

# Workshop: Veliko Tarnovo - European Capital of Culture 2019

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**Abstract.** The proposed event is part of the initiatives promoting Veliko Tarnovo city as a future candidate for European capital of culture for 2019. The workshop is part of the Third international conference on "Digital Presentation and Preservation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage" - DiPP2013, which is under the patronage of UNESCO.

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## 1 Veliko Tarnovo City

Veliko Tarnovo is situated in North Central Bulgaria and it is an administrative centre of the Veliko Tarnovo Region. The population is about 80,000 inhabitants. The Region incorporates a great variety of natural beauty, fauna and flora and a rich cultural history dating back over thousands of years.

They call Veliko Tarnovo “*the Soul of Bulgaria, the Spirit of Europe*”. It is a city – phenomenon. Here each step measured eternity - overlapping historical layers of Pre-history, Antiquity, Middle Ages and Renaissance. High cultural value is complemented by intricate exchange of influences as a crossroads between East and West. The city is an unique symbiosis between architecture and nature. Over the centuries the city has been one of the three main centres of Christianity in Bulgaria. It is known as the Third Rome in the XIV century based on preeminent cultural influence in the Balkans and the Slavic Orthodox world. Generously endowed with cultural sites and artifacts the city ranks among the 10th famous Bulgarian town-museums.

Deeply rooted in the past, bearing essential features of European cultural history the modern city is driving the creative energy of Bulgaria forward.

Nearly 20,000 students and the local young people convert the ancient Turnovgrad into a living, open and innovative place.

Within the framework of united Europe the importance of the city and the region will increase. Besides its historical richness the modern city attracts substantial interest and attention with its growing potential as national and international center for contemporary art and culture. This is the road the city is undergoing with an ambition.

Veliko Tarnovo is natural engine in the region for the development of existing and new contacts, to offer a region oriented cultural events and programs, to initiate debates, cultural exchange and introduce innovative practices.

The North Central Bulgarian region is characterized by high level of youth unemployment, migration and low level of development. Though culture is communicated as a strategic development and added value factor at policy level there is still lack of vision encompassing the complex processes ranging from creative and innovative thinking cultivation to urban transformation. Working in close relation with the Region and beyond the city of Veliko Tarnovo wishes to prove that creativity matters and that it could accelerate from the perspective of each specific cultural and socio-economic context, contributing with new approaches. The main goal of the city is to promote the cause of creativity as a cross-sectoral phenomenon, in all its forms, and as a driver for social innovation and economic growth with changing the society through culture being the ultimate goal.

## **2 The Concept of Veliko Tarnovo Candidate for European Capital of Culture**

The concept of Veliko Tarnovo candidate for European capital of culture is highly based on the integration with the region. This is a prerequisite for the expansion of the social community, civic spirit and the transformation of the city as a centre of artistic encounter, cultural exchange and infrastructural services for the surrounding region. This will give a competitive advantage to the application as it envisages no barriers in terms of participation and engagement, education, training opportunities, work experience, financial support and access to information and professional networks within the region and beyond.

The partnership with the region and the surrounding territories will be based on creative experience with the aims to perform a collective “a learning by doing” exercise. Creativity is not a privilege only of artists. Creativity is a universal aptitude, found in people of all ages and all professions and occupations. But lead by artists this could be a powerful tool for community and personal change. The approach will reach a wide audience, participants and popularity. It is an opportunity for valuable and memorable personal learning; facilitates the making of valuable connections; experience, knowledge and skills from different fields influence and nourish each other; brings happiness and appreciation of creative thinking and work. Series of creative interventions, workshops within another events (concerts, city festivals, summer campus etc.), are defended to be a very accurate strategy for small and medium areas with lack of budget. It’s an opportunity to connect small settlements even with global flows, while taking into account that a certain and continued support from some local institutions is always needed to success. All this initiatives will measure and experience the correlation between culture-based creativity and personal happiness which proposes non-conventional, both practical and metaphorical way to follow concept aims.

In parallel, the city and the region will increase their role as promoters of national, European and international cultural diversity and artistic excellence.

The European capital of culture initiative is a golden opportunity for Veliko Tarnovo and the region, in an active and competitive environment, to show off its

cultural richness and solidarity and to develop and implement a modern, long-term and sustainable cultural strategy that will benefit both the city and the region for the future. The strong wish behind Veliko Tarnovo application for the title is to bring back the lost feeling of togetherness and happiness.

### **3 Veliko Tarnovo Concept “Together we Create Happiness”**

The ongoing economic crisis has seriously challenged the way we understand and measure economic growth. A fairly recent measure of progress has been the Happy Planet Index (HPI). It points the way towards integral and sustainable wellbeing for all. The third global HPI report reveals that this is largely still an unhappy planet – with both high and low-income countries facing many challenges on their way to meeting this same overall Goal (The Happy Planet Index: 2012 Report). Bulgaria ranks 123rd among 151 countries included in the latest ranking of the British Institute “New Economic Foundation”, which for several years publishes “happiness index”. Bulgarians claim to be among the unhappy people on the Planet! Even more according to the recent study of the Germany’s Bertelsmann foundation on solidarity Bulgaria is at the bottom of the list. And social cohesion is important for shaping the future and “more solidarity means rise in subjective well-being”.

In the 1970s the King of Bhutan coined the term Gross National Happiness. It implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of wellbeing. The Happy Planet Index (resent measure of progress) points the way towards integral and sustainable wellbeing for all. In 2013 the Office of the UK National Statistics (ONS) has added for the first time, arts and culture to its survey “Measuring National Well-being”. It is recognition of the important role that arts and culture play in well-being. We create Happiness is a concept about how to reconnect arts, culture, heritage and wellbeing as a strategic and exploratory resource for personal and community development. It is Veliko Tarnovo’s burning desire to make a mark by contributing to the world positive changes and to benefit present and future generations. The originality lies in how to reconnect art, culture, creativity, health, joy, being-well, balanced- with human -society, culture, values-, humility (bottom-up perspective, honesty) and territory, process, life cycle thinking- as a strategic and exploratory resource for local development. The concept proposes inter-disciplinary, cross-sectoral cooperation between scientists, anthropologists, artists and cultural workers to highlight the role of arts and creativity in particular towards social cohesion and wellbeing.

The program is envisaged as a world-wide celebration of arts and culture enabling:

- cities to be increasingly experienced and enjoyed by citizens of the world;
- the Generative power of the residents, stakeholders, led by their own passion, business, and capacity;
- the crisis to seed an opportunity;
- making the world a better place for us our children and future generations.

The concept is not a mere collection of happy stories but is a rewarding process of protecting and strengthening the moral fibre of our societies.