bodo2024.no



Photo: Martin Losvik

BODØ2024
EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

Report

This was Bodø2024

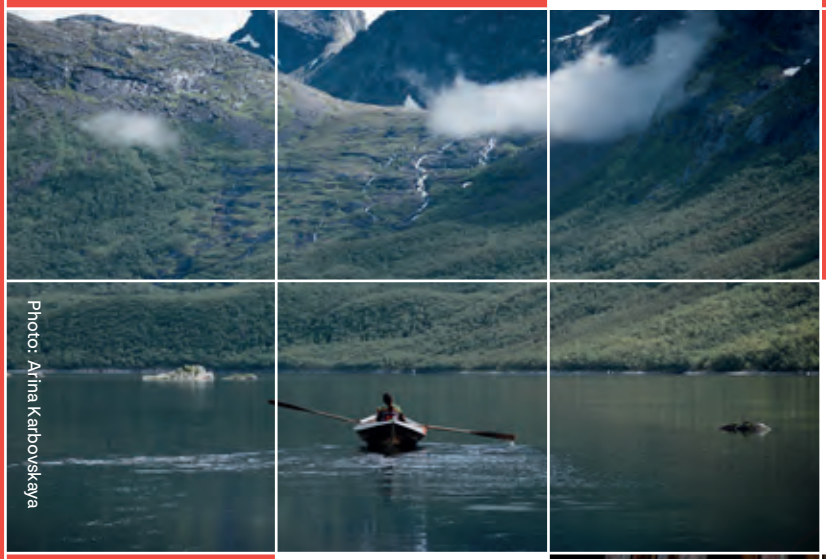


Photo: Arina Karbovskaya



Photo: David Engmo





Midsummer Mystery
in Breivika.
Photo: David Engmo



Her Majesty
Queen Sonja
Photo: Jørgen Gomnæs,
The Royal Court

Queen Sonja
Patron of Bodø2024

Her Majesty Queen Sonja has been the High Patron of the European Capital of Culture project. For Bodø2024, this has been both a great honour and a significant recognition. It is tradition for members of the Norwegian Royal Family to act as patrons of the country's largest cultural and sporting projects.

The Queen has been closely involved with the project from day one and has visited Bodø and the Capital of Culture several times throughout the year. The Queen Sonja Print Award was hosted in Bodø in 2024, resulting in a number of wonderful events and workshops. The Queen also held the official opening speech at the opening ceremony.

In her speech, she said among other things:
"Culture creates strong communities. Culture shapes identity and fosters belonging. Culture builds societies, binds us together, and makes us whole human beings.
I believe – no, I know – that culture creates meaningful lives.
It is difficult to imagine what our lives would be like without culture."
We have experienced that the Queen's engagement and deep understanding of the cultural field have both been noticed and left a lasting impression.

Innhold

9. Foreword
10. Key figures
15. Programme
- Concept and criteria
- Organisation
- Collaboration model
- Outreach
- European dimension
- Main themes in the programme
- Prior to 2024
- How 2024 unfolded

55. Communication
- Who we were
- Explaining the possibilities
- Target groups
- Bodø2024's own channels
- Physical arenas
- Hospitality
- Press
- Results
- International attention
- The value of international visibility
- Advertising surfaces
- Creative marketing
- Documentation
- Films
- Campaigns
- International marketing
- Challenges

75. Financial information
- Budget and funding
- Use of funds

82. Organisation of Bodø2024
- Organisation chart
- The Board of Representatives
- The Management Board
- Administration



Opening ceremony
produced by
Phase 7 in Molobukta
Photo: Martin Losvik

Time line

The idea is launched by Bodø Municipality. The Metropolitan Network in Norway is in favour of Bodø as Norway's candidate.

2015

The application project with working groups for each chapter is established.

2017

Bodø Municipality submits an application to the EU.

2018

Bodø is awarded the status of European Capital of Culture together with Tartu in Estonia and Bad-Ischl in Austria.

2019

A board of directors is established for Bodø2024, and the first employees are in place. The company is registered in the Brønnøysund Registers. The state will contribute a share of the financing of NOK 100 million.

2020

The Bodø2024 organization is being built up to realize the project. A general sponsorship agreement is signed with Bodø Energi. Samfunnsløftet reserves NOK 50 million for the project.

2021

The program is developed and planned in collaboration with companies from Norway and abroad.

2022

The program is launched.

2023

Bodø is the European Capital of Culture.

2024

Bodø2024 Legacy

2025



Nordlandsruta took the participants through Sulis. Photo: David Engmo

Foreword

2024 has come to an end.

In the autumn of 2019, the city of Bodø was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture for 2024. At that time, people in had relatively little knowledge of what such a project entails, despite both Bergen and Stavanger having previously held the title. Nevertheless, the designation generated excitement and high expectations among many, though some critical voices were also raised.

In 2020, a new legal structure was established to assume responsibility for the implementation of Bodø2024, with a board representing a wide range of sectors and interests. The owners of this company were Bodø municipality and Nordland county council.

In the lead-up to 2024, the organisation was gradually developed, with a General director at the helm and three department directors for programme, communications, and administration. By 2024, the organisation had 26 employees, corresponding to approximately 24 full-time equivalents.

This is significantly fewer than, for instance, Oulu in Finland, which at the time of writing employs 37 people to prepare for their European Capital of Culture year in 2026. The Bodø project was nonetheless realised as planned, largely because we deliberately sought cooperation with existing cultural institutions in the region to develop a strong programme. Administratively, we also relied heavily on services purchased from Bodø municipality and, to some extent, Nordland county council.

The European Capital of Culture year was carried out with more than 1,400 events and a total audience of over 300,000. It kicked off with the televised opening on 3 February, which became a citywide celebration despite challenging weather conditions in the days leading in. The year brought a significant increase in international visits to the city and the county, both in the form of audiences and through professional collaborations within the artistic and cultural programme.

The motivation for applying for the title of European Capital of Culture has always been to increase the attractiveness of Nordland as a region and of Bodø as a city. In a time marked by concerning demographic trends, we sought to contribute to quality of life and a stronger desire to settle, particularly among young people.

Nord University has been commissioned to research the impacts of Bodø2024. They have delivered interim reports along the way and will present a comprehensive report towards the end of 2025.

The report you are now reading is Bodø2024's self-assessment. Here we wish to present our own account of the project: What artistic considerations were made? How did we intend to engage young people? The voluntary sector? How did we plan to communicate the project to the local, regional, national and, not least, international public?

Those of us who worked on Bodø2024 are proud of what was achieved. We were a team inspired by the idea that a small city north of the Arctic Circle could become a European Capital of Culture, and we were eager to contribute to the project. There was an immense amount to learn, an enormous workload, and a relentless schedule of meetings. At times, there was also strong criticism, both from the public and from cultural stakeholders. Many regarded Bodø2024 as an opportunity to realise ambitions within their own field. It was, of course, impossible to satisfy everyone, but much was indeed accomplished.

The European Capital of Culture year has ended, but the title will forever remain with Bodø. For the city's and county's residents, it has been a year filled with an extraordinary range of cultural experiences, and cultural issues have been discussed and debated as never before. We hope this will continue, that cultural life will develop further, and that it will provide unforgettable experiences for all of us who live here.

I wish to extend my gratitude to everyone who contributed: our owners, the cultural institutions, artists, cultural workers, volunteers, the dedicated participants in the UNG (young) project, sponsors and other financial supporters, the people of the city, and finally, the staff of Bodø2024 IKS.

It has been a great privilege to work on the European Capital of Culture project for Bodø and Nordland.

Jacob Normann
Managing Director

Key figures

1400
events

1800
cultural actors were involved

300.000
audiences

10.000
press releases

NOK 600 million
in value from international press reports



NOK 1,3 billion

in expected socio-economic benefits

59 %

increase in international visitors by 2024

34 %

increase in hotel occupancy in 2024

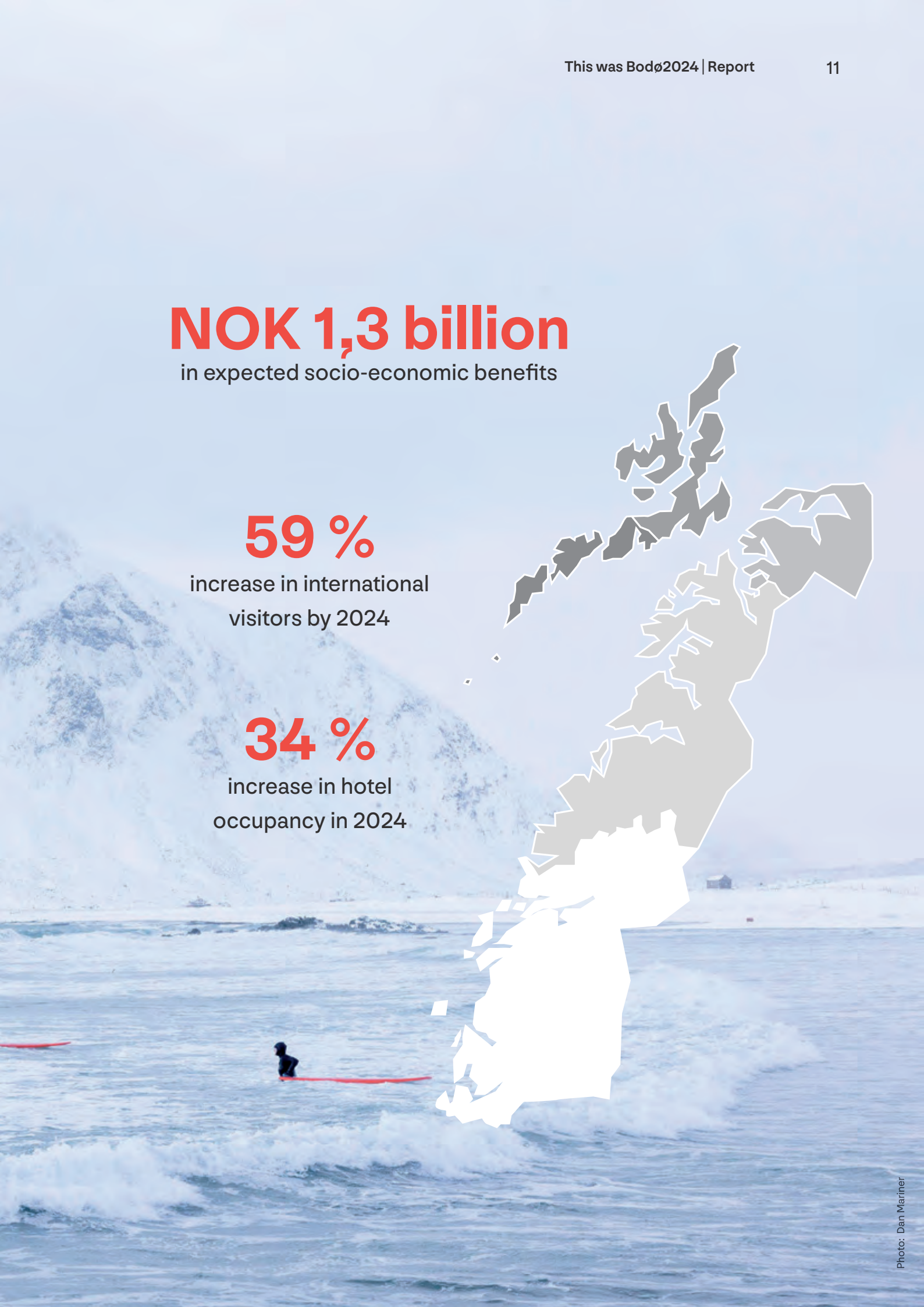


Photo: Dan Mariner



The exhibition Queer Ways was part of Pride Art and Pilgrimage to change. Here from the Crypt in Bodø Cathedral.
Photo: David Engmo


FAIL
SALOMON



Åarjelhsaemien Teatere, the theater trilogy Bïegke Beahteme, The betrayal of the wind, Bodø domkirke. Photo: Martin Losvik

Programme

The following constitutes an overarching report from the Programme Department of Bodø2024. Each of the more than 100 sub-projects has been individually evaluated and reported. In view of the overall scope of information, Bodø2024 IKS hereby presents a consolidated overview of the European Capital of Culture project as a whole.



Hannah Strid and Reidar Sørensen, opening show in Molobukta.
Photo: David Engmo



Village Party a dance project with Kartellet and Art in Motion.
Photo: David Engmo

Concept and criteria

Throughout all phases of the project, Bodø2024's programme work was guided by the EU bid ARCTICulation (2019), which secured the city the status of European Capital of Culture for 2024. Unless otherwise specified, this application is referred to in this report simply as the bid book.
The bid was developed between 2017 and 2019 by Bodø municipality and Nordland county council in close cooperation with local and regional institutions and partners, including Nord university, Nordland's museums and art institutions, and the main publicly funded festivals. In the status designation from September 2019, the EU describes the bid book as "the city's de facto contract with the EU." Since the company's establishment, Bodø2024 IKS was committed to the bid book as a governance document.

ARCTICulation was developed with a particular focus on interpreting and applying the criteria and descriptions of the European Capital of Culture concept. The general objectives, as defined by the EU, are as follows:

(a) to safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe and to highlight the common features they share as well as to increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area;

(b) to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities in accordance with their respective strategies and priorities.

The specific objectives of the action are:

(a) to enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational cooperation;

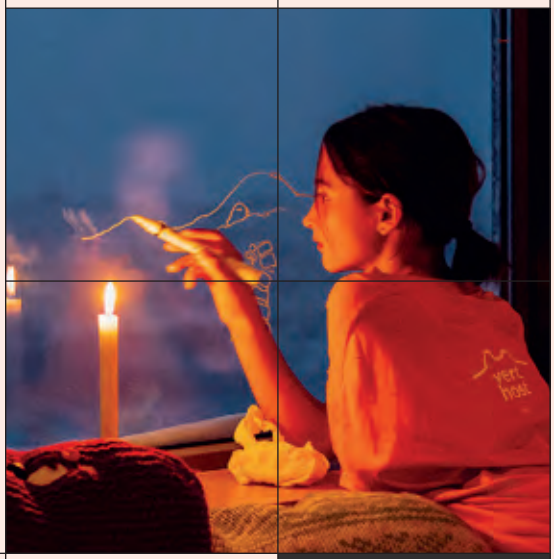
(b) to widen access to and participation in culture;

(c) to strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors;

(d) to raise the international profile of cities through culture.

Decisions and priorities in programme development were made in relation to these objectives and the resources available. Bodø2024's close adherence to the ECOC concept criteria at times created tension between the expectations of the cultural operators and the project's goals and possibilities, both with respect to the scope of individual sub-projects and to what types of projects and activities should be part of a European Capital of Culture programme.

The scope of each individual project was largely determined by financial constraints. Many of the city's and the region's cultural operators had high ambitions for the year and sought larger financial contributions from Bodø2024 than were practically possible. In some cases, sufficient external funding was raised, enabling projects to be realised according to their original ambitions. In other cases, proposals were simply not feasible.



Slow Adventure at Rabothytta. Photo: Marthe Thu



A packed Glasshus
on opening day.
Photo: Marthe Mølstre

Organisation

The programme work was managed by a small central administration within Bodø2024 IKS, consisting of ten positions led by Programme director Henrik Sand Dagfinrud. The Programme director was part of a management group together with the directors of communications, finance and administration, and the General director. Both the Programme department and Bodø2024 IKS as a whole employed comparatively few staff members relative to other European Capitals of Culture, comparable projects often employ twice as many, if not more.
Five of the ten positions in the Programme department had various coordinating functions. The department's main responsibility was to coordinate projects with external partners and project owners so that, together, they formed a coherent programme that made chronological sense, aligned with the overarching artistic concept, and contributed to achieving the project's objectives. In practice, several of the programme coordinators also assumed substantial producer responsibilities during the year, often in addition to their coordination tasks. In many cases, it was necessary for both Bodø2024 IKS and external partners to mobilise all available resources to ensure implementation with the quality and scope desired.

One might argue that the project was significantly understaffed, even with strong collaborations and hired production resources. This was especially true around the opening on 3 February, when live stage productions were mounted simultaneously across virtually all available spaces and venues, under highly demanding conditions. Nevertheless, the programme was mostly delivered as planned, thanks to the involvement of highly experienced professionals in key positions. Fundamental evaluations have been carried out for each production that pushed these limits. In sum, the conclusion is that Bodø2024 was executed according to plan, without cancellations, accidents, or other major deviations.

In addition to the Programme department of Bodø2024 IKS, the work was organised with a structure of advisory bodies, as described in the following sections.

Regional Council and Local Councils

The Regional Council consisted of cultural leaders from the regional centres of Nordland and had 11 members. It served as Bodø2024's point of contact with the municipalities of Nordland and was intended to help foster local engagement and activity within the project. The Council included representatives from the municipalities of Brønnøy, Alstahaug, Vefsn, Rana, Fauske, Bodø, Vestvågøy, Vågan, Hadsel, Sortland, and Narvik. In addition, Nordland county council was represented by the Head of Cultural Development. The Regional Council was chaired by the Director of Bodø2024 IKS and served primarily as an advisory body on strategic issues.In addition to the Regional Council, the European Capital of Culture project established six Local Councils, each linked to one of the regional centres in Nordland: South Helgeland, North Helgeland, Salten, Lofoten, Vesterålen, and Ofoten. In some regions, the Local Council for Bodø2024 was based on existing structures, for instance in Vesterålen, where an active inter-municipal cultural collaboration was already in place. In other regions, new structures were created, or in the case of South Helgeland, the project provided the impetus to revive earlier municipal cultural collaborations that had ceased to function for various reasons. Both the existing and newly established councils are inter-municipal structures that can relatively easily be continued beyond the European Capital of Culture year, providing a foundation for future projects.The Local Councils contributed their expertise and knowledge of local conditions to ensure that Bodø2024 reached as many stakeholders as possible. They were tasked with disseminating information, receiving input, and processing and recommending applications to the "Local Funds" scheme announced by Bodø2024.

Artistic advisisory board

The Artistic advisory board was composed of seven members. Five were appointed by Bodø2024's Board, and two by the project's owners, Bodø municipality and Nordland county council. The members included two programme directors from previous European Capitals of Culture, Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva (Plovdiv 2019) and Sjoerd Bootsma (Leeuwarden 2018); three arts and cultural leaders with particular expertise in international collaboration and Arctic issues, Bente Andersen, Stine Nilsen, and Kristoffer Dolmen; and two representatives of the project's owners with expertise in arts, culture, and community development, Elin Eidsvik and Astrid Arnøy. The Council had four full-day meetings annually in 2022 and 2023, two physically and two digitally. Due to the scope of the programme, the Council's work was to a degree oriented around strategic guidance for the artistic direction, but in a limited number of cases the Council was also directly involved in providing specific recommendations, for example, in connection with the main projects and productions.

Administrative Cooperation Forum

The Administrative Cooperation Forum was defined in the company statutes of Bodø2024 as a platform where Bodø2024 IKS would meet with its owners, Bodø municipality and Nordland county council, at the administrative level. The purpose was to coordinate activities and ensure effective interaction between the organisations.



Bodø International Association BIF organizes Food and Mingling.
Photo: David Engmo



Collaboration model

During the preparatory phase, Bodø2024 IKS carried out extensive work to disseminate information to local and regional stakeholders. Among other measures, plans outlining objectives and models of collaboration were published and made available to all who wished to participate. The overarching plan described the following ways of taking part in the programme:

Independent programme

In 2023, we launched a digital calendar in which anyone with an event or activity they wished to present under the Bodø2024 brand could register. The only criteria were that the activity had to contribute to achieving at least one of the eight strategic objectives of Bodø2024 and that the event had to be open to the public, either with paid admission or free of charge. Bodø2024 approved events on a rolling basis and published them in the online programme calendar.

These events received no direct financial support from Bodø2024, but they were nonetheless considered a full part of the programme. Participants gained access to a PR package, including logos and graphic materials, for use in their own marketing. For Bodø2024, it was important to highlight these events in order to demonstrate the breadth of engagement surrounding the European Capital of Culture project. Grassroots enthusiasm and independent initiatives were just as much a part of the whole as the productions organised directly by Bodø2024 IKS.

Contributions from Bodø2024

Some projects received financial support from Bodø2024, but were otherwise responsible for their own implementation. These projects and events formed part of the realisation of the programme chapter in ARCTICulation. There were several ways to be included into this category:

→ Projects explicitly described in ARCTICulation

→ Projects programmed by Bodø2024 IKS

→ Projects included in the programme by Bodø2024 IKS

→ Projects awarded support following public calls announced by Bodø2024 IKS

Bodø2024 IKS did not process unsolicited applications submitted outside publicly announced calls. In certain cases, however, direct partnerships were established if a project was clearly aligned with Bodø2024's objectives.

Co-productions

In a few cases, Bodø2024 involved directly into co-production agreements. These were primarily projects described in ARCTICulation, in which several parties collaborated to realise the content. In practice, these collaborations took various forms with institutions as key partners.

Cooperations

With the exception of the opening ceremony and seasonal openings, Bodø2024 aimed to produce a limited number of events by ourselves. The project was primarily organised through collaborations with existing entities; institutions, organisations, and festivals. This approach was central to the sustainability strategy. The intention was that the experience and learning from the projects would remain with local and regional stakeholders to the greatest extent possible. Partnerships were project-oriented and designed to contribute to achieving the goals of the European Capital of Culture. The scope and division of responsibilities, financial as well as organisational, varied from project to project.

Incentive grants

Bodø2024 also had the capacity to initiate and/or support projects that stimulated various parts of the cultural sector without necessarily being audience oriented. This applied in particular to capacity-building and competence-development initiatives, which we saw as a core component of the European Capital of Culture concept. Such projects and measures were seldom proposed in submissions from local and regional stakeholders.

These initiatives were intended to help meet the objectives set out in ARCTICulation. For example, there was a need to encourage the cultural sector to become more internationally oriented, to apply for European project funding, and to seek international partners.

Sámi Dimension

The Sámi dimension was a key element of the project from the very beginning of the bidding process, in 2016–17. The Sámi people are the only recognised indigenous people in the EU, and a clear Sámi component was regarded not only as part of the programme but also as an essential aspect of the project's European dimension. In the Bodø2024 bid book, both concrete and strategic objectives were defined. These included major performing arts productions, arts and cultural projects with a focus on traditional culture and language, institutional collaborations, youth involvement, and international exchange projects. It was a key aim to integrate the Sámi perspective into the entire programme concept and to encourage more stakeholders to incorporate this dimension into their own projects. Bodø2024 worked closely with a number of Sámi organisations. Active efforts were made to create new projects that could increase understanding of Sámi culture. Throughout the project period, Bodø2024 maintained a cooperation agreement with the Sámi Parliament and had a dedicated Sámi Coordinator position within the Programme department.

The Sámi dimension received significant international attention. Interest from journalists, particularly those from countries with indigenous populations, was expectedly strong. More surprising, perhaps, was that Bodø2024 succeeded in realising several international exchanges, both for professionals, adults and for young people. Estonia, with its Finno-Ugric language connection to the Sámi languages and its ongoing nation-building around South Estonian languages and cultures, emerged as a more important partner than initially anticipated.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a vital part of cultural life in Nordland and was therefore also a cornerstone of Bodø2024's work. The volunteer initiative included a comprehensive programme for capacity- and competence-building. Regular meetings were organised in all regions of Nordland under the name Frivilligforum (Volunteer Forum), which served as an arena for networking and collaboration. In addition, training and courses were offered. Strengthening the capacity and competence of the voluntary sector was intended not only as a contribution to Bodø2024's programme but also as a long-term investment in the sector as a whole. Bodø2024 recruited volunteers for its own events but simultaneously sought to increase recruitment to the existing voluntary sector. A particular focus was placed on recruiting from new communities and target groups. A strategic objective was to enhance the status of voluntary work within the world of work and education. Parts of the volunteer programme have continued beyond the European Capital of Culture year, benefitting municipalities, cultural institutions, and others. The volunteer initiative was led by the Project Manager for Frivillig2024.

UNG2024

Youth and young adults were defined in the bid book ARCTICulation as the project's primary target group. The work with young people was organised as a "project within the project." UNG2024 was a sub-project with a high degree of independence, supported by two dedicated staff members within the Programme Department, its own Youth Board with members aged 13 to 19, its own programme with open calls, and a wide range of projects and events specifically designed for this target group

Ecological economy and sustainability

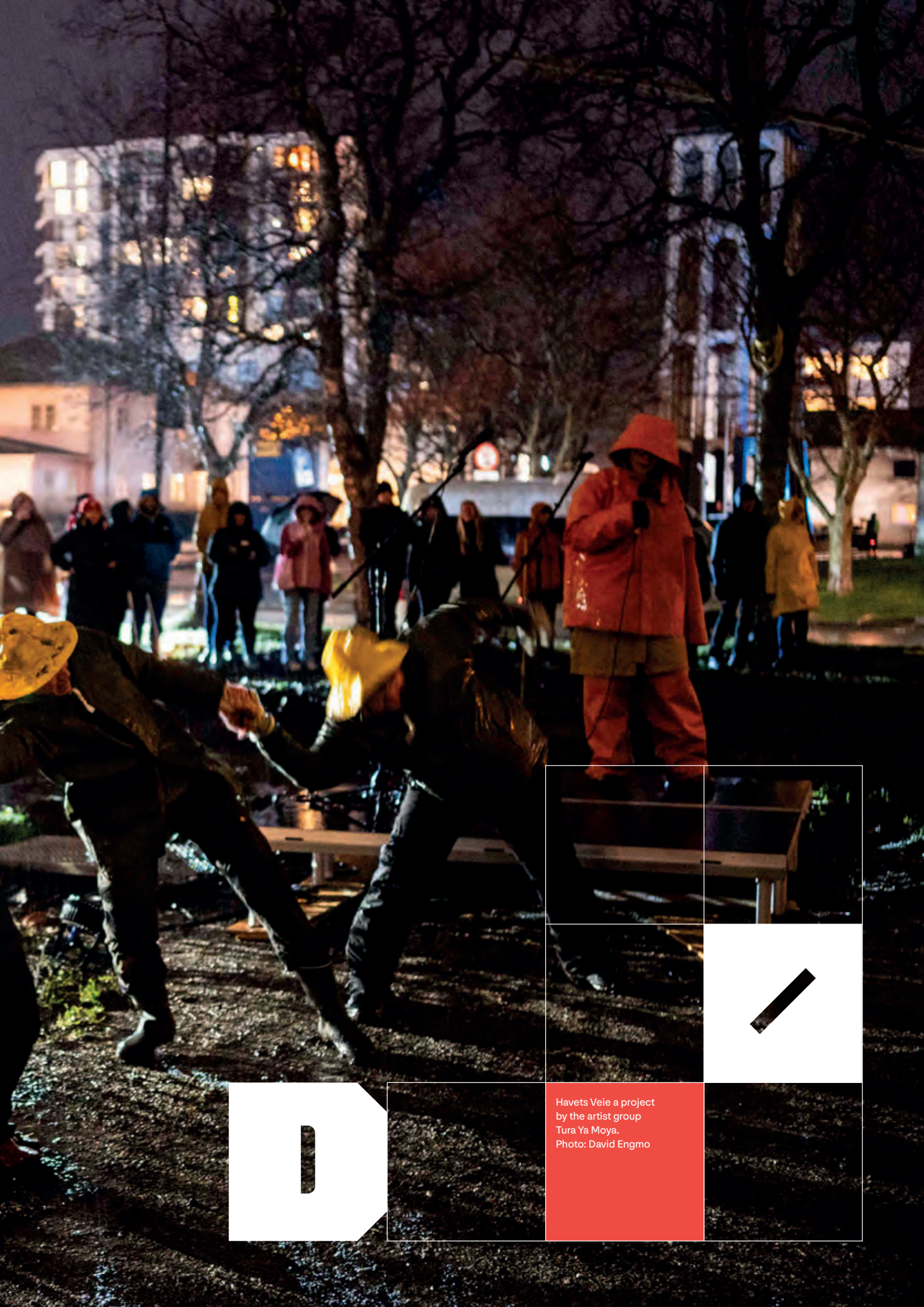
Ecological economy was a key dimension of Bodø2024 from the very outset of the EU application process. Bodø2024 IKS employed a dedicated part-time project coordinator who followed the organisation throughout the entire project period. The ambition was that the principles of ecological economy should serve as guiding values for the whole European Capital of Culture project.

In addition to this general orientation towards a shared set of values, certain projects and activities addressed ecological economy as their explicit theme. Courses and workshops were organised across the county, and long-term collaboration was established with a network of local food producers. This work was documented in the form of a book publication authored by project coordinator Professor Ove D. Jakobsen.



Tolou created a good atmosphere during the UNG Finale at Svømmehallen Scene.
Photo: Matheo Steinvik





Havets Veie a project
by the artist group
Tura Ya Moya.
Photo: David Engmo

Outreach

In the European Capital of Culture concept, the work with groups who are “under-consumers” of a city’s cultural life is referred to as outreach. In Bodø2024, this concept was translated into the guiding question: “Who do we reach, and who do we not?”

It was a key objective to extend the reach of the European Capital of Culture project to as many as possible, including those who are not usually active participants in cultural life. This included various immigrant groups, older people, people with disabilities, other minorities, as well as children and young people. Approximately ten per cent of Nordland’s population are immigrants, representing more than 150 nationalities.

The outreach work was strongly informed by experiences from the application phase, when Bodø’s international population in particular expressed a desire to be more actively engaged in cultural life. They wanted opportunities to perform and to present their own culture and identity.

From this focus emerged one of Bodø2024’s greatest success stories. Under the leadership of the Project Manager for Frivillig2024, and in cooperation with Bodø’s diverse international associations, a new network was established in the years leading up to 2024: Bodø’s International Associations (BIF in everyday use). BIF provided concrete answers to questions we had struggled with during the bidding phase: How do we reach the city’s international population? Why are they rarely seen at the city’s traditional cultural venues? What can we do to engage them more effectively?

In addition to functioning as a meeting place, which is valuable in itself, BIF became an integral part of Bodø2024 during the year itself. At all major events, BIF contributed both on the programme side, for example by filling the Glasshuset shopping arcade with song and dance on the opening night, and as part of the volunteer base that made the productions possible.



Artist Elin Sundström. K-Lab, Kjerringøy Land Art Biennale, led by Ane Øverås. Photo: Arina Karbovskaya

European dimension

The European Capital of Culture is, by definition, a European project. Many cities implementing such projects find the criterion of "European dimension" among the most challenging to succeed with. While expectations of the project are primarily generated locally and regionally, stakeholders such as hotels, tourism operators, major cultural institutions, and municipal development departments also hold clear expectations of international outcomes.

There is no single definition of what a European dimension is or should be. In the development of Bodø2024's governance documents, the European dimension was described in somewhat general but guiding terms as "Bodø in Europe, and Europe in Bodø." In practice, this meant that Bodø2024 worked to create lasting connections, project by project, partner by partner.

Another objective of the European Capital of Culture concept is to raise awareness and understanding of common European challenges. Within this perspective, themes such as Sámi culture, youth and young adults, democracy, freedom of expression, tolerance, and the environment played a central role in Bodø2024's programme development.

In the preparatory phase, Bodø2024 described the international dimension in the following way:

"Europe has experienced extraordinary growth over the past hundred years. Technical, medical, and economic progress has given us opportunities our ancestors could only dream of. At the same time, xenophobia, exclusion, poverty, loneliness, and conflict remain part of everyday life for far too many.

The political tectonic plates of the world seem to be in constant motion. The Nordic countries are ranked by the UN year after year as the best places in the world to live. At the same time, war has broken out elsewhere in Europe. We also face major challenges related to the environment and climate. We live in uncertain times.

We want to use our shared history and cultural heritage to create new understanding and dialogue between us — as families, as cities, as nations, and as Europe. We are so much stronger when we pull together to meet life's great challenges. We genuinely believe that our programme relates to what we perceive as the major challenges and opportunities in today's Europe. Through our projects, we will provide opportunities for dialogue, for mutual learning, and for finding new solutions.

International cooperation is woven into our planning, and our ambition is to create lasting relationships between European artists, institutions, and people. The notion of Europe's cultural diversity is embedded in our programme concept, and our goal is to create a large and unique mix of local and international partners who will shape our programme through a diversity of projects.

The cultural institutions of Nordland have long been active on the European stage. We will build on the strong cultural connections we already have and invite European artists to work alongside local practitioners in an inspiring coastal landscape. We want them to expose us to new ideas, to give us new perspectives. We will help our young people understand that the cultural road can just as easily lead northward as away from here.

International cultural collaboration in the North has for many years followed two axes: North–South and West–East, with Sámi culture in particular spanning all of Sápmi. We hope that the situation will change towards 2024 so that we may once again cooperate and build trust through dialogue between peoples of the North. We northerners are known for our open minds and warm hearts. We are a peaceful people. We welcome newcomers and visitors. With ample space, we always have room for more. We take care of one another. We provide open and inclusive meeting places. When people come here, they will receive an unforgettable welcome.

Our strategy is to create experiences for all kinds of visitors in a safe, friendly, and hospitable atmosphere. Open minds."



Lofoten
Photo: Dan Mariner

Main themes in the programme

In the EU application ARCTICulation, and later in Bodø2024's own plans, we described the artistic and cultural programme under three main themes. The descriptions can serve as an example of some of the changes the city, and Europe, have undergone during the years the project has been active.

Bodø2024 was originally based on the idea that the city would move from being a host city for NATO, where military activity had been a driving force in societal development, to a situation where NATO ended its presence in Bodø at the same time as the Armed Forces relocated the fighter jet base away from the city. In other words, Bodø was to find its identity in something entirely new. The military dimension was to be replaced by culture.

One could claim that culture is developing in Bodø, and even that the European Capital of Culture project has contributed to this development over the years, but the story of the military activities and presence has turned out to be quite different from what we first expected.

Art of Nature

Art of Nature is about exploring art in or from an Arctic perspective. It is based on the idea of being one with nature and the environment, rather than hiding from it. Art of Nature consisted of events and projects that brought art into nature and vice versa. We articulated our responsibility for the nature we are part of, as we made nature itself our main arena.

Fish and ships

Through the programme, we convey the story of living in Nordland, and how history still lives and surrounds us today. The stockfish trade has been an important contribution to the development of our country for hundreds of years. It remains a living part of our everyday life as fishing boats dock along the coast of Nordland. Fish and Ships also addressed World War II, the Cold War, and how these have shaped our collective consciousness and confidence.

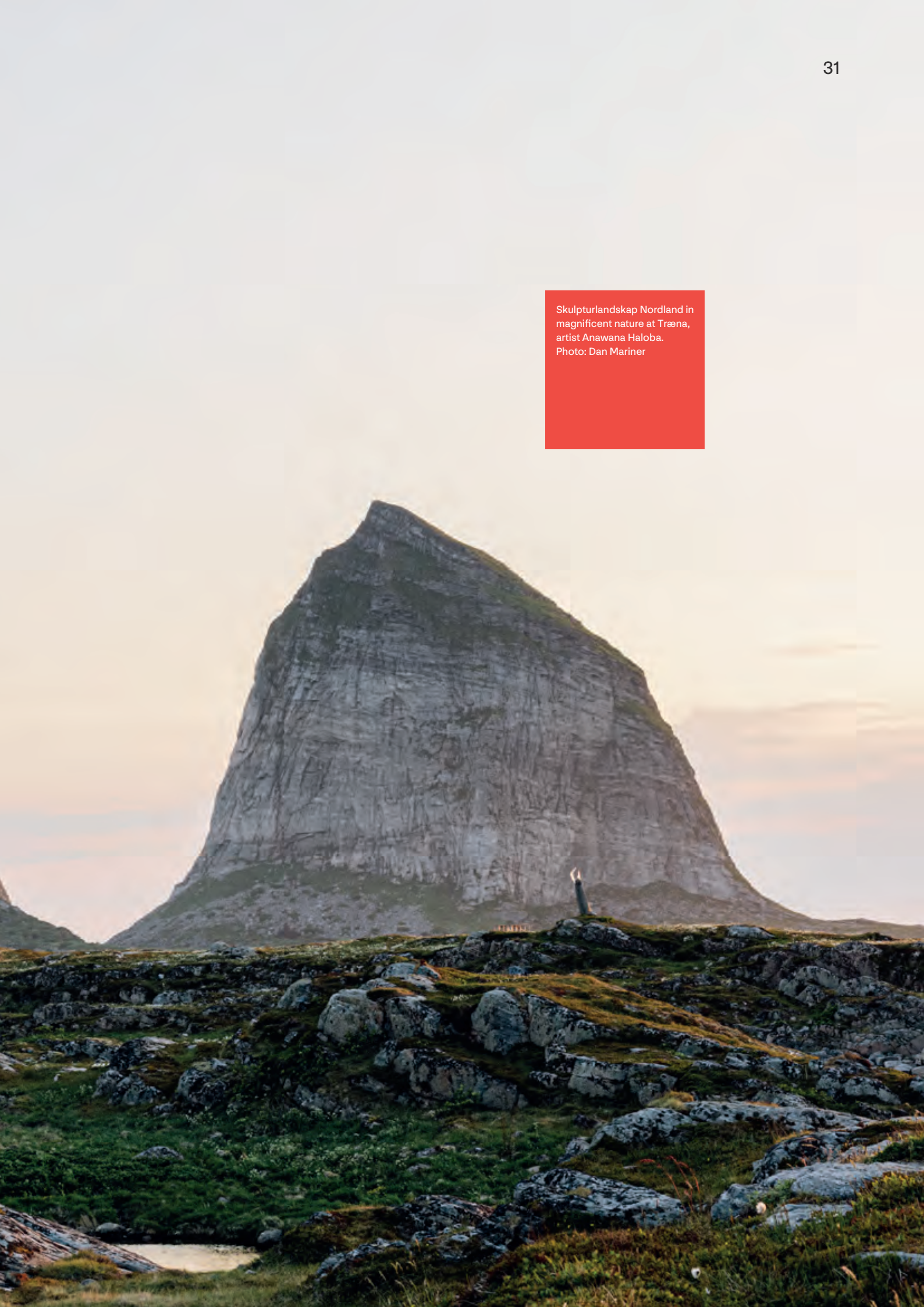
Transition

Transition highlights the connection between urban development and capacity-building projects. Towns and villages in Nordland have adapted to change throughout history, surviving the rise and fall of the industrial era and becoming modern societies. Now, we will once again be challenged. The F16s have flown their last missions from the Bodø base, and we are preparing to develop a smart, vibrant, and sustainable city and region.

We are undergoing a transformation, from being a military target during the Cold War to a future where culture connects us with people all over Europe, inspires innovative dialogues, and creates a cultural powerhouse.

Periods of transition also relate to our ambition to build on and develop our existing festivals and cultural events. They are good, but they can, and will, become even better. By investing in their development towards 2024, and by collaborating with European partners, they can evolve from being good to being excellent. Excellent also in the sense of becoming a legacy for the future, for upcoming international festivals that will continue the collaboration and attract a larger and more diverse audience.





Skulpturlandskap Nordland in magnificent nature at Træna, artist Anawana Haloba.
Photo: Dan Mariner

Prior to 2024

In the years leading up to 2024, the resources of the organisation Bodø2024 were primarily devoted to preparing for the title year, 2024. Recruitment of staff to cover all internal roles, fundraising, tender processes, calls for proposals, and processing of applications, etc. There was limited capacity to produce artistic and cultural content, even though there were relatively high expectations that the European Capital of Culture project would be visible from day one. Despite the focus and resources being directed towards 2024, some preparatory activities and projects were carried out.

The projects implemented during the preparatory years were either intended to contribute to the visibility of Bodø, Nordland, and/or Bodø2024, or to have a concrete capacity-building effect, or both. A few exceptions were made to these principles, in connection with very special circumstances.

Pandemic and war

While the pandemic was still in its most active phase, Bodø2024 entered into a collaboration with Parkenfestivalen and Bodø municipality. The project was an attempt to create an alternative model for organising major events through mass testing. In the end, the trial was not approved, and therefore not carried out.

When Russia escalated to a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the chamber orchestra Kyiv Soloists were on tour in Europe. They could not return to Kyiv and therefore continued their tour north through Europe. When a request came to the Arctic Philharmonic to help organise one or more tour stops in Northern Norway, a project was instead established between the Arctic Philharmonic, Bodø municipality, Nordland Music Festival, Molobyen (real estate development project), and Bodø2024 IKS to temporarily employ the musicians in the Arctic Philharmonic. A financial, organisational, and practical collaboration was initiated at record speed, and 13 musicians were incorporated into the orchestra's daily operations in Bodø. After about a year, some of the musicians moved on, while others brought their families to Bodø and have remained here.

Creating visibility nationally and internationally

The projects carried out prior to 2024 were implemented according to plan and contributed to achieving the goals we had set. The Arctic Philharmonic, Parkenfestivalen, Svømmehallen Scene and Bodø2024 collaborated with a-ha on a major recording project at Svømmehallen Scene in autumn 2021. What was probably a-ha's final album, True North, along with its accompanying film production, also became a development opportunity for a number of local players in Bodø, and a jump-start for the brand-new Svømmehallen Scene. Young people organised through UNG2024 participated as production assistants. News of the project, and especially the film, with footage from Kjerringøy, Landegode Lighthouse, and other local spots, travelled around the world from 2022 onward.

The TV production Hver gang vi møtes (Norwegian «De beste zangers») was moved to Kjerringøy from 2021, a similar project to True North, but targeted at national reach. A financial collaboration between Bodø municipality, Nordland county council, Bodø2024 and a number of local businesses laid the foundation for place-branding Bodø and Nordland in prime time during the winters of 2022–2025.

Bodø2024's preparatory productions

Throughout 2023, Bodø2024 IKS took a more active role as producer and carried out a series of productions designed to build awareness and capacity leading up to the title year. A large number of projects with partners across the county also increased their activity throughout 2023. The following are selected examples of Bodø2024's own productions.

On 3 February, exactly one year after the announcement of the opening date for Bodø2024 and exactly one year ahead of the officaial opening, a programme launch was produced at Svømmehallen Scene. The event was a technically complex production, serving as a stress test for the entire organisation. More than 1,000 people had booked tickets. In addition to the presentation of the programme from stage, the food project Feeding Europe, a collaboration with Arktisk Mat (Arctic Food), was launched for the public. This collaboration became central to most major productions throughout 2023 and 2024.

Barnas Internasjonale Dag ("Children's International Day") has become a regular part of Bodø's cultural calendar. Together with Bodø's international associations, the goal was to further develop the event. Already in 2023, Children's International Day was held in seven municipalities across Nordland. The international associations of Bodø were also key partners at the Volunteer Festival in May 2023 and organised the first Food and Mingling events, which would become a recurring feature throughout 2024.

In October, the project Via Querinissima travelled to Venice. Singers, orchestra members, professionals and amateurs, adults and children, nearly 20% of the population of Røst municipality brought the Querini Opera "home" to Venice. A successful collaboration between cultural and business actors became a kind of Nordland Expo in the legendary Arsenale in Venice,

where Pietro Querini himself may have been before embarking on his fateful voyage north in 1431. The audience could taste seafood from the Nordland coast, see art from the region, meet business representatives, and, of course, experience the story of Querini as an opera, with professional soloists alongside fishermen and schoolchildren from Røst in the choir.

Towards the end of the year, the youth organised their own kickoff. The event En UNG Start ("A YOUNG Start") took place at Svømmehallen Scene on 2 December. With Isah and Dutty Dior as headliners, UNG2024 filled the venue. The event helped lay the foundation for a long series of well-attended youth events in the following year. The word of mouth got off to a great start when a hall full of young people learned what was coming.

European cultural cooperation

Early in the project period, Bodø2024 took the initiative to establish close cooperation between the three European Capitals of Culture for 2024. The pandemic changed the world in early 2020. Exchange between European cultural actors became nearly impossible just as work on developing a clear European dimension for Bodø2024 was to be intensified. An important solution for Bodø2024 was therefore to strengthen collaboration with the two other 2024 cities. The first staff members of the three projects established a close strategic partnership, including regular digital meetings, a practice that still continues within the European Capitals of Culture network. Through this collaboration, a number of concrete projects emerged: network initiatives, cultural exchanges, and artistic collaborations. In addition, the three 2024 Capital of Culture organisations became, in effect, an extended collegium, exchanging knowledge and experience throughout the preparatory years leading up to 2024. Below are two examples of professional cooperation initiated by Bodø2024 that we believe have made an impact within the European Capitals of Culture network, both of which have been continued by the cities that followed Bodø, Tartu, and Bad Ischl.

In September 2023, the annual network meeting for all European Capitals of Culture was held. At the 2024 cities' initiative, it was organised as a single large gathering, bringing together all the cities in Tartu. It was decided to produce one major joint event in which all three 2024 cities contributed to a shared meeting, with each city hosting its own showcase. Bodø's day was held on 22 September 2023, featuring a presentation of the programme and a preview of the dance project Village Party with Kartellet and the Simon Mayer Company. Participants were also given a taste of Nordland, served by Arktisk Mat (Arctic Food). Bodø2024 also contributed to the professional segment of the event, including a workshop on youth participation, led by the project manager for UNG2024, Charlotte Nyheim Eriksen. In line with this joint network meeting, held as one collaboration rather than three separate meetings in three countries, Bodø2024 proposed organising a joint event in Brussels with all three cities. The idea was to hold a kick-off presentation for the three cities and their projects to the EU and Brussels delegations of their respective countries. On 15 November 2023, for the first time in the history of the European Capital of Culture programme, the title cities travelled together to Europe's capital. The event gathered administrators and politicians in a packed Anna Lindh Room inside the European Parliament. The artistic segment from the September meeting in Tartu was also brought to Brussels. Folk dancers and musicians from Estonia, Austria, and Norway engaged the entire plenary hall in a spontaneous pols (folk dance), with EU Vice President Othmar Karas arm-in-arm with colleagues from across Europe a highlight of the event.



Deconfining at Svømmehallen scene. Photo: Airida Bekeryte

How 2024 Unfolded →





The opening of Bodø2024
Bodø Port
Photo: Martin Losvik

Here comes the sun

The first season was described as follows:
“Historically, the first season is about production and growth. History will provide the foundation and shape the beginning of the programme year. The programme will range from the grandest of the grand, as the official opening launches the Capital of Culture year across the region, to the smallest and most intimate experiences. The Sámi dimension will be central in the first season, as we present the complete theatre trilogy by Åarjelhsaemien Teatere, celebrate the Sámi National Day with participants from across the region, and learn the words and phrases that Sámi youth believe we should all know.”

The first season was characterised by the opening ceremony and the following opening week, including Sámi National Day and the theatre trilogy by the South Sámi Theatre. The European Capital of Culture project’s largest production was also its first. Considerable risks were taken, both in terms of production and content. The opening ceremony took place outdoors in the harbour, on a floating stage built specifically for the occasion. The production survived three storms in the final week before the opening, and the show went ahead as planned on the first attempt, without a full rehearsal.

The winter storm subsided, but in the days and weeks following the opening, the debate about the content, and about the Capital of Culture project in general, was quite stormy as well. With some exceptions, it became a constructive discussion, where culture and Sámi issues dominated the media landscape for an unusually long time.

Above: Marstein at the UNG Opening at Svømmelhallen Scene. Photo: Kasper Holgersen
Below: Marcialonga in Bodø. Photo: David Engmo | Volunteer during the opening weekend in Bodø. Photo: Marthe Mølstre

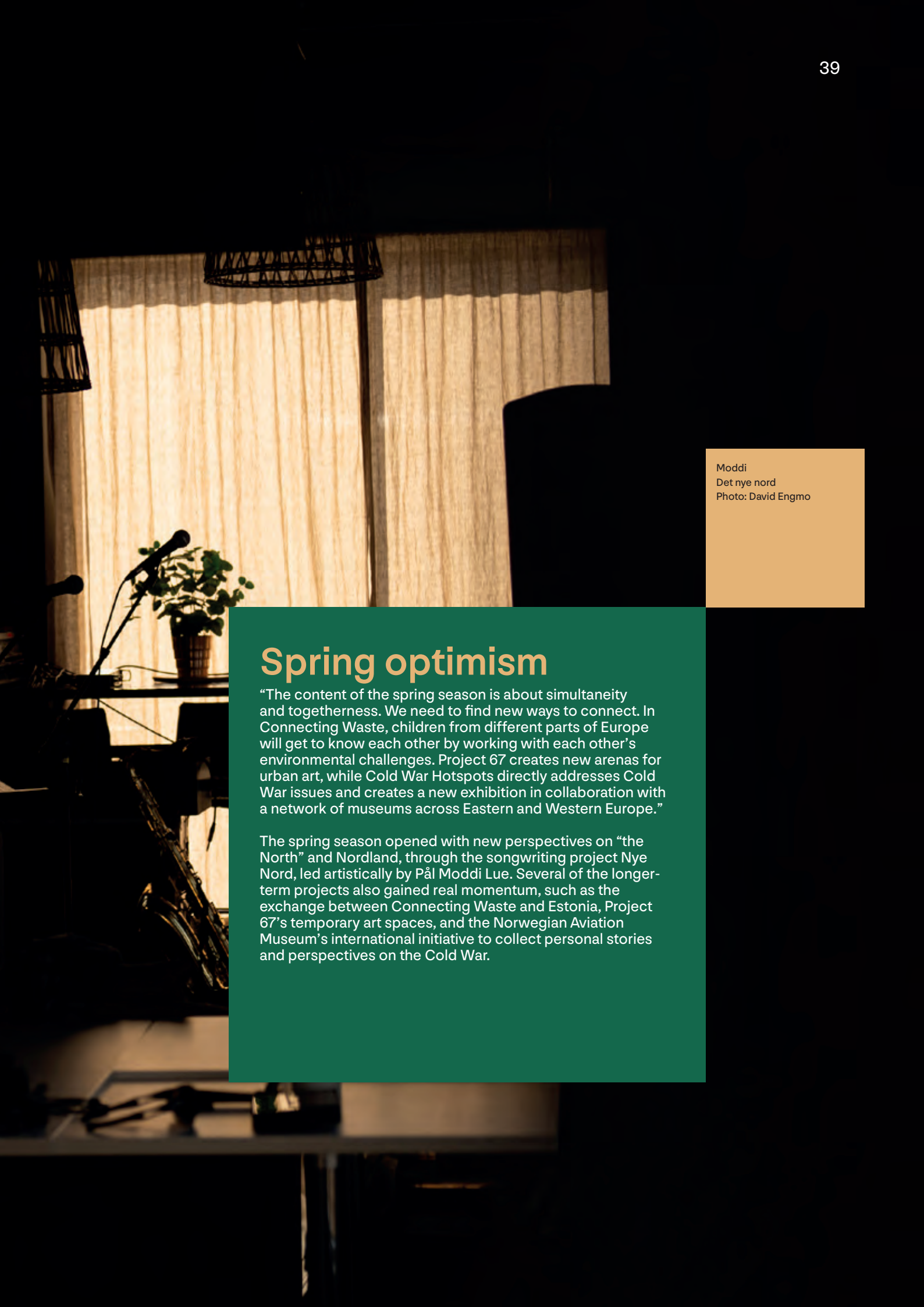




Above: Dancers from Bodø Upper Secondary School at the opening ceremony. Photo: David Engmo

Below: Sami week in Glasshuset. Photo: David Engmo





Moddi
Det nye nord
Photo: David Engmo

Spring optimism

“The content of the spring season is about simultaneity and togetherness. We need to find new ways to connect. In Connecting Waste, children from different parts of Europe will get to know each other by working with each other’s environmental challenges. Project 67 creates new arenas for urban art, while Cold War Hotspots directly addresses Cold War issues and creates a new exhibition in collaboration with a network of museums across Eastern and Western Europe.”

The spring season opened with new perspectives on “the North” and Nordland, through the songwriting project Nye Nord, led artistically by Pål Moddi Lue. Several of the longer-term projects also gained real momentum, such as the exchange between Connecting Waste and Estonia, Project 67’s temporary art spaces, and the Norwegian Aviation Museum’s international initiative to collect personal stories and perspectives on the Cold War.

Above: Artist Katarina Spik Skum, at the exhibition Gullevaš/Golgolaš. Photo: David Engmo

Below: Exchange between Norway and Southern Estonia where youth from Sapmi, Norway and Southern Estonia met to dance. The burning of the bow of a Nordland boat was part of the food art project Festlunsj i glasshus. Photo: David Engmo





Above: Kari Bremnes at the Queen Sonja Print Award in Bodø. Photo: David Engmo
Below: Confederation of Independent Football Associations (CONIFA) at Aspmyra in Bodø. Photo: David Engmo




hummel



Roger Opdal Paulsen and the audience, Midsummer Mystery in Breivika.
Photo: David Engmo

Midsummer madness

“Summer in the Arctic means full daylight for weeks on end. It means fresh seafood, beer outdoors, and the world’s sweetest strawberries growing around the clock. It means too little sleep because of intense encounters with nature at its most beautiful. This period begins with a major performance about myths and stories from the surrounding natural world. There will be trips and excursions to new artworks and performances both in the city and at mountain lodges around the region, and major and minor festivals on every headland throughout the county.”

The summer season was the most active in terms of the number of participants. It opened with Midsummer Mystery, an original performing arts production in Breivika attended by 5,000 locals. Bodø also hosted thousands of young athletes during EuroGym, the traditional Coastal Fair returned to Bodø, and numerous small projects ensured that the city buzzed with life. Activity spread throughout Nordland, including along the entire Nordlandsruta trail, which was filled with art and culture through the project European Cabins of Culture.

Above: Sondre Justad at the Hjertebank festival in Rensåsparken. Photo: David Engmo
Below: Eurogym in Bodø Photo: David Engmo | John Andrew Wilhite, bassist for dancer Yohei Hamada, Nordlandsruta. Photo: David Engmo







Ann Christin Nordberg as the Jektenissen, Midsummer Mystery in Breivika. Photo: David Engmo
Below: Eurogym gathered in Breivika. Photo: David Engmo







Emilie Ouedraogo aka “Lady Madskillz”, during Arts of Democracy at Glasshuset. Photo: David Engmo

Autumn Storms

“After a short but intense summer programme, the autumn storms arrive. Our programme reflects the return of the dark evenings. Arts of Democracy will bring together artists from ICORN cities and create a festival for freedom of expression and democracy. In My European Story, young people in Nordland will explore their own connections to Europe. The Hamsun Centre will present a brand-new main exhibition focusing on the difficult aspects of the author’s story, while Nordland Teater, together with a large network of partners along the Nordlandsbanen railway, will invite audiences on a journey through one of the darkest chapters of European history.”

Autumn in Nordland means the return of the storms, and in the programme, this also meant the return of gravity and reflection. Arts of Democracy became a highlight for Bodø2024. During a beautiful September week, both the European Capital of Culture concept and Bodø2024’s goals were clearly expressed. Powerful stories of persecution and escape were conveyed through painting, sculpture, dance, music, text, and dialogue, culminating in a full-day conference organised in collaboration with ICORN and the Arts and Culture Norway.

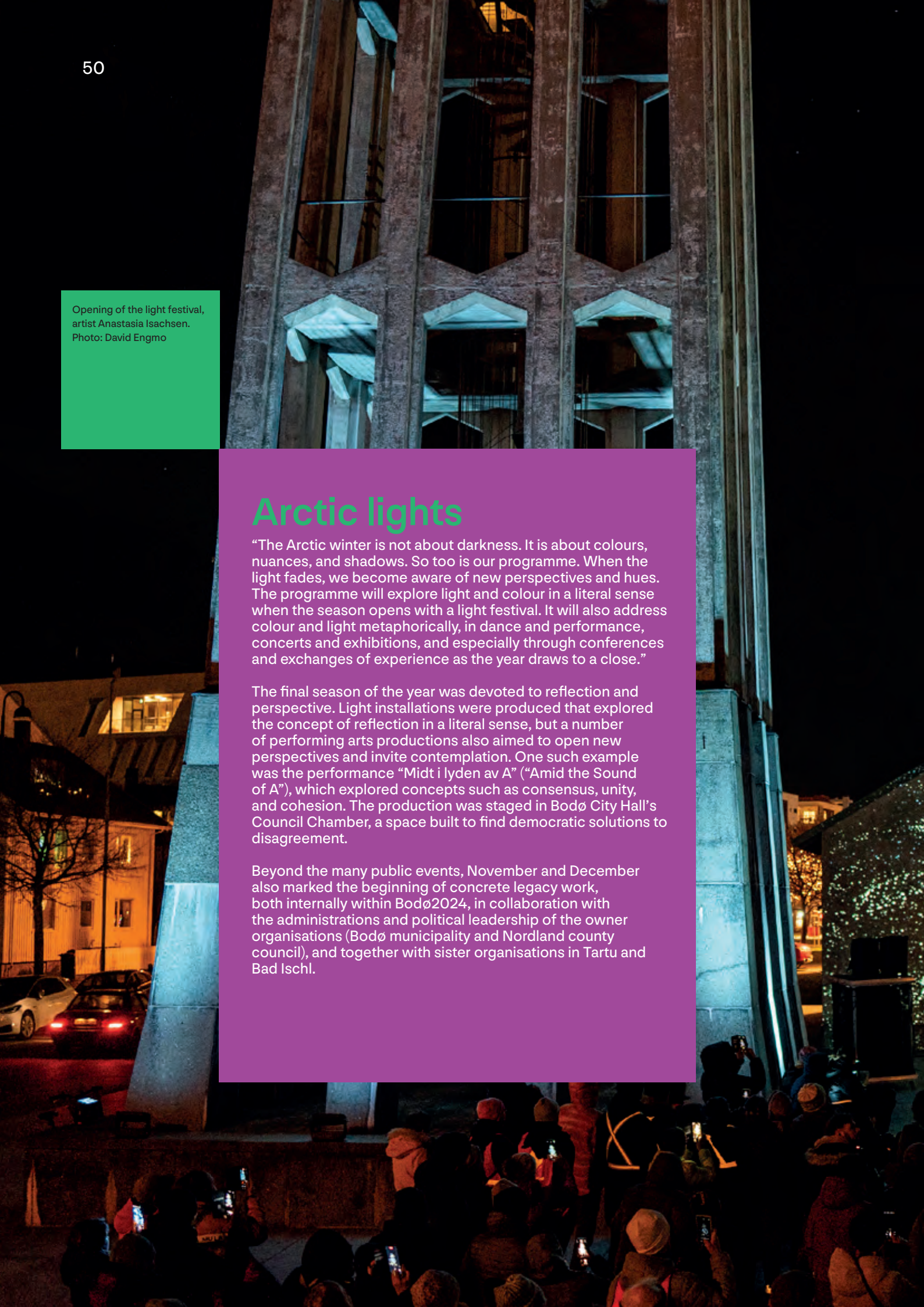
Above: Jørgen Nordeng and KORK with guest artists, Reinspikka hip hop at the Opera. Photo: David Engmo
During: Open Art in Bodø Photo: David Engmo | Arya Aramnejad at Dama Di during Arts of Democracy. Photo: David Engmo





Above: Fargespill Nord-Norge brought together companies from all over the region. Stormen in Bodø. Photo: David Engmo
Below: Åsil Bøthun's work Metamorfe ekko, project Kunstkanten in Stokkvika. Photo: David Engmo





Opening of the light festival, artist Anastasia Isachsen. Photo: David Engmo

Arctic lights

"The Arctic winter is not about darkness. It is about colours, nuances, and shadows. So too is our programme. When the light fades, we become aware of new perspectives and hues. The programme will explore light and colour in a literal sense when the season opens with a light festival. It will also address colour and light metaphorically, in dance and performance, concerts and exhibitions, and especially through conferences and exchanges of experience as the year draws to a close."

The final season of the year was devoted to reflection and perspective. Light installations were produced that explored the concept of reflection in a literal sense, but a number of performing arts productions also aimed to open new perspectives and invite contemplation. One such example was the performance "Midt i lyden av A" ("Amid the Sound of A"), which explored concepts such as consensus, unity, and cohesion. The production was staged in Bodø City Hall's Council Chamber, a space built to find democratic solutions to disagreement.

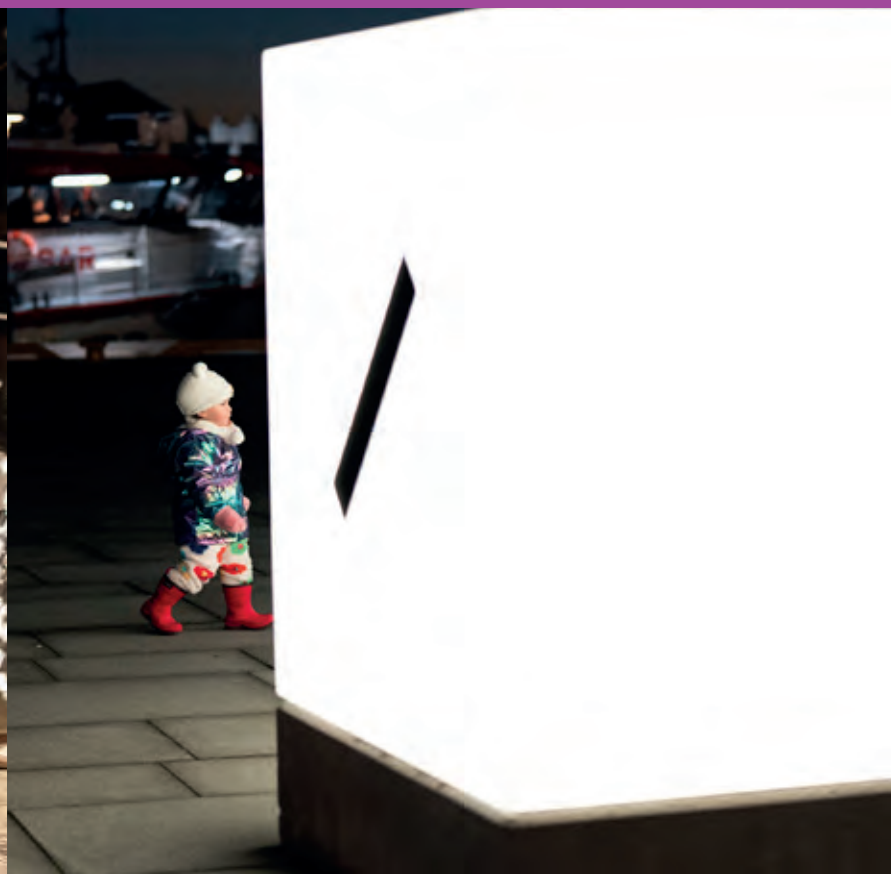
Beyond the many public events, November and December also marked the beginning of concrete legacy work, both internally within Bodø2024, in collaboration with the administrations and political leadership of the owner organisations (Bodø municipality and Nordland county council), and together with sister organisations in Tartu and Bad Ischl.



Above: The opening of Prosjekt 67, performance with Veera Neva. Photo: Arina Korbovskaya
Below: Maiko Nishino with trumpeter Marius Gjersø. Photo: David Engmo

Above: Village Party at Folkets hus. Photo: David Engmo
Below: Light walk in Bodø city center, artist Isa Stein. Photo: David Engmo | Bodø2024 cubes outside Stormen library. Photo: David Engmo







Cave music, concert
with Håkon Skog Erlandsen
in Pluragrotta.
Photo: Pekki Tuuri

Communication

Bodø2024 was the largest cultural event in Norway in more than ten years, and the biggest ever in Northern Norway. Since the first plans and ambitions to become a European Capital of Culture were launched in 2016, and especially after Bodø and Nordland received the title in 2019, public engagement has been immense. “Everyone” has had an opinion about Bodø2024.

Many have cheered the project on and the way we have handled the task of being the first European Capital of Culture in the Arctic. Others have been critical. That is exactly as it should be. Major societal projects are meant to spark engagement. Openness, lively debate, and inclusion are cornerstones of both art and culture. Bodø2024 has never shied away from debate, quite the opposite, we have welcomed it. This has been particularly true of our work in communication and marketing.

There is never enough communication. And there is never enough marketing. We have heard this many times, from the public, the press, and the business sector. We would have liked to do even more, but the framework was clear. The total budget for communication and marketing was 35 million NOK, roughly ten percent of the total budget, spread over six years. On average, this means we spent around six million NOK per year. For comparison, each of the major grocery chains in Norway spends about 750 million NOK per year on marketing.

It takes a lot to get noticed. In a landscape where “everyone” is shouting for attention, the biggest players can buy their visibility, while the rest of us must be smart and creative. This is not an excuse, but an important context. At the same time, it should be noted that Bodø2024 has been in a unique position regarding financial resources within the cultural sector in the North.

So, what did we do?





Havfolkets paradekorps
at Træna.
Photo: Dan Mariner

Who we were

In 2023 and 2024, the Bodø2024 communication department consisted of nine people, with specialised competence in journalism, photography, video, graphic design, project management, marketing, international communications, and social media. Compared to many other European Capitals of Culture, this is a small team. Our colleagues in Tartu, Estonia, had more than 25 people in their communications department.

Explaining the possibilities

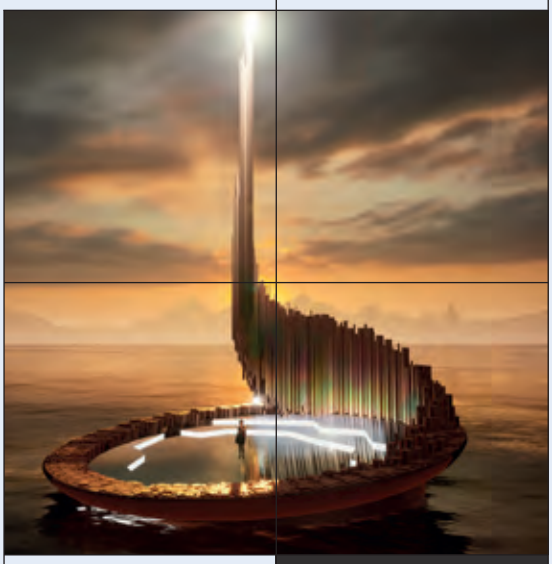
The communications department supported the programme department, and the main task was to make Bodø2024 known, as described in the ARCTICulation application, and to ensure that the programme reached its audience. In practice, we explained the opportunities that Bodø2024 represented as a concept, to the public, municipalities in the region, cultural actors, and the business community.

The project resulted in over 1,400 events. Some received extensive marketing; others less. Particularly large, self-produced events such as the opening ceremony and season openings received significant attention. Partners who received economic support from Bodø2024 were also responsible for their own marketing. This was stipulated in their contracts. In addition, we offered courses and workshops in marketing and communication, with a particular focus on strengthening youth competence in these areas.

Target groups

Bodø2024 had a wide reach. In practice, “everyone” has been part of the target audience, from the very youngest children (we have even produced opera for infants) to the elderly, as well as those who do not normally take part in cultural activities. Even so, it is fair to say that youth were particularly important in our communication efforts. Young people were, in fact, identified as our “number one key priority” in the application.

Target groups are not only defined by age. Geography is also an important factor when reaching an audience. Our reach has been local, regional, national, and international, and we have taken that into account in all our communication, from printed brochures to how we approached algorithms on digital platforms. Segmentation has been key to getting our message across.



The stage for the opening ceremony.
Illustration: Bjørnådal Arkitektstudio

Bodø2024's own channels

Website

The website bodo2024.no with its cultural calendar were the hub of our communication. Here the public could find all information about Bodø2024, news articles, presentations of various projects, in-depth information about UNG2024 and the volunteering project, details about the region, the organisation, and our partners, as well as photo and video archives and materials for the press and other interested parties. In 2023 and 2024, our website had 370,000 users and almost 2.9 million visits. Most users were, unsurprisingly, from Norway. Next on the list were Germany, USA, Sweden, and the UK. The average engagement time on the website was 1 minute and 9 seconds, which we consider good by today's digital standards.

Newsletter

The newsletter was also an important and well-used communication channel. From September 2022 to December 2024, we sent out 29 newsletters to our 4,258 subscribers. The newsletter gave us the opportunity to share in-depth information with an audience that had a genuine interest in the projec

Social media

Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and TikTok) played a central role, and here we really delved deep.

By the end of 2024, we had 29,000 followers across all platforms. Facebook was by far the largest, with 15,000 followers, followed by Instagram with around 7,000. Meta has been our most important arena for direct communication, both for organic content and paid campaigns.

We have observed that Facebook mainly reaches an adult audience, while Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok generally attract younger users, something we have been very conscious of. We have tailored both content and messaging to our different target groups. UNG2024 has largely managed its own platforms, which explains much of the success of the youth initiative. Many of our largest events (such as Hjertebank and several concerts at Svømmehallen Scene) were driven by UNG2024 and sold out in record time. This confirms what we assumed: young people know best how to reach other young people, and where to do so. In short: Youth spoke to youth, in the right place and in the right way.

Twitter/X has primarily been used for communication with our international network and international journalists. The platform is not as widely used in Norway as abroad, and Bodø2024 used it more actively before it was acquired by Elon Musk. At the end of the title year, Bodø2024 had 1,500 followers on Twitter/X.

Our strategy for organic use of social media can best be described as a three-stage rocket:

- **Before the event:**
  Focus on the process and the people behind it.
- **During the event:**
  Highlights and snippets, especially via Instagram Stories.
- **After the event:**
  Photo series, videos, aftermovies, and summaries.

Over the past two years, we have posted more than 8,000 social media updates. Frequency and volume have been consciously balanced. The public doesn't want to be spammed, but they do want to stay informed, and they want relevant content. It's a difficult balance to strike, and what was considered best practice on social media a year ago can already be outdated today. By having a dedicated specialist in this field, we have stayed current and succeeded in promoting both the European Capital of Culture concept and our own programme.

We have also benefited from great support from our owners: both Bodø municipality and Nordland county council's communication departments have willingly shared relevant material through their own channels.

Demographics

Most of our social media followers were from Norway. Looking more closely at the demographics, it is interesting to note that almost 70 percent of followers are women. If one were to summarise our findings in a single statement, we could say say that the average user of our channels is a 42-year-old woman, likely well-educated and living in Nordland.

These findings are fascinating, but not at all surprising. Women are far more active consumers of culture than men. In Norwegian theatres, for example, 75 percent of the audience are women. The same trend is found within performing arts, visual arts, classical concerts, and literary events. Statistics Norway (SSB) data show that women participate more often in cultural activities across all fields, except for sports events. The organisation Norsk publikumsutvikling (NPU) refers to a French study showing that since the 1960s, the cultural field has undergone a feminisation, making culture increasingly the domain of women.

Printed materials

Bodø2024's overarching strategy was to avoid printing more material than necessary. Printed materials are increasingly being replaced by digital solutions, often mobile-based, and environmental considerations also favour digital approaches. However, we did make some exceptions to this principle:

- We produced programme brochures for each of the five seasons.
- Small printed materials aimed at the art sector were distributed via cultural institutions and hotels in Bodø.
- QR codes were used actively on both digital and printed surfaces to direct the public to relevant websites, the cultural calendar, or ticket links.

In addition, we produced publications that combined programming and communication. In collaboration with The Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT), Salten Outdoor Council, and Nordland County Council, we published the book Kultur langs Nordlandsruta (Culture Along the Nordland Trail) in autumn 2024, an extensive documentation in text, illustrations, and photographs of what must be one of the most beautiful hiking trails in the world.

The Cultural Calendar

The Cultural Calendar became a key initiative for Bodø2024. Early on, we identified a need for a complete overview of our own events as well as those naturally connected to the project. The calendar was programmed so that all ticketed events were automatically added via the ticket operator. In addition, all other organisers were given the option to manually enter their events. This made the calendar widely used, both by the cultural field and by the public.

Bodø2024 invested substantial resources in marketing the calendar digitally, especially through films shown in all cinemas in Nordland, at every airport in the county, and across paid channels such as Meta, Amedia, and Clear Channel.



The Bodø2024 flag flutters in the wind.

Physical arenas

Physical meeting arenas have been important to Bodø2024 ever since the city was awarded the title in 2019. Meeting people face-to-face, to receive input or share information, has been a central strategic approach. In practice, this meant that Bodø2024's staff visited organisations, companies, associations, politicians, businesses, artists, cultural actors, and the general culture-interested public as often as possible.

By the end of 2024, we had held presentations, workshops, courses, and lectures for around 25,000 people.

The European Capital of Culture concept can be complex to explain, especially in Norway, where it is relatively unfamiliar to most people. Personal meetings, often over a cup of coffee, have been absolutely crucial for anchoring the project within the population.

Hospitality

Hospitality workshops aimed at businesses and front-line personnel in Bodø and the Salten region were important both before and during the European Capital of Culture year. These workshops created closer connections between the business community and the many actors involved in Bodø2024 projects. The goal was to ensure that local businesses could actively participate in, and benefit from, the Capital of Culture year, while also ensuring that residents and visitors alike had the best possible experiences.

The workshops served as arenas for information exchange, where organisers of major events could present their plans directly to local businesses and hospitality staff. This strengthened Bodø2024's visibility while giving the business community an opportunity to prepare for expected visitor activity. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, and the workshops contributed to increased engagement and value creation.

These workshops were a collaboration between Bodø2024 and Visit Bodø.

Examples of business involvement:

- The restaurant Gatsby introduced a special Bodø2024 burger on its menu.
- Bryggerikaia restaurant launched a three-course Bodø2024 menu.
- Posten Norge (Norway Post) issued a special stamp collection based on Bodø2024.

24-hour race organized by Bodø Bauta.
Photo: David Engmo



Press

Communication and marketing for Bodø2024 took place locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Few areas illustrate this better than our work with the media. A strong and close relationship with the press was a clearly defined priority for Bodø2024, and absolutely essential for achieving our strategic goals, especially in terms of strengthening the brand, promoting the region as a cultural destination, keeping the public informed, and fostering debate about the project.

Bodø2024 had an inherent gravitational pull that attracts media interest. This due both to the scale of the concept, the amount of public funds, and the large number of people who have engaged with the events and initiatives created by Bodø2024. In addition, the context of economic pressure and strained municipal finances provided fertile ground for intense debate. Bodø2024, quite simply, has been food for hungry journalists.

Locally, in Bodø and Salten, relations with the press have been close and constructive, even when criticism has been strong and editorials sharply worded. Avisa Nordland, NRK Nordland, and Bodø Nu have followed the project closely, producing hundreds, if not thousands of articles and broadcasts.

Bodø2024 has consistently maintained the principle that we always respond when the press calls. We have never said “no comment” and have done our best to provide accurate and transparent information. We have also repeatedly held in-person meetings with the media to brief them about the project.

Regional media, that is, editorial offices in the rest of Nordland and Northern Norway, were approached early in the project and have been regularly supplied with press releases and tailored pitches for stories relevant to their geographical area. In practice, this meant that Helgelendingen in Mosjøen received different PMs and stories than Lofotposten in Svolvær.

At the national level, we experienced a certain degree of indifference toward Bodø2024, especially in the lead-up to the title year. We achieved good coverage on NRK and TV2, while major newspapers such as VG and Aftenposten were more absent.

Nevertheless, overall, we achieved good results in terms of media coverage. Monitor2024, the research project led by Nord University, tracked the number of stories written about Bodø2024.

Results

The final count was 5,280 media stories in total during 2023 and 2024.
About 1,500 of these were produced in Bodø, meaning that a significant share was published by media outlets outside Bodø and Nordland.
According to the report from Monitor2024, “Understanding the Narrative of BODØ2024: AI-assisted Sentiment Analysis of the Discourse in Norwegian Media (2023–2025)”, researchers conducted a deep analysis of each article using AI, examining whether the tone of the media coverage was positive or negative. The findings were:

- **55%** of the stories had a positive tone.
- **28%** were neutral.
- **12%** balanced between praise and criticism.
- **5%** were directly negative.

The negative coverage primarily concerned financing and criticism of the Sámi program content. There is a clear trend showing that articles produced in Bodø were more balanced between praise and criticism, while stories from the Helgeland region tended to be more positive.

Media coverage has been important for many reasons. It not only helped raise awareness of Bodø2024 and its programme, but also contributed to shifts in regional consciousness, local pride, and public reputation.



Arktisk Mat in Mosjøen produced the project Feeding Europe.
Photo: Arina Karbovskaya



Stamp launch Bodø City Hall, Halvor Fasting, Director of Stamps at Posten and Mayor of Bodø Odd-Emil Ingebrigtsen.
Photo: David Engmo



Campaign in bus shelter.
Photo: David Engmo

International attention

Bodø2024 received extensive international attention. Media coverage has reached around 45 countries, from Japan and China to the USA, Canada, Mexico, Colombia, and of course all across Europe. Major news outlets such as Forbes, BBC, The Times, The Guardian, El País, La Stampa, FAZ, and Público have written about the project. Leading travel magazines including Lonely Planet, Condé Nast Traveller, Le Petit Futé, and Wanderlust Magazine have featured Bodø2024, as have lifestyle magazines such as Vogue and Vanity Fair.

National TV and radio broadcasters from more than a dozen countries, including Spain, Ireland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Italy, have also reported on Bodø2024, alongside independent outlets such as Deutsche Welle (DW).

As expected, the majority of the coverage has been within Europe, with media, both large and small, in nearly every European country reporting on the European Capital of Culture for their respective audiences. Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom have shown particularly strong interest.

Several Norwegian-based media outlets specialising in English-language news about Norway have also covered Bodø2024, among them The Local Norway, Norway Today, and Life in Norway. The multicultural newspaper Utrop, Norway's first and largest of its kind, has also featured the project. In addition, several art-focused professional journals published major stories about the European Capital of Culture.

By the end of 2024, we had recorded more than 300 articles from international media outlets. These articles did not appear out of thin air, Bodø2024 placed strong emphasis on international outreach, including media relations. Together with our partners Visit Bodø, Visit Norway, Northern Norway Tourist Board, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we invited, hosted, and facilitated visits from numerous journalists throughout the project period.

On top of that, we regularly distributed press releases and maintained close contact with an international network of journalists and media organisations.

Bodø2024 also hosted countless visits from other European Capitals of Culture and international delegations from business, the cultural sector, and politics, an effort combining cultural diplomacy, programme development, and network-building.

The value of international visibility

To estimate the value of our international marketing, particularly the visibility in the media, Bodø2024 and Northern Norway Tourist Board jointly commissioned the report "Bodø2024, The European Capital of Culture's Impact on International Profiling and Tourism Development." The data was provided by Cision, and the analysis and design were carried out by the communications agency meraki studio.

The report revealed a number of interesting findings, including:

- NOK 599 million in advertising value
- 89.3% of articles were positive, 10% balanced, and fewer than 0.7% negative
- 15.9 billion in potential reach

The estimated advertising value indicates what it would have cost to purchase equivalent editorial space as advertising, a standard method for measuring media effect in the communications industry. The value does not reflect actual costs but provides an indication of the commercial significance of editorial visibility, which often carries greater credibility than paid advertising.

The estimated potential reach of the media coverage was calculated at 15.9 billion. This figure, based on data from Cision and its partners (including Similarweb and TVEyes), refers to the potential number of exposures, that is, how many unique users and viewers could have come into contact with the content.

Together, these numbers provide a clear picture of the project's global reach and impact.



Craig Alibone with his own Bodø2024 chocolate.
Photo: Fredrik Stenbro



Campaign at City Nord



Bodø2024 knitting pattern for sweater designed by Stine Erikstad.
Photo: Fredrik Stenbro

Advertising surfaces

Bodø2024 has become one of the strongest brands in Bodø and Nordland, achieved through systematic and comprehensive communication efforts. Physical visibility, from flags in the streets to banners at the airport, roll-ups, posters, and logos on municipal vehicles, ensured outstanding recognition. Bodø2024 was everywhere, an inescapable part of the cityscape.

Not many European Capital of Culture has had a more visible physical presence than Bodø, in terms of branding and visibility. It was simply impossible to walk around Bodø without realising that you were in a European Capital of Culture.

In addition, a wide range of merchandise, T-shirts, vests, caps, and stickers, was produced, further reinforcing the brand.

Even more important, and more visible, was the digital marketing. Bodø2024 secured visibility in all cinemas across Nordland, shown before every single film screening. Both promotional films and campaigns ran continuously throughout 2023 and 2024, reaching approximately 500,000 viewers. The same content was shown at all airports in the county, with over five million screenings. We also had access to digital screens at City Nord shopping centre, Glasshuset arcade, Fauske Shopping Park, Bodø Tourist Information, and Aspmyra Stadium.

In summary: Bodø2024 achieved more than 119 million impressions on its own digital platforms and over eight million engagements and clicks, in addition to the exposure from external platforms beyond our direct control.

Creative marketing

Although Bodø2024 primarily relied on well-tested and traditional communication channels and marketing strategies, we occasionally adopted creative approaches:

- Early in the process, we entered into a collaboration with local chocolatier Craig Alibone, who developed a special Bodø2024-themed chocolate. The Englishman created two varieties, one flavoured with blackcurrant and Norwegian brown cheese, and another with rosemary and almonds. The products were a huge success, by the end of 2024, more than 10,000 bars had been sold.

- The Bodø2024 knitting project was also highly successful. Knitting influencer Stine Erikstad designed a dedicated Bodø2024 collection, and all patterns were made freely available both online and in printed brochures. The patterns have now been downloaded over 5,000 times. Even Queen Sonja received her own Bodø2024 wool sweater.

- It is not known what the Queen thinks of Bodø2024's own aquavit, but we created a special edition in the run-up to the year.

- Queen Sonja also appeared in a spectacular opening film that went viral, viewed by over one million people.

- Bodø2024 commissioned the award-winning British author Stef Penney to write a novel "with a strong sense of place" set in Nordland. Writing from her home in London and inspired by conversations and tips from people in Nordland, Penney produced the novel The Long Water, published in summer 2024 to excellent reviews. The book was featured on The Guardian's "Books to Look Forward To in 2024" and The Scotsman's "Best Books of 2024" lists. Additionally, we engaged a graffiti artist to decorate a traditional Nordland-boat, used at several events and exhibitions; partnered with the sailing ship Christian Radich as a "festival ship" during summer 2024; and collaborated with Arktisk Mat in Mosjøen for several national and international events.



The Bodø2024 bus



Roof banners in Glasshuset.

Toyota Nordvik wrapped its cars with Bodø2024.



City cars with profiling.



Documentation

All Bodø2024's own events, and many of the partner events, were thoroughly documented through photography, text, and film. This means that Bodø2024, and consequently its owners, now possess an extensive archive of documentation from the project. This archive has significant historical value and serves as a time capsule of a unique project in the context of Northern Norway. The material will be preserved by Arkiv i Nordland (Nordland Archives) as well as by Bodø2024's owner institutions.

Films

Film and moving images have been a major focus area, particularly for reaching younger audiences. We employed in-house filmmakers who, often in collaboration with the Bodø and Nordland film community, produced short films from each season. UNG2024 also produced its own documentary film.

In 2022, we began collaborating with filmmaker Trond Kvig Andreassen to follow the Kyiv Soloists after the war broke out in Ukraine. The commission was to capture images, interviews, and the story of their journey through Europe and their integration into the Arctic Philharmonic in Bodø. The project evolved over the following years, Andreassen raised additional funding through external partners and formalised a partnership with Indie Film in Oslo. The film, The Soloists, premiered in winter 2025 and will be shown across Europe.

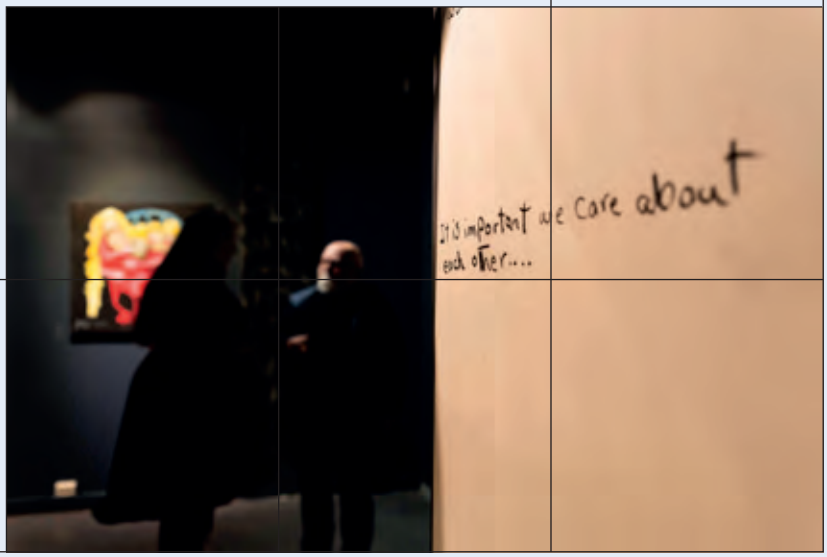
Campaigns

Bodø2024 has run a wide range of campaigns across multiple communication platforms during our years.In 2023, we launched the concept "Hear, See, Taste, Experience, and Visit", consisting of videos, digital banner ads, print ads, and native articles. The target group was a culture-interested audience locally, regionally, and nationally. The campaign used Meta, Amedia, Google Ads (YouTube), Schibsted, Klassekampen, Aftenposten, and Clear Channel screens (in Oslo city centre, Gardermoen Airport, and all airports and cinemas in Nordland). This took place before the programme launch, and the purpose was to create interest and pride around the project.

The same year, we also ran several campaigns related to the various open calls under the Bodø2024 umbrella.

Later, most campaigns focused on different aspects of the programme (the opening and seasonal launches received significant attention), with a particular emphasis on the cultural calendar. One of the most effective campaigns was our monthly series recommending 20 selected events from our programme.

Partin Bastan and Marjan Najafi created the exhibition Wing of Democracy
Photo: David Engmo




HJERTEBANK



Sondre Justad at the Hjertebank festival in Rensåsparken. Photo: Drone Nord

International marketing

Achieving the status of European Capital of Culture is a unique opportunity to promote the city and region to an international audience. This is also part of the ECOC concept, and it's regularly emphasised in the monitoring of the ECOC projects. Consequently, this has been a central element in Bodø2024's communication and marketing efforts.

Early in the project, we entered a strategic partnership with Visit Bodø for international marketing. Bodø2024 hired an additional staff member who became part of the Visit Bodø team in a matrix position. In addition, Bodø2024 contributed significant funding to support extra marketing activities.

The task was threefold:
1. Digital campaigns / Google Ads
2. B2B – trade fairs and meetings
3. Press trips

The digital campaigns began as early as 2023, following a three-stage approach: first an awareness campaign, then "Our Arctic Identity", and finally seasonal campaigns. Unique film and photo material from Bodø and Nordland was produced and presented to European audiences, largely through Visit Norway's Meta channels. The campaigns were highly successful and undoubtedly contributed to the dramatic increase in visitors to Bodø and Nordland in 2024.

Targeted Google Ads were also used, with search terms directly related to the Bodø2024 brand and project leading to bodo2024.no, while terms related to travel, attractions, and the general destination led to visitbodo.com.

To ensure broad international visibility and positioning of Bodø and Salten as an attractive destination for culturally interested Europeans, Visit Bodø prioritised a number of B2B activities in collaboration with Bodø2024. The goal was to attract visitors across several segments, leisure and holiday travel, the MICE sector (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events), tour operators, airlines, and media. This work was especially important during the title year, when we had a unique opportunity to highlight the region's cultural and natural offerings on international stages. Through participation in fairs, workshops, and B2B events, we consistently presented Bodø2024 as the main focal point.

Bodø, as the first European Capital of Culture north of the Arctic Circle, has been a key selling point. We have highlighted the region's unique cultural events and attractions, and emphasised the combination of culture and nature that makes Bodø and Salten especially appealing as destinations.

There is no doubt that Bodø and Nordland havebeen in the spotlight these years. The ECOC title drew significant international media attention to the region. Both Visit Norway and Northern Norway Tourist Board contributed additional funds to meet this demand. Visit Norway financed journalists' flights, while Northern Norway Tourist Board covered local transport and accommodation. The tourism industry in Bodø and Salten also made an extraordinary effort, members of Visit Bodø generously offered their activities and experiences free of charge.

Visit Bodø coordinated and designed programmes for several press trips, followed up afterwards, and participated in many of them. Through this exceptional effort, the tourism sector in Bodø and Salten has helped to create lasting international visibility for the region and ensured that Bodø2024 achieved maximum media impact.

Challenges

The strained finances of Bodø municipality and Nordland county council posed challenges for Bodø2024's communication work. Many were critical of public spending on culture at a time when, for example, schools faced potential closures. The funding of Bodø2024 and the municipality's economic priorities became subjects of debate in local media and online comment sections. Criticism of the project was strongest before the public actually experienced the various events. In autumn 2025, Monitor2024 will publish research and evaluation, likely showing that both the municipality and the county will achieve a significant socio-economic surplus as a result of the initiative. While this outcome has long been expected, it has been difficult to communicate during a debate often driven more by emotions than by facts.

The debate concerning the Sámi content of the programme was particularly surprising. From the very beginning, Bodø2024 had been clear that Sámi culture would be a major part of the programme. This was met with hostility by some, and the comment sections were, at times, toxic. The fact that Mayor Odd Emil Ingebrigtsen had to address the issue publicly, urging people to calm down, was both sad and concerning.

The controversy reached its peak around the opening ceremony, drawing attention from all the major national news outlets. Even the satirical TV show "Nytt på Nytt" (Norway's Have I Got News for You) covered Bodø2024 extensively, more than once.

We see the critical coverage in local media as a strength, both for the project and for journalism. Local outlets (and occasionally Klassekampen) have been diligent in asking critical questions, requesting access to public documents, and producing high-quality, relevant journalism with a wide range of sources. The criticism has always been factual and professional, never malicious.

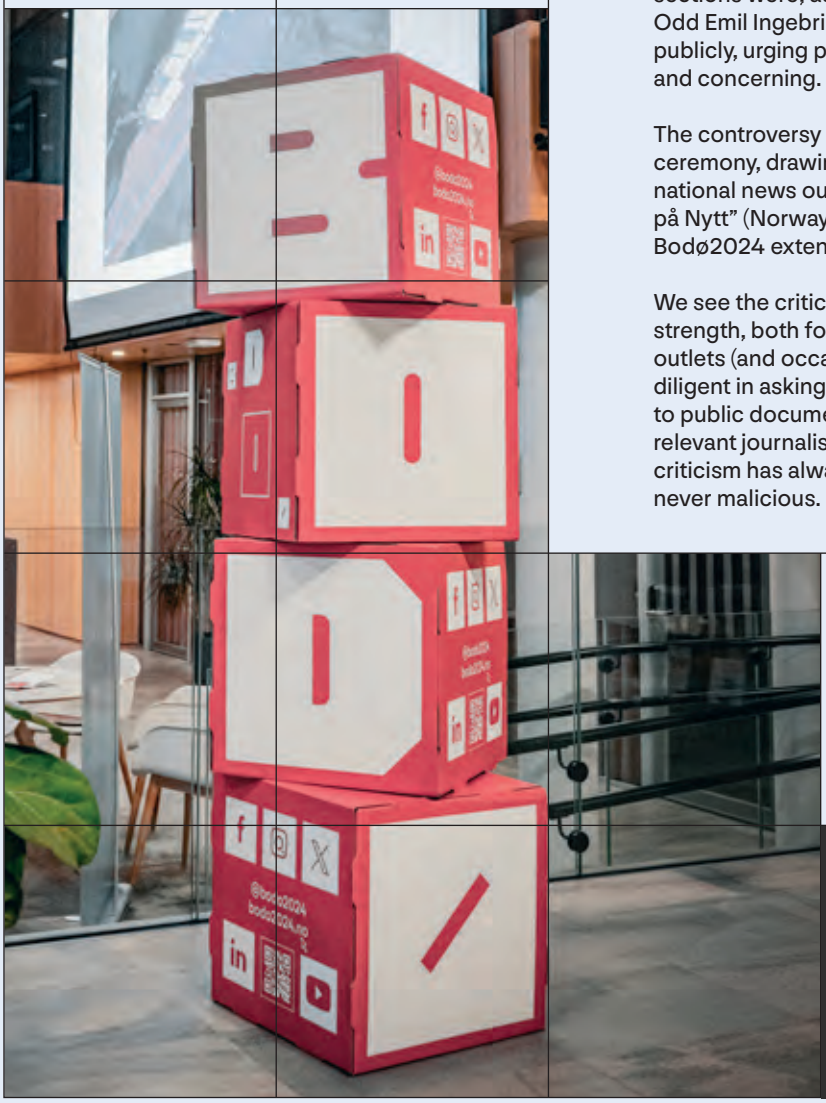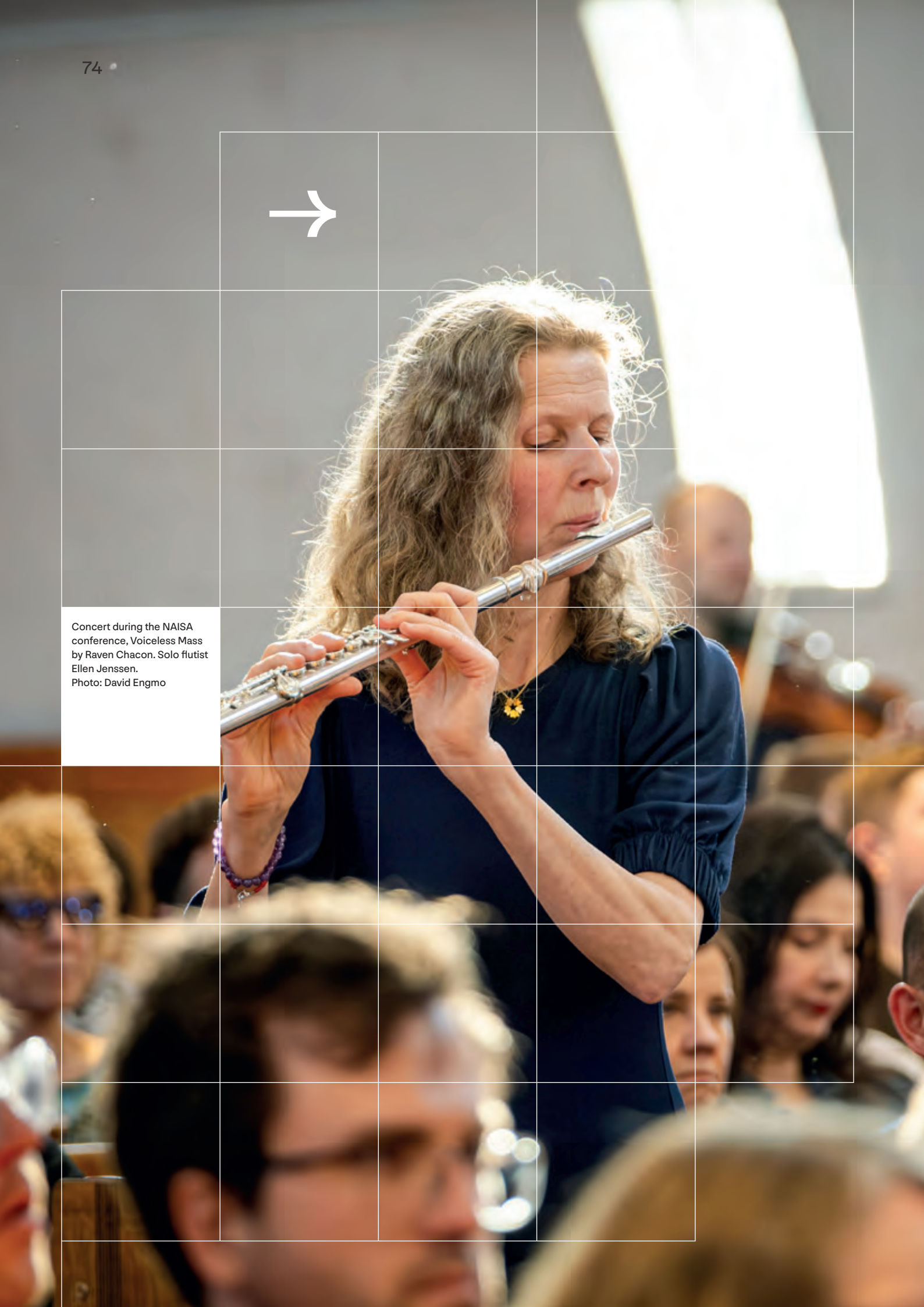


Photo: Marie Nystad





The Coastal Convention,
by The Coastal Association.
Photo: David Engmo



Concert during the NAISA conference, Voiceless Mass by Raven Chacon. Solo flutist Ellen Jenssen.
Photo: David Engmo

Financial information

Bodø2024 represents the largest investment in cultural content ever made in Northern Norway. The original budget was NOK 300 million, covering the period 2020–2025, averaging roughly NOK 60 million per year. For comparison, the Bergen International Festival has an annual budget of NOK 60–70 million, while the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet has an annual turnover of NOK 800–900 million.

Compared to other European Capitals of Culture, Bodø2024's budget is on the lower end, though not remarkably small in absolute terms. However, considering the high cost level in Norway, the budget must still be regarded as very modest. The Stavanger 2008 European Capital of Culture project had roughly the same nominal budget as Bodø in 2024. Adjusted for inflation, Bodø's budget would have needed to be around NOK 455 million to be on par with Stavanger's investment.

The annual contribution from Bodø municipality and Nordland county council averaged NOK 8.3 million per year over the 2020–2025 period. This represents less than 15 ‰ of the annual budgets of Bodø2024's two owner institutions.



Opening of the light festival with a concert in Bodø domkirke.
Photo: David Engmo



Artist Ted Efremoff,
K-Lab at Kjerringøy.
Photo: Arina Karbovskaya

Budget and funding

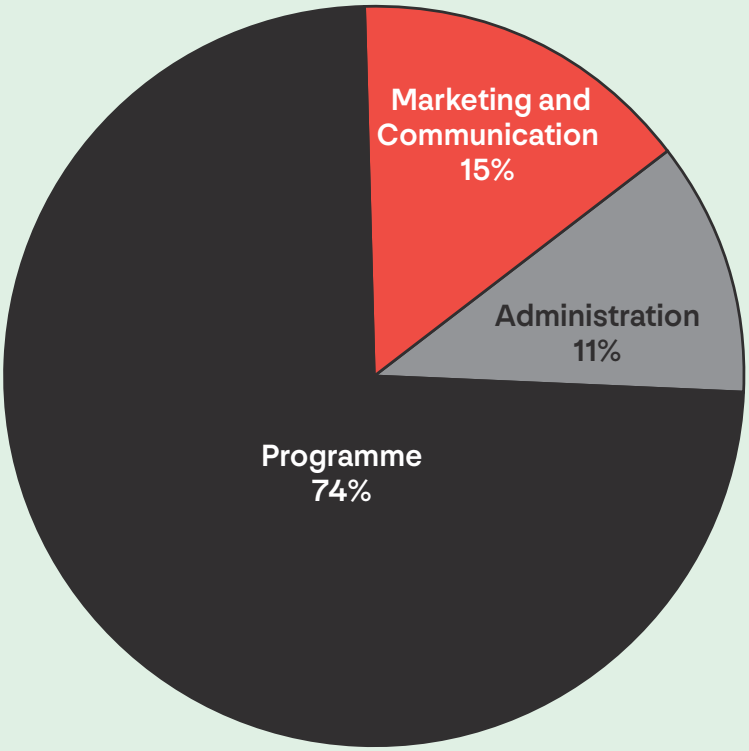
The financing of the European Capital of Culture year was as follows:

Source	Accounts	Original Budget
Contribution from the State	NOK 100 million	100
Contribution from Bodø municipality	NOK 50 million	50
Contribution from Nordland county council	NOK 50 million	50
Sponsors	NOK 80 million	85
Melina Mercouri Prize	NOK 17,5 million	15
EU / EEA funds	NOK 3,8 million	
Ticket revenues	NOK 1,3 million	
Other income	NOK 29 million	
Total income	**NOK 331 million**	**300**

Bodø2024 has contributed over NOK 20 million to the cultural sector in Nordland and Bodø from funding sources outside Norway. In addition, several projects that were part of Bodø2024 received direct funding from European programmes, meaning that the actual total income benefiting the cultural sector is even higher.

Use of funds

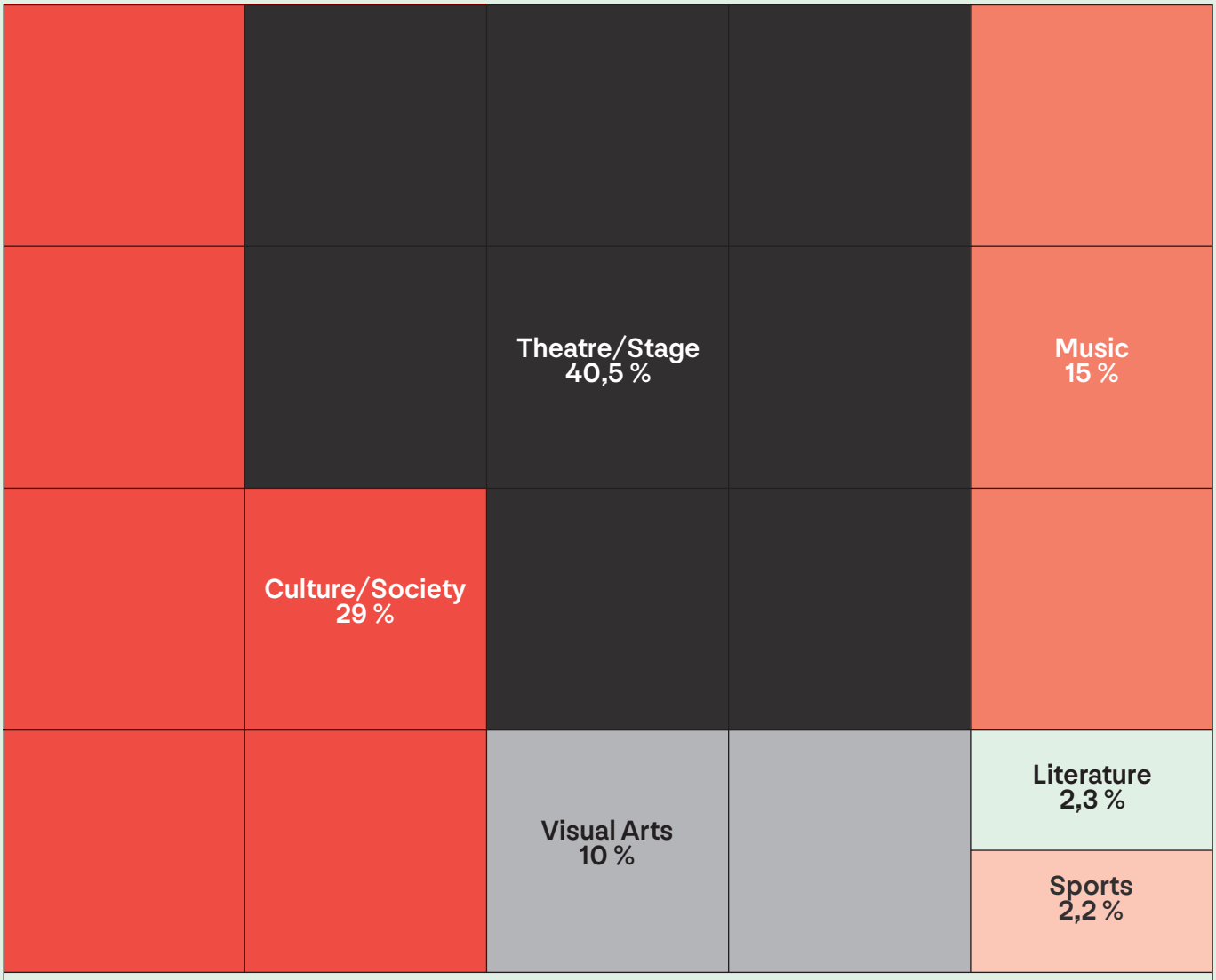
Bodø2024 IKS was organised into three departments: Programme, Marketing and Communication, and Administration. The distribution of funds between the departments is shown in the pie chart: 74% / 15% / 11% respectively.



Approximately 20% of the funds used covered salaries and social costs. This includes both the salaries of Bodø2024 employees and payments to artists, performers, and technicians directly engaged by Bodø2024. Most cultural actors, however, were not paid directly but instead received grants or invoiced for their services.

Purchases of cultural activities and grants to cultural institutions amounted to approximately NOK 207 million, equivalent to 65% of total expenditure.

The open calls, through which the cultural sector could apply for grants, accounted for a total of about NOK 9.4 million in available funding.



Genre

The European Capital of Culture project was designed to encompass a broad range of cultural fields. The chart above shows an approximate distribution of funds by genre.

Based on the needs and ambitions expressed by the various cultural sectors, Bodø2024 could have doubled its budget without being able to meet all expectations — and that is probably how it will always be.

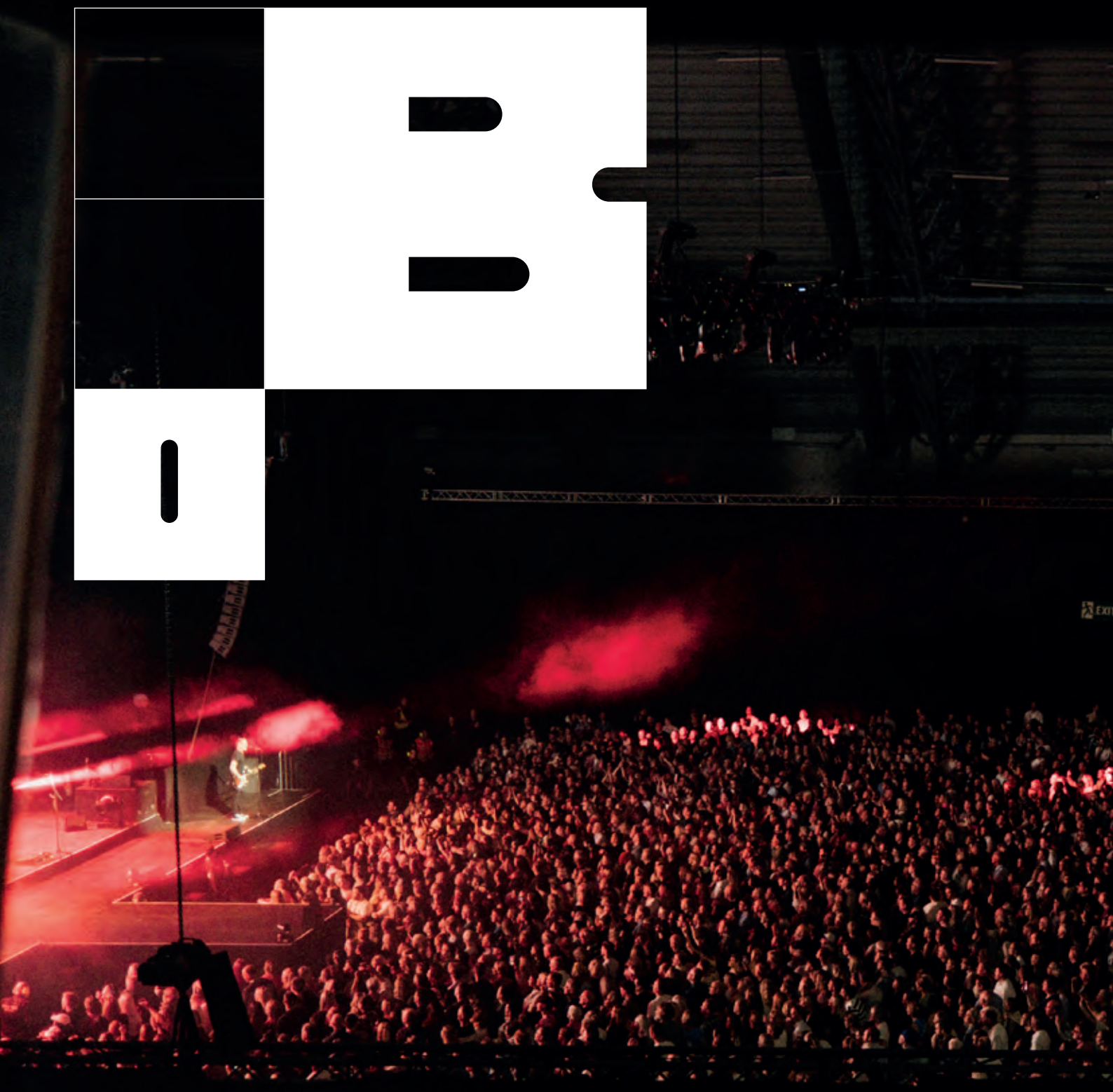
Geography

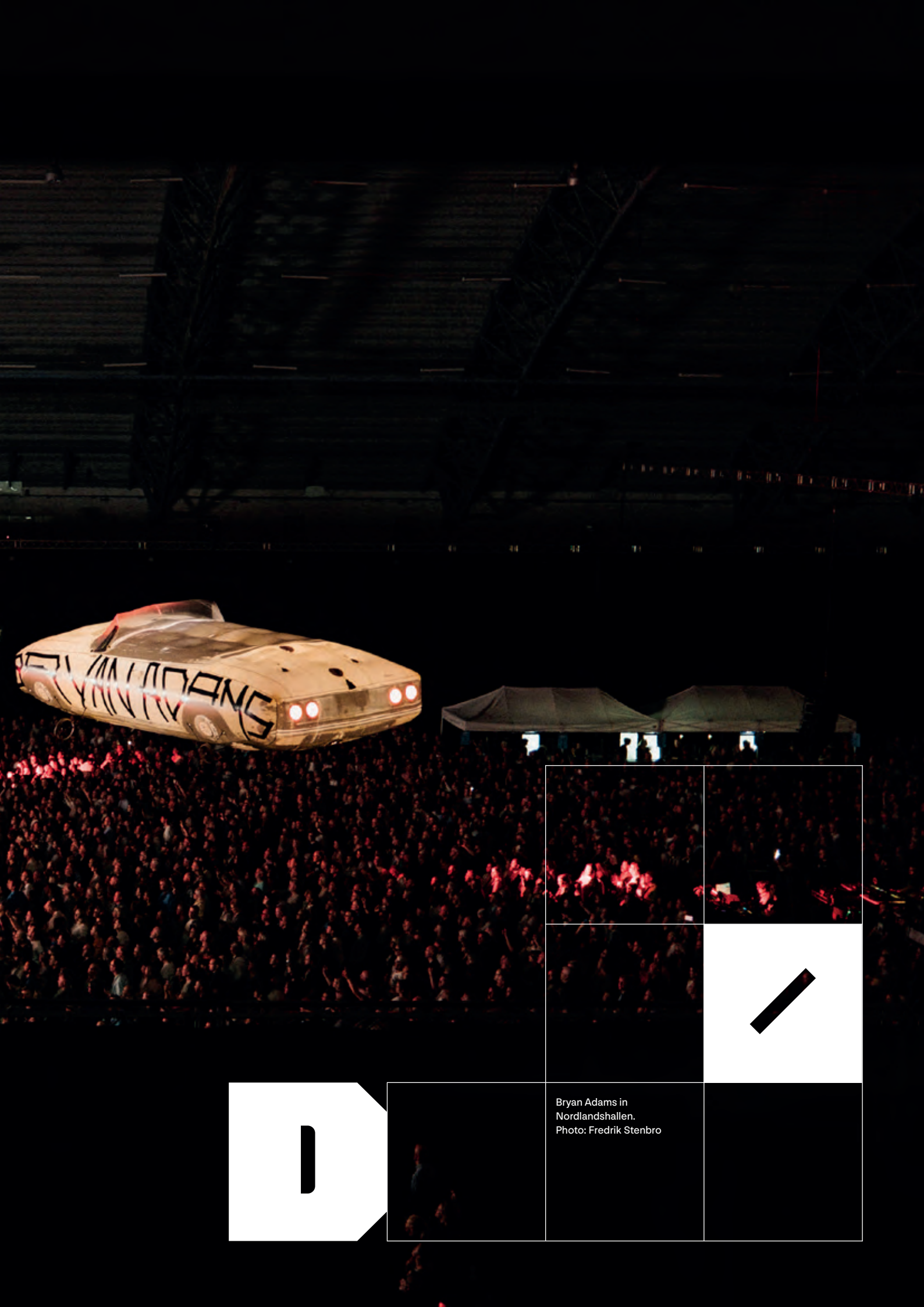
Although Bodø was awarded the European Capital of Culture title, the project encompassed the entire county of Nordland. Bodø2024 received invaluable assistance from local cultural workers in the municipalities for activities outside Bodø.
A dedicated programme line was created to support projects taking place beyond the city itself.

The distribution of funds was as follows:

Bodø:	68%
Nordland (outside Bodø):	30%
Outside Nordland:	3%

In conclusion, the European Capital of Culture project is expected to show a small surplus upon completion. There is a political commitment that these remaining funds will be used for initiatives consistent with the strategic goals of the Capital of Culture project.





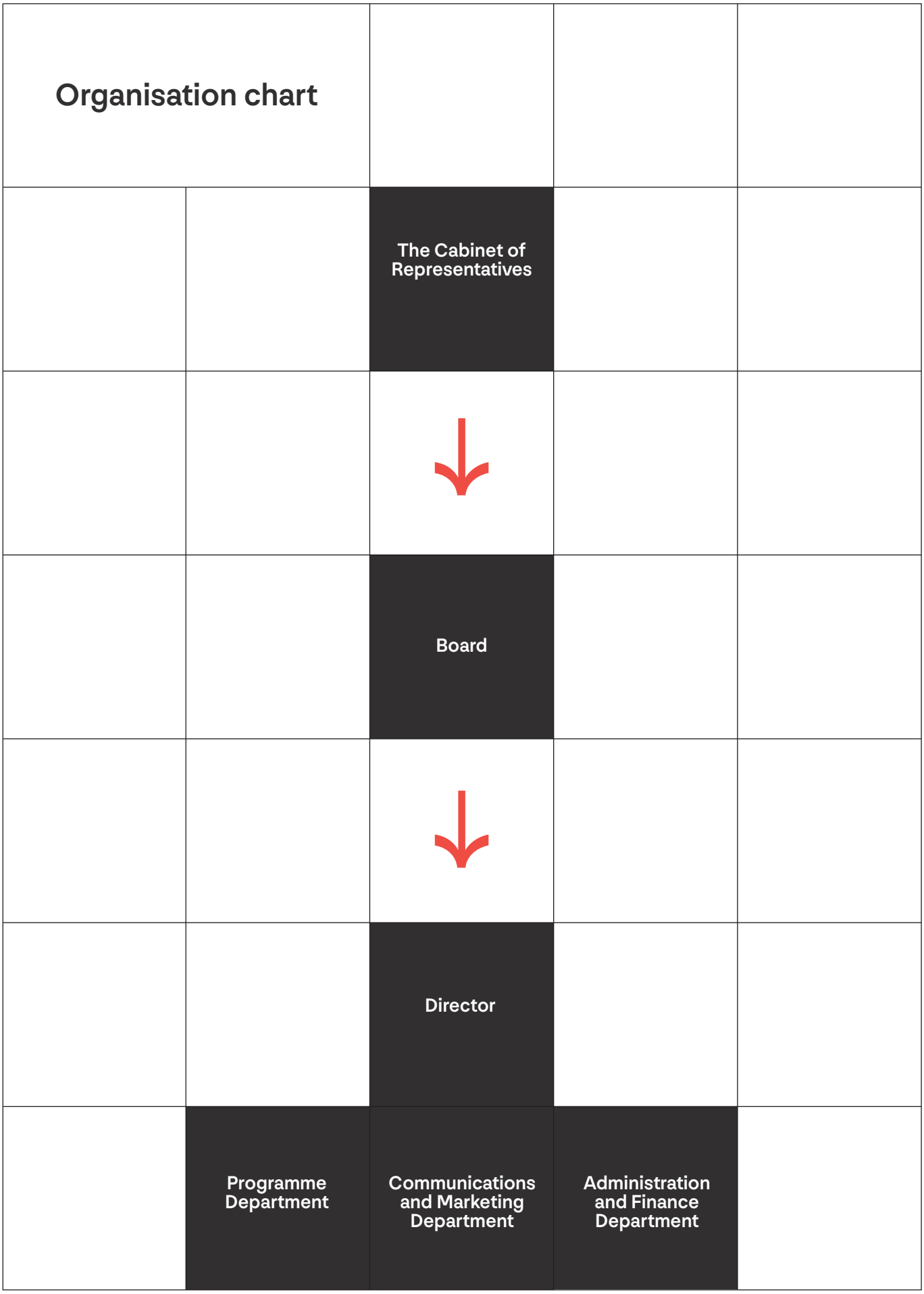
Bryan Adams in
Nordlandshallen.
Photo: Fredrik Stenbro

Organisation of Bodø2024



Theodor Skognes Johansen, Bodø Kulturskole.
Photo: Dan Mariner

Organisation chart



The Board of Representatives

The Board of Representatives is the company's supreme governing body and consists of six members with two personal deputies, half appointed by the Bodø City Council and half by the Nordland county council. The council is composed of elected politicians from both the municipality and the county.

The Head of the County Government of Nordland and the Mayor of Bodø have served as Chair and Deputy Chair, respectively. The Board of Representatives approves the financial plan and annual budget, as well as the annual accounts of the company. It also has the authority to appoint the Management Board.





The Management Board

The Board of Bodø2024 has consisted of five to six members. The Board is responsible for ensuring that Bodø2024 is operated in accordance with the company's purpose and annual budget. It must also oversee the Director's management of the organisation and submit recommendations to The Board of Representatives regarding the financial plan, budget, and accounts.

During the project period, the Board has comprised the following members:

Aili Keskitalo	*Chair*	(2022 – 2025)
Hill Marta Solberg	*Chair*	(2020 – 2021)
Lars Magne Andreassen	*Deputy Chair*	(2020 – 2025)
Fredrik Lindegren		(2020 – 2025)
Unni Olsen		(2020 – 2025)
Dorthe Eide		(2020 – 2025)
Mads Andreassen		(2022 – 2025)

The Querini Opera in Venice
Photo: Annar Bjørgli

Administration

The administration of Bodø2024 consists of three departments, headed by the Director, with each department led by its own manager. The administration holds the professional responsibility for implementing Bodø2024 and for the programming of the Capital of Culture year.

Bodø2024 Management

Andre Wallann Larsen	Managing Director
Jacob Normann	Head of Administration and Finance - Managing Director from 1 January 2025
Henrik Sand Dagfinrud	Head of Programme
Helge Grønmo	Head of Communications and Marketing

In total, the organisation had a core staff of 26 employees working to deliver the best possible Capital of Culture year. The organisation was gradually built up from 2020, reaching full staffing in autumn 2023 and throughout 2024. From January 2025, staffing has been gradually reduced month by month, and at the time of writing, three employees remain to handle follow-up, reporting, and accounting work.

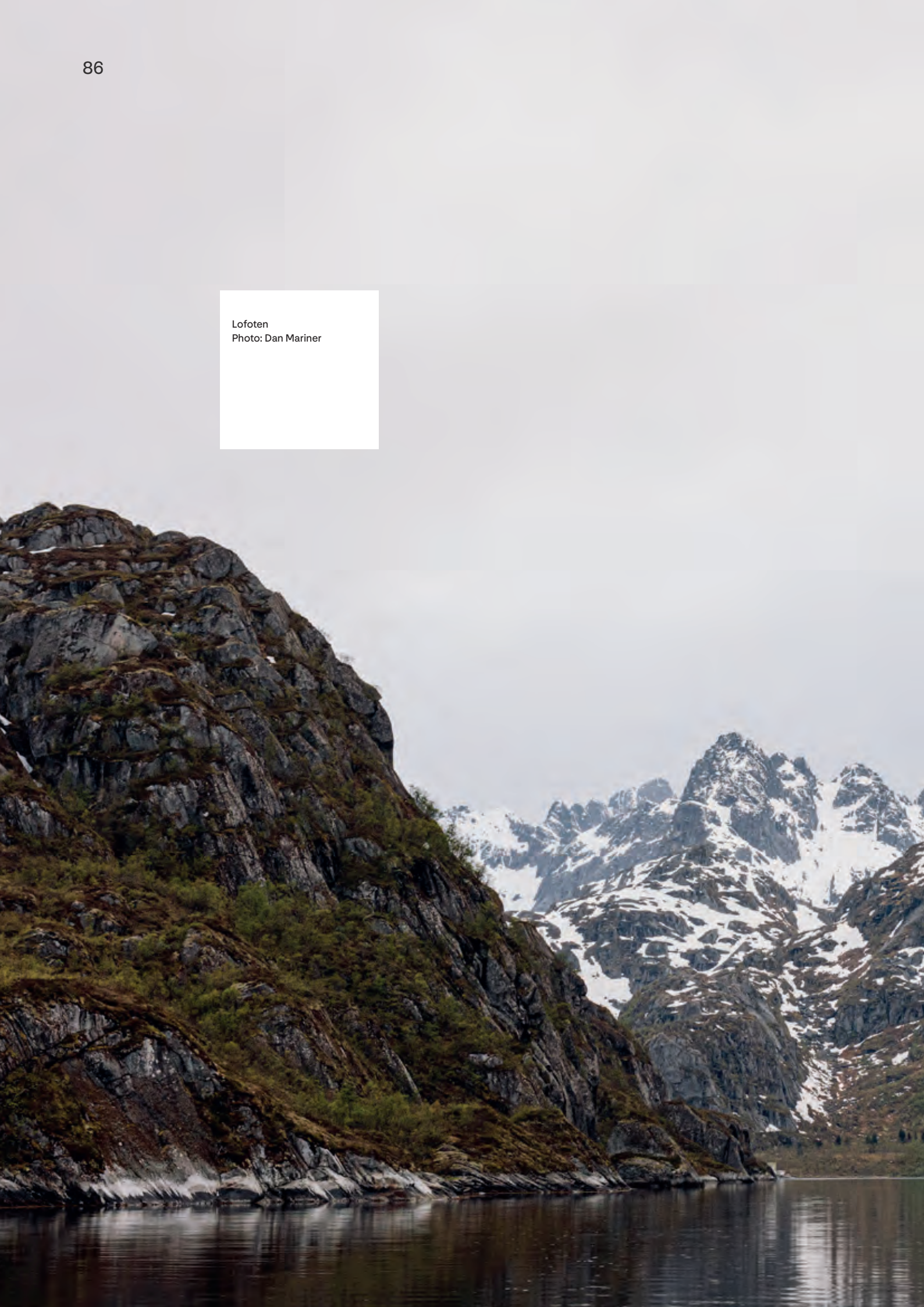
The organisation has been characterised by dedicated employees and very low staff turnover. Sick leave throughout the project's lifetime has remained well below 2 %. Many employees also worked considerable overtime during peak periods to ensure successful events.

The staff of Bodø2024 have developed unique expertise within the cultural sector in Nordland and Norway, and will continue to play an influential role in the cultural landscape in the years ahead.

Music on display
– a self-playing piano
at Keiservarden created by
Benjamin Mørk.
Photo: David Engmo



Lofoten
Photo: Dan Mariner





BODØ2024
EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

For norwegian and
digital version, scan
QR-code or go to
bodo2024.no/rapport

bodo2024.no

Layout: tinehole.com