

Demo site 1: Christo and Jeanne-Claude Centre, Gabrovo, Bulgaria



In Gabrovo, a city known for its creativity and craftsmanship, an unused socialist building is being given a second life as a vibrant cultural hub. The Christo and Jeanne-Claude Centre is located in the former Textile Technical School — a monumental structure built in the 1960s. Situated by the Yantra River, the building is now at the heart of an ambitious vision that blends art, science, education, crafts, and social inclusion.

Facade of the former Textile Technical School — now the Christo and Jeanne-Claude Centre, already home to cultural events and artistic expressions, and awaiting full renovation with EU support (Photo credit: Boriana Pandova)

From abandoned school to cultural powerhouse

The transformation of the Centre is part of the large-scale urban regeneration project “Shores of Contemporaneity – a set of measures under the Regional Development Programme 2021–2027”, approved in early August 2025 under the Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) approach — a pilot mechanism in Bulgaria’s new territorial development strategy, supported by the EU Cohesion Policy.



Scene from an art workshop held inside the building (Photo credit: Boriana Pandova)



A glimpse inside the Christo and Jeanne-Claude Centre — concept rendering of its future spaces, ahead of the architectural competition

The redevelopment will turn the building into a multi-functional cultural and community space, bringing together a diverse range of uses under one roof. It will include adaptable event halls for performances, conferences, and public gatherings; exhibition galleries alongside educational rooms; and a specialised textile material library celebrating Gabrovo’s heritage in textile arts and manufacturing. Accommodation will be provided for artists-in-residence, while visitors and residents alike will be able to enjoy a café for informal meetings, a library for research and inspiration, and a gift shop offering locally crafted works and souvenirs.



Linking culture, community, and the riverside

The Centre's location on the banks of the Yantra is strategic. The surrounding riverside zone will also undergo major improvements: connecting pedestrian and cycling routes, creating new green and recreational spaces, and installing a pedestrian bridge between key neighbourhoods. Plans include recreation areas, sports zones, and Gabrovo's first pump track for extreme and urban sports.

Visualisation of the project for improving the area around the Centre and the Yantra River

A pilot site for AccesS

As a demonstration site in the AccesS project, the Christo and Jeanne-Claude Centre will test innovative approaches to accessibility and sustainability. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Building Information Modelling (BIM), and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) will be deployed to design and manage spaces that are more inclusive and adaptive.

Here, accessibility means more than ramps and elevators: it is about spatial orientation, cultural openness, and enabling people to actively participate rather than remain passive visitors. The pilot will explore how digital tools can support these goals, from environmental monitoring to improved wayfinding.



Moment from a meeting/cultural event involving partners and the local community (Photo credit: Boriana Pandova)



From an exhibition presenting the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude



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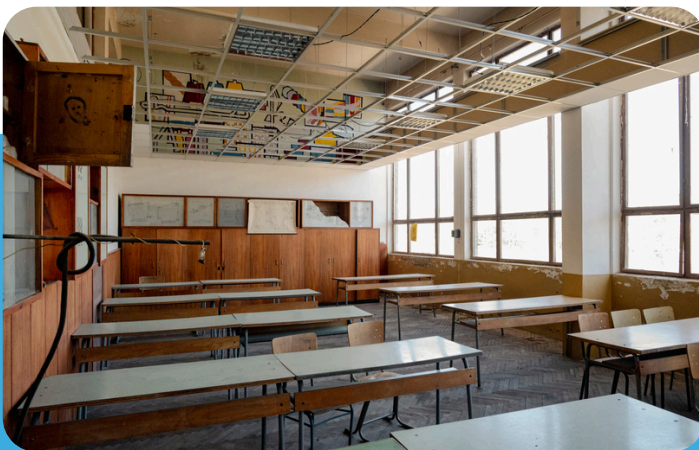


International interest and community engagement

The Centre is already attracting attention. In June 2025, during the “Mayors Speak” forum in Gabrovo, international guests, including urban sustainability experts from Poland, Azerbaijan, Spain, Czechia, Germany, Finland, Greece, and Slovakia visited the site. They were impressed by its history, potential, and the city’s bold vision for combining heritage reuse, culture, and accessibility.



Moment from the visit of international guests during the “Mayors Speak” forum, taken on site at the Centre



Classroom from the former school, “frozen in time”, awaiting its transformation into an artist residency (Photo credit: Boriana Pandova)

Part of a bigger picture

The Christo and Jeanne-Claude Centre is just one of several flagship investments in Gabrovo under the ITI approach. Together, these interventions are designed to strengthen Gabrovo’s role as a green, innovative, and inclusive city. In the broader European context, the project illustrates how cultural heritage can be a driver of sustainable urban development — not only preserving history but adapting it to serve contemporary needs and inspire future generations.



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