European Commission

Bodø
European Capital of Culture 2024

Third Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECoC Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, 15 November 2023

Creative Europe

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 15 November 2023 between the Panel and the team of Bodø, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2024[1]. Bodø was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2024 by the European Commission on 3 February 2020 on the basis of the recommendation included in the Panel selection report[2]; its bid book is available on the Bodø 2024 website[3]. The previous two monitoring meetings took place virtually on 23 September 2020 and on 23 June 2022. The relevant Panel's reports can be consulted and downloaded on the European Commission website[4].

The present report is addressed to the Bodø 2024 organisation and will be published on the same European Commission's website.

Attendance

The Panel members:

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

The Bodø 2024 delegation was composed by: the Mayor of Bodø, the Chair of Bodø2024 Management Board, the General Director Bodø2024 IKS, the Programme Director Bodø2024, the Director of Communications and Marketing, the Director of Administration and Finance, the Bodø2024 Youth project

[1] The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2020 to 2033, which provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the Panel. See: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG
[2] See the Selection Report at: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/bad-ischl-Bodø-and-tartu
[3] https://Bodø.kommune.no/les/ECC/
[4] See the two Panel Monitoring Reports at: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/bad-ischl-Bodø-and-tartu

responsible, the Evaluation project research leader and the Evaluation project researcher.

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

Report from Bodø 2024

The Bodø 2024 Organisation (Bodø2024 IKS) submitted a comprehensive progress report in advance of the virtual meeting, supplemented by detailed annexes on the updated status of the projects, the marketing plan, the digital communication plan and the risk calculation analysis. The report gives evidence of the important advancement made by Bodø 2024 since the last monitoring meeting, while providing additional information related to some of the questions, recommendations and issues raised in the previous monitoring report.

The Bodø 2024 delegation made a 20-minute verbal presentation, outlining their progress 2 months ahead of the start of the ECoC year.

During the presentation the Mayor, the Chair and the team addressed, among others, the following issues:

- The newly elected Mayor started the presentation emphasising this concept: "Bodø is a small city that makes the impossible happen". The Bodø 2024 project is a tangible example of this. Likewise, they built an airport in 15 years and a new huge concert hall. Bodø 2024 is supported by all political parties as well as by the regional business sector.
- As to financial and human resources, it was stressed that the team is solid and has not changed since the last monitoring meeting. The budget is sound as well, as, out of a total of 31 million euro, 30 million are already secured. Yet, because of inflation, the team is actively seeking for more funding and sponsorships. The projection in this sense is optimistic.
- On 3 November 2023, the team publicly presented the programme in Norway and received an encouraging response. Their concept is also well-known in Europe.
- With this project, Bodø 2024 would like to change the way Europe views the Arctic and the High North and to attract young people and new residents. The youth programme is one of the highlights of Bodø 2024.
- The projects envisioned in the bid book will be delivered in 2024. The original key message and main topics are enhanced in the programme that will be actually delivered. The focus is on transition, looking for new solutions and resources; on Art of Nature, illustrating how the special Arctic

asset can be enriched by arts and culture; and finally, on Fish and Ships, showing how cultural traditions can evolve into contemporary European topics.

- In the development of the programme, a balance between quality and quantity was sought. The team responded to this challenge by upholding a collective cultural movement.
- The regional dimension is strong: a number of events are spread across the region and there is a wide participation of operators from the whole Nordland.
- The European dimension shaped the regional regeneration and youth democracy programmes. In addition, the steep increase in applications to the EU Creative Europe programme submitted by the regional cultural scene is evidence of its upgraded skills and networking capacity. This is perceived as the main tool to ensure legacy.
- The schedule for the opening ceremony has been fully respected. The opening ceremony will take place on 3 February. It is meant as a spectacular and magical show, hopefully with Northern lights, encapsulating the essence of the ECoC year, though there is an element of risk connected with the weather conditions.
- Generally speaking, the team is confident that Bodø 2024 will produce lasting and durable impacts in the city and in the Nordland region. "There will be a 'before/after Bodø 2024' effect".
- Finally, the Chair of Bodø2024 Management Board stressed that an emphasis was also placed on the indigenous cross-border Sami culture. Bodø 2024 articulated the struggle to preserve nature and people. The programme was able to address these conflicts artistically.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the Panel sought clarification on some issues and provided experience and advice. Topics discussed included the following:

<u>Long-term cultural strategy</u>

- The first question concerned the legacy of Bodø 2024. In particular, the Panel asked who is in charge of legacy, considering the decision to dismantle the ECoC delivery organisation rapidly after the ECoC year, and what projects may continue beyond the title-year.

The team stressed that dismantling the ECoC delivery organisation was a political decision that had been made since the very beginning.

The development of the legacy plans will be under the responsibility of the Head of Culture within the City administration, although a smooth transition could be envisaged as the key Managers of the ECoC organisation will stay in place until December 2025.

The priority for the ECoC team is to ensure the continuity of the projects for a few more years. Most of the projects are expected to continue after 2024: e.g. the new youth festival Hjertebank is supported by sponsors for an additional two-year period, while a number of large-scale cultural projects are financially sustainable. Generally speaking, the capacity-building programme was successful in upgrading the skills of the regional cultural operators, who are now able to submit projects to EU and other international or national funding programmes.

The Mayor added that the focus is now placed on delivering a successful year. There are some plans for the future, to make Bodø and the region more attractive.

- The Panel asked Bodø 2024 about their idea of a successful ECoC from a European perspective.

The team replied that there are different ways to measure such success. Under the technical angle, success is ensured by the capacity to raise all the funds needed, to manage risks and to prevent cancellations of events. On a European level, the intent is to show the attractiveness of Bodø and its region also outside the midnight sun period: a place to travel to, study in, and work in, with a rich cultural agenda (not necessarily large-scale events) throughout the year. For the Mayor, success can be measured by the growing number of new residents realising this is a region to take seriously.

- The Panel inquired about the baseline data collected so far, specifically about their quality and their coverage of the key topical dimensions of their evaluation. Furthermore, more details were asked on the timeline concerning the release of evaluation reports and their dissemination. Finally, the Panel wanted to know who will ensure the connection between the evaluation results and the legacy plan.

The independent evaluator stressed that they were working on the second version of the baseline data and were planning to share these results with the reference group of stakeholders in December 2023. These data are also based on the "People's Jury" that decided to contribute to monitoring during a period of three years (2023 to 2025).

Generally speaking, the evaluator was satisfied regarding the quality of the collected data and confident that this baseline will enable them to make comparisons and to observe the changes that emerged over the years.

The baseline report is expected to be published in January 2024, before the opening of the year. A series of thematic reports are planned to be disseminated to the public throughout the year, while the final and major report will be released at the end of 2025. There is close connection with stakeholders that are enabled to easily visualise the ongoing monitoring results through a dashboard developed on the basis of the experiences of Leeds and Valletta.

As to legacy, the evaluators are preparing a monitoring toolkit that can be integrated into the strategic plan of the City of Bodø and used as an ECoC legacy. Finally, they trust that findings can inform the drafting of the legacy plan.

Cultural and artistic content

- The Panel investigated the rationale that induced the Bodø 2024 team to nearly double the number of the expected events in 2024, in spite of high inflation and the decrease in the programme budget by 1 million euro. In particular, the Panel asked which projects had incurred budget cuts and whether, in general terms, this impacted the artistic quality or international cooperation of the programme.

The team explained that they had to face a trade-off between quantity and quality. It was crucial for them to engage the large number of people who replied to their specific calls, a number that was much higher than expected, considering the initial widespread scepticism. Thus, they chose the option to "let a thousand flowers bloom", so as to enhance the collective ownership of Bodø2024. The local organisations were basically able to register their own activities into the ECoC calendar as long as there was an 'extraordinary aspect' involved and the proposal was coherent with the ECoC concept. However, it was highlighted that not all of these projects are financed by Bodø 2024. For instance, some additional large-scale projects, such as Marcialonga, are not funded under the ECoC budget. On the other hand, this decision to facilitate a collective movement towards culture resulted in reducing the budget of the big events. For instance, the cost of the opening ceremony was reduced from 1.5 to 1.2 million euro.

- About the impact and possible legacy of the individual projects, the Panel asked which Bodø 2024 project is expected to be best remembered in Europe and which project could make the most important change for the inhabitants of Nordland.

According to the team, the opening ceremony will be the most extraordinary moment to lure the European attention and will probably be best remembered both locally and internationally. The most important change for the people in Bodø and

Nordland will come from the local and international networks spreading from the projects. The Mayor added that the "European cabins of culture" project will be remarkable as well.

- Concerning the opening ceremony, the Panel asked if a plan B had been developed, considering that the report explicitly mentions the risk that a storm could ruin the main event in the harbour.

The team underlined that a plan B of the opening ceremony is fully integrated in the production strategy. Furthermore, it was stressed that the opening ceremony will be produced and digitally streamed by the national broadcaster NRK, with a rehearsal and footage made the day before as a mitigating measure.

<u>European dimension</u>

- The Panel was interested in learning how the ordinary citizens in Bodø – like the taxi driver or the shop assistant – will recognise that Bodø2024 is a European Union project meant to foster common European values and highlight European cultural diversity and what they will learn from European cooperation.

The team mentioned the hospitality project addressed to all the tourism sector workers – shop owners, restaurants and hotel employees, taxi drivers, travel agencies-. Around 20.000 people were involved in 2023 in a series of workshops aimed to make them more aware of what the European Capital of Culture means. To convey the European dimension of Bodø 2024 was a challenging task, considering that Norway is not part of the European Union, but the team reported that in the end people deeply understood the importance of cooperation with Europe.

Furthermore, the team explained their strategy to combine the branding of Bodø and "Bodø 2024" with a rich cultural agenda, so that everyone in the city is aware of the European Capital of Culture. On the other hand, the 'Arts and Democracy' and 'My European Story' projects give a constant focus on the importance of international cooperation.

- The Panel asked about the number of international artists, cultural organisations and networks involved in the cultural programme and if these international partners correspond to those indicated in the bid book.

The team stressed that about 50 international partnerships were created. They were in contact with all the partners listed in the bid book and, as a result of this careful follow-up, 90% of them were involved in the programme that will be ultimately delivered in 2024. In some cases, the international organisations are involved in different projects than what was originally planned.

Opening up to cultural operators across the region has produced a higher number of international connections, in the sense that they have activated their own connections to make projects happen with their own funding. This is the case, for instance, of a group of Jazz musicians from the South Region that collaborated with Roma musicians coming from Bulgaria. A clearer picture about international collaborations will emerge at the end of 2025 with the finalisation of the evaluation project. The team is confident that the number of international partners will be higher than originally envisioned.

- The Panel asked to mention a project with a strong European dimension that will stand out and be remembered long after the ECoC year in Bodø and Europe.

According to the team, the 'Midsummer' event produced by Walk the Plank will inspire more memories, as it will involve in the production a large number of people. Initiatives of this kind will stand out, as they give people the opportunity to create culture for their cities and to approach arts from a community-building perspective.

- In relation to the shared topic of environmental sustainability, the Panel asked if some cooperation had been developed with other ECoCs (notably with Tartu 2024).

The team stressed that the three ECoCs 2024 are very keen on sustainability issues. Bodø 2024 did not adopt the Tartu guidelines on environmental-friendly events, but they share the same values and principles. For instance, the three ECoCs 2024 decided to co-organise just one meeting of the ECoC family so as to reduce flights and carbon footprint. Likewise, the choice to have a limited number of large-scale events is also aimed to reduce the related environmental impacts. More generally, a common issue that was debated among the ECoCs and that is closely related to sustainability is how to produce culture that is not "event-dependent".

<u>Outreach</u>

- Concerning one of the pillars of the Bodø programme, the Panel was interested in knowing if there are some plans to support the initiatives of young people that will grow up in 2024 under yoUNG2024 or to keep the Youth Council after the title-year.

The team replied that at present there are no plans for the Youth Council itself and for the flagship project. The legacy is a political issue that will be dealt with in 2025. Generally speaking, they worked on sustainability by putting a priority on the capacity-building process, creating "event-makers" and not only events. The ultimate objective for this is that these people will work into existing structures.

- With reference to the target objectives that estimate the growth of the audience by 30% and even by 40% among hard-to-reach groups, the Panel was interested in getting more details on the practices deployed to attain these targets and on the relevant monitoring tools.

The team stated that they are in the position to reach these target objectives. Their long-term strategy relies on the creation of affordable and accessible cultural offerings and on the priority given to small events.

The attainment of these targets will be monitored through a database of all 2024 programme events, which will register attendees, providing a tool for the producers to understand their audience and to improve their capacity to attract minorities.

In addition, the People's jury is another monitoring tool, as it is made up of 750 people who do not fit into the ordinary group of culturally active groups. It was not easy to involve representatives from the young and elderly; they are still working on ensuring further participation of these two groups, for example by launching a specific social media campaign targeting youth.

- The Panel investigated the plans to live broadcast or stream some of the events so that interested audiences who are unable to come to Bodø can follow them virtually.

The team explained that the largest events will be digitally available, either through professional TV productions or streaming. They underscored that after the Covid pandemic, there was a shift from pure digital events to hybrid events.

<u>Management</u>

- As to communication and marketing strategy, the Panel asked if the segmentation of the possible target groups carried out with reference to the Norwegian context was extended also to international level so as to pinpoint the different profiles of the potential wider European and international audiences.

The team replied that they did not work on the segmentation of the potential international audience as they rely on the cooperation with 'Visit Bodø' and on their international targeting groups. In addition, they are using Meta algorithms to reach the people interested in travelling and culture.

- Concerning the risk management, the Panel enquired about the contingency plan to adopt in case one or more key staff members could not work during the year.

The team replied that their working pattern does not rely on a single person. It is based on the pooling of all the information through frequent meetings and through

a knowledge platform. They already experienced such a situation and addressed it successfully.

- The Panel asked about the forecast of visitor numbers during the title year and the European markets targeted for the communication and marketing strategy.

The team explained that they have not yet succeeded in setting a target number of visitors for the year, but they calculate the maximum capacity for each event at 15-20.000 people. In this sense, they expect 20.000 visitors for the opening ceremony if the weather forecast is positive, while the rest of the visitors will depend on the constant flow of events throughout the year. In summer, nearly everything is fully booked so their endeavour is to attract people in the rest of the year. They are in the position to monitor the flows of international and national visitors through geo-data from telecom.

As to their communication campaign, their targeted countries are Germany, The Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Italy and France.

Capacity to deliver

- The Panel thanked the team for their honest approach in acknowledging that the ECoC project faced a lot of turbulence and that there was pressure to change the direction and priorities of the ECoC. The Panel was interested to know about the general perception of the project now two months ahead of the opening and eventually how the team was able to change it.

The team acknowledged that they "turned the tides". At present, the general perception of the project is very positive, as they could observe from the positive tone of the media and social media after the presentation of the programme on 3 November. They expected some turbulence, but they received only positive feedback. Generally speaking, people are aware that something unique is happening in Norway. At media level, a widespread comment is that the ECoC project will enable it to fill the gaps in the cultural ecology looking for new solutions and resources.

- With reference to the previous question, the Panel asked for further details about the greatest communication challenge and the strategy adopted to cope with it.

According to the team, the biggest challenge was to manage expectations about the programme. People were expecting large-scale events, like mass concerts, and so a lot of time and energy was spent to explain what Bodø 2024 really is about. At the end, the 1.000 events included in the programme are their main stars.

- Delivering an ECoC programme is a mammoth task with stressful moments that can lead to conflicts within the team and challenging working relationships. The Panel investigated the initiatives taken to preserve the well-being of the team and a safe and pleasant working environment.

The team highlighted that it was important to remind themselves that the 4-year preparation process is like a marathon. Their attitude was to accept criticism, to embrace small successes along the way and to pursue the ultimate objective to reach a wide audience. Under the organisational angle, they had weekly team meetings to deeply discuss all the issues and, according to the Scandinavian approach, they made sure that the team did not overwork.

- Finally, the Panel enquired about the major lessons learnt in this 4-year journey to share with other ECoCs.

The team indicated three main lessons: do not start with a small team; to have a clearer timeline, so as to better manage expectations; to start the monitoring and evaluation activities earlier, as the identification of the proper indicators and of the available data sources is very time-demanding.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Panel appreciates and congratulates Bodø 2024 for the serious commitment and significant advancement made since the last report to ensure the successful delivery of the ECoC year. To support the work for the coming months, the Panel wishes to make the following recommendations:

- To devote specific resources and time to develop a legacy plan starting from next year. A dedicated interdisciplinary group composed of experts from the ECoC organisation, the City of Bodø and eventually the Nordland Region could be the best option to pinpoint the successful projects and/or results to be bolstered after 2024, to investigate on the eventual need of public sector intervention to accompany them and to explore the best legacy legal organisation that can keep Bodø 2024 track record;
- To link the evaluation process and the legacy plan drafting, so that findings can support the planning work;
- To put more emphasis on the international dimension of the marketing and communication plan, by boosting the visibility of the projects that could attract a European audience.

* * * *

Based on the report submitted by Bodø 2024 as well as the hearing with the Bodø 2024 team, the Panel considers that the conditions regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize, as specified in Article 14 of Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, are met. Consequently, the Panel is pleased to propose to the European Commission that Bodø receives the Melina Mercouri prize.

The Panel would like to remind Bodø 2024 that, in line with Article 14, its marketing and communication strategy and its communication material have to clearly reflect the fact that the European Capital of Culture is a Union action, as well as that, in line with Article 16 of the same Decision, it will have to draw up its own evaluation report of the results of its ECoC year and transmit it to the European Commission by 31 December 2025.

The Panel would like to thank Bodø 2024 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to a successful realisation of Bodø European Capital of Culture project in 2024.

(Signed) all attending Panel's members