Pécs2010: borderless culture?

Descrizione

“The Borderless City” is the official slogan chosen for the 2010 event in Pécs. The history of this city in the Southern Trans-Danubian region gives an account of its real borders. In more than 2000 years of history, the city established relations in most of the countries in Central Europe and in the Balkan region, as well as in Turkey. The history of Pécs lays on a substrate of different cultures and civilizations. Celts and Illiryans lived in this territory, followed by the Romans when Pécs, since the IIIrd century to the late IVth century BC. The Avarian, the Slavic, the Carolingian Empire and, finally, the Ottoman have influenced many places and monumental buildings in the city.

The actual urban form was defined in the XVIII century, after the end of the Turkish domination. In particular, it has been designed through a deep urban reorganization led by the Roman-catholic bishops who governed the city until 1780. The reopening of the oldest university in Eastern Europe, founded in 1367(1), was also attempted in this period. The history of this institution and the particular urban form have made of Pécs one of the favourite university centres of the whole country. Nowadays, Pécs is the fifth largest city in Hungary and the administrative and economic center in Baranya. Located between Western Europe and the Balkans, it has become a city without cultural boundaries, developing during its history the capacity to integrate people from Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Germany and Turkey. This overlap of culture and people is visible today in the city’s cultural heritage, with the early Christian Roman, the Medieval, Classicist, the middle-class culture of the second half of the 19th century and the modern art of the 20th century: five phases as suggested by the same name of the city(2).

The main point of the candidacy report for Pécs 2010 essentially concerns its different souls and its capacity of linking them. Thanks to the rich Ottoman heritage and the traditional relations with the Balkan area, Pécs is a potential gateway between the two souls of Europe. According to this, the city might be the first capital of multiculturalism. In the phase of candidacy, much attention was placed on the chance of organizing events and cultural experiences along the Eastern border of Europe. This

topic is one of the elements of the candidacy programme and it specially concerns the objective “Pécs: a gateway to the Balkans”.

“Pécs within the European network of culture” is another element of the programme. It focuses on the history of the city and its population as well, but here, much attention has been paid both to the particular relation that the city has established with the German candidate (Essen) and to the natural attitude to cooperate for the 2010 cultural programme. With reference to the candidacy document, this element is also justified by the physical connection offered by the River Danube. In order to promote the effective work of the German-Hungarian tandem, the Management Centre of Pécs2010 has previewed the creation of joint offices with the German partner city.

“Pécs as a city of cultural heritage and innovation” is the theme linked with the UNESCO’s World Heritage Site(3). In this case, Pécs is presented as a city characterized by a strong attitude towards artistic innovation. Also through the ECOC event, the aim is to position the city within that network of cities where cultural industry and cultural development are the basis for urban and social development.

On occasion of the ECOC 2010 programme, Pécs has striven to obtain decentralized levels of governance from the national government and the capital city Budapest. It is our belief that this fourth element, “Pécs: the regionalism city”, is the focal point of the Pécs 2010 objectives. The question is how the cultural field can contribute to define a suitable way of decentralization and governance. This path could be a valid example for other realities both in Hungary and abroad. Nevertheless, according to the official documents of candidacy, the key message of Pécs 2010 is another one: the deep connection between Pécs and its territory and the Balkans area. In a moment in which the borders of Europe are moving towards the Southern and the Eastern countries(4), the chance of having an ECOC looking at those countries and proposing a cultural offer linked to their tradition seems the main justification for Pécs to be an ECOC(5).

The management structure of Pécs 2010 project is on two levels: a political (strategic) one, involving social partners, sponsors and advisors, and a management (operational) one, that is responsible for implementing and co-ordinating specific tasks. A clear division of labour and co-operation between these two levels and the transparency of the structure are crucial to the success of the entire project. The

management structure established by Pécs has followed this model even in the application phase.

When it was originally established, ample attention was given to the management models of previous ECOC, the evaluation contained in the Robert Palmer Report and the applications of cities that have won the title in recent years. Despite this, the Organizing Committee has not managed to successfully follow the Palmer Report instructions as some difficulties has come out very soon. Accidents, tensions, resignations, loss of confidence, delays in investment projects and insufficient funds from sponsors have contributed to creating a negative public image of the programme.

The first problem was that two different organisations were established to manage the budget of ECOC, which resulted in a lack of clarity over the responsibility for artistic direction. The responsibility for allocating funding tended to remain with the public authorities and the managing agency enjoyed only a limited degree of autonomy. Secondly, the selection of an Artistic Director and the leadership of the development of the cultural programme proved to be challenging. Moreover, there was also high leadership turnover as well as changes in the institutional set-up. All these difficulties were compounded by changes at the political level in Pécs during the development phase.

In addition to this local complexity, separate structures were also set-up at national level including a Project Steering Committee and an Inter-Ministerial Committee. As a result, the decision-making process was complicated and lengthy and the governance arrangements became settled only at the end of 2008, when, finally, the attention could be turned to the development of the cultural programme. However, by this stage it was already too late to mobilize many cultural operators and realise some of the original project ideas. In order to cover the total cost of the event and its associated infrastructure works, the city was forced to adopt some unusual financing strategies for the ECOC programme: it sold certain properties in the municipality for a sum of 19 million euros. Finally, it had to negotiate a loan to cover the remaining cost. With these premises, it was hard to reach the year of designation with a defined and structured program.

The interventions for Pécs 2010 can be divided into three linked macro-areas concerning the social, cultural and urban fields. With regards to the social dimension, beside searching for a high level of cohesion and integration during 2010 and beyond, the aim is to promote participation. Through the Ambassadors program (already successfully experimented in Lille 2004) citizens are part of both the organizational process and the management of the events. This creates a sense of belonging that positively influences the success of the initiatives. The involvement of the civil society and the constant collaboration with the local population, associations and firms is a task to be accomplished.

Despite the above challenges, the cultural programme of Pécs 2010 has been far more extensive than the cultural offerings of the city in previous years. According to the Ex-Post Evaluation Final Report “in total, 650 projects were supported involving 4,675 different cultural events during the title year, as well as 360 projects during the preparatory years 2007-09. The programme included projects that attracted a mass audience, such as the opening and closing ceremonies that attracted 18,000 people, as well as more innovative and avant-garde events. Some projects were delivered by non-governmental organisations and specifically targeted local communities especially deprived areas, members of minority groups, and disadvantaged people. Overall, the cultural programme provided the opportunity for local cultural operators to implement more and bigger projects than in previous years. It also supported projects that commissioned new art works, as well as a new international arts prize. The cultural programme also incorporated a European dimension in two main ways: it featured co-operation projects with other Balkan countries with the aim of establishing a transnational cultural region – the “Southern Cultural Zone”; it featured co-operation with the other cities hosting the ECoC title: 18 projects with Essen for the Ruhr, 20 projects with Istanbul and 12 projects with both.”(6)

Referring to urban interventions, Pécs 2010 has realized a series of significant requalification that have enriched the infrastructural elements of the city. Among the main interventions(7):

– The Conference and Concert Centre: the aim is to establish an internationally significant, acoustically designed multifunctional building with modern technology that operates as a concert hall and a conference centre.

– The Zsolnay Cultural Quarter: one of the most prominent investment projects of the European Capital of Culture programme with a total ground floor space of some

41 thousand square metres on the premises of the old Zsolnay Factory. The factory that is currently in operation on the site will move to the eastern blocks, making room for a cultural and artistic area that will not only be a new patch of colour on the palette of the city but moreover, the residents of Pécs will benefit from a novel relaxation and recreation facility.

– The Grand Exhibition Space – Museum Street. The project brief included a full refurbishment of the building with new sevices, contemporary technical equipment and renovations of the museum gardens.

– The South Transdanubian Regional Library and Knowledge Centre. A modern regional library and knowledge centre providing information and documents for the people of the region and the city at European standards and host community, cultural and leisure programmes as well.

– The Revival of public spaces and parks. The central component of this project is to give public spaces a new community and cultural function that can facilitate growth in international and domestic tourism and can also host several outdoor cultural events in the 2010 cultural season.



Fig.1: The Kodály Concert and Conference Center



Fig.2: The Zsolnay Cultural Quarter

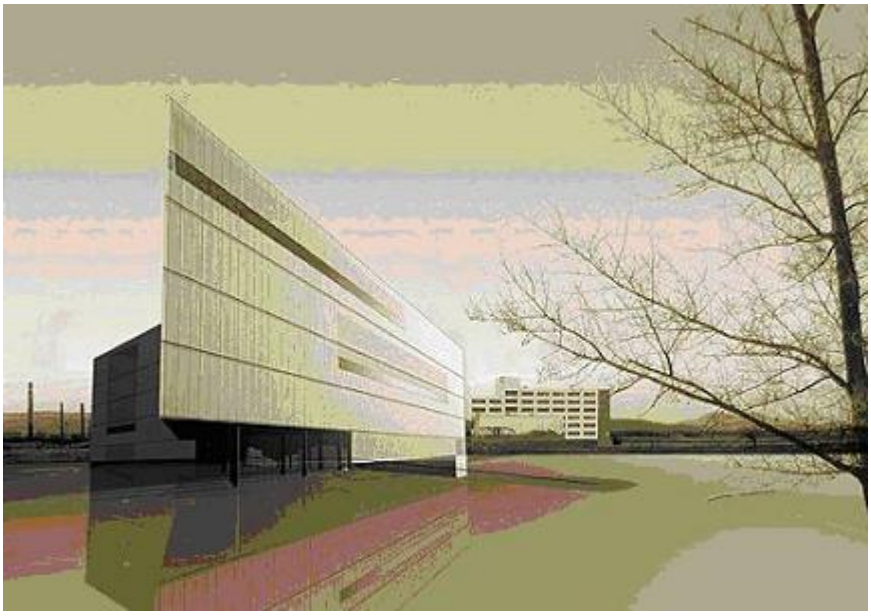


Fig.3: The South Transdanubian Regional Library and Knowledge Centre

What has been said seems to coincide with the outlined objectives within a national plan called Competitiveness Pole Programme. Again, the basic elements of the urban development strategy of Pécs are based on a strong local governance, on the cooperation between the university and the institutions, on the development of its

own creative industry, on the increasing employment of skilled young people, and on the increasing access to culture to all its residents. All this allows, on the one hand, to raise the cultural level of the population and, on the other hand, to expand the tourist target. The final goal is to increase the overall quality of life. The structural interventions undertaken during the years of the ECOC event highlights the importance of integrating the results of research to the economic life and to regional and trans-regional cooperation.

The strategic vision presents Pécs as a regional and trans-regional center for innovation, based on local development. Not surprisingly, an interesting project, the Competitiveness Pole Programme(8) (promoted by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Pécs-Baranyai and by the Enterprise Europe Network) places Pécs and its region as a pole of quality of life within a national network of five poles(9) besides the capital city Budapest.

The opportunities for regional growth could be identified through the analysis and restructuring of the internal factors, as well as balancing these findings against the vision of the future economy of Europe. The program also presents the main goals to achieve an adequate level of governance and political and administrative decentralization, as stated in the objectives of Pécs 2010. However, the strategic aim is to embrace community and entrepreneurial development processes and channel these into an integrated system bearing the following in mind:

– measures must be taken based on the strength of the city and its surroundings;
– the existing natural, technical, technological, infrastructural, and intellectual capacities must be utilised in an integrated way;
– developments must be based on all stakeholders: SMEs, educational, cultural and research institutions, authorities, NGOs, and local initiatives;
– a development process co-financed by the European Community, national, local, and private resources and grants must be launched, resulting in a new, attractive and innovative supply in the city and its environment, addressing and achieving international scope and visibility.

The last point suggests that the ECOC program is fully embedded in national strategies and should be one of the key moments of growth for the Pécs region. The identified aims can be delivered in three flexible and still emerging industries which also bear a standard profile: the health industry; the environment industry; the culture

industry(10).

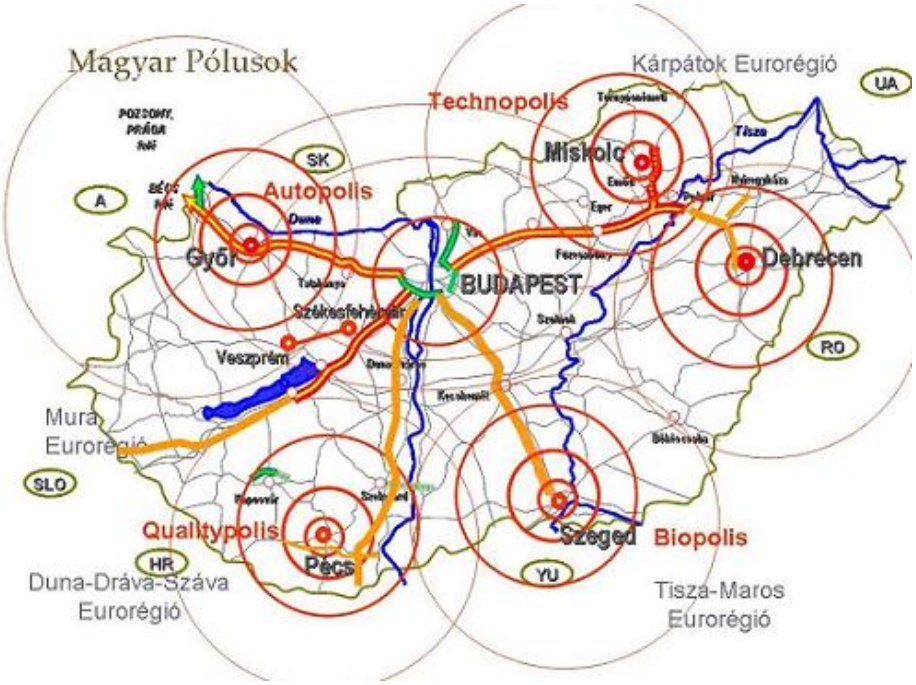


Fig. 4 – The Competitiveness Pole Programme

It is possible to point out some reflections concerning the approach adopted for implementing the ECOC program. We can notice a certain degree of coherence between the strategic vision and the actions and projects for Pécs 2010. The whole urban area at the regional scale asks for a development pattern founded on the knowledge economy, and the Competitiveness Pole Programme seems a framework for the adopted actions.

The effort of shifting the whole economic and social system towards a cultural-based approach in which innovation is led by culture and knowledge can find in Pécs a good example, but it is too early to establish how much the ECOC programme can positively influence the Quality-polis process.

It seems evident how, in order to pursue this aim, the ECOC is a moment within a process; a moment for reflecting on the role of the city and the potential of the whole

urban area, both from a point of view of citizen empowerment and considering the relations of cooperation that can be established at the international level.

If we look at the first point, the university and the different research centres can play a fundamental role; if we consider the second point, the city's geographical position can influence positively its development through the relations with the regions mentioned in the ECOC program. It seems evident moreover how the ECOC program is contributing to create a certain level of governance, that was among the objectives, thanks to an autonomous management from the central government. What is missing is perhaps a greater attention to the different degrees of citizen participation before the implementation of the program.

The legacy of Pécs 2010 is strongly linked to the new and improved cultural infrastructure which has the potential to increase the quantity and the quality of the city's cultural offer in the long-term. Whilst some of the cultural projects initiated in 2010 are set to continue, there is a shortage of funding opportunities, particular for smaller cultural operators. In the absence of an overall plan for ECoC legacy projects, the sustainability of cultural projects depends very much on the success of individual bodies in securing funding.

The legacy of 2010 also includes the experience gained by cultural operators and stakeholders across the city. Many individuals involved in the ECOC remain employed within the city's cultural sector and many of the partner organisations and cultural operators are more engaged than previously in the civic life of the city. The development of the city's cultural sector remains a high political priority at local level and there is a strong support for a city development strategy based on culture. However, the new cultural strategy for the city as well as the financial support for that strategy (and the projects therein) remain yet to be confirmed.

Notes

(1) The University of Pécs is the first in Hungary and the fourth oldest one in the territory of the Holy Roman Empire.
(2) The name Pécs means 'five'; it is translated in Italians as Cinquechiese (*Sopianae* or *Quinque* Ecclesiae in Latin).

(3) It is a world heritage site since 2000.
(4) At the moment of its candidacy there was a debate upon the admission into the European Union of Croatia and Turkey, that have had a dominant role in the history of Pécs (the connection with Croatia in the cultural field are witnessed by the presence in Pécs of a Croatian theatre and a school).
(5) In fact, in the designation document, we read: "*Pécs emphasised the cultural links it proposed to develop with the neighbouring countries, especially in the Balkans*".
(6) Ecorys, (2011) "Ex-Post Evaluation of 2010 European Capitals of Culture. Final report for the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture", Ecorys UK Ltd www.uk.ecorys.com.
(7) What follows is taken from www.pécs2010.hu.
(8) The Competitiveness Pole Programme can be defined as an approach to spatial economic development, evolving at the crossroads of several dominant domestic and international tendencies and including the following features: a significant thematic change in the field of economic competitiveness in the context of European and global markets: what we can see is a shift away from minimalizing costs through the cheap production of products and services to maximizing revenues through a knowledge-based economy, focusing on the application, and at a more advanced level, the production of knowledge; changes in the structures of economic development; high value-added products representing knowledge and intangible values conquering the markets; innovative economic development; the increasingly significant role of urban areas both in economic and general spatial development; polycentric spatial models; the demand for a well-established regional economic cohesion; the enhancement of linkages between town centres and their surrounding areas; the diffused organization of the economy is replaced by integrated networks, clusters, co-operations, and partnerships. The economic performance of the South Trans-Danubian Region in previous years was identified at the breaking-point of the tendencies pointing out the disparities between the Hungarian regions. The region was more and more moving away from being seen as a dynamic area and fell into the category of regions lagging behind. http://www.pecseconomy.eu/strategy-for-economic-development-pecs-development-pole
(9) Beside Pécs, Qualitypolis concerns Gyor, Autopolis; Miskolo, Technopolis; Debrecen; Szeged, Biopolis. http://www.pecseconomy.eu/strategy-for-economic-development-pecs-development-pole.
(10) http://www.pecseconomy.eu

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