

Lublin
European Capital of Culture 2029

First Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECOC Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, 12th September 2025

Creative Europe

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting held on 12 September 2025 between the panel and the team of Lublin, one of the two European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2029. Lublin was designated as European Capital of Culture on September 25, 2024, by the Ministry of Culture and Natural Heritage of Poland. Panel's recommendation concerning the nomination can be found in the selection report[1] and Lublin's bid book is available on the Lublin 2029 website[2]. This report of the first monitoring meeting is addressed to the Lublin 2029 team and will also be published on the European Commission's website[3].

Attendance

The Panel members:

Toni Attard
Csaba Borboly
Jelle Burggraaff
Jorge Cerveira Pinto
Else Christensen-Redzepovic
Suvi Innilä (rapporteur)
Erni Kask
Hrvoje Laurenta
Tanja Mlaker
Matthias Ripp (chair)
Agata Wąsowska-Pawlik (national expert)

For Lublin 2029:

Deputy Mayor for Culture, Sports and Participation
Plenipotentiary of the Mayor of Lublin for ECoC 2029 programme, Head of ECoC Programme Committee
Director of the Department of Culture at the Lublin City Hall
Chief Executive Director (CEO) of the Lublin 2029
Artistic Director of Lublin 2029
Two Programme Curators of Lublin 2029
Member of the Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Team
International Relations Manager of Lublin 2029

Observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland were also in attendance.

[1] https://culture.ec.europa.eu/document/selection-report-european-capital-of-culture-2029-poland
[2] https://lublin2029.pl/en/home-page/#ecoc
[3] https://culture.ec.europa.eu/node/3266

Report and presentation from Lublin 2029

Lublin 2029 submitted a comprehensive progress report in advance of the meeting. The report described the process since the city of Lublin was awarded the title in September 2024. The report followed the six evaluation criteria of the European Capital of Culture action and pointed out consistently how the recommendations of the panel's selection report have been taken into consideration in the past months.

The monitoring report emphasised the significant progress that has taken place in several areas. One of the key milestones of the last months was the establishment of the European Capital of Culture 2029 institution. The CEO of the institution was appointed in July 2025.

An independent, interdisciplinary Monitoring and Evaluation Team has developed a preliminary methodological report of the programme evaluation. They have also prepared a baseline study drawing on analysis of available data, institutional and official sources, surveys and qualitative research, as well as a logical intervention model.

Addressing directly the panel's recommendations, the Curatorial Board has simplified and strengthened the overarching narrative of the **RE:UNION** programme. A key step was moving away from an overly complex structure toward three coherent and communicative programme areas: **Community, Habitat** and **Borders**.

The Curatorial Board, together with the Consortium of 24 operators acting as an advisory body to the ECoC, has undertaken substantial work on the programme to ensure the implementation of the fully operationalised programme as outlined in the final bid book and in accordance with the ECoC criteria, whereby the final selection bid book serves as a de facto contract with the European Commission. The monitoring report included a substantial table presenting the status of each project of the bid in terms of the implementation phase and the realisation level on several strategic elements. The team is currently finalising a comprehensive model for open calls in 2026 and 2027, including clear evaluation criteria.

Strengthening European relations has been in the focus since the nomination. This has also included a knowledge transfer process between current and future ECoC's as well as candidate cities. Lublin is also pursuing membership in various European networks, such as Trans Europe Halles, Culture Action Europe, European Museum Academy, and Europa Nostra. In terms of the European dimension in the programme, issues of local importance have been integrated with current topics of crucial importance to the EU, such as democracy, solidarity, and cultural diversity.

The social outreach and impact development are currently at an initial stage, and will expand in 2026, when the core documents such as Cultural Education Strategy and Audience Development Strategy are planned to be finalised. The legacy of Lublin as the European Youth Capital 2023 has been strengthened by the ECoC title, allowing projects to continue and evolve in the ECoC direction.

In the wake of the establishment of the Lublin 2029 institution and in line with the panel's recommendation to clarify the governance scheme and stakeholder roles, the new model of governance structure will define the tasks and specify the responsibilities of existing groups and bodies such as the ECoC Team, the Curatorial Board, the Consortium and the Monitoring and Evaluation Team. The aim is to create an organisation capable of delivering the objectives of the bid while remaining faithful to the original idea of a shared, participatory and cross-sectoral process.

Concerning the investments listed in the final bid, the report provided an update that four out of seven investments have entered the implementation stage. For two, financing sources are being sought and for one, alternative funding possibilities are being analysed after the original plan was not successful.

Alongside with many areas progressing strongly in the past months, the monitoring report also noted several challenges such as managing expectations. The project authors have had expectations for a faster progress after the nomination, while the residents have anticipated events immediately. In addition, the financing agreements with the region and the academic union have been postponed forward from the year 2025.

According to the report, the local political context is also marked by intense polarisation, reflecting the broader divisions present across Poland. Nonetheless, the report emphasises that in Lublin, the ECoC initiative and cultural activities are viewed as transcending political divides. The objective, therefore, is to foster broad-based consensus on the ECoC programme.

At the monitoring meeting the Lublin 2029 team gave a presentation, which complemented and confirmed the progress report. They highlighted that several significant milestones have been achieved in recent months, even after the report was finalised, including the recent appointment of the Artistic Director, who was also present at the meeting.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the panel sought clarification on the following issues:

Contribution to the long-term cultural strategy

- Regarding the criteria of contribution to the long-term strategy, the panel wanted to know which concrete cultural, social and economic legacy indicators will be used to measure the impact a decade after 2029. The team responded that the RE:UNION concept is based on broader social change, with a strong focus on social resilience. General aims include strengthening social ties, fostering economic growth, and supporting social transformation. The concrete indicators are still to be developed, but a team of sociologists is already on board.

- In response to the panel's inquiry about measuring the ecological impact of the ECoC, the team responded that this is currently in the preparation stage, but various survey and research techniques are being considered. One measurable outcome could be increased environmental awareness.

- Considering that one of the goals of the long-term strategy is strengthening the cultural sector, the panel sought clarification on why, according to the monitoring report, capacity-building activities for local cultural operators are postponed until 2026. The team clarified that the whole process has not been postponed and that in autumn a course on cultural diplomacy for all interested cultural operators will be launched. There are also plans to support the cultural sector's competence for fundraising as soon as possible.

Artistic and cultural programme

- Regarding the role of the Artistic Director, the panel sought further clarification on how this position will function given that much of the programme has already been defined in the final bid, with the remaining components expected to emerge through forthcoming open calls. The team acknowledged that they are aware the ECoC programming process differs significantly from that of international festivals. There will be detailed negotiations with all partners concerning each project, exploring among other things the international connections as well as the legacy of the projects. As an example of new projects, musical Yentl was mentioned – it will be translated into Yiddish and staged as a European project, having a strong role also by the Artistic Director in shaping the project.

- The Panel asked the CEO and Artistic Director what they envisioned as the legacy of Lublin 2029, both in shaping the city's cultural fabric and in its impact on different target groups at the local, national, and European levels. In their reply they asserted that one of the key legacies will be the revival and rediscovery of memories that have been lost or forgotten.

- The panel wanted to know how the team will ensure that projects listed in the final bid will not have to scale down due to new projects emerging from the open calls, especially considering that the report states expectations for less budget than estimated. The team explained that not all funds have been allocated to the projects already presented. A portion of the budget has been reserved for open calls, another for existing festivals, and a further share dedicated to youth-focused initiatives.

- The report described scalability as one mechanism to adjust the programme and each project to the available resources. While the mechanism was initially acknowledged as effective, the panel raised concerns about its long-term viability and potential impact on project implementation and quality. They also questioned whether some projects, such as the flagships ones, would be excluded from this scalability process. The team described that each project has been asked to prepare three different versions based on three different budget realities, e.g. in case the projects cannot raise the planned external funding. The final decisions will be made, depending on the project size, between late 2026 and early 2028.

- To the question on how to ensure that all stakeholders and processes involved in the delivery of Lublin 2029 are aligned to the programmatic vision, the team admitted that this is a challenge and requires the right people in the different positions.

- The panel also wanted to know how the legacy of the Youth Capital and the growing European attention to youth development will be fully reflected in the ECoC programme, especially in the form of strengthening the cultural framework for young talents in the coming three years. In its response the team assured that young people are not only welcome but actively invited to shape the programme. Part of the programme budget is reserved for youth projects but will only be distributed later in order to ensure that those who are not yet ready can still get involved before 2029.

European dimension

- Considering the growing social polarisation, as well as the rise of anti-Ukrainian and antisemitic sentiments and the influence of Russian propaganda, the panel inquired about the team's plans for addressing these challenges and responding to this complex reality. The team responded that Lublin has for several years been one of the safest cities in Poland with nearly no racism-related violence. Still, they plan to work on this issue increasingly with several NGOs and claimed their intention to learn from Ukraine on how to tackle the issue of propaganda.

- Concerning the international partners and artists listed in the bid, the panel wanted to know how the team had engaged them since the nomination. The team explained that all partners who worked with them on the bid have been contacted and told that the delivery phase will soon begin and that they will be contacted again shortly.

- Responding to the question on how Europe will be visible in Lublin in and after 2029 and how will people think differently about Europe after the ECoC, the team described that e.g. now, during the Europe Day in May, the European flag, anthem and values were strongly present.

Outreach

- Concerning outreach, the panel wanted to know, how the team will engage citizens currently underrepresented in cultural life. The team acknowledged that this is a significant challenge with multiple levels. The goal is to reach people who have never previously participated in cultural activities, and to do this primarily through educational programmes, especially in schools. In addition, people with special needs will be directly involved in developing inclusive ideas and approaches.

- Referring to the report's observation that rising public expectations may pose a challenge, the panel requested further information on how this issue is being managed. The team explained that they are collaborating with an NGO working closely with local residents, and they are striving to bring together various stakeholders to collectively address these expectations. One of the measures taken has been to ensure the participation of residents living in districts outside the city centre - an aspect that has been emphasised on several occasions.

- Acknowledging Lublin's ambition that the ECoC is a social process activating the community, the panel wanted to learn more about the plans for audience, volunteer and cultural education development. The Homo Faber Association oversees the inclusion of different minorities, concentrating at this moment on the migrants who have come to Lublin due to the war in Ukraine. All minorities will be reached even though they are not mentioned separately – the team does not want to divide people into different groups. Inclusivity is seen very relevant.

Management

- As a response to the panel's question about the recruitment process of the Artistic Director, the team explained that the city authorities made a shortlist of artists and cultural professionals, and the selected candidate was the first on the list. It was important that the recruited person possessed knowledge of the national cultural scene, as well as personal confidence and strength.

- The panel was concerned about the statement in the report that funding is expected to fall short and about the postponement of the financial agreements with the Region and the Academic Union. The team explained that it is currently challenging to get political support but assured that they are not expecting a reduction of the ECoC budget. They affirmed that the funding will partly be sourced, and the agreements will be made on another level than originally expected. The team emphasised that they are working hard to utilise the momentum with required funding.

- Seeking clarification on a note in the report that identified an additional risk in the currently unspecified status of the Curatorial Board, the panel was informed that the team is in a transition phase. While some tensions are normal during this period, they are confident that once all structures are fully established, this issue will be resolved.

- The panel wanted to have more information about the status of the sponsorship and fundraising strategies planned for the first half of 2026, and about the sponsorship status. The response was that the CEO has made the first contacts with companies which have been very enthusiastic, so the team is confident that the goal for fundraising will be achieved.

Capacity to deliver

- Regarding the infrastructure investments, the panel wanted to know what kind of contingency plans exist in case delays would occur. The team assured that the investment processes, although complex, will proceed. Some projects are already in the delivery stage, others in procurement, while alternative funding is being sought for some.

Conclusions and recommendations

The panel positively acknowledges the progress made so far by Lublin 2029 as well as the wide support for the ECoC in the city, the region and the state.

The panel wishes to draw attention to the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Acknowledging the need for further improvements and adjustments following the nomination, the panel wants to emphasise the importance of ensuring that what has been stated in the final bid book is regarded as de facto contract. Not only regarding the programme but also in terms of the various principles from outreach to the selection of key staff members. The panel also recommends ensuring a seamless transition and continuity between the previous and new team members, without undue loss of tacit knowledge. Furthermore, it advises safeguarding the valuable and meaningful networks and partnerships established during the candidacy period to ensure they are not lost.

Recommendation 2: Review the principles and develop a strategy for managing public and stakeholder expectations - highlighting that ECoC is a long-term transformation process - to maintain trust, prevent frustration, and to safeguard the programme's credibility.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the overall coherence and integration of the programme by ensuring that all strands from flagship projects and open calls to outreach and European collaborations are clearly connected to the RE:UNION vision and reinforce one another.

Recommendation 4: Design the open calls framework in such a way that the calls do not reduce the budget available for projects presented in the final bid.

Recommendation 5: Although the international artists and partners involved in the bid have been contacted after the nomination, the panel recommends keeping communication alive to ensure that the cooperation continues. The panel would also like to see in the next monitoring report the status of collaborations with European and international partners on each project.

Recommendation 6: While acknowledging that various outreach strategies and plans are under development, the panel recommends ensuring also that minority groups play an active role and have meaningful opportunities to participate in the programme.

Recommendation 7: Clarify and secure the financing framework early, in particular the agreements with the Region and the Academic Union, as well as private sector contributions, to avoid uncertainty and to ensure stability for programme delivery.

Next steps

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

The Commission will call for a second monitoring meeting in the spring 2027 and the third and final meeting in the autumn 2028. At the end of the third monitoring meeting, the panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to grant the Melina Mercouri Prize to Lublin 2029.

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 Lublin 2029 team for a very informative and open discussion and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending ECOC panel's members