



Reclaiming the Rivers of Sofia



Reviving the city's rundown and inaccessible riverbeds



(BG)

SOFIA



1,200,000



Cultural heritage
for sustainable development



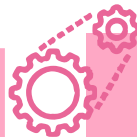
Challenge

Sofia's rivers, the Perlovka and Vladayska, cross the city centre and have defined the city's urban planning since the late 19th century. The rivers are channeled into artificial beds of hewn stone that have enormous potential to be developed as green public spaces. However, they remain inaccessible from the street level for most of the year. The rivers also regularly become polluted when Sofia's sewage system malfunctions. The public perception of the riverbeds was that they were rundown, unusable spaces.



Solution

The Rivers of Sofia initiative, created by The Collective Foundation in 2020, consists of an annual festival that transforms the rivers and people's perception of them. Creating points of access, installing basic infrastructures like electricity and lighting, and cleaning and disinfecting the space has given new life to the heritage site and made it a venue for a cultural programme that has engaged diverse social groups. This, in turn, is leading to longer-term conservation and adaptive reuse of the riverbeds.



How ?

1

The poorly maintained, artificial riverbeds of Sofia were identified by The Collective as having enormous potential to be transformed into public green spaces.

2

The municipality granted permission to create a temporary solution to make the space accessible. The area was sanitised, and pop-up interventions were designed to make it attractive.

3

In September 2020 a first edition of a festival along the banks took place offering activities and facilities for all age groups.

4

A wide communication campaign was employed to reach beyond the cultural spheres and to encourage the participation of everyone in the community.

5

After evaluation the project was deemed a success and has become a permanent feature in Sofia's cultural calendar. It also spread to other cities.

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Budget/Financing

- About €25,000 per festival for the first two editions, plus operating costs of around €5,000 per month for all the other activities managed by The Collective (main organiser of the festival).
- In 2022, around 10% of the funding came from the Municipality, 30% from the national administration and 60% from private sponsorship.



Management

- The festival was initiated and is run by a foundation, The Collective. The Collective has worked closely with Sofia Municipality and has received support from many partner organisations, public institutions, and private companies.



Links

- <https://www.europeanheritageawards.eu/winners/rivers-of-sofia/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/riversofthecity>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/company/collective-foundation/>
- <https://youtu.be/kU8j5XXckzM>
- <https://youtu.be/RaTCZjyYall>
- <https://civic-europe.eu/ideas/danube-design-lab/>



Transferability

The project is transferable to other cities because of its relatively small budget and high impact.

- Go beyond your bubble! Attract different partners, including from the public and private sector, young people, and disadvantaged groups. Make it clear that your initiative is not only for a certain class or community.
- Show the spaces you want to preserve in a new light. Create beautiful experiences with clever design and simple structures. A lot can be achieved on a small budget.
- Build the change you want to see - even if it is temporary at first. Experiment to see what may work more long term.



Impact

- The [festival](#) is one of the most popular urban events in Sofia.
- Citizens have since voted to select a project that will create a permanent public green space for culture and recreation where the festival's temporary interventions take place. Thus, the city has decided to permanently improve and preserve these forgotten spaces.
- Longer-term improvements to the rivers' conditions are in the making. There is greater interest and support for such measures, both among the public and among decision-makers.
- [Rivers of the City](#) is a new platform for collective urbanism offering a scalable model that is spreading to other cities.



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