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NONA

Gabrovo's *Transformative Riverfront Development*



"Our goal is to make the most of what we already have—transforming neglected riverfront spaces into vibrant, green, and inclusive places that serve people, culture, and the local economy."

Tanya Hristova,
Mayor of Gabrovo Municipality

INTRO

Located in central Bulgaria, Gabrovo is a mid-sized city with a strong industrial heritage, rich cultural identity, and a strategic position along key transport corridors. The Yantra River runs through the city, shaping its urban form but also hosting underused and fragmented spaces along its banks. These degraded riverfront areas represent a major opportunity to reconnect nature, culture, and everyday urban life. Through the NONA pilot, Gabrovo is repositioning its riverbanks as a catalyst for sustainable development, green investment, and social cohesion.

LONG-TERM VISION

Gabrovo aims to become a green, innovative, and accessible city, where cultural heritage, ecological restoration, and inclusive public spaces drive sustainable economic development and improve the quality of life for all residents.

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Commitment to Sustainable Development

Gabrovo Municipality is committed to climate-resilient, low-carbon, and inclusive urban development, aligning local investments with the European Green Deal and the principles of the New European Bauhaus—beautiful, sustainable, and together.

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Pilot Location

Project *Area Map*





The map shows the location of the Pilot area.



DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

Gabrovo covers approximately 233 km² and has a population of around 56,000 inhabitants. The city developed along the Yantra River as a major industrial and manufacturing hub, which later experienced deindustrialisation and demographic decline. Today, the riverfront includes a mix of abandoned buildings, sports facilities, cultural sites, and fragmented public spaces, many of which lack accessibility and coherent governance. Despite this, the area benefits from strong municipal leadership and growing experience with integrated territorial investments.

Local Identity & Character

Gabrovo is internationally known for its humour, creativity, and strong cultural traditions. It is the birthplace of Christo (Hristo Yavashev) and hosts major cultural institutions such as the House of Humour and Satire. The city's identity combines craftsmanship, innovation, and cultural experimentation, increasingly linked to environmental awareness and public space regeneration.

Strong Points

- *Strong cultural identity and international visibility*
- *Experience with integrated territorial investments*
- *Active municipal leadership and governance capacity*
- *Strategic river corridor through the urban core*
- *Engagement with New European Bauhaus principles*

KEY FACTS

Name of the Pilot Space

Gabrovo's Transformative Riverfront Development

Location

Along the Yantra River, the central urban area of Gabrovo, Bulgaria

Total Surface Area

approximately 150,000 m² along both sides of the Yantra River in the central part of the city of Gabrovo, Bulgaria

Type of Project

Green and culture-led urban regeneration/riverfront revitalisation

Accessibility

Accessible via main city roads, pedestrian paths, bridges, and public transport; limited continuity for pedestrians and cyclists along the riverfront.

Ownership Structure

Primarily public (municipal), with some adjacent private properties.

Regulatory Status

Urban redevelopment zone under integrated territorial investment planning.

Past Use / History

Historically linked to industrial, sports, and public service functions, the riverbanks gradually lost their economic role, leading to fragmented use, physical decay, and reduced public access.

Current Land Use & Governance

Mixed uses, including sports facilities, cultural buildings, vacant plots, and informal public spaces, coordinated by Gabrovo Municipality with emerging participatory governance mechanisms.






ТЕЧЕНИЕТО



CHALLENGES



- *Fragmented governance and land use along the riverfront*
- *Degraded public spaces and environmental pressures*
- *Limited investment readiness for green projects*

SHORT EXPLANATION

These challenges limit Gabrovo's ability to unlock the riverfront's full social, ecological, and economic potential and require integrated governance and investment models.

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

- **Phased temporary–seasonal–permanent activation**

  The project applies a phased activation approach, starting with temporary and seasonal uses of degraded areas (e.g. cultural events, pilot interventions and tactical urbanism), which are gradually transformed into permanent functions. This allows testing of solutions, stakeholder engagement, and progressive investment readiness, reducing risks and enabling evidence-based long-term development.

- **Culture-led regeneration combined with ecological restoration**

  Regeneration is driven by cultural initiatives and creative industries, acting as catalysts for reactivating spaces, while being fully integrated with ecological restoration measures such as riverbank greening, biodiversity enhancement, and nature-based solutions. This dual approach reflects the New European Bauhaus principles, combining aesthetics, sustainability, and inclusion.

- **Participatory governance and co-production**

  The project introduces a multi-level governance model based on active involvement of public authorities, civil society, and the private and financial sectors. Through participatory processes, local communities co-create solutions, define future uses of spaces, and contribute to investment planning, ensuring socially accepted and economically viable outcomes.

OBJECTIVES

ECONOMIC

The project aims to stimulate local economic development through job creation, entrepreneurship, and revitalisation of underutilised urban areas. It supports the emergence of green jobs, cultural tourism, and innovative local businesses, leveraging the economic potential of regenerated spaces and attracting new investments in line with a green transition model.

SOCIAL

The project strengthens community involvement and social cohesion by actively engaging citizens, with a particular focus on youth participation and cultural activities. It promotes inclusive public spaces, co-creation processes, and access to cultural and social opportunities, enhancing quality of life and reinforcing local identity.

ENVIRONMENTAL

The project contributes to environmental sustainability through the development of green infrastructure, CO_2 reduction measures, and climate adaptation solutions. Key interventions include riverbank greening, biodiversity enhancement, and implementation of nature-based systems such as rainwater management, supporting resilient and ecologically balanced urban environments.

PROJECTS & NEEDS TABLE

PROJECT / NEED	DESCRIPTION	STATUS (ONGOING /PLANNED)	WHAT IS NEEDED (FUNDING, TOOLS, DESIGN)	INNOVATIVE ASPECTS	EXPECTED OUTCOMES
Phase I – Festival Activation	3–5 day cultural activation of riverfront	Completed (pilot tested)	Cultural funding, sponsorships, logistics	Tactical urbanism, rapid activation	7,000+ visitors, awareness, tested uses
Phase II – Seasonal Activation	1–6 month activation with pavilion & events	Planned	Small-scale investment, operators, permits	Hybrid cultural-economic model	Continuous use, local economy activation
Phase III – Permanent Development	Long-term riverfront redesign and infrastructure	Planned	Capital investment, design, public-private partnerships	Evidence-based urban transformation	Increased land value, long-term usability
Governance & Platform	Local coordination structure for long-term management	Ongoing	Institutional support, capacity building	Participatory governance	Sustainable project continuity

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

ACTIVITIES & ROADMAP

Phase I – Temporary Activation (0–1 year)

- *Festival implementation*
- *Community engagement & co-design*
- *Data collection and testing of uses*

Phase II – Seasonal Activation (1–3 years)

- *Installation of removable infrastructure (pavilion, seating, lighting)*
- *Weekly cultural programming*
- *Introduction of local business operators*

Phase III – Permanent Development (3–10 years)

- *Design competition and planning*
- *Capital investments in riverbank transformation*
- *Integration of mobility, ecology, and cultural infrastructure*

TIMELINE & MILESTONES

MILESTONE	DATE	DESCRIPTION
M1	Completed	Festival pilot and initial activation
M2	2025–2026	Launch of seasonal activation phase
M3	2026–2030	Gradual implementation of permanent interventions

STEPS ALREADY TAKEN

Successful pilot festival with 7,000+ visitors; Stakeholder workshops and co-creation processes; Strategic roadmap developed under NONA; Initial municipal alignment and planning framework

VALUE ADDED

Economic
Unlocks dormant urban assets and creates new revenue streams

Social
Builds long-term community ownership and engagement

Environmental
Restores ecological systems and improves resilience

Governance
Introduces a scalable model for integrated urban regeneration

COORDINATION TEAM

NAME	ROLE	INSTITUTION	CONTACT
Margarita Dorovska	Project lead	Gabrovo Municipality	m.dorovska@gmail.com
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Supporting Stakeholders

Christo and Jeanne-Claude Centre (CJC), Youth Center Gabrovo, House of Humour and Satire, Local NGOs, cultural organisations and independent creatives, Local businesses (F&B, creative industries), Schools, youth groups and volunteers.

Call to Action



We invite public and private partners to join us in transforming Gabrovo's riverfront into a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient urban landscape.
This project offers a unique opportunity to invest in a* proven, scalable model of culture-led urban regeneration,** ***aligned with the New European Bauhaus and Europe's green transition.

Contact Details

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Join the local network and collaborate with others to co-create innovative, green and community-driven solutions.