



Selection of the EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2024 IN A CITY FROM AN EFTA/EEA COUNTRY, A CANDIDATE COUNTRY OR A POTENTIAL CANDIDATE TO EU MEMBERSHIP

**The Expert Panel's report
Selection Stage**

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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the final selection stage of the competition for the European Capital of Culture 2024 title in a city from an EFTA/EEA country, a candidate country or a potential candidate to EU membership.

The European Commission (the “Commission”) is the managing authority of the competition.

The competition is governed by:

Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 as amended by Decision (EU) 2017/1545 (the “Decision”)¹,

The Rules of Procedure – “Competition for the 2024 European Capital of Culture title for cities in EFTA/EEA countries, candidate countries and potential candidates participating in Creative Europe” (the “Rules”) issued by the Commission and posted on their website in October 2017².

Selection Panel

The selection panel consists of 10 members, appointed by the institutions and bodies of the European Union (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions) in line with article 6 of the Decision.

Preselection phase

The Commission issued a call for submission of applications in October 2017³. The call was open to cities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Norway. Cities in Serbia were not eligible, as Novi Sad in Serbia will host the European Capital of Culture event in 2021. There were five applications submitted by the deadline of 10 October 2018: Bodø (Norway), Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Srebrenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Tirana (Albania).

The competition was then in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and final selection.

The panel met in Brussels on 21-22 November 2018 for the pre-selection meeting. The panel elected Jiří Suchánek as its chair and Suzana Žilič Fišer as vice-chair. The panel recommended that the Commission invite three applicant cities (Banja Luka, Bodø and Mostar) to progress to the final selection stage. The panel’s pre-selection report is published on the website of the Commission⁴.

¹ See at:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG and <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32017D1545>

² See at:

file:///U:/D2/Culture%20other%20actions/European%20Capitals%20of%20Culture/2024/Candidate_EEA%20countries/rules-of-procedure.pdf

³ See at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/calls/2017-eac-a01>

⁴ See at:

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/ecoc-2024-preselection-report-candidatecountries_en.pdf

The Commission accepted the panel's recommendation and invited the three cities to submit revised applications with a deadline of 23 August 2019.

The three short-listed cities submitted their revised applications ("bid-books") by this deadline.

The following steps took place between the pre-selection and final selection meetings: The three cities met with the panel's chair Jiri Suchanek and representatives from the Commission via videoconference to seek clarification of the recommendations in the pre-selection report.

In September 2019, two members of the panel (Cristina Farinha and Suzana Žilič Fišer) visited Banja Luka and Mostar, while in parallel two other members (Beatriz Garcia and Dessislava Gavrilova) visited Bodø, spending one day in each city. Observers from the Commission attended these city visits. The visiting panel members reported to the full panel at the selection meeting.

Selection meeting

The panel met again in Brussels on 24-25 September 2019 for the final selection meeting. Since pre-selection, the three members of the panel designated by the Council of the EU and the one member designated by the European Committee of the Regions have changed in accordance with Article 6, paragraph 7, of the Decision. On 24 September, the panel confirmed Jiří Suchánek as its chair and Suzana Žilič Fišer as vice-chair. Due to force majeure, one of the panel members – Beatriz Garcia – was unable to attend. Representatives of the Commission attended the meeting as observers. The observers took no part in the panel's deliberations or decision.

All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality.

At the meeting each candidate, in alphabetical order, presented their case (in 30 minutes) and answered questions from the panel members (in 75 minutes). Delegations had up to ten members, and they were all led by their Mayor.

The Chair of the panel announced the panel's recommendation at a press conference in the House of European History in Brussels.

Context

The panel recognised three strong bids reflecting different situations in their respective countries and acknowledged a considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection. The panel noted that all three cities have further used the opportunity of the bidding process to reinforce their cultural strategies as well as the role of culture in their overall socio-economic development and their connection with the European Union. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECOC competition. The panel encourages all three cities, to continue with the development and implementation of their strategies as well as with the reinforcement of their cultural operators' connection with counterparts from the European Union.

Assessments of the candidates

The panel assessed each candidate against the objectives of the ECOC action (Article 2 of the Decision) and the six specific criteria in Article 5:

- Contribution to the long-term cultural strategy of the city,
- European dimension,
- Cultural and artistic content,

- Capacity to deliver,
- Outreach,
- Management.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the proposed programme set out in the bid-book and presentation session.

Banja Luka

Banja Luka presented their bid under the banner of “Opposites Attract”. The city has partnered with the cities of Bihać and Jajce.

Contribution to the long-term cultural strategy of the city

The city’s cultural strategy – which is in line with that adopted at the level of “Republika Srpska” (one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina) – was unanimously approved in June 2018. According to the bid-book, the process that led to its adoption took on board the views of all local cultural stakeholders, and the capacities and potentials of the city’s cultural landscape are well defined, which is sound.

The panel takes note that this is the first strategy of cultural development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a very positive and welcomed achievement. It provides in general a good starting point for Banja Luka’s cultural development. In this regard, the strategy’s objectives – which include the implementation of a transparent and participative cultural policy, the creation of an infrastructural network for culture and arts as well as the promotion of a strong professional art scene – are perceived as important steps. However, the view of the panel is that the role of independent stakeholders is insufficient and the necessary capacity-building planning was not strong enough to overcome this deficiency in the longer run.

Furthermore, while the City is now committed to implementing the project, the panel felt that the strategy’s operational settings could have been more visible, in particular regarding long-term ambitions. The great expectations connected with these cultural plans are also very demanding and imply a high level of risk-taking.

It appears that the strategy has been developed in line with the goals of the Banja Luka ECOC 2024 candidature, which is sound. Indeed, the document identifies not only the main challenges but also the role of the ECOC project in the overall city development.

It is planned that the ECOC internal evaluation is conducted by the Foundation in charge of delivering the ECOC project in cooperation with the University of Banja Luka and the Association of Accountants and Auditors of Republika Srpska. External evaluators are planned to be selected through public tenders. The various stages of the evaluation planning are clear and well defined and a good dissemination of the outcomes at local and international levels (among ECOCs) is foreseen. However, the features of the evaluation could have been more connected to the European dimension.

While the planning for cultural development with the cities of Bihać and Jajce is quite welcomed, the structure of such a cooperation is unclear at this stage.

European dimension

The bid-book highlights the main European topics that are planned to be addressed by the ECOC under the overall concept of “Opposites Attract”: the idea of reconciliation, dealing with the recent traumatic past of this region of Europe, the need to deal with blocked memories and interreligious conflicts. These are all very relevant and important

topics for the whole of Europe. In this context, the ECOC also plans to promote European values in an intercultural setting and to explore issues of migration and cultural dialogue for the further development of European societies. However, while the linguistic dimension of Europe, in general, and of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular, is extremely rich and could have been an evident area of European dimension, the panel's view is that this issue was not convincingly addressed in the bid-book.

The panel also regrets that partnerships for intercultural projects were not yet sufficiently identified. The intention to promote cultural diversity in Europe as well as intercultural dialogue and a greater mutual understanding within Europe is clearly mentioned in the bid-book, but the panel felt that this dimension, which is an important objective of the ECOC action, would need greater capacities in relation to European partnerships. Accordingly, also a cooperation with countries that underwent similar processes should have been more developed and the concept "Opposites Attract" was expected to be more clearly translated into a European narrative. The panel appreciated the professional approach regarding the relevant topics, but international partnerships are needed for implementing these ideas.

The panel did not see clearly enough from the bid-book and the hearing how Banja Luka intended to reach its welcomed ambition to have more than 85% of its projects co-created with European cultural organisations, networks, institutes and artists while the local scene was reported as not cooperating internationally in a satisfactory level. The lack of European funding for cities from Bosnia and Herzegovina in general is a factor that narrows the opportunities for such international cooperation and the panel was expecting a proposal that would address this shortcoming.

On a more positive note, the bid-book included some very positive cooperation ideas with ECOC cities. Moreover, the idea of implementing active steps for the diaspora to use its members as cultural ambassadors during the ECOC year is a very sound element but not very clear at this stage.

Cultural and artistic content

The programme is coherent and well-structured around two opposite poles – weaknesses and neglected yet enormous potentials. The weaknesses are explored through two streams: "Alternating Current" (with "Checkpoint" and "Intersection") and "Charging the Battery" (with "Hajduci i Jataci" and "The Generator: 224"). The potentials are represented by two further streams: "Spark" (with "Remember, Remember" and "Ground yourself") and "New Energy" (with "Inside out" and "Sing-Off"). The programme includes four flagships, one for each stream.

There is a plan for three opening ceremonies – as the symbol of dialogue and participation, reflecting the three constituent nations living in the region of Krajina. The panel would expect that the languages of these three nationalities are included in all activities. The involvement of further expertise as well as the use of a wide range of available local and international knowledge and experience would make the cultural heritage plans stronger. This applies also to conflict prevention techniques and most-needed professional moderation, which are not convincingly covered.

The panel appreciated good projects' descriptions based on coherent principles: partners, participation, impact, challenges and opposites that attract. The variety and range of proposed activities – covering various art fields – are satisfactory. Visual arts, design, film, music and sound as well as architecture are prominent in the programme. The latter includes many interesting elements, for example: "I for Identity" – a large-scale exhibition on building and destroying identity, "Checkpoint" with 249 spatial installations,

“Hajduci i Jataci” as well as a promising collaboration with the “Magnificent Ten” (big international names in the artistic community).

While the projects are certainly of interest, the panel had however some doubts in terms of their overall feasibility. The panel was not convinced about the level of collaboration with different groups in society. There is also additional need in building the capacities for stakeholders. The panel appreciated the idea to develop different partnerships but some of them are not perceived as solid artistic collaborations. The application stresses the interdisciplinary approach and the plan to have 80% of the artistic programme of Banja Luka 2024 coming from open calls.

The programme is sophisticated with an optimistic approach; however, the fact that many projects are connected to new infrastructure brings additional risks in terms of implementation. The panel also had the feeling from the hearing that there was a lack of expertise regarding the use of intangible elements for the museum. Additionally, the methodology for developing the programme alongside a conflict prevention methodology was not presented. Finally, the concept of “Opposites Attract” was not clearly translated into the projects.

The ECOC project intends to encourage sustainability in the sector by strengthening existing events and introducing new processes. There are some NGOs and cultural institutions mentioned with which cooperation is envisaged, but it is not clear whether the cooperation includes the conception and implementation of the cultural programme or whether these are just general partners of the ECOC. The status of collaboration with the proposed renowned international artists remained unclear, which raised the question of the proposal’s feasibility.

The panel especially encourages creating partnerships with artistic and cultural organisations from Central and Eastern Europe, countries that have already successfully undergone the process of transformation and reconciliation.

Capacity to deliver

The ECOC project has the support from Banja Luka's current mayor and the City administration. The bid-book also indicates that it has the community and political support at the level of Republika Srpska and of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, there is a clear support from the mayors of the two partner cities of Jajce and Bihać.

The panel was not totally reassured that Banja Luka would have an adequate infrastructure to hold such a large-scale event as an ECOC. There are still some question marks regarding the existing and the future cultural infrastructures, even though the bid-book includes an ambitious plan for capital investments. Not surprisingly, the application mentions cultural infrastructure as a strong legacy for the ECOC year.

Outreach

The panel appreciates the involvement of the local population and civil society in the preparation of the application. It appears from the bid-book that many public presentations and panel discussions, open discussions in educational institutions, open call and talks as well as public events for local communities were organised. There are also good ideas for further facilitating the engagement of citizens in different subjects.

However, it was not clear from the bid-book and the hearing which elements of the ECOC candidature had been proposed by the population and the NGOs in Banja Luka and the region.

The main target group for Banja Luka 2024 is young audience. The plan for addressing target groups with special needs (e.g. people with visual, auditory and motor impairments and their families) includes clear expectations in terms of outcomes, which is a positive element. The panel appreciates that the important topic of mental health is included in the programme, potentially also increasing its outreach potential. There are also projects for senior citizens and, very importantly, socially marginalised groups.

The Foundation also plans to implement a capacity-building programme for managers, producers and artists. The audience development strategy is being prepared and though there are already some good ideas – e.g. meeting points for different audiences and other projects mentioned – the overall methodology in this regard is not yet satisfactory presented.

Management

The overall budget for operating expenditure is €22m, which seems realistic to implement the project. The breakdown between programme (around 70,5% of the total), promotion and marketing (around 13%), wages and administration (14,5%) and other expenses (around 2%) is clear and feasible.

It is planned that the national level and the City of Banja Luka will both contribute with €5,5m to the ECOC project, while Republika Srpska would be the main contributor with €9m. Private funding is planned to amount to €1m. However, for a sound implementation of an ECOC, the intended plan for project funding should be presented and the panel was not provided with enough details to assess its financial feasibility.

The ECOC 2024 managing foundation is already established by the City of Banja Luka as a non-profit independent body. The managing structure and staff employment plan of the Foundation are clear.

The procedures and the criteria for the appointment of the CEO and programme director as well as their fields of action are well explained. The bid-book also includes an ambassadors' programme, which is sound. The tools and aims of this programme are however not very clear.

It was clear from the hearing that the team that had prepared the bid embraced the ECOC vision and was fully committed and dedicated to the project. Furthermore, a solid capacity-building programme to raise the skills of the different stakeholders is an important delivery strategy of the candidature.

Summary

The panel would like to recognise that the need for reconciliation in the region is a priority for any future development in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Europe. The traumatic past is a burden and a challenge for the city and its citizens and the panel appreciated that this vision was a clear priority of Banja Luka 2024.

The investment in the existing and in new cultural infrastructure is an important task but also a challenge considering the somewhat fragile financial context in the country and the region.

There is a need for a regional cooperation as a prerequisite for any future development. According to the panel, the basis for such a cooperation and for the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders is unclear in Banja Luka candidature. It is not evident there would be a clear structure that would act as a solid basis for cooperation at all levels.

The involvement and the profile of the local/regional artistic and cultural institutions and NGOs in the preparation – and therefore future delivery – of the programme’s concept was not clear enough. In addition, the activities included in the programme are not based on a wide and deep enough collaboration with international partners, what would bring a much-needed broader dimension to the project. Furthermore, the topics that are proposed to become the background of the programme – though very relevant – were not clearly translated into a convincing European narrative. Finally, European audiences were not sufficiently addressed through the activities of Banja Luka 2024. The cultural activities should be more closely connected to tourism sector and tourist plans in the city and region.

Bodø

Bodø 2024 presented its bid under the banner of ARCTICulation. The city of Bodø partnered with the Nordland County.

Contribution to the long-term cultural strategy of the city

Bodø Municipality and Nordland County had cultural strategies long before the thought of being European Capital of Culture emerged. They both endorsed their ongoing strategies in 2018. The strategies are renewed every four years, in accordance with the national law. The main goal is that by 2025 Bodø and Nordland will have gained a Europe-wide reputation as a cultural hotspot where culture forms a vital part of life. The main priorities in the strategies are children and young people; audience development; connection and capacity of the cultural sector; city and community development; and freedom of expression as a new priority that emerged during the second phase of the application.

The panel appreciated that the strategy was adopted in a democratic and participatory process involving many stakeholders and that Bodø 2024’s key strategic priorities are in line with these general strategies. It is also interesting to see that the results from the ECOC evaluation processes will feed the future strategy, artistic plans and programmes, making the connection between the ECOC project and strategical development an organic and living one.

The monitoring system plans are to be built on two features. First, a set of core economic indicators as well as social indicators will measure the progress of delivery and success of Bodø 2024 in a long-term perspective. Yet, the three threads of inquiry indicated, i.e. cultural vibrancy, community involvement and the Nordland brand, though interesting and relevant and in line with the cultural strategy, cover only part of the ECOC’s goals. Second, another data collection is planned, based on the concept of “Dialogues for A Living City”. It is meant to get more qualitative information from the local population. The qualitative analysis would present the effect of the ECOC year on the population of Bodø and Nordland. Overall, the monitoring system is based on clear features; however, some indicators are not quantifiable and some have no specific targets.

The bid-book highlights that Bodø 2024 intends to build on the research done by Nord University and become an arena to test ways promoting ecological economy, which is extremely topical. Bodø 2024 is also connected to the debate on the development of the “new city” resulting from the move of the NATO base and the airport. In this context, the intention is to bring to the urban vision development of the “smart city” approach a social (as opposed to a mere technological) dimension, based on a dialogue within society and between society and nature. In the panel’s view, this is forward-looking and a strong element of the bid.

The capacity-building model with its 4 C's (Competence, Connections, Character and Culture) is a good starting point; however, it is not yet sufficiently elaborated.

European dimension

The programme is based on important European and world topics, such as climate change and the importance of nature, the history of the city and the region and its connections to the rest of Europe as well as a reflection on how to ensure a better future in our continent. Bodø 2024 plans to build strategic relations between cities, regions and cultural institutions. The notion of European cultural diversity is well embedded in the programme's concept. The panel appreciates the proposed plans in this respect, but the potential links that are needed to put the concept in practice could have been more developed. Even if intercultural understanding and dialogue (one of the elements of the European dimension) is included in the long-term plans, it is not clear which specific projects in the bid-book will address this issue.

According to the panel, Bodø and Nordland can become a best practice on how an ecological economy can be implemented in the cultural sector (an issue with a strong resonance in today's Europe), with crucial links to innovative cultural and creative education plans for young people. In this respect, the panel appreciates that Bodø 2024 intends to host a European Conference about sustainable European Capitals of Culture already in 2021, which is an interesting way to ensure the process starts on a solid basis. Even if the role of the Arctic region in the development of the Bodø 2024 project is not fully clear from the bid-book, it appeared during the hearing that the city and the county had already many relations with partners from all over this region on which they can rely for their ECOC 2024. The panel regrets that this Arctic potential has not been satisfactorily used in the project so far and hopes that it can be better exploited in the future, with related global cultural links becoming more visible in the programme.

Bodø 2024 has been participating in activities with other ECOC cities and partners, which is positive, but ECOC partners are not sufficiently present so far.

The panel welcomes the ambition stated in the bid-book to have each project of the cultural programme developed with local, national and international artists. However, the cooperation with cultural operators from the rest of Europe is still relatively modest and there is still a need to further strengthening the cooperation of Nordland's stakeholders with their counterparts from the European Union. The bid-book presents a list of international partners for joint projects, but this list is only a (good) starting point and it is expected to be much further developed in coming years.

Bodø's strategy is to create experiences for all types of visitors in a safe, friendly and welcoming atmosphere, using the city's "Open Minds, Warm Hearts and Cool Place". The idea is to transform the reputation of the region from a cold to a cool place. The starting idea is that a combination of natural experiences with spectacular cultural events is bound to attract visitors from abroad. In this regard, Bodø plans to have events that focus on the talents of European artists and on European artistic co-productions and cultural collaborations. The inclusion of the Sami culture would offer European audiences the chance to get in touch and know better this unique community. According to the panel, these are all sound prospects.

The panel also appreciates Bodø's idea to create a Cold War museum in one of the former military facilities – as this could have a strong European appeal – as well as the intention to develop its narrative based on close exchange with and expertise from similar museums around Europe. In this respect, the panel would like to stress that it is crucial for the Museum to reflect also the story of those European countries that were

located east to the former Iron Curtain and were unwillingly placed under the communist rule.

Finally, the panel's view is that the future-oriented projects included in the programme of Bodø 2024 have the potential to attract people from all over Europe and beyond. However, there is a need for considerable further investment in order to develop unique projects and related artistic strategies for this European (and world) audience.

Cultural and artistic content

The concept of ARCTICulation is based on the capacities of the Nordland region. The main inspiration of the vision comes from nature, and the ambition of Bodø 2024 is to produce the most environmentally friendly and sustainable ECOC programme. The programme is built around projects and events that reflect and experience the interconnection between culture and nature.

There are three main strands. First, "Art of Nature" is about exploring art in and from an arctic perspective. Second, "Fish and Ships" is about the region's history, the relation between the past and present way of living and how all this connects with the rest of Europe. Third, "Transition" intends to highlight connections with the city development and capacity building projects. Under the umbrella of "Transition", the plan is also to develop existing festivals and events.

The programme will follow a timeline that is well presented in the bid-book and correspond to the five seasons of the Arctic year: "Here comes the sun", "Spring optimism", "Midsummer madness", "Autumn storm" and "Arctic light". It is well rooted in the local heritage, both natural and cultural.

The bid-book includes many interesting projects for each strand of the programme, covering all different art fields as well as mainstream and more intimate events. The projects are well described, with planned partners and corresponding estimated budgets, which nevertheless need some revision. Examples of promising projects include: "Who owns the Wind", a trilogy of political theatre discussing the green shift, "Via Querinissima", the creation of a modern cultural route combined with an opera production, "Cold War Hotspots", with the Museum of Cold War but also a big music event, "European Cabins of Culture", using existing tourist cabins as small venues for culture throughout the region or "Wind in your air" as a cultural trail of a new type etc...

In the panel's view, the programme included in the bid-book is a good and promising basis, but it needs further development particularly with the view to reach broader audiences in Europe.

The panel noted that the vision of Bodø 2024 is also to combine indigenous Sami culture and expressions, traditional and contemporary Norwegian culture as well as the culture new migrants and expats add to the mix, which is a welcomed ambition. Clear and quite relevant links are made between traditional and contemporary cultural and artistic expressions.

The involvement of local artists and cultural organisations in the conception and implementation of the cultural programme is clearly visible. However, there is a need for a stronger and clearer artistic leadership to implement a more daring and innovative programme while respecting the concept presented in the bid-book.

Finally, some important programme lines will continue through the year, namely the programme developed for and with young people, as the latter are considered key partners of the project.

Capacity to deliver

The application benefits from a broad and strong political support and the commitment from the local and regional authorities, which is a clear asset. Both the City and County Councils approved the application's budget framework and financing plan. Several infrastructural projects have been initiated to meet Bodø's and Nordland's challenges and growth in the period between 2018 and 2024.

Bodø already has a very solid cultural infrastructure and the plans for capital investments, including improvements in the fields of culture and natural heritage, are ambitious but realistic and are in line with the ECOC project. Examples include the trail connected to "Wind in your Hair", which is financed through other municipal planning, and the Cold War Centre, scheduled to be completed in 2024. The plans for ECOC activities should be better related to the tourism strategy and the panel would like to stress the need for capacity building in the touristic sector if Bodø is to attract broader international audiences. Furthermore, the issue of the "financial" accessibility of the ECOC needs to be addressed as Norway – and even more so, the north of the country – is a high-price destination. The panel notes that the bid-book includes no convincing proposals in this regard.

Outreach

The bid-book convincingly describes how the local population and civil society were intensively involved in the process of preparation of the Bodø 2024 project through many group and coordination meetings, discussions and open idea workshops, including with formal civic bodies, youngsters and people of various nationalities and backgrounds. The panel was therefore convinced that the process was quite democratic, following a bottom-up approach.

The main aim of Bodø 2024's strategy for audience development is to have a fully inclusive programme, which is quite a welcomed ambition. The strategy is however not fully developed at this stage, but the existing schools' programmes presented in the bid-book form a very good basis and can be a model to be developed also for other target groups. In addition, convincing inclusive cultural projects are presented to overcome obstacles to cultural participation.

There is also a strong potential for audience engagement through collaboration between Bodø 2024 and the various cultural stakeholders in the city and the region, such as the network of libraries to give but one example. In this regard, the panel appreciates the ambitious goal to increase cultural participation by 30-40%.

The Sami community, who lives in this region of Norway, is well represented in the project of Bodø 2024. A weaker point is the failure to properly address the international community also living in the county while 122 different nationalities have been identified, which could potentially bring a huge contribution to the success of the ECOC project.

Management

The proposed budget is €30m with €10m expected from the National Government, €5m from the City and €5m from the Region. The expectations in terms of income from the private sector are high (€8,5m), and the bid-book reported that part of this private funding was already committed. The private fundraising strategy is a strong asset of the bid. The panel, while not questioning this strategy and its ambitious target, would need

some reassurance regarding its feasibility. The ECOC delivery team should also weigh up the level of private funding with the interference into the ECOC artistic programme it may mean. Regarding the split of the budget, 75% is dedicated to the programme, 12% to promotion and marketing and 13% to wages, overheads and administration. According to the panel, the marketing budget is too small.

The bid-book indicates that the ECOC will be governed by an Intercommunal Company under the name Bodø 2024. The management structure is flat and decentralised but the role of the artistic director should be more clearly explained. The procedures and criteria for the appointment of the general and artistic directors as well as their fields of action do not fully reflect the organisational chart that is presented for Bodø 2024.

There is a staffing plan for the delivery structure, which hardly corresponds to large production projects. The part of the programme production that is planned to be produced and coordinated directly from the Company is not yet specified while this will have an impact on the number of the Company's staff members working in programme development.

The marketing strategy for attracting international audiences is not sufficiently developed at this stage, though some standard marketing tactics are mentioned. The tourism agency "Visit Bodø", which promotes the region through the unique connection between culture and nature and is currently working to certify Bodø as a sustainable destination, is an asset to be further exploited. This is even more essential as the approach of Visit Bodø's is in line with the mission of Bodø 2024, laying the foundations for the establishment of good collaboration between the two.

Summary

The concept of ARCTICulation addresses important European and global challenges. The cultural programme is connected to sustainable development goals with a strong connection between nature and culture. The ambition of implementing an environment-friendly ECOC is a plus of the bid, while caring for the wellbeing of the individuals and the planet through artistic and cultural means is also an important topic for our present and future.

The panel appreciates the structure of the programme together with the proposed partners, budget and timeline for the various and interesting projects included. The programme is well rooted in the local heritage, both natural and cultural. It provides an opportunity to exploit the potential of local traditions and geography while also establishing creative spaces for new forms of art. There is, however, still a need to reinforce the cooperation between local and regional stakeholders with their counterparts in Europe and beyond.

The programme clearly emerges from a shared vision from the city administration, the local population and the cultural sector. The local stakeholders have been involved through a democratic process. The project intends to tackle the obstacles to cultural participation that have been identified. The panel is convinced that Bodø 2024 is well tuned to overcome such obstacles and enable cultural activities for all. There is a solid budget for the project, which also benefits from a strong political support at City and County levels. The narrative for engaging an international audience is still to be developed and translated into a solid marketing strategy.

MOSTAR

Mostar presented its bid under the banner “Everything is Bridgeable”. The idea of the banner and the overall concept of the bid is to say that it is possible to “bridge” and overcome deep divisions within society as well as trauma resulting from war.

Contribution to the long-term cultural strategy of the city

The city of Mostar, perceived as a vibrant but divided community still afflicted by the burden of a traumatic recent past, is looking for new steps and opportunities for a brighter future. A cultural strategy was adopted to contribute to this overall goal. It is in line with the ECOC project as its primary goal is to create the conditions for a good implementation of Mostar 2024.

It appears that key factors for the success of the strategy are the efficiency of public institutions, citizen support, education of citizens, investment in culture and the mutual support of fellow artists. Since pre-selection, Mostar has decided which elements of the strategy should be given priority in connection with the ECOC project and could more realistically be implemented efficiently. Mostar’s ambition is to turn into an information technology centre, an incubator of start-ups and hubs, so the focus was put on the development of creative information technology in the service of arts and culture through a cooperation between the educational, cultural and private sectors.

The strategy is in place for the period 2018-2026 and the main challenges are on the level of infrastructure and processes. The panel appreciates the importance of this strategy but regrets that it is not clear, which mechanisms are in place for its implementation.

European dimension

The bid-book highlights the role of Mostar with its complex history as reflecting the dilemmas of today’s Europe. The main topics the ECOC wants to tackle are for example migration, war refugees, integration of refugees and migrants in European societies as well as intercultural living. The panel recognises that those are very important topics for Europe as a whole with a strong potential therefore in terms of European dimension.

The long-standing tradition of neighbourhood “Komšilik”, implying a deep respect for diversity within the community, as well as a strong mutual trust and a joint celebration of religious holidays of different confessions, is presented as a model of good cultural practices that can be offered to Europe. The panel agrees that this tradition has also potential in terms of European dimension.

While appreciating the ambition of the ECOC project to explore relevant European issues as well as Mostar’s intention to promote cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in Europe, the panel’s view is, however, that there was a lack of relevant partnerships in the bid-book for those intercultural projects to take place in practice.

The bid-book mentions some positive cooperation with the ECOCs in Rijeka and Novi Sad.

As far as European and international audiences are concerned, there are well-established relations with the diaspora all over the world and this diaspora is rightly planned as a crucial network for future cultural developments. The plan is centred on having touristic promotion mainly in those places where there is a diaspora, but also to use famous monuments or religious places (Mostar’s Old Bridge, Medugorje, the monastery of Žitomislići, Tekija-Dervish house etc.), festivals held in Mostar, the Mostar Economy Fair and the cultural centres of foreign countries to trigger the interest of foreigners.

However, the bid-book includes few concrete methods on how to use all these points of interest to attract a broad European and international public other than on-spot promotion of the title. The plans for attracting European audiences are not fully in tune with the ECOC mission and rely mostly on existing contacts of the cultural sector as well as tourism initiatives. Consequently, this approach does not guarantee a successful reach to new European/international audiences.

Cultural and artistic content

The overall concept is built around the bridge that gave the city its name and is a strong symbol for the city. The bridge is seen as a metaphor for overcoming persistent divides, which is further emphasised by the use of the term “bridging”, the guiding principle of the bid.

The bid explains that Mostar needs an opportunity to become a city of harmonious life. The preparation period of the candidature brought different groups and nationalities together and already showed that culture could be a powerful tool for the social transformation and integration that Mostar deeply needs. The panel appreciated that the artistic programme resulted from such a collective process.

The strategy of the artistic programme is structured around four programme lines. “Urban Synapse” is dealing with the re-urbanisation, the use of urban space and the citizens’ mutual relationship. “Mostar in a Suitcase” is dealing with migration. “Lights of Herzegovina” is addressing interculturality and multiculturalism while “Quantum Leap” is about innovation and the relationship between the city and its desired future. The programme is oriented towards the creation of a smart, sustainable, open and inclusive city.

While the panel supports the importance of the revival of public spaces in Mostar in the framework of the city’s process of re-urbanization as well as the overall intention of the bid, it did not find in the programme description clear links with the ECOC mission especially as far as the European dimension ambitions are concerned.

The cultural and artistic projects as presented in the bid-book are too vague in terms of content, partnerships and budgeting for the panel to have a precise enough view of what the programme of ECOC 2024 would look like in Mostar. It is therefore difficult for the panel to make an assessment, even more so because – on top of this lack of details – open calls are planned for the opening and closing events.

Capacity to deliver

The ECOC project is said to have the support of Mostar’s City Council since 2017. The cantonal authorities and the National Government also provided their support to the project. According to the panel, the political instability prevailing at different levels, in particular at City level with the absence of municipal elections since 2008, is however a risk in terms of infrastructural investments as well as support (financial and other) for the well-functioning of the ECOC project.

The panel learnt that the region’s tourism strategy is reflecting the ECOC needs in terms of infrastructure. There are, however, some question marks regarding existing and future cultural infrastructures, even though the bid-book includes an ambitious plan for capital investments. In this regard, the bid-book states that the financing for the main infrastructural investment, i.e. Nama and the new Sport Hall, is mostly guaranteed. However, the panel was not totally reassured that an adequate and viable infrastructure to hold such a large-scale event as an ECOC would be finalised within the coming years. Furthermore, it is not very clear from the bid-book and presentation how the region will participate in the ECOC programme.

Outreach

The aim for engaging different marginalised groups is evident from the bid-book and welcomed by the panel. The bid-book mentions special programmes dedicated to the inclusion of disabled and elderly people; however, the panel expected more details regarding this issue. The bid-book also includes a focus on activities for children with special needs and foresees activities for groups of war victims. It presents Komšilik as a project acting as a platform for many activities aiming at including different groups.

The panel perceived that Mostar's candidature included good practices in terms of inclusion of different groups. Several citizens and artists increased their involvement through their contribution to the Forum Mostar 2024.

The audience development strategy is planned to be developed in 2024, which is too late according to the panel. Some first ideas were presented – e.g. collaboration with the education sector or projects stimulating socialisation and intergenerational dialogue –, but no overall strategic approach towards reaching different audiences was visible in the bid-book.

Management

The proposed budget is €21m, with €3m expected from the National Government, €6.3m from the Federation, €4m from the City and €6.1m from the region. Even though the political parties active in Mostar have given their unanimous support to the ECOC project by signing and certifying their declaration, the lack of an elected City Council makes the adoption of decisions related to the city an extremely difficult and slow process, with no appropriate interlocutors and mechanisms. Consequently, it results from the unclear political situation at City level that the ECOC is not provided with the necessary financial security needed.

The breakdown of the operating expenditure is unusual as equipment and technology for the implementation of the programme (€5,5m) is presented as part of operating expenses while this should be seen as capital investment. Moreover, the budget for the cultural and artistic programme (€12m, i.e. 57% of the operating budget) and the promotion of the ECOC (€1,6m, i.e. 8% of the total) are under the usual level for a successful ECOC project.

The bid-book does not present clearly the ECOC management structure and includes some inconsistencies. The outline presented for the management structure should have been further developed so that the roles of and interactions between the different directors could be fully understood. It is planned that Forum 2024 will retain an advisory role in the project and will delegate a representative to the supervisory and management bodies of the future Mostar 2024 Foundation. The procedures and criteria for the appointment of the general and artistic directors as well as their fields of action are presented in the bid-book. While some general information was provided in this respect, the panel was also not convinced about the role of the University in the ECOC process.

As far as marketing is concerned, the panel considers that the marketing strategy as presented in the bid-book was not sufficiently developed for this stage of the competition and that the marketing budget was too low.

The panel noticed that the team who prepared the bid embraced the ECOC vision and was very committed and deeply involved in the process of transition of their city.

Summary

The panel would like to stress that the overall idea of giving a voice and visibility to a city with a traumatic past that struggled in recent history is an important endeavour for Europe as a whole. The intention to involve different ethnic communities, cultural stakeholders and audiences express a strong and positive vision in terms of city development. The panel understands that a process promoting reconciliation and intercultural dialogue for the sake of future development is essential. However, the relevant European issues proposed in the programme would require the help of significant international partners. This aspect was not satisfactorily presented in the bid-book and the presentation.

The panel had concerns about Mostar's capacity to deliver an event of the scope and scale of a European Capital of Culture, in particular due to the lack of effective and efficient administrative processes as well as suitable infrastructure. It is extremely demanding to invest in infrastructure when the financial situation is not clear due to the broader politic context.

Moreover, the bid-book did not present a coherent artistic programme and a clear marketing strategy for attracting European and international audiences.

The Panel's Decision

The panel was presented with bids from three different cities facing their own very different challenges and contexts and each with its own interpretation of the ECOC criteria. The bids had many strong points as well as some weaknesses. The panel was looking, according to Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council, at the programme specifically designed for the ECOC year.

After the presentations, the panel debated the merits of each city against the six criteria and then in the final discussion the applications were weighed up against each other.

Each panel member weighed their own interpretation of the criteria against the three bids with their bid-books, presentations, questions and answers, augmented by the feedback from the visits.

Accordingly, the panel recommends that the Commission designate **Bodø** as the 2024 European Capital of Culture in an EFTA/EEA country, candidate country or potential candidate.

Designation

This report has been sent to the Commission, which publishes it on its website. In accordance with Article 11 of the Decision, the Commission will formally designate the city to hold the ECOC 2024 title in an EFTA/EEA country, candidate country or potential candidate, on the basis of the recommendation included in this report. It will then inform the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Committee of the Regions. This formal designation enables Bodø to use the title "European Capital of Culture 2024".

Melina Mercouri Prize

The panel recommends that the Commission award the Melina Mercouri Prize to the delivery structure of Bodø 2024, based on this report. However, the payment of the €1,5m Prize is deferred until 2024, in line with Article 14 of the Decision. It is conditional.

The ECOC panel will make a further recommendation to the European Commission in late 2023 at the end of the monitoring process on whether to make the payment.

The conditions for the payment are as follows (Article 14):

- The ECOC honours its commitments made in the application;
- It complies with the criteria;
- It considers the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports;
- There has been no substantial change to the programme and strategy set out in the bid-book:
 - The budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-level programme and at a level consistent with the bid-book;
 - The independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;
 - The European Dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final programme;
 - The marketing and communications strategy and material clearly reflect it is a European Union action;
 - Plans for monitoring and evaluation are in place.

Reputation of an ECOC

A city awarded the ECOC title receives considerable international attention from the selection recommendation and extending well beyond the ECOC year. It has a responsibility to uphold the reputation of the ECOC brand for the benefit of those previous titleholders and future ones. City administrations should be aware that decisions taken (and not just in the cultural sector) might attract formal media and social media attention far beyond they are used to handling. This adds a special and new aspect to decision taking in the city over wide full range of issues much beyond culture only.

The monitoring phase

- Once an ECOC has been designated, it enters the “Monitoring Phase” (Article 13 of the Decision). Under the auspices of the Commission, the panel will work with the ECOC to ensure the quality of the ECOC brand and to offer advice and experience.
- The **bid-book** at final selection becomes the *de facto* contract between the designated city, on the one hand, and its own citizens, the panel and the European Commission, on the other hand. It has an important role in the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize. The panel will expect a close alignment with the bid-book during the preparation phase and during the ECOC year. Significant variations from the bid-book should be discussed with the panel, through the Commission, in advance of decisions being made.
- There are three formal monitoring checkpoints (normally autumn 2020, mid 2022 and autumn 2023) when the ECOC will meet with the panel under the auspices of the Commission. Prior to each meeting, the Commission will invite the ECOC to provide progress reports. The Commission, after consultation with the panel, will indicate areas that specifically need to be addressed in the reports.
- In addition, the panel may decide, with the agreement of the Commission, to visit the city to observe progress.
- The panel’s reports after all three meetings will be published on the Commission’s website. The ECOC may decide to publish its own progress reports in the interest of transparency.

The panel's recommendations

The designated ECOC now moves to a transition period from a set-up suited to a bid campaign to the more formal ECOC delivery structure that is independent of local city administration. The panel expects Bodø to develop cooperation with other bidding cities and the wider artistic and cultural community in Europe. The ECOC 2024 provides a national opportunity, which will reflect internationally not only on Bodø but also on the whole country.

The panel will expect the first progress report in autumn 2020 to consider the recommendations and comments in the assessment of the bid as well as the recommendations below.

The recommendations refer to the content of the proposed programme:

Cultural strategy

- The work continues on the implementation of the cultural strategy and further arrangements are made for a reinforced integration between policy areas (culture / urban development / innovation).
- All documents are published to ensure transparency.
- Stronger connections between the cultural sector and the city administrative staff are secured with involvement of both in the capacity building activities; long-term links between the cultural, economic and social sectors in the city are being developed.
- The ECOC 2024 impact assessment is detailed with monitoring tactics, the baseline figures are defined and first attempts to outline the specific targets are made. KPIs include European sources of information like Eurostat for example.

European dimension

- The scope and quality of activities promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding between European citizens as well as highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history are secured, deepened and developed.
- The cooperation and communication with the European Union, ECOC titleholders and other international partners is strengthened and deepened and actions to generate an interest in other parts of Europe are promoted.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme involving local and regional stakeholders is very demanding. An open communication towards dozens of programme partners needs to be done in a transparent and professional way in order to create one big ECOC team.
- Innovative, experimental and digital programme elements are strengthened to ensure the ECOC 2024 meets the needs of the 21st century.
- The artistic programme out of the existing cultural events needs to be further developed.
- The production capacity of the delivery structure in terms of programme implementation should be reviewed and addressed.

Capacity to deliver

- The urban development plans affecting the ECOC delivery are clarified. The Bodø 2024 team has clear information on the status of the implementation of these projects.

- The accommodation capacities, also those in the region, are revised and addressed to fully support participation (of diverse public) in all elements of the ECOC programme.

Outreach

- Work continues to ensure social innovation in line with ECOC mission and vision.
- ECOC audience development strategies and plans for local, regional and international audiences are developed. A special focus to be dedicated to reach out to European and international audience.
- Involvement of the different nationalities and young generation (beyond formal cooperation with universities and schools) is further developed to increase its scope.
- Audience development and community engagement are included in capacity building activities involving all relevant partners.

Management

- An international call for an artistic director should be launched as fast as possible to ensure artistic leadership and vision for the ECOC.
- Information about the registration of the Bodø 2024 organisation and its statutes are publicly available.
- Clarification of the financial contribution from all stakeholders is necessary and the funding timeframe and conditions allowing smooth implementation of the ECOC need to be agreed with all funders as soon as possible.
- The strategies and copyright issues of the ARCTICulation concept including authorship rights of related merchandise and services are developed and publicly communicated.
- The communication message (including a European dimension) is clearly articulated for use by the ECOC team and other relevant stakeholders.
- Issues of security are addressed.
- Issues of data protection are addressed.
- The marketing strategy for attracting international audiences should be developed although some standard marketing tactics are mentioned.
- The activities of Bodø 2024 should be supported by the tourist strategy of the city and the region.

The bid-book sets out several actions to be taken in before 2024 – these timeframes should be met. Experience has shown that successful ECOC's use the first year after selection to establish all **the governance, management and administration structures and systems**. This essential role needs to run concurrently with the first stage of the project in 2020–2021.

Recommendations in this section are based on the experience of previous ECOCs.

The panel would expect the following:

- The marketing strategy for international audiences should be translated into a European narrative.

- The financial structure regarding private involvement should be solid and confirmed.
- The plan for implementation of the programme should be presented with a clear structure for decisions regarding the production activities.
- The inclusion of different minority groups should be evident beyond the Sami group.
- The communications strategy should be implemented. This covers communications within the Bodø 2024 organization, between the organization and the city (and regional) administration, between the organization and the Ministry of Culture and between the organization and the European Commission.
- A detailed staffing plan up to 2025 is created.
- The organization ensures that in all its (on and offline) marketing and communications there is recognition that the ECOC is a European Union action.

Thanks

The panel wishes to place on record its thanks to DG EAC of the Commission for their efficient management of the competition.

Signed

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