and action planning, a range of longer-term initiatives for ecological change were co-developed. These are aimed to feed the legacy plans of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) in the Salzkammergut region.

## THE BIG GREEN (TBG) IN SALZKAMMERGUT



The implementation of the THE BIG GREEN (TBG) project started in 2023. In the Salzkammergut, a range of cross-sectoral stakeholder workshops involving representatives from art, culture, biodiversity, sustainable tourism, agriculture, and water were the starting point for the common definition of thematic priorities and action planning. The process was enriched with substantial insights to international good practice examples and exchange in the field of ecological transformation by and with culture. Final exchanges on financial options allowed for further detailing the action planning for 2025 onward.

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## Main conclusions and lessons learned

### The regional context matters!

A European Capital of Culture (ECOC) remains – in most cases – a temporary project. Many of the implementation organisations are arm-length bodies neither being directly part of a public administration nor a typical cultural stakeholder. While it is difficult in such a framework to come up with binding regional strategies, most ECOC structures are ideally placed to bring forward debates on new culture topics. Due to the European dimension of a European Capital of Culture the often-missing links between local stakeholders and European projects and research can be strategically bridged. Furthermore, an ECOC disposes of staff to ensure local coordination and networking.

### Culture and ecology are transversal concepts, difficult to grasp!

Culture-based regional development is a concept going beyond the “usual” perceptions of culture by large parts of decision-makers and populations. By addressing local challenges and opportunities with culture, it is much more than attending events. The green transformation is also a transversal concept. It impacts societies and economies as a whole. Therefore, aiming at contributing to ecological transformation and climate change mitigation by the means of culture (regional) development is a complex endeavour. Targeted and lasting communication efforts are needed to support citizens and politicians to understand the opportunities of cross-sectoral green culture approaches.

### The cultural dimension of change is a missing link for ecological transformation – also on regional level!

The topic of climate change has become a frictional topic due to party-political debates and related polarisation in the society. Despite this challenging framework, the ecological transformation requires substantial cultural and behavioural changes in the societies, economies and on individual level. The cultural and creative sectors have the important potential to address the emotional side of change and to investigate a range of future options in safe interaction spaces. Many also local stakeholders like company owners, councillors in municipalities or individuals have difficulties to cope with the cultural dimension of change. These facts require a longer-term engagement and mediation with the means of art and culture.

## Recommendations for culture and green transformation stakeholders

Based on the process and actions implemented between 2023 and 2025 with the stakeholders from the Salzkammergut region, we recommend to consider the following areas of attention:

- Include participative planning, international exchange of information, access to funding options as well as common evaluation for local green culture action planning.
- Analyse the local/regional contexts before starting a green culture development action, understand related dynamics and build on realistic objectives as well as on local thematic niches (e. g. water resources, micro-agriculture, building cultures).

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- Allow for broad brainstorming with long-term perspectives while complementing these debates with concrete short- to middle-term targets so that stakeholders continue to believe in the feasibility
- Include intermediaries and stakeholders from the fields of culture AND ecology as a cross-sectoral approach is crucial for the successful implementation of green culture programmes.
- Beyond cross-sectoral, important stakeholders to be involved, can be from the private (e. g. companies with green products, corporate social responsibility departments) and from the public field (e. g. local councillors in municipalities).
- Keep in mind the operational capacities of these stakeholders. In local contexts, resources to engage might be scarce. Intermediaries might be able to work more. EU projects might provide the necessary additional resources.
- Demonstrate innovative cross-sectoral pathways with key stakeholders in the regional or local context together with cultural stakeholders by the means of e. g. common pilot actions.
- Invest in the establishment of temporary and lasting local networks involving the culture and green sectors. Ideal is the long-term financing of a regional networking, a rural think tank or local coordinating structure.
- Ensure that regular European and international exchange enriches local debates and provides insights in desirable and feasible pathways for local green culture initiatives. These exchanges are also an excellent opportunity for peer reviews.
- Use European funding in order to bring forward these agendas. But understand that to reach this objective many local stakeholders require technical support and backing to cope with related (perceived) risks.
- Understand that European funding is not only an opportunity to have access to finances, but an important tool to have access to innovation, information, and to networks. This applies specifically for EU programmes like Creative Europe and Horizon Europe.
- Communication and dissemination of good practices at the intersection of art, culture and ecology are crucial. Local stakeholders and decision-makers learn best from these practices. Exchanges with good practice owners also translate strategic frameworks into concrete local anchor points (from theory to practice).
- Unicorns in the field of culture and ecology can be found on local as well as on international level. Both have difficulties to be visible. A communication plan is a good investment. It should include the commoning of information to large target groups in the region.
- A common engagement across municipalities provides the opportunity for considerable synergies (e. g. sharing of costs) and for enhanced reputation (e. g. to be known as a green culture model region on the EU level). Regions can learn from each other e. g. by inviting mayors of Green Capitals.

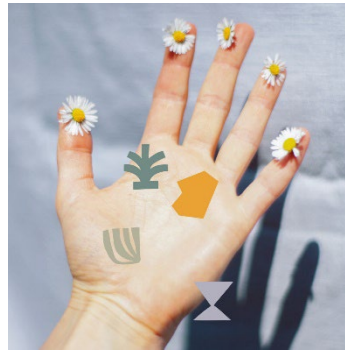
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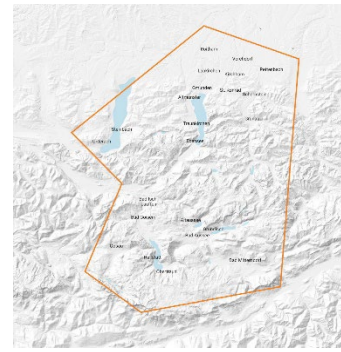
Impressions from green culture programmes during the European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024:



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Region of the ECoC

## Special recommendations for European Capital of Culture (ECoC) implementation teams

### **Integrate a green culture strand in the art and culture programme of European Capitals of Culture.**

Such an initiative is not an outdated approach. Climate change (adaptation) will require the engagement of all - still for many years to come. Local and international (culture) stakeholders including artists are relevant contributors to this huge endeavour. You can for example refer to the Salzkammergut 2024 programme strand [Globalocal - Building the New](#) for further inspiration.

### **Ensure that a team member at the ECoC organisation is in charge of the topic of green culture.**

Settings anchoring topics with faces provide a clear message internally but also related to project promoters cooperating with a European Capital of Culture team. Furthermore, it allows European Capitals of Culture for leading by example (e. g. local green transport, green public procurement, etc.).

### **Understand the substantial power of funding providers for accelerated greening of practices.**

The European Capitals of Culture with their comprehensive artistic and cultural programmes, their calls for project proposals as well as their residency programmes, have it in their hands to go forward with green implementation settings (e. g. additional funding for green artistic mobility, expert support for sustainability concepts and strategies).

## Want to know more? – Contact us!

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The [THE BIG GREEN project in the European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024](#).

The [THE BIG GREEN project website](#).

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