

UNESCO

CITY OF LITERATURE



**APPLICATION OF DEBRECEN
2025**

1. City Information and Contacts

1.1 Name of City

Debrecen

1.2 Country

Hungary

1.3 Mayor of the City

Title (Mr/Ms/Other): Dr

Family name: Papp

First name: László

Address: 4025 Debrecen, Piac u. 20.

Telephone number: +36 52 511 411

Email address: polgarmester@ph.debrecen.hu

1.4 Representative of the Mayor

Title (Mr/Ms/Other): Dr

Family name: Puskás

First name: István

Institution/function: Vice-mayor

Status/type of institution: Municipality

Address: 4025 Debrecen, Piac u. 20.

Telephone number: +36 52 511 574

Email address: puskas.istvan@ph.debrecen.hu

1.5 Main executive contact

Title (Mr/Ms/Other): Dr

Family name: Kovács

First name: Béla Lóránt

Institution/function: Director

Status/type of institution: Méliusz Juhász Péter Library

Address: 4026 Debrecen, Bem tér 19/D

Telephone number: +36 52 502 470

Email address: jgazgato@meliusz.hu

1.6 Main communication contact

Title (Mr/Ms/Other): Mr

Family name: Machlik

First name: Adam

Institution/function: Administrator

Status/type of institution: Méliusz Juhász Péter Library

Address: 4026 Debrecen, Kálvin tér 11.

Telephone number: +36 52 511 425

Email address: machlik.adam@meliusz.hu

1.7 Alternative contact

Title (Mr/Ms/Other): Ms

Family name: Szabó

First name: Tünde Gyöngyi

Institution/function: Vice-director

Status/type of institution: Méliusz Juhász Péter Library

Address: 4026 Debrecen, Bem tér 19/D

Telephone number: +36 52 502 470

Email address: igazgatohelyettes@meliusz.hu

2. Creative Field

Please choose the creative field your city wishes to apply for

Literature

3. General Questions

3.1 General Presentation of the City

Presentation of the main geographical, demographic, cultural, social and economic characteristics of the city; mode of governance, principal culture-related facilities and infrastructure, international connections, etc. (1750 characters maximum with spaces).

Debrecen is the second largest city in Hungary; it is the centre of the Northern Great Plain Region and the seat of Hajdú-Bihar County. Building upon its Central European traditions and values, the city acts as a catalyst for the region's development, conveying technological, economic, and cultural innovation to the surrounding area and its neighbours. The city's European and intercontinental relations are strengthened by numerous international network memberships, in addition to its sister city network, which currently includes 19 cities.

The range of the city's cultural institutional system goes beyond its administrative boundaries; many of its cultural services, particularly library services, are regional in scope. A total of 300,000 people live in Debrecen and its vicinity. The indisputable proof of the city's diversity is the nine separate, autonomous minority self-governments (Armenian, Bulgarian, German, Greek, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian), which continuously play a role in the city's public and cultural life.

In terms of maintenance, the city's cultural service system rests on several pillars: the state, the municipality, churches, NGOs, and actors from the private sector. The primary coordinator of the implementation of cultural tasks is the city's institutional system, which is maintained by the municipality and is supported by the state in close cooperation with NGOs. Thanks to the efforts of diverse participants, the city exudes a compelling educational and cultural appeal. In addition to the urban nature of the city's cultural life, the presence of sacrilegious and folk elements in culture and education is also significant.

3.2 Main development opportunities and challenges facing the city - using creativity as a driver for action

Every city is unique and pursues its own objectives according to its particular context and priorities. In this section, applicant cities are invited to explain how they consider culture and creativity – particularly in the creative field concerned – to act as a driver for identifying opportunities and challenges, and thus to propose interventions that seek to maximize the potential of the creative field concerned for sustainable urban development and mitigate and resolve the challenges they face (1400 characters maximum with spaces).

Debrecen's recent economic growth has made it a prime investment destination with a vision of becoming a leading regional city. The city's Sustainable Urban Development Strategy states that, in addition to developing the economy, Debrecen focuses mostly on green energy management and the development of its digital services, intending to become a more retaining, providing, and inclusive city. In the last five years, foreign investments in the value of 10.5 billion euros have arrived in Debrecen, as a result of which 13,000 new jobs have been created. All of this affects the city's entire infrastructure and service sector, as well as its cultural life. To ensure the conditions of a liveable city, the development of the creative industry and the cultural sector is necessary. Commitments are needed in this area to make access to culture more democratic, which promotes social integration, eliminates discrimination, and strengthens community cohesion.

Through our program plan, the creative and cultural sectors can grow, on the one hand, by adopting the best international practices, resulting in new knowledge and diversity that enrich the city's relatively small international presence in the creative sector. On the other hand, with the help of infrastructural developments and literature appearing in public spaces, cultural institutions can reach a larger audience.

3.3 Global Development Strategies and Policies

Presentation of the city's main and global development vision, strategies and policies, particularly those in line with the international development agendas, such as the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, African Union's Agenda 2063, etc., as well as with UNESCO's priorities in the field of culture highlighted in MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration (1150 characters maximum with spaces)

The vision of our city's development is summarized in the document *Debrecen2030*. Our main goal is to create a strong community and a sustainable, inclusive city. As a supplement to the above document, independent strategies were prepared for various sectors. The *Cultural Strategy of Debrecen* formulates a social development and community-building

program that focuses on the interests of local society, builds on the active involvement of citizens, and takes into account the tasks arising from Debrecen's regional role. The directions of infrastructural developments are set by *Debrecen's Sustainable City Development Strategy*, which compiles plans for the period 2021-2027, considering the interests of the citizens, businesses, civil and other organizations, as well as institutions operating in the city. In order to achieve well-balanced urban development, Debrecen developed an environmental protection framework program called the *Green Codex*. Thanks to the synergy of the multifaceted strategic documents, our city aims to meet no. 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, and 16 of the UN's sustainable development goals.

3.4 Expected impact of the designation and the membership on the sustainable development of the city

Presentation of the main reasons behind the decision to submit an application to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and the expected medium and long-term impact of the designation for the sustainable development of the city, particularly over the next four years following the eventual designation (1400 characters maximum with spaces).

Our residency program and international events promote cultural exchange and diversity, which strengthens community ties. By introducing the local culture to a global audience, the city can emphasize its unique identity, while also promoting inclusivity. This cultural commitment leads to social cohesion and a community spirit that is essential for the sustainable development of the area.

Displaying literature in public spaces enhances cultural vibrancy, encourages involvement, and builds a sense of belonging among local citizens. Modern libraries serve as community hubs that provide vital resources and services to society as a whole, including access to technology, quiet spaces for study, and skill development programs. In addition, new technological solutions help to achieve environmental sustainability.

The primary goal of our proposed program is to build a culture of cooperation within the community, the impact of which will be felt beyond the creative field. Thanks to various collaborations, a community that participates more actively in civic life will be formed. The skills and relationships fostered through these combined initiatives will serve as a foundation for a network that can address a broad range of challenges.

3.5 Preparation process for the application

The design and preparation of the application submitted by the city should involve stakeholders from the creative field concerned, drawn from the private and public sectors, academia and civil society, as well as creators, professionals and practitioners. Describe how each of these groups have been consulted and/or engaged in the process of preparing the application; and how each group will benefit from the designation and membership to the Network (1400 characters maximum with spaces).

Following our 2021 application, the implementation of the goals set out in our proposal continued unwaveringly. Thanks to these efforts, a network called *We Love Books* was established, connecting NGOs, cultural and educational institutions, and economic

enterprises. The network currently comprises over 70 members who, alongside their daily activities, promote book and literary culture and are dedicated to spreading the joy of reading to as many people as possible. The city's religious organizations are an especially important part of this network as they are able to reach a wide audience. Strengthening social responsibility, one of the goals of the network, is an integral part of our current application.

Debrecen has been actively building its international relations in recent years. Literature plays a prominent role in this process, thanks to which there have been numerous joint initiatives with the cities of Oradea, Târgu Mureș, Bratislava, Kraków, Wrocław, Ljubljana, Brno and Stadtallendorf. We owe a lot to these connections for reviewing our previous plans and the development of new initiatives. At the time of writing our application, the revision of Debrecen's Cultural Strategy is in progress. The city will follow the plans formulated in this application regardless of the outcome, thanks to which Debrecen will provide a dynamic and inspiring home for international programs.

4. Comparative Assets of the Applicant City Made Available to the Network

4.1 Role and foundations of the creative field concerned in the city's history and development. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

In the middle of the 16th century, Debrecen joined the international network of religious reformation, with culture and craftsmanship driving the city's development. The education system was continuously improved, libraries grew, the printing industry and other creative activities expanded. The creative industry in Debrecen is represented by several innovative enterprises, such as the Alföldi Printing House, founded in 1561, the oldest continuously operating printing company in Central and Eastern Europe.

For centuries, the city's librarianship was represented by the collections of schools and the Reformed College, as well as the personal libraries of citizens. The Reformed College, founded in 1538, accumulated a significant collection of documents over the centuries, thanks to which Debrecen could become the centre of knowledge sharing and cultural exchange in the region. Today, 8,000 foreign students from around 130 countries attend the city's two excellent universities.

Many notable figures in Hungarian literature are linked to Debrecen or the surrounding region, including the author of the national anthem and key representatives of the Enlightenment and Romanticism periods.

4.2 Current economic importance and dynamism of the cultural sector and, in particular, of the creative field concerned. The information can be supported by data, statistics, and other indicators on its contribution to economic development and employment, number of cultural enterprises in the city, etc. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

The cultural sector in Debrecen not only has a great past but also a significant present and a promising future. Approximately 80% of today's Hungarian literary works are printed at the Alföldi Printing House. There are three major libraries in our city (Library of the University of Debrecen, Méliusz Juhász Péter Library, and Library of the Reformed College), and more than sixty local businesses are involved in publishing and printing. The number of people employed in this area is close to 500. Another 40-50 creators are not directly employed but are employers or sole proprietors. There are approximately 250 more people in the sector who work in Debrecen, but their employer is registered in the capital, as it is part of a national network or a larger company. There are dozens of bookstores of different sizes, as well as second-hand bookshops in the city, which employ around 50-60 people. Literature in Debrecen therefore ensures the livelihood of nearly a thousand people.

4.3 Different communities and groups engaged in, and/or that earn their livelihoods from, the creative field concerned. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Debrecen House of Literature, the Reformed College of Debrecen, and Méliusz Library are the institutions that organize, bring together, and support communities interested in literature and the culture of books. The Library of the University of Debrecen handles the assets of national and local knowledge while acting as a supporting partner and an inspiring space for university and city communities.

A key player in the creative field concerned is the 70-year-old literary journal *Alföld* and its publisher, the *Alföld Foundation*. Alongside it is the unique talent-nurturing workshop, Alföld Studio. KULTer.hu is an internet portal and intellectual workshop focusing on contemporary cultural phenomena. In 2023, its editors launched a reading circle, where participants examine issues such as gender equality and the opportunities of vulnerable groups in the field of literature. The members of the We Love Books network are institutions, NGOs, and individuals from Debrecen and beyond, including from abroad, promoting and supporting the culture of books and literature in various ways. Művészettér (Art Space) Association fosters the emergence of young writers.

4.4 Major fairs, conferences, conventions, congresses, and other national and/or international events organized by the city over the past four years, aimed at professionals and practitioners in the creative field concerned (creators, producers, marketers, promoters, etc.). (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Debrecen Literary Days, a festival of rich traditions going back more than half a century, is one of the largest gatherings of contemporary authors in Hungary. In addition to roundtable discussions and book presentations, which are organized around a central literary theme, an important segment of the event is the presentation of the Alföld Prize, which is awarded based on the decision of the editorial board of the literary journal *Alföld*.

On the 50th anniversary of the birth of the late János Térey, one of the most talented and prolific writers of contemporary Hungarian literature, Térey Book Festival was launched in 2020 with the intent of creating a tradition. In addition to preserving the oeuvre of Térey, the aim of the event is to draw the attention of the professional community to the literary traditions of Debrecen.

Méliusz Library, in cooperation with the Library and Information Science Society, has been organizing conferences in recent years, exploring the relationship between artificial intelligence, literature, and culture. These events have featured several renowned domestic and international experts discussing the opportunities (and risks) posed by modern technology.

4.5 Major festivals, conventions and other large-scale events organized by the city in the past four years in the creative field concerned, aimed at the general audience at the local, national and/or international level. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Staying true to its motto, “Open doors – open books,” the Debrecen Book Festival provides opportunities for people of all ages to connect with literature and engage with authors in person. From 2024 onward, the event features not only a distinguished author, but also a European city as the festival’s guest of honour. This focus helps the international literary orientation of Debrecen’s readers and emphasizes the importance of cultural dialogue.

The day of the city of Debrecen (11 April) coincides with the Day of Hungarian Poetry. On this day, the Debrecen Poetry Festival traditionally begins, centred around the theme of “living poetically.” The week-long event offers a range of activities throughout the city, including literary competitions in schools, artistic performances, a scholarly conference, and presentations by poets, inviting participation from all who are interested.

MODEM Modern and Contemporary Art centre regularly hosts the Debrecen Slam Poetry Competition, providing a platform for dozens of young people from Hungary and abroad to showcase their creativity in the genre over the years.

4.6 Main curriculum mechanisms, courses and programmes aimed at promoting culture and creativity, as well as arts education in the creative field concerned across different educational levels. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Literature education is a core mission for many institutions in Debrecen, playing an essential role in public education and the work of public and school libraries. The Reformed College’s centuries-old self-education circles are prime examples of extracurricular literary learning. In

the past two years, the university's Institute of Hungarian Literature and Cultural Studies has hosted conferences focusing on prominent Hungarian literary figures of local and national importance.

Since 2014, the Youth Program of the Csokonai Theatre has actively engaged with young people, using literary texts to address social issues through theatre. Reaching over 10,000 children of various ages, the program regularly visits schools with classroom performances and drama workshops.

For the purpose of supporting young talents, the Student Conference of Debrecen was created, which has expanded over the years into a nationwide competition. Students conduct research on a topic of their choice and present it to an audience. Thousands of children have participated in the conference since its inception.

4.7 Lifelong learning, tertiary education, vocational schools, training centres, residencies and other complementary education institutions specialised in the creative field concerned. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

The University of Debrecen offers one of Hungary's most extensive humanities education programs. Applicants can choose from 23 full-time Bachelor and 19 Master programs, including Hungarian language and literature, studies in other literatures and cultures, as well as translation and interpretation. PhD programs in literature are also offered and students can acquire their doctorate in the relevant field through four different departments. Available courses include literary criticism, editorial practice, culture and democracy, and more. Each year, the university provides hundreds of graduates to the region's cultural scene.

Future teachers and youth workers can study at the Reformed College of Debrecen, which also offers courses in drama therapy and literature therapy. At the Vocational Training Centre of Debrecen, students can pursue careers in the printing industry, training as technicians, machinists, print processors, and printing editors, with opportunities for local internships. The city also supports residency programs for international contemporary literature representatives, fostering professional relationships and collaboration.

4.8 Research centres, specialized institutes and programmes that focus on research and development in the creative field concerned. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Several groups are researching the field of literature at the University of Debrecen, for example, the Classical Hungarian Literary Textology Research Group at the Institute of Hungarian Literature and Culture. Their research programs are implemented in collaboration with departments of other universities and academic institutes. Undergraduate and postgraduate student groups usually organize around the teams formed in this way. Professional meetings and seminars for students have become a regular occurrence between groups.

The Méliusz Juhász Péter Library's local history collection includes articles, pictures, books, periodicals, and audiovisual content, which is also available in digital form. The database serves to expand and transmit information about the city's history, and it is freely accessible to researchers.

During the past year, the municipality of Debrecen has established a scholarship (Ferenc Kölcsey Scholarship) to support the creative activities of amateur and professional artists and communities. Alföld Studio, a literary talent development workshop, announces playwriting, translation, and poetry competitions to support creators in the creative field concerned.

4.9 Recognized infrastructure for the creation, production and dissemination of activities, goods and services in the creative field concerned, at the professional level (for example, centres for professionals, cultural enterprise incubators, chambers of commerce with specific programmes for cultural goods and services, etc.). (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

The city, its institutions of higher education, and the local NGOs offer many opportunities, services, and programs for creative and research professionals in the field of literature. The most significant of these are the libraries of the city, which are both research centres and organizers of professional programs (meetings, conferences, workshops, etc.).

Debrecen House of Literature is responsible for the preservation, safekeeping, and continuous collection of documents concerning the literary history of Debrecen, all of which are made available for scholarly research. Its collection includes legacies of writers and poets, manuscripts, and any material related to literary life. It is unique among national collections due to its comprehensiveness and richness.

The primary publishers of textbooks in Debrecen are Alföldi Printing House, the largest book and textbook producer in Hungary, and the Publishing House of the University of Debrecen, the primary goal of which is to support education and research.

Independent bookstores and cafés, which frequently organize literary events, book presentations, and reading circles, are also gaining popularity.

4.10 Main facilities and cultural spaces dedicated to practice, promotion and dissemination in the creative field concerned, aimed at the general public and/or specific audiences (such as youth, women, vulnerable groups, etc.). (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

The majority of literary programs and events in the city are organized by the Méliusz Library. The institution plays a key role in the promotion of literature, and its services are available in eight branches to tens of thousands of users, during convenient opening hours and free of charge. Due to its role as a regional centre, it also provides library services for more than 50 settlements in the surrounding area. Following Oldenburg's thesis, the library plays the role

of the 'third place' after home and workplace, the scene of recreation and community life in the lives of its visitors. The promotion of reading among children is one of its primary tasks. It provides safe and inclusive spaces to help young readers discover literature and develop lifelong learning habits.

The libraries of the university and the college support the research and learning activities of students and teachers with their extensive collections and research resources. Meanwhile, school libraries provide access to literature for younger generations. Active participation in cultural life is ensured for everyone through initiatives brought to life with the help of these shared resources.

4.11 Present a maximum of three major programmes or projects developed by the city in the past four years to promote wider participation in cultural life in the creative field concerned, particularly those aimed at disadvantaged or vulnerable social groups. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

To improve their accessibility, the city has made library services free for everyone from 2024, thus improving access by disadvantaged groups. Self-service library kiosks and library points in outlying areas ensure access for those whose access is hindered for some reason.

In connection with the international day against drug abuse, a series of events is organized in Debrecen through the efforts of the Drugs Conciliation Forum of Debrecen. These events aim to foster broad social cooperation and awareness raising concerning drug-related issues at a societal level, with literature playing a significant role in the initiative.

The Field of Dignity is a sensitizing and attitude-shaping program for children, where experts engage them in discussions about the topic of passing away. The program culminates in a literary contest, inviting children to submit poems, short stories, or tales exploring themes such as coping with loss, human dignity at the end of life, and breaking the taboo around death. The aim of the program is for the participants to become compassionate and caring adults.

4.12 Present a maximum of three major programmes or projects developed in the past four years in the creative field concerned that have helped to create and/or strengthen relations of cooperation between different actors, including the local government, the private sector, creators, civil society, academia and/or other relevant stakeholders. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

The Creative Community of Debrecen is an association of shops and communities of a pedestrianized street in the city centre, which started operating in 2022 to create a small creative district with the cooperation of the nearby shops and the city's institutions. A variety of family programs are offered here, such as the literature-focused Rhymefest. The programs are implemented by NGOs, with the support of the municipality.

Organized and coordinated by the Debrecen Great Forest Conservation Association, a literary writing competition for children is announced annually on the topic of nature conservation. Each year, more and more works are submitted to the call from areas beyond the border. A book of 50 works deemed the best by a jury is published after the conclusion of the event.

Méliusz Live Session is a new initiative of the library's music department, which is aimed at diversifying the cultural life of the community. It provides a unique platform for local amateur bands to showcase their talent, allowing them to connect with audiences in a new way. By promoting music, the library not only supports emerging artists but also serves to diversify the city's cultural life.

4.13 Role and impact of the main professional, industrial or sectoral, and non-governmental civil society organizations that are active in the city in the creative field concerned. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Debrecen is renowned for its collaborative, non-hierarchical approach among cultural and educational institutions, creative businesses, and civil society. The city is home to over 1,600 NGOs, including 200 actively engaged in cultural activities. The most significant of these corporations is the We Love Books network.

Founded in 2022, We Love Books unites communities in Debrecen that share common values centred around books, literature, and reading through their daily activities. The network currently has over sixty members, including participants from the Hungarian-inhabited regions of Romania, fostering cross-border connections.

Since 2023, the network's members have been organizing reading promotion programs and participating in major literary festivals. In 2024, they launched We Love Books Day with the goal of establishing it as a tradition. The event aimed to introduce the network's members to the public and showcase the literary activities available to interested participants throughout the year.

4.14 Main initiatives, policies, guidelines, programmes and measures, implemented by the city in the past four years to improve the status of creators and professionals and to support creative work, particularly in the creative field concerned. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Each year, Debrecen allocates a budget to provide direct financial support to NGOs and offers various awards and scholarships to recognize regional creators. The city encourages the publication of works and supports both theoretical and practical research, as well as local community initiatives. It facilitates the publication of cultural magazines and assists with the operational costs of online portals. Some of this support is provided directly by the city, while others require formal applications. The support may be financial, but may include services, in-kind support, or help with implementing specific programs. The municipality also contributes to the annual budget of We Love Books.

In addition, various foundations, such as the Foundation for the Culture of Debrecen, also support NGOs. Local creators have received more than €200,000 worth of support over the past 4 years. Beyond the support of NGOs, the municipality has encouraged proactive social initiatives and has been a partner in the operation of sustainable community projects that reach an increasingly wide range of social and age groups.

4.15 Main initiatives, policies, guidelines, programmes and measures, implemented by the city in the past four years to support and enhance local cultural industries in the creative field concerned. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

In addition to the support detailed above, the local government acts as a mediator and incubator to promote collaborations between the various actors of the sector, by organizing major events, for example, or by supporting publications of local importance. In addition, it encourages the strengthening of cooperation between the cultural and the economic sectors in local or international contexts, with the city's economic development company, EDC Urban and Economic Development centre, leading these efforts.

In the spirit of a new initiative, Phoenix Event Organizer Ltd., a municipally-owned nonprofit company, organized a large-scale professional conference in 2022, which was attended by decision-makers of larger companies, representatives of the service sector, and leaders of cultural institutions in Debrecen. The Culture to Business conference aimed to connect local cultural actors and representatives of corporations, as well as to foster a corporate culture and mindset where businesses, whether established or new in Debrecen, can channel the support received from the city and its institutions into community-building through their corporate social responsibility programs.

4.16 Main international and/or regional cooperation initiatives in the creative field concerned, developed with cities from different countries in the past four years. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

As part of a new local initiative, Méliusz Juhász Péter Library teamed up with the publishing house Wydawnictwo J in Wrocław to translate the works of the late writer, János Térey into Polish. The book was also presented at the Miłosz Festival in Kraków. Similarly, Debrecen supported the Borbély Conference organized by the University of Bratislava in honor of Szilárd Borbély, a contemporary writer with ties to both cities. Debrecen started a bilateral program for writers and illustrators with Brno, where a joint project called Holocaust 80 was organized by the two municipalities. For years, the city has been organizing the NFTDEB international hackathon and conference, with renowned speakers from Europe and beyond.

In the framework of an interregional project, the Csokonai Theatre of Debrecen cooperated with the Szigligeti Theatre of Oradea, to renovate the old theatre building in Debrecen and establish a new venue called Csokonai Forum. The Romanian partners participated in the process as supporters and contributed with programs (workshops, lectures, etc.) at the locations. During the implementation, the professional relationship between the two theatres could be further deepened.

4.17 Major programmes or projects implemented in the last four years that directly or indirectly support and create synergies with at least one of the other creative fields in the Network. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

The Day of the Book is a grassroots initiative designed to showcase Debrecen's creative communities to local residents. Launched for the first time in the fall of 2024, the event featured nine creative participants who welcomed visitors with a variety of engaging activities, including creative sessions, workshops, lectures, and concerts.

"Deszka" (Board) Festival is one of Hungary's most prestigious theatrical events. Over its 10-day run, it features not only performances but also writer-reader meetings, music events, and film screenings. Its sister event, the "Gördeszka" (Skateboard) Festival, offers performances primarily aimed at children.

MODEM Art centre is a cultural institution with international ties, showcasing the most significant fine art achievements of the 20th century. Its exhibitions regularly include contemporary works in which literature and visual arts interface.

Each year, Debrecen University Theatre holds a competition for the translation of a freely chosen contemporary drama text. The purpose of this is to introduce younger audiences to theatrical texts and provide them with experience in the art of complex translation.

4.18 Main international cooperation initiatives and/or partnerships developed in the past four years involving at least two of the eight creative fields covered by the Network (crosscutting and/or trans-sectoral projects). (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

In 2024, on the Memorial Day of the Holocaust victims in Hungary, the cities of Debrecen and Stadtallendorf, announced an international program in memory of Éva Fahidi, author, Holocaust survivor and native of Debrecen. It is supported by the Jewish Community of Debrecen, the local universities, the German Cultural Forum, and the Svetits Catholic School. The aim of the initiative is to combat racism and exclusion, counter hate speech, and promote the message of peace. The annual program includes literary and architectural events, along with a student exchange program.

Vojtina Puppet Theatre organized the International Meeting of Red Hoods in 2023. The two-day event offers attendees the opportunity to explore puppetry traditions through the performances of several Hungarian and foreign puppeteers.

Chromosphere is an initiative implemented within the framework of a Creative Europe grant, with the participation of six cultural institutions from six countries. It merges the world of Fulldome projections with digital arts workshops and performances. The main mission of Chromosphere is to explore the intersection of art, technology, sustainability while raising environmental awareness.

4.19 Main facilities and infrastructure made available as well as activities (fairs, conferences, conventions, etc.) organized by the city in the past four years, aimed at

promoting the creative fields covered by the Network other than the selected one in the application. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Next to literature, music is another creative field with a long history in the city. Made In Debrecen is a recently launched festival designed to provide an opportunity for amateur bands to perform live. Debrecen's School of Rock, operating since 1989, is a platform for learning music, regardless of previous education or age. The city has a declared musical program to develop musical life and support local amateur music performers.

The Béla Bartók International Choir Competition is one of the most prestigious music competitions in the world, which aims to promote the high-quality performances of contemporary choral music. During the event, seven European choirs compete for the European Grand Prize. A similar event, the Zoltán Kodály Music Competition, is organized for orchestral musicians, focusing on a different instrument each year.

In 2022, the Debrecen Music Council was established, which includes several organizations involved in music, educational institutions, and musical ensembles. The council aims to enrich the city's palette, which ranges from light to classical music, with new ideas, proposals, and events.

4.20 Provide detailed information of the city's overall proceeds and expenditures over the last four years, showing amounts devoted to and generated from the creative field concerned. (1200 characters maximum with spaces)

Debrecen had a budget of 476 million euros in 2020, 458 million euros in 2021, 520 million euros in 2022, and 461 million euros in 2023. The decline of the last closed year was caused by the energy crisis, but the city's budget remained balanced. Its cultural expenses and revenues in the last four fiscal years also reflect the crisis caused by the pandemic. The city's spending on culture amounted to 19 million euros in 2020, nearly 17 million euros in 2021, 19 million euros in 2022, and 15 million euros in 2023. The effects of the coronavirus epidemic and the energy crisis also affected the cultural sector, with revenues and expenses falling significantly.

The largest part of the annual cultural support is allocated to the cultural institutions: Méliusz Library, Csokonai Theatre, Debrecen House of Literature, and Vojtina Puppet Theatre, which provide the infrastructure for professional activities. The remaining amounts fund the publication of books and periodicals, the organization of literary events, or support creators in the form of scholarships. In the past four years, the creative sector produced an average annual revenue of 506,000 euros.

5. Contributions to Achieving the Objectives of the Network

5.1 Presentation of a maximum of three major initiatives, programmes and/or projects aimed at achieving the objectives of the Network at the city level by enhancing the role of culture and creativity in sustainable development.

It is recommended that two of the proposed initiatives, programmes and/or projects should correspond to the creative field concerned and one of the initiatives presented should be of a cross-cutting nature and link with at least one of the other creative fields covered by the Network. The presentation of the proposed initiatives should notably include the scope, objectives, outreach and stakeholders (partners, participants and beneficiaries), the expected results and impact to highlight the quality, diversity and innovativeness of the approach. Initiatives, programmes and/or projects supported by and/or involving the public and private sectors, civil society, professional associations and cultural institutions are encouraged (4000 characters maximum with spaces).

All of the initiatives outlined in sections 5.1 and 5.2 have been formulated with the **Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda** (TICA) in mind and several relevant indicators have been listed after each project's description.

Literature in public spaces

Displaying literature and books in public spaces is a good opportunity for literary texts to become a part of everyday life. In Debrecen, public bookshelves, poetry benches with QR codes, literature-themed murals, installations, walking tours, poetry gardens, and free outdoor literary programs contribute greatly to the democratization of culture and the cultivation of reading habits.

An important asset of Debrecen is nature, such as the Great Forest and the nearby UNESCO World Heritage Site, Hortobágy National Park - the *Puszta*. The We Love Books network plans to create a community garden where literature and nature meet. Urban community gardens would be connected to this initiative, thereby strengthening the commitment of residents to environmental awareness and sustainability.

The projects build on previous literary, community art, design, and architectural initiatives. Partners: Méliusz Juhász Péter Library, Reformed Great Church of Debrecen, MOME, Debrecen House of Literature, businesses, associations, and citizens. Participants: cultural specialists and artists. Expected results: public spaces as community spaces where literature is accessible to everyone in line with TICA 5, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22.

Month of Books

The members of the We Love Books network, within the framework of a participatory program that encourages cooperation and the involvement of new members, implement literary, artistic, and community programs for a month in neighbourhoods where culture is less or not at all accessible to the people who live there. The highlight of the project is the We Love Books thematic day, which is also connected to World Reading Day and is realized in cooperation with the members of the network.

The programs are based on previous initiatives and cover a wide spectrum of genres, including contemporary literary lectures, literary therapy sessions, pop-up exhibitions, craft activities, literary walks, poetry writing competitions, readings, etc. The project aims to expand the network, increase its visibility, promote reading culture, make culture more accessible, and strengthen social cohesion.

Partners: We Love Books network. Participants: residents of the city. Expected results: stronger cooperation between the members of We Love Books, new members joining the network, culture becoming accessible for disadvantaged social groups in line with TICA 5, 18, 20, 21, and 22.

BookLab

By bringing together various actors of the creative industry - software developers, publishers, printing houses, distributors, libraries, and authors - we set up creative industry hubs in libraries, thanks to which we can enhance the library experience of users with personalized recommendations, demand-based and automated purchases. On top of that, we want to reach and involve new groups in the libraries by creating online and hybrid services that were previously unavailable elsewhere and offer a different perspective on library usage. In the course of the development of the creative industry, we strive for cost-effectiveness and environmental protection, as a result of which access to library services becomes even more convenient and cheaper for all users.

Partners: software developers, book publishers, printers, distributors, libraries, and authors. Participants: residents of the city. Expected results: renewal of library services and making them more convenient to access in line with TICA 3, 4, 8, 11, and 20.

5.2 Presentation of a maximum of three major initiatives, programmes and/or projects aimed at achieving the Network's objectives on an international level, particularly those involving other member cities of the Network.

The presentation of the proposed initiatives, programmes and/or projects should notably include the scope, objectives, outreach, stakeholders (partners, participants and beneficiaries) and expected results and impact, to highlight the quality, diversity and innovativeness of the approach. Initiatives supporting the promotion of the Network in under-represented regions and countries, as well as actions involving cities in developing countries to strengthen North-South and South-South cooperation, are encouraged. A cross-cutting initiative linking more than one creative field covered by the Network may be presented (4000 characters maximum with spaces)

Writers' Residency

From 2025, Debrecen wishes to create new locations for bilateral residency programs in cooperation with UNESCO Creative Cities. The apartment recently created for this purpose is the former residence of the late contemporary author Szilárd Borbély, an important site of literary memory in the town. According to our current plans, we will welcome two foreign authors in the city for 2-8 weeks each year, providing an opportunity to get to know local actors and audiences of literary life, as well as to inspire the creation of new works.

The initiative is aimed not only at writers but translators as well. Literary translation is a field with considerable background in the city thanks to curricula provided by the university, active local translators, and international relations maintained by the cultural institutions. The residence program and the aforementioned assets provide a solid foundation for future initiatives.

Partners: UNESCO Creative Cities Network, writers' associations, professional organizations, creators. Expected results: cultural exchange and enrichment, support of local and foreign talents, strengthening of community and network relations, diverse cultural offerings in line with TICA 1, 2, 10, 14, and 19.

Book Festival and Poetry Festival

The Book Festival and the Poetry Festival are the region's most popular literary events. The Book Festival, set to celebrate its 100th anniversary soon, attracts thousands of city residents each year and continues to thrive with unbroken success and popularity. From 2024 onwards, our international partners are also represented at the event. After this year's visit from Târgu Mureș, writers, poets, and translators from Bratislava will be our guests in 2025.

The Poetry Festival is a less centralized event offering diverse locations and programs, which enrich the city's cultural life with both classical and contemporary poetry. Thanks to the strengthening of international relations, we can expect greater involvement from our international partners at both events, which further expands the possibilities of literary exchange and cultural dialogue.

Partners: Méliusz Juhász Péter Library, University of Debrecen, Reformed College, Déri Museum, Goethe Institute, Alliance Française, American Corner, Alföld Studio, bookstores and publishers operating in the region. Expected results: cultural exchange and diversity, support of emerging authors, strengthening of community identity, strengthening of cohesion between network members in line with TICA 5, 8, 11, 14, and 20.

Book of the Year Award

We are planning to announce a joint award of the UNESCO Creative Cities of Literature Network. This offers an opportunity for publishers and printing houses operating in the network to earn the award with books that meet the following three criteria:

- the content of the book meets modern expectations and hopefully conveys the values represented by UNESCO;
- the publication represents high-quality and/or innovative book design;
- the production technology complies with today's economic and environmental standards.

The decision on the award will be made by a board made up of members of the network, which includes both southern and northern cities, thus strengthening the North-South relations between the members. We would like to contribute to increasing the proactivity of the cities belonging to the network, by encouraging the presentation of the winning book at the cities' literary events, thus providing the winners with ever greater prestige and visibility.

Partners: members of the Cities of Literature network Participants: residents of the cities of the network. Expected results: greater prestige and visibility for books and book creators in line with TICA 5, 14, 19, 20, and 21.

5.3 Estimated budget for implementing the proposed action plan.

It is recommended to present the estimated overall annual budget for implementing the proposed action plan over a period of 4 years, as well as the respective percentages that will be earmarked to local and international activities respectively. All of the resources that the city expects to allocate should be mentioned, not only including financial resources but also other resources (personnel, facilities, etc.). Please indicate any existing funding or envisaged funding opportunities with national, regional and international funding agencies such as development banks and institutions, in order to complement the budget from the municipality itself. Alternative and innovative fundraising mechanisms may be presented (1200 characters maximum with spaces). The evaluation will not be made on the basis of the size of the proposed budget but in terms of its feasibility, coherence, achievability and sustainability in relation to the proposed action plan.

€252,000 annually, €190,000 for local (5.1) and €62,000 for international (5.2) projects based on the following distribution:

- Literature in public spaces: €20,000
- Month of Books: €20,000
- BookLab: €150,000
- Writers' Residence: €12,000
- Book Festival and Poetry Festival: €40,000
- Book of the Year Award: €10,000

60% of the planned budget comes from the city (60% of which comes from EU grants), and 40% comes from state funds. The planned budget primarily reflects the first year of the program; the ratio of the costs of local and international programs may change over the years, in favour of international programs, thanks to increased foreign presence.

Partners: Municipality of Debrecen, Méliusz Juhász Péter Library, EDC Debrecen Urban and Economic Development centre, We Love Books network.

Other expected sources: National Cultural Fund, Petőfi Cultural Agency, EIT Culture & Creativity, Creative Europe.

5.4 Intended structure for the implementation and management of the action plan

Presentation of the organizational structure, human resources and planned working arrangements that will be established to ensure the programming and implementation of the proposed action plan. It is recommended that the person in charge of the team or entity will also be the main executive contact (focal point) of the city in case of designation. Information about potential partners for the implementation of the action plan, along with the names, titles and contact details of key experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions, may also be provided (1700 characters maximum with spaces).

Based on the decision of the Municipality of Debrecen's City Council, the coordination of the planned programs and the tasks associated with network membership will be supervised by Méliusz Juhász Péter Library. Through its role and experiences in local cultural life, the library can effectively cooperate with Debrecen's leadership, partner institutions and cities, as well as NGOs operating in the creative field, in order to make the city an active member of the Creative Cities network, representing the network's values and objectives. As an active member of the We Love Books network, the library already has direct relations with the NGOs and businesses involved in the implementation.

The implementation itself is coordinated by a five-person management team consisting of professionals with several years of experience in the relevant fields. Furthermore, every member of the team has actively participated in the process of preparation and the writing of the application, so they have adequate knowledge and insight into the commitments and tasks associated with network membership from the very beginning.

The management team includes a project leader, an operative manager, a coordinator, as well as a communications and a project assistant.

5.5 Intended plan for communication and awareness-raising.

Presentation of a comprehensive communication and awareness-raising strategy and plan for promoting the Network and its objectives to a wide audience, as well as the expected outcomes and impact of this plan (1700 characters maximum with spaces).

In case of a winning application, our primary goals include the creation of an image booklet that reflects the values of our city and paints an overall picture of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, which will strengthen the effectiveness and credibility of our common messages.

The dissemination of the objectives represented by the UNESCO's Creative Cities Network will be primarily supported by Méliusz Library and the We Love Books network. By having city-wide coverage, they are able to deliver messages to a wide audience, and with their

online challenges, they can also reach the younger generations. The Month of Books in the fall of 2025 will be the first in a dedicated series of events during which we will celebrate our membership in the event of a successful application.

The websites and social media platforms of the municipality and the various cultural institutions also enable the continuous flow of information. Since they can reach a wide audience, local radio and television channels play a key role in the communication network of the city's cultural life as well.

Our main tool for communication is the debrecenliterature.com website, which was created in 2021 to present the city's book culture, popularize reading, and provide news about Debrecen's literacy programs. Debrecen Literature pays particular attention to conveying its messages to young people, so it has extended its communication to social media sites, such as Facebook and Instagram.

A prominent partner for communication within the city is the news portal Dehir, which provides opportunities for appearances on its various platforms (Debreceni Korzó, television, dehir.hu) and helps to reach the public service media.

6. Commitment to the Network

6.1 Commitment to the UCCN Reporting Exercise

✓ By checking the box, the city if designated commits to participating in the UCCN Reporting Exercise on a quadrennial basis. This report will provide detailed information on the implementation and impact of its action plan as a UNESCO Creative City, as well as its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and the global priorities put forward by the MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration in the field of culture. Further details will be provided to the designated cities in due course.

6.2 Participation in the annual conferences of the Network

✓ By checking the box, the city if designated commits to ensuring the participation of a delegation from the city, preferably including the Mayor and the main executive contact, in the Annual Conferences of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, and to cover any travel, accommodation and other subsistence costs incurred.

6.3 Providing information to the Secretariat

✓ By checking the box, the city if designated commits to regularly providing up-to-date key information related to the implementation of the city's membership, notably any changes in

all its contact details (Mayor, main executive contact and other contacts - see sections 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7) through a formal letter from the Mayor or a relevant municipal department/service. The city also commits to creating a generic email address to facilitate communications within the Network in case of designation.

6.4 Dissemination of information provided by UNESCO

✓ By checking the box, the city if designated commits to regularly disseminating key relevant information as well as communication materials shared by UNESCO through the city's communication and social media platforms. The main communication contact alongside the main executive contact (please refer to Section 1.5) shall be responsible for undertaking this task and keeping the UNESCO Secretariat informed in this regard.

7. Communication Materials

7.1 Brief and pertinent presentation of the cultural assets and creative industries of the city in the creative field concerned, avoiding the exclusive promotion of city branding or tourism. Data, statistics and other indicators in the field of cultural and creativity, especially in the creative field concerned, are highly recommended (1700 characters maximum with spaces).

Debrecen is the second largest city in Hungary, with 200,000 inhabitants, and another 100,000 in its vicinity. Hundreds of years of literary traditions formed a bridge between religious and cultural communities living side by side. The creative field has a wide-ranging institutional system, an active civil life, and several important industrial actors, providing a living for nearly 1,000 creators. Among them is the 460-year-old Alföldi Printing House, which employs 400 people and has a turnover of 30 million euros. The city's three major libraries have more than 7,000,000 documents and 35,000 readers, and their services are regional and national in scope. The city's primary, secondary, and higher education systems, which date back half a millennium, are embedded in a significant national, and international network. At the University of Debrecen the literature of Hungary, as well as other nations is researched and taught at the highest professional level. The citizens engage in an active literary life; there are reading and creative circles, such as Alföld Foundation, which publishes the 70-year-old literary magazine Alföld.

Currently, the city does not have a dedicated tool/organization for a more detailed examination of these indicators, therefore, during the development process of the following years, it is necessary to modernize this area as well.

7.2 Expected contributions of the city to achieving the objectives of the Network according to the proposed action plan (800 characters maximum, presented in bullet points).

As the City of Literature, Debrecen wants to achieve the following:

- conveying the values of UNESCO to the population of the city and the region;
- providing open and inclusive spaces for culture;
- embracing knowledge, new perspectives, and good practices through foreign relations;
- strengthening the cohesion between NGOs, institutions, and economic enterprises;
- achieving an increase in cultural expenditures;
- increasing participation and participation opportunities;
- developing the cultural infrastructure;
- representing and promoting sustainable development.

7.3 A maximum of two URL links to websites related to the creative field concerned in the city and/or key elements of the application. Relevant social media handles for the city, if any, (such as Facebook, Instagram, and X) may also be provided.

<https://debrecenliterature.hu/>

Social media:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086123298272>

<https://www.instagram.com/litdeb/>

7.4 List of the city's membership in other UNESCO's cities networks (such as UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities), as well as other major international and inter-regional cities networks or platforms.

Alliance Française

American Corner

Association of Hungarian Librarians

Carpathian Euroregion

Combat Antisemitism Movement

Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy Europe

Culture Next

Ecsite – European Network Science Centres & Museums

European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) - Culture and Creativity, Cities and Regions Network

EIT Health

EIT Urban Mobility

ekip (Innovation Policy Platform for the Cultural and Creative Industries) Community

Eurocities

Eurodesk

EUNIC – EU National Institutes for Culture

European Botanic Gardens Consortium (EBGC)

European Cities of the Reformation