



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC)2027 in Latvia

*The Expert Panel's report
Pre-Selection Stage*

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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 2027 in Latvia. The competition is a European Union initiative created in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” has previously been awarded to one city in Latvia, namely Riga in 2014.

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia (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 16 April 2014 (the “Decision”)¹ and by the “Rules of Procedure – Competition for the European Capital of Culture 2027 in Latvia” (the “Rules”) – adopted by the Ministry and published on its website².

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 did not attend the meeting for health reasons, while another member (nominated by the European Commission) resigned from the panel in late April 2021 and has not been replaced so far.

The competition takes place in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. The Ministry issued a call for applications on 4 August 2020. Nine applications were submitted by the closing date of 4 June 2021: Cēsis, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Jūrmala, Kuldīga, Liepāja, Ogre and Valmiera.

Panel Meeting

The panel members met online, joining in from 9 countries on 5-8 July 2021, as the COVID-19 related travelling restrictions still in place at the time made it impossible for them and the delegations of candidate cities to be physically present in Riga. The panel elected Suvi Innilä as its chair and Diana Civle as its vice-chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and sent it to the Ministry ahead of the pre-selection meeting. 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.

At the pre-selection hearings on 5-7 July 2021, each candidate city, in alphabetical order, presented its case (45 minutes) and answered questions from the panel (60 minutes). The panel deliberations took place on 8 July AM.

At a press meeting on 8 July 2021 PM, the chair of the panel announced (via Zoom connection) the panel’s recommendation that the Ministry invites the following cities to submit revised bids for the final selection (in alphabetical order):

Daugavpils, Jūrmala, Liepāja and Valmiera.

It is important to note that the panel took into account the extraordinary context in which the bid books had been prepared due to the lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the transition from physical meetings to online meetings have

¹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG (in English)
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014D0445&from=EN> (in Latvian)

² <https://www.km.gov.lv/en/media/398/download>(in English)

become the new normal, the continued lockdown situation in Europe and the world seriously limited the competing teams' possibilities of engaging citizens and local stakeholders and, to some extent, hampered the establishment of European and international partnerships. These dimensions are expected to be much strengthened during the final selection phase. It is expected that the pandemic will leave a long-lasting impact on the cultural sector, which needs to change substantially from within and adapt to the new situation. It is also expected that all four preselected cities focus on both practicalities and the artistic vision of their projects in the time after COVID-19. Similarly, budget plans included in the bids are expected to be revised and confirmed. It is important that all cities selected for the final round of the competition ensure a realistic budget contribution from the national government.

Next Steps

The Ministry 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 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 soon be communicated by the Ministry.

The final selection meeting is scheduled to take place in Riga in April or May 2022 (tbc 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 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 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. The panel encourages all candidate cities to continue with the development and implementation of their respective cultural strategies.

The panel wishes to thank all nine candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids, the European Commission for its advice and the Ministry for its excellent administration, including the IT team.

Assessment 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 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.

It was not clear to the panel if all candidate cities had fully completed the formal approval of their cultural strategy at city council level. 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 is to ensure that the ECoC is grounded on a medium-term transformation of the city and its cultural life.

In the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their findings during the pre-selection phase. In reference to successive cities, specific and common recommendations are made, in order to assist them in the preparation of their final bid books.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the bid book and on the cities' presentation 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 relevant for the selection process. The panel's assessment and recommendation for the shortlist are also based on the analysis of the capacity of all candidate cities to make the required steps in order to win the ECoC title in the following months until the final selection meeting.

Cēsis

Cēsis presented its candidacy under the theme "22nd Century". The aim of the project is to ask questions and seek answers for 22nd century issues, showing 'that people in small places can ask big questions, offer solutions, and make themselves heard and that ties among people are important for the future.' With its candidacy, Cēsis wants to become a bright star in the European cultural constellation.

The city involves neighbouring municipalities in the ECoC process and is cooperating with other local governments in the region to realize its ambitions regarding human resources and cultural events.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- The city's cultural strategy was approved in 2020 and runs until 2030.
- The bid underlines the ECoC and is included in this strategy document (as well as in the city's long-term development documents), without sufficiently specifying the connections between these two at this stage, though.
- The long-term cultural, social and economic impact is identified in a clear way along the five pillars of the programme.
- In light of the plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, references are made to initiatives like the coworking house 'Skola6' and the creative and digital quarter 'Neredzīgo kvartāls', without providing a

sufficient context though. On the other hand, the aim to find digital solutions in culture in various aspects is relevant and sound.

- However, the characterization of the connection between the cultural and other sectors only through listed projects does not allow to assess the validity and real links for long-term connection.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are rather underdeveloped even for this first phase of the competition. Indicators are marked but lack sufficient detail and are not embedded in a methodological framework.

Cultural and artistic content:

- Cēsis as European Capital of Culture intends to 'become a creator of positive global processes that will help us find a chance to think, escape and renew ourselves to then return and engage in processes of joint creation.' In 2027, the ambition of the ECoC in Cēsis is to create a new thinking about humans in the context of the future. The panel considers this is ambitious and relevant.
- The programme has a number of thematic pillars, which relate to the environment and ecosystem, contemporary political culture, the relationship between people and places, as well as the intersection between the past and the future. The bid book presents 43 projects, 19 of which have been produced through community brainstorming at the end of 2020. The overall programme concept is rather well-developed, and there is variation between small and local projects and projects with high European aims, e.g., Cēsis wants to become 'a kind of Northern European Davos'.
- Projects are well rooted in the history or other typical elements of Cēsis, and they are often linked with larger European questions; in general, the programme is ambitious and has some very interesting projects.
- However, considering the small size of the city's own cultural field and the ambitious plans for the programme, one has to wonder how much of the productions would be brought to Cēsis from outside; this is not clear from the bid book or the hearing.
- Also, it is not clear how much this ambitious programme has taken into account the needs and desires of the local population despite the community brainstorming, since most of the proposed activities clearly target audiences outside Cēsis.
- The future oriented theme of "22nd century" seems risky, given the rather obvious inability to predict challenges of people in Europe in 80 years' time.

European dimension:

- Although there are examples of networks and cooperation partners, the European dimension is poorly described and without a concrete relation to the cultural programme.
- The city is part of some international organisations (European Network of Cultural Centres, Union of Baltic Cities, Association of Castle and Museums around the Baltic Sea and the Hanseatic League) that could be a good basis for cooperation and publicity for the ECoC programme
- There are mentions of some European themes (European democracy, counteracting the manipulative info, Europe's collective memory, New Bauhaus, European climate-neutral plans), which are all very topical and relevant, but these themes are not connected concretely to the cultural programme presented.
- The candidate has already established links with some recent past, present and future European Capitals of Culture as well as with their four twin cities, which the panel sees as a positive endeavour, as this can foster cultural cooperation Europe-wide, but there is no detail of the kind of cooperation envisaged.
- There is no mention either of European artists or of foreign cultural operators.

- Plans for attracting broad international audiences are lacking, and the city's cooperation with European cultural networks should be concretely translated into the cultural programme.
- The involvement of national minorities as European connectors could have been better exploited.

Outreach:

- The preparation of the preselection bid was done in the midst of the pandemic, making classical forms of community interaction impossible. However, a series of online meetings and brainstorming sessions were organised with all the city's stakeholders representing public, private and NGO sectors. This is welcomed by the panel.
- It appears that despite these difficult circumstances the team managed to get active involvement of the local inhabitants (i.e., the logo was chosen through an open competition and an open call was launched to get project ideas, 19 of them were included in the bid). This is also a positive element.
- However, so far, only one "event" has been organised – i.e. the decoration of a Christmas tree. Soon, walks through the city will be organised, to visit places, which are mostly still closed, due to pandemic.
- On a less positive note, there is no clear strategy on how to incorporate minorities or disadvantaged groups into the programme. The bid stresses that the post-pandemic reality is still blurred, so it is impossible to predict future circumstances. Therefore, a hybrid approach, combining use of new technologies and open, free-access public events is promoted to include various layers of the population, but this approach is not developed in sufficient detail.
- The inclusion of school children and youth is considered an important factor, yet again no details are provided, which is all the more surprising given the main theme of the bid, which addresses future citizens through its "22nd century" motto, who are therefore today's children of Cēsis and its region.
- No references are made in terms of an audience development strategy or a programme for volunteers. When enquired about this, the team recognised that this was a weakness of the project.

Management:

- The annual budget for culture presented in the bid book includes the investment in cultural infrastructure besides the cultural activities, which makes it impossible to have a view over the culture budget dimension and trend.
- The budget is 10.1 mil. euros, which the panel sees as rather low for the ambitious programme presented. On a more positive note, it is soundly structured between the private and public sectors and in terms of breakdown between the various types of operational expenditures.
- The proposed delivery structure will be the Cēsis 2027 foundation and its team will be based on the members who participated in the preparation process. The team will be supplemented through open competitions if the city wins the title.
- The contingency planning is solid and comprehensive.
- The plans for marketing and communication are appropriate and realistic.
- On a less positive note, the structure for the management and implementation of the project is not described in sufficient detail in the bid book. In particular, the composition of the Cēsis 2027 Council is not specified and the delivery structure is described in too sketchy a way. The panel sees this as a strong weakness.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has unanimously agreed with the candidacy.
- The city has mapped 150 potential cultural sites suitable for cultural events, on top of which pop-up infrastructure as well as a permanent exhibition hall, a black-box stage and an open-air stage will be created. These are positive developments whatever the outcome of the competition.
- Cēsis is experienced in hosting international level events, which is a plus.
- Main challenges concern accommodation and transport; the city will work on that in the coming 6 years.

Conclusion

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

The panel found the future oriented theme of “22nd century” risky, given the inability to predict the challenges the people of Europe will face in eight decades from now. Furthermore, the project ideas and solutions proposed in the application do not provide a convincing extension of this concept of the distant future in the content of the programme. In addition, the connection between the theme and the inhabitants seems limited to the panel, with no strategy at hand for working together with children and youth whereas they will be living this century.

The cultural and artistic programme is ambitious and has some very interesting projects, but it is not clear to what extent the needs and desires of the local population have been taken into account. The development of the European dimension also lags behind what should be expected at this stage, with no sufficient and concrete international cooperation partnerships having been established so far. In addition, several aspects concerning the foreseen management of the ECoC lack sufficient detail.

The panel, however, recognises the broad support for the candidacy and encourages the city to continue its plans for investing in cultural infrastructure.

Daugavpils

The city’s cultural strategy aims to shape Daugavpils into a dynamic city of culture on the eastern border of Latvia with a visible presence on the national and European stage by generating a diverse and contemporary supply of culture, stimulating creative freedom and self-expression, keeping custody of the cultural heritage, boosting the community’s local patriotism and their sense of belonging to the city.

The concept of Lingua Franca is at the core of the application, reflecting the multinational situation in Daugavpils.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- The city’s cultural strategy was approved in May 2021 and runs until 2027. The integration of and an emphasis on culture in the city’s and district’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 has to ensure a continued implementation of the planned goals post 2027.
- The ECoC bid has been prepared together with the cultural strategy, resulting in a close alignment between the ECoC goals and the long-term vision for cultural development, which is a very positive element.
- In light of the plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, including developing tighter cooperation among different disciplines, a

cross-disciplinary working group with representatives from different municipal departments has been created to plan development projects for culture. This is already a positive outcome of the bidding process.

- The long-term cultural, social, economic and environmental impact of the ECoC on the city, regional and European levels is described in a detailed and realistic way.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are addressed sufficiently for the pre-selection phase.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The main ECoC programme concept is Lingua Franca: Find, Make, Speak. The strategy for the Lingua Franca programme is based on three questions: How does ECoC help find a common language? How does ECoC help make a common language? How does ECoC help speak a common language? Most of the project ideas are well developed and near to ready to implement.
- The cultural programme has been created so that it has room for projects of various sizes including very small cultural initiatives proposed by the public on the "Letter" and "Syllable" thematic lines, as well as large long-term and transformational events on the "Punctuation" thematic line. Each thematic line has its own form of naming the programmes and project entities. The programme has been compiled through wide participation and the projects have strong connection to the local conditions and needs. The panel welcomes these developments.
- However, the concept and the proposed structure are complicated, with too many layers, making it difficult to communicate with the public in this format. In addition, the concept raises coherence issues, since - according to the panel - it does not answer the questions raised and objectives set.
- The aim of the ECoC is to 'invite people speaking in all languages to jointly create and cooperate in support of a sustainable common existence'. Still, one of the cultural programme's major goals is promoting the use of Latgalian, and the emphasis is strongly on promoting Latgalian culture through the programme in general. The panel sees a contradiction in this respect.
- In general, the ideas of the programme activities are relevant and good for the Daugavpils culture calendar but lack an international dimension to be considered in the context of an ECoC.
- Another shortcoming of the proposal is that there are insufficiently successful ways to develop and enhance cultural heritage and traditional cultural developments through innovative and experimental cultural expressions.

European dimension:

- The programme contains varied activities and concrete projects are presented that cover European themes and values like: democracy, environment protection/nature preservation, preservation of cultural diversity, European citizenship, tolerance, etc.
- The strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public is realistic, well-structured and is focused on the quality of the cultural programme, digital availability, creative tourism, pan-European conferences and forums, activation of Latgale's diaspora as cultural ambassadors, strengthening hospitality capacity and investment in international marketing.
- The narrative of the city feeling that it lives in the shadow of the past Soviet heritage with stifling growth, opportunities, stereotyping of citizens and unleashed national and international cultural and creative opportunities has potential as an European topic.

- The European and international connections are solid, and the city has also good connections with other ECoC titleholders or candidates. Nevertheless, most of the collaborations are not clearly connected to the cultural programme and the plans to feature foreign artists need further development.
- There is no mention of major European cultural networks that the city could collaborate with. These networks can add value to the process and ensure that Daugavpils acts as host city for European conferences, meetings, workshops in the framework of these networks. Those network activities could help brand Daugavpils 2027 in Europe and beyond.

Outreach:

- Due to the pandemic situation, all meetings with different organisations active in Daugavpils and the region were held online. Against this background, a recent survey shows that 88% of the city's inhabitants support the ECoC candidature. This is a promising result in the panel's view.
- The project aims to engage the majority of citizens as volunteers, including taxi drivers, waiters, general staff, etc. However, the plans for recruiting volunteers are very broad, and until now there has been no strategy to secure the involvement of the various targeted audiences.
- An advisory board is to be established to help ensure access to ECoC events for all disadvantaged groups. This is a positive initiative. However, though the barriers for attracting different age groups are identified, along with a simplified strategy to overcome them, the groups at risk of exclusion are not clearly described and the approach towards them requires much more work.
- It is planned to involve people originating from Daugavpils who now live in different parts of Europe and beyond to promote the ECoC idea, which is *per se* a good idea, but the strategy in this regard is still vague.
- Also, though the multicultural character of the city is mentioned, it is not exploited in the outreach part of the bid, which is a missed opportunity.

Management:

- The city intends to use part of the annual budget for culture in order to fund the preparatory activities for the ECoC programme and the planned events in 2027. The annual budget allocated for culture (1.7 mil. euros) is included in the overall contribution of the city for the operating budget (5.5 mil. euros). 3.8 mil euros extra budget will limit the capacity to organise big international events.
- The 20 mil. euros operational budget is realistic and well-balanced between the expenditure categories. The budget for capital expenditure is mainly based on income from the EU (52%) and the city (37%).
- The city council will approve the financial commitment later this summer and the partner municipalities from the Latgale region will be able to commit financially after the administrative reform in June 2021.
- The delivery structure will be the Daugavpils Creates Foundation, which will be created in 2023. The competences of the different departments and bodies of the foundation are transparent and realistic, with the exception of the Supervisory Council and those of the Chairman of the Board.
- The marketing and communication strategy is extensively elaborated, it is well structured and contains goals, methods and tools.
- The risk assessment and analysis are solid, detailed and complemented with mitigation measures.
- It is not clear why three advisory councils are planned. It is the panel's view that having all representatives in one council would be much more efficient and provide more synergies.
- The role and coordination of regional partners is not clearly shown.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has unanimously agreed with the candidacy.
- Although the Arts Centre Mark Rothko is a strong cultural infrastructure and a clear asset and the planned Oskars Stroks hall and various renovation plans are promising, the panel is concerned about the relatively low capacity in terms of suitable cultural infrastructure available in the city for hosting an event of the scale and quality of an ECoC with international resonance.
- The distance between Daugavpils and the partner city Rēzekne raises questions about how big a role Rēzekne can play in successfully realising (part of) the ECoC programme.
- The panel wonders whether hotels, guest houses, restaurants, bars and cafés in Daugavpils will have the capacity necessary for receiving large crowds of national and international guests that can be expected for an ECoC.
- Apart from the Arts Centre Mark Rothko, the city has a limited experience in hosting international level events.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Daugavpils proceeds to the final selection phase.

The proposed concept is considered by the panel strong with potential to lead to a good ECoC proposal. However, the panel considers that the concept and the proposed structure are at this stage still too complicated and require further consolidation and development. Also, there are doubts if the projects answer the questions raised and objectives set.

The projects need to improve their international dimension and the overall European Dimension to be considered in the context of an ECoC - what can Europe do for Daugavpils and what can Daugavpils do for Europe?

Finally, most of the collaborations are not clearly connected to the cultural programme and the plans to feature foreign artists need further development. There is no mention of major European cultural networks that the city could collaborate with. It is also unclear how the promotion of the Latgalian language interlinks with the main theme.

Jēkabpils

The concept is encompassed by the phrase *Imprint in Time and Space* and is developed from the vision that puts focus on the individual affected by the territorial reforms within the cultural space. The concept is further developed in the cultural programme into 4 dimensions: ME AND NATURE, ME AND SOCIETY, ME AND ME, ME AND FUTURE.

The administrative territorial reform that is being implemented in Latvia will result in a merger of 5 neighbouring municipalities, comprising Jēkabpils and directly adjacent territories (Krustpils, Jēkabpils, Aknīste, Sala and Viesīte), and creating a unified administrative territory and a single cultural environment space with the administrative centre in the City of Jēkabpils that will be the centre stage for the ECoC year.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- The city's cultural strategy, approved in May 2021, runs until 2027 and is linked to the city's long-term vision until 2030.

- The ECoC contributes to and is an integral part of this strategy in that it has to act as a catalyst for development: the incentive for change and the main driving force.
- The plans for strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors include a wide range of activities such as promoting the involvement of educated, creative people in the field of culture to organising creative industry conferences and the establishment of a network between cultural institutions and non-governmental organisations.
- The long-term impacts of the ECoC on the city, region and European levels are described in a satisfactory way. However, the links between the cultural, economic and social sectors could have been elaborated in more detail.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are addressed sufficiently for the pre-selection phase.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The cultural and artistic programme has a simple concept – How technology/engineering affects physical spaces and people’s lives. Jēkabpils wants to ‘*use research, cultural and art programs as the basis for discussion with other European cities about the long-term impact of territorial reforms on the society*’. The primary desire for becoming the European Capital of Culture is getting an answer to the question “what is the long-term impact of the reforms on the society?”.
- It is the panel’s view that although original, the theme is too narrow for an ECoC. The programme is too generally sketched in the bid book, and the individual activities listed are predominantly discussions, workshops, sports and recreation events, “multimedia footpaths”, amateur groups’ festivals, etc... The link between the concept and the described cultural events is thin and rather weak.
- Furthermore, the cultural and artistic programme is still under-developed and most of the conceptual questions raised by the proposal remain unanswered, including the question related to the involvement of local artists. Both the idea of the programme and project ideas lack European scope.
- It is also not clear how local cultural organisations and artists have been involved in the proposal development. The same can be said, regarding potential European partnerships and collaborations (under the “European dimension” criterion).

European dimension:

- **The European dimension is severely underdeveloped, and it is not connected with** the cultural programme.
- The main European theme is urban unification. The panel has doubts about the relevance of this subject as a major theme at the European level.
- The plans for attracting broad foreign participation focus on conurbation as an international theme (which is very limited and doubtful in its potential to attract a broad audience), international events, international cooperation with different networks and artist residencies, diaspora, partnerships with foreign cities and communication.
- European artists’ participation is addressed in a generic way, without examples of existing or foreseen collaborations.
- There are no mentions of specific existing or foreseen partnerships with foreign cultural operators, European cultural networks or cities.

Outreach:

- **According to the bid, the aim of the ECoC process is to make the city a friendly** place to live and work in, and a place to be proud of. So far, a survey

among the inhabitants has been conducted, but no results are provided. An open call for project proposals was also launched, which gathered ideas from different members of the community. Another campaign was launched to attract the attention of the city's former residents now living abroad. Unfortunately, the outcomes of these interactions, which are positive exercises as such, are not presented, even though the bidding team stressed that "the individual is the central value of our concept".

- Therefore, it is impossible to establish to what extent the proposed concept and programme actually meets the needs and expectations of the local community.
- An extensive voluntary programme is planned, but here again it is unclear whether the inhabitants are willing to take part in it, or in what ways they are to be recruited.
- As for disadvantaged groups, a series of events is planned, instead of assuring accessibility to all events and presenting an inclusive approach.
- Regarding the audience development strategy, it is so far limited to the need for a stronger cultural education of the community in order to prepare for the "big arts and culture events". This is only one dimension of a proper strategy in this respect. Also, there are no references either to the multinational character of the city and various national minorities, or to the international audience.

Management:

- The 22.08 mil. euros operating budget will have as main contributors the City and the National Government, each representing approx. 47% of the total budget coming from the public purse. The operating expenditure is realistic and feasible and it is centered on the artistic programme (70%).
- The candidate relies mainly on EU funding for capital investment (85%), but the city and its subordinate institutions have the experience in attracting EU funds, since 95% of the municipality's investments for the period 2010-2020 came from those funds.
- The city council will commit financially for the operating expenditure after the approval of the application by the panel.
- The delivery structure will be the "Jēkabpils 2027" Foundation, which will be established in 2022. The responsibilities of the General Director and of the Artistic Director are presented, and they are adequate.
- The risk assessment is thorough and detailed.
- The marketing and communication strategy is comprehensive and realistic.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has agreed with the candidacy.
- The panel doubts if the available cultural infrastructure in the city and region will be sufficient for hosting international events of the scale of an ECoC.
- The city lacks sufficient accommodation capacities and is dependent upon other cities in this regard.
- Delivering an ECoC at the highest European professional standards requires a critical mass of capacities with the right skills at the right time. With the capacity at hand in Jēkabpils, the panel is concerned about the capacity to deliver within the plan of the bid.

Conclusion

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

It is the panel's view that although original, the theme is too narrow for an ECoC. The programme is too generally sketched in the bid book and its links to the cultural,

economic and social Jēkabpils' sectors should have been better demonstrated. Therefore, it is impossible to establish to what extent the proposed concept and programme actually meets the needs and expectations of the local community.

Furthermore, the cultural and artistic programme is still underdeveloped and most of the conceptual questions raised by the proposal remain unanswered. Both the idea of the programme and project ideas lack European scope.

The European dimension is severely underdeveloped, and it is not connected with the cultural programme, e.g. there are no mentions of existing or foreseen partnerships with foreign cultural operators, European cultural networks, or cities.

Finally, the panel doubts if the available cultural and accommodation infrastructures in the city and region will be sufficient for hosting international events of the scale of an ECoC.

Jelgava

Jelgava presented its bid under the motto of "Tabula Rasa", which is about 'the urge to change yourself, to re-evaluate the existing conditions and to make a greater impact.' With its candidacy, the city wants to open a new page. The prospective events of the ECoC are primarily meant to happen in the city of Jelgava, but a significant part of the artistic and cultural programme will also be carried out at various locations in the Jelgava County.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- The city's cultural strategy was approved in May 2021 and runs until 2027. There is a newly established Jelgava County Sustainable Strategy 2022-2035. The place of the ECoC in the city's cultural strategy could be further refined, and the impact of the ECoC as a strategic objective is underdeveloped.
- In light of the plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors, references are made to organisations that play a role in the development of creative industries and the political commitment to promote the development of creative ideas in business, tourism, management and social integration processes. However, apart from training offered in various creative professions, there seem to be no concrete plans in place in this regard.
- The long-term cultural, social, economic and environmental impact of the ECoC on the city and regional, regional and European levels has been described in a sound way.
- However, the long-term links between the cultural, economic and social sectors remain rather underexposed.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation need to be made more concrete to also include elements such as a concrete list of key indicators and an envisioned timeline.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The main ECoC programme concept is *Tabula rasa*. The aim is to open a new, blank page for Jelgava, and to 'write on the tabula rasa of Jelgava's imperfection'. The *Tabula rasa* concept is not only an artistic vision, but also an axis of the organisational and programmatic scheme. The proposed project ideas mark the transition from ordinary entertainment to creative, more meaningful cultural content, and this is, in the panel's view, a very positive change.
- However, the concept is still underdeveloped and not coherent with the presented projects: the programme is conceptualised through the keyboard keys

(CapsLock, Return, Alt, etc.), but this seems more of a design-driven rather than content-driven approach; there are also some incoherencies or lack of proper descriptions – why are the “Student days” part of the “Backspace” programme line, which is about the past?

- Overall, the programme is still in a very early stage and projects are mainly described at a very general level. When more detailed information is provided, the proposed projects are very small in terms of scale, given the ECoC context, or don't have a clear artistic/ cultural content - e.g., to apply for the Unesco City of Literature nomination or establishing a new botanical garden.
- The projects that are listed are a combination of already existing annual events and vaguely described new projects. Some local partners are mentioned vaguely in the project description, but no references are made to international partners.
- Finally, the approach to cultural heritage is stereotypical, not knowledge based, and there is no message to convey. Besides, any use of cultural heritage could contradict with the concept of *tabula rasa*, so this is not properly addressed and explained.

European dimension:

- Overall, the panel considers that the European dimension is poorly developed. As an example, there is no concrete mention about featuring European artists or transnational partnerships.
- Furthermore, the only mention of a collaboration with ECoCs are plans to work with five Portuguese candidate cities. Though the ideas in this respect are well presented and adequate for the ECoC project in Jelgava, they are insufficient to cover the magnitude of the title year.
- The candidate demonstrates a clear but theoretical understanding of the necessity for an ECoC project to reach beyond the city/national borders. It is unclear if the candidate has the capacity to convert this theoretical knowledge into practical actions.
- Jelgava has many sister cities from Estonia, Lithuania, Italy, France, Denmark and Poland. These are connections that could be useful in terms of cooperation and marketing, yet these connections are not used in a convincing way to potentiate the European dimension of the cultural programme.
- On a positive note, the candidate recognizes it is not about branding Jelgava in Europe but about having a genuine impact in terms of enriching the European cultural map through the city's contribution to art and culture with a European dimension. This is welcomed by the panel.
- The candidate also demonstrates a good understanding on how to attract visitors from abroad to the city, and it has sound strategies for this.

Outreach:

- In the process of the preparation of the bid, a survey among the inhabitants was conducted, done by a professional company. The results showed that the community is very active in participating in cultural events, but also desires higher quality. This could be an opportunity to further develop and improve the culture offering in the city and region.
- The survey also showed that the majority of the residents are not interested in the culture and traditions of national and ethnic minorities; in terms of the proposed outreach strategy, this requires further considerations that are however lacking.
- As for disadvantaged groups, several are identified, but little is said in terms of strategies and solutions to engage with them. Audience development is only mainly focusing on attracting youth to participate in cultural events. Also, there is no mention of a volunteering programme and international audiences are absent from the bid.

Management:

- The 24.5 mil. euros operational budget is adequate and well-balanced between the expenditure categories.
- The private funding plans are not convincing and need further refinement.
- A non-profit organisation called Jelgava 2027 will be the delivery structure. The delivery structure is adequately organised with clear composition and competencies for the Supervisory Body and for the Board of the Organization, but these bodies lack representatives from the cultural sector, as only administration representatives are included.
- The Supervisory Board is administratively constructed - Jelgava city council, Jelgava county, Ministry of culture. It would be advisable to involve representatives of cultural NGOs, the public and businesses for a more transparent monitoring of the project.
- The ECoC project has a coherent risk analysis, but the financial risk is not taken into consideration.
- The marketing and communication strategy is solid and realistic. It contains enough (and relevant) details and activities that show the overall perspective of the candidate's plans.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has agreed with the candidacy.
- Although improving the infrastructure is a priority for the city, the panel doubts whether the cultural infrastructure in place will be sufficient for hosting larger international events.
- The city lacks sufficient accommodation capacities and is dependent upon Riga in this regard.

Conclusion

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

The panel found the theme of "Tabula Rasa" underdeveloped and lacking sufficient content and a straightforward link to the programme. The cultural and artistic programme itself seems to support mainly existing annual events, with new projects only vaguely described.

The development of the European dimension also lags behind what should be expected at this stage, with no concrete mentioning of European artists or transnational partnerships. Concerning outreach, little information is provided on how to engage the disadvantaged groups identified and the audience development strategy seems to have a limited focus. The risk analysis is coherent, albeit the financial risk is not taken into consideration.

The panel, however, recognises the support for the candidacy as a positive element and encourages the city to continue its plans for investing in cultural infrastructure and to continue the changes initiated by the candidacy in the cultural processes of the city.

Jūrmala

By becoming an ECoC, the city aims to "release the power that culture hosts and demonstrate that culture is an artery of health and of life and keeps the circulation between society and nature flowing".

The aim of the cultural strategy is to highlight the city's unique nature as a resort town, to create a range of cultural events and high-quality cultural tourism activities for both visitors and residents and to provide quality in the living space through creative neighbourhoods and by making culture accessible. The ideas, priorities and projects included in the ECoC application will also be included in the new cultural strategy, which will ensure the longevity of cultural events.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- The city's current cultural strategy has been extended until 31 December 2022. A new strategy is expected to be approved in early 2022.
- The ECoC contributes to and is an integral part of the new cultural strategy in that the latter will also include the ideas, priorities and projects of the ECoC application, which has to ensure the longevity of cultural events.
- The plans for strengthening the cultural and creative sectors are convincing and include cultural mapping, building local cooperation platforms, cultural planning, training and international networking. The capacity-building programme – the Brain *ART*ery in particular seems promising in this regard.
- However, the long-term links that will be developed between the cultural, economic and social sectors could have been elaborated in more detail.
- The long-term cultural, social and economic impact is identified in a sound and detailed way along the four strands of the programme.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are addressed sufficiently for the pre-selection phase.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The main ECoC programme concept is *ART*eries, referring to the five natural arteries that pass the city. The concept is presented in a solid and coherent way.
- The programme structure and strategy are clear and well thought out, and the programme includes innovative projects of different scales. In fact, the programme is rather developed for this stage of the competition, with a clear identification of partner organizations in terms of geography and types.
- Positively, the programme emphasises cultural heritage in a contemporary framework.
- The team has already involved local artists and cultural organisations in shaping the bid proposal, e.g. through an open call for projects. An advisory council is proposed to be established, to keep arts and culture organisations involved. The panel considers all this to be very positive.
- However, the international cooperation aspect of the programme requires further development and concretisation. The same can be said regarding the involvement of regional partners, to guarantee that the ECoC stretches beyond the city. The programme could also benefit from some more artistically edgy projects.

European dimension:

- The European dimension is widely - and convincingly - present in the application, touching relevant European themes that are connected with local realities and aspirations. The proposed events and actions cover a wide range of art expressions and they are consistent and relevant for the promotion of European cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding between European citizens.
- The candidate provides good and detailed project examples in the cultural programme that stand as evidence of its intention to develop the European dimension.
- The city has an elaborated strategy to attract broad foreign audience that is mainly based on the city's advantages and opportunities like: closeness to Riga

(25km), the solid, Europe-oriented programme, digitalisation as well as diverse collaborations in which the city is involved (twinning cities, different foreign networks and organisations, embassies, etc).

- Partnerships are envisaged with relevant institutional partners for the implementation of cultural projects that emphasise the EU's values, such as: the European Parliament, the European Commission Representation, public bodies, embassies and the Charter of European Rural Communities.
- The city is part of strong international cooperation networks and has solid experience in organising international music competitions, festivals, concerts, exhibitions, creative meetings and workshops with world-class artists.
- The candidate has very good plans to develop links with other ECoC cities in terms of ways to connect the proposed activities and the cultural programme.
- On a not so positive note, there is an absence of programmes and actions to demonstrate how the citizens of Jūrmala and its visitors will experience Europe in Jūrmala. This aspect is a key element of the European dimension criterion.

Outreach:

- Due to the pandemic, real life meetings with the community were impossible but online discussions allowed to define the expectations of the inhabitants in the field of culture. Citizens were invited to put their ideas in an "Ideas Bank", so the programme was constructed in a participatory manner (more than 150 ideas were collected). This is considered by the panel as very positive.
- Disadvantaged groups and organisations representing them were involved in project preparations to make them as accessible as possible. The multinational character of the city was also taken into account.
- Audience development is targeted in a participatory approach and the volunteering programme is supposed to attract representatives of all social groups of the community. This is assessed by the panel as very positive.
- However, the profile of the local population is defined in a very general way, without reflecting the specific features of the inhabitants and the problems and challenges of the indigenous population of the resort town. This aspect requires further development, leading to a more detailed consideration of the sociological profile of Jūrmala citizens and, accordingly, to offer a more detailed action plan for their participation and involvement.

Management:

- The 15 mil. euros operational budget proposed is realistic, both in terms of income and proposed expenditure lines with the city of Jūrmala (47% of the total coming from the public purse) and the National Government (43%) as the main sources of finance.
- By approving the application, the Jūrmala city council also gave an initial approval of the total budget to cover the costs of the ECoC programme. It is expected that the city council will take a final decision at the end of 2021, which coincides with the final selection meeting. Due to the administrative reform, the newly established municipalities of Tukums and Talsi will be able to make the budgetary decisions only later this year.
- The fundraising plans focus on the advantage resulting from the proximity to the capital city of Riga to get major companies involved in financing the project. Other fundraising directions are a solid sponsorship programme, donations and private co-financing of the open call projects.
- The capital budget is 79.4 mil. euros and will be based on income from the city (30%), the EU (30%) and loans (39%). The proposed capital investments are relevant for the ECoC.
- In case of selection, the Jūrmala 2027 Foundation will be established. The elements from the organizational chart of the delivery structure are thoroughly

presented. The Supervisory Council selects the Director general and the Artistic Director through international open calls, which are positive elements.

- The marketing and communication plans are well elaborated and contain specific principles, objectives and measures.
- The contingency planning is underdeveloped, and it lacks a risk analysis and mitigation measures.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has unanimously agreed with the candidacy.
- The city has a developed cultural life, but limited capabilities with indoor venues.
- The panel questions the city's capacity to deliver a programme all year round.
- The city is experienced in hosting international level events.
- Jūrmala is a well-developed tourist destination in many aspects. However, the city's capacity to receive additional visitors for the ECoC year, ensuring adequate access by both public and private transport, needs to be addressed and assessed.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Jūrmala proceeds to the final selection phase.

The main programme concept - *ARTeries* - is presented in a solid and coherent way, and the programme strategy and plan are well advanced. The bid provides good and detailed project examples in the cultural programme that shows evidence of its intention on developing the European dimension.

The European dimension of the proposal requires development, since there is an absence of programmes and actions that demonstrate how the citizens of Jūrmala and its visitors will experience Europe in Jūrmala. This aspect is a key element of the European dimension criterion.

Audience development is targeted in a participatory approach, but a detailed consideration of the sociological profile of Jūrmala citizens, their needs and challenges, is needed in order to have a realistic plan involving the population. This aspect requires much further development.

The budget is comprehensive and realistic, but the contingency planning needs refinement with a focus on risk analysis and mitigation.

Kuldīga

"Home Streams", a term used to denote the return instinct of spawning fish, is the guiding principle of Kuldīga bid and the concept of the cultural programme. It represents a set of values, an instinct that calls one to come back home, to give oneself to the native stream, to create and motivate.

Kuldīga plans to implement part of the ECoC programme together with five neighbouring districts – Skrunda, Saldus, Ventspils, Alsunga and Aizpute.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- The city's new cultural strategy, adopted in spring 2021, runs until 2028 and will come into force during the selection phase.

- The bid states the ECoC candidacy is in line with this strategy, without clearly specifying the interlinkage between the two, apart from the fact that it will serve as a starting signal for a new stage of development.
- In light of the plans for strengthening the cultural and creative sectors, references are mainly made to a newly established study programme, the creation of an educational and business support centre and the already existing Kaļķu Street Quarter, without sufficiently explaining how these initiatives will help strengthening the aforementioned sectors.
- Regarding the long-term links between the cultural, economic and social sectors, references are made to existing initiatives such as the Restoration Centre and the Kuldīga Democracy Quarter, without specifying how they will be deployed in developing intersectional connections.
- The long-term cultural, social and economic impact is identified, but rather in a descriptive manner.
- Initial plans for monitoring and evaluation are in place. However, the provided information on key indicators is rather limited and a clear timeline is lacking.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The main programme concept is *Home Streams*, referring to spawning fish. In the city's vision, ecology is to become the mainstay of culture: the cultural sector, and cultural Capital, has to employ its creative potential to address a complex, systematic challenge our aquatic cultures are facing in the coming years.
- The idea of the river could have a lot of potential as a basis for a programme concept. However, it would need to be developed in a more conceptual and culture-oriented way.
- The development of the programme involved meetings with artists, focus group discussions, and brainstorming sessions. The plan is to continue cooperation and to obtain full representation of local culture, community organisations and their employees.
- Although two sub-programmes streams are named, the proposed projects have not been assigned to any of those.
- The list of proposed projects per se are quite interesting but remain detached from the concept. The framework of the programme with the dominant ecological approach does not reach a balanced concept.
- The definition of culture seems to be very wide, including nature and angling. As a result, only a few of the projects concentrate on arts and culture, having art as the core and the starting point of the project. In most of the projects, artists seem to have a superficial role. Even though the local artists and focus groups are said to have been involved in the development of the programme, the question is who and which organisations, and this information is lacking.

European dimension:

- The candidate proposes ecology as the main European theme with its ramifications towards the European Green Deal, the New European Bauhaus and the issue of security in its diverse forms. The panel considers that this is a relevant approach with a clear European resonance.
- The ecology theme is presented convincingly as it is connected to local realities with the Venta River as the basis of Kuldīga's ecosystem and a consolidating force for the people, but the panel fears that this thematic concentration narrows the potential impact of the title at the European level.
- The bid includes many contacts with foreign networks and organisations but without describing their link with or involvement in the cultural programme, which is a serious weakness.
- The strategy to attract the interest of broad European and international audiences is unrealistic and underdeveloped as it is concentrated only on the

power of attraction of three continental challenges - actualisation and mitigation of climate change, lack of public participation in cultural processes and the polarisation and social inequality in the society.

- The collaboration with other ECoCs is very incipient with no concrete links in terms of cultural programming, but the numerous twinning cities could be a basis for expanding the cooperation at European level.

Outreach:

- The bidding team demonstrates a participatory approach to their work. Due to lockdown caused by the pandemic, numerous meetings with the community members were held online. This is seen by the panel as a positive effort.
- A study on the conditions of life and culture habits in the city was performed. It showed a rather passive approach of the residents, yet with a strong need for belonging to a place, a community. Therefore, development of civil society is amongst the biggest challenges. However, it is not clear how this is reflected in the ECoC bid book.
- Several social groups at risk of exclusion were also identified. An important conclusion from the study is that disadvantaged groups are not necessarily discriminated against but simply feel invisible, and this challenge must be overcome. In response, a strategy for engaging all members of the community into ECoC programme preparation and implementation is being developed, but further details at this stage are not presented.

Management:

- The 19 mil. euros operational budget proposed is realistic, both in terms of income and proposed expenditure lines with the city of Kuldīga (43% of the total coming from the public purse) and the National Government (43%) as the main sources of finance. The Melina Mercouri Prize is included in the operational budget, which is not in line with the prescriptions of the questionnaire.
- The Kuldīga District Council adopted a decision supporting the programme as well as the corresponding financial obligations.
- The capital budget is 12 mil. euros and will be based on income from the District Council (42%), the EU (31%) and the National Government (27%). The proposed capital investments are relevant for the ECoC. No new cultural infrastructure is planned to be created for the implementation of the ECoC programme.
- The contingency planning is incomplete and inconsistent. There is no risk assessment.
- The legal form of the delivery structure is not presented. No organogram of the delivery structure is presented, so the relation between different bodies/parts of the delivery structure is unclear.
- The marketing and communication strategy is extensively elaborated, but lacks methodology and tools.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has unanimously agreed with the candidacy.
- The existence of indoor spaces is limited; and no concrete new solutions/projects are being proposed in this regard.
- The panel is concerned that the application team does not consider the weak infrastructure and delivery capabilities as an issue.
- The panel questions the city's capacity to deliver a programme all year round.
- The city and the team have experience in hosting international level events.

Conclusion

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

The main programme concept - *Home Streams* - interlinks the ecology with culture, but many of the projects are inconsistent with the concept as it seems the ecology part predominates cultural issues. The idea of the river could have a lot of potential as a basis for a programme concept, if developed in a more conceptual and culture-oriented way.

The plans to attract a broad foreign audience are underdeveloped and incoherent. The bidding team demonstrates a participatory approach to their work, which is a positive aspect. Although the operating budget is a realistic one, the project management is poorly described, which impedes the panel to assess the management capacity.

Liepāja

Under the theme of “(un)rest”, the Liepāja bid aims to activate the 85% of the community that don’t regularly participate in cultural life or events. With its candidacy, the city wants to bring more (un)rest to all parts of society, increase international networking and connections and find out what the European Dream entails.

The bid includes the surrounding South-Kurzeme region. Within the ECoC context, the city works together with this region in the fields of ‘sea and nature’ and ‘cultural and military heritage’.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- A cultural strategy is currently into place until 2030; another strategy running until 2035 will be approved early 2022.
- The ECoC is connected with the strategy in that the latter’s core objectives align with the ECoC actions. The strategy also shows coherence with the cultural and artistic programme.
- The plans for strengthening the cultural and creative sectors include a list of 10 initiatives that are planned within the framework of the ECoC.
- In light of developing long-term links between the cultural and creative sectors and the economic sector, references are made to a (pre-)incubation programme and the expected boost the ECoC will generate in the fields of fashion and textile innovation as well as in the crafts sector. Mutual contacts between sectors will be encouraged through a training and capacity programme. This looks quite promising to the panel. On a less positive note, specific links with the social sector remain rather unexplored, though.
- The long-term cultural, social and economic impact in the fields of culture, public involvement, education, public health, environment and urban development and economics is identified in a sound and detailed manner.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are sufficiently addressed for the pre-selection phase.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The main programme concept is (un)rest. Referring e.g. to the windiness of the city (a city where the wind is born), and the notice that part of the city’s inhabitants are very active and some very passive ones. ‘What is in rest must be shaken up and what is in unrest has to become more peaceful and accessible.’ Therefore, the main aim is to activate the “sleeping 85%”, to create more

synergies between population groups in the city and to stimulate active participation of citizens in the life of the city community.

- The vision is that the programme will help to understand and articulate healthy and sustainable human-nature relationships and promote critical thinking, help to avoid confusion in an increasingly globalised world of information technology, science and artificial intelligence, and to help us all navigate the creative foresight of the future. This is a very strong and multifaceted concept. It has a logical background story, fitting to the city, and it has dimensions which make it relevant and potentially interesting also on a European scale.
- The programme supports the concept, and the programme lines bring additional layers to the programme entity. Still, all the layers of the programme form a coherent entity, and are clearly structured.
- The projects have been designed by cultural institutions, independent artists and NGOs together with partners and contacts from different parts in Europe and the world, demonstrating a high level of collaboration and involvement.
- The dichotomy “traditional vs contemporary art” is approached in a rather limited way, by limiting the distinction between the two in terms of IT involvement.
- It remains not entirely convincing how the strategy will activate the “sleeping 85%” - the proposed programmes might have a mild effect in this direction, but accomplishing the expected big impact requires further explanations.
- The city’s rich cultural heritage and complex history are relatively absent and should be better incorporated into the programme and used as inspiration, including earlier centuries’ history, worth exploring, in terms of multinational and multi-ethnic peaceful coexistence.

European dimension:

- The European dimension is well represented horizontally throughout the cultural programme with relevant threads developed on common values, such as equality, acceptance, identity preservation, mutual learning, common history etc... This is very much welcomed by the panel.
- However, the numerous international connections and partners included in the bid book are generally described without explaining their connection with the cultural programme. In the panel’s view, the plans to feature European artists must also be improved in order to multiply and intensify the European component in the cultural programme.
- The strategy to attract a broad European and international public is limited to the varied themes of the cultural programme and needs further improvement.
- The links with other ECoC cities are numerous and adequately described with concrete links to the cultural programme.
- The fact that the city has twinning agreements with 11 foreign cities might constitute a solid basis for cooperation and a tool to facilitate connections with artists and cultural operators.
- At this stage, the panel still has doubts that the programme as it stands now will duly highlight and celebrate in Liepāja the rich European cultural diversity, which is an important element of the “European dimension” criterion.

Outreach:

- Due to the lockdown caused by the pandemic, all meetings with the local community were organized online as well as surveys that helped in preparing the bid. The panel considers these efforts to be very positive.
- However, the needs and expectations of the inhabitants are not described in detail. For example, the city team recognises the need for different nationalities living in the city to get together and even reconcile (Latvians and Russians), but no solution is provided.

- A large-scale volunteering programme is planned, but the team admits that very limited work has been implemented. Creating better conditions for NGOs to develop and operate is another challenge, but no solutions are proposed at this stage.
- Audience development is another big task, especially given the fact that most inhabitants do not participate in any cultural events at all. Therefore, the challenge is not only to allow participation for disadvantaged groups, but to attract all community members. This, however, requires a thorough audience research, which is planned as well, but mainly absent at this stage.

Management:

- The 20 mil. euros operational budget proposed is realistic, both in terms of income and proposed expenditure lines with the city of Liepāja (39% of the total budget coming from the public source) and the National Government (54%) as the main sources of finance.
- Liepāja City Council approved the city's contribution and the overall budget for the European Capital of Culture 2027.
- The planned private contribution is significant (8% of the total budget), but at the same time the strategy to attract financial contributions from the private sector is solid and coherent. It is mainly based on companies from the Liepāja Special Economic Zone, cooperation with different foundations, diaspora, direct donations and crowdfunding etc.
- The capital budget is 30.5 mil. euros and will be based on income from the city (25%), the EU (65%) and the National Government (10%). The proposed capital investments are relevant for the ECoC.
- The proposed delivery structure is a foundation called Liepāja 2027. The recruitment of the specialists needed will take place via an open process, involving both local cultural and creative professionals and also professionals from elsewhere in Latvia and internationally. This seems adequate.
- The marketing and communication strategy is comprehensive and realistic with goals, methods and tools.
- The contingency planning is solid and realistic.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has unanimously agreed with the candidacy.
- Liepāja has a developed cultural life and an adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme.
- In addition, the city has an adequate capacity to deliver a digitally advanced ECoC- one that utilises IT and AI in its preparation and cultural programme.
- The city is experienced in hosting international level events in culture and sports.
- Liepāja and its surrounding region are a well-developed and attractive tourist destination.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Liepāja proceeds to the final selection phase. While the panel sees a lot of potential in the bid, there are areas, which need deeper consideration.

The panel found the multifaceted concept of (un)rest convincing and saw it supported by the cultural and artistic programme. The programme itself has been designed by cultural institutions, independent artists and NGOs together with contacts from different parts of Europe and beyond, thus illustrating a high level of collaboration and involvement. Further explanations are required though to demonstrate that the proposed programme can activate the "sleeping 85%".

The European dimension could be deepened through improving the plans of featuring European artists and by looking at more options for attracting a wider audience in Europe and beyond. The engagement procedures as well as the planned volunteer programme are sound, although they could be further elaborated keeping minority groups in mind.

The operational budget proposed is realistic, and the city has the adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme. The candidate should strengthen the aspects of the programme that enables all Liepajans to have access to and experience the richness of the European cultural diversity in Liepāja.

Finally, the panel recommends that more work be done on the strategy to attract a wider European and international audience by showing what the specific and unique attractions of Liepāja are, that could catalyse audiences from abroad.

Ogre

The bid book is entitled "Spark of Change", and the programme is named "Ogre. The European Capital of Culture 2027". The concept of the programme is based on two guiding themes: water and light. Water refers to the river Daugava, and the presence of water is the common guiding theme for all activities. The theme light will be used in the broadest meaning possible, from lighting in the dark seasons of the year to intellectual light and cultural light.

The artistic vision of Ogre 2027 is created by emphasising the local cultural diversity from the formation of the settlement of Ogre to the present day. During this journey Ogre will highlight not only the significance of history and how it has affected both the population and the development of the territory as it is today, but also how it all affects the environment, human equality and people's attitude towards each other.

The programme offer will be developed not only by highlighting the traditional cultural sector, but by closely involving parallel sectors – sports, education, entrepreneurship, and science.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- Various aspects of the status of the cultural strategy are not clear; it seems the understanding of the cultural strategy in the overall governance of the city could be improved.
- The ECoC contributes to the strategy in that the activities that are planned in the antecedent years gradually prepare the course for 2027, which will help to start the centenary celebration of Ogre in 2028.
- The plans to strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors seem to be based mainly upon investments in the construction of the Musical Theatre and infrastructure for summer activities.
- There seem to be no concrete plans for developing long-term links between the cultural and creative sectors and the economic and social sectors.
- The description of the broader long-term cultural, social and economic impact of the ECoC remains limited to references to the European Parade of the Operettas and an increase in visitors. On a more positive note, information is provided on the long-term impact per cultural event.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are underdeveloped even for this phase of the competition.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The concept of the programme is based on two guiding themes: water and light. Water refers to the river Daugava, and the presence of water is the common guiding theme for all activities. The theme light will be used in the broadest meaning possible, from lighting in the dark seasons of the year to intellectual light and cultural light. During this journey Ogre will highlight not only the significance of history and how it has affected both the population and the development of the territory as it is today, but also how it all affects the environment, human equality and people's attitude towards each other. Overall, the panel considers that the concept is potentially interesting as a basis for further development.
- However, the concept is still very underdeveloped and there is no explanation how the two themes are implemented in the projects – besides some obvious cases. The project examples are still very preliminary, which makes the evaluation of the programme very difficult. No partners or responsible organisations are mentioned, not to mention international partners.
- The response to the question concerning the combination of local heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions lacks the understanding of what could be meant with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions.
- According to the bid, Ogre has consulted with local artists, creative personalities, entrepreneurs, schools and other organisations regarding their vision of the implementation of the project, but not much information is provided. Only in the second round, working groups are planned to be formed for the creation of the artistic programme, with the inclusion of artists from the municipality of Ogre – both those who live in it and those who were born there but have not lost their connection with it.
- Finally, although the bid book is entitled "Spark of Change" and the programme is named "Ogre. The European Capital of Culture 2027", the theme is not at all mentioned in the strategy and programme. Therefore, at this stage, it is not clear how the two relate to one another.

European dimension:

- The candidate proposes three symbolical European dimensions:
 - Ogre - a contemporary town, in which the city's desire is to be on the same level as other contemporary cities;
 - Ogre - an environmentally friendly town, in which the city will implement environmentally friendly cultural activities;
 - Ogre - a technologically advanced town, in which the city wishes to invite everyone there interactively.
- However, the European dimension is not sufficiently present in the bid and would have gained significantly in going beyond what the panel considers too theoretical a presentation. The narrative behind the main themes touched is much too superficial and in most cases lacks connections with the cultural programme.
- The city's plans to create links with other ECoCs are mainly centered on exchanging exhibitions, interactive joint concerts and "other activities where dialogue and cooperation can be built". The plans are incipient and need further development both in terms of the number of ECoC collaborations and in terms of links to the cultural programme. The main partnerships are based on the cooperation with twin cities and with one of the Portuguese candidates for the other ECoC title in 2027 - The Azores, which the panel considers as insufficient.

- The strategy to attract broad foreign audiences is based on the power of attraction of some important themes (such as environmental change, rapid development of technology, generational change, preserving traditions), but it lacks diversity and needs further development.

Outreach:

- The bid has been prepared by a team composed of heads of the most important cultural institutions and organizations in the city, assisted by invited experts. This scheme implies that this is a top-down initiative and the involvement of the community has been limited to the possibility to express ideas on an online platform and participate in a competition for logo and slogan of the bid.
- There is no information about any diagnosis being performed to establish the actual community needs and expectations. This is a major shortcoming.
- Disadvantaged groups are mainly identified as persons with physical and intellectual disabilities, and it is planned to include disabled artists in some projects, like theatre festivals. However, there is no strategy designed on how to make all events accessible and how to overcome social exclusion.
- Finally, the ideas for audience development are also very general and therefore limit the assessment of their adequacy.

Management:

- The city plans to use funds from the annual cultural budget for the ECoC only as co-financing for the participation of Ogre cultural institutions in the ECoC project. The total amount planned to be used from the annual cultural budget is 440,000 euros and it is not included in the operating budget presented.
- The 8.6 mil. euros operational budget proposed is realistic, both in terms of income and proposed expenditure lines with the city of Ogre (3 mil. euros) and the National Government (4.3 mil euros) as the main sources of finance. Nevertheless, the panel doubts about the capacity of the ECoC project to produce events with an important resonance at European level with this limited budget.
- The city council has already decided to participate in the project. The decision was almost unanimous, which is positive. The final decision on the allocation of funding will be taken if Ogre is selected as the ECoC 2027.
- The plans to attract income from the private sector are too synthetic, but the methods presented are adequate even though the impact of the private sector's contribution on the overall budget is very limited.
- The delivery structure lacks details like: legal form, who will lead the executive management, who will be responsible for the artistic programme. The structure of the organisation is poorly presented and inconsistent. The candidate answered during the Q&A that the delivery structure would be the Cultural Centre under the municipality's jurisdiction.
- The contingency planning is very weak and unrealistic. There are only three risks identified and the mitigation measures are inadequate.
- The marketing and communication strategy is focused on three main directions: local residents, Latvians and European people. The other foreigners that are not Europeans are practically excluded.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council has agreed with the candidacy.
- The panel is concerned the city and region lack suitable cultural infrastructure for hosting an event of the scale and quality of an ECoC with international resonance.
- The city has limited experience in hosting larger events.
- Ogre has no hotel and limited accommodation facilities in the direct region; the city depends upon Riga in this regard.

Conclusion

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

The proposed concept is still very underdeveloped and there is no explanation on how the two themes are implemented in the projects. Also, it is not clear how the involvement of local artists, creative personalities, entrepreneurs, schools and other organizations will happen in real terms.

Strong partnerships, both at local and international level are missing. Furthermore, there seem to be no concrete plans for developing long-term links between the cultural and creative sectors and the economic and social sectors. Regarding the European dimension, it is not sufficiently present in the bid and requires significant development.

There is no information about any diagnosis being performed to establish the actual community needs and expectations. This is a major shortcoming.

The plans to attract income from the private sector are too synthetic, while the delivery structure lacks details: the structure of the organisation is poorly presented and inconsistent.

Valmiera

The guiding principle of the Valmiera program is *CONVERSION*, which is translated in initiating a series of processes in which people will experience significant transformations in thinking and attitudes, turning Valmiera into an excellent place to live for anyone fond of culture, economy and sustainable environment.

The bid is a joint offer of Valmiera city and seven neighbouring towns - Burtnieki, Beverīna, Kocēni, Mazsalaca, Rūjiena, Naukšēni and Strenči.

Contribution to the long-term strategy:

- The city's approved current cultural strategy runs from 2018 until 2028 and was updated in March 2021.
- The ECoC is linked to the cultural strategy in that it will contribute to achieving the objectives defined in this strategic document in 7 different ways.
- There are elaborate plans in place for strengthening the cultural and creative sectors, as well as the cooperation between these sectors.
- The transformation of the municipality's cultural ecosystem will be implemented in close contact with the business sector, thus illustrating the link between the cultural and economic sectors. A clear link with the social sector is lacking, though.
- The cultural, social, economic and urban impact of the ECoC is described in a sound way along 3 pillars of the programme pillars with impact indicators in place.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are sufficiently addressed for the pre-selection phase, but lack information on baseline data, though.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The main concept of the programme is *Conversion*, initiating a series of processes in which there will be 'significant changes in thinking and attitude, developing Valmiera as a micro-city, which is an excellent place to live for a

person interested in culture, economy and sustainable environment'. The artistic strategy of the programme is to cultivate and strengthen the perspective of cultural depths and vastness of opportunities, and to engage the entire cultural ecosystem of the municipality. Both the concept, and the artistic strategy are well-developed, the listed projects are conceptually developed, and vary in terms of art forms, genres, and themes that they deal with.

- The programme has been created with wide-ranging and direct participation of cultural organisations, artists and public representatives of Valmiera municipality. Ideas were developed in working groups, and the common story of the programme was developed by a creative director. The wide participation of the local artists and cultural organisations shows in the quality and broadness of the programme.
- However, the individual projects are quite well described in terms of content, but it is not stated (with a few exceptions) who is going to deliver them, with what partners (national or international), etc. One wonders how they came about, and if they were proposed by artists and other cultural workers (curators, festival directors) and in this case why they were not mentioned.
- Another aspect of concern, relates with the fact that the theme is very much about Valmiera itself, and little is said about how the international aspects will be integrated, in terms of programme and artistic dimension.

European dimension:

- The European dimension is overall well developed and transversally present throughout the cultural programme both in terms of the themes embraced and also the European collaborations with artists and cultural operators, even if the dedicated section in the bid book could have been more detailed.
- The panel understands from the bid book and presentation that the local community is trying to overcome post-soviet stigmas, not through a form of denial, but by learning to accept the differences and opening up to collaboration. This is an interesting approach that can potentially resonate with the experience of other cities and communities in Europe.
- The candidate bases its strategy to have an international audience on the diversity of the power of attraction of the cultural programme, the participation of international artists and representatives of creative industries, the collaborations with twin cities, other ECoC cities, Latvian athletes as ECoC ambassadors and Latvian diplomatic missions.
- According to the panel, the candidate seems to have a good understanding of some common European challenges, such as - in particular - the necessity to counteract populist tendencies and threats to democracy. Furthermore, it underlines the importance of jointly working on solving the climate crisis.
- On a less positive note, there is a lack of understanding of the European dimension in an ECoC being a two-way road: what does the city have to offer to Europe and what can Europe bring to the city?
- 35 international partners are listed, but there is no description of the cooperation, nor their concrete involvement in the cultural programme. Only twin cities are mentioned.

Outreach:

- The team understands that implementing a successful ECoC is not possible without active participation of the community. However, low activity of the inhabitants in the cultural life is identified as a big challenge. Therefore, a series of brainstorming sessions with community members were held in autumn 2020 in order to exchange ideas and learn about each other's expectations. There was also a study conducted to learn more, and it proved that 89% of the population

support the ECoC bid and 26% would like to become volunteers. This detailed understanding of reality is considered very positive by the panel.

- However, at this stage, limited information is further provided in terms of specific actions to address the identified specific needs and desires. The idea is to use very different places, not only typical cultural infrastructures, but also other locations for cultural events, in order to attract an even broader public. This approach also aims to make the cultural events more accessible to various disadvantaged groups, socially or otherwise.

Management:

- The city plans to mainly use money from the annual cultural budget for the preparation period until 2025 included while attracting other sources of finance. The city earmarked 1.8 mil. euros from the total cultural budget for the period 2021-2025 for the preparation of the ECoC. For the period 2026-2028 a separate operational budget will be used.
- The total operating budget of 21.5 mil. euros is realistic and well balanced between different income sources and in terms of expenditure lines. The public contribution is mainly divided between the City and the National Government in equal amounts of 9.5 mil. euros.
- Valmiera Municipality Council decided to submit the application while evaluating and accepting the planned operational budget of the Valmiera bid. The Municipal Council will make more specific decisions on the necessary funding if Valmiera is chosen as the ECoC.
- The private foreseen contribution is significant (1.5 mil. euros) and the plans are too incipient without any already concrete potential sponsor contacts.
- The capital expenditures are financed by the EU (7.65 mil. euros), the City (1.25 mil. euros) and the National Government (3.1 mil. euros) and they are mainly formed by the development of infrastructure necessary for the ECoC program, the establishment of which is included in the municipal investment plan.
- The city of Valmiera will create an independent legal structure for implementing the ECoC - an association with a Board of Trustees (council) that will make strategic decisions and an executive body. The activities of the association will be financed by Valmiera municipality. The structure of the organisation seems appropriate and the competences and appointment procedures of the Executive and Artistic Directors are well described.
- The contingency planning is coherent and feasible.
- The marketing and communication strategy is comprehensive and links the activities of three phases of the cultural programme with concrete target audiences, messages and channels/tools of communication.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council strongly supports the city's candidacy.
- The application team is confident that the indoor capacity of the cultural infrastructure will be put in place to adequately meet the needs of an ECoC.
- The city has experience in hosting bigger events.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the city of Valmiera proceeds to the final selection phase. Nevertheless, even if there is a lot of potential in this bid, the panel would also like to highlight that there are some areas that would need further refinement in the final selection phase.

The panel recommends that the city focus on concrete cooperation and co-creation projects with European and other international partners. It will be necessary to promote projects that highlight and celebrate the cultural diversity of Europe in Valmiera in order to ensure that citizens and visitors in Valmiera gain a better understanding and experience, through the ECoC programme and activities, of the richness of the European cultural diversity.

The main concept of the programme - Conversion - is a generous one, and it is consistent within the cultural programme, which is well developed. However, although the European dimension is present in the cultural programme, it is done in a rather isolated manner with too few concrete connections and adaptations to the local specificities.

The bid has a sound and realistic operational budget and the proposed infrastructure is adequate for hosting the cultural programme.

Finally, the measures for attracting broad interest of the public, while integrating their needs and desires, need more concrete and specific actions and projects.

General recommendations

The following recommendations apply to all four shortlisted candidates.

The panel considers it necessary that all shortlisted cities develop their bids for the final selection in order to reach the required level of quality of such a demanding project as the European Capital of Culture. There is a considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection. The panel expects significant progress in the final bid books to reflect the recommendations of the panel.

The shortlisted candidates are advised to continue studying carefully the **six criteria in the Decision** and the specific comments to all candidates in the assessments above.

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 web page.

General

Since last year, Europe and the world has entered into a new reality as a consequence of COVID-19. The pandemic has created major disruptions, anxiety, fear and limitations. In the panel's view, there is a need for 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 work. 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, 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.

In the final selection bid book, candidates must cover all the questions in the final selection questionnaire included in Annex 1 of the call for applications. For the next and final stage of the competition, the panel expects a considerably more developed section on the proposed artistic vision, the cultural and artistic programme and the European dimension.

The selection panel (and the subsequent monitoring panel) has a responsibility to protect the long-term brand of the European Capital of Culture programme. 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 ECoC image. The panel would expect to see candidates being aware of this and taking steps to minimise international and national negative images of their city through policy changes rather than marketing/PR.

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 will expect a tighter focus in the bid books of the final round: cities should indicate the priorities of the cultural strategy that are connected to the ECoC project, its target outcomes and how resources will be changed over the next few years. The expected legacy of the ECoC should also be 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 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 operating programme between 2022, when the ECoC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECoC year of 2027. The panel recommends the four cities to have an open minded and daring artistic approach and not be afraid of new, experimental ideas. Deeper considerations on the visions presented in the bids could offer more clarity overall. Consistency between the vision selected 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. ECoC programmes normally cover a wide range of art forms and include the increasing development of creative interventions in social issues. An approximate budget should be shown for each major project for the panel to understand the relative balance of projects in the programme.

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 panel recommends that all four cities revisit this criterion with great care. Although with a promising approach to this criterion, the proposals failed to engage fully with the challenges. The teams focused mainly on their cities' image and relations within Latvia 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.

Developing European cooperation requires strategic approaches and actual partnership with artists as well as cultural organisations and institutions throughout Europe. It cannot be limited to relations with other, former and future ECoCs, existing European cultural networks or twin cities.

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.

The panel expects to see a significantly increased focus on European partnerships: co-productions, co-curations, conferences, networking as well as visiting artists/performers. Most recent ECoCs have included European and international partners in well over half their projects. Cities should encourage their cultural operators to be active participants in European cultural networks.

One of the elements of the European dimension criterion for the ECoC title is the ability to attract visitors from the rest of Europe and beyond. 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 2027. The panel advises to thoroughly consider building a

strategic communication plan for the ECoC project as well as to make a connection between the cultural and artistic programme and an international marketing vision.

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. The bids should approach audience development from a long-term and strategic perspective, using both online and offline measures.

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 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 all four selected cities. However, all final bids should show a strategic approach (in relation to the ECoC and not just current practises) 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 analysis of the impacts expected for the preparation and implementation phase of the ECoC, related to the ongoing pandemic and economic challenges focussing on the main issues to be addressed in 2022. The risk assessment analysis of all four bids shall take into consideration the experiences gained during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The panel expects the four shortlisted cities, which all plan in their pre-selection bid books a considerable level of capital expenditure, to carefully investigate whether these investments are actually feasible.

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 2022 to 2027 should be outlined including secondments, interns and volunteers.

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 if appropriate) councils and all political parties. The panel also recommends that all 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 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

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