



# **Bodø**

# **European Capital of Culture 2024**

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

**Virtual Meeting, September 2020**

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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

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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Attendance .....	4
Report from ECoC Bodø 2024.....	5
Discussion .....	5
Programme and European dimension.....	6
Capacity to deliver .....	7
Outreach .....	8
Management .....	8
Milestones.....	10
Conclusions and recommendations .....	10
Next Steps.....	11

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## Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 23rd September 2020 between the panel and Bodø (Norway), one of the three cities holding the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) title in 2024<sup>1</sup>. Bodø was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2024 by the European Commission on 3 February 2020 on the basis of the recommendation of the ECoC Expert panel in its selection report<sup>2</sup>; its bidbook is available on the Bodø 2024 website<sup>3</sup>. This report is addressed to the Bodø 2024 public non-profit institution and will be published on the European Commission's website<sup>4</sup>.

## Attendance

### The panel members:

Sylvia Amann, Cristina Farinha and Agnieszka Wlazel (Rapporteur), 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 Jelle Burggraaff (Chair), appointed by the European Commission 2020–2022;

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

### For Bodø 2024

Mayor of Bodø;  
Programme director Bodø2024 IKS;  
Vice-chair Bodø2024 Board/Sami representative;  
Youth representative/Chair of Bodø Youth Council;  
Representative of the Bodø Business Forum;  
Representative of Nord University;  
Artistic Director (starting on 1.10.2020).

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

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

<sup>2</sup> See selection report at: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/ecoc2024-eftaeea-selection-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://bodo.kommune.no/les/ECC/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en)

## Report from ECoC Bodø 2024

Bodø 2024 submitted a comprehensive progress report ahead of the meeting. The report outlined in detail the activities of the organisation since the selection meeting in September 2019. In advance of the virtual meeting, Bodø 2024 delivered a 22-minute-long video that included: reflections of the President of the Nordland County Council and Bodø Mayor, as well as representatives of other organisations presenting programme themes, projects' state of developments and some programme activities organised despite the pandemic. The video included a statement from the Norwegian Minister of Culture. The reactions to the current pandemic situation were also echoed in the video-report. The panel appreciated the lively and creative approach demonstrated in the video presentation. Even though it was not an easy year since selection, it appears the project's strategic work has continued with an adjustment of the means of communication. The expansion of digital platforms has in fact eased and opened ways for some new international contacts e.g. intensified contacts with other Mayors from the Arctic Circle.

### Discussion

During the discussion, the panel sought clarification on some issues. Topics discussed included the following:

#### Long-term cultural strategy

- The panel asked how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Bodø's cultural strategy and how the team saw its future impact, in particular, in terms of outreach and private sponsors' commitments.

The team stated that the pandemic had no impact on the strategies, as they worked towards long-term plans and goals for 2024. The Mayor underlined the need for strategic collaboration and the essential and special role of culture in this respect in the coming years. The situation has even strengthened the collaboration between local and regional administrations. In general, everybody is open to the idea of developing a more strategic and long-term thinking whilst related preparations are on track.

Surprisingly, the team noticed that the pandemic did not diminish – but instead increased – the willingness of private sponsors to give support to the ECoC project. The team was now feeling much more confident than at selection phase about reaching its targets in terms of private sponsorship.

As far as outreach is concerned, the first year was focused on youth involvement (with excellent involvement examples provided in the report and in the video). The international part of the outreach was, obviously, more challenging under current circumstances, and the team is aware of the need to intensify work in this regard. In a way, the COVID-19 pandemic had a positive impact on local outreach (as many activities could happen in the City and County both on- and offline) but a more negative one on an international level.

- The panel was interested in knowing how core strategic objectives would be translated into evaluation objectives. What are the team's priorities in order to capture baseline data and what is the role of the *social audit system approach* the University has proposed? How does the team view the University's capacity to

combine aspirational research / knowledge advancement with precise evaluation and monitoring targets?

Agreement has been reached with groups that will be carrying out the data collection together with the team. In addition, a partnership agreement with Nord University is under development. Collecting baseline data has not yet been possible due to the pandemic. However, there will be one collective project for evaluation covering the cultural strategies of the city and the region as well as audience analysis. A call to find evaluation partners was published, and the *audit system approach* is an example of one of the submitted proposals. All submitted applications will be evaluated later when the core Bodø 2024 team is in place in early October 2020. Starting from next year, PhD students will also follow the ECoC development whilst the University is implementing several other relevant projects. Finally, a representative from the university is included in the Board.

- The panel wanted to get additional information about youth engagement (a key priority of the ECoC project) and the plans for capturing change in this area (as well as other outreach targets). In particular, is this being identified as part of the baseline data capture?

This will be part of the evaluation team's work. Regarding youth engagement, based on discussions with Novi Sad, it was decided that Bodø would increase collaboration with European Youth Capitals and bid for the 2026 title, as a way to build on the ECoC enthusiasm and capacities acquired and ensure legacy. The Culture Forum for Youth was established as planned and all youth organisations are invited to meet and discuss relevant issues with the view to creating the best possible structure for youth projects. The first meeting of the Forum was a success and one event per month is planned. Some data will be collected in relation to youth activities, so those actions will be included in the evaluation.

### **Programme and European dimension**

- The panel wanted to know about international partners Bodø 2024 is cooperating with and to learn about the strategy in place to find new ones.

The newly appointed Artistic Director will start working on 1.10.2020, so those aspects are to be developed later in tune with upcoming artistic decisions. In the first phase, the team prepared an overview of contacts and the plan is to use the team's (and the Artistic Director's) networks in the future to enrich the partnership basis.

- The panel inquired about Bodø 2024's plans to highlight the diversity of European cultures, which is an important element of the European dimension criterion. How does the team plan to ensure that the overall ECoC project is about Europe and not just advancing regional development and promotion?

The team mentioned that it was extremely important to ensure first that the experience from the bidding phase and bidbook plans (e.g. actions directed at Bodø's international communities) were included in the city plans. Contact with the city's international community was established and the team now intends to - and will - work more on all international aspects. As an example, an aim was to integrate the topic of minority cultures as an important element of ECoC projects as opposed to developing single or separate projects. In the themes and the overall programme of the ECoC, there is much room to integrate in particular indigenous cultures such as the Sami culture but also those from other parts of Europe. European diversity will also be presented through incorporating values of democracy into discussions and seminars on international level.

- The role of the Artistic Director was discussed, as well as the difficulty to combine a bottom-up approach with a real artistic vision and local involvement with a strong European dimension. The panel noted that at this stage, most projects included in the programme were more of a cultural (as opposed to an artistic) nature and wondered whether the plan was to have the Artistic Director working as the coordinator of the projects already identified or developing other artistically more daring and European projects?

The team agreed the programme was currently more cultural, in a broad sense, but added that the intention was now to build on this and develop a stronger artistic dimension. In the first phase, the role of the temporary manager was to focus on creating solid foundations so that the Artistic Director could develop a meaningful and more challenging programme.

The Artistic Director added that her individual values, experience and ideas (e.g. in terms of political and social issues to be addressed through artistic means) were strongly aligned with the ECoC's vision. She plans to work cooperatively with artists (including local ones) and to protect artistic integrity. She also intends to expand the still too limited reservoir of cultural organisations and institutions in the region (though there are some excellent ones) by bringing in and anchoring in the local scene new professional talents coming from the rest of Norway or from abroad. The goal is to double the number of artistic places, bring in international collections (10 hotspots in the region), increase the value of artists in life and increase the value of the sector in the region. Finally, the Artistic Director plans to build a strong team and is emphasising a democratic (as opposed to an imposing) type of leadership.

- The panel wanted to get more information about the collaboration with Arctic neighbours in regard to the artistic programme development and challenges.

As far as city administration is concerned, Bodø is working with partner cities in the Arctic region, and new collaboration agreements now include the ECoC project. It was important for the team to bring in the neighbouring countries first as they are connected through common cultures, indigenous people and politics. One way to bring them in is by the inclusion of one member of the Umea 2014 ECoC team in the Bodø 2024 Board. The Arctic dimension (reflecting the "Articulation" slogan) will also strongly manifest itself in the programme. Cooperation with Sami and other minorities (including linguistic minorities) will be developed and provide an opportunity to work with European and Arctic Circle partners. A meeting with the Sami Parliament on cooperation is planned, resulting hopefully in some co-funding.

### **Capacity to deliver**

- The panel asked about the greatest challenges concerning programming, outreach, management, etc., identified at this stage of the ECoC preparation.

From an implementation perspective, the team is not too worried about funding, which is progressing well with public and private partners. In these COVID-19 times, the team's biggest challenge is to establish the international connections that are crucial for developing an ECoC programme. The ECoC network (and its members' networks) have been of invaluable help this year. Another challenge is on the programming front, which also experienced some delays.

Bodø 2024 is ambitious in its ECoC goals and it feels the need to be visible and have a clear communication with partners and society. Many partner institutions have the capacity to

deliver, but the team is also handing over projects to newcomers with little or no production capacity (as one of the priorities of the Bodø ECoC is to involve the younger generation of cultural producers). Working with less experienced cultural producers is the other challenge identified by the team. The issues of capacity building and risk management in this regard are linked. Newcomers will be supported through processes that will allow them to test ideas, develop competences and use networks that will enable them to deliver.

As far as the Board is concerned, there are also positive developments, and processes will speed up now with two key staff positions being covered starting from October 1. The Board will take care of risk management and monitor the planning done by the CEO and Artistic Director.

Another challenge is obviously the pandemic, in particular because the evolution of the situation is unpredictable. However, the team takes the circumstances into account and plans with a high level of flexibility. Plans will always adapt to the situation.

- The panel sought clarification on the state of affairs of the urban renovation project New City - New Airport.

The Mayor answered that the Government officially decided the day before the meeting to go ahead with the plan to move the airport. The city is on track with its city planning competition with three master plans, all of them being connected to the ECoC status and needs.

## Outreach

- The panel asked about a strategy towards developing an audience development strategy for ECoC and who will be responsible for that.

The team plans to work closely with existing institutions and some work has been done at regional level. The ECoC team will probably be coordinating audience development actions. There is know-how and good practice in the region (e.g. the city library) that will be built upon. Audience development plans will connect marketing and artistic issues.

## Management

- The panel sought clarification on the promotion and marketing budget. As the Bodø plans and suggestion from the panel in the selection report was to increase the budget - when will it happen, and to what percentage?

The plans are to increase the overall budget and the budget for promotion and marketing. The assessment and final decisions are being left to the new management.

- The panel was interested in the key features of the intercommunal structure of the ECoC delivery body. How would the decision-making process look like in practice?

From a management perspective, the type of structure chosen (the same as the one used in Stavanger 2008 ECoC) allows Bodø 2024 to meet the regional needs and get legal solidity. The county is taking care of the whole region's participation, so municipalities in the region are automatically in the partnership. The team does not have to ask each municipality for money for example. Funding is provided through the county. The ownership share is 50-50 between municipality and county. The intercommunal company form is as dynamic as it has

to be. The issue was carefully examined, and the administration considers this type of delivery structure as the best vehicle for the ECoC implementation. It allows the team to recruit, apply for funds, receive funds (also national) and manage the budgets. There are strong connections between Bodø 2024 and both (local and regional) administrations. The private sector is well represented in the Board and the enthusiasm of private sponsors is visible. The administration has one contact point – the Board, which is providing/managing the budget. This takes the weight and time away from the team as far as cooperation with the owners is concerned.

- Additionally, the panel inquired if the county has provided the delivery structure directly with funding, or if there is a need to ask for money.

The situation is as follows: the company is funded; the plan regarding the distribution of the money available is in place and the county has confirmed its contribution. Bodø 2024 does not have to ask for money and can start with the creative processes.

- The panel asked about the steps taken so far, as a response to the recommendation to create a narrative that will make the city and the region famous far beyond the Polar Circle.

The team is aware that this is complicated, but also an exciting challenge. It will need to be addressed when the full team is in place. So far, they have started building on the story from the bidbook and connecting it more closely to the city's development projects, as now those developments are confirmed. There is a need to start from bottom-up to build local confidence. There is also a growing interest from the media, and large national newspapers are featuring Bodø and asking: "what is happening in Bodø?". It is partly connected to the football team success but also with other developments in the city. In this atmosphere, the team starts at local and national level, working step-by-step on what could become a promising narrative.

- The panel was interested in understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the strategy to attract visitors for 2024, taken into account that its outbreak caused a major and unexpected shift in the tourism industry – with no visitors coming from abroad but many from Norway.

This is both a threat and an opportunity. This year was challenging for tourism and culture. However, it is an opportunity to change the tourism market. The team hopes that Norwegians will continue visiting the region while international guests will start coming again. At the moment, airlines are asking Bodø 2024 to take them into their planning, which is a positive change. Companies such as Lufthansa have indicated their interest in setting more travel linkages there. It indicates that Bodø is now perceived as a valuable partner and a destination for the national and international markets.

The situation caused by COVID-19 is unstable for everybody. The team believes in the need to build places and opportunities for people to meet offline and online. This is a risk and an artistic opportunity to develop projects that enable people to meet. Artistic networks will be asked to address these issues.

- The panel sought clarification on the organisational chart: will the Artistic Director be put on an equal footing with the CEO? If not, what are the plans to prevent imbalance between general and artistic issues?

In job descriptions, it is stated that the CEO has the overall responsibility. Artistic issues will be the domain of the Artistic Director (AD), where she will have full freedom within the available allocated budget. There are some advantages (the AD can concentrate on art) but

there is an understanding of a need for a close collaboration between the two. The AD and CEO worked together before on another project, and will develop the structure of the organisation and address the challenges / opportunities in a dialogue mode.

The Board President added that the CEO would respond to the Board and the Board would closely work with both directors.

### Milestones

- As one of the milestones for 2021 is to get EU funds, the panel asked what concrete EU programmes Bodø 2024 was intending to use and whether any concrete projects are already being developed.

Those decisions have not been taken yet and were not meant to be taken before the arrival of the Artistic Director. There are some ideas and common ground for cooperation with other 2024 ECoCs and candidate cities for example on the themes of salt and fish as well as the mining culture with Portuguese and Austrian cities. Projects will become more concrete soon. The knowledge of European funding opportunities needs to be strengthened. The team thinks strategically and develops a more structured approach in collaboration with the administration.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The panel acknowledges the good progress made so far by Bodø 2024 and draws attention to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- The panel appreciates the stable and strategic work delivered by the team, which resulted in the registration of the organisation and recruitment of a CEO and an Artistic Director. These steps are key milestones for the ECoC to stay on track with its original planning and start developing the actions and projects indicated in the bidbook. The panel acknowledges this fact as a strong point at this moment of the ECoC implementation.
- Not surprisingly, a significant part of the debate addressed the current COVID-19 situation and related challenges and opportunities. The panel was pleased with the flexibility of Bodø 2024 and the interest from the private sector, which may result in increased funding.
  - **Recommendation 1:** The panel recommends to give support and increased focus to capacity-building in a few key areas: 1/ establishment of the appropriate conditions for the development of artistic creation; 2/ internationalisation of the cultural sector; 3/ developments in the digital realm, practical and careful planning in every detail such as for example organising adequate technical equipment for virtual meetings and raising capacities of the cultural sector.
- The panel welcomes the recruitment and integration of a new artistic leadership and the principles and intentions discussed with the upcoming Artistic Director, notably in view of conciliating local and European artists and projects.
  - **Recommendation 2:** Invest in a daring artistic vision able to explore further the selected topics in a high quality and experimental programme, notably increasing the attractiveness for international audiences.

- **Recommendation 3:** Enlarge further, in quantity and diversity, the links and integration of European and international partners (making sure it goes beyond the Arctic and Nordic circles) to provide the programme with a strong European dimension.
- Good and stable financial and political support from key stakeholders is essential for any city wanting to maximise its benefits from the ECoC project. The panel was pleased to learn that Bodø 2024 benefitted from an extremely solid support and cooperation with both the region and the city. The fact that the national Government assured that it would give a financial contribution to the ECoC project and cooperate on infrastructural projects is a very positive signal.
- **Recommendation 4:** Continue developing a collaborative environment and a sense of ownership amongst stakeholders in the city, the region and the country. In this respect, the ECoC can act as a facilitator for actions and dynamics that are meant to ensure sustainability.
- Bodø 2024 evaluation and monitoring processes are in their initial phase.
- **Recommendation 5:** The panel recommends to make a clear distinction between monitoring and research / evaluation and to ensure a balance between ECoC and university needs and priorities, while retaining independence of the research. The timeframe with milestones and deadlines for evaluation, starting with the baseline, should be established as soon as possible. In general, the evaluation should include not only qualitative but also quantitative measurements.
- The panel appreciates the strong involvement and strategic cooperation with youth organisations.
- **Recommendation 6:** Consider ways of better linking youth engagement goals with other ECoC programme goals (e.g. links with Arctic neighbours / work with minorities and indigenous communities) to make this topic more transversal. In addition, make sure that all those actions are reflected in the evaluation approach.
- The panel appreciates the mention of issues and themes of global importance, for example, climate change or rising temperatures and tensions in the Arctic region.
- **Recommendation 7:** The panel encourages Bodø 2024 to work on ecological topics and environmentally friendly organisational solutions even more intensively and in cooperation with relevant partners in order to ensure impact and legacy for these projects.

#### **Other recommendations:**

- To explore additional international funding opportunities in 2021 and make a survey of successful applicants/project partners for Nordic funds from the past.
- To include a detailed organisational chart into the next report.
- To increase the marketing budget and link marketing plans with an artistic narrative. Plan for impact and visibility at European level.

## Next Steps

The panel welcomes the relevant steps undertaken so far and remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a second monitoring meeting in 2022.

The panel would like to thank the Mayor of Bodø, the Bodø 2024 team and other contributors to the monitoring report and ECoC project as such for a very informative and frank discussion via digital means and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel's members

