

Designation of
a European Capital of Culture
for 2015 in the Czech Republic

Selection Panel
Pre-selection report

Prague, 7th-8th December 2009

Introduction

In accordance with the Annex of the Decision 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019 (hereinafter referred as "the Decision"), the Czech Republic is entitled to host a European Capital of Culture in 2015. The managing authority of the ECOC competition in the Czech Republic is the Ministry of Culture, the Independent Department of European Union. The procedure for implementing this Decision in the Czech Republic was set out in the Rules of procedure adopted by the Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic in January 2009.

In accordance with the Decision and the Rules of procedure, the Ministry is responsible for the organisation of the national competition, designation of national experts, organisation of the pre-selection and selection meetings, visits to the cities and it shall also liaise with the European Commission when necessary.

The selection panel was appointed by the Ministerial Decree issued in September 2009.

According to article 7 of the Decision establishing the first phase of the selection called "Pre-selection", a selection panel must examine the applications in accordance with the criteria set out in article 4 herein, agree on a shortlist of cities to be examined in greater depth and produce a report.

The following cities submitted an application for the title of European Capital of Culture for the year 2015 within a fixed deadline (31st October 2009):

Hradec Králové,

Ostrava,

Plzeň.

The applications (in English and Czech) were forwarded to the members of the panel immediately after the closing date for further examination. The Czech Ministry of Culture invited the panel to a pre-selection meeting, which was held in Prague on 7 and 8 December 2009. Twelve members of the Selection Panel were present - 6 members nominated by the European Institutions (1 member was absent, namely Jyrki Myllyvirta) and 6 members nominated by the Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic.

In accordance with article 6 of the Decision, the panel designated Sir Robert Scott as the Chairperson and Mr Roman Bělor as the Vice-Chairperson. At the same time, Ms Olga Poivre d'Arvor was appointed as the rapporteur for the meeting.

The received applications were examined thoroughly and it was clear to the panel that a considerable effort had been made by the authors to stick to the objectives of the event and the criteria for the cultural programme fixed by Article 4 of the Decision, i.e. the „European Dimension“ and “City and

Citizens". The cities were all represented at the highest level by their Mayor or Deputy-Mayor and experts from the organising committees appointed by the cities took part at the meeting.

1 hour and 15 minutes was dedicated to each city – 30 minutes for the presentation and 45 minutes for questions and answers. The panel was pleased to note interest and enthusiasm of all three cities to host the event.

Hradec Králové

The panel recognized the historical and cultural importance of the city, a good infrastructure and vibrant cultural life. It congratulated the representatives of the city on the efforts to make the city a friendly place to live and work. However, the panel saw that the process of preparing ECOC application had started late and the genuine involvement of the citizens in the public discussion was seen to be lacking. This was partly due to the fact that the city had never participated in such contest.

The panel observed that the project contained some interesting ideas as far as the impact on the future of the city's cultural life was concerned in order to revitalise it and get rid of the „civil servants' city“ label. The authors of the project aimed to get the citizens out of their homes within the specific programmes oriented towards children and seniors. However, these ideas did not seem to be fully thought through. The panel observed that more than 10% of the city budget is dedicated to culture, which seemed to be very promising for the fulfilment of the task. Other positive aspects were noticed such as the experience of the city with Structural Funds and other European funds, participation of volunteers in the project since it had been launched, the involvement of the independent sector and the universities. On the other hand, it was observed that the „European dimension“ part of the project showed serious weakness as the criterion did not seem to be well understood. Also the structure of the communication of the project towards Europe and beyond was not sufficiently worked out.

Conclusions of the panel

- The city has great potential but unfortunately it is not sufficiently explained in either the written or oral presentation of the project.
- The panel noticed that no real substance on developing the concept was presented.
- The panel agreed that incomplete answers were given to the questions during the discussion.
- A misunderstanding was noticed as far as the independent cultural sector is concerned.
- A strong potential of the city – students – was not taken sufficiently into account.

- Some crucial parts of the presentation, such as the „European dimension“, the budget and the communication strategy, were weak.
- The panel noticed that the concept of Hradec Králové, which could have served as a model to other smaller European cities, was not sufficiently explored.
- The panel expressed its disappointment with the quality of the submitted application in comparison with the requirements for such a bid (related to the criteria for the event) as well as the oral and audiovisual presentation.

Ostrava

Ostrava was introduced as the industrial, cultural and administrative capital of its region and the 2nd city of the Czech Republic which experienced an extraordinary industrial boom between the 1930's and 1940's. The strong impact of the introduction of major industries had created a cosmopolitan society. However, there has been no real continuity in the city development and this has led to the creation of a specific culture, very different from other Czech cities. This was enhanced during the oral presentation of the project by the city representatives. The delegation specified that the projects and partners for the event would be selected through an open call at international scale. The panel expressed its positive feeling on the fact that the elaboration of the project represented a real challenge for the city which is currently going through a huge cultural transformation process. The representatives of the city expressed their deep conviction that if the city passes to the 2nd round, the required funding can be assured as the city's ambition is to bring the city to a genuinely international cultural level. Currently, the city devotes 9% of the overall budget to culture. The members of the panel appreciated the city's ideas and suggestions about the „message“ to be delivered to other European cities and to Europe as a whole – Ostrava wants to become a real multicultural centre by preserving national culture, respecting basic values and involving all members of its population such as young people, seniors and people with disabilities.

Conclusions of the panel

- The panel was impressed by the will and enthusiasm of the city for the project and for implementing an innovative European Capital of Culture project. Some other very positive points were noticed such as the intention of the city to attract locals and foreigners and the professional level of the presentation - both written and oral.
- The city has potential and there is a genuine local interest in the project. The presentation and the questions and answers part were fruitful and interesting.

- However, the members of the panel observed the project was still "work in progress" and noticed many unclear items, especially in the financial analysis. Some parts of the budget are not clear and, in particular, the cultural programme budget is inadequate.
- The panel questioned the structure of the budget when there is a significant disproportion between the programme and organisational costs and the investment costs. The panel noticed that the planned programme costs are currently the lowest in the history of the ECOC competition (4,8 million euro). There will need to be a major rethinking of the whole cultural programme budget.
- The „multiculturalism“ of the city and the “European dimension“ of the project should also be demonstrated more deeply and precisely.
- The „prestige of the region“ expressed in the project must be taken into account more widely in all its parts.
- The panel noticed a lack of a City cultural policy. The panel would expect this part of the project to be more fully worked out.
- The panel was not certain that Ostrava could be compared to other European industrial cities. This means that Ostrava needs to consider further the "European dimension".
 - Some doubts were also expressed regarding the „Black Meadow“ plan, which is a major item on the list of the projects. This project is very ambitious and requires serious funding. As far as the comparison of the „Black Meadow project“ to other European clusters is concerned, the members of the panel expressed doubts about the possibility to generalise these findings, as it is well known that not all such development efforts have been successful.

Plzeň

The members of the panel noticed that the capital of West Bohemia has a long history and has a very rich cultural and industrial past. It is also a student city which represents a real potential for the development of the European dimension of its cultural life. Its cultural infrastructure, proximity to Germany, long-term relationship and cultural contacts with other European cities represent a good starting point. The presentation was performed in an unusual, very creative and interesting way. The delegation specified that the projects for the event would be selected through an open call at international level and would be very demanding in terms of quality. As far as the quality of the project and the participation on the European level is concerned, the representatives of the City reassured the panel that there is a plan to enlarge the organization team by the artists and the artistic board. The panel regarded this undertaking as crucial and would like to see evidence of the enlargement. The Mayor of Plzeň, present at the presentation will not be there in 2015 but he assured the audience that the programme

has been already approved by the City Council; therefore a strong financial support has been agreed for the project.

Some questions about the development of longer term projects were raised in the discussion. Also some concerns about the evaluation were expressed. The panel considered that the „European dimension“ was not too clear or evident in the project and that further efforts should be made in the matter.

Comments and conclusions of the panel

- The panel congratulated the city for a very original presentation and noticed that the city shows a strong will and enthusiasm to become the European Capital of Culture. It has good regional ties which means that it should be able to count on a lot of help.
- However, the programme of the project is less clear and the panel expressed doubts about its quality. This part of the project should be elaborated and developed in more detail. In addition, both the European and overall vision of the bid should be more worked out and better defined.
- The panel expressed the feeling that the team was not consistently strong and its tasks had to be developed in more detail. The team needs to grow.
- The members of the panel recommended that a stronger focus should be put on evaluation and there was a need for a more clearly defined communication strategy.
- The team must both develop and clarify the "European dimension". Also more details of the funding projections were needed (sources and amounts).
- The members of the panel agreed that the bid provides a solid and good basis but that there was a need to strengthen and develop all parts of it.

General conclusions

After the general final discussion of panel, it was recommended that there were 2 cities which best met the objectives of the process and the criteria stipulated by the Decision; It was agreed unanimously that Ostrava and Plzeň should be shortlisted. These two cities are expected to complete their applications further on the basis of the criteria and objectives required for the event, and in particular to stick to the panel's recommendations mentioned above.

Following its deliberations, the panel submitted the shortlist of cities to the Czech Ministry of Culture and the Chair with Vice-chair solemnly announced the results to the participating cities and the press immediately after the meeting.

It was stated that the City of Hradec Králové, although it presented an interesting project, was not ready for the challenge and also did not fully

respond to the criteria and requirements for the event. However, the panel believes that the work carried out by Hradec Králové can be put to good use to give impetus to its cultural life and therefore should not be lost.

To obtain more complete information for the final selection process, the Chair of the panel would like to visit the shortlisted cities (after the deadline for submitting the final bids, to be fixed by the Ministry of Culture), accompanied by a delegation composed of Vice-chair, rapporteur and one additional member of the panel. In line with the preliminary agreement of the panel, the visits shall take place on 6 and 7 September 2010 and the final selection meeting will be held on 8 September 2010.

Prague, 10th December 2009

The selection panel:

Sir Robert Scott, chairman	signed
Roman Bělor, vice-chairman	signed
Olga Poivre d'Arvor, rapporteur	signed
Eliška Fučíková	signed
Manfred Gaulhofer	signed
Danuta Glondys	signed
Jaroslav Kořán	signed
Michal Lukeš	signed
Mary Mac Carthy	signed
Maria Michailidou	signed
Pavla Petrová	signed
Andreas Wiesand	signed