Bodø
European Capital of Culture 2024

Second Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECoC Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, 23rd of June 2022

Creative Europe

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 23rd of June 2022 between the Panel and the delegation of Bodø (Norway), one of the three cities holding the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) title in 2024[1]. Bodø was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2024 by the European Commission on the 3rd of February 2020 based on the recommendation of the ECoC Expert Panel in its selection report[2]; its bid-book is available on the Bodø 2024 website[3]. The first monitoring meeting took place in September 2020, and the corresponding monitoring report is available on the European Commission website.[4] This report is addressed to the Bodø 2024 public non-profit institution and will be published on the same European Commission's website.

Attendance

The Panel members, nominated by EU institutions:

Jelle Burggraaff
Jorge Cerveira Pinto
Else Christensen-Redzepovic (Chair)
Beatriz Garcia
Marilyn Gaughan Reddan
Goda Giedraityte (Rapporteur)
Suvi Innilä
Hrvoje Laurenta
Rossella Tarantino

For Bodø 2024

General Director
Programme Director
Head of Administration and Finance
Director of Communications and Marketing
Youth involvement coordinator – yoUNG2024
Volunteering and hospitality coordinator
President Nordland County Council / Chair Board of Representatives
Ecological Economy project coordinator
Chair Bodø 2024 Board
Nord University / Evaluation and monitoring manager

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture).

[1] The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2020 to 2033, which provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the panel.
See: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG
[2] See selection report at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/ecoc2024-eftaeea-selection-report.pdf
[3] https://bodo.kommune.no/les/ECC/
[4] https://culture.ec.europa.eu/bad-ischl-bodo-and-tartu#bodoe

Report from ECoC Bodø 2024

Bodø 2024 submitted a second progress report, including an overview of all six selection criteria, ahead of the virtual meeting, supplemented by succinct annexes on milestones and status of the projects. Bodø 2024 develops its programme under the banner of ARCTICulation, which addresses important European and global challenges connected with climate change. The report outlined the activities of the organisation since the previous report meeting in September 2020. During the virtual meeting, Bodø 2024 delivered a presentation, emphasising the following:

- The ECoC programme is seen as an asset not only for the city, but also for the whole Nordland region, with which it is developed in partnership. There is a close cooperation between Bodø 2024 and other 40 municipalities of the region;

- The Bodø 2024 team is focused on long-term achievements, following the bid-book as closely as possible. Their role is to act as a coordinator enabling other organisations to run projects rather than to keep direct control on events. This is key to ensuring capacity building within project promoters in the region;

- The ten regional cities have established a Regional Advisory Board; institutions across Nordland are developing projects that together with the broad cultural activities will form a coherent programme for 2024, increase long-lasting capacity for the institutions, and create networks that can be sustained for future European collaborations;

- The team is expanding and has now double the initially planned staff member number;

- The pandemic created difficulties at administration level, leading to some setbacks and delays;

- All planned public funding is secured. Private funding is also almost entirely secured and there is a solid hope to get an extra 5m EUR to extend the programme beyond the one included in the bid-book. However, the project is currently lacking around 1.5m EUR, thus the team has applied for EU funding and intend to apply for more to bridge the gap;

- The structure of the programme, which is bid-book driven, is slowly emerging, based on the solid foundation that was created by the team in recent months;

- A big challenge is to manage expectations from the public in the long term, while some projects may only be implemented in 2025 and 2026 as part of legacy;

- Transparency laws for government agencies in Norway make communicating about contracting – and therefore about the programme – a challenge;

- Attention is put on youth and sustainability, which coincides with European initiatives such as the 2022 European Year of Youth and the New European Bauhaus as part of the European Green Deal;

- The team uses the ECoC network extensively and communicates with other ECoC teams.

Discussion

During the discussion, the Panel sought clarification on some issues. Topics discussed included the following:

Long-term cultural strategy

- The Panel asked about the greatest challenges the team was facing in preparing its ECoC title-year.

The Bodø 2024 team stated the challenge was to balance the slow progress in programme development with keeping the interest and curiosity from the cultural field. On a positive note, there is no concern about finance, political support or regional commitment. The structure of ownership helps, because Bodø 2024 is a public company, while accounting, IT, archive, human resources and legal issues are managed by the city administration. Also controlling the programme release is a challenge.

The team expects to announce the programme's highlights in early February 2023, precisely one year ahead of the official opening, and the whole programme in October 2023.

- The Panel wanted to know more on the People's Jury, which is presented as an innovative tool, in particular in terms of long-term commitment and data accuracy.

The People's Jury is just one among many other elements in the overall approach to evaluation. It is an innovative method, to be tested in autumn 2022, aiming to involve the community in the project. In this way, Bodø 2024 wants to engage in a dialogue with the people and appeal to their sense of responsibility. A more classical approach will also be used as a complement, especially if the Jury's method does not work as planned.

- The Panel referred to the report, which states: "(...) we must admit the pandemic has been longer and tougher than expected, both for us and the rest of cultural Bodø and Nordland." The team was asked to briefly describe some of the changes that it implemented in terms of the cultural strategy to respond to the new post-pandemic situation in Europe.

Not much has changed strategically, but some processes were delayed and must therefore be accelerated now to come up to speed. In this challenging context, the team sees the ECoC as a strong added value, as it contributes to rebuilding infrastructure, changing the social life of the city/region and their inhabitants, attracting high competency jobs and showing to people that the region is a good place to live in.

- The Panel inquired about the actual progress (as opposed to mere plans) of their evaluation project, for instance how the over 100 KPIs mentioned had been prioritised and related to the ECoC project's strategic priorities. It also wanted to know more about the evaluation conceptual model & inception report, which is planned to be completed by the end of June 2022.

A research team working under the leadership of Nord University will finalise an inception report in the summer of 2022, which will outline the conceptual model for the evaluation. The plan is to have a descriptive part presenting the 100 KPIs and a more complex explanatory part that will show to what extent the project has delivered on them. The

challenge is to find out what data can be collected to populate each KPI and to ensure a baseline is in place.

Artistic and cultural programme

- The Panel asked how many projects were in contracting phase with a detailed production plan and a production budget, and how many of these needed match financing.

Bodø 2024 replied that it contributed to many projects, but was not, in most cases, the main contributor and therefore did not develop directly a detailed planning for those projects. The planned projects are run autonomously by different contractors and it is up to them to have a production plan. According to the team, approx. 80 % of the bid-book projects are in the process of signing or already signed (contracts or cooperation agreements).

Bodø 2024 has decided not to have a set match financing for all projects, but to agree on the level with each partner. Match funding is indicated in contract or cooperation agreement negotiated with all partners (close to 50 % match financing overall). Contracts are signed only when match funding is guaranteed.

- In the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the Panel wanted to know if the team had a plan to involve in their ECoC programme Ukrainian artists and cultural organisations, as well as Russian non-regime artists.

The team said this was not the case, as the Norwegian public system to fund cross border cultural projects, such as Barents-partnership, is now on hold due to the current geopolitical context in Ukraine.

The team has however developed a network of international organisations in Bodø, including Ukrainian and Russian people, and organised a volunteer festival with them. The plan is to continue bringing this network together in more neutral meeting places.

Furthermore, the Arts of Democracy platform, a key element in the bid-book, will provide a good tool to bring in Ukrainian artists, as this platform is precisely about promoting EU values.

- From the report, it appears that in addition to the programme presented in the bid-book, new projects and independent productions are added. A total of 400-600 events and productions are expected to be carried out in 2024. According to the same report, the Artistic Advisory Board influences the artistic direction with a special focus on the main events of the year, calls and competitions. In relation to this, the Panel asked to specify what aims the team was working towards, what the process was, as well as the schedule of still adding new projects to the programme. It also inquired whether there would be open calls or commissioned projects and how many new projects were still to be added (and with what percentage of the programme budget).

There is a mix between commissions and competitions (through specific calls as opposed to general calls). There will be an open call in the region early in the process.

No new main projects will be added unless there is sufficient funding. Bodø 2024 is in dialogue with sponsors in this respect. For instance, there are discussions with a company for additional funds to finance a traditional music concert.

The bid-book projects will represent 80 % of the final programme and additional projects around 20 %, though there is no limit set. Adding additional projects will depend on how they fit into the artistic programme as well as do they have a corresponding funding.

- The Panel asked what the most daring project in the programme is, and what projects have the potential to attract an international audience.

"Daring" can have many meanings and can go into different directions. For instance, the concept of an 800 km long ECoC is per se daring. Both in a logistical sense, but also from the aspect of change in people's mentality.

From an artistic point of view, Art of Democracy/the Freedom Festival, which will attract refugee artists is also daring, as well as the Southern Sami theatre project "Who owns the wind", which creates contemporary performance as a political protest.

Finally, projects can be daring in a physical way, such as the 1 km under water concert inside of the mountain to reach the most unreachable parts and fragile nature of the region, or the creation of 360-degree natural screen for Sami films.

- The progress report from Bodø 2024 states: "All over Nordland, cultural organisations and independent artists are making their first attempts at European-level collaborations and co-productions to be ready for 2024". In the first report, the team expressed worries that "working with less experienced cultural producers is a challenge. The issues of capacity building and risk management in this regard are linked." Referring to these statements, the Panel wanted to know how the team felt about this today and if all the partners and artists would be capable of being pioneers in the field and deliver qualitative and, most importantly, European projects.

Artists and organisations are invited into a network they did not experience before. The Bodø 2024 organisation functions as a scaffolding to help those local organisations grow in their ambitions to work internationally. This is successful, as it appears that the number of cooperation projects is on the rise, with also more Creative Europe and other EU programmes applications than ever before. If some of those projects are not ready for the ECoC title-year, they will be part of the ECoC's legacy.

- The Panel asked to provide more details about the programme development process, especially focusing on how the team involved the local creative scene and cultural institutions and if they develop the capacity building programme altogether.

It is challenging to become more structured as each municipality is different and their needs are very diverse. Thus, each municipality's involvement in the programme is already capacity building for themselves. Regional centres build their teams together and ensure everyone can meet, and invite people to co-create, and through this to build capacity. The team is collaborating with the regional advisory board, which consists of people working in culture departments of all 10 major municipalities of the region. This is the first time a network of cultural leaders in the Nordland region is created, what already is an achievement. This helps to join all people in this 800 km-long region. The network will also be a legacy for the ECoC.

European dimension

- The Panel asked if there were plans to cooperate with other European and/or international cultural networks beside ICORN.

Existing networks are used to reach this goal. For instance, the ECoC network opens many doors and Bodø 2024 is collaborating with present and future ECoCs on various specific projects. Examples include the "Deconfining" network between Bodø and other ECoC cities, exchanges of best practices with "Young 2024" board in Tartu to create connections and going to visit Kaunas 2022. Many European partners want to collaborate through Erasmus+ projects.

- The Panel asked for an outline of the projects with other ECoCs.

Examples mentioned included a project with Tartu regarding a new network for aviation museum and exhibition, for which Bodø 2024 have used the EEA Grants to be able to organise visits; new collaborations developed with the Estonian National Museum for a Sami exhibition; a children's exchange project about waste and ecology and a project with Tartu 2024 and Bad Ischl 2024 on arts and technology called from "DNA to AI" (applying for Creative Europe support).

The two other 2024 ECoCs are also involved in volunteer's leadership programme and training course with Bodø. There are contacts with Oulu 2026 on Sami content projects.

- The Panel wanted to know whether the team has an overview of which international partners were attached to every single project.

Such an overview exists, because everything that is contracted must have a European dimension. In the upcoming calls, the team also wants to consider the European dimension in regard to an indigenous perspective.

Outreach

- The Panel sought for more details about the audience development strategy. It referred to the table within Annex 2 of the report where it is stated that target group plans will be developed by the end of 2022. The Panel is aware that it takes some time to prepare and organise audience development activities, and worries that with this timeline, the team will not be able to implement them until just a few months before 2024 starts.

This is related to delays due to Covid. The planning started immediately after designation, but it did not make sense to develop strategy during the pandemic. The main task was to build confidence in communities who wanted to engage with the programme. Covid created problems for utilising unusual places, as well as connecting with groups that are not currently engaged with the programme.

The team presented the Ambassador School programme, which organises meetings in unusual places, creating connections that would not otherwise exist. It also mentioned the Youth programme, emphasising that youngsters would be responsible for developing their own programme and attracting other young people.

- The Panel inquired about challenges that would result from the current war situation and how this would affect the strategy of attracting international tourists.

According to the team, the geopolitical situation will not affect the strategy in this respect. The process of creating an ECoC in the region is already a leap, their strategy is to open the doors to Europe, strengthen the international dimension for local institutions, etc.

Management

- The Panel referred to the team's ambition to increase the budget significantly, up to 35m EURO while there was currently a gap of 1.5m EUR in comparison with bid-book's projections and asked how the team expected to reach this target.

The team is working on securing funds from the EU (with already successful applications), the State and the private sector (local and national companies), with two staff members working on this. It is quite positive about reaching the new target.

- The Panel inquired about the communication strategy regarding the release of the ECoC programme, while also inviting the team to engage without further delay with local media, so they understand what the ECoC is.

Bodø 2024 explained that they had an overall communication strategy. The strategy is in development in the sense that sub-strategies are needed for several areas depending on when and what aspects of the programme would be announced.

The team agrees there is a need to explain what the ECoC is all about, as this is quite new in this Arctic part of Europe. To do that, one staff member is travelling around the region and building networks with the local media, while the team is also planning breakfast meetings with local media.

Capacity to deliver

- In its progress report, Bodø 2024 states: "Some of the regional cities have used the ECoC status to create their own "2024 strategies". The Panel wanted to know how the team would ensure a coherent ECoC programme, in line with the bid-book.

The team explained that these strategies were not ECoC related programme, but an opportunity for the regional cities to focus on further connecting the cultural sector and the business community, while also aiming to attract new inhabitants and curb demographic decline. There is also a need to create connections between the small regional cities. The actual work is controlled by Bodø 2024. The regional partners have a meeting cycle every three months for instance, and that leads to changes in the region and creates a story that will become part of Bodø 2024 legacy.

- The Panel asked about the various milestones outside of programming the team had for 2022 and 2023.

The team highlighted that there were milestones in every area, from evaluation to marketing and communication, from funding to volunteers and programme. In particular, it is important to get a proper baseline for data, to find a national level sponsor and to secure funding for their first collaborated ECoC-project.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Panel acknowledges the good progress made so far by Bodø 2024. It appreciates the stable and strategic work delivered by the team, resulting in a strong political support at all territorial levels, a clear involvement of Nordland, a solid public and private funding (as well as the possibility of a budgetary increase that would help addressing current and new challenges such as inflation), and an artistic reflection aimed to reinforce some aspects of the programme.

However, the Panel wants to emphasise a few important concerns in other areas: the need for a reinforcement of the European dimension, the lack of clarity regarding the state of development of the capacity-building programme as well as of the audience and communication strategies. Thus, the Panel draws attention to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- In its report, Bodø 2024 presented the programme in an elliptical way. The Panel was therefore not given sufficiently detailed information and was not in a position to evaluate the team's progress in full scope.

Recommendation 1: The Panel understands that Bodø 2024 will soon finalise key strategic documents and invites the team to share these documents with them. In particular, the Panel wants to receive more information by the end of September 2022 on:

  - The evaluation strategy;
  - The communication strategy;
  - The audience development plan.

- The Panel understands that the decentralised organisational model adopted by Bodø 2024 creates challenges in terms of having a very precise overview of programme development, in particular the state of development and contracting of the individual projects.

Recommendation 2: The lack of concrete planning and production details provided to the Panel regarding programme development is a major concern, as it does not allow the Panel to have a clear idea on the status of the programme. Therefore, the Panel wants to receive by the end of September a follow-up report, providing all the guarantees it needs in this respect (number of contracts or partnership agreements already signed or in phase of being signed, percentage of bid-book projects signed or in phase of development, number and origin of partners, includin g European/international organisations, institutions and artists, level of match-funding, etc.). This material would be treated in strict confidence. It is important to act fast as the ECoC-year is approaching quickly.

To monitor the programme development closely, the Panel suggests the team to go monthly through the whole planning process from a "helicopter" perspective in order not to get lost in detail.

- Although the Panel sees encouraging improvements in the attempt to ensure that the overall ECoC project is about Europe, the project still lacks a deeper European dimension and needs stronger European diversity, as the emphasis is placed on the Arctic and Nordic/Baltic area partnerships.

Recommendation 3: It is important to reinforce the European dimension in the Bodø 2024 programme and to share it with people in Bodø, international cooperation partners and other people in Europe, who will get to know about Bodø 2024 either by reading about it or by visiting it virtually or in person.

In particular, the Panel suggests strengthening the European dimension from an under artistic point of view, building cooperation partnerships not only via the ECoC network but also referring to other professional cultural and art networks. The Bodø 2024 artistic advisory board could be supportive in this sense as well.

Furthermore, it is important to constantly take an outside-in perspective on your city, region and country in relation to the ECoC. It will help to understand the perspectives of people from elsewhere in Europe. A perspective that goes two ways - both on how Bodø 2024 understands and takes onboard cultural diversity, values and specificities of other

countries, and the way Bodø 2024 communicates the cultural specificities of the city and region to people elsewhere in Europe. Only that way will allow achieving a true European dimension in Bodø 2024.

- The Panel would like to encourage the team to approach communication issues faster.

Recommendation 4: A strong and detailed communication strategy should be put in place urgently. It is important not to wait until details of the programme are ready to be announced. The priority should be to communicate about what the ECoC is, its rationale and its importance for the inhabitants of Bodø and Nordland. The Panel encourages the team to start telling the story now.

However, launching the entire programme one year before is quite risky. Cancelations can still take place due to contracts not having been fully negotiated yet (= negative news to be communicated), thus time of programme's launch should be considered with a great attention.

- The Panel draws the attention of Bodø 2024 to the necessity to have a back-up plan in order to address the uncertainties related to the on-going war, inflation and pandemic. At the same time, the challenges posed by the war in Ukraine deserve a deeper cultural reflection.

Recommendation 5: The Panel suggests grasping the opportunity that the ECoC can act as a facilitator for actions that are meant to illustrate and promote European values and address key topical issues of the time.

- The Panel was pleased to learn that Bodø 2024 benefited from extremely solid support and cooperation with both the region and the city. The Panel notes that evaluation/monitoring and capacity-building programmes should be based on the long-term legacy of ECoC.

Recommendation 6: It is important to ensure the reach of the goals foreseen in the bid-book. Evaluation/monitoring and capacity-building strategies should be developed with international partners and expertise. The Panel recommends giving support and increased focus to capacity building especially on internationalisation of the cultural sector and digital development. The timeframe with milestones and deadlines for evaluation, starting with the baseline, should be established as soon as possible.

Next Steps

The Panel welcomes the relevant steps undertaken so far and remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

As indicated in the "Recommendation" section above, the Panel asks to receive more information from the team by the end of September 2022 about the Evaluation strategy; the Communication strategy; the Audience development plan; as well as the Programme development (including the list of local, national, European and international partners for each project).

The Commission will call for a third (and final) monitoring meeting in autumn 2023.

At the end of this meeting, the Panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to grant the Melina Mercouri Prize to Bodø 2024.

The conditions for the payment of the Prize are specified in Article 14 of Decision 445/2014/EU:
"The prize money shall be paid by the end of March of the year of the title, provided that the designated city concerned continues to honour the commitments it made at the application stage, complies with the criteria and takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports.

The commitments made at the application stage shall be deemed to have been honoured by the designated city where no substantial change has been made to the programme and the strategy between the application stage and the year of the title, in particular where:

(a) the budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-quality cultural programme in line with the application and the criteria;

(b) the independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;

(c) the European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final version of the cultural programme;

(d) the marketing and communication strategy and the communication material used by the designated city clearly reflects the fact that the action is a Union action;

(e) the plans for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the title on the designated city are in place."

The Panel would like to thank the Mayor of Bodø, the Bodø 2024 team and other contributors to the monitoring report and ECoC project as such for a very informative and frank discussion and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending Panel's members