



Nova Gorica European Capital of Culture 2025

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

Virtual Meeting, October 2021

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared for the European Commission.
However, it only reflects the views of the authors, and the
Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be
made of the information contained therein.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

E-mail: eac-unite-D2@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

© European Union, 2021

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is regulated by Decision 2011/833/EU (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EU copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Attendance.....	4
Report from Nova Gorica.....	5
Discussion	5
Conclusions and recommendations	8
Next steps.....	12

Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 07th October 2021 between the Expert Panel for the selection and monitoring of European Capitals of Culture, hereinafter referred to as the Panel, and the European Capital of Culture team of Nova Gorica, one of the two designated European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2025¹. The city of Nova Gorica was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2025 in Slovenia on 12th April 2021 by the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia on the basis of the recommendation included in the Panel selection report²; its bid book is available on the Nova Gorica 2025 website³. This report is addressed to the team of Nova Gorica 2025 and the local authority of the city and will be published on the European Commission's website⁴.

Attendance

The Panel members:

Else Christensen-Redzepovic (Chair), Jorge Cerveira Pinto (Rapporteur) and Suvi Innilä, appointed by the European Parliament 2021–2023;
Paulina Florjanowicz, Dessislava Gavrilova and Pierre Sauvageot, appointed by the Council of the EU 2019-2021;
Jelle Burggraaff and Beatriz Garcia, appointed by the European Commission 2020–2022;
Alin Adrian Nica, appointed by the European Committee of the Regions 2019-2021;
Suzana Žilič Fišer, appointed by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture.

For Nova Gorica:

Mayor of Nova Gorica (ECoC title holding city);
Mayor of Gorizia (partner city);
Artistic director of ECoC team;
Project manager of ECoC team;
Manager of EPIC project and international relations in ECoC team;
Director of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Nova Gorica/Gorizia;
Member of the office for strategic development projects in the Municipality of Nova Gorica.

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia.

¹ The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union for the titles 2020 to 2033. The Decision provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the Panel. See:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG

² See selection report at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/ecoc2025-slovenia-selection-report.pdf>

³ <https://www.go2025.eu/en/>

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en

Report from Nova Gorica

The organisation of Nova Gorica • Gorizia 2025 submitted a comprehensive progress report in advance of the virtual meeting. It outlined in detail the activities of the organisation since the selection meeting on 18th December 2020. Before the virtual meeting, a 21-minute long video was shared with the Panel members, as a substitute for the regular presentation that could not take place because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The video comprised an opening statement by the Project Manager of the ECoC team, followed by a conversation among the two cities' Mayors, reiterating the main aims of the project. This was followed by a presentation related to the management solution agreed upon for the implementation of the project as well as for the funding schemes that will support the ECoC project. The Artistic Director then gave a presentation on the progress made in terms of the artistic programme and existing collaborations, including presentations of specific projects already in development, followed by presentations of the various areas of work by members of the team (Go!Green; EPICenter; Outreach).

Discussion

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

A. Contribution to the long-term strategy ("Long-Term Strategy")

The Panel inquired about the postponement of the appointment of an independent evaluation organisation and the commissioning of the baseline study (initially proposed for the summer of 2021). This was justified by the need to first establish a clear legal framework for the ECoC implementation. However, it was also indicated that key indicators were provided to both municipalities (the ECoC title-holder Nova Gorica and its partner city Gorizia) in order to inform their respective cultural strategies. Based on this, the Panel wanted further information on the indicators that the municipalities had found easiest to populate so far - and about the indicators that seemed most challenging to meet. Furthermore, the Panel requested the ECoC team to share any reflections / thinking about how to further refine relevant indicators and impact objectives, based on their experience in advancing the new strategic documents (e.g. All Man's Land project / cultural strategy consultations).

In their reply, the ECoC team explained they were using the ECoC programme long-term goals as the basis for concrete indicators and had tested all ECoC projects against these goals. In terms of the challenges, two major ones were identified: capacity building (the quality of data from all stakeholders must be improved) and cross-border cooperation (since this affects standards / comparison of the various kinds of data available and to be collected).

Another question by the Panel was about the most valuable achievement, so far, the new X-Centre (creative industries hub) and what was the most immediate priority to ensure the centre delivered against expectations. In their reply, the ECoC team explained that the Centre had been in operation since September of 2021 and in fact, the present monitoring meeting was being held exactly in this place. The ECoC team has been working hand in hand with the management structure of the X-Centre and so far, 10 events - including workshops about the new European Bauhaus initiative - have been jointly organised. They

reiterated that a space of this kind was missing in the city – and X-Centre was clearly filling very important gaps and being successful in engaging people. They further added that they expected to open more spaces / areas for exchange at the basement of the building and planned to use the square in front of the centre for ECoC related events.

B. Cultural and artistic programme

The Panel inquired about the status of the projects listed in the Report submitted ahead of the meeting, since many referred that they were in a “re-evaluation” phase. At the same time, the ECoC team has recently organised two very specific open calls (e.g. one for the mural projects), while planning to organise two further open calls for new projects later on (one in June 2022 and one in March 2023). The Panel wanted to better understand what was planned for these upcoming open calls, both thematically and in terms of budget that would be used for these new projects compared to the programme presented in the bid.

In their response, the ECoC team stated that the open calls organised in 2021 aimed to manage the expectations of the culture professionals and to support the work situation of artists. Approximately 20% of the proposals were selected based on the criteria of high quality, cross-border dimension (a key element in the original bid) and other values included in the bid’s cultural programme. All previous projects are being re-evaluated as part of a process where a development plan document will be made of each project. This work is expected to be ready by the end of 2021. The open call planned for 2022 is the second phase of the programme process, and the budget has been planned accordingly.

The Panel asked the ECoC team to provide additional information about their strategy to also include cultural organisations from the rest of the country in the programme, thus ensuring that the city is seen as the European Capital of Culture on behalf of Slovenia, instead of a regional project. In their response, the team stated that they had been in contact with Ljubljana about the existing open calls, and in addition, conversations had taken place with cultural organisations on how to connect, beyond the bid book projects. The team also mentioned that they had been in contact with museums to explore their further participation in the project. The team reiterated the importance of the EU dimension (besides the national connections) and hoped that now that the borders were opening up and physical events were re-starting, they would be able to increase the exchanges and contacts.

One other question from the Panel related to the opening ceremony, considered an important moment of every ECoC, one that “sets the tone” of the ECoC programme to the general public. The Panel asked the ECoC team if they could provide more information about the process of defining the focus and format of this event. In their reply, the ECoC team mentioned that this was not a priority for the moment, but they thought it could be interesting to set up a method that would involve local artists, cultural operators and inhabitants in the process, while agreeing with the Panel that it was a crucial moment of the ECoC programme.

The Panel inquired about the issue of expectations management, already considered by them as very challenging. The Panel wanted to understand what was the present situation in terms of expectations, how the team was tackling the issue now and what were the plans for handling it in the future. In their response, the ECoC team recognised that managing expectations had proved to be a major challenge, not only in terms of artists and the cultural sector, but – given the importance of the ECoC project for Nova Gorica – also in terms of economic expectations and general public. To deal with these expectations, the team has been investing in the organisation of meetings and in communication efforts. The team also recognised that tackling this would require both extensive PR work but also

capacity building to inform the actual aims and possibilities of the ECoC in order to avoid wrong expectations to emerge.

C. European dimension (“Programme with European Relevance”)

The Panel asked the ECoC team how they would make sure that the international artistic projects that would be part of the Nova Gorica 2025 ECoC would not turn out to be just “fireworks” that sparkle and then disappear without leaving a trace. Furthermore, what kind of legacy is expected from these international projects (beyond the cross-border ones with Italy) and what is being done to ensure that this will happen?

In their response, the ECoC team mentioned that the current Covid-19 pandemic situation prevented them from developing international partnerships and programmes as initially planned, but they were aware that this was work to be done. Their initial strategy started with cities that are part of the ECoC network because it was easier and obvious. However, their approach will be to encourage local artists and cultural organisations to work with international partners, so as to secure a legacy beyond 2025.

The Panel requested the ECoC team to explain how it would concretely monitor that the international partners listed in the final bid book were also engaged in the development and execution phase of the project and whether the scope would broaden to include artists and cultural organisations from beyond Central Europe. In their response, the ECoC team stated that Zoom talks had taken place with a significant number of organisations and artists and that as soon as Covid travel restrictions were relaxed, international partners would be invited to come to Nova Gorica. However, the team also added that funding was required for this to happen, and therefore it was dependent on their availability.

One other question from the Panel related to a recommendation made during the selection phase. It highlighted the necessity for the ECoC project to establish connections with other cities in Europe that are divided by a State border. The Panel wanted to know if this actually happened, and if the ECoC team identified and established contact with such cities. The ECoC team explained that they identified twin cities and divided cities as well. They also looked into the topic of new towns (with a potential partner based in the Netherlands). Some examples were provided: Nicosia (Cyprus) and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), both cases of divided communities and cities, Frankfurt am Oder (Germany) bordering Słubice (Poland). The cooperation in this area is, however, at a very early stage. The Panel noted that the twin cities mechanism was a different matter – although very important – since it was not necessarily related with border issues.

D. Outreach

The Panel questioned the ECoC team on what was the current people’s state of mind about the ECoC. Furthermore, how will the ECoC project keep the engagement and involvement of the citizens in the near future? The Panel also wanted to hear from the ECoC team in terms of the digital footprint of the ECoC project. In their reply, the ECoC team referred that the expectations and interest of the population were very high, and that due to the pandemic restrictions this proved complicated to manage, but they believed that they were able to maintain this interest high, while at the same time, using the digital tools to improve the communication. They understand that now, more than ever, the digital presence and projects will be paramount for the success of the ECoC, and that they expect to include a digital dimension to all their projects. However, they recognise that there are still many questions and doubts regarding how this will be implemented and sustained behind the ECoC year.

E. Management

The Panel recognised that the proposed ECoC organisation model that was created was a complex organisation design (with a public institution in Slovenia and EGTC) that allowed for a true cross-border collaboration with the Italian partners. The way it will cross-represent the interests of the two main stakeholders (Nova Gorica and Gorizia) in the organisational and supervision structures of Go!2025 and ECGT is innovative, but might bear problems. Therefore, the Panel asked the ECoC team to describe and clarify “the line of command”, by clearly answering the following questions: will the CEO of Go!2025 be the one at the top of the reporting pyramid? Will the Programme Director of the Slovenian public institution Go!2025 be able to decide on programme activities that will be run through the ECGT? Will the Slovenian delivery structure be independent from the political level (at city, regional and national scopes)? In their reply, the team recognised some of the challenges and explained that the supervisory board of the Slovenian delivery body would ensure the independence of its actions. The mayor of Nova Gorica also confirmed that the “chain of command” had the CEO and the Artistic Director at its top.

The Panel also inquired the ECoC team to explain the changes implemented in terms of legal organisation structure: during the selection phase the ECoC team stated that the entity created for the general cross-border cooperation would be best to manage the ECoC, given the fact that the ECoC project concept depended on the relation with Gorizia in Italy. However, now the decision was taken to change it to a public entity based solely under Slovenian law. The Panel wanted to understand the reason for this change and how in these new circumstances the ECoC project would be funded and fund projects taking place on both sides of the border. In their reply, the ECoC team explained that after discussion with the Slovenian Ministry of Culture, it proved necessary to create another structure placed under the Slovenian law reflecting the fact that this is a Slovenian ECoC, while keeping EGTC (under Italian jurisdiction) for cross-border funding and activities. The tasks of both structures are overlapping to some extent but also complementing, and some key individuals would be employed in both (this also raised doubts in terms of staff remuneration and potential conflict of interests).

F. Capacity to deliver

The Panel requested further information regarding the new public body created to manage the ECoC project. In their answer, the ECoC team recognised that some more work was necessary to clarify the organisational structure and relations of CEO to the members of the Council, the role of the Supervisory Council, the Programme Council as well as the other Councils/bodies being considered. The team explained that this was demanding but hoped that with the good will of all stakeholders concerned, the endeavour would lead to a well-functioning structure in line with the ambitions and main goals of the project and where everyone would get a clear understanding of his/her role and position in the overall organisation. The Panel also inquired the ECoC team about the part of the programme (in percentage) that was planned to be produced by the public entity and the part that was programmed to be co-produced or produced by other cultural (and other) institutions. The team answered that this was too early at this stage to provide an answer.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Panel acknowledges the challenges and also some good progress made so far by the team of Nova Gorica ECoC 2025. It understands that more work than initially planned has been needed to find the proper governance structure with a delivery entity which is legally sound and can receive funding from the relevant public authorities in Slovenia (the country

hosting the ECoC title in 2025), in particular from the national Government. The Panel sees this (time-consuming) endeavour as a sound investment that must now pave the way for a smoother implementation of the ECoC project. However, this also means that limited progress has been made on other issues that in its final selection report the Panel identified as important areas for development. The Panel reiterates the recommendations and comments included in the final selection report, and expects that they are taken into account in the next progress report.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The designated ECoC now moves to a transition period from a set-up suite and from a bid campaign to the more formal ECoC delivery structure ensuring an appropriate level of independence for the artistic team while maintaining a good working relationship with the local city administration and authorities in Nova Gorica.
- It would be useful to prioritise / advance evaluation capacity building activities on time, ahead of the appointment of the independent evaluation team that the project is ready to commission & complete the baseline in 2022.
- It would be helpful to consider the issues related with legacy at the early stages of the project implementation as well as termination (or development) of the Institution responsible for legacy activities.
- While welcoming the work carried out so far to develop and implement the city's cultural strategy, it is important to make further arrangements for a better integration between policy areas (culture / urban development / innovation and creative industries / education) in the cross-border context.
- The level of cooperation needs to grow to include other cultural institutions around Slovenia (not only Ljubljana), other candidate cities and previous ECoC cities and projects from Slovenia. This must be complemented by more extensive European and international content and collaborations. The ECoC in Slovenia in 2025 provides a national opportunity, which will reflect internationally not only on Nova Gorica but also on the country as a whole.
- The ECoC 2025 impact assessment is detailed with monitoring tactics, the baseline figures are defined and first attempts to outline the specific targets are made. KPIs include European sources of information like Eurostat.
- The capacity building is intra-regional, cross-sectoral and cross-border and runs with the view of a successful implementation of all ECoC aspects, as well as sustainability and long-term legacy. The topic of agile and flexible strategic planning is included in the capacity building topics to prepare the teams for unexpected events.

Cultural and artistic programme

- The artistic elements of the cultural programme are further developed and connected with the ECoC narrative in order to improve the overall artistic quality of the ECoC programme. A procedure for selecting the remaining part of the programme is developed, clearly communicated and implemented. Newly developed content has a coherent and clear artistic outlook and European importance in line with the ECoC vision and mission.
- The borderless narrative along the various dimensions as outlined in this city bid evaluation report is further strengthened and made clearly visible in the cultural and artistic programme.

- Innovative, experimental and digital programme elements are strengthened to ensure the ECoC 2025 meets the needs of the 21st century digital challenges, paying attention also to principles of environmental sustainability.
- Appropriate facilitation mechanisms including decision-making and conflict resolution principles are developed to support EPICentre mission and multi perspective narrative, positively impacting programme decisions.
- The panel recommends to consider the need for open calls very carefully, and weigh it against the need to develop the already planned programme.
- The proposed programme is complex and includes many activities. There is the need to streamline the narrative, and make it clearer and more readable, particularly for inhabitants who do not use cultural venues.

European dimension

- The scope and quality of activities promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue, and greater mutual understanding between European citizens is satisfactory. Highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history is already a part of the program approach.
- The cooperation and communication with partners from across Europe, including a wide range of the ECoC titleholders, as well as partnerships with other continents are developed and strengthened; particular attention is dedicated to European and Extra-European border regions that could contribute to and benefit from the Nova Gorica ECoC activities and findings.
- Further development is needed to ensure Europe wide collaborations, extending beyond a focus on Central Europe, to provide new contexts for developing the European dimension to the full. Actions to generate an interest in other parts of Europe are strategically developed and promoted.
- Furthermore, there is a need to develop much stronger and content-based partnerships with other divided cities across Europe in order to develop interesting project ideas.
- The Panel recommends that a team member be appointed to be responsible for monitoring if and how international partners in the final bid are approached.

Outreach

- Work continues to ensure social innovation and meaningful participation in line with the ECoC mission and vision.
- The ECoC audience development strategies and plans for local, regional and international audiences are developed. A special focus will be dedicated to reach out to European and international audiences.
- Both audience development and community engagement are included in capacity building activities involving all relevant partners.

Management

- Information about the Nova Gorica 2025 organisation and its statutes, as well as the ECoC implementation strategies are publicly available and easy to interpret (e.g. there is a need for a clear organigram). The tasks of both structures are obviously overlapping and the same individuals will be employed in both - this also raised doubts in terms of staff remuneration and potential conflict of interests. Clarity and transparency must be increased to ensure the reputational aspects of the ECoC project and their responsibilities.

- An early appointment of the Programme director, with his/her independent role, is needed and his/her high-level position needs to be secured to ensure that a collective approach to artistic decision-making has a firm structure.
- The envisaged ECoC unit is set up within the EGTS structure and efficient organisational procedures are created in order to successfully deliver this demanding project. Sustainable and effective mechanisms for delivery of an extensive cultural programme with partners demonstrating different levels of expertise (especially in the “EPICentre” flagship) are developed.
- The ownership of strategic areas and spaces is clearly defined and clear information on what will be integrated and what will not be included in the programme is communicated.
- The contingency planning is refined and operationalised, including the management of the “EPICentre” project.
- The communication message (including on European dimension) is clearly articulated for use by the ECoC team and other relevant partners and stakeholders. Furthermore, the proposed communication elements that include “GO!” features are carefully considered from the point of view of conveying the intended messages to a variety of European audiences.
- A clear strategy and a concrete plan for responding and managing the expectations of the various audiences is conceived and implemented as soon as possible.
- The strategies and copyright issues of the “Go! Borderless” concept, including authorship rights of related merchandise and services, are developed and publicly communicated.
- Issues of security related to the pandemic, post-pandemic, mass events and other relevant potential threats must be carefully addressed.
- Issues of data protection are addressed and clearly communicated.
- The sensitivity towards environmental impact is demonstrated.

Capacity to deliver

- The bid-book sets out several actions to be taken in before 2025, and time frames that should be met. Experience has shown that successful ECoCs use the first year after selection to establish all the governance, management and administration structures and systems. These need to run concurrently with the first stage of the project in 2021.
- The relationship between the Supervisory Council, other fora/Councils and the staff of the Nova Gorica 2025 organisation to be clearly delineated and made public.
- The senior staff is recruited through open competitions.
- The General Director issues, with the approval of the Supervisory Board, the financial regulations for the Nova Gorica 2025 organization, including:
- An external organisation is appointed to undertake annual audits and to approve the annual accounts of the organization.
- Arrangements are made for the publication of the Annual Accounts and the Annual Report to ensure transparency.
- Internal management and administrative processes are in place. These will include human resources, legal aspects (e.g. project contract arrangements, data privacy, and intellectual property rights), the criteria and systems for calls for projects, the marketing and branding strategy. A program of ensuring continued support of political stakeholders at local, regional, national and international level is developed and implemented.
- The plan for production and co-production of programmes and projects should be agreed and put in place for the next few years.

- The accommodation and transport capacities, also those in the region, are reviewed and potential weaknesses addressed to fully support participation (of diverse public) in all elements of the ECoC programme; accordingly the plan for cooperation with different sectors (tourism, schools, NGo-s, is needed).
- An internal communications strategy is developed and implemented. This covers communications within the Nova Gorica 2025 organization, between the organization and the city (and regional) administration, between the organisation and the Ministry of Culture and between the organisation and the European Commission.
- A detailed staffing plan up to 2025 that includes plans on volunteers' involvement is created.
- The organization ensures that in all its (on- and offline) marketing and communication activities recognise that the ECoC is a European Union action.

Next steps

The Panel recognises the importance and groundbreaking nature of the cross-border nature of this specific ECoC project, as this has *per se* a very strong and extremely interesting European dimension. Governance structures and related systems are critical, and must reflect both this cross-border nature and primarily the fact that Nova Gorica will hold the ECoC title for Slovenia. Consequently, the Panel recommends that an interim report be submitted during the first quarter of 2022, clearly describing in detail:

- The Governance structure, and if relevant, the legal basis that supports it;
- The appointment procedures for the CEO and Artistic Director, and the people ultimately selected to fill in these two key positions;
- Updates on the development and implementation of the EPICenter;
- Updates of the suggested/planned milestones.

The Panel also recommends the appointment of an independent evaluation team as soon as possible, so that all required baseline work can be fully implemented in 2022.

Given the groundbreaking nature of the project, the Panel recommends a second progress meeting in mid-2022.

The Panel welcomes the relevant steps taken so far and remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services. The Panel would like to thank the Nova Gorica team for a very informative and frank discussion and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending Panel's member

