

# CULTURE OF NATIONALITIES IN A CREATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE CITY

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The concept of creative cities has a history of only two decades. According to Richard Florida, the most significant researcher of the topic, a settlement can only be successful if it is as tolerant as possible, and at the same time as diverse as possible. In addition, a creative settlement can only operate with a sustainable approach. In our study, we examine, partly from this prospective, the cultural activities of the nationalities of Szombathely, a medium-sized Hungarian city, and also because we believe that the cultural activities of the nationalities contribute to the performance of the local creative and cultural economy. The cultural activities of the nationalities are largely traditional, consequently it also reflects a close-to-nature, sustainable approach. There are four nationalities in Szombathely: Germans, Gypsies, Croats and Slovenes. They maintain civil organizations, educational institutions, community spaces, help the city's international relations, and contribute to the city's economic development with cultural programs. In our paper, we wish to present the importance of the culture of nationalities in general, as well as the specific activities of the four studied communities carry out in the city.

## 1. Introduction

Due to their much larger population, urban areas are generally more diverse than rural ones. Cities are melting pots of cultures, languages and traditions, the mixing of people from different cultural backgrounds can lead to a rich exchange of ideas, perspectives and traditions. Cross-cultural connections can foster creativity by exposing individuals to different mentalities and innovative approaches.

The urban environment shapes the collective identity of its residents. Nationalities in towns often develop specific cultural manifestations influenced by their environment, history and shared experiences. They serve as valuable repositories of creativity as they provide a means for urban populations to be able to express their identities and communicate their narratives to the wider world.

Persell et al. (2001) highlight two important dimensions of civil society, the institutional and the qualitative dimension. Persell et al. describe the institutional dimension of civil society as including all of the organizations and associations to which people belong and the qualitative dimension as the social attitudes such as loyalty and trust, social practices such as civility and cooperation, and the health and safety of its members.

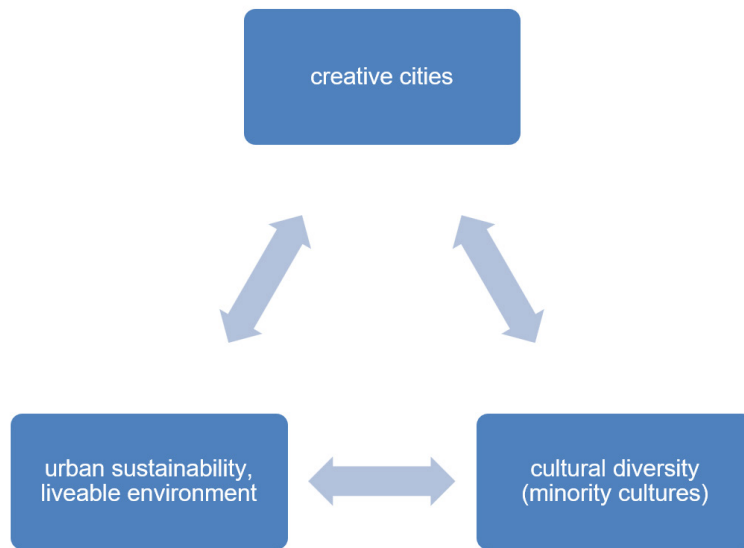
In the definition of social capital, many have used the term *social tolerance* as a component of social capital. Social tolerance is generally considered attitudes of one social group towards members in a different social group. Persell et al. (2001) define pure or complete social tolerance as full recognition and acceptance of the identity and uniqueness of differences that are seen as not reducible to invisibility by their bearers. Florida (2010a) defines the level of tolerance in a country as consisting of two major dimensions; the degree to which a country values traditional beliefs over more modern or secular values and the degree to which a country values individual rights and self-expression. Past research suggests that tolerance is a part of social capital

and greater levels of social capital has been shown to promote economic growth and sound institutions. In our study, the latter aspect plays an important role in relation to the nationalities of the region under study.

Richard Florida, who created the concept of the creative class and also deals with creative cities, claims that individuals working in creative occupations strongly influence urban development and economic growth. One of the central elements of this theory is the tolerance index, which measures the level of acceptance and openness to diversity within the city's population. The purpose of the publication is to provide a comprehensive picture of the Index, its conceptual framework, and the promotion of social cohesion and the enhancement of urban well-being. Florida argues that diversity and tolerance are key components to the flow of talented individuals to cities and to encourage innovation and economic prosperity. The tolerance index can be calculated using various indicators. The results indicate the receptivity and receptive attitude of the cities. The most frequent metrics include racial and ethnic diversity, LGBTQ+ friendliness, religious acceptance, and the presence of creative communities. A high level of tolerance in cities can lead to increased social integration, reduced social tensions, and cultural revitalization, and cities with higher levels of tolerance and acceptance tend to attract diverse talents and skilled professionals from different fields. The inflow of creative individuals can contribute to economic growth, innovation, and the ignition of entrepreneurial activities. Tolerance therefore becomes a key factor in attracting the creative class and, as a result, positively influences the city's economic prospects, which is why the sustainability of tolerance is of high importance. Tolerance is not a static concept and may alter over time due to various factors such as economic and political changes and global events. Understanding the factors that maintain tolerance and prevent its erosion is essential to ensuring the long-term prosperity of diverse urban communities. (Florida, 2002) Florida also introduces the 3T model, talent, tolerance, and technology, which make cities attractive to the creative class. Talent refers to the availability of a highly skilled and trained workforce; technology refers to the availability of high-speed internet, state-of-the-art research facilities, and other technological infrastructure; tolerance on the other hand refers to the openness and diversity of a city's social and cultural environment. These components are essential for the new urban economy. (Florida, 2005) The strong correlation between tolerance and the creative economy has been confirmed by research outside of Europe and North America. (Brata et al., 2023) However, it should be noted that, according to some authors, the creativity indices (thus the tolerance index) make cities comparable, so the uniqueness disappears. (Kačerauskas, 2021)

After the economic crisis of 2008, Florida emphasized that an economic policy based on debt and consumption should be replaced by balance and sustainability, which requires more liveable and sustainable cities. New urban planning solutions are necessary, which require investment in urban infrastructure elements such as affordable housing, public transportation, or parks and green spaces (Florida, 2010b). Such sustainable cities are settlements that balance the social, economic, and environmental needs of their residents without compromising the prospects of future generations. The goal is to create healthy and liveable neighborhoods while reducing their impact on the environment. Sustainable cities ensure a high quality of life for their residents by promoting efficient transport, access to green areas, and social interaction. On the other hand, the sustainable settlement approach also induces significant economic benefits, as green investments create jobs, attract investors, and improve economic competitiveness. They also reduce the costs of infrastructure maintenance and operation (Nagy, 2008). Jeffrey D. Sachs said social inclusion is important to achieving sustainability goals. (Sachs, 2015). It is an important task to prevent and reduce the spreading out of settlements since the environmental burden strongly increases with the relocation of urban citizens to the agglomerations (Glaeser, 2011). Connecting the concepts of a creative city and an inclusive city can also help city branding. (Alsayel et al., 2022)

Based on the above, it can be concluded that creative cities are significantly influenced by cultural diversity, which is represented, among other things, by members of minority cultures. At the same time, the conditions of a creative urban milieu are urban sustainability and a liveable environment. We find that the traditional, native national minorities also like to represent their own traditional culture in the cities. These traditions can often be linked to the agrarian culture and their own sustainable community tradition, consequently, they point in the direction of not only the creative but also of the sustainable city. Based on the above, in order to create a creative, sustainable and culturally diverse settlement, it is necessary for the city decision-makers to embrace, support the urban nationalities by creating an accepting, partnering environment for them. **Figure 1**



*Figure 1: A model of the creative city, cultural diversity and urban sustainability (own editing)*

In the following, we would like to present the functioning of ethnic communities in a Hungarian city, Szombathely, as a case study of the above theory.

## 2. Nationalities in Szombathely

Cultural arts and local traditions can create social closeness, maintaining a harmonious environment between humans and their surroundings. These local traditions have significant meanings and values that deal with religious and cultural differences in social interactions. The local practices are the expression of local knowledge or wisdom, often referred to as the local genius of a community in responding to their environmental situation. The values of local wisdom are viewed as an entity that significantly determines the human dignity in their communities. It contains the elements of intelligence, creativity, and local knowledge from social figures and their communities. Traditions and social norms in the community can functionally strengthen the cultural system as a life reference, essential in strengthening human social emotions. Therefore, local wisdom can be an element of social closeness in cross-cultural lives. (Rivadi, 2022)

Szombathely is a town in Western Hungary currently with approximately 75,000 inhabitants. It has been the country's longest continuously inhabited settlement for the past 2,000 years, significantly defined and shaped by different civilizations and cultures since the Roman era. The town is the center of Vas County - one of the areas with the most complex ethnic structure at the beginning of the 20th century in the Carpathian Basin. However, the assimilation at the beginning of the 1900s was already felt in Szombathely, as well. (Balizs and Bajmóczy, 2013)

From previous research on national minority communities, we highlight the example of Vas County. The questionnaire survey carried out in 2019 looked at the scope of activities of communities linked to the Slovenian nationality. It revealed that 58 % of the organizations are involved in cultural activities, 25-25 % are involved in child and youth protection, sports, health, and environment protection, 16-16 % in historical preservation and pensioners and elderly affairs, 8 % are involved in social and equal opportunities issues, and the other category includes national and historical preservation and fostering friendship between peoples and the preservation of traditions. (Vehrer-Papp, 2020)

The most recent census data is available from 2011 from Szombathely. At that time, the town's population was approximately 79,000. The number of Hungarians was 64,500. The largest ethnic community in the city was Germans (585 people). They were followed by Gypsies (579 people), Croats (412 people), and Slovenians (119 people). In the 2011 census, another 61 Romanians were recorded, as well as a small number of

Bulgarians, Greeks, Poles, Armenians, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovaks and Ukrainians. The total population of traditional nationalities was 1,876.

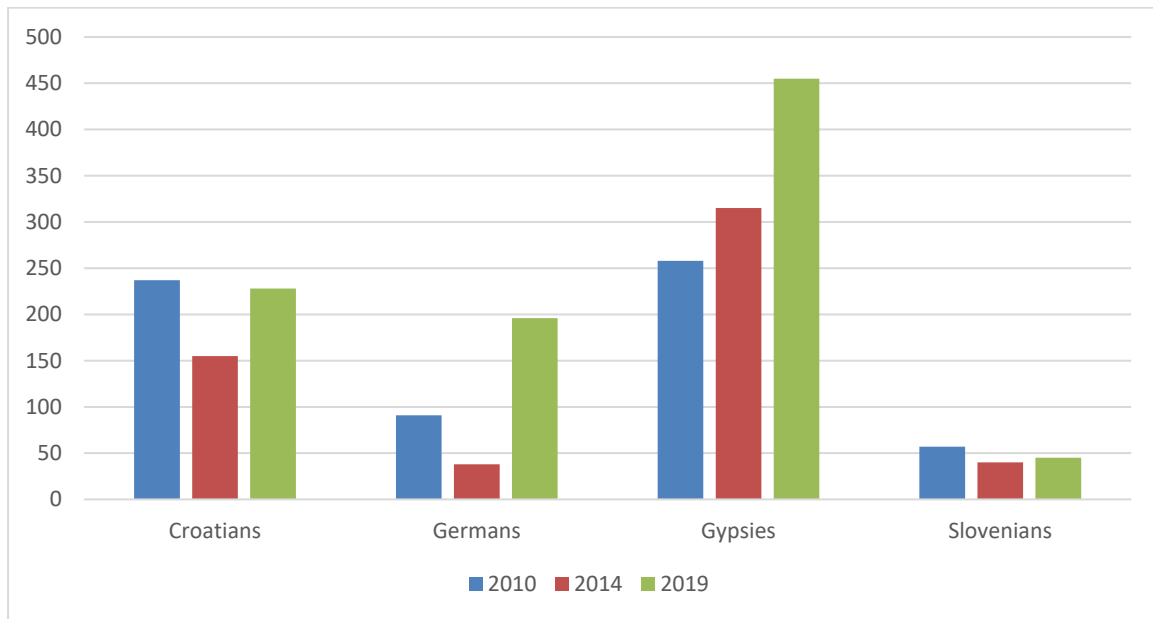
Apart from them, a few declared themselves to belong to non-native nationalities (Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, and others): a total of less than 200 people. (During the census, several people did not want to answer the question about their nationality.) (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2011)

*Table 1: Nationalities in Szombathely (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2011)*

Nationality, language	Number of population
Hungarians	64,576
Bulgarian	14
Gypsies	579
Greeks	13
Croats	412
Poles	17
Germans	585
Armenians	15
Romanians	61
Ruthenians	7
Serbs	17
Slovaks	27
Slovenians	119
Ukrainians	10
Arabs	16
Chinese	11
Russians	29
Vietnamese	3
Other	115

We can see that the proportion of all non-Hungarian nationalities does not reach 3% in Szombathely, but their cultural and community presence is more significant than this proportion. There are four nationalities in the town that, thanks to Hungarian laws, can form a minority self-government with the support of the local government: Germans, Gypsies, Croats and Slovenians.

The number of citizens of the four nationalities is also indicated by the number of citizens registered during the minority local government elections held in parallel with the municipal local government elections. In the case of the Gypsies, 258 people had the right to vote in 2010 (153 cast their vote); as for the Croats, 177 out of 237 eligible voters voted; among the Germans, 91 people were registered, of which 64 voted; while for the Slovenes there were 57 entitled to vote, but only 46 people cast their votes. (National Electoral Office, 2010) In 2014, the number of Croats eligible to vote decreased to 155 (of which 122 voted); 28 out of the 38 Germans voted; 34 out of the 40 Slovenians cast their votes. However, the number of voters of Gypsy origin increased to 315 (of which 157 people voted). (National Electoral Office, 2014) The number of voters increased in 2019 compared to the previous elections: 228 Croats could vote, 196 Germans, 455 Gypsies, and 45 Slovenians. (National Electoral Office, 2019) **Figure 2.**



*Figure 2: Number of citizens registered during the minority local government elections*

Since whoever registers can vote, the recent numbers obviously do not authentically show how many people belong to the given nationality in the town, but they show the activity of the local ethnic communities, they are good indicators of community engagement. These local governments established after the elections are important because they will be the defining bodies of the local communities, primarily responsible for cultural, educational, community, or international (with the motherland) relations. The Szombathely municipality provides them with the official background and the resources necessary for operation. There is a separate sub-page on the town’s website where the background materials, minutes of representative body meetings, decisions and reports of the four ethnic municipalities can be found. (szombathely.hu, 2023) In the following, we summarize their activities based on the documents found here.

The civil organization of the Slovenian nationality in Szombathely is the Slovene Cultural Association, named after the linguist, writer, and ethnographer Pável Ágoston, which holds a general assembly every spring according to their 2022 and 2023 program calendar. The association was founded in 1999 and organizes its programs jointly with the minority local government. During the year, they organize several trips to Slovenia or to the settlements of Slovenes in Hungary. They commemorate the local aspects of Slovenian culture, continuously cherishing the memory of Ágoston Pável. In 2022, they celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Slovene house of the Szombathely open-air museum, and in 2023, a book presentation by a local Slovenian author was held. They are regular participants of the Szombathely Minority Day. Their folk culture is primarily nurtured by the Szombathelyi Nefelejcssek song circle. Their recurring program for years is the Slovenian Film Days at the AGORA–Savaria Film Theatre, where the interested audience can view contemporary Slovenian cinematographic works.

The Croatian nationality is larger in number; therefore, they perform more tasks. They also operate a Croatian elementary school and kindergarten in the town in addition to their programs and NGOs. These communities also serve as cultural bases. Their artistic groups include the choir, the tramp band, and the folk dance circle. They take care of their traditional culture: there is a mass held in Croatian; they organize carnivals, balls, and in the winter, an event to make sausages together. In the summer, they participate in the Szombathely Minority Day, but they also organize an independent Croatian day. Important Croatian national and international holidays (Mother’s Day and Children’s Day) are also commemorated. Their civil organization is the Szombathely Croatian Association. The community also has outdoor sports groups in the town.

Children belonging to the German nationality can have their education in Szombathely in two kindergartens and a primary school. These educational facilities – like in the case of the Croats – also help the cultural

goals of the minority community. They organize art groups and a summer reading camp and participate in the Szombathely Minority Day, but their primary focus is the operation of the elementary school.

The operation of the local Gypsy minority differs from the previous ones in certain elements. They do not maintain an institution, but they have a community space suitable for holding cultural and other events. It does not have a classical art group, but thanks to the active artistic and cultural organizing work of the Roma artist József Ferkovics, there are regular Gypsy art exhibitions and equal opportunity events in the city. Every year, a Roma creative camp is held in the northern part of Szombathely, to which artists come from all over the country. Instead of art groups, the Gypsy nationality focuses on other civil communities. For example, they operate a civil guard association, as well as a social organization that helps young people. During the operation of the community it focuses more on social activities, and helping the disadvantaged is more emphatic. Commemorations of the victims of the Roma Holocaust are regular in the life of the community. There is a plaque in the town that helps preserve the memory of the victims.

### 3. Conclusions

In our study, we demonstrated that diverse, accepting cities promote the creation of a tolerant yet creative settlement. Cultural diversity can be helped not only by subcultural minority groups but also by indigenous nationalities. Urban sustainability is also a condition for liveable and creative settlements. We argued that, during their operation, the ethnic communities primarily display a more traditional, smaller-scale culture that is closer to nature, which also points towards the sustainability of cities.

The operation of the ethnic communities of Szombathely in Hungary was presented as a case study through the example of the Slovenian, Croatian, German, and Gypsy communities. As a summary of the case study, we can make the following conclusions:

1. Even small ethnic communities can be strongly present in the life of a city. These communities can complement the mainstream culture, which they also influence. Nationalities, therefore, have a greater impact on the life of a city than their real weight would suggest.
2. The operation of educational institutions can be of high importance for an ethnic community. These organizations are not only places for continuous resupply of mother tongue speakers and nationality education but also community and cultural institutions, the background bases of the nationalities. They are also regionally important since they can also receive the children of ethnic families from the villages and smaller settlements around the city. In addition to the city and regional level, educational institutions also have an impact on their close surroundings, the neighborhoods, so the nationalities are also present in the everyday life of these parts of the cities (they take care of parks, raise traffic problems affecting the school, etc.)
3. The operation of art groups and civil organizations is also highly important in the life of ethnic communities. In the case of each nationality, we can find such organizations that provide a non-profit basis for the realization of their goals. With these organizations, it is possible for them to access civil funds, which can supplement their operations.
4. Urban nationalities do not shut themselves up in their own communities. They are present in the life of the settlement with their cultural programs: minority day, Croatian Day, and Slovenian Film Days. In this way, they help those belonging to the majority culture to get to know and experience their ethnic culture, which, in addition to the visible diversity, can strengthen the cultural diversity and tolerance of the cities.
5. Traditional cultural care is used to implement environmentally sustainable programs on a sustainable scale linked to community events that respect and recognize natural values.

The case study thus shows a link between tolerance, human capital, development, and sustainable economic growth expressed in terms of competitiveness in the region under study.

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