



Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2021

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

Timisoara, June 2019

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

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Introduction

This report relates to the second monitoring meeting that took place on 4 June 2019 in Timisoara¹. It follows the first monitoring meeting of 10 October 2017 and the monitoring visit of 13 June 2018 by two panel members. Novi Sad was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2021 in a candidate country in January 2017 on the basis of the recommendation made by the ECOC Expert panel in its Selection Report². Its bid-book is available on the Novi Sad website³. This monitoring report is addressed to the Novi Sad 2021 Foundation and will be published on the European Commission's website⁴.

Attendance

The panel members:

Sylvia Amann (Rapporteur), Cristina Farinha and Agnieszka Wlazel, appointed by the European Parliament 2018-2020;

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

Beatriz Garcia, Jiří Suchánek and Suzana Žilič Fišer (Chair), appointed by the European Commission 2017-2019;

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

For Novi Sad:

Nemanja Milenković, CEO;

Dušan Kaličanin, Programme director;

Lazar Jovanov, Head of Curators;

Bojan Milosavljević, Programme coordinator;

Milica Rašković, Head of the Programme development department;

Tamara Zelenović-Vasiljević, Head of the Strategic planning department;

Tamara Belajić, Communication manager;

1The 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 See selection report at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/files/ecoc-2021-final-selection-report_en.pdf

3 <http://novisad2021.rs/en/bidbook/>

4 http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/capitals-culture_en.html#eng

Miroslav Vujičić, Chief Evaluator;

Darko Polić, Member of the Board and chair of the working group for NS2021 infrastructure;

Vuk Radulović, Head of International Relations.

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

Report from Novi Sad 2021

The Foundation submitted a detailed and comprehensive written report and annexes in advance of the meeting. The report outlined the activities of the Foundation since the first monitoring meeting and the monitoring visit in Novi Sad - European Capital of Culture 2021 in a candidate country.

At the meeting, Novi Sad 2021 made a presentation that included the following points:

- Mr. Nemanja Milenković, CEO, explained that the continuity of the team in charge of the project since the bidding phase has been a major asset and that considerable steps forward had been achieved regarding the involvement of local partners and the city's population. More than 60 projects from the 170 included in the bid-book as well as many others have been initiated by the Foundation so far involving a considerable number of artists and attracting the interest of around 200.000 visitors. Recent results confirm that more than 90% of the residents of Novi Sad strongly support the European Capital of Culture. Furthermore, several infrastructures planned for the ECOC-year are ready for use –participative and co-creation methods had been applied to involve the local population. Mr. Milenković confirmed that the work of the Foundation benefitted from a very strong political support and that challenges on the regional level had been positively addressed. He stressed the fact that such a cooperation model with an independent foundation is a new approach in the national context.
- Mr. Lazar Jovanov, Head of Curators, highlighted the main guiding principles of the artistic concept. Each of the four bridges comprises two programme arches and interlinks directly with a whole set of basic values including human rights, peace, multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue and ecological awareness. Artists are invited to join this thematic journey. He highlighted the opening ceremony concept, which will span a bridge between the Gregorian and Julian calendars – an approach that may develop into an annual event in Novi Sad and be part of the legacy of the ECOC-year. The Head of Curators presented different highlights and flagships from the "Four new Bridges" concept, with each bridge consisting of two programme arches, i.e. topics that are the backbone of the artistic narrative. The "Rainbow Bridge" is focusing on migrations and peace policies. The "Love Bridge" is celebrating the city's multiculturalism inter alia through sub-cultures, as well as minority and marginalized expressions. The "Freedom Bridge" is fostering a better position for women, on the one hand, and youth culture and creativity on the other hand. In addition, the Novi Sad 2021 Foundation had already implemented a series of open calls for the further involvement of public cultural institutions and will continue with a similar format for the independent cultural scene. Last but not least, Mr. Jovanov drew the attention to

the "Best-Of-ECOC"-project – a cooperation with a wide range of former and present European Capitals of Culture.

- The Programme Coordinator Bojan Milosavljević, focused on the European Dimension of Novi Sad 2021. He emphasised the ECOC as a tool for wider public debates on the European Union – an especially important topic for a candidate country. European values are therefore important guiding principles for the programming. This comprises also the furthering of inter-relations between the cultural and other sectors as well as responding to the needs of all the strata of society with a special focus on marginalised people. Therefore, the programme will have a stronger focus on social innovation than on technological innovation. This approach, he is convinced, is of special relevance for Serbia. The programming is elaborated by a team of the Foundation collaborating with a larger group of artistic curators.
- Mr. Vuk Radulović, Head of International Relations, provided insight into the specific needs of the local cultural sector which support and engagement into the project was lacking behind and is now been reinforced. Their needs steer the cooperation offer and support actions of the Foundation aiming to build a favourable ecosystem for the European Capital of Culture and its legacy. The biggest challenge is the lack of financial means for the local cultural scene. To overcome this shortcoming, the Foundation was able to provide new budgetary means for projects from the bid-book amounting to Euro 1 million. Furthermore, the city lacks spaces for cultural and artistic practice, which should be addressed through the development of new cultural stations and other cultural infrastructure investments within the Novi Sad 2021 project. In addition, the Foundation invested in capacity building with more than 100 travel grants to network and train local cultural stakeholders with the support of EU partners. The Foundation is also an active partner for EU-fundraising with 15 experienced mentors helping local organizations to apply for EU calls.
- Ms. Milica Rašković, Head of Programme Development team, pointed out the need of the local cultural institutions to engage further with (new) audiences. The current traditional programming of many institutions tends to attract always the same type of audiences. Furthermore, the involvement of volunteers is not very intense. The Foundation's support concentrated on the development of individual cultural strategies for all the main cultural institutions in Novi Sad. In addition, 61 cultural spaces were analysed in terms of accessibility and more than 80 volunteers now engage in the cultural development of Novi Sad institutions. Moreover, the shortages in modern equipment are addressed by a lending system that the Foundation also put in place. Finally, Ms Rašković also presented the Novi Sad Volunteering service as one of the most tangible results with over 600 volunteers currently in the database.
- The Head of International Relations, Mr. Vuk Radulović, highlighted the main achievements of Novi Sad 2021 regarding European cooperation. The context of the city and Serbia not being a Member State of the European Union does not favour the access to European funds and different approaches are pursued to overcome this disadvantage. An important element from the very beginning of the implementation of Novi Sad 2021 has been the training provided to help local operators submit EU applications and manage EU projects. This initiative has involved already more than 100 cultural workers in the city. The Foundation also developed programmes in

connection with the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, initiated dialogue with the EU officials present in Serbia as well as the EU Member States' embassies in the country. In addition, the exchange and cooperation with other ECOCs play an important role. To date more than 350.000 EUR have been channelled through EU funds into the Novi Sad 2021 project while 25 small-scale projects have been implemented.

- Mr. Dušan Kaličanin, Programme Director, highlighted the new organisational settings and frameworks of the Foundation. A new programme directorate was established including a production unit, which will concentrate on the Foundation's own productions. On top of the staff directly working within the Foundation, there are also many collaborators from partner organisations.
- The Chief Evaluator of the Novi Sad 2021 European Capital of Culture, Mr. Miroslav Vujičić, explained the methodology, target groups and institutional setting of the evaluation and monitoring of the ECOC. Due to the lack of available baseline data, the evaluation will first have to gather primary data. The Chief Evaluator will act in a coordinating role with a whole set of cooperating experts and researchers for data collection and related analysis reports. The evaluation frame is based on three dimensions – community, economy, culture – leading to an index named "Index of European Capital of Culture (IECOC)" that should provide easy to communicate and comparable figures for European Capitals of Culture. A first cultural impact index was elaborated for Novi Sad and in the next phase comparable indexes will be calculated for other ECOCs. Related contacts to European partners were already established.
- Finally, Ms. Tamara Belajić, Communication Manager, highlighted that a refined communication strategy was under development. It is also linked to the first results emerging from the evaluation. The communication process will involve local audiences, Serbia, the whole South-Eastern Balkan area as well as the EU and the international level. The communication activities to reach international audiences will already start in 2019 and will inter alia concentrate on image building and lifestyle. Furthermore, Ms. Bjelajić presented some of the achievements and quantitative data before concluding the session with a short promotional video of Novi Sad 2021.

Discussion

During the discussion, the panel sought clarification on a number of issues, raised questions and offered experience and advice. Topics discussed included the following:

- The panel acknowledged the considerable progress in the preparation of Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture 2021 since the last monitoring report and the monitoring visit as well as the Foundation's important contribution to the broader cultural development of the city. The work done so far for the cultural strategy conception and implementation – alongside 33 city's cultural institutions and with the guidance of diverse mentors from the UNESCO Cathedra University of Belgrade for the last 1,5 years – has also been well acknowledged.
- The panel enquired about the main challenges the Foundation was currently facing. The CEO stressed that an early start of small-scale projects of reference with public cultural institutions was crucial for building trust and good will for cooperation.

European cooperation projects were valuable to learn from European partners. Structures had to be established first, in order to be able to become operational. Moreover, staffing remains one of the main challenges for the Foundation, especially regarding senior management positions. Micro-granting targeting citizens in different quarters needed another big effort, which could be overcome with appropriate training.

- The panel asked about the programme structure. The Foundation answered that around 20% of the total programme would be produced in-house, including the opening and closing ceremonies. Furthermore, it explained that Novi Sad was internationally known for the strength and experience of its production companies. This is a solid ground on which the European Capital of Culture can build. On the other side, the Foundation added that what was needed – and it is being addressed by the ECOC team – is to improve the conception and ideas generation capacity of the sector.
- The panel inquired about the commitment of the city to the ECOC project as no high representative of the city authorities attended the meeting. The delegation reassured the panel that the mayor could not be present due to other international duties, but that the Foundation worked in close cooperation with the city administration on the ECOC preparation, the related transformations in the city as well as the first settings for legacy. It is planned that the Foundation will remain in place after 2021 and that it could transform into a resource platform. The existing Cultural Centre of the city should also further develop after the ECOC year.
- The panel inquired about developments regarding cooperation with public cultural institutions. The delegation of Novi Sad explained the process of involving these institutions in the ECOC project as a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches, notably for the development of 5-year long strategic plans (a precedent in the history of Novi Sad).
- Novi Sad is geographically close to several other current European Capitals of Culture. The panel wished to know whether and how Novi Sad would make use of the opportunities that this proximity offers. The delegation answered that the titles of European Capital of Culture and European Youth Capital have been instrumental in making the city better known in the wider European context. Consequently, the team now receives an increasing number of requests for cooperation, and not only from the neighbouring area. The other European Capitals of Culture play a major role in this context and several formats of collaboration have already been developed. A formal cooperation agreement between Timisoara and Novi Sad was to be signed the following day [It was actually signed on 5 June]. This may include a “Culture Bus” linking the two ECOCs. Furthermore, the cooperation with universities of ECOC cities is also an important area for the Novi Sad team.
- The panel sought further clarification on evaluation. The main challenge remains data collection as the statistical framework in Serbia does not provide a sufficient starting point and institutions are not used – nor motivated – to share data. Baseline data is being collected through a lengthy questionnaire targeting the local population. The team believes that this process will provide the required inputs also in the upcoming rounds of data collection. The key performance indicators (KPI) are currently under

development and input from specialist researchers is expected regarding social impact measurement. The evaluation team at the Foundation will include the project manager as well as a second position for internal evaluation.

- The role of artists in the overall project as well as the coverage of more difficult topics and related debates in the cultural programme were addressed by the panel. The Foundation mentioned artistic curators for nine artistic disciplines, currently working on the development of an artistic programme. The Foundation confirmed that the programme includes a wide range of programme activities and festivals in which artists are intensively involved. One of the most challenging topics of the European Capital of Culture in Novi Sad is the Fortress of Peace – a project focussing on peace and intercultural dialogue, which relates also to the Balkan wars. Alternative approaches to culture will also play an important role in the programme such as sub-culture as well as the involvement of minorities and excluded people throughout the Second Europe Programme Arch.
- In response to a question on how to address the wider European audience, the delegation said the programme would include topics and artists of international interest such as the exhibition on Mileva Marić Einstein and a project with Yoko Ono, which is part of the Fortress of Peace Programme Arch. The alternative (music) scene in ex-Yugoslavia is another opportunity for the marketing of Novi Sad 2021 towards European audiences as it gathers increasing interest in academic research as well as in the media. In addition, considerable efforts are under way to partner with the tourism organisations of the city, the region and Serbia. A budget pool is under discussion in order to enhance impact and visibility of Novi Sad ECOC 2021.
- The panel asked about the relationship of the Foundation with (parts) of the independent sector that complained in previous years about a lack of involvement and cooperation opportunities. The delegation clarified that the frameworks for cooperation with the ECOC are the same for all (i.e. through calls) and that potential partners are treated equally. The Foundation explained that 2019 was dedicated to involving the independent sector into the Novi Sad 2021 project.
- The budgetary framework was another question by the panel. The Foundation ensured that it has currently a stable financial framework and sufficient means for preparing and implementing the ECOC project. However, some delays occurred at provincial level, but corresponding payments are now expected in 2019. The Foundation has so far not been successful in getting the EU delegation in Serbia as a co-funder of the European Capital of Culture. Related exchanges at all policy levels are under way to solve these issues. The election period in 2020 – just one year before the ECOC in Novi Sad – might be critical. Upon request of the panel, the Foundation explained that most of the financial agreements were made on an oral basis during the application phase, while the ECOC budget was adopted during a session of the City General Assembly immediately after designation. Annual contracts are signed with the national and regional levels. Furthermore, the delegation ensured the panel that sponsoring activities have already started and will be considerably intensified by the end of 2019. A start-up phase with smaller sponsors was needed in order to build confidence in the Foundation and the ECOC programme.

- The cooperation with the business sector is often an under-exploited opportunity for cultural endeavours. The panel sought clarification from the Novi Sad delegation on how they wish to address this opportunity. The delegation stated that the business eco-system was very favourable in Novi Sad due to the presence of a wide range of (internationally) successful companies, e.g. in the field of IT and gaming. The intention – still to be further developed – is also to attract more (international) digital nomads so to further convince potential sponsors.

Conclusions and recommendations

The progress made since the first monitoring and the monitoring visit are promising. In this context, the panel would like to make the following conclusions and recommendations:

- The strategic cultural framework for the implementation of the European Capital of Culture in Novi Sad is strong and professional. The capacity building activities for the local public cultural institutions and NGOs are another strong point. Legacy and evaluation frameworks are under development and based on good European standards with elements of potential interest for the wider ECOC community such as the index “iECOC” and the involvement of universities.
- The cultural programme based on the principles of the four bridges is well structured. The involvement of artists is however not yet fully visible and the procedures to involve local stakeholders may be too strict to attract individual artists. There is a need for a further debate around the criteria of artistic quality of the ECOC programme. The role of the independent sector for the European Capital of Culture is not yet fully reflected in the current outline of the programme. The European dimension becomes already well visible but could gain from a wider geographical and institutional approach (going beyond ECOCs and universities).
- The different elements that are a pre-requisite for a sound capacity to deliver are in place. Several infrastructures required for the ECOC project are already renovated and functional. The political support at all levels is strong. The cooperation with external partners and related capacity building programmes are well developed. Both have the potential to influence positively the legacy of the European Capital of Culture in Novi Sad. Clarification was sought concerning the financial framework and the Foundation ensured that the operating budget announced in the bid-book will be maintained exactly on the planned level (28,6 Mio. EUR). The Melina Mercouri prize in the value of 1.5 Mio EUR should be integrated in the budget, in line with the common practice.
- Outreach activities are on a good way, including the cultural stations as well as the proposed projects for different target groups. The availability of comprehensive audience development and engagement strategies remains unclear. Special attention should be dedicated to the involvement of the Roma population in order to ensure co-creation and participation. The multi-cultural approach, also related to the geostrategic position of the city, is an added value well noted during the bidding phase, which should be explored further.
- The management and governance structures and procedures have developed in a professional manner. The organisational chart and the number of staff members is in

line with the share proposed for own productions. The team spirit was very visible during the monitoring session and should be maintained. The careful and forward-looking management of the budget must remain a central priority for the Foundation. Communication efforts have already generated some quantitative impact.

The following list of recommendations comprises input from the panel from previous reports and letters as well as new recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** The European dimension in the programme needs further development using a broad vision regarding a variety of cooperation partners as well as geographical backgrounds.
- **Recommendation 2:** The panel emphasises that the programming process for Novi Sad ECOC 2021 must have a clear artistic vision and a corresponding strong involvement of individual artists. Selection criteria for the programme must put a strong focus on artistic quality.
- **Recommendation 3:** Special attention must be dedicated to vulnerable target groups in order to ensure their full involvement in terms of co-creation and sustainability, including, among others, the Roma community. Audience development strategies based on comprehensive and systematic data collections are a requirement for the sustainability of the ECOC project.
- **Recommendation 4:** The capacity building efforts in Novi Sad should be further deepened and enlarged to cover wider parts of the independent cultural sector and the Novi Sad 2021 team.
- **Recommendation 5:** The staffing plans require further attention and careful analysis especially regarding outsourcing potential. Opportunities to outsource further some activities to strategic cooperation partners should be investigated. This approach would also generate positive effects in terms of legacy of the ECOC project.
- **Recommendation 6:** The elaboration and implementation of a strategic sponsorship plan will enhance the budgetary stability of Novi Sad 2021. It can also positively influence the sustainability of relations between the cultural and the business sectors in the city.

Next Steps

The panel acknowledges the progress made so far by Novi Sad 2021 since its nomination and puts itself at the disposal of Novi Sad 2021 for any questions, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a third monitoring meeting in the autumn 2020. At the end of the third monitoring meeting, the panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to pay or not the Melina Mercouri Prize to Novi Sad 2021.

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

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

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

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

The panel would like to thank Novi Sad 2021 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel's members

