

## Graz - The application

In 1998, having only recently acceded to the EU, Austria was given the opportunity to nominate one of its cities as a candidate for the "Cultural Capital of Europe". At that point, the Austrian government had already nominated Graz for the title of "Cultural Capital of Europe" on two previous occasions. The first time (1988), Graz was elected to host the "European Cultural Month" in 1993, an event created by the EU for cities outside the union that wanted to participate in the Cultural Capital programme. In the nominations for 1998 and 1999, Stockholm and Weimar were chosen instead of Graz. Originally, Graz could have become the tenth Cultural Capital in 2000 - only to share the fate of its nine competitors of remaining largely unnoticed. Therefore it was decided to nominate Graz for the year 2003, running the risk that the entire Cultural Capital project might be scrapped due to the year 2000 flop. And this time Graz received the title - and did not need to share the honour with another city in 2003. However, the host of the European Cultural Month, St. Petersburg, which also celebrated its 300th anniversary in 2003, joined Graz for a number of projects.

It is remarkable that the Austrian government chose Graz rather than Vienna or Salzburg as its candidate. Since 1990, the EU's ministers of culture have made a point of choosing smaller, less well-known cities as Cultural Capitals rather than large metropolitan centres. The Austrian government also knew that Brussels expected Graz to be particularly competent in showcasing eastern and south-eastern Europe. Inter-religious dialogue, too, was a feature of the history of Graz and was duly reflected in the programme of Graz 2003.

During the Cold War, Graz was a western European city situated close to the Iron curtain, hence not in a favourable position for tourism. However, the city functioned as a bridgehead for artists and promoters of culture from Eastern Europe. Here they informed themselves about the latest trends in contemporary art and presented their own work to "the West". These links with south-eastern Europe made Graz a solid base for building new bridges to the East while Europe was in the process of undergoing enormous changes. The programme of the "European Cultural Month" in 1993 already focused on this new role of Graz as a gateway to the south-eastern region of the continent. In 2003 Graz positioned itself as a Cultural Capital at the heart of a new Europe.

According to the city's application for the title of Cultural Capital, "Graz has been situated for centuries at the cross-roads of European cultures. It was a melting pot where Italian, Slavic, Hungarian and alpine Germanic influences fused to form a very specific character."

A character that proved particularly open to innovation, not only in the fields of economics and science. In the 20th century, Graz and its Forum Stadtpark were considered the nucleus of contemporary art and significant literature, and the "steirischer herbst" festival was a stepping stone to the international avant-garde. Which probably provided the city with a sound basis for facing the challenges of on-going cultural and social changes in the 21st century.

## Philosophy and project history

### GRAZ 2003 - CULTURAL CAPITAL OF EUROPE

On 28 May 1998, Graz was awarded the title of Cultural Capital of Europe for the year 2003. The driving forces behind the city's application and behind the entire Graz 2003 project were Helmut Strobl and Alfred Stingl, who at the time were respectively the city councillor for cultural affairs and the mayor of Graz. Strobl and Stingl publicised the success of the city's application and immediately began to search for a manager or programme director with a professional profile that included experience in national and international cultural activities and an external position that would make him independent of the local cultural community of Graz. In summer of 1998, Wolfgang Lorenz was asked to develop a concept for Graz as the Cultural Capital. Lorenz, a native of Graz, was the director of planning and coordination and formerly the cultural director of the Austrian broadcasting company ORF in Vienna. He had also served as regional director of ORF in Styria from 1998 to 2000. At the same time, information events were organised with protagonists from the Graz cultural community and representatives from earlier Cultural Capitals were invited to give talks in Graz about their experiences.

In January of 1999, Wolfgang Lorenz presented his **first concept paper**, titled "**Im Namen der Windrose. Graz goes Europe - Europe goes Graz**" to the city council and the district council. This paper defined several guidelines - for instance, that Graz "was built on cultural ground, possessed of a cultural identity, and therefore had attractive standards" which should be utilised and which should form the basis for the special programme of the "magical" year.

The paper continued that the business and tourism sectors should lose no time in seizing this opportunity for consolidating the international image of Graz ("Graz goes Europe - Europe goes Graz"). Lorenz, however, deliberately changed the project's original focus on south-eastern Europe to a pan-European thrust. This initial concept paper already included the concept of sustainability as a key factor: "The opportunity to exercise an influence beyond 2003 should be one of the main criteria for all activities." And Wolfgang Lorenz insisted from the very beginning that "marketing and public relations work should be given a high priority (and an appropriate budget)".

The programme's contents should combine "top quality with maximum acceptability" and present "culture as a constructive instrument for life management" to "a large audience".

The paper already included initial outlines for specific projects - for example, the "Graz Pyramid", which coalesced into the "Mountain of Memories" during subsequent programme planning. A strong focus on the topic of religion also featured in the initial concept paper.

After the director was officially appointed by the city council on the strength of the first concept paper, a Cultural Capital Office with one employee was installed in Herrengasse 28 on 1 February 1999. All project proposals could now be submitted to this office.

The director's **programme workgroup** met first on 13 February 1999. This workgroup, which was to exercise a crucial influence on the programme planning of the Cultural Capital in the following years, was defined as follows:

"The programme workgroup has been voluntarily formed by the director and constitutes an 'instrument' for developing and controlling the programme for 2003. The workgroup's task is innovation, discussion, project work, and assistance for the director in the decision-making process. The workgroup also serves as a controlling body which has been chosen by the director himself. The programme workgroup is not a committee or a jury and does not constitute part of the rules of procedure. The director ultimately makes all decisions with complete autonomy. The programme workgroup includes the members of the management; members of the team for 2003; one representative each of the City, the State of Styria, and the Austrian government (these serve chiefly, but not exclusively, as informational links to the mandators); and representatives from the local and general Austrian cultural community.

"The number of members of the workgroup reflects the demands of the moment and may also increase or decrease as individual members re-evaluate their interests, their personal circumstances, their agreement with the product under development, and not least their ability to participate in the workgroup's activities while receiving no remuneration other than an attendance fee. The workgroup itself must be considered a 'work in progress'".

"The members of the programme workgroup are invited to look beyond the borders of the genres they represent and to act as generalists by helping to evaluate, develop, and perfect outside projects. Members are also invited to submit their own ideas and projects just as the inner Graz 2003 team does."

The major workload during this preliminary phase consisted of viewing and classifying the projects that were submitted (over 200 by the middle of 1999, and a total of 896 by the end of 2003); **drafting preliminary programme thrusts and developing projects**; and preparing an initial publication. The workgroup deliberately avoided placing limitations on the project contents by means of a theme or motto.

At the same time, a **logo and a corporate identity** for the Cultural Capital were developed. On 13 March 1999, a jury of experts chose the design by the Viennese company DMC out of all the entries that had been submitted for consideration.

Finally, **Programme I**, designed by DMC, was presented to representatives of government, the media, and creative artists on 23 November 1999 in a public event in the Eisernes Haus attended by the programme workgroup. The Eisernes Haus is now home to Camera Austria and the Kunsthaus.

Programme I strengthened the underlying philosophy of a broad-based definition of culture and stressed the opportunity of attracting the attention of Europe in general as well as the importance of including the population of Graz and, above all, young people as the most important target group to ensure sustainability.

Many projects were already presented as concept outlines at that early date: the Island in the Mur; the "17 Cultural Districts of Graz" (still under the collective title of "The state of the city"); the p.p.c. and the Children's Museum in the

"Children and Youth" section of the programme; university projects; new media projects such as Chess003; exhibition projects such as "Venus in Furs" (which later became the Sacher-Masoch Festival) and "real\*utopia"; the styriarte "Easter Festival" (later called "Psalm 2003"); the focus on the scenic arts in the Theatre section; and the Jazz Cartel and Urban Music. A focus on film and television was planned, and so was another on religion and culture and a third on literature. This initial division into themes essentially remained throughout the project.

The Cultural Capital explicitly defined itself as a driving and designing force for urban development. The railway station, the redesigned Hauptplatz, the Kunsthaus, the Literaturhaus, the Children's Museum, and the Island in the Mur were important elements of the programme even though only the Island was actually financed by the Cultural Capital project.

The programme began to take shape in the year 2000. In the same year, the first version of the operating company, Graz 2003 - Kulturhauptstadt Europas GmbH, was established with an executive director, a marketing manager, and a number of employees. Owing to personal differences and disagreements about the programme content, the executive director and a large part of the team left the company in the autumn of 2000. The definitive executive directors and their core team of employees were appointed in early 2001.

The second programme appeared in April 2001. This was already a very detailed and lengthy document in German and English which was the first publication to provide a chronological overview and to map out a deliberate choreography for the entire year. The subsidiary programme - projects marketed together with the Graz 2003 programme but not part of the core programme and not financed by Graz 2003 - was also presented in this document. (The very witty foreword by the executive director gave an atmospheric picture of the making of the Cultural Capital.) At the same time, the first marketing phase was presented to journalists, project partners, and politicians under the title of "Graz - who would have guessed?"

The final programme, taking the form of a text volume and a calendar, was published in November 2002.