



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2028 in the Czech Republic

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The Expert Panel's report
Pre-selection stage

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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the pre-selection phase of the competition for the European Capital of Culture in 2028 in the Czech Republic. The competition is a European Union initiative, which started in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” has previously been awarded to two cities in the Czech Republic, namely Prague in 2000 and Pilsen in 2015.

The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (the “Ministry”), acts as the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16th April 2014 (the “Decision”) and by the “Rules of Procedure – Competition for the European Capital of Culture 2028 in the Czech Republic” published by the Ministry on its website. Four applications were submitted by the closing date of 1st September 2022 by: Brno, Broumov, Budweis, and Liberec.

Panel meeting

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process, in line with Article 2 of the Rules. The European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions) appointed ten members of this panel, while the Ministry appointed two members. One panel member could not attend the meeting, due to another commitment. Else Christensen-Redzepovic was elected as a chair and Petr Suska as a vice chair of the panel.

All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and submitted it to the Ministry ahead of the pre-selection hearings. Representatives of the Ministry and of the European Commission attended the meeting as observers. The observers took no part in the panel’s deliberations or decision.

The competition takes place in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. At the pre-selection hearings on 12-13th October 2022, each candidate city, in alphabetical order, presented its case in 45 minutes and answered questions from the panel during a 45 minutes period.

At the live press meeting on 14th October 2022, the chair of the panel announced the panel’s recommendation that the Ministry invites the following cities to submit revised bids for the final selection (in alphabetical order):

Broumov and Budweis

Next steps

The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic will arrange for the formal approval of the shortlist based on the recommendations included in this report (Article 8 of the Decision). It will then issue an invitation to the cities named on the approved shortlist to submit the revised applications for the final selection. The shortlisted cities are encouraged to take into account

the panel's assessments and recommendations in this report. The deadline for the submission of revised applications will be specified simultaneously to the two cities by the Ministry. The final selection meeting is scheduled to take place in Prague in late June 2023 (the precise date will be communicated by the Ministry). Two to four members of the panel will pay a one-day visit to the shortlisted cities just before the final selection meeting, in order to obtain more background information on the respective bids. Representatives of the European Commission and of the Ministry will accompany the panel members as observers.

Thanks

The panel members would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in this pre-selection phase of the competition. In particular, the panel noted that all four cities have used the opportunity of the bidding process to reinforce their cultural strategies as well as the role of culture and Europe in their overall social-economic development. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECoC competition.

One of the most important features in Decision 445/2014/EU, governing the ECoC action from the 2020 titles on, is the requirement that cities have a formal and explicit cultural strategy. This requirement is to ensure that the ECoC is grounded in a medium-term transformation of the city and its cultural life.

The panel encourages all four candidate cities (including the two that are not recommended for pre-selection) to continue with the development and implementation of their respective cultural strategies, using the positive momentum of the bidding process. The panel would like to thank all four candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids, the European Commission for its advice and the Ministry for its administration, interpreters and technical team.

Assessments of the candidates

In its assessment of the candidates, the panel noted the general and specific objectives in Article 2 of the Decision and the requirement for the application of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2028 in the Czech Republic to be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension created specifically for the title (Article 4). The panel assessed each bid against the six criteria outlined in Article 5 of the Decision:

- Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city,
- Cultural and artistic content,
- European dimension,
- Outreach,
- Management,
- Capacity to deliver.

In the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their findings during the pre-selection phase.

The panel noted that all candidate cities had underdeveloped European dimension in their bid. The European dimension is the *raison d'être* of a European Capital of Culture and must be at the heart of a bid.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the bid books, the city's presentation and Q&A sessions during the pre-selection meeting. A city's history, its recent and current policies and its cultural offer may form a basis for the proposed programme, but they are not criteria in the selection process.

In reference to successful cities, specific and common recommendations are made, in order to assist them in the preparation of their final bid books.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the panel that both cities progressing to the second stage of the bidding process include the following in their bid books (in line with the final selection questionnaire included in the call published by the Ministry):

- Clear commitment of all candidacy partners and commitments demonstrated in projects and budget lines;
- Clear project outlines, with named and committed local, national, EU and other international project partners;
- Strong European dimension throughout the bid;
- Clear and developed outreach models within the cultural programme;
- Clear organisational structure including clear decision-making processes;
- Clear budget breakdowns with clarity between operational and capital spend.

It is also the recommendation of the panel that all those attending the presentation be active participants in either the presentation and/or subsequent questions and answers session. A further recommendation for presentations is to respect a private sphere between the presentation team and the panel. The panel underlines the prohibition of photos, video or sound recordings during deliberations and inside the deliberation room while the panel is still present.

BRNO

The philosophy underpinning the bid of Brno is “inclusive degrowth” that intends to transform Brno into a people-centred city that “does not want to grow quantitatively but qualitatively” by supporting the enrichment of its social and cultural capital. Great emphasis is placed on dialogue and the necessity to provide a safe space for everyone. The concept of the programme is “*Immersive city: May Brno be with you*”, which is an invitation to enter the city and live it in an immersive way.

The bid was put forward by the City of Brno in agreement with the South Moravian Region.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- Brno Strategy for Cultural and Creative Industries was approved in 2018. It spans a large period (2018-2050) and is divided into action plans. The strategy was built through a wide participatory process that resulted into the creation of a dialogue platform between the city's department of culture and the creative scene (Brno Cultural Forum), which the panel sees as a useful tool.
- One of the crucial challenges of the strategy is to reinforce the independent scene, which is so far underfinanced, by devising innovative policy tools and by reallocating the City's cultural budget.
- The bid underlines that the ECoC is included in this strategy, but without sufficiently specifying the connections between these two at this stage.
- The impacts are based on the strategy of "inclusive degrowth", which is also the inspiring concept of the ECoC bid. According to the panel, this concept – in particular the notion of degrowth – remains very vague in the bid and would need an accurate conceptualisation with scientific references. The concept might be interesting *per se*, in its intention to bolster the social and cultural capital of the city and its region, but it must be further clarified and developed so as to include clear examples of relevant strategic actions to be implemented or the long-term cultural, social and economic impacts that it could engender.
- The different needs of the creative and cultural sectors are well identified, which the panel recognises as a sound basis for taking action; yet, the capacity-building programme is underdeveloped at this stage.
- Although the Strategy is focussed on the city of Brno, a number of important actions are in place to involve the South Moravian Region, such as for example the mapping of regional cultural and creative sectors or the creation of a regional platform to boost the interaction of arts, crafts, education and entrepreneurship (Kumst). This is a welcomed endeavour.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluating require further elaboration, especially in terms of definition of desired impacts that are consistent with the "degrowth vision" and of identification of clear indicators relevant to the strategy and ECoC programme. In addition, it is unclear whether the University is involved in these activities.
- The panel appreciates the importance attached to data and the intention of creating a Central Cultural Data Storage; yet, greater clarity is needed as to how this Centre may work and its reference points.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The artistic vision of the programme is based on the notion of “inclusive degrowth”, aimed to transform “Brno into a laboratory for relationship and interrelationship”. The concept of the programme is “*Immersive city: May Brno be with you*” that leads to four thematic lines: 1) *Trust in fate*, 2) *A safe space to thrive*, 3) *Brno to go* and 4) *Rich local layers*.
- The programme reflects the witty and playful approach that characterises the bid book; however, the connection between the concept of the programme and its inspiring vision is elusive and not easy to convey.
- Although the programme outlines a number of interesting and experimental projects, overall it lacks a cohesive narrative with a European resonance. More specifically, the concept of immersive city is not specific to the place and could be applied to any city, while the bulk of the programme is essentially focussed on the city needs.
- The programme also contains some playful and experimental projects, such as the *Opening ceremony*, which rethinks the format of the Fair as a social experiment putting together arts, design, crafts and participatory culture. Also, the *Shamans and Shamanesses* project, the *Central European Institute of Exhibition Management* or the *štatlování festivities* have an imaginative potential to be further explored.
- The panel appreciates the idea to set up a special curatorial team of young people to create a specific programme for young people.
- It appears that the programme was developed through a strong involvement of the local cultural sector including the independent scene, which is considered as a positive element.

European dimension:

- There is a welcome intention to increase the exposure of Brno in Europe (considered so far “an invisible city”) and to present the city's contribution to European cultural diversity. However, the philosophy (around the notion of “inclusive degrowth”) that underpins the programme and the relevant challenges – though they have potentially a European relevance – have not been fully explored, which the panel sees as a major missed opportunity. Likewise, most of the themes addressed in the projects included in the bid are presented in a way that appears more relevant to Brno than to other European cities facing similar challenges.
- The strategy for international cooperation has been focussed essentially on Central and Northern European cities and on reinforcing cooperation with Brno twin cities; the enlargement of the spectrum of cooperation with cities, cultural organisations and artists also from other regions of Europe appears not to have been developed widely.

- There is an appreciated intent to reflect on shared European values, like solidarity, as signalled by the work conducted with Ukrainian refugees and cultural institutions. The design of the Kharkov architectural manual is a good European practice.
- The accurate selection of a number of artists that could be recruited to attract an international audience is valued as well by the panel.

Outreach:

- Inclusiveness is a clear-cut objective of the bid and this is reflected in the outreach strategy, which is well presented. Great care is taken to ensure the involvement of the local population in the process, with particular attention to the persons who do not normally participate in cultural activities, like those living in the peripheral suburbs.
- The bid provides an important education programme, designed according to the needs of the schools. It presents persuasive examples that can trigger the active engagement of schools in the bid activities and produce stimulating connections between education and culture.
- There is a good intention to ensure that the programme is laid out so as to embrace a cross-diverse social spectrum and open up to communities that normally live in bubbles, as evidenced by the involvement of the expats community, the Ukrainian refugees and the different city neighbourhoods.

Management:

- The bid can rely on a solid operational budget amounting to € 35 million. The relatively high contribution of the City (€8 million, covering 24% of the budget) is seen by the panel as evidence of a strong commitment from the City but also as a realistic one (when compared with the very high yearly municipal budget allocated to culture). It was approved in June 2022 and is to be secured in case of a successful bid. The contribution from the South Moravian Region covering 5% of the budget is to be approved.
- At € 20 million (and just under 60% of the overall operational budget), the contribution expected from the State is high, but in line with the amount agreed by the bidding cities in their joint letter to the Ministry of Culture (a maximum of € 25 million, not exceeding 60% of the non-investment costs of the project).
- The City's culture budget is sound and high, as proven by the fact that Brno has allegedly the highest proportion of budget allocated to culture among Czech cities.
- With 60% of the budget allocated for the programme, 18% for advertising and marketing, and a high 22% for staff and administration, the budget is realistic. However, the panel raises concerns about the low level of budget allocated for programming.

- The panel was looking for more evidence of the independence of the evaluation team in the delivery structure. The inclusion of the artists in the evaluation process is welcomed, but the involvement of the University or other independent research centre should guarantee an objective assessment of the results and impacts.
- In the marketing and communication strategy, great attention has been paid to the design of innovative and participatory communication tools, although the emphasis is more placed on the country and on neighbouring cities, than on a wider international audience.

Capacity to deliver:

- The City Council strongly supports the candidacy: a strategic cultural department in the municipality and an inter-institutional working group have been created to support the bidding for the ECoC title along with the preparation of the CCI Strategy; the candidacy is upheld also by the South Moravian Region that signed a “Memorandum of cooperation and support of the candidacy” in summer 2022.
- Brno has an adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme. Cultural infrastructure is concentrated in the city centre, but there are plans for a more even distribution of venues throughout the city; priority will be given to the re-use and refurbishment of existing spaces.
- The city can count on a well-developed transport system and on a good and diversified absorption capacity in terms of tourists’ accommodation. Furthermore, Brno has a good experience in hosting large events.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Brno does not proceed to the final selection phase.

Although the philosophical theory that inspires the bid could be thought provoking and could be interesting in its intention to enhance the social capital of the city, it remains too vague at this stage, while its significance and EU potential resonance have not been sufficiently explored.

The programme reflects the witty and playful approach that characterises the bid book; it displays a number of experimental and interesting projects that can trigger the active participation of diverse social groups and a strong engagement of schools; yet, the programme is perceived as being more focussed on the city’s specific needs.

The panel highlights the importance of the long-term strategy being in place and the willingness of the City to go ahead independently from the outcome of the ECoC competition. The panel strongly recommends the city to consolidate its endeavours to strengthen the great potential of its cultural and creative sectors (including the gaming industry) in an international cooperation setting. In particular, the panel encourages exploring the connections between education and culture, strengthening the independent cultural scene, which played an

important role in the bidding phase and continuing the extensive bottom-up work. The Cultural Forum designed to be a dialogue platform is an interesting basis for ensuring layered voices in the development and implementation of the Strategy.

BROUMOV

The concept of the candidacy is “*Creative pilgrimage*”, which stems from the rituals and tradition of the local Benedictine monastery. The programme is designed as a call for action to creative pilgrims from all the regions to take part in a cultural journey through land, time and mind, and to turn “the European public space into a place of well-being and good neighbourhood relationships”. The candidacy put forward by the “small small” (sic) European city of Broumov intends to be a source of experimentation for European small cities in remote and rural areas.

Broumov intends to involve and is strongly supported by the Region of Hradec Králové. The bid is also to be seen as a cross-border endeavour with the neighbouring Polish region.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The Broumov Cultural Strategy 2022-2032 is the first culture-driven plan in the region, apart from that approved by the region’s capital city. It was drafted as part of a participatory approach and is connected to the regional programmes on culture, tourism and creative industries.
- There is a clear intersection between the goals of the cultural strategy and the ECoC programme, which the panel sees as a precondition to ensure relevance and legacy of the ECoC project; the design of an all-embracing capacity-building programme, also addressed to the bureaucrats, is valued as well.
- The strategy is complemented with an adequately detailed evaluation plan at this stage.
- The Region strongly supports the bid, not only in financial terms, but also in the intention to reinforce the monitoring capacity of the city, above all in the area of data collection and storage.
- The partnership with the neighbouring Polish region is to be better clarified. The cross-border cooperation is welcome, but the name and role of the Polish partners should be clearly defined.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The concept of Creative pilgrimage is quite unique and stands out in terms of the local context in Broumov, the inbuilt connection with natural landscapes and the deep-rooted Benedictine tradition. Further, the concept has a strong European resonance, in its

intention to rethink the idea of pilgrimage of the 21st century as a healing movement of the rural areas.

- The programme is well laid out and easy to communicate, with a strong coherence between the overarching theme of Creative Pilgrimage, the three thematic strands (“*The healing landscape*”, “*Memories are in the making*” and “*Being the source of creativity and kindness*”) and the projects included in the bid book. Each strand has a flagship and all the projects have identified potential lead organisation, potential local and international partners and a clear timeframe.
- The programme has a good balance between heritage and innovation: the Creative Pilgrim Festival with the idea of co-creating a new form and identity of the pilgrimage itself or the projects aimed to rethink the role of the monasteries and of their rituals according to the needs of our time are very good and telling examples in this direction.
- The panel appreciates the strong involvement of the local cultural and artistic scene in the design of the programme.
- Partnerships with EU and international artists and cultural organisations should be further forged in order to reinforce the artistic component of the programme.
- The programme is quite ambitious, especially concerning the budget. At the final selection stage, the panel would need evidence of the capacity to realise the significant projects listed in the programme in the light of the available financial resources.

European dimension:

- The bid has a solid and genuine European dimension in its concept, relevant themes and corresponding programme.
- The programme is designed as a call for action to be a creative pilgrim and to take part in a cultural journey through land, time and mind. This element has a strong European appeal, as an invitation to collaboratively address a number of issues that are significant under both the European and local perspective such as for instance water retention, lands in between, slow and sustainable tourism, creation of safe spaces for creation.
- There is a genuine quest for international cooperation on the themes raised in the programme; yet, the search for artists and cultural organisations needs to be further developed and extended beyond the neighbouring countries.
- An intense dialogue has been established with French and Portuguese ECoC candidate cities and with Wroclaw2016. The intent is to build significant cooperation projects on key common issues, such as spiritual trails (Braga), walking meditation or music education for disadvantaged families (Ponta Delgada), charter of mountainous

and rural areas (Clermont-Ferrand) or healing school campus (Bourges). This is a welcomed development.

- The digital delivery strategy, aimed to allure and involve European and international audiences, though it is promising, is not well detailed and fully budgeted at this stage. The panel recommends paying great attention to the development of a wide-ranging plan designed to attract the interest and remote engagement of a broad European and international public.

Outreach:

- A comprehensive outreach strategy, articulated around four steps, has been designed and implemented so as to rouse a widespread participation to the bidding process and ensure local ownership.
- A wide range of marginalised and disadvantaged community groups are addressed in the bid book with the help of different methodological approaches that are well described. The engagement of the Roma minority in the co-design of some projects or the involvement of drag performers in an education programme are some of the examples that the panel values. The panel encourages the design of further initiatives (beyond the idea of a “free ticket”) to encourage access to culture for people living on the edge of poverty.
- The bid pays attention to the activation of schools and young people, creating opportunities for international cooperation and mobility. Some schools have already been engaged in the process; an extensive involvement of the schools from the region could provide a larger basis for delivery and experimentation. The challenge of the low level of education in the community could be further developed in the second round.

Management:

- The yearly Broumov budget for culture is quite low (at around € 0,242 million), reflecting the small size of the city, and its share has not increased over the years since 2019.
- The operational budget amounts to € 22,28 million, which the panel considers a reasonable budget to implement an impactful ECoC project. The contribution from the City is very low at only € 0,82 million, reflecting again the small size of the City and its reduced financial capacities. It may also be seen as a risk, in that it represents more than three times the annual cultural budget of the City. It is however supplemented by a reasonable allocation from the Region (covering at this stage 14% of the budget coming from the public purse), which must be guaranteed in the second phase.
- The panel takes note that an important part of the operational budget (corresponding to almost 17% of the total) is to be covered by other public institutions in Poland and the region that intend to co-finance individual projects in the ECoC programme. It is not

clear to what extent this (very high) contribution is secured and will be under the control of the ECoC delivery entity. This must be clarified in the final bid book.

- At € 12,96 million (and 58% of the overall operational budget), the contribution expected from the State is in line with the amount agreed by the bidding cities in their joint letter to the Ministry of Culture (a maximum of € 25 million, not exceeding 60% of the non-investment costs of the project).
- With 66% of the budget allocated for the programme, 14% for advertising and marketing, 16% for staff and administration and 4% for other costs, the budget is realistic and sound. In particular, the panel appreciates the high proportion of the budget allocated to the programming. However, the panel underlines the necessity to indicate clearly the amount allocated to monitoring and evaluation in the “contingency fund”, budgeted with slightly under € 0,9 million.
- The delivery entity (The Endowment Fund Broumov - City of Culture) was already founded in 2020 by the City of Broumov and the Broumov Regional Development Agency. It is not clear if the Regional Administration is part of this entity.
- While the role and functions of the Managing and Creative Directors are clearly presented, further details should be given on the composition and role of the Committee, whose functions seem to overlap those of the supervisory board and of the management team.
- The communication and marketing strategy are well connected to the outreach objectives. A higher emphasis on international media and press is recommended.

Capacity to deliver:

- The City Council and the Hradec Králové Regional Government clearly support the candidacy, as declared respectively in June 2020 and in June 2021. The regional commitment to Broumov 2028 is also evidenced by the funding provided to the bidding process and by the importance attached to the candidacy in the context of the Cultural and Creative Strategy of the Region.
- Broumov intends to rely on some revitalised historical buildings, such as the Monastery, which could serve as a multifunctional space, and on the use of natural and even virtual landscapes. It seems to have the capacity and experience to host large-scale events outdoors (as evidenced by the organisation of festivals hosting up to 35,000 people), while its indoor capacities are limited, which may be problematic during the colder seasons of the year.
- The very low absorption capacity of Broumov in terms of tourists' accommodation could be supplemented by the accommodation provision in the surrounding region within a 45-kilometre distance. However, the transport system connecting these municipalities and villages to Broumov is not developed yet at this stage.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Broumov proceed to the final selection phase.

The bid has a strong concept that is very connected to its place and has at the same time a European resonance. The programme is well laid out, closely linked to the City's Cultural Strategy and it is easy to communicate. It is designed as a call for action to be a creative pilgrim and to take part in a cultural journey to collaboratively address a number of issues that are significant from both the European and local perspectives.

A number of cooperation projects have been designed with ECoC candidate cities, while a more extensive and targeted quest for EU and international cultural partners needs to be developed to highlight the artistic component of the programme.

Furthermore, the panel recommends further development of the strategy aimed to attract and involve a European audience also remotely and digitally, which is a crucial aspect for Broumov candidacy, as well as to budget such a strategy. For the final round of the competition the panel expects the bid to demonstrate more deeply its European dimension, which is the *raison d'être* of a European Capital of Culture and should therefore permeate the whole project.

Another challenge is to envisage a specific mobility system to connect the diffused accommodation facilities to Broumov.

Specific attention should be paid also to the budget so as to comply with the ambitious programme.

BUDWEIS

Under the title “*Creating a (Perma)Culture Environment*”, the programme aims at cultivating an environment where change can thrive. To achieve this goal, the team has devised the concept of CARE, a subtle culture-induced transformation to a Conscious, Accessible, Regenerated and Empowered socio-cultural territory. The candidacy of Budweis is seen as both a city strategic development goal and a grassroots project.

The bid of Budweis is presented in synergy with the South Bohemian Region.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The panel has been impressed by the quantity of research completed by the bidding team, which is a good starting point to build a solid project based on a thorough understanding of the needs and challenges of the various stakeholders concerned. However, it remains unclear what data has been included as a basis into the cultural strategy of the city and the ECoC project.
- The bid very clearly presents how the cultural strategy of the City is directly linked to the vision (Culture as a Care), the permaculture design approach and the projects of

the ECoC programme, which the panel considers as a good way to ensure coherence between the two and a precondition to ensure relevance and legacy of the ECoC project.

- The panel was pleased to see that diverse and relevant capacity building programmes had been developed to reinforce the cultural and creative community in the city.
- The range of the research carried out provides a range of baselines, which the panel sees as a very promising element to better measure progress. The panel, however, was left with the impression that the links between the data and the assessment framework remained unclear, i.e. that indicator / benchmark goals are not yet sufficiently refined. It is therefore important to focus the monitoring and evaluation plan on a clear definition of the overarching goals and impact indicators of the ECoC programme, including the outreach strategy.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The theme and vision of the overall ECoC project around culture and permaculture is quite ambitious and has a strong potential. Inspired by permaculture farming, the Budweis programme is spread over four life phases: from *Sowing and Sprouting*, to *Growth, Harvest and Celebration*, and finally *Regeneration and Dissemination*, which the panel sees as a good strategy to ensure a steady development of the ECoC project and to build ownership among the local stakeholders.
- In line with this concept, the programme is built on four robust pillars – Culture, Art, Research and Education. Finally, the structure of the artistic programme is based on three main lines: *Dreams, Stories, and Mothers*.
- Each of the three programme lines highlights in a clear way flagships, various projects and actions, outcomes, and partners. This easy to read and understand structure is powerful, and is a solid element in the bid.
- There is a well-developed focus on children and young people, as well as on creative place making (in particular through the flagship project *Kulturista*).
- The programme was considered too generic at this stage (“it could work everywhere”) and would therefore benefit from further artistic elaboration to become more convincingly a reflection of the city itself and its agricultural background. The panel recommends reinforcing the artistic component of the programme.
- In addition, the programme needs to be opened to European relevance more broadly. The panel recommends developing the potential challenges with European and global resonance connected with the vision of the bid (permaculture, climate change, connection between culture and farming).

- The programme line “*Mothers*”, though it includes very interesting projects and could be quite relevantly connected with the discussion on feminism at European and world levels, is presented in a somewhat archaic way. It would gain from linking traditional heritage with new approaches in order to send positive messages on gender issues to all generations, in particular the youngsters.
- The audio-visual or cinema sector should be included as well in the digital programme strategy. This would need to be fully developed for the second round.
- The panel appreciates the careful engagement strategy adopted by the bidding team in the design of the cultural programme that resulted in the involvement of 75 experts coming both from city and regional cultural scene and from other sectors. In the final phase, there is a declared will to enlarge this participation with open calls and complementing the working groups with national and international experts. In this context, the involvement of other cultural and artistic players, such as the National agriculture museum could be beneficial to reinforce the artistic component of the programme/for the bid.

European dimension:

- The programme addresses a topic (sustainable agriculture) with a strong European relevance, which is connected to the overall European Union’s Green Deal strategy and the New European Bauhaus (NEB). However, the connections with the NEB are not made explicitly in the bid and could be further explored in the final bid book.
- Almost all programme lines and projects include international partners and international networks/organisations, which the panel views as an excellent starting point to develop further. In the second round, the international strategy should further enlarge its geographic scope beyond the neighbouring countries with international artists and cultural organisations.
- There is a valuable listing of cooperation projects with ECoC cities, based on a careful analysis of the common ground and shared themes.
- There is also a convincing strategy intended to attract foreign artists and cultural organisations (via the ECoC family and international open calls) with the view to enriching the programme qualitatively and quantitatively in a meaningful way. On the other hand, attention should be paid also to the elaboration of a digital delivery programme, able to attract the European and international audience even remotely.

Outreach:

- The panel appreciates that the endeavours outlined are very ambitious, and connected with the cultural strategy, which demonstrates again a very good match between the latter and the ECoC project. There is also a clear schedule of delivery.

- A very comprehensive public engagement exercise has been carried out to prepare the bid, with a clear emphasis on a solid and inclusive research process to capture local expectations, wishes, opinion, etc. in a very crosscutting way.
- Both in the design of the programme and in the outreach strategy, great emphasis has been placed on children and young people, as well as in the engagement of the wide-ranging neighbourhoods of the city. The panel valued these aspects very well.

Management:

- The operational budget is substantial at € 51,45 million and in line with the ambitious programme presented in the bid. The City plans to invest € 20 million to finance Budweis2028, which the panel sees as evidence of a strong commitment from the City, but maybe also as a potential risk in that it represents three times the yearly municipal budget for culture. The City and the Region (€ 6 million) plan both to confirm their respective contributions in Spring 2023.
- At € 20 million (and representing just under 40% of the overall operational budget), the contribution expected from the State is high, but in line with the amount agreed by the bidding cities in their joint letter to the Ministry of Culture (a maximum of € 25 million, not exceeding 60% of the non-investment costs of the project). In terms of percentage, this contribution is even far below the cap decided by the candidates but not confirmed by the State, which the panel sees as a cautious approach.
- With 65% of the budget allocated for the programme, 16% for advertising and marketing, 18% for staff and administration and 1% for a Legacy Fund (percentages obtained without taking into account the amount of the Melina Mercouri Prize), the budget is realistic and sound. In particular, the panel appreciates the high proportion of the budget allocated to the programming. The panel also welcomes the fact that part of the ECoC budget is already oriented towards legacy.
- The fundraising strategy from the private sector is very well developed and entails diverse sources (with at least 20% of this revenue item coming from abroad, which is a very ambitious but also positive target in terms of European aspiration).
- The plan to set up a Legacy Fund is very positive, as it is an expression of a willingness to ensure continuity of some ECoC cultural activities after the title-year.
- The organisational structure of the ECoC programme is well presented so as to ensure an efficient relationship between all the stakeholders involved and the delivery team. There are some interesting aspects such as the intention to include international experts in the delivery team (at least 20%) or to preserve the platform (local ECoC meeting platform) to imply the different stakeholders engaged in the bidding phase also in the implementation process. The role of a Dramaturgical council is welcomed, but its relationship with the Artistic Director should be better clarified in the second round.

- The marketing and communication strategy is based on the experience/event approach. The experiential “2000 places” project seems to be very promising in this sense; yet, the plan, including the digital delivery strategy, needs to be further detailed in the second round.

Capacity to deliver:

- There is strong and broad political support from both the City and the Region.
- The city has important cultural institutions, such as theatres, museums, galleries, etc., which already have developed connections with many international partners. However, the independent, non-institutional cultural scene (organisations, venues, etc.) is not sufficiently represented in the bid book. The panel wishes to see the full scale of cultural operators taking part in delivery of the ECoC programme.
- The city can count on a well-developed transport system and on a good and diversified absorption capacity in terms of tourists’ accommodation. Furthermore, Budweis has a good experience in hosting large events.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Budweis proceed to the final selection phase.

The panel views the concept as strong and relevant locally as well as for Europe and beyond. It however still needs more specific adjustments and refinement to reach the high standards expected from an ECoC programme.

The panel also recommends diversifying the range of partners locally, nationally and internationally. For instance, including the local branch National agriculture museum to the list of stakeholders may prove a good step, as the latter’s sphere of activity corresponds to the overall ambition of the bid.

For the final round of the competition the panel expects the bid to demonstrate more deeply its European dimension, which is the *raison d’être* of a European Capital of Culture and should therefore permeate the whole project. Open calls for projects should be reinforced and the monitoring and evaluation strategy developed further to ensure local and regional ownership and inclusion.

LIBEREC

The bid book’s concept is entitled “*Dialogue*”. The goal is “to keep the dialogue of the people of the Tri-border up-to-date and alive. It is essential for us to stay in constant contact, to talk and to live together. Not side by side”. The overall strategy is based on team play and collaboration, as opposed to the paradigm of rivalry and competition. The bid book starts with an analysis of the city’s contradictions in its introductory part.

Liberec bid includes the Tri-border zone, which is home to nearly 450.000 inhabitants.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The Culture Development Strategy of the city of Liberec for the years 2022–2029 and the ECoC candidacy were approved by the Liberec City Assembly in June 2021, which the panel sees as a sign of strong ownership of the two endeavours by the local authorities.
- The vision of the strategy, based on an excellent analysis of the city's contradictions, is to be fulfilled by activities in five areas: Next Generation, Open Communities, Strong Cultural and Creative Industries, Vibrant City Centre, Challenging Identity.
- The cultural strategy is developed in parallel with the ECoC bid, with many stakeholders involved in both processes. This resulted in a good match between the two exercises, the bid book highlighting clearly how the various actions of the title-year will serve the goals of the strategy. The panel considers this as a precondition to ensure the legacy of the ECoC project (or at least, of the bidding process).
- The results of the ECoC project will be continuously monitored and evaluated at least once a year by the team, at the level both of programme availability for various target groups and involvement of the population. The management and financial health of the project will be assessed by an independent auditor. The panel thinks that the team's aim to explore basic qualitative research is positive; however, it is insufficient and proves a lack of experience with actual evaluation and establishment of measurable indicators.
- The team explained that data (especially economic) is secondary within the evaluation and monitoring plan as they would like to focus on the experiences and feelings rather than measurements. The panel considers prioritising experiences over measurements to be quite concerning.
- It is not sufficiently clear how the strategic & impact / evaluation lines link to the programme's thematic lines. The panel considers it important to ensure the possibility to visualise / explain clearly how the programmatic lines link to strategic priorities and how this, in turn, may be assessed / evaluated.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The programme is built around a cornerstone *Beyond Language* and three programme peaks: *Beyond Margins*, *Beyond the Screen* and *Beyond Cycles*. There are 13 programmes presented within the four pillars, each including a variety of projects. While this could form the basis of a strong project, it appears from the bid book and the presentation that there is a lack of depth in the actual concept, and the corresponding artistic vision would require further development.

- The programme lists a series of ideas and activities, which are potentially interesting, but are still too vague at this stage to be seen as developed projects. It is also not clear to see what the main events are, all the less because it appears that several already existing festivals and events have been included.
- An open call was published in order to develop the ECoC programme and received more than 120 proposals, which is very positive and evidence of a strong level of commitment from the local cultural community.
- The coaching programme called *Circumflex* (giving a safe space for the artists to develop their projects and reach quality) is very attractive. However, the panel thinks that the team has to take responsibility in making the final choice of the projects to ensure overall artistic coherence and quality.
- The bid presents good and concrete examples of how the team intends to combine local cultural heritage with innovative expressions. However, strong elements in the city, such as architecture, design and technology could have been highlighted more.
- The team introduces *Dialogue of Virtuality, the Digital Culture Forum* as legacies of Liberec's candidacy, and the plan to establish a digital manager or expert is very welcome. However, the digital delivery of the programme would have needed more development, in particular as it appears that digital content in most of the projects is not yet presented.

European dimension:

- The concept of *Dialogue*, at the core of the bid, which the panel understands as being relevant for Liberec and the Tri-Border area, has a strong European relevance, especially in today's challenging geopolitical context.
- The panel appreciates that the bid intends to celebrate *Dialogue* as one of Europe's core values. Moreover, Liberec plans to address a number of issues that are significant from both the European and local perspectives, such as language and communication, environment (Liberec is the only Czech city to be included in the EU mission to create 100 climate neutral cities) and (EU) identity and belonging.
- The international focus is mostly on Germany, Austria, and Poland, i.e. the three countries included in the Tri-border area, which is a good starting point but not enough (even at the state of pre-selection) to ensure an appropriate European reach.
- While some partners are mentioned in the bid book, they are not listed for each individual programme, which makes it difficult for the panel to have a clear view.
- The bid lists a wide range of potential collaborations projects with ECoC cities, based on an accurate analysis of common topics and issues.

Outreach:

- The outreach section of the bid is well developed and articulated. The team has involved many people in a bottom-up approach. The panel appreciates in particular the participatory project called *1000 Wishes*, the work done to engage various generations together (for instance, *Cross-generation Art Academy*) and the mapping of students' cultural behaviour. This is a solid achievement that the panel encourages the city to use in implementing its cultural strategy.
- The bid has a strong focus on the soft legacy projects, such as audience development, capacity building, platforms, or forums.
- The bid presents an inclusive approach to local participation, with the project for volunteering being open to everyone.
- The city is very cosmopolitan: as an example, elementary schools host 27 nationalities. All children are integrated in normal classes. It appears that the city has knowledge about how to integrate people of different abilities, ages and backgrounds, and the ECoC project could serve as an instrument to reinforce these capacities.
- The digital outreach delivery plan is not sufficiently developed at this stage.

Management:

- The operational budget is € 28 million, which the panel considers a reasonable amount to implement an impactful ECoC project. The contribution from the City is relatively modest at € 2,2 million, representing one third of the City's yearly cultural budget. It is supplemented by an equivalent financial contribution from the Region.
- At € 20 million – but representing over 70% of the overall operational budget – the contribution expected from the State is high, and does not respect one of the two ceilings agreed by the bidding cities in their joint letter to the Ministry of Culture (a maximum of € 25 million, not exceeding 60% of the non-investment costs of the project). It is the panel's view that such a proportion may result in an over-reliance on State funding, while the level of this funding is not known at this stage.
- With 62% of the budget allocated for the programme, 20% for advertising and marketing, 18% for staff and administration, the budget is realistic. However, the panel is concerned about the relatively low level of budget allocated for programming.
- An association is planned to be established to implement the programme, in which the City, the Region and the Technology University are meant to join forces.

- Economic issues are presented as a threat; therefore, the team relies on the help of private businesses. There are three trends to achieve that: sponsoring / crowd-sourcing / innovative methods, like *World cafe*, *Match and found*, *Club 28*.

Capacity to deliver:

- The bid has good political support. The candidacy was approved by a vast majority.
- The city is very well connected in terms of transport and can count on a well-developed transport system and on a good and diversified absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.
- Liberec has an adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme. It can also count on a strong industrial base, in particular in nano-technology. Finally, it has also a solid experience in organising and hosting large-scale international cultural events.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Liberec does not proceed to the final selection phase. The concept of the bid is still lacking depth and artistic vision is underdeveloped. Despite an excellent analysis of the city contradictions in the Introduction part, and potential relevance of *Dialogue* to European context, the programme is not revealing the theme in full scale. Although it gives evidence of valuable cooperation work with ECoC cities, the programme lacks European dimension regarding potential partners and artistic collaborations.

The experiences gained and networks built nationally as well as internationally in this pre-selection phase could prove very beneficial if choosing to pursue an alternative opportunity. The panel recommends that the city of Liberec build on the good work it has started and continues its cultural development journey.

General recommendations

The following recommendations apply to both shortlisted candidates.

The panel would like to emphasise the considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection. The final selection phase offers an opportunity for shortlisted candidates to develop and consolidate their bids and to improve the level of quality throughout, paying particular attention to the attractiveness of the cultural and artistic programme and to a higher European relevance.

The panel expects significant progress in the final bid books to reflect the expanded **six criteria in the Decision** and the recommendations of the panel.

A study of the evaluations of recent ECoCs (since 2013) and monitoring reports of recently designated ECoCs may also be of value. These are available on the European Commission's ECoC website.¹

General

Since 2020, Europe and the world has entered into a new reality as a consequence of COVID-19, climate changes, a new geo-political crisis and its relevant economic and social implications. The new reality is causing major disruptions, uncertainty, social inequalities and restrictions. At same time, this new perspective opens up the opportunity to rethink the role of culture and to redesign a new approach to align culture and major yearlong events with this new world, notably new procedures and expectations. This refers to every level of operation, from artistic expression to administrative procedure. A more elaborated contingency plan with due alternatives should be an integral part of such long-term planning as the ECoC. This is a great challenge for us all, also for the bidding cities, but equally - an opportunity to reflect on new and sustainable culture models.

The bid book at final selection becomes, *de facto*, a contract for the designated city. It sets out the artistic vision and the key objectives, projects, directions, national and international partners, financing and management of the programme. Close concurrence with the bid book is a factor when at the end of the monitoring phase the panel makes a recommendation to the Commission regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize.

It is the responsibility of the panel (which functions as both the selection and subsequent monitoring panel) to safeguard the European Capital of Culture brand. Candidates should be aware that with the level of international attention now being given to ECoCs, policy decisions over a wide area (not just cultural) may affect the reputation of the city, and in turn the image of the European Capital of Culture Action. The panel expects the ECoC candidate cities to take all possible steps to minimise negative and potentially harmful international and national issues connected to their city.

The panel also emphasises that size of the city is not the issue to become the ECoC, but artistic vision, quality of the programme and European relevance are of the most importance.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

A formally approved city cultural strategy needs to be in place before submitting the final bid book. The panel expects much focussed bid books and presentations for the final round: cities should indicate the priorities of the cultural strategy that are connected to the ECoC project, its target outcomes and impacts and how resources will be changed over the next few years. As a result, the expected legacy of the ECoC should be clearly described.

An ECoC is a transformational opportunity for a city. The pre-selection bid books set out in general terms the objectives of why a city is seeking the title. The objectives should be clearly put, as there is a tendency to perceive ECoC as a panacea for every city challenge. An important aspect that requires elaboration is the expected visible change in the urban landscape. The panel would expect a more focused (and shorter) explanation, which can link

¹ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture>

to the programme vision, themes, activities, and through monitoring and evaluation, to the outcomes in the subsequent legacy. There is considerable literature and research available for cities to see the range of cultural, urban development and social benefits of an ECoC.

The evaluation sections of the bid books should be given more attention in the second phase (especially research in order to establish baseline data) and the panel expects to receive ECoC indicators of success. The monitoring and evaluation should not be overwhelmed with (just) statistics and data gathering though. The final bid book should focus on the priority objectives for the ECoC (rather than those for the entire cultural strategy). One of the priority areas should refer to how the ECoC will meet the various elements of the European dimension criterion.

Capacity building should be based on a wide understanding of specific capacity building needs of all kinds of cultural players and hospitality industry and services. The cultural and creative sectors (CCS) should be understood as a transversal topic of the cultural and artistic programme and must be linked to a related mapping and needs analysis of the sector. Capacity building should therefore also encompass the CCS.

Cultural and artistic programme

The focus of the final selection is the cultural and artistic programme between 2023-2024, when the ECoC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECoC year of 2028.

The panel recommends both cities to have an open minded and daring artistic approach and not be afraid of new, experimental ideas.

For both shortlisted cities, the artistic vision of the programme must be highlighted, with a further elaboration of the challenges relevant both locally and European-wide and with significant cultural cooperation partnership at EU and international level. Consistency between the vision underpinning the programme and all other elements of the bid must be ensured. Innovation and originality is required not only in theory but also – even more importantly – in practice. The panel will expect to see more details on the programme, its projects and partners. Indeed, the cities should set out more clearly not only their artistic vision, but also the programme and projects; differentiating between partners who have indicated firm interest and those who are still only potential or possible partners.

The panel strongly encourages the two final candidate cities to forge significant partnerships with artists, cultural institutions and networks both at EU and world level. ECoC programmes normally cover a wide range of art forms and include the increasing development of creative interventions in social issues. An approximate but at the same time realistic budget should be shown for each major project for the panel to understand the relative balance of projects in the programme and to give evidence of the feasibility of the ambitious programmes the two cities present.

The panel recommends a more focused and detailed approach to digital cultural content (not just social media promotions and interactions) as integral parts of the programmes. Furthermore, more attention should be given to the sustainability of the projects – including cultural, ecological, social and economic wise – so as to ensure an expected substantial legacy of the ECoC.

European dimension

The European dimension being the *raison d'être* of an ECoC the panel expects to find Europe at the heart of all final bids and permeated throughout the cultural and artistic programmes. The panel expects to see a continuous focus on European partnerships: co-productions, co-curations, conferences, networking as well as artist residences. Cities should encourage their cultural operators to be active participants in European cultural networks.

Although with a promising approach to this criterion, so far the two pre-selected cities have focused their European cooperation on the neighbouring countries and on networking with ECoC or twinning cities. The international cooperation strategy cannot be limited to relations with other, former and future ECoCs, existing European cultural networks or twin cities, which has been understood in most of the final selection bids. The panel urges the two cities to further develop the international strategy by forging actual partnership with artists as well as cultural organisations and institutions and to extend its geographical scope throughout Europe and even other continents, beyond the consolidated relations with neighbouring countries.

In addition, the efforts were addressed to reinforce their cities' visibility and relations within the Czech Republic and/or the neighbouring regions whereas the panel would like to see a deepening and widening of the programmes that ensures a more embracing European dimension. That a city aims to market itself in Europe, is not in itself a strong interpretation of the European dimension. An ECoC enables a city to promote itself internationally but that is only half of the story. Becoming the ECoC means becoming the representative of diverse European culture.

The European dimension has a two-way direction. It is of course to present to the rest of Europe the city's contribution to European cultural diversity. But an equal focus is on seeking to broaden the understanding and awareness of the city's own citizens on the diversity of cultures in Europe and linking through cultural and other projects with citizens in other countries. It is important to clearly demonstrate how the European dimension is translated into concrete projects in the cultural and artistic programme. It is this focus on other cultures that primarily differentiates an ECoC from a national city of culture. An ECoC offers the opportunity for a city and its citizens to learn from others in an open way. One important legacy area is the creation of new and sustained partnerships between a city's cultural players and those from other countries.

One of the elements of the European dimension criterion for the ECoC title is the ability to involve a wide audience from the rest of Europe and beyond, both in the city and digitally. The programme has to have its attraction and that is why it is something else than the usual tourist offers of the city and region. The panel would expect to see these attractive programme ideas in the final selection's bid for ECoC 2028.

Attention emphasis should be paid also to the elaboration of a digital delivery programme, able to lure and to engage even remotely the European and international audience.

A strong connection must be sought between the digital outreach delivery plan, the cultural and artistic programme and the strategic international communication plan.

Outreach

The audience development strategy for the ECoC is expected to be much further developed in the final bid books, including online and offline measures and channels for all identified target groups.

A special focus should be dedicated to those audiences that are more difficult to reach but crucial for a new “cultural climate” in an ECoC city (e.g. minorities, the elderly, disabled, people outside of city centres or temporarily in the city, refugees, people living at the edge of poverty or with a very low education level, etc.).

The panel would expect to learn how the audience development policies of the main cultural organisations including independent operators and NGOs relate to the ECoC programme.

The role and contribution of universities (except engagement in evaluation) was underplayed in most of the pre-selection bid books.

The panel appreciates the ideas for the involvement of schools that are already present in both selected cities. However, all final bids should show a strategic approach (in relation to the ECoC and not just to current practices) that illustrate how schools are linked to the ECoC project.

Management

New times of uncertainty require new approaches in management, too.

Special attention needs to be dedicated to the risk assessment in the final bid book. This section should include a thorough and deeper analysis of the impacts expected for the preparation and implementation phase of the ECoC related to the ongoing pandemic, economic and geo-political crisis focussing on the main issues to be addressed in 2023-2024.

The panel expects both shortlisted cities, which in their pre-selection bid books plan a considerable level of capital expenditure, to carefully investigate whether these investments are actually feasible and to prioritise those infrastructures and operations that are crucially functional to the ECoC programme.

As far as the management models are concerned, the panel recommends learning from other ECoCs’ experiences, while not necessarily copying ready-made concepts.

The delivery team plays a key role in all ECoCs. The cities should address in a clear and well-informed way the best model to guarantee the quality and independence of the artistic management of the project.

The recruitment processes and planned staffing arrangements from 2023 to 2028 should be outlined including secondments, interns and volunteers.

The communication strategy of the two cities should be further elaborated to target European and international media. The marketing of an ECoC should go beyond standard information dissemination tactics to include an attractive narrative of European importance and relevance coherent with the artistic vision. It is important to remember that the marketing of an ECoC is not only about city branding but mostly about a European message that the city is wishing to share with the rest of Europe and requires a thorough communication strategy.

Capacity to deliver

Candidates should re-confirm that their bid book, including the overall vision and concept and the financial commitments, have the formal approval of the mayor, the City (and County/Region as in the case of Broumov) Councils and all political parties. The institutional support is fundamental also to ensure the legacy of the project.

The panel also recommends that the candidates have common understanding and expectations regarding the financial contribution from the national Government.

Candidates are reminded that the criterion for an ECoC requires a special programme for the year in addition to the normal cultural offer. The panel expects more information on the managerial capacity in the City/Region to manage a programme of the depth and range of an ECoC. Capacity building should not be confused with the implementation of the cultural strategy, but it should be in accordance with local and regional development plans. The cities should also plan strong capacity building programmes as the ECoC's scope goes beyond current local capacities. If projects are planned to be funded from competitive EU programmes (e.g., Creative Europe), this should be indicated.

Information on urban development and infrastructure programmes, cultural heritage restoration projects and new cultural premises is useful as background and context at pre-selection. The final selection will focus on those infrastructural projects that directly impact the ECoC programme activities (e.g., a new cultural centre in a restored building that becomes a focal point for community arts projects contained in the programme). A timeline for these projects and the realistic estimate of completion should be given.

The final bid books should clearly indicate how those potential capital projects would be managed (management structures, state-of-play related to the EU ESI-Funds such as the connection with the relevant Operational Programme, timeline, and public procurement).

Signed

Jelle Burggraaff

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Beatriz Garcia

Goda Giedraityte (Rapporteur)

Suvi Innilä

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