



Veszprém European Capital of Culture 2023

**Second Monitoring Meeting
Report by the ECOC Expert Panel**

Virtual Meeting, April 2021

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate Culture, Creativity and Sport
Unit D2

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 29 April 2021 between the Panel and the team of Veszprém, one of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2023¹. Veszprém was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2023 in Hungary by the relevant Hungarian authorities in April 2019 on the basis of the Panel selection report²; its bid book is available on the Veszprém 2023 website³. There was previously a first monitoring meeting on 25 September 2019 in Brussels. The first monitoring report by the Panel can be accessed on the European Commission website.⁴

This report is addressed to Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Jsc. (the delivery team of Veszprém 2023) and will be published on the European Commission's website⁵.

Attendance

The Panel members:

Else Christensen-Redžepović, Suvi Innilä and Jorge Cerveira Pinto, appointed by the European Parliament 2021–2023;

Dessislava Gavrilova (Chair), Paulina Florjanowicz and Pierre Sauvageot, appointed by the Council of the EU 2019-2021;

Jelle Burggraaff (Rapporteur) and Beatriz Garcia, appointed by the European Commission 2020–2022;

Alin Adrian Nica, appointed by the European Committee of the Regions 2019-2021.

Tamás Fejérdy and Orsolya Korosi, nominated by the relevant Hungarian authorities.

For Veszprém:

Mayor of Veszprém

CEO

Director of Programme Development

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 <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/default/files/library/ecoc-2023-hungary-finalselection-report.pdf>

³ <https://veszprembalaton2023.hu/en/documents>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/default/files/ecoc2023-veszprem-first-monitoring-report.pdf>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en

CFO

Former CEO, Chief Programme Development Adviser

Chief Creative and Artistic Adviser

Head of Infrastructural Developments

Monitoring Specialist

Head of Community Involvement and Capacity Building

Cultural Project Manager

Head of Mayor's Cabinet Office

Head of CEO's Cabinet Office

Also in attendance were observer(s) from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and the Hungarian Secretariat of High Commissioner in charge of ECoC Veszprém-Balaton 2023.

Report and video presentation from Veszprém 2023

Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Jsc. submitted in advance of the meeting a comprehensive progress report. It outlined in detail the activities of the organisation since the first monitoring meeting in Brussels on 25 September 2019. Before the virtual meeting, Veszprém 2023 delivered a 33-minute-long video as a substitute for the regular presentation that could not take place because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The video was introduced by the Head of the CEO Cabinet Office who explained that various team members would talk about the preparations of the ECoC project, the results that have been reached so far and the plans for the next 1.5 years. The CEO started by outlining the work that has been undertaken in the fields of fundraising, mapping of international collaboration opportunities, infrastructure, regional collaboration, grant schemes, programme development and strategic partnerships. She also touched upon the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the preparations. The Mayor stressed the tight working relation with Veszprém-Balaton 2023 Jsc., the established cooperation with the region and the support of the Hungarian government for the ECoC.

The Veszprém-Balaton Filmfestival that took place from 3-5 September 2020 was the first major self-developed ECoC project. The Manager for film programmes and the Chief Artistic and Creative Advisor elaborated on the events that were organised in this context. More information on the digital cluster, including CODE, a digital experience centre, was provided by the former CEO, who is now Chief Programme Development Adviser.

The Head of Community Involvement and Capacity Building elaborated on the activities that have been organised to engage with locals and interested civilians and the launch of the volunteering programme 'The Shiniés'. Insight into the projects, grants and collaborations was given by the Director of Programme Development. The project list currently features 140 programmes, of which more than half will be co-produced or

outsourced. 22 cultural managers are preparing cultural-artistic and community projects, for which they work together with professional partners. A preliminary target is to develop existing festivals and events and elevate them onto a new level. Besides preparing self-produced projects, the ECoC team is setting up and running several grants schemes. International collaboration with twin cities and other ECoCs are ongoing.

Discussion

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

Long-term cultural strategy

- The Panel inquired about **the main challenges the ECoC team is currently facing and their plans for addressing them.** The ECoC team explained that people would already like ECoC representatives to have a very active presence in 2021, whereas the team feels obliged to focus its forces on 2023. This is a communication challenge encountered by the programme development team on a daily basis. Another challenge is regional presence. The actors in small settlements need to be addressed in a completely different way to those in the bigger centres, which takes up a lot of resources and time. Having had only few opportunities to meet in recent months has slowed this process down. However, the ECoC team feels it is emerging from this and states that dialogues with a focus on 2023 can take place now. The last challenge concerns the rapid and vast expansion of the ECoC team, in particular given the lock-down situation of imposed home working. Large-scale team building activities will be undertaken to ensure everyone is working together as a team as soon as Hungary reopens again.

- The **Panel asked about the Coo-C progress and how the ECoC team envisages to complete its monitoring strategy and toolkit by the summer.** The Panel wanted to learn, in particular, about **how monitoring efforts will inform the evaluation plans** and how the team will account for **the impact of COVID-19 on its baselines.** The ECoC team explained it is proceeding well with building the monitoring system. It is working together with the university and has signed a contract with a market sector company. Existing surveys and market sector partners' surveys of modified cultural consumption habits will be used for research on COVID-19 related effects. The results are going to be channelled into the monitoring system, while communication surfaces are being set up in such a way that they can collect data automatically. The aim behind this is that instant feedback can be gathered at events and for area development investments. This will provide information on whether the ECoC team's actions or strivings are successful. If it turns out that activities are not achieving the desired outcomes, the aim is to be in a position to react, be informed by the data in real time ('live feedback') and have time to intervene and turn into another direction with the programmes.

- The Panel also asked for **clarification on the digital museum concept and whether the pandemic would not diminish people's interest in digital content**

activities. Furthermore, it asked about the **strategy to attract attention and how the team envisages achieving this in the limited time** before 2023. The ECoC team contextualised the institution of CODE, an immersive digital museum, and explained that establishing such a centre in Eastern Central Europe is a huge step forward in repositioning the Veszprém-Balaton region as a cultural-creative region. Digital fatigue is expected to pass as digitalisation per se cannot be avoided. Moreover, whereas the content as such is not digital, the form of expression is. With reference to international examples, the ECoC team explained that there is no higher impact format with respect to how a citizen in a small settlement in Veszprém county can be shown art from Van Gogh to Klimt. The expected numbers of annual visitors lies between 120,000 and 150,000. To make the museum work, the ECoC team stressed the need to create a content laboratory for the development of digital events, which is an additional step on the way to establishing a creative hub in Veszprém. The hope is that CODE will eventually synergize with the Hungarian Motion Picture Festival, thus turning Veszprém and the region into a centre for the visual arts with European significance.

Artistic and cultural programme

- The ECoC team clarified it had decided **to change the flagship projects**, as it is now clearer which projects have communication power that can turn them into flagship ones. This flagship status also has an internal perspective. Due to the very high number of projects, it is hard to set priorities if no decision is taken on which 15-20 projects are most important. Amongst the current flagships are the digital cluster, the ecological project package and the music line. The green aspect of the programme is strengthened through a series of ecological programmes called the BalatonLab. Furthermore, the opportunity came along to bring the most important Hungarian film festival to the region. The team also explained that Dante's Comedy project that was envisaged in the Inota power plant was cancelled, as it turned out to be unsustainable.
- In regard to the regional cooperation, the ECoC team expects that **roughly half of the programme, both budget-wise and in numbers and scale of the projects, will take place in the region. This will be a combination of existing and new initiatives.** A range of projects developed by the ECoC team will be exclusively carried out in the region. There will also be a multilingual website on which regional programmes are collected and presented. Moreover, several grants targeted to creative communities in the countryside have been launched. In this regard, the ECoC team refers to the Culture Points - already existing local grassroots undertakings. The aim is to identify at least 15-20 of these cultural regions and encourage them to upgrade and gain European visibility. The latter is made possible by support for inviting European artists or other experts to joint work, which will provide a new range of offers. Other initiatives that might grow out of Culture Points are a significant international literary festival and a long-term fine arts-focussed festival.
- Another important element concerned clarification on the downscaling and merging of projects with other ideas. The Panel wanted to know **why a project would turn out to be viable only if it were to be downscaled and how the ECoC team would negotiate the "merging with other ideas" with the artists.** The team stated that merging projects with other ideas is not an arbitrary decision, but always the result

of a process. The merging of several small bid book projects that target ecology or the Balaton cultural landscape into a stronger project is provided as an example in this aspect. After winning the title, the team sat together with all partners involved to discuss how projects might develop, and they subsequently have evolved to everyone's satisfaction. More decisions will need to be taken in 2021 and 2022 when at the end of conditional procurement processes the previously allocated budget does not cover the plans of initial programme ideas. In this case, it must be decided if an idea is worth a larger budget, if resources can be brought in from somewhere else, or if the project is to be carried out at a smaller scale and if it is still worth being executed then.

European Dimension

- The Panel inquired about **who is responsible for contacting the European partners listed in the final bid book (seen as a *de facto* contract) and how this is being monitored, as well as how the European themes from the bid book are currently incorporated into the programme.** An international project manager joined the team last autumn, whose task it is to establish a contact and keep track of it. The current focus is on establishing contacts with the new partner ECoCs Elefsina and Timișoara. Furthermore, each project has at least one project manager who is responsible for carrying out a project in a genuinely international way, if the team wants so. The project owners also monitor this. A large part of the international partners in the bid book are actual contacts provided by collaborating partners. The DANCE Festival, digital cluster, Culture Points, Chaconne Festival and a land art installation are mentioned as example projects in which the international dimension will be omnipresent. The ECoC team also explained that although it may seem late to involve European or international partners, it is important to note that a project like CODE has not been given the green light until last November and therefore could not establish these kinds of connections before.
- The Panel questioned how the ECoC team **ensures that Europe is clearly present in Veszprém and the region now and in 2023, which is a key element in any ECoC project**, and what is going to be the change that will leave a **very strong legacy on that the city has been engaged in Europe.** The team quotes three concrete projects that illustrate the European Dimension in their ECoC programme. The first one is Container City that introduces the other 26 Member States at a large empty inner city plot in Veszprém. EU Member States' cultural institutes, tourism agencies or other ECoCs are asked to fill each container with content. The second project concerns the Fortnight programmes series, which mixes the team's cultural connections with other ECoC cities and with UNESCO City of Music Partners. This means that in a bi-weekly rotation, one city with a regional outlook is welcomed to Veszprém. The last project is the Balaton Wine Gourmet Festival, for which the ECoC team is planning Carpathian Basin, Visegrad Group, Spanish, French, Italian or even extra-continental tastings to take place in wine courtyards. Concerning legacy, the team tries to make its self-generated programmes continue after 2023 by not financing a project with more than 50% and by involving financing partners in execution from 2021 onwards already. This gives a part of the programmes the chance for self-financing and continuation. Furthermore, cultural

infrastructure projects varying from CODE to ACTicity and the art cinema in the castle will stay and present an offer to locals and visitors in the medium run.

- Concerning **securing concrete arrangements with international artists and cultural operators**, the ECoC team explained it had chosen to include in the progress report only those partners, with whom it has already fixed an agreement or who are collaborators in carrying out projects. A great number of negotiations are in progress, which have not been easy in the current pandemic situation. Project partners that are not certain, or with whom the conditions of collaboration have not been laid down yet, have not been indicated in the progress report. Tartu is given as an example in this regard, with whom online meetings take place on a weekly basis now.

Outreach

- The Panel was interested to learn how the ECoC team intends **to reach out to minorities not listed in the report including LGBTQIA and homeless people**. The ECoC team has a horizontal guideline of securing equal chances for all in its programmes. The target groups that have been identified in this regard are non-Hungarian speakers, people with disabilities, people/families with little children and the elderly. The team aims to provide a degree of access for these groups, which would enable them to actively participate in events. An artistic programme is going to be carried out with the involvement of the homeless in a homeless shelter.
- In light of the tendering and open calls for project development, the Panel asked if the ECoC team had faced any issues with **managing expectations, in particular disappointment from those who had not been selected to take part in the programme work**. The team explained that this is the biggest challenge it is trying to respond to now. There is a great bidding activity and bids have already been handed in for more funding than is allocated for this year. In addition, in many cases the ECoC team sees a perfect programme envisaged for 2023 already suggested for this year, which means the execution of projects needs to be rescheduled. To reduce rejections of applications, the ECoC team provides pre-application counselling on the administrative burden and the direction of the bid. For those thinking of applying, the team offers fortnightly online meetings during which concrete ideas can be discussed. Personal meetings are going to take place in the upcoming weeks so that submitted applications do not get an all-or-nothing reply.

Management

- As the Role of a **National Commissioner for the ECoC is new, the Panel was interested to learn how the role of civil society and artists can be guaranteed**. The ECoC team considers the role of the Government Commissioner as positive for planning the ECoC. Talks with the government and the securing of funds have become significantly easier. The National Commissioner also has a thorough and accurate knowledge of State administration systems, so that the team knows where and when to

turn to in case of a problem. The ECoC team does not see this appointment infringes the freedom of programme development to any extent. The team indicated that public attitudes towards the National Commissioner are positive too, which is valuable.

- The Panel was interested to know what **the reasons were for doubling the budgets for programme and promotion and tripling the budget for administration.** Moreover, it asked for more information **concerning the EU funding programmes the ECoC team expected to raise money from and what this money is intended for.** The national government has allocated more funding to the programme as it wants to ensure that Veszprém can perform in the European dimension and that the local population is satisfied with the programme. Regional involvement takes up more resources and staff than initially planned. In addition, the team has individual project managers following the various cultural areas and organises many programmes by itself. This seemed the most cost-effective solution. Concerning EU funding, the team expects calls opening in Hungary for the new programming period, in which it looks forward to a number of cultural heritage calls and calls for its prime target areas.

- The Panel wanted **to raise a flag concerning the high number of staff that have already been working on the project and the new staff that is still expected to be hired. This can lead to struggles to integrate everyone in the organisation.** The ECoC team commented that upon hiring this additional staff it organised online training. In addition, these members have been employed for a specific purpose into small teams. The continuous motivation of the staff is being discussed on a regular basis. As soon as COVID-19 restrictions are eased off it is possible, a big team building training will be organised.

- The Panel inquired about the **annual breakdown of the national government's contribution to the ECoC for programming and infrastructure and the amount of money that has been included in this year's national budget. It also wanted to learn if money had been allocated to infrastructure investments for the title year and if any delays are foreseen in this regard.** The ECoC team explained that the main, most time-consuming and costly projects have already been submitted to the public procurement process and that it is already looking for contractors. Construction work is expected to start in autumn when the building grounds for these areas are opened. If nothing out of the ordinary happens, this should leave the team with enough time to finish the construction works by the set deadlines.

Capacity to Deliver

- with the Hungarian Motion Picture Festival, thus turning The team explains that **the number of regional settlements that have joined the ECoC project has risen to 85 and that this is not a bad ratio,** as this means that well over half of the region's population and all the cultural centres of the region are involved in the ECoC now. Calls are open on the website for the settlements that have joined in. The team also looks for venues for its self-produced ECoC events in these places. With the successes of the settlements that can apply for grants, the events and what is forthcoming in 2023, the number of 85 is expected to be able to rise up to 120-130, which in the region would be considered as a success story.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Panel acknowledges the progress made so far by Veszprém and wishes to draw attention to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- The Panel acknowledges that with a total staff of 70 people a lot of effort has been put into establishing a solid team for the implementation of the ECoC. In addition, Veszprém continues to benefit from stable political conditions, national recognition and engagement of various stakeholders.
 - **Recommendation 1:** The Panel finds it unusual that such a large number of staff is already working on the ECoC at this early phase of development. This requires a clear strategy on how to manage the ECoC team in terms of capacity to deliver, team coordination as well as the training/skill base required for everyone.
 - **Recommendation 2:** In view of the legacy, a clear exit strategy needs to be developed to determine what will happen with the hired staff after the ECoC year is over, and how to maximise the transfer of knowledge opportunities.
- The Panel appreciates the progress that has been made in the development of the programme, of which the open calls are a first good step to also include partners from the region.
 - **Recommendation 3:** As the programme should have a good balance between the local (diverse) cultural potential as well as the top international scene, the development of European partnerships is top priority now. Therefore, a considerable number of European artists and organisations need to be included in the programme. Do not start from scratch here, but concretely explore the cooperation with the European partners listed in the final bid book and monitor the number and quality of European partnerships with artists, cultural organisations and networks who will participate in the projects.
 - **Recommendation 4:** Develop a strategy for the visibility of Europe in Veszprém and the region that includes addressing the European themes listed in the final bid book, connections with cultural operators and their peers in Europe, co-creation processes and invitations for hosting network meetings.
 - **Recommendation 5:** The European Capital of Culture Action is innately European and the European dimension must be at the heart of an ECoC programme. The European dimension ensures that an ECoC is an international programme and not exclusively a domestic event. Hence, the European dimension must permeate the entire cultural programme as well as the associated activities, notably marketing and communication. It is of

utmost importance to keep this fact in mind in all aspects of your daily work in preparing your ECoC programme and processes.

- The Panel understands that including the region is an important aim for Veszprém and welcomes the various open calls that have been set up in this regard.
 - **Recommendation 6:** Open calls that involve public procurement processes usually have to adhere to very strong regulations, in which the artistic quality of projects does not always come first. The Panel would like to stress the importance of not losing sight of the artistic quality when assessing applications.
 - **Recommendation 7:** Considering the high number of open calls and the downscaling and merging of projects, it is important to manage the expectations of all parties involved properly in order to safeguard the ECoC brand. Failing to deal with this optimally can lead to severe tensions, negative communication flows and parts of the cultural sector turning against the ECoC Action.
- The Panel fully understands the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on the way the ECoC team has been able to work together and the limitations this has brought in developing a project the size and scale of an ECoC.
 - **Recommendation 8:** With the country about to reopen, revisit the final bid book with the entire ECoC team as this serves as a contract. The Panel requests a midterm report that clearly outlines how the final bid book relates to what the ECoC team is doing at this moment (see under “Next Steps”). This should include the state of play concerning the programme, a list with the status of cooperation with artists, cultural organisations and networks, planning for the cultural infrastructure projects and an overview of the allocation of the budget coming from the national government.
 - **Recommendation 9:** Reassess the digital transformation strategy in response to the experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic. For the CODE project also look at more recent examples in this field than the ones discussed now.
 - **Recommendation 10:** Although the Panel acknowledges that the ECoC team appears to have the technical side of monitoring and evaluation in hand, it stresses the need for a new (or revised / updated) baseline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Panel also recommends greater clarity in the distinction between monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Next Steps

The Panel greets the relevant steps taken so far and remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a third (and final) monitoring meeting in autumn 2022. Prior to that, the Panel would like to receive a midterm report by mid November 2021.

At the end of the third monitoring meeting, the Panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to grant the Melina Mercouri Prize to Veszprém 2023.

The conditions for the payment of the Prize are specified in Article 14 of Decision 445/2014/EU:

"The prize money shall be paid by the end of March of the year of the title, provided that the designated city concerned continues to honour the commitments it made at the application stage, complies with the criteria and takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports.

The commitments made at the application stage shall be deemed to have been honoured by the designated city where no substantial change has been made to the programme and the strategy between the application stage and the year of the title, in particular where:

- (a) the budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-quality cultural programme in line with the application and the criteria;*
- (b) the independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;*
- (c) the European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final version of the cultural programme;*
- (d) the marketing and communication strategy and the communication material used by the designated city clearly reflects the fact that the action is a Union action;*
- (e) the plans for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the title on the designated city are in place."*

The Panel would like to thank the Mayor of Veszprém and Veszprém 2023 for a very informative and frank discussion and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending Panel's members

