



EUROPEAN CAPITAL  
OF CULTURE

**Selection of the  
European Capital of Culture  
in 2023 in Hungary**

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

**Budapest  
February 2018**

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## Introduction

This is the report of the selection panel (the "panel") for the pre-selection phase for the competition of the European Capital of Culture in 2023 in Hungary.

The Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary (the "ministry") is 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")<sup>1</sup> and by the "Rules of procedure – Competition for the 2023 European Capital of Culture title in Hungary" (the "Rules") signed by the Hungarian Minister of Human Capacities on 20 February 2017 and published on the Ministry's website<sup>2</sup>.

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process in line with Article 2 of the Rules. Ten members were appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of Regions). One of them, Beatriz Garcia, was excused for the meeting due to conflicting professional commitments. Two members were appointed by the ministry.

The competition is in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. The ministry issued a call for applications on 20 February 2017. Seven applications were submitted by the closing date of 20 December 2017 at 12:00:

**Debrecen, Eger, Gödöllő, Győr, Székesfehérvár, Szombathely, Veszprém.**

## Panel Meeting

The panel met in Budapest on 13-15 February 2018. The panel elected Aiva Rozenberga as its chair and Csaba Kaél as vice-chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality.

At the meeting all candidate cities, in alphabetical order, presented their case (in 30 minutes) and answered questions from the panel members (in 45 minutes).

At a press conference on 15 February 2018 the chair of the panel announced the panel's recommendation that the Minister shall invite the following cities to submit revised bids for final selection (in alphabetical order):

**Debrecen, Győr, Veszprém.**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L\\_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG)

<sup>2</sup> <http://kulturalisfovaros.kormany.hu/>

## Next Steps

The ministry will arrange the formal approval of the cities shortlist based on this report (Article 8 of the Decision). The ministry will then issue an invitation to these cities to submit their revised applications for final selection.

The shortlisted cities should take into account the assessments and recommendations of the panel in this report.

The deadline for submission of revised applications is 9 November 2018 at 12:00 (Budapest time).

The final selection meeting will be held in Budapest on 13-14 December 2018.

A minimum of four members of the panel will pay a one-day visit to the shortlisted cities shortly before the meeting to obtain more background information. Representatives of the European Commission and the ministry will accompany the visiting 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 this is the first time several cities in Hungary have developed specific cultural strategies. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECOC competition. The panel encourages all cities, not just those shortlisted, to continue with the development and implementation of their respective strategies.

The panel thanks all seven bidding candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids; the European Commission for their advice and the Minister of Human Capacities and his staff for their excellent administration.

## Assessments of the candidates

In their 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 of the Decision).

The panel assessed each bid against the six criteria in Article 5 of the Decision:

- Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city;
- European dimension;
- Cultural and artistic content;
- Capacity to deliver;
- Outreach;
- Management.

The panel noted that not all the candidates had fully completed the formal approval of their cultural strategy at city council level at the time of pre-selection. One of the most

important changes in the Decision on ECOC from the 2020 titles on is the requirement that cities have a formal and explicit cultural strategy when bidding for the ECOC title. This is to ensure that the ECOC is grounded in a long-term transformation of the city and its cultural life rather than a one-off festival. The panel will have to exclude candidates if the relevant councils have not approved the cultural strategy before the final submission deadline.

The panel also noted that the principles of the ECOC project should be based on a both way international cooperation going beyond the Central and Eastern European context. Despite the fact that the ECOC 2023 competition in the UK was discontinued in November 2017 as a direct consequence of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union as of 29 March 2019, ECOC candidates and - ultimately - the selected city in Hungary may nevertheless build bilateral cultural bridges between the EU and the UK cities for the upcoming years and especially for the year 2023.

Moreover the interpretation of the key criterion of "European dimension" in the bids of all Hungarian candidate cities was rather simplistic and could have been more ambitious. As there are several ways to translate and explore this topic, the panel recommends to all the cities to start up by making an attempt to answer the question „what can Europe learn from your city and what can your city learn from Europe?". Candidates are invited to keep in mind that the European dimension is not only about their cities' unique contribution to the diversity of cultures in Europe - based on their history, heritage and identity, but that it also includes the need to expose and promote interactions of their citizens with the diversity of European cultures, including the debate of themes connected to today's European realities.

In the next part of the report the panel presents the main elements of its conclusions. In the case of the three shortlisted cities specific recommendations are made to assist them in their preparation of the final bid-books. There are also recommendations, which apply to all the shortlisted cities.

The panel emphasises that its assessment of the candidates is based on the proposed programme set out in the bid-books and the hearing sessions, and their adequacy with the objectives and criteria of the ECOC Action. It is important to lay down that a city's history, its recent and current policies as well as its cultural offer may form a basis for a programme but play no part in the selection process.

## Debrecen

Debrecen presented their bid under the theme of "future.hand.book". The aim was to capitalise on the strengths of the city represented by the tradition of craft making combined with knowledge resulting into creative solutions for the future of the city as a progressive European metropolis.

The panel acknowledged the potential of this theme, but expressed doubts regarding the building of a strong narrative on it and its translation into a clear and strong message. Therefore the panel advises to revise this slogan.

The bid has the full support of the municipality and the regional and county institutions. Surrounding cities and villages also support the candidature, which is a positive element. Suitable cultural, transport and accommodation infrastructure is also available.

The programme of the city builds on six main topics/directions: "Botanica Reloaded"; "Debrecen Hype"; "Cool Craft"; "Send a Letter"; "Global Locals"; and "Transit". The panel regards these six directions as clear and understandable. There are some promising elements in the programme such as 3D mapping in "Imaginary Spaces", "Plattenbau District Cultural Incubator Points", "DRIVE – spatially created energy", "Cool School Containers", but a strong vision now needs to be further developed and also include flagship projects with the capacity to attract international audiences. As they stand now, both the artistic vision and the overall cultural programme have a potential, but need to be developed significantly.

Although 75% of the Debrecen ECOC programmes will be implemented in international cooperation, which is a positive direction, the panel considers that the European dimension is underplayed. The programme includes stronger points in this respect such as a good cooperation with ECOC cities and promising intentions regarding engagement with neighbouring Slovakia, Romania as well as Ukraine and EU-candidate countries in the Western Balkans. Nevertheless the European dimension must be significantly strengthened in particular towards multiculturalism and handled in a wider European context. The existing cultural potential of local cultural operators shall be utilised much more extensively to this effect.

The concept for the creative industries - as well as their potential for the city development - is a good starting point. However, the corresponding programmatic elements as presented in the bid-book remain too vague at this stage and the concrete impact of the ECOC in this regard is not sufficiently elaborated. The panel would also suggest to further detail the much needed capacity building programme proposed.

The proposed budget is €20,2m of which €10,5m would be allocated for programme expenditure. The panel would like to recommend reevaluating the structure (for instance the administrative costs are unusually high) and the amount of the budget as the proposed figures for programming might not be sufficient in a city of the size of Debrecen to reach the main targets of the ECOC project. Also the legacy issue for years 2024+ needs to be seriously taken into account.

Expectations from the private sector (especially sponsorship) (at €3,0m, i.e. 15% of the total operating budget) as well as from EU sources (especially Interreg funds) (at €5,0m, i.e. 20% of the total) seem to be over-optimistic in the absence of a very solid corresponding strategy to attract such funding, and should be rather modest at this phase when setting concrete plans for a budget.

A much more professional approach is therefore expected when setting the budget for the second round of the competition: income structure from key stakeholders shall be re-

evaluated and especially sources from national and EU funds should not be overestimated.

The panel appreciated the approach to outreach that seems to be decentralised hence promising. The Youth programmes in Philharmonics and MODEM are a good basis for future developments. Audience development shall however be considered as a strategic and systematic activity.

While the marketing budget is appropriate, the marketing objectives and messages are not fully coherent with the actions and are too diverse. This can result in a lack of clarity in the communication efforts.

The ECOC Debrecen 2023 Nonprofit Ltd was established in 2016 and started working in 2017, which is a positive aspect. The management and organisational chart presented in the bid-book is comprehensible, but the working structure is exclusively under the competence of the city, which is not a best practice according to the experience of former ECOC. The responsibilities over the artistic management as well as the competences of - and relationships with - the advisory boards shall be clearly described.

Overall the panel found that the ECOC bid of Debrecen was well-suited to the city's strategic New Phoenix Plan. The panel appreciates the self-critical and partly in-depth analysis of the city and its potential. In the panel's view, the city shall capitalise on both its current cultural infrastructure, institutions and NGOs and also develop new flagship projects in order to strengthen EU cooperation. It shall also reinforce audience development with respect to various target groups including youth, elderly people, minorities, etc. The promising artistic ideas included in the bid-book as well as the strategy for the development of the creative industries (and the way the latter will contribute to the ECOC project) need to be developed into much more concrete project proposals. The target of reaching 75% of all projects through international cooperation is ambitious and if the city is finally selected this target will be monitored by the panel.

## Eger

Eger presented their bid under the vision of transforming a popular tourist destination with a large cultural and natural heritage into a creative centre having “light” as a symbol for innovation. The bid’s slogan is ‘Switching to Culture’.

The bid has the full support of the municipality, regional and county institutions as well as surrounding cities and villages, which is a positive element.

As far as the cultural strategy is concerned, it is in place with a focus on cultural and creative industries, cultural tourism and local youth’s engagement. The ECOC plays in this strategy an important role but obviously the city is also ready in case they don’t get the “ECOC” title. The panel appreciates the endeavour to develop new creative hubs. However the capacity building projects should have been more developed at this stage of the competition.

The essence of the programme concept is to give a new interpretation to the connection between urban spaces (in and outdoors) and urban (community) life. Furthermore, Eger intends to create a series of events, in which art, technology and science meet. The programme is based on four thematic pillars: “Europe of many stars”; “Accessible Star Region”; “The Stars of Eger” and “Somewhere in Europe”.

Two artistic genres have been given priority in the programme due to the Eger creative profile: creative arts and film. Eger has chosen to put artists working with light in all its forms (filmmakers, photographers, creative artists, light architects and light projectors) at the centre of events in 2023, in line with its overall slogan. Although this concept may seem progressive and potentially promising, the artistic programme lacks coherence and a clear artistic vision. It creates a good starting point to explore the legacy of local-born artists such as cinematographer Lajos Koltai or photographer and art theorist György Kepes, but unfortunately the programme included in the bid-book hardly explains how the relationship between science, art and technology will be explored as part of the ECOC project.

From the bid-book and the hearing, the panel had the impression that the cultural and artistic programme was more tourism-oriented than focusing on the ECOC objectives and criteria. Indeed, the programme is based on the local cultural heritage such as festivals, Baroque architecture etc., which should only be a starting point and be put in the wider European context. The absence of a connection with today’s issues in Europe is detrimental to the European dimension of the project, and this aspect is missing in the bid-book. According to the panel it is a pity that the renowned winery as well as spa traditions in the region have not been artistically approached in the bid as they could have been used as sources for cultural themes (with a European dimension) in the programme.

There is an intention to strengthen and create new European partnerships, which is very positive. On the other hand European themes are too broad and at a very preliminary stage of development, with a very limited amount of partners coming from beyond the Central European region and sister cities. The connections mentioned with some European networks such as EUNIC or LIKE (Les Rencontres) might be relevant in this regard, but they are not enough to result in a strong European dimension. As a consequence, the bid programme and plans seem rather local.

The proposed budget is €61,7m of which €51,2m would be allocated to the programme. The panel is not convinced that the proposed operating budget is achievable, as it is extremely dependent on a very high contribution from the national government (€51,2m, i.e. almost 83% of the budget). This can put the ECOC plans and the overall quality of the project at risk. The contribution from the city - at €10,5m - seems to be in

adequation with its size. As a whole, the budget is a very weak point of the bid. Furthermore, the dependence on national resources for capital projects is also a worrying element.

The approach to audience development was considered as a good starting point; yet the panel would have expected more concrete plans at this stage.

The management structure of the project as described in the bid-book is not very clear and brings doubts about its functionality. The panel acknowledges the three main infrastructural projects related to ECOC as being coherent with the proposed programme.

Overall the panel found the bid-book more convincing than the oral presentation, the latter being too much tourism oriented and sometimes in contradiction with the written application. On the other hand Eger showed a big potential as a city that adopted (in advance of the ECOC competition) a cultural strategy, has great dynamics and energy to maintain its positive reputation in the future as a progressive and hospitable centre. Film industry, science and technology, light design and other contemporary cultural fields combined with the city's cultural and natural heritage can place Eger on the European map even without the ECOC title.

## Gödöllő

Gödöllő presented their bid under the banner of “Engage and Share”. Their objectives were to reinforce, highlight and share with Europe the qualities of life in a smaller city which inhabitants are proud of.

A cultural strategy is in place but it needs to be extended to beyond 2023. The coherence with other strategies of the city seems promising. A set of objectives was presented and interlinked with ECOC-related targets, which is also a positive element.

The bid has the support of the city and county councils, suggesting a welcomed stability. The short distance from Budapest is an advantage in terms of transportation, as well as accommodation capacities, but potential synergies in several other domains, notably cultural wise, with the capital city should have been utilised more intensively to make the bid more convincing.

The leitmotif of the cultural and artistic programme is storytelling. As explained in the bid-book, “it derives its resources from Gödöllő’s past, and foretells its future”. The programme is based on five thematic pillars: “Small city community”; “Generations”; “Communication”; “Sustainable lifestyle; and “Eco-city”. These five lines are potentially interesting. However, the content of the programme was not very convincing, especially regarding the coherence of thematics and examples of projects provided.

During the presentation the bid-team highlighted some interesting elements for a cultural programme mixing arts, culture, society and sustainability. The involvement of the local cultural scene is strong, which is per se a good starting point as this is a precondition to create ownership by local stakeholders. However the programme as a whole - as described in the bid-book - is missing a clear artistic vision. It is also more events/festival oriented, therefore not responding fully to the wider ECOC requirements. The programme displays good ideas, like an orientation towards environmental issues and the use of small businesses as venues. However, topics covering creative industries, multiculturalism and social issues - though promising elements in themselves - were just slightly touched upon, and would have needed to be further developed.

Furthermore, the level of international cooperation and involvement of international partners and artists is rather low, which is detrimental to the European dimension of the candidacy. The city showed a (positive) will to make some connections with ECOC cities and some other international institutions, but the level of negotiations seem to be more at a stage of a declaratory intention or early initiation. Moreover, the panel had doubts about the capacity of the programme to attract European and international audiences.

The proposed budget is €23,1m of which €16,9m is allocated for programme expenditure. Although the city size is small, the small contribution of the city at only €2m is not ambitious enough and in addition the dependency of the project on a very high contribution from the national government (at €18,2m) raises questions and is a potential risk.

The ECOC project as presented lacks a systematic approach to outreach and audience development, but a few good points - e.g. building on museum pedagogy and organizing meetings and workshops for the audiences to offer insight of the process of creation - are worth pursuing.

According to the panel, the communication actions go towards engagement, which is a good direction. However, from a marketing point of view, the panel points out the low

activity on social media during the bid process as well as the rather weak bid-book visual presentation.

The panel was not convinced about the management and governance structures which were underdeveloped at this stage, in both the bid-book and the oral presentation.

Overall the panel had the impression that the ECOC bid had the makings of a sound local and regional cultural offer. However the panel did not see enough content in the outline programme or its artistic vision to make an impact at European level. On the other hand, the Gödöllő's image as a small hospitable city investing in culture and eco-sustainability as well as in its younger generations to improve quality of life for its citizens and tourists is clearly an asset. The city has a good vision worth being pursued in the future especially with the young generation being involved in these developments.

## Győr

Győr presented their bid under the slogan “Enjoy the FLOW”, where the flow can be translated into four different meanings: geographical flow (conflux of rivers and repositioning of the tradition into future looking flows), flow of time (discussion on the future of Europe based on the flow of information), flow of people (opening a dialogue about traditional Judeo-Christian culture and other inputs brought by migration), and community flow (local citizens with newcomers creating one strong community). Though the panel appreciates this starting point, it feels that the flow concept needs to be con-substantiated by clearer distinctive features that would make Győr’s slogan unique.

Despite the fact that a so-called cultural concept - giving a comprehensive view of the the city’s present cultural life with roots in its historical past - was adopted by the local government, a specific long-term strategy of the city cultural development - based on this concept and including the ECOC project - still has to be formally adopted. Adoption shall happen no later than before the final bid-book is submitted.

The bid has all-party support from the city and county levels.

The interesting presentation made by the delegation during its hearing enhanced the bid-book. The panel recognised from both the oral presentation and the bid-book that the preparation period for the bid had been long and sustained: the team had time to identify and understand some essential issues which underpin the Győr ECOC project.

Nevertheless the cultural and artistic programme needs to be further developed in terms of its flagship projects (with a potential to attract a European and international audience) and European cooperation (i.e. reaching beyond Central Europe and including a wide contemporary approach to religion, migrations and cultural diversity). A clear artistic vision shall be reflected much more intensively in the programme proposal – meaning in particular more concrete projects connected with the main theme. The panel also underlines the importance of a stronger involvement of the younger generation. As the city plans to be an atelier for the younger generation, the involvement of youngsters and children should be given a more prominent role in shaping the ECOC future programme.

The number of international partners as one key aspect of the European dimension shall be significantly extended and the presence of such partners should be turned as a principle into the artistic vision. The cooperation with other ECOC including candidates is also one element of European dimension which is missing at this stage and should be further developed.

The proposed budget is €23,2m of which €16,2 would be allocated for programme expenditure. The panel acknowledges the budget as being realistic and well structured. The expectation from the national government for the operating budget (€6,4m) is rather modest and realistic. The expected contribution from EU at €4,8m is quite ambitious and a detailed planning (at the level of concrete individual projects) shall be submitted at the next stage of the competition.

Cooperation with the local business sector is promising but needs to be capitalised for the ECOC project as it is still somewhat unclear how they would concretely contribute to it. The panel appreciates the presence of a creative industries development plan not only for the purpose of the ECOC project, but as a solution for the future development of the city as well as avoiding brain-drain. However, the creative industries’ potential is not sufficiently visible and should therefore be further explored in the proposed programme.

Capacity building activities should also be planned to ensure the sector is up to the challenge of the ECOC project.

Both the bid-book and the presentation highlighted a high degree of civic participation in the development of the bid. Activity on social media is promising but shall be strengthened in order to engage all generations of citizens. The outreach and the audience development aspects also need a clearer and strategic approach.

The marketing strategy also needs to be developed in the second phase, in coherence with the ECOC's mission.

The management structure of the project mixes the responsibilities for infrastructural and operational projects, which might entail some difficulties. The panel notes the experience of the city in organising the Youth Olympic Festival in 2017 as a positive element but advises to study also different organisational models used in previous ECOC projects. The panel expects to get a proposal for a solid organisation of the foundation.

Overall the panel found that the programme, currently under development, was dynamic, engaging and interesting, with projects based on a long-term reflection on how to build, and sustain, the future. There is a need for a stronger focus on European and international partnership as well as for exploring ways to further develop themes with a clear European dimension. The panel expects the cultural strategy to be approved and a majority of projects to have partners from other European countries. The panel has concerns over the concrete legacy aspirations and this shall be developed for the next bidding phase.

## Székesfehérvár

Székesfehérvár presented their bid under the banner of "Ready for Culture – Ready for Future!". The city wants to capitalise on both its past as the former "city of coronation" and its present as one of the most developed industrial centres in the country, resulting in a future-oriented city where culture and education are crucial tools "to achieve a historical conversion of human curiosity and skills".

A cultural strategy for the 2017-2038 time period is in place with a relevant focus on the cultural and creative industries. A "Local Community Development Strategy" was also adopted in 2016. In the long run, the ECOC application is planned to serve the overall economic, social, environmental and regional purposes of the Integrated Settlement Development Strategy, which is only partly in line with the overall goal of the European Capitals of Culture (i.e. to reinforce the contribution of culture to the development of cities). The panel appreciates the plan to develop a new creative hub with the intention to involve the local business sector.

The bid has the full support of the city council. Furthermore the cultural infrastructure seems to be adequate and in case the plans included in the bid-book for new infrastructure projects do materialize the city will be ready to host and put forward programmes with an international dimension, even in the absence of the ECOC title.

The programme for the ECOC project is established on the historical past of the city from the Neolithic age, through Roman times to the present, and based on a strong and stable network of values and artistic life, both real and virtual. Alongside the programme and concept for the ECOC year, a Strategy for Action, the "6C Art and Activity Plan", has been developed under the following claims: "Cumulate!, Create!, Concentrate!, Construct!, Cooperate!, Connect!". It includes thematic years (Baroque Year 2018, Industrial History Year 2019, Beethoven Year 2020, Seuso Year 2021 and Golden Bull Year 2022). According to the panel, a graduated programme building is potentially a positive approach; however there is a risk that thematic years focused on the city's past would take the attention away of the ECOC year and its forward-looking mission.

All in all the cultural and artistic programme seem to be more a randomly built portfolio of unconnected - though sometimes interesting - projects artificially put under the same banner, with a strong focus on festivals, than a consistent cluster of projects corresponding to a (unfortunately missing) clear artistic vision.

Although the city acknowledges the diversity of its inhabitants underlining Croatian, Polish, German, Armenian, Roma and Serbian contributions to its cultural life, this was not clearly visible in the overall approach of the bid and the proposed programme. The international collaboration is focused on European Coronation Cities, which is only a positive starting point. However it is not clear how this aspect would make audiences (including international audiences) "Ready for the future". The city showed a (positive) will to strengthen its international connections. Unfortunately the way it was done was too much focused on historical facts and the past instead of creating fresh connections with European artists, organisations and institutions. There was also no convincing strategy to build a strong interest of European and international audiences.

Finally, there was a patent imbalance between, on the one hand, the high number of projects on traditional local and regional artforms and, on the other hand, too few projects aiming at creating sustainable international partnerships in order to develop new contemporary artworks and content. As a result, the artistic and cultural content was rather local or Central European oriented, giving the overall impression of an inward-

looking application, while a clear approach towards the contemporary European art scene was lacking.

The European dimension was therefore considerably underplayed. While the point of an ECOC is precisely to offer a platform to highlight the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe, celebrate the cultural features Europeans share and increase European citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural area, these aspects were not visible in the application. This is a missed opportunity because the existing contemporary arts and festival scene in Székesfehérvár has clearly a big potential.

The proposed budget is €22m, of which €12,7m is allocated for programme expenditure. Almost 36% of the overall budget is planned for wages, overhead and administration (which is a high figure) while only 6% is foreseen for promotion and marketing activities. This split of expenditure is in contradiction with the experience of all successful ECOC cities in the past. On the other hand the contribution foreseen from the city (at almost €15m) shows its commitment to the programme.

A few positive ideas are presented in the "outreach" section of the bid-book, for example the promotion of equal opportunities also for people with disabilities, local ECOC buses, and a collaboration with schools. However, audience development is not approached from a strategic perspective and presents a top-down approach not covering for example the need to create opportunities for a close collaboration between artists and inhabitants.

The marketing and communication strategy (connected with a low budget) is rather underdeveloped and is therefore too general even at pre-selection stage. The absence of social media communication means that some of the target groups could easily be left out.

Overall, Székesfehérvár showed some good potential as a city as it has already a cultural strategy in place, interesting cultural dynamics and the energy to maintain its positive reputation as a future-orientated city with a developed industry base and a big potential in creative industries. However, the panel felt that although Székesfehérvár has a dynamic economy and a rich cultural tradition, the bid-book was not up to its potential and could - should - have included a much more future-oriented cultural and artistic content. It is also a missed opportunity that the programme ideas do not cover a geographical area going much more beyond the nearby Central Europe.

## Szombathely

Szombathely presented their bid under the theme “Iron Curtain Call Szombathely” and with the motto “2 thousand years, 3 borders, 4 beats and a complete, healthy city.” The objective is to have a “curtain call” at the site of the former Iron Curtain in order to lift it and have Szombathely introducing itself on the imaginary stage of Europe in a worthy way linked with iconic dance and wide cultural scene.

The bid has the full support of the city council, which is relevant.

The bid-book is unclear about whether a long-term cultural strategy has already been approved and is currently in place or not, and the connection with the ECOC bid is also not very apparent. Furthermore the “Creative City – Sustainable Region” concept is a promising concept for the future of the city; yet besides the relevant mapping needs acknowledged, no further strategic elements taking advantage of the ECOC have been devised, notably with respect to the potential regarding the film industry.

The main theme of the “Iron Curtain” has a powerful symbolic value echoing the recent history of Europe. There is a will to overcome traumas from this recent past - which resonate with various countries of today’s European Union - and create cross-border partnerships. However, it appears that other potentially concerned border areas in Europe have not been approached yet, which is a missed opportunity as this would have resulted in a strong element of European dimension.

Furthermore, despite the big potential of the proposed theme, there is not a corresponding coherent programme and artistic vision, and the theme is not translated into a contemporary European arts language. The panel however acknowledges the positive fact that the bid-book was created with a strong participation of local inhabitants.

The programme does not include a wider cooperation with other ECOC cities. While the already mentioned cross-border projects are potentially a positive element towards the European dimension criterion, the panel feels that the other strands of the programme, such as the “Savaria Historical Carnival” or the “St Martin Festival”, are less developed in having international partners or promoting European themes and intercultural dialogue, which are also key components of this criterion.

The panel was also expecting more consistent cooperation projects with neighbouring Austria and Slovenia, taking advantage of the commuting and labour mobility in this cross-border region. The programme is dominated by festivals which are not connected to the central theme of the application, as well as light events and folklore providing entertainment for cultural tourism but it lacks a clear artistic vision.

The proposed budget is rather modest at €14,8m, of which €9,3m would be allocated for programme expenditure. The structure of the budget seems to be reasonable, with however some discrepancies from current ECOC practice, in that the percentage of the budget dedicated to wages, overhead and administration (8%) is lower than usual and the percentage for promotion and marketing (28%) is particularly high. The contribution expected from the national government for the operational expenditure is realistic at a modest €3,5m.

The management organisational chart presented is understandable and valid. However a more common approach in recent ECOC is to ensure a greater independence from the municipality for ECOC delivery teams.

The marketing and communication strategy is too general, insufficiently developed (even for this first stage of the competition) and inward-looking.

Overall the panel considers that the ECOC bid was well prepared in terms of the analytics and coherence of the project with the city's strategies. However, from an artistic and cultural point of view, the bid is too much focused on the Hungarian or Central European context. The will to change from the communist past to a future based on creativity is generally plausible. A stronger focus on international partnership within the European dimension criterion should have been added, as the panel expects most individual projects of an ECOC to have partners from other European (and other) countries. The appeal of the programme to wider European and international audiences is also questionable. On the other hand the panel appreciates the self-confidence of the team stating that even without the ECOC title the city has already moved forward and will continue on this way.

## Veszprém

Veszprém presented their bid under the title "Beyond" representing the intentions of the city to go beyond their provincialism, beyond their defeatism and beyond the indifference. The panel appreciated the key sentence in the "General Considerations" of the bid-book: "Our programme is a vote for Europe".

The overall goal is to create an exciting new destination within Europe – a region around the Balaton lake that can move beyond paralysing preconceptions and show that small cities linked to a harmonious network of towns and villages can be culturally relevant at the European level. In this new kind of tourism, sustainability is an ultimate pillar and quality time is the main product. The bid intends to demonstrate how much Hungary is in need of forging new ties as well as strengthening old ones within Europe.

The project has the support of the city and county councils as well as an overall support from all political parties.

A cultural strategy has been in place since December 2017 for the period 2018-2030 and it is well connected with the city long-term strategy and vision. The ECOC project seems also to be well linked to the targets of the cultural strategy, which is a positive point. However not winning the title shall not have an impact on the further development of the cultural scene of the whole territory. Infrastructural projects such as the Golden Valley Creative Hub (meant as the "brain" behind design-driven city programmes) could turn into a real asset for the whole territory. It should now be linked with the cultural and creative industries strategy of the city, alongside the intents in terms of capacity building programme.

The programme presented in the bid-book has four main axes: "Beyond our tracks – changing the future of the city through creativity and culture"; "Beyond the boundaries – regional cooperation instead of simple coexistence"; "Beyond the buzz – exploring and embracing other narratives"; and "Beyond charm and isolation – finding rural stepping stones". Some individual projects (including flagships) are presented in the bid-book. While they seem promising, these projects would however need to be further developed. Several programme elements such as the cluster called "The Woman, the Family, the Artist" would also need considerable further deliberation. As an example, in the case of the quoted example on the female (artists), reflection is needed notably on their role(s) in the 21st century. The programme includes a good combination of old and new as well as popular and more ambitious elements. The panel noticed in particular "Living Lakes", the "Monsters and Mermaids Party", the cluster called "The Spoken Truth" on the impact of language on identity, the "Festival of Thoughts", "Spiritual Detox", the new "City-Arch Centre" acting as a project office, architectural laboratory and a think tank, the "XX/XXI – Veszprém Contemporary Art Show", the "Republic of Freedom" (one of the programme's highlights), and "Playful City". The cultural programme also mentions ideas to integrate creative industries – including a hub with a potential for sustainable effects, "The Cube – interactive IT knowledge centre and exhibition space".

The target of going beyond the seasonality is ambitious and may be relevant for the whole region. Also cultural events based in the region shall be taken as a valuable source further developed for the ECOC project – for instance, the "Valley of Arts Festival" could serve as a potential project that might be boosted under the condition that both sides accept this strategy.

As far as the European dimension is concerned, the panel appreciates the discussion of themes of contemporary European relevance such as nationalism and migrations. However the criterion was only partially developed thus it needs to be both broadened

and deepened. In this respect, the panel expects most projects to have a European partner in the final bid-book. For the next stage the panel expects to get concrete examples about how the cultural programme of the Lake Balaton Region will work as an instrument to overcome populism and nationalism. The cooperation with other ECOC cities (including from EU candidate countries) could help to strengthen this international aspect. It would also be interesting to know more about those projects that can engage the international audience. Some European networks, including the Finno-Ugric cultural network and the Small Size Network (performing arts for young audience), were mentioned.

The projected operating budget is €38m of which €24m would be allocated to programme expenditure. The budget is quite realistic. However the expected contribution from the national government is quite ambitious (representing 58% of the total income from the public sector), and there is therefore a need for Veszprém to explain in their final bid-book how they intend to achieve such a high target. The panel would also need to know the strategy the city plans to implement to apply for EU funding programmes. The level of the budget for capital expenditure (including the expected contribution from the national government) is relatively modest at €60,3m, reflecting the willingness expressed during the presentation to invest in people more than in buildings as well the fact that the city is already well equipped in terms of infrastructure.

The panel welcomes the audience development trajectory, the participative approach to the bid-book development and the strong emphasis on capacity building in this respect.

One of the biggest strengths of the bid – the regional approach – needs a more consistent reflection at governance level (decision-making flows) but also a clear vision regarding its translation into the programme content. A management structure that allows wide participation, investment and willingness of all the regional partners is crucial and shall be developed for the final bidding phase. Former ECOCs such as Essen for the Ruhr 2010 or Marseille-Provence 2013 can serve as examples of good practice. Longer-term legacy for this regional cooperation hub is an issue that requires a systematic approach looking upon years after the ECOC. Finally, an organisation structure with two artistic directors might bring some difficulties and therefore there is a need to have responsibilities clearly described.

Overall the panel considers that the ECOC bid of Veszprém is ambitious and the presentation was very professional with a real team spirit. The presentation focused on the ECOC criteria and enhanced the bid-book. The programme is developing on sound lines and there is a clear linkage between strategy and projects. The “Vote for Europe” principle is promising and challenging at the same time. Concrete projects and links to main themes are expected to be presented for the next round. The city shall capitalize on all the energy collected for the first round and present much more concrete plans to reach its ambitious targets.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations apply to the three shortlisted candidates.

The panel considers that all three shortlisted cities need to further work on and develop their bids for the final selection in order to reach the required level of quality for such a demanding project as the European Capitals of Culture. There is a considerable 'qualitative leap' between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at the final selection. The panel will expect significant changes in the final bid-books to reflect the recommendations.

The shortlisted candidates are advised to study carefully the **six criteria laid down in the Decision** and the comments on all candidates in the assessments above.

### General

The bid-book at the final selection becomes the *de facto* 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 the monitoring panel will recommend the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize.

In the final selection bid-book candidates must cover all the questions in the call's "application form". The panel expects a considerably more developed section on the proposed artistic vision, the 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 EU action. 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.

### ECOC and cultural strategy

The panel will expect a tighter focus in the bid-books of the final round. In the next, upgraded bid-books cities should indicate the priorities of their strategy, its target outcomes and how the structure of cultural budgets will change over the next few years (rather than broad changes in the total budget allocated to culture). A city's cultural strategy will normally be wider in scope than the objectives of an ECOC. Bid-books should indicate more clearly which priorities of the broader cultural strategy the ECOC is seeking to contribute to.

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 panel would expect a more focused (and shorter) explanation which can be linked to the programme's vision and themes, the programme itself, and through evaluation, to the outcomes in the subsequent legacy. There is considerable literature and research available for cities to see the range of cultural, economic and social benefits of an ECOC.

There was a tendency in the evaluation sections of the bid-books to list many indicators not clearly related to the ECOC plans. There is a risk of excessive focus on statistics and

data gathering. The final bid-book should concentrate on the **priority** objectives for the ECOC (rather than those for the entire cultural strategy) and explain how baseline data will be produced to measure progress towards realisation of the objectives. One of the priority areas should refer to how the ECOC will meet the various elements of the European Dimension criterion.

## European dimension

The panel found that this criterion was considerably under-developed. At this stage the proposals are too inward-looking in their local context in the city, the region and Hungary. The panel would wish to see a greater deepening and widening of programmes to ensure a more relevant **European dimension**. That a city is in Hungary, in Europe, has a vibrant existing cultural offer and will 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 the story. Cities need to understand that the European dimension, although not being in daily politics, links - depending on the themes chosen for the ECOC - to wider debates. Selected cities must be able to handle these debates in a professional manner as they become representatives of the whole of the European Union.

The European dimension has a two-way direction. 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 this focus on other cultures which 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 and to travel to visit their European peers.

One of the elements of the European dimension criterion for the ECOC title is the ability to attract **visitors from different parts of Europe**. This 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 attracting programme ideas in the bid for ECOC 2023.

## Cultural and artistic programme

The focus of the final selection is the **operating programme** between early 2019, when the ECOC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECOC year of 2023. **A city's previous cultural history and heritage and its recent and current cultural offer, may form a basis for this programme but plays no part in the decision.** Many ECOCs in recent years have used the opportunity provided by an ECOC to address difficult issues from their 20th century past which still resonate today. The panel suggest candidates to re-consider their approach to the appropriate topics from Hungary's past history.

The panel will expect to see considerably more details on the programme and its projects. The three cities should set out their artistic vision, the programme and projects more clearly; 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 artforms 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 their programme. This component was under-developed in all bid-books.

The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) should be understood as a transversal topic of the cultural and artistic programme and must be linked to a related mapping exercise and needs analysis of the sector. Capacity building should therefore also encompass the CCIs.

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 **the capital projects which directly impact the programme activities** (e.g. a new cultural centre in a restored building which 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.

## Capacity to deliver

Candidates should re-confirm that their financial commitments, have the formal approval of the mayor and a cross-party support from the city (and county if appropriate) councils.

All three shortlisted cities explained their capacity to manage large one-off cultural events. 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 the depth and range of an ECOC. All cities should also plan strong capacity building programmes as ECOC's scope goes beyond current local capacities.

## Outreach

The **audience development** programme 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 panel would expect to learn about the audience development policies of the main cultural organisations including the main independent operators. Besides, the role and contribution of universities (except evaluation work) was underplayed in the pre-selection bid-books. Special focus should be dedicated to those audiences which are more difficult to reach but being crucial for a new "cultural climate" in an ECOC city (e. g. the elderly, disabled, people temporarily in the city, cultural minorities). These were under-represented in the bid-books at pre-selection phase. The revised bid-books should cover the participation of schools, youth groups, (international) students, volunteers and the capacity building of the creative art sector to approach audience development from a long-term and strategic perspective.

## Management

The **membership of governing boards and their independence from city administrations** should be explained, with post holders (or positions) and the method of appointment. The decision making role of the board should be explained. Clear relationship between different bodies and advisory boards is expected to be outlined.

The **General and Artistic/Cultural Directors** play a key role in all ECOCs. The selection, preferably through an open international call, of these posts before the candidates' appearance at the final selection meeting, will be to their advantage. This is especially important for the Artistic Director as, unlike many such appointments, the artistic vision is already set out in the bid-book. The same applies if a candidate proposes a collective artistic leadership. It is acknowledged that the appointments may be conditional on the outcome of the competition. If projects are planned to be funded from competitive EU programmes (e.g. Creative Europe) this should be indicated.

The final bid-books should clearly indicate how potential **capital investments crucial for the ECOC** (those mentioned in the capacity to deliver criteria above) will 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). The planned staffing arrangements from 2018 to 2023 should be outlined including secondments, interns and volunteers.

### **Signed**

Aiva Rozenberga (Chair)  
Csaba Kaél (Vice-chair)  
Jiri Suchanek (Rapporteur)  
Sylvia Amann  
Cristina Farinha  
Tamas Fejerdy  
Ulrich Fuchs  
Alain Hutchinson  
Pauli Sivonen  
Agnieszka Wlazel  
Suzana Žilič Fišer

### **Budapest**

February 2018