



Veszprém European Capital of Culture 2023

Third Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECOC Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, 15 November 2022

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 15th November 2022 between the Panel and the Veszprém 2023 team, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2023¹. Veszprém was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2023 in Hungary by the relevant Hungarian authorities in April 2019 on the basis of the Panel selection report². Its bid book is available on the Veszprém 2023 website.³ The first monitoring meeting between the Panel and the Veszprém 2023 team took place on 25th September 2019 in Brussels, followed by a second virtual monitoring meeting on 29th April 2021. The two previous monitoring reports by the Panel can be accessed on the European Commission website⁴.

The present report is addressed to the Veszprém 2023 organisation and will be published on the European Commission's website.

Attendance

The meeting was attended by the following individuals:

- The Panel members (experts nominated by EU institutions):

- Else Christensen-Redžepović, Suvi Innilä, and Jorge Cerveira Pinto (rapporteur), appointed by the European Parliament;
- Marilyn Gaughan Reddan, Goda Giedraityte, and Rossella Tarantino appointed by the Council of the EU;
- Beatriz Garcia (Chair), Jelle Burggraaff and Hrvoje Laurenta, appointed by the European Commission.

Excused: Anne Karjalainen (appointed by the European Committee of the Regions).

- The Panel members nominated by the relevant Hungarian authorities:

- Tamás Fejérdy and Orsolya Kőrösi.

- The Veszprém 2023 team: Mayor of Veszprém, CEO of Veszprém 2023, Director of Programme Development, CFO, Chief Artistic and Creative Adviser, Chief Programme Development Adviser, Head of CEO Cabinet Office and Monitoring Officer.

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

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

² <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/default/files/library/ecoc-2023-hungaryfinalselection-report.pdf>

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

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/elefsina-timisoara-and-veszprem#timisoara>

The meeting was also attended by observers from the European Commission and the Hungarian Ministry of Culture.

Report from Veszprém 2023

Prior to the meeting, the Veszprém 2023 team submitted a detailed and comprehensive written progress report. The report was divided into two separate documents: one submitted by the Veszprém 2023 team as per the initial agreed timelines for the preparation of the monitoring meeting and a second document with additional information in reply to a request made by the Commission concerning specific questions related with aspects that were not fully covered in the initial document and were considered relevant to determine the conditions for the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize.

The progress report presented in detail the major developments since the last monitoring meeting, and provided information related to some of the questions, recommendations and issues raised in the previous monitoring report.

The Veszprém 2023 team made a 20 min verbal presentation, outlining their progress less than two months before the start of the ECoC year. During the presentation, the Veszprém 2023 team addressed the following issues:

- The consolidation of the programme and its structure around the proposed themes and clusters, in line with the initial bid book.
- Diversity has a fundamental value, which structures the programme and reflects a culture of coexistence.
- The aim of the project, to make Veszprém a city leading in music projects, with proportionally the largest numbers of musicians and singers in Hungary. A big investment will happen in music education programmes.
- A careful balance between preserving traditions while also focusing on contemporary culture.
- A programme that will make use of unconventional spaces and formats for local cultural creators.
- A recognition of existing challenges and mistakes made, resulting in two municipalities in the region (out of a total of 118) leaving the project.
- The need to fight back preconceptions and generalisations on local / regional and national levels.
- The issues of political interference and ideological influence and potential impacts on the artistic approach of some projects.
- The collaboration with other ECoC cities - in particular Timisoara and Elefsina, the two cities sharing the spotlight in 2023 - in terms of communication and promotion.
- Further examples of European collaboration, including the European networks and platforms.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the Panel sought clarification on a number of issues and offered experience and advice. Topics discussed included requested additional information on the following:

- *The hosting of a handover ceremony on the 9th January in Athens, with all three previous and three upcoming ECoCs present.*

The Veszprém 2023 team informed that the concept was based on Galway's suggestion to pass on the *baton*, and they intended to follow and make it a tradition. Initially the Esch 2022 team proposed this, and the three current ECoCs and the three upcoming ones will meet in the Acropolis in Athens. The event will be media covered and the intention is to invite mayors, CEOs, Ministers of Culture, representatives from the EU, and ambassadors. A main Hungarian TV station has been secured as a main sponsor and will provide live coverage of the event.

- *The Panel enquired the Veszprém 2023 team about the letter received from Amnesty International on the difficulties faced by two artists from the LGBTIQ+ community in presenting their work in Veszprém, while reiterating that its concern is also with safeguarding the ECoC brand. Therefore, the Panel would like to be informed on how the Veszprém 2023 team was preparing for communication on potential international criticisms in this regard.*

The Veszprém 2023 team recognised the issue, and replied that the implementation of the projects was the best possible answer to the critics. They also explained that the team was giving much leeway to project promoters without interfering in the details of the many individual projects included in the programme. However, projects now include much more participation of local minorities, e.g. the Roma project, and this was the result of hearing the initial criticisms. The Veszprém 2023 team recognised that some of the issues cannot be solved solely by the ECoC project, but they are "planting the seeds for future plans".

The Veszprém 2023 team highlighted that there were some generalisations and preconceptions about Hungary in Europe. They are trying to actively respond to these with concrete actions, with an updated and more diverse programme and by establishing relevant partnerships. The communication will clearly present what the ECoC aims and this should address some of the more negative voices.

A. Long-term strategy

The Panel enquired on the current development of the evaluation plan (who is conducting/what are the key evaluation questions). The Veszprém 2023 team informed that:

- There is an online monitoring platform that includes a mobile app.
- The Hungarian Tourism Agency is a strategic partner providing data about cultural sources and hospitality from January 2023 onwards, including geo-location data, the National Railways providing passenger statistics data on discounts, disabilities etc.
- The monitoring platform also integrates other web-based platforms - including grants applications, surveys and volunteers platforms - and its access is open to all

partnering organisations working with volunteers in the region. This will stay beyond the project and will be an important legacy component of the ECoC project.

- The platform will be fully available from January 2023 onwards, and some components will also be available in English.
- The project is scientifically supported by a Veszprém 2023 team from the university and the tourism office, including local engineers and data scientists. Currently, the Veszprém 2023 team is finalising negotiations on data visualisation.

The Veszprém 2023 team reiterated the idea that the data would contribute to the sustainability of future culture events, e.g. festivals, and that there were efforts to introduce some level of gamification through the mobile services.

B. Cultural and artistic content

Coming back to the letter from Amnesty International, the Panel asked the Veszprém 2023 team about the concerns related to potential limits to the freedom of artistic expression based on topics related to sexual orientation highlighting that this also connected with the recommendations issued by the Panel and included in the last monitoring report. The Panel was informed by the team that there were no restrictions on artistic expression and that there were no intentions to limit or suppress it. The Veszprém 2023 team reiterated that they did not have any political preconceptions or censorship intentions. Most of the programme came from open calls, based on a diversity of artistic values, and furthermore the Veszprém 2023 team does not interfere with the list of invited artists that will be involved in the various activities developed by the individual project partners.

When enquired about which projects include and even highlight minority groups, the Veszprém 2023 team provided as an example the work with a Maltese organisation that operates a homeless shelter together with the House of Arts, in the area of fine arts. It will go on until 2023, inviting homeless people to participate and engage. Secondary schools will also work with the homeless and it will lead to the presentation of several exhibitions in the end. Another example is the *Prison Theatre* project - with a German artistic group working with inmates.

The Veszprém 2023 team also informed the Panel that they did not receive from the open calls any project proposal addressing specifically the LGBTIQ+ community and therefore there was no question related to acceptance or refusal.

On the issues related to ongoing open calls, until December 2022, the Panel expressed concerns that the closing dates were very late and wanted to understand how and when the projects were going to be implemented. The Veszprém 2023 team informed that they had created the conditions for a quick start of the projects, by assigning dedicated project managers and legal Veszprém 2023 team members to support the projects still pending. They are confident that the relevant projects can start in time. They expect that the number of projects to be in this situation will include 25 regional projects to be awarded funding; 10 to 15 conference projects and 10 projects related to the gastronomy and wine culture programme. The Veszprém 2023 team reiterated that the small grant applications are administered in a simplified procedure and the selection of the winners is done by a community Panel.

Finally, the Veszprém 2023 team also addressed the issue of “regional limitations” included in the open calls, by explaining that the relevant criterion is where the activity will take place, not the origin of the organisers, who can originate from beyond the region.

C. European Dimension

On the issue of European “co-productions”, the Panel was informed that the Veszprém 2023 team opted not to have formal “co-operations”, because they are legally difficult to manage. Hungarian organisations will lead and take full responsibility. This does not mean that they will not engage with international partners and deliver *de facto* “co-production” projects, but there are some administrative hindrances if they are legally considered as “co-productions”.

D. Capacity to deliver

The Panel expressed concern with the current situation related to the infrastructure projects that will only be completed in 2023. The Veszprém 2023 team reiterated that they planned solutions to address any lack of infrastructures. However, they recognised that there were some limitations in terms of infrastructures, although they do not foresee major new risks, and alternative solutions are being considered.

E. Outreach

The Panel positively reacted to the fact that some of the social media channels - like YouTube - already have a significant number of podcasts, interviews and other audio-visual content, but mostly in Hungarian. The Panel wanted to understand better what were the plans for online delivery of the programme to the international audience that would not be able to come to Veszprém in 2023. In their reply, the Veszprém 2023 team explained that most of the content was initially targeting local and national audiences, but now they were starting to reach international audiences and the content would mainly change to English.

When enquired about “legacy”, the Veszprém 2023 team expressed many doubts on what would be able to continue and become a legacy of the ECoC. However, the Veszprém 2023 team was confident that many positive impacts would occur and that these would change the current scenario in the medium and long term. For example, culture institutions are now actively involved in international networks and platforms and this will most probably continue.

F. Management

The Panel enquired the Veszprém 2023 team about the changes in the funding structure that was presented in the bid book - the city funding is down to just 3% (bid book was 35%), regional funding to 2% (bid book was 9%) with the government funding now representing more than 95% of the Veszprém ECoC. The Veszprém 2023 team first highlighted that the ECoC's secured budget was much higher than the one in the bid book (88,72 million Euros vs 31,70 million), showing a strong commitment at national level towards the project. Then, they explained that the changes were justified mainly by the negative economic impact brought by the Covid-19 situation and the current economic crisis. Faced with these situations, the central government decided to guarantee the core funding. In any case, the city and neighbouring municipalities still feel that they own the programme even if the major funding is no longer with them. The Panel reiterated their concern that this change in the funding structure would not impact the “city logic”, which

is at the very foundation of the ECoC initiative of the European Union (the title is awarded to a “city”, in the name of the whole country).

On sponsorship, the Veszprém 2023 team informed that there were still negotiations happening, that they expected to be successful - including media partnerships - and represented significant value, although not reflected in financial terms. Private sponsorship will therefore be instrumental in funding legacy activities.

The Panel also requested further information on the numerous changes in the funding values of various projects. The Veszprém 2023 team explained that there was a need to extract information from various systems, and that the differences were just reflecting this, not any changes in committed funding to the various projects. There is an on-going effort to re-adjust and re-align the projects and budgets. There have also been many changes in the title of the projects and new programmes, so this resulted in many differences.

The expert Panel recognised that there is a growing interest among the Hungary society about the ECoC project and year. The visibility in the media has also increased substantially.

Regarding the international promotion - including actions targeting tour operators and journalists - the Veszprém 2023 team explained some of the initiatives programmed, mentioning the crucial role that Hungarian Embassies and Hungarian Tourism Authority would play. In a similar way, a series of programmes was also launched through the institutions of the Network of Hungarian Cultural Institutes. One other example mentioned was the work happening with the foreign journalists based in Hungary.

Summary and recommendations

In Summary, the Panel expressed:

- Concerns with the delays in some individual projects included in the overall ECoC programme and in the establishment of contracts with the various organisations that will be awarded funding and therefore the need to accelerate contracting.
- The need for a clear public statement reiterating the values of ECoC - based on the values enshrined in the Treaty of the European Union - to all project owners. Non-discrimination based on sexual orientation is among such values. It is the task of all ECoC cities and delivery teams to ensure that these values are respected in the content of individual projects included in the overall ECoC programme and in the way project promoters implement their activities.
- The need for more clarity on how the budget will be transferred and managed locally, avoiding any interference, so as to ensure appropriate independence of the artistic team, in line with Article 14 of Decision 445/2014/EU.
- The need to continue the efforts made in the improvement of the European dimension.
- The necessity to continue to improve the management system, and in terms of accessibility and communication, the importance of using other languages beyond Hungarian, mainly other major European languages.

- The need for further visibility and commitment to the projects that have European values at their core like the *Republic of Freedom* flagship project.
- Reassurances and commitments that the capacity building programmes and open calls will continue beyond the ECoC year and be a legacy of the Year.

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Based on the report submitted by Veszprém 2023 as well as the hearing with the Veszprém 2023 team, the Panel considers that the conditions regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize, as specified in Article 14 of Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, are met. Consequently, the Panel is pleased to propose to the European Commission that Veszprém receives the Melina Mercouri prize.

The Panel would like to remind Veszprém 2023 that, in line with Article 14, its marketing and communication strategy and its communication material have to clearly reflect the fact that the European Capital of Culture is a Union action, as well as that, in line with Article 16 of the same Decision, it will have to draw up its own evaluation report of the results of its ECoC year and transmit it to the European Commission by 31 December 2024.

The Panel would like to thank Veszprém 2023 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to a successful realisation of Veszprém European Capital of Culture project in 2023.

All attending Panel members (signed)

