

External Expertise for the project BSR Cultural Pearls: Development of the evaluation framework and value output

Request for expertise proposals 18/09/2024

The BSR Cultural Pearls project, co-funded by the EU's Interreg programme, aims to strengthen social resilience in Baltic Sea Region municipalities by harnessing the potential of local assets of culture and creativity. Annually, we invite local authorities from the region – especially those from less central areas – to join this transformative journey. Through a meticulous selection process, the candidates with outstanding and impactful action plans on culture driven social resilience are awarded the BSR Cultural Pearls title. The journey to becoming a BSR Cultural Pearl unfolds in stages. Initially, a selection based on motivation and concept identifies eligible candidates. These candidates then enter a phase of action plan development, creating Culture and Resilience Action Plans with access to specialised tools, webinars, and individual mentorship. An international jury then selects the best plans to award the BSR Cultural Pearl title. Award recipients then embark on a one-year programme of action plan implementation, supported by mentors and experts locally as well through webinars, conferences, and study visits. This includes seed money for external support and collaboration with local cultural and creative sector actors. Showcased across the region, the BSR Cultural Pearls recipients highlight the power of community and culture. Both awardees and the other participating municipalities join the BSR Cultural Pearls network, gaining international exposure and continuing to enhance their community's resilience.

The project's key components are 1) the cultural and resilience action plan 2) the peer-learning programme and 3) the BSR Cultural Pearls award. These are diverse elements developed in the project yet aiming for the same goal of added resilience and innovation capacity for involved municipalities and cities through cultural means.

The expert's role is to qualitatively assess the project outcomes and their added value. The evaluation should provide an overview of the project's impact and the usefulness of the solutions developed. It should also offer practical suggestions for short to medium-term implementation, both within the current project and future ones building on it. The knowledge will come from qualitative interviews with Pearl representatives and selected members of the project consortium. These interviews, along with regular evaluations, will help draw relevant conclusions. As a result, an overall evaluation framework will be produced, synthesizing the assessments of the awarded Pearls to improve the initiative in the future.

The evaluation will consist of two phases:

Phase 1: First evaluation

The purpose of the first phase is to conduct an evaluation with the input of the first round of Cultural Pearls title receivers, four municipalities throughout the Baltic Sea region. The expert will develop an evaluation framework, approach, and methodology. Input will be gathered through qualitative interviews and possibly other methods. These will involve Pearl title recipients, their mentors, and selected partners from the project consortium. The evaluation aims to uncover the Pearls' experiences during the title year and their perceptions of the program elements. It will also assess the impact and added value the program has brought to the municipalities. The findings support the overall understanding of project value creation and possible future positive impacts of cultural means in social resilience building.

Tasks and Timeline

- Development of the overall evaluation concept, approach and methodology for qualitative assessment of the project added value (10-11/2024);
- Gathering input from awarded Pearls, their mentors and selected partners from the project consortium as well as from the evaluations carried out throughout the project, analysing the gathered data and summarizing the received input (11-12/2024);
- Presenting the partner consortium with the findings and conclusions as well as give practically implementable suggestions for the future of the project and its forthcoming iterations (01/2025)

The current timeline of tasks is indicative and subject to changes. The tasks and the timeline will be clarified with the expert once contracted.

Phase 2: Second evaluation

In this phase, the expert is using the previously created framework and methodology to carry out two separate rounds of evaluations. First, the expert approaches the first round of Pearls for the second time with the aim to gather information on their experience after the ending of the Title year. The evaluation builds on the findings of the initial assessment. It explores whether the first round of Pearls has had a lasting impact on social resilience. It also examines if their efforts to engage the cultural sector for resilience have continued. Additionally, the evaluation looks into their experience within the Pearls network and other related findings. Secondly, the expert conducts an evaluation with the second round of Pearls, their mentors and select partners of the project consortium, conducting qualitative interviews in combination with other evaluative methods, if deemed necessary. The evaluation is structured in the same way as the initial round: aiming to learn about the Pearls' perceptions regarding the elements provided to them within the year and the impact and added value the program has brought about within the municipalities, among other conclusions. Having conducted both evaluations, the expert then presents their findings to the partner consortium.

Tasks and Timeline

- Gathering input from the first round of Pearls and the second round of Pearls, their mentors and select partners from the project consortium as well as from the evaluations carried out throughout the project, analysing the gathered data and summarizing the received input (09-10/2025);

- Presenting the partner consortium with the findings and conclusions as well as give practically implementable suggestions for the future of the project and its next iterations (11/2025)

Tangible outputs

As a result of the data gathering and the made analysis, the expert is expected to produce a tangible output, a methodology of how the added value of the Cultural Peals is assessed during the project and in the future. This output is an online document including visualizations of the evaluation elements and approaches, analysis of the made evaluations highlighting the diverse qualities of added value in a simple and easily understandable form. This output is also a practical guideline and support for the possible future Cultural Pearls and the supportive institutions, in how value is understood and assessed within the project context of social resilience building by cultural means.

All costs, such as use of external visualists or graphic design, need to be part of this offer in a way that the expert can provide the ready outcome as a conclusion of the service.

Timeframe and budget

Maximum amount of remuneration is **EUR 20,000 including** all applicable taxes, also VAT if applicable. However, the cost effectiveness of the proposal will be one of the selection criteria.

Expert involvement in project - 10/2024 – 11/2025.

Application proposal submission

We are asking for proposals from a small, selected group of experts, with acknowledged expertise in the project topic. The proposal may also be available to the public on the project partner websites. The expert for the work will be selected according to their profile, the quality of their proposal and the financial offer made. In the selection process, the following qualities will be evaluated:

- Expertise and former experiences related to the evaluation and/or research of cultural means and their intangible impacts (social resilience, community development or other).
- Work experience and relevant references for these tasks:
 - Proposed methodology and practical approach to the development of the evaluation framework, data analysis and output design.
 - Former experience of development of an evaluation framework, data analyses of cultural projects and/or projects related to social resilience, and presented former references of similar outputs, frameworks and tools.
 - Description of expert networks useful to the development of the evaluation framework and other possible resources.
- Skills and experience for these tasks:
 - Research skills: Strong research skills, including creating evaluation concepts, identifying relevant research approaches and using various research methodologies;
 - Analytical Skills: Strong analytical skills to review and analyze data, identify patterns, and draw conclusions;

- Communication Skills: Excellent communication skills to convey complex information and ideas to various stakeholders, including project managers, project partners, stakeholders, involved municipalities and cities.
- Objectivity: The expert should be able to maintain an objective perspective throughout the evaluation process, without bias or influence from external factors.
- Technical Knowledge: Good understanding of the technical aspects of the project they are evaluating. This may include knowledge of project management methodologies, tools, and software.

In your proposal, please point out and clarify the potential approach and/or methods and tools for the evaluation process, and estimated time investments for the different tasks and their price in euros (proposed budget, details of full cost and the breakdown of separate tasks, hourly rates, and anticipated number of hours). Share information about your solutions regarding team building and possible use of outsourced services and provide the short CVs of all core team members who are part of the proposal. Also add information about the company or organization and its registration number, as well as a list of relevant previous projects or customers. Send all materials preferably in PDF format.

The expert is commissioned by the Northern Dimension Partnership on Culture, a project partner in the BSR Cultural Pearls project co-financed by the Interreg Baltic Sea Region. NPDC will take in consideration all proposals that arrive by October 9th, 2024 at the latest to the e-mail info@ndpculture.org.

For further information:

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The total budget of the BSR Cultural Pearls project is 3.5M EUR, of which 80%, or 2.8M EUR, comes from the Interreg Baltic Sea Region program and the remaining 20% from the project partners.