



Évora

European Capital of Culture 2027

First Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECoC Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, September 2023

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 12 September 2023 between the panel and the team of Évora 2027, one of the two European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2027. Évora was designated as European Capital of Culture in March 2023 by the Ministry of Culture of Portugal based on the recommendation in the panel's selection report¹. This report of the first monitoring meeting is addressed to the Évora 2027 team and will also be published on the European Commission's website².

Attendance

Panel members:

Toni Attard
Jelle Burggraaff
Else Christensen-Redzepovic (rapporteur)
Suzana Faro (national expert)
Marilyn Gaughan Reddan
Goda Giedraityte
Suvi Innilä
Anne Karjalainen
Hrvoje Laurenta (excused)
João Seixas (national expert)
Jorge Cerveira Pinto (chair)
Rossella Tarantino

For Évora 2027:

President of the Évora 2027 Executive Committee, Mayor of Évora and
President of CIMAC - Intermunicipal Community of Central Alentejo
Deputy Mayor of Évora
Coordinator of the Évora 2027 Team
Head of the Évora 2027 Communication Strategy
Évora 2027 Team - Dialogue with the Municipality and
Executive Committee
Responsible for Digital Transformation.

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and the Bureau for Cultural Strategy, Planning and Assessment ("GEPAC"), under the Ministry of Culture of the Portuguese Republic.

¹<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/latvia-and-portugal>

²<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/latvia-and-portugal>

Report and presentation from Évora 2027

Prior to the first monitoring meeting, the team of Évora 2027 submitted a report on the progress of preparations since the city of Évora was recommended as European Capital of Culture 2027. The report is structured around the six selection criteria and systematically follows the comments and recommendations presented by the panel in the selection report.

The Mayor of Évora addressed the panel and expressed how bidding for and being awarded the ECoC title has been an emotional journey for everyone involved. He stated how the concept has been received with great enthusiasm in Portugal as well as in the rest of Europe and that much progress has been made for the preparations of Évora 2027.

Intense work has been undertaken on establishing the management structure and securing funding mechanisms. Notably, negotiations with the Portuguese Ministry of Culture have resulted in positive outcomes such as:

- A collaboration protocol ensuring a timetable for the transfer of funds and considering the eligibility of Évora 2027 expenditure within the regulatory framework of Portugal 2030 funding.
- An additional allocation of approximately 5 million Euro has been secured to strengthen the implementation of the artistic programme across the region.

Despite these achievements, navigating bureaucratic procedures has presented challenges, particularly in establishing entities with public and private capital involvement. However, progress has been made, with a national and regional political consensus on the general principles governing the Évora 2027 management entity.

The completion of a technical and financial feasibility study has been completed. Last approval processes, and consensus on the Association's statutes are expected to be completed by November 2023.

In the meantime, the dedicated Évora 2027 mission team's work is under the strategic guidance of the Executive Committee and the executive direction of its President. Technical aspects crucial to the implementation have been reinforced, and the hiring of a team for the "ex ante" evaluation of the initiative is a priority. Terms of reference for the CEO and Artistic Director have been established, emphasising transparency and alignment with the vision of "Vagar" and the winning programme.

The coordinator of the Évora2027 team underlined how they regard the bidbook as a roadmap and a commitment. She emphasised that Vagar, so deeply rooted in the region, has been well received throughout Portugal and the whole of Europe,

also as a potential response to contemporary social, cultural, and economic challenges in Europe.

Responding to the panel's recommendations in the selection report, the Évora 2027 team dedicated the initial six months to various key actions, including confirming project partnerships, ensuring that a significant proportion is led by independent cultural operators, establishing working groups for legacy projects, simplifying the artistic programme layout, and deepening collaborations with various entities.

The outreach strategy has been expanded, focusing on digital engagement and communication, involving younger generations and international audiences. The team has responded to national and international inquiries about the Vagar concept and is developing outreach projects like "Taking Évora 2027 to markets and fairs", "At the Table we understand each other", and "Being Évora 2027". The relationship with strategic partners in the third sector has been deepened, and plans for a communication and marketing campaign centred on Vagar are in progress.

Although the outreach team is not yet in place, preparations are underway for projects like "Disarranging" and "Indisciplining" for schools, neighbourhoods, and cultural associations.

The following is a brief summary of the main facts from the progress report and follows largely the six selection criteria.

Long-term cultural strategy

Évora 2027, being a strategic intervention aligned with the Évora 2030 strategy, is grounded in the concept of Vagar, that aims for a transformative impact on the city and region, addressing cultural, social, environmental, and economic challenges in a rapidly changing Europe. Success is envisaged in both cultural and catalytic transformation dimensions, but long-term impacts will be measured through ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The recruitment process for an independent monitoring and evaluation team is underway, and a comprehensive dissemination plan is integral to share results through various channels, aligning with Évora 2027's Communication and Marketing Strategy. Data collected thus far indicates the potential impact of the ECoC process.

The Évora City Council's Communication Department has drafted a communication strategy for the Évora 2030 Strategy, aimed at boosting visibility and fostering a positive perception of Évora as a city of "good living" ("bem viver"). The strategy involves creating a visual identity for Évora 2030, with the current focus on graphic design. Both the Évora 2030 Strategy and the Strategic plan for Évora's culture will be made available on the Évora 2027 website, in Portuguese and English, at the institutional launch of the Évora 2030 Strategy.

Following the ECoC title announcement, the Executive Committee and the bidbook team adhered to the selection report's recommendations. A comprehensive review was conducted of the proposed programme, collaborating with project leaders to

ensure feasibility and alignment with intentions and objectives. While no projects will be cancelled or altered, further development is anticipated under the guidance of the future Artistic Director, given the inherent complexity of each project related to the concept of Vagar.

Artistic and cultural programme integrating the European dimension

Évora 2027's artistic vision invites Europeans to reflect on the present and future through cultural and artistic content. The international open call, "Our Lab", seeks to enhance cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue by exploring various themes such as cultural history, migration, climate change, and more. The programme includes projects like "Travelling Light", "Guadiana", "New Residents", and others that celebrate diversity, foster dialogue, and address critical questions.

The Vagar Academy will bring together experts to discuss themes vital for humanity's future, while the ECoC Family network strengthens intercultural projects. Évora 2027 engages in partnerships with other ECoC cities, forms collaborations with international organisations, and participates in various networks, fostering dialogue and cooperation. The programme, designed for co-creation between local and international artists, emphasises the concept of Vagar as another way of existence.

The programme involves local artists and organisations, encouraging their participation through open calls and collaborations. Traditional art forms are combined with innovative expressions, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting sustainability. The artistic director will ensure the overall artistic quality and diversity of the programme, with ongoing efforts to balance representation across different artistic fields. Évora 2027 aims to attract a broad European and international audience, offering a unique cultural experience rooted in the city's holistic culture and the concept of Vagar.

A table of cultural and artistic programme milestones is set out in the report indicating timelines and goals of each activity.

The executive team has participated and continues to participate in processes and events related to other European Capitals of Culture, as well as in meetings and conferences of relevant international networks and project partners.

Outreach

Évora 2027, anchored in the concept of Vagar, invites reflection on the present and future through cultural content. The Vagar Academy engages experts in vital discussions, while collaborations with ECoC cities and international organisations strengthen the city's outreach.

The communication strategy aims to disseminate the Évora 2030 strategy, bolstering the city's image as a "place of good living". The programme emphasises co-creation, combining local and international artists, merging traditional and innovative expressions. The artistic director will ensure quality and diversity.

A comprehensive digital platform is under development, enhancing Évora 2027's online presence. Strategic partnerships for accessibility include the Local Council for Social Action and the Alentejo Social Innovation programme. Generation 2027, focusing on diversity and equity, will lead the strategy for increased cultural access.

The Outreach team, set to be recruited in January 2024, will engage with school groupings, presenting the cultural education program. The open call "Our Voice", empowering young voices, is scheduled for February 2025. A table outlining the planned Outreach milestones between 2023 and 2025, including the formation of the Évora 2027 Scientific Council for Culture is set out in the report.

Management

Évora 2027's establishment has faced delays in establishing a legal structure for the delivery of their ECoC due to the Portuguese legislation and the ongoing process of decentralisation of State competences in Portugal.

Staffing during the transition involves the existing Évora 2027 team. Financial reprogramming aligns with the implementation timeline. Negotiations for increased funding and EU funds are ongoing. The managing entity's formation is expected by November 2023.

Communication efforts include marketing campaigns, multimedia outreach, and social media engagement. The Vagar concept is central, gaining positive media coverage and public enthusiasm.

Efforts have also been made to share the Évora bidbook in Portuguese and English on their website as well as on the website of GEPAC, the management authority of the ECoC initiative in Portugal. An easy-to-read brochure was produced, and a social media campaign rolled out to demystify what an ECoC is and the content of the Évora bidbook to the general public.

Discussions have also started on improving the digital communication plan and its accessibility.

Plans for EU funds are contingent on final guidelines. Despite delays, efforts to leverage existing funds and partnerships are in progress, maintaining alignment with the Évora 2030 Strategy.

Capacity to deliver

After being designated the European Capital of Culture for 2027, Évora witnessed widespread enthusiasm locally and nationally. The Portuguese government, exemplified by a formal vote in the Parliament, demonstrated strong political commitment. A Protocol signed between Évora and the government outlined financial support from various sectors like Finance, Economy and the Sea, Culture, and Territorial Cohesion.

At the regional level, focus shifted to implementing the cultural programme, involving intra regional mobility and preparations for visitors. Commitments from the Ministry of Territorial Cohesion to increase Community funds for Évora 2027 were secured. The Évora 2027 team received commendation from Municipal Assemblies in Alentejo.

Locally, the municipal board, including opposition councillors, demonstrated commitment by approving funds for the program. Évora City Council and CIMAC were identified as key entities responsible for financial execution. The City Day celebration revolved around Évora's ECoC designation.

Infrastructure-wise, a working group oversees necessary projects, with a focus on initiating contracting procedures and securing Community funding. Special attention is given to projects like the Multi-Use Cultural Center and the Old EPAC Granaries' transformation into the National Centre for Contemporary Dance, involving negotiations and architectural planning.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the Panel sought clarification on following aspects of the six selection criteria:

Long-term cultural strategy

- The panel was interested to understand what the biggest learning and most significant challenge since the designation had been. The team responded that suddenly feeling like being at the centre of Europe and playing an important role in Portugal was overwhelming and very encouraging. Further the interest in the concept Vagar from potential project partners and Universities around Europe was a big and positive surprise.
- The panel enquired as to why Evora had not published the Évora 2030 vision/strategic plan as this is a very relevant political document. The team responded that the document needs a last workover and will be published in December 2023. Further the panel enquired about the alignments with the region on strategic documents - namely the regional operational strategies - on what concerns Évora 2027. The Mayor responded that they are working closely with the Regional Authorities to ensure good cooperation as well as regional resources guarantees for Évora 2027.
- On monitoring and evaluation, the panel had a question on whether Évora 2027 had obtained effective commitments and collaboration of an accredited and independent body for this essential task to be taken as soon as possible. The team informed the panel that they are collaborating with Évora University and that contracts are launched on this task. A work plan is drafted and work on the ex-ante evaluation is in progress.
- The panel felt that the catch phrases "Évora 2030" and "Évora 2027" might induce some ambiguity and misunderstanding in respect of Évora 2027 in the communication. The team agreed and explained that the communication

department is working on finding a good way to explain and distinguish the two but at the same time communicate clearly how the two strategies go hand in hand.

Management

- The panel wanted to know if following the submission of the monitoring report there had been further details about when Évora could expect to obtain the approval from the Court of Auditors on establishing the Évora 2027 Association. The team explained that the feasibility study and work on the framework for the association had been completed but that they are not in a position to say when the Court of Auditors will come back with their response. It is, however, expected that it should be ready to pass in the municipality assembly already in September and that the association will be created soon thereafter.
- There was a question on whether the envisioned contribution from the local, regional and national authorities for operating expenses remained the same as listed in the bid. To this the team could inform the panel that a protocol and schedule for funding from the government is confirmed and that they are currently being funded by the local and regional authorities. The main change from the bidbook phase is that an additional 5 million Euro has been granted for regional cooperation.
- The panel requested more details about the role of the different bodies encompassed in the governance scheme. In particular the label “executive commission” causes confusion. The team responded that the governance structure has three levels as is described in the bidbook, with a general assembly, a board and the executive level with the CEO, artistic and financial directors and Communication and Outreach Direction. The board has all entities represented and an executive representation with the CEO and two other members designated by the general assembly. The CEO and artistic director will be autonomous and independent in their work. The team agreed that the term “executive commission” is indeed confusing as they have no executive power. They are currently working on finding a more suitable terminology.
- Given the delay in establishing the delivery body of Évora 2027, significant amounts of work have already been accomplished on various projects (both in terms of programme and engagement). The panel, therefore, inquired about the strategies in place for planning the succession or continuation of this work with the team that would be recruited following the establishment of the association at the conclusion of 2023. The Mayor of Évora underlined that key people from the bidbook phase will stay on for the implementation to ensure a smooth transfer, continuity, and collective tacit knowledge.
- The panel found that dismissing social media platforms such as TikTok and Twitter (X) for not being consistent with the Évora 2027 brand values and hence not wishing to use them in communication could be missing important target groups in arts and culture such as young people and cultural and

creative networks that occupy these platforms. The team responded that they are still working on analysing all media platforms and that they have not decided on specifically avoiding any.

Artistic and cultural programme

- The panel was interested in understanding the team's perspective on how residents, cultural experts, and visitors will perceive Évora's contribution to the legacy of the city, region, and Europe. The team explained that Vagar and its connotations offer an excellent connection in thinking and action between tradition and contemporary. Further it proposes another way of life socially, culturally and politically as well as a new future for Europe. Vagar offers a notion of how life and the world operates in a cycle - a notion that is understood by locals and visitors alike - a legacy of humanity.
- With four open calls scheduled in the next months the panel requested the team to clarify how this could be accomplished before the appointment of an artistic director and team that is not envisaged to start before the first semester of 2024. The team responded that the schedule for launching the open calls will indeed be postponed enabling the artistic director to be involved from the launch. It will of course be the duty of the artistic director to uphold the level of excellence when working on the outcomes of the four open calls.
- Further the panel noted that many important programming procedures are planned for this year and the beginning of next year such as meetings with project leaders, recruitment of curators etc. The question therefore remains on how the team will go about this aspect of programming with the artistic director not being in place for some months to come. The team responded that involvement with partners and artists has been put on hold for this very reason. Everyone respects the necessity for this. On legacy however, there are matters the interim team can work on even without the artistic director being in place. Once the position has been announced the team anticipates that an artistic director will be operational around two months later.
- The panel sought information on the cooperation with the other Portuguese runner up cities for the ECoC title as well as cooperation with Mediterranean cities - especially on the concept of Vagar. The team has very close cooperation with Braga and Aveiro on differences and complementarities. The cooperation with Aveiro and Braga is on programme level, and on communicating common messages both locally, nationally as well as to Europe. There will be a specific programme line with Aveiro and Braga. The team is in ongoing discussions with the General Direction of Arts (Ministry of Culture Department) for the establishment of a financial line to support artistic projects with national scope connected with the concept of "Vagar".
- The panel wanted to know some more details on the profiles and roles of the artistic director and the curators to be recruited. The team responded that the artistic director must have an ability to sense the future so to speak - to be well informed about the global and European agenda and main

themes. The artistic director must be highly qualified and connected and be willing to engage in discussions on topics deriving from Vagar such as humanity, nature, science, new ways of living and building, the transition to a more digitised work and of course the role of artificial intelligence. She/he/they must give clear directions and always insist on the highest quality and be able to uphold and motivate the team. The curators' role will be to stay well connected to the original teams/programmers that have conceived the projects for the final bidbook and to ensure that the projects are implemented with due respect for the original ideas. They too must possess the qualities listed for the artistic director.

European dimension

- The panel wanted to learn about the team's strategy to work with the European partners listed in the final bidbook beyond the ECoC partners and programmes. The team responded that communication with all partners listed in the bidbook is maintained. The team senses a strong feeling of responsibility from the side of the European partners for the Évora 2027 programme and so far, nobody has withdrawn from the cooperation. In addition to the current European partners there has been a strong interest from the academic world across Europe. However, the current interim team will await the appointment of the artistic director for pursuing this work.

Outreach

- The panel wanted to hear more about the challenges and learnings on the Évora 2027 digital outreach. The team responded that they are working diligently on this and are engaged in developing a digital concept with the digital transformation team. They want to develop a platform with other Portuguese Capitals of Culture targeting young people and European audiences.
- The panel sought clarification on who will coordinate the outreach programmes and the overall participation of the projects - i.e. the relationship between the outreach, the artistic and the overall management team. Further the team was interested in understanding the connections between the regional authorities, the local management and more specifically with the artistic team. The team explained that all capacity building programmes will take place under the Meeting Line (one of the legacy projects) and that it will work closely with the outreach team. The role of the outreach team is the launch of the outreach programme. Generation 2027 will work on the activity plans and be the advisory board. All projects are managed by the artistic director. Meeting Line is a vital capacity building programme, and it is pertinent that it is developed as a project of the intermunicipal community of central Alentejo. Generation 27 will be launched by the outreach team but will work independently after that. It is an advisory group that will serve as observers and advisors about all that matters. All communities will be invited to work in the outreach programme.

- The panel asked Évora 2027 how they will work with transforming the stereotypical perception of Vagar as being “lazy and unproductive” into a strength. The team responded that on an international level this is not an issue and on a local level the fact that Évora was designated European Capital of Culture 2027 by Europe has already destroyed the stigma. More and more they experience that the word Vagar induces pride in local people.

Capacity to deliver

- The panel was pleased to notice that most infrastructure projects are expected to be finished well ahead of the ECoC year. However, there are a few projects that have a close call time wise. The team informed the panel that most projects have finances cleared for starting the work and that the city is fully committed to the schedule provided to the panel in the progress report.
- The panel enquired about the impact of inflation, especially on the long-term plans for infrastructure. The team responded that this is indeed a challenge and that material for building is also looming. All partners have been warned that not all venues may be ready on time. They are introduced to several possible venues and as such will have a plan B.

Conclusions and recommendations

The panel appreciates the progress made so far by Évora 2027 despite the challenges caused by the war situation and high inflation. The panel also positively acknowledges the strong commitment to Évora 2027 from the city, regional and national partners.

However, the panel wishes to draw attention to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Acknowledging the bureaucratic challenges associated with establishing the delivery structure for Évora 2027, the panel underscores the utmost importance of expediting this process as swiftly as possible. The panel urges all entities engaged in this endeavour to collaborate effectively and take proactive measures, ensuring that the setup progresses without any unnecessary further delays.

Recommendation 2: While recognising the efforts that are made to cooperate closely with the region through the municipal association, the Panel would like to underline the utmost importance of ensuring strict alignment between the city and the regional strategic documents for an assured delivery of the ECoC in 2027.

Recommendation 3: The communication department is working on explaining the two Évora strategies for 2030 and 2027 respectively in a clear way that both distinguishes and connects the two. The panel would like to recommend putting an emphasis on solving this potential confusion in communication of the two strategies ahead of the publication in December.

Recommendation 4: The panel recommends exploring all current and emerging media platforms and media outlets in their communication strategy for Évora 2027 for ensuring reaching key target audiences for Évora 2027, ambassadors, partners, sponsors, politicians and networks.

Recommendation 5: Although the governance structure was presented and discussed during the monitoring meeting, the panel would nonetheless request an organogram from the team at the earliest convenience.

Recommendation 6: The panel finds it very interesting that the team is pushing for a financial line in the national cultural budget to support artistic projects with national scope connected with the concept of Vagar. The panel recommends pursuing these efforts as this would profoundly strengthen the Évora 2027 project as well as fostering the national and international legacy.

Recommendation 7: Although most infrastructure projects are planned to be ready well ahead of the ECoC year due to inflation and shortages of materials, the panel recommends developing a plan B for all events.

Next steps

The Panel remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a second monitoring meeting in mid-2025 and a third and final meeting in the autumn 2026. At the end of the third monitoring meeting, the Panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to award the Melina Mercouri Prize to Évora 2027.

The panel would like to thank the Mayor of Évora and the Évora 2027 team for a very informative discussion and looks forward to the next developments of their European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel members

