



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2029 in Sweden

5th-6th of December 2024

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

Edited by

Else Christensen-Redzepovic (Chair), Marilyn Gaughan Reddan, Goda Giedraityte, Hrvoje Laurenta, Jelle Burggraaff, Joakim Sandberg (Vice-Chair), Jorge Cerveira Pinto (Rapporteur), Maria Jansén, Rossella Tarantino, Suvi Innilä and Toni Attard

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared for the European Commission.
However, it only reflects the views of the authors, and the
Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be
made of the information contained therein.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate Culture, Creativity and Sport
Unit D2

E-mail: eac-unite-D2@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

© European Union, 2024

Contents

Pre-selection and final section rounds	4
Panel meeting	4
Thank you	5
Assessments of the candidates	5
Uppsala	6
Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy	6
Cultural and Artistic Content	7
European Dimension	7
Outreach	8
Management	9
Capacity to Deliver	9
Conclusion and Recommendation	10
Kiruna	10
Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy	11
Cultural and Artistic Content	11
European Dimension	12
Outreach	13
Management	13
Capacity to Deliver	14
Conclusion and Recommendation	15
The panel's decision	15
Melina Mercouri Prize	15
Reputation of an ECoC	16
The monitoring phase	16
The panel's recommendations	17
Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy	17
Cultural and Artistic Content	17
European Dimension	17
Outreach	18
Management	18
Capacity to Deliver	18
Signed	19

Introduction

This is the expert panel's report (the "panel") for the selection phase of the competition for the 2029 European Capital of Culture title in Sweden. The competition is a European Union initiative that started in 1985. The title "European Capital of Culture" was previously awarded to two cities in Sweden, Stockholm in 1998 and Umea in 2014.

The Swedish Ministry of Culture entrusted the Swedish Arts Council to act as the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by Decision n°445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 (the "Decision") and by the "Rules of procedure - Competition for the 2029 European Capital of Culture title in Sweden" adopted by the Arts Council and published on its website.

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process, per Article 2 of the Rules of procedure. The European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions) designated ten members of this panel, while the relevant authorities in Sweden designated two members.

The competition occurs in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection.

Pre-selection and final section rounds

The Arts Council issued a call for submission of applications in December 2022. A total of 2 cities submitted their applications at the pre-selection phase. On the 21st of February 2024, the panel recommended inviting both Kiruna and Uppsala bidding cities to progress to the final selection stage. The panel's pre-selection report is published on the European Commission and the Arts Council websites^{1 2}. The Arts Council and Ministry accepted the panel's recommendation and invited the two cities to submit final applications with a deadline of the 4th of November 2024. The two cities submitted their final applications ("bid books") by the deadline, and both applications were considered eligible.

A delegation of three panel members participated in city visits from the 2nd until the 4th of December 2024. Observers from the Arts Council and the European Commission accompanied the delegation. The delegation reported to the panel at the selection meeting.

Panel meeting

The panel members met in Stockholm on the 5th and 6th of December 2024. One panel member was excused for professional reasons. The panel confirmed Else Christensen-Redzepovic as its chair and Joakim Sandberg as its vice-chair.

All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and gave it to the Arts Council before the final selection hearings. Representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the Arts Council, and the European Commission attended the meeting as observers.

The observers took no part in the panel's deliberations or decisions.

At the selection hearings on the 5th of December 2024, each candidate city, first Uppsala and then Kiruna, presented its case (in 45 minutes) and answered questions from the panel (in 90 minutes). The chair of the panel announced the panel's recommendation at a press conference, live streamed on the social networks of the Ministry of Culture and of the Arts

¹ See: <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-03/pre-selection-report-european-capital-of-culture-2029-sweden.pdf>

² [Selection of the European Capital of Culture 2029 in Sweden, pre-selection report](#)

Council on the 6th of December, in the presence of the Swedish Minister of Culture, Ms Parisa Liljestrand, and the Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Sweden, Ms Annika Wäppling-Korzinek.

Thank you

In this regard, the panel members wish to extend their gratitude to everyone who participated in the selection phase of the competition. The panel specifically observed that the two cities utilised the bidding process to strengthen their cultural strategies and emphasise the significance of culture and Europe in their socio-economic progress. This is already a substantial potential legacy that the ECoC competition has produced. Both candidate cities - one of which did not win the ECoC title - are encouraged to continue developing and implementing their respective cultural strategies. The panel wishes to extend its gratitude to both cities and all those who contributed to their proposals.

Additionally, the panel extends its appreciation to the European Commission for its guidance, the Swedish Ministry of Culture and the Swedish Arts Council for their flawless coordination, and the technical team for its assistance during the hearings.

Assessments of the candidates

In its assessment of the candidates, the panel noted the general and specific objectives in Article 2 of the Decision and the requirement for the application of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2029 in Sweden to be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension explicitly created for the title (Article 4). The panel assessed both bids against the six criteria outlined in Article 5 of the Decision:

- Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city,
- Cultural and artistic content,
- European dimension,
- Outreach,
- Management,
- Capacity to deliver.

In line with the specifications of the call, the panel assessed both short-listed candidate cities based on their revised bid books and hearings against the objectives of the European Capital of Culture action and the criteria as specified above. A city's history, its recent and current policies, and its cultural offer may form the basis for the proposed programme, but they are not criteria in the selection process.

The city visits are not part of the formal assessment process; however, they provide invaluable assistance to the panel members in gaining a deeper understanding of the context and background of the ECoC applications.

In the following commentaries, the panel highlights the main elements of their findings during the selection phase.

One of the most essential features in Decision 445/2014/EU governing the ECoC action from the 2020 titles is the requirement that cities have a formal and explicit cultural strategy. This requirement ensures that the ECoC is grounded in a medium-term transformation of the city and its cultural life.

In the case of the selected city, specific recommendations are made to assist it in implementing its ECoC project.

Uppsala

Uppsala's bid book, titled *Between the Lines*, presents a vision that aligns culture with the city's ambitious goals for sustainable urban development and social cohesion. The document outlines a comprehensive approach, embedding cultural initiatives into broader environmental and social strategies. Uppsala positions culture as a catalyst for tackling social segregation, climate transition, and sustainable tourism while aiming to strengthen its regional and European networks. The bid emphasises inclusivity, participatory governance, and long-term benefits, reflecting Uppsala's commitment to becoming a leader in cultural innovation and sustainability.

A defining feature of Uppsala's proposal is its focus on decentralisation while fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, strengthening community participation, and providing accessible cultural spaces across the municipality. The strategy is underpinned by capacity-building initiatives, such as artist residencies and partnerships with European networks, ensuring that the cultural ecosystem evolves dynamically in response to local and global changes.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

- Uppsala's bid, *Between the Lines*, seeks to enrich the city's cultural landscape by embedding culture into broader strategies and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration. Positioned as a catalyst for sustainable urban and societal development, the bid aligns with Uppsala's ambitions to lead in climate transition and innovation. It integrates into Uppsala's cultural policy, action plan, and Region Uppsala's cultural plan (2023–2026), while being supported by municipal strategies and budgets for 2025–2028, emphasising culture's role in achieving social, economic, and environmental goals.
- Through the bid, Uppsala strengthens connections between culture, education, business, and tourism, driving revisions to the city's cultural policy to align with its ambitions. The initiative supports cultural infrastructure, encourages local creativity, and fosters new cultural expressions, enhancing Uppsala's standing as a European cultural leader. A revised action plan, set for approval in winter 2024, further solidifies this vision, ensuring long-term cultural and societal growth.
- The *Resource Centre for Intercultural Collaboration* is proposed as a key capacity-building initiative to facilitate partnerships and strengthen the cultural sector. However, limited details were given on how this centre would operate beyond 2029, raising questions about its long-term sustainability. Similarly, while the bid book and the presentation reference Uppsala's cultural strategy, its action plan timeline only extends to 2026. The absence of a finalised post-2026 action plan creates uncertainty about how the ECoC will be embedded into the city's long-term development.
- Uppsala proposes a framework for monitoring and evaluation, with indicators designed to measure cultural, social, and economic impacts. While the commitment to evaluation is commendable, the panel noted that the proposed baseline studies are scheduled too late (2028), reducing their utility for guiding adjustments during the preparatory phase and for monitoring the impact of the title from the start of

the preparations of the ECoC year onwards. Additionally, the metrics lack specificity, making it difficult to accurately assess the programme's potential success.

Cultural and Artistic Content

- Uppsala's bid centres its cultural and artistic programme around the theme of *Between the Lines*, exploring cultural, social, and geographical boundaries. The thematic concept connects diverse narratives, reflecting the city's multicultural identity and addressing local challenges like social segregation and environmental sustainability.
- The panel appreciated Uppsala's effort to outline over 23 proposed projects, reflecting a diverse range of cultural and artistic activities and a strong regional collaboration. However, many of these specific projects lack detailed descriptions, including budgets, making evaluating their artistic quality, feasibility, and potential impact challenging.
- The *De-Central Stations* project, a central element of the programme, reflects the project's ambition to decentralise cultural activities by creating hubs in urban and rural areas to enhance inclusivity and accessibility for a broader audience. Similarly, the proposed *Resource Centre for Intercultural Collaboration* shows the potential to build capacity within the cultural sector and foster partnerships among local and regional stakeholders. While these are promising initiatives, at this stage, the panel expected more detailed plans outlining how these projects would be implemented and their impact measured to assess their feasibility and long-term benefits fully.
- The thematic concept *Between the Lines* was recognised for its ambition to explore boundaries and narratives, aligning with Uppsala's multicultural identity. The programme lines—Body, Hope, Science, Home, and Heritage—were viewed as quite general, lacking a profound reflection of the city's unique characteristics. Furthermore, while the concept aligns with Uppsala's multicultural identity, a more focused approach to deeply engaging its multicultural communities could have strengthened this aspect.
- While the programme has successfully established partnerships with regional stakeholders, incorporating a broader engagement with European partners could further enhance the reach and diversity of the programme.
- The bid demonstrates a commitment to sustainability by integrating environmental considerations into its cultural activities, such as promoting eco-friendly practices and reducing the carbon footprint of events. However, further detailing specific actions to achieve these goals could strengthen and fully develop all aspects of the programme.

European Dimension

- Uppsala's bid emphasises its ambition to connect local and European cultural narratives, aiming to highlight the city's multicultural identity and foster cross-border cultural dialogue. Initiatives such as the proposed artist residencies

demonstrate a commitment to creating platforms for European exchanges that the panel appreciates. The bid also mentions collaboration with existing European networks and participation in projects that address sustainability and cultural inclusion, reflecting Uppsala's efforts to align with broader European goals.

- The panel noted positively the integration of Uppsala's rich academic resources, including partnerships with Uppsala University, as a potential strength in fostering knowledge exchange on a European scale. Additionally, several projects - for example, the *Audience Lab* project - provide an innovative approach to research audience engagement strategies and develop creative methods for cultural inclusion, which could serve as a model for similar collaborations across Europe.
- The panel recognises the potential of the initiatives presented. However, it observes that the proposed European collaborations could benefit from further elaboration and more detailed commitments. Although references to European networks and collaborations with other ECoCs are noted, a clearer outline of their evolution into joint projects or sustained partnerships would enhance the programme's overall impact in the European context.
- Furthermore, the project aspires to attract European audiences; however, the strategies for engagement, including targeted cultural tourism and digital outreach, could be better articulated. The panel observed that the opportunity to tie concrete actions to European themes or challenges could enhance the city's engagement with European cultural narratives and contribute to a lasting legacy.

Outreach

- Uppsala's bid strongly emphasises inclusivity and accessibility, aiming to engage a diverse population, including underrepresented and rural communities. The *De-Central Stations* project stands out as a key initiative, aiming to establish local cultural hubs that bring activities closer to citizens across the municipality, fostering a sense of ownership and bridging geographical and social divides. However, the panel notes that more detailed plans are needed at this competition stage to outline these projects' implementation and expected reach and impact, ensuring their feasibility and long-term sustainability.
- The project also highlights innovative strategies like the *Audience Lab*, which uses participatory methods to identify and engage new audiences. This approach and plans to address cultural segregation align with the ECoC objective of promoting widespread cultural participation.
- The panel noted areas for further development within Uppsala's outreach strategy. Although inclusivity is rightly identified as a key objective, the strategy could benefit from a more detailed explanation of how it will meet the specific needs of the city's elderly residents, marginalised groups, and the student population, all of whom form a significant segment. Furthermore, while the proposal refers to engaging with "non-audiences," it lacks a comprehensive outline of the concrete tools or methods to reach these groups effectively.

- The panel noted that Uppsala's approach to accessibility, particularly for European visitors, could benefit from further elaboration. While decentralising cultural activities is commendable, a comprehensive plan to ensure physical and digital accessibility would have been more convincing.

Management

- The ECoC project will be embedded within Uppsala's existing administrative and cultural frameworks. Uppsala's bid outlines a governance framework with dedicated roles for overseeing the ECoC programme. The panel noted the inclusion of a separate ECoC budget and the establishment of a management team as positive steps. However, the team's exact responsibilities and decision-making processes are insufficiently explained for the panel to understand the project's operational efficiency.
- The ECoC operational budget is set at €26.6 million, with secured commitments from local (€6.9 million from the city) and regional stakeholders (€3.6 million from the region and €1.8 million from other municipalities, based on a letter of intent). Additional funding is anticipated from the national government (€7.1 million), EU programmes (€5.4 million), and private sources (€1.8 million). The panel noted the bid did not specify a timeline for the disbursement of funds, making it difficult for the panel to assess the management of the overall budget. The amount expected from private sources is considered very modest, considering the city's capacity. Furthermore, the bid does not include clear contingency plans to address potential funding shortfalls.
- Uppsala mentions risk assessment as part of its management strategy, but the panel found the approach insufficiently detailed. There is little information on how risks related to governance, financial uncertainties, or operational delays will be mitigated, which could undermine the programme's feasibility.

Capacity to Deliver

- Uppsala highlighted its robust cultural infrastructure and projects designed to connect urban and rural communities. These initiatives, aiming to decentralise cultural activities and ensure accessibility for all residents, showcase a strong commitment to inclusivity. While these plans are promising, the panel required more clarity on the timeline and funding for completing these initiatives before the ECoC year.
- The project demonstrates extensive regional cooperation to create a unified cultural offering, particularly with neighbouring municipalities. This regional support is further strengthened by funding commitments from local authorities, expressed in a shared letter of intent, which the panel welcomes.
- Environmental sustainability is a cornerstone of Uppsala's bid, with commitments to reducing the carbon footprint of its cultural programme. These goals align well with the city's broader environmental strategies, which is commendable.

- The decentralisation approach provides a strong foundation for making cultural activities accessible to local communities. The panel commended this aspect and suggested that additional specific details on accessibility - including digital - for European and international visitors would further enhance the bid's appeal to international audiences.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The panel recognises Uppsala's commendable efforts towards inclusivity, accessibility, and environmental sustainability in its bid for the ECoC 2029 title. The city's focus on decentralisation, regional collaboration, and dedication to capacity building reflects a strong commitment to enhancing its cultural sector. Furthermore, the engagement of stakeholders at the regional level and the involvement of local cultural organisations were significant, demonstrating widespread support and a collaborative approach to cultural development.

However, the bid also revealed notable areas of concern. The absence of a finalised cultural strategy extending beyond 2026 raises questions about the long-term sustainability of the ECoC project and the city's cultural strategy. The artistic programme lacked essential details, such as budgets, making it challenging to assess its artistic quality, feasibility, and potential impact. While the bid outlined European collaborations, many partnerships were at an early stage, making it difficult to assess their content and impact appropriately. Additionally, the connections to broader European narratives were unclear. The monitoring and evaluation framework relied on rather generic indicators, with baseline studies planned too late to effectively guide adjustments. Engagement with the private sector could have been stronger, and the contingency plans more detailed.

Given these observations, the panel does not recommend Uppsala for the ECoC 2029 title. Despite demonstrating strong local engagement and innovative concepts, the proposal lacked the required specific details and strategic depth necessary to meet the ECoC criteria.

The panel nonetheless encourages Uppsala to build on its strengths and continue advancing its cultural vision for the future.

Kiruna

Kiruna's bid for the ECoC title centres around the theme of *Movement*, inspired by the city's extraordinary circumstances of physical relocation due to mining activities. The concept intertwines the city's natural Arctic landscape, cultural history, and socio-economic transformation. The bid emphasises resilience and adaptation, showcasing Kiruna as a living example of cultural rebirth amidst significant urban and environmental changes. The programme seeks to connect its unique narrative to European audiences through themes of heritage, innovation, and sustainable development.

The bid outlines a cultural strategy deeply integrated with Kiruna's ongoing urban transformation. It highlights the potential of culture to act as a unifying force for the municipality's diverse population, including Indigenous Sámi communities and the Tornedalian and other minority groups. Kiruna aims to enhance its cultural infrastructure, such as the new Aurora Cultural and Congress Centre, while leveraging its rich traditions, including Sámi storytelling and Arctic crafts, as tools for intercultural dialogue and engagement. The strategy also addresses accessibility and inclusion, striving to reach remote communities across its vast geographical area.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

- Kiruna's cultural strategy, aligned with its broader urban transformation plans, spans until 2029 and emphasises the integration of culture into the city's long-term vision and growth, ensuring that the ECoC programme contributes to cultural and social development beyond the ECoC year.
- The strategy highlights inclusivity and sustainability as key pillars, with a strong focus on rural communities and the incorporation of Indigenous Sámi and the Tornedalian minority cultures. This approach reflects Kiruna's unique identity and demographic diversity.
- Kiruna's proposal includes innovative monitoring and evaluation methods, such as using the Creative Cities Index and partnerships with academic institutions. These tools aim to assess cultural, social, and economic impacts over the long term, offering a comprehensive approach to understanding the programme's outcomes. Additionally, the proposal presents the intriguing and promising idea of pooling evaluations from Bodø, Oulu, and Kiruna to compare the ECoC effects in the Arctic region under the theme "*Culture in the Cold*." This comparative approach could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities of cultural initiatives in the Arctic area.
- While the bid includes a detailed evaluation framework, some aspects of the baseline studies and success indicators could benefit from further specificity to enhance their clarity and practical application.
- The long-term cultural strategy outlines ambitious goals for post-ECoC sustainability. However, additional detail on the mechanisms for maintaining financial and organisational support after 2029 would provide greater reassurance. Additionally, although Kiruna plans to enhance the skills and capabilities of its cultural sector through targeted training and workshops, few details are provided regarding this vital aspect.
- The strategy emphasises inclusivity but would be further strengthened by additional clarity on how it plans to involve national minorities and the strong and diverse civil society in Kiruna, in the ECoC programme actively.

Cultural and Artistic Content

- Kiruna's artistic vision, built around the theme of *Movement*, is firmly rooted in the city's unique context of physical relocation, Arctic identity, and industrial transformation. The programme's innovative thematic concept provides a cohesive narrative for the planned cultural activities.
- The cultural programme is organised around three key lines: *Seeds of Knowledge*, *Art of Transition*, and *Endless Horizon*. These themes seamlessly blend local heritage with global perspectives, making the programme meaningful for local residents and European audiences. It features detailed descriptions of 21 projects, including the opening and closing events. Each project description provides

essential information, including the timeframe, partners involved, and a budget outline.

- The bid highlights efforts to establish collaborations with European artists and cultural institutions. Including Arctic-European narratives and Indigenous Sámi and Tornedalian minority cultures further demonstrates Kiruna's intention to contribute to the diversity of European cultural heritage.
- The programme prioritises community participation, with cultural activities designed to engage residents from rural areas and underrepresented groups. This focus on local involvement aligns with the broader objectives of inclusivity and accessibility.
- The bid includes creative initiatives - such as artistic projects that draw on Kiruna's transformation, including demolition art and temporary installations - emphasising creativity and highlighting the city's unique circumstances. While the thematic structure is compelling, some projects could benefit from additional detail to clarify their feasibility, timelines, and anticipated impacts, and stronger European partnerships would enhance their relevance.

European Dimension

- Kiruna's programme emphasises the diversity of European cultural heritage by integrating Arctic-European narratives and showcasing the Sámi and Tornedalian minority cultures. This approach highlights local uniqueness and shared European values, contributing positively to the broader cultural dialogue within Europe.
- The bid includes detailed plans for collaborations with European artists and cultural institutions; however, a vast number of collaboration partners are concentrated in the Nordic region. It is pertinent that more cooperation partnerships are established in all parts of Europe.
- The theme of *Movement* resonates with universal European challenges, such as urban transformation, migration, minorities, the transformation of industrial sites, forced exodus, and gentrification. This thematic connection provides a solid foundation for engaging European audiences and enhancing Kiruna's identity as a cultural hub within the Arctic.
- Kiruna demonstrates its commitment to participating in European cultural networks and other ECoCs, aiming to contribute to shared cultural goals. However, while these intentions are clear, further detail on the scope and depth of these partnerships (especially regarding the participation of European artists) would provide a stronger case for Kiruna's integration into the European cultural framework.
- The strategy to attract European and international audiences - with projects like *Arctic Fire* and *Making it Visual* - demonstrates a commitment to enhancing European and international visibility and potentially fostering cross-cultural connections. However, to strengthen the strategy further, it could benefit from additional details on specific actions, such as incorporating a digital delivery

strategy for the programme, considering the fragile environment of Kiruna and its surroundings.

Outreach

- Kiruna's bid highlights its commitment to reaching a wide range of audiences, particularly those in rural and remote areas. The cultural programme emphasises inclusivity and accessibility, ensuring that cultural activities extend beyond the city to involve the broader region.
- The focus on marginalised communities, including the Sámi and Tornedalian people, reflects Kiruna's dedication to cultural democracy. The bid outlines specific initiatives to engage underrepresented groups, ensuring that the programme resonates with diverse population segments.
- The programme fosters a strong sense of ownership among residents, with opportunities for community members to actively participate in the creation and execution of cultural projects. This participatory approach aligns with Kiruna's vision of culture as a unifying and transformative force.
- The project includes plans to engage children and young people in the cultural and artistic programme through workshops, artistic residencies, and educational initiatives, reflecting a strong commitment to nurturing the next generation's connection to culture and creativity. However, the emphasis on children, one of the key target groups in the strategy, could be more assertive. Likewise, greater attention should be given to involving and integrating Kiruna's temporary residents, ensuring a more inclusive and diverse cultural programme.
- The bid recognises the need to ensure accessibility for visitors, particularly from other parts of Europe. While the geographical location poses challenges, focusing on Arctic tourism and immersive cultural experiences helps position Kiruna as an attractive destination.
- While the outreach strategy is strong, details on how the proposed initiatives will be implemented, particularly regarding low threshold spaces and resources, are not sufficiently described.

Management

- The delivery structure of the ECoC project is intended to be a temporary project organisation directly under the Municipal Management Administration. Kiruna's bid presents a clear and well-defined governance structure with roles and responsibilities allocated among the management team. This framework supports effective coordination and decision-making throughout the ECoC programme.
- The bid highlights strong collaboration with local and regional stakeholders, including cultural institutions, community organisations, and private sector partners. This collective approach ensures a broad support base and shared ownership of the programme.

- The ECoC operational budget amounts to €21.8 million (a substantial increase from the €15 million foreseen at pre-selection). The national government's anticipated contribution is €9.68 million. The city and the region will respectively contribute €3.5 million (a doubling since pre-selection) and €3.4 million (against €1.35 million at pre-selection, although the final decision will be taken only in February 2025), showing a strong commitment from these two levels of territorial governance. Furthermore, Kiruna provides evidence of a well-structured and ambitious private fundraising plan, with substantial commitments amounting to €3.96 million. Including contingency plans to address potential financial risks adds credibility to the city's ability to manage its resources effectively.
- The bid includes a robust risk management framework, addressing potential governance, funding, and operations challenges. This proactive approach is welcomed since it enhances the city's preparedness to handle uncertainties during the implementation phase.
- The bid emphasises transparency in decision-making processes, with mechanisms in place to ensure accountability and inclusivity.

Capacity to Deliver

- Kiruna's bid emphasises its ongoing urban transformation, which includes significant infrastructure projects like the *Aurora Cultural Centre* (opened in 2022) and the new *School of Culture* (opened in 2023). New developments include Kiruneum and the relocation of the main wooden church. These developments are essential to delivering the ECoC programme and enhancing the city's cultural offering. However, the panel noted that the timelines for completing these projects remain unclear, raising concerns about their readiness for the ECoC year.
- Strong partnerships with regional stakeholders demonstrate a collaborative approach to delivering the programme, supported by letters of commitment from municipalities and institutions that reinforce the city's capacity to mobilise resources.
- The bid includes generic details on the capacity-building plans within the cultural sector. Given the challenges posed by the city's small population and limited existing cultural workforce, it is strongly recommended that investment in capacity building and talent attraction and retention be prioritised to manage the scale and complexity of an ECoC programme effectively.
- Kiruna's emphasis on environmental sustainability is well-integrated into its cultural strategy, including efforts to minimise the carbon footprint of cultural activities. However, few details are given concerning the possible adverse effects of tourism on the fragile environment.
- Kiruna's location in the Arctic may present logistical challenges for attracting international audiences from some parts of Europe. While Kiruna aims to leverage its unique setting as a draw, additional strategies to address transport and accommodation barriers would strengthen its capacity to host international visitors

effectively, along with a robust plan for the digital delivery and digital engagement of the various audiences with the programme.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The panel acknowledges Kiruna's compelling bid for the ECoC 2029 title, rooted in its extraordinary urban transformation and Arctic identity. The theme of Movement, encompassing *Below Ground*, *On Earth*, and *In Space*, provides an innovative framework that effectively integrates Kiruna's local heritage with global challenges, creating a strong narrative that resonates with European audiences. This thematic structure reflects the city's ambition to position itself as a cultural hub while addressing universal issues.

Kiruna's bid demonstrates a well-aligned cultural strategy that supports its broader urban and regional development goals, emphasising inclusivity, sustainability, and community engagement. The thoughtful integration of Sámi, Tornedalian, and other minority cultures, along with Arctic-European narratives, highlights the city's commitment to promoting diversity within the European cultural space. Strong stakeholder collaboration, significant financial obligations, and a clear governance framework further enhance the credibility of the bid.

While the proposal is ambitious and creative, certain areas require further clarity, such as the monitoring and evaluation framework and the timeline for completing key infrastructural projects. Despite these challenges, the panel commends Kiruna's ability to leverage its unique circumstances as a source of inspiration for European cultural values and recommends that Kiruna be nominated for the title of European Capital of Culture 2029 in Sweden.

The panel's decision

The panel was presented with two high-quality but also very different bids from significantly diverse cities, each with its own interpretations of the ECoC criteria. The bids tackled issues of significant urgency for Europe and the world at large. Both bids had their strengths and weaknesses. According to Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, the panel looked at the programme designed explicitly for the ECoC year and with a strong European dimension. The panel debated the merits of each city against the two objectives and six criteria of the Decision, and then, in the final discussion, the applications were weighed against each other.

Each panel member weighed his/her interpretation of the criteria against the two cities with their bid books, presentations, questions, and answers. **The panel decided by vote to recommend to the Swedish Ministry of Culture to designate Kiruna as European Capital of Culture 2029 in Sweden.**

This report has been sent to the managing authority and the European Commission. Both will publish it on their websites. In accordance with Article 11 of the Decision, the Ministry will proceed to the designation of the ECoC 2029 in Sweden based on the recommendation contained in this report. It will then inform the European Parliament, Council, Commission, and Committee of the Regions. This formal designation enables Kiruna to use the title "European Capital of Culture 2029".

Melina Mercouri Prize

Based on this report, the panel recommends that the European Commission award the Melina Mercouri Prize to the designated city. However, the payment of the €1.5 million prize is deferred until 2029, in line with Article 14 of the Decision. It is conditional.

The ECoC panel will further recommend to the European Commission in late 2028 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 continues to honour its commitments made in the application;
- It complies with the criteria;
- It takes into account 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, in particular:
 - 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 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 extending well beyond the ECoC year. It is responsible for upholding the reputation of the ECoC brand for the benefit of those previous title holders and future ones. City administrations should be aware that decisions taken (and not just in the cultural sector) might attract attention far beyond what they are used to handling formal media and social media. This adds a unique and new aspect to decision-making in the city over a 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 European 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 citizens, the panel, the Ministry, 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 European Commission in advance of decisions being made. There are three formal monitoring checkpoints (autumn 2025, mid-2027, and autumn 2028) when the ECoC will meet with the panel under the auspices of the European Commission. Before each meeting, the European Commission will invite the ECoC to provide progress reports.

The European Commission will indicate areas that specifically need to be addressed in the reports. In addition, the panel may decide, with the agreement of the European Commission, to visit the city to observe progress. The panel’s reports after all three meetings will be published on the European Commission’s website. The ECoC may decide to publish its 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 independent of local city administration.

The panel expects Kiruna to develop cooperation with the other bidding city and the wider artistic and cultural community in Sweden. The ECoC in Sweden in 2029 provides a national opportunity, which will reflect internationally on Kiruna and the country as a whole.

The panel will expect the first progress report in autumn 2025 to consider the recommendations and comments in the bid assessment, as stated above and below.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy:

- Ensure that the cultural strategy and urban transformation plans are fully synchronised and accompanied by detailed timelines and actions for implementation.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation framework by providing more precise baseline studies and specific, measurable indicators to track progress and outcomes.
- Further, mechanisms should be developed to secure financial and organisational support for cultural initiatives that ensure long-term sustainability.
- Develop a comprehensive and well-structured capacity-building plan tailored to the region's specific needs of cultural and artistic professionals. This plan should equip them with the skills, knowledge, and resources required to successfully deliver an ECoC and other similarly complex, large-scale events, fostering long-term professional growth and regional expertise.

Cultural and Artistic Content:

- Enhance European collaborations by defining specific partnerships and joint projects with cultural institutions and organisations across Europe.
- Ensure that all cultural and artistic projects align with the overarching theme of *Movement* while reflecting Kiruna's unique identity and relevance to European audiences.
- Maintain a strong focus on community involvement, ensuring that temporary and permanent residents, local, regional, and national artists, and cultural stakeholders actively shape and deliver the cultural programme.
- Reinforce the artistic vision to address with courage and creativity the controversial issues that resonate in Kiruna and in Europe.

European Dimension:

- Deepen the integration of European narratives by creating cultural and artistic projects that explicitly address shared European themes, such as migration, minority languages and cultures, sustainability, and resilience.

- Further strengthen partnerships with European cultural networks, institutions, organisations, and individual artists by outlining specific collaborations and their expected outcomes.
- Develop targeted strategies to attract European audiences, leveraging Kiruna's Arctic identity and unique cultural offerings to overcome geographical challenges.
- Provide greater detail on how European collaborations will contribute to the long-term legacy of the ECoC programme.

Outreach:

- Detail the logistical and financial resources required to implement the proposed outreach initiatives, ensuring they are realistic and achievable.
- Enhance the accessibility strategy by addressing various barriers that international visitors may encounter, including practical challenges such as transport and accommodation and informational obstacles that may hinder their engagement and participation.
- Enhance the inclusivity plans by providing detailed and specific methods to actively engage marginalised groups, including those in remote rural areas, ensuring their participation and representation in the ECoC programme.
- Ensure that measurable objectives accompany all outreach activities to evaluate their effectiveness and impact on target audiences.
- Further, develop a robust digital delivery and engagement strategy. This strategy should complement efforts to improve physical accessibility, ensuring broader reach and participation.

Management:

- Pay attention to the number of staff members in the delivery structure; the experience of recent European Capitals of Culture shows how important it is not to start with a team that is too small.
- Expand contingency plans to address potential funding or operational challenges, ensuring the programme remains adaptable and sustainable.
- Emphasise the importance of continuous monitoring and adaptation of risk mitigation strategies while providing more detail on specific measures in areas such as governance, funding, and the timely completion of infrastructural projects.
- Strengthen the mechanisms for stakeholder collaboration, ensuring that all relevant local, regional, and national actors are fully engaged throughout the ECoC process.

Capacity to Deliver:

- Ensure that the timelines for completing key infrastructure projects are maintained as planned to guarantee their readiness for the ECoC year.
- Continue to address any limitations that might impact ECoC regarding accessibility (including regional, national, and international), tourism accommodation capacity, and planned infrastructure projects.

Signed

Else Christensen-Redzepovic (Chair)
Marilyn Gaughan Reddan
Goda Giedraityte
Hrvoje Laurenta
Jelle Burggraaff
Joakim Sandberg (Vice-Chair)
Jorge Cerveira Pinto (Rapporteur)
Maria Jansén
Rossella Tarantino
Suvi Innilä
Toni Attard

Stockholm, 13th January 2025
All panel members (signed)

