



Veszprém
European Capital of Culture 2023
First Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECOC Expert Panel

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Introduction

This report follows the meeting in Brussels on 25 September 2019 between the European Capital of Culture expert panel (the “panel”) and Veszprém, European Capital of Culture (“ECoC”) in 2023¹. Veszprém was designated as European Capital of Culture 2023 by the relevant Hungarian authorities in April 2019 based on the recommendation included in the panel’s selection report²; its bid-book is available on the Veszprém 2023 website³. The report is addressed to the Veszprém 2023 organisation and will be published on the European Commission’s website⁴.

Attendance

The panel members:

Sylvia Amann, Cristina Farinha and Agnieszka Wlazel, nominated by the European Parliament 2018-2020

Paulina Florjanowicz, Dessislava Gavriloza (Chair) and Pierre Sauvageot, nominated by the Council of the EU 2019-2021

Beatriz Garcia, Jiří Suchánek (Rapporteur) and Suzana Žilič Fišer, nominated by the European Commission 2017-2019

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

Tamás László Fejérdy and Csaba Káel, nominated by the Hungarian Ministry of Human Capacities.

For Veszprém 2023:

Zoltán Mészáros, CEO of Veszprém 2023

Friderika Mike, Director of Programme development and International Relations

Togay Nezsát Can, Creative and Artistic Director

Tamás Józsa, President of the Supervisory Board

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

¹ The European Capital 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/library/ecoc-2023-hungary-finalselection-report.pdf>

³ <http://2023Veszprém.hu/en/ecc-programme/>

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

Report from Veszprém 2023

The Organisation submitted a detailed and comprehensive written report in advance of the meeting. The report outlined the activities of the organisation since the date of the official nomination by Hungary in April 2019.

At the meeting, Veszprém 2023 made a presentation, which included the following points:

- Zoltán Mészáros presented the organisational chart as well as the governance structure. He then stressed that the Mayor of Veszprém was highly interested in the ECoC project and conveyed the latter's apologies for not being able to attend the meeting. Regular meetings with the Mayor and representatives of the city administration are organised on a weekly basis in order to provide enough space to develop the project and coordinate various tasks. Mr Mészáros also informed the panel that as a CEO he was required to get the permission of the Board of Directors for transactions above approximately 60.000 EUR.
- The CEO indicated that the name of the project had been changed into "Veszprém – Balaton 2023" to better express the regional approach and strengthen the ties between the city of Veszprém and associated cities and villages. He stated that in the next six months regional cooperation would be the key focus. Although the region does not have an organisational basis, it has a strong identity and getting the title mobilised the whole of it. Measures planned in this regard include a regional roadshow in November 2019 and the establishment of 10-12 regional contact points across the region as well as of micro-grant schemes.
- The team addressed three main challenges they face in the project's current phase of development: the upcoming local elections, the coordination of soft activities with the developers of the infrastructure and the ambition to maximise the involvement of all cultural institutions and other stakeholders of the region.
- Local cultural operators were already asked to design a convenient way to develop their capacity. As an example, a regional museum and a local archive, which already presented their capacity-building programme, were mentioned.
- The programme and artistic team (Friderika Mike and Can Togay) presented the current state of development. The ambition is to reposition Veszprém as a recognised cultural hub. A strong accent is put on the digital dimension of the programme and new media. The team is gathering inspiration abroad (in Linz, Marseille, etc...). It also presented the idea of establishing a Future Lab, inspired by Ars Electronica. This project is planned to be carried out by Veszprém House of Arts in cooperation with Ars Electronica.
- Tamás Józsa, responsible for the investments on behalf of the city of Veszprém as well as for the coordination of the cooperation within the city administration

departments, expressed the strong support offered by the City Hall to the project. Mr Józsa explained his role as a moderator of potential conflict situations within the city administration. He mentioned one of the main infrastructural projects, the arts school, which shall be open before 2023. One of the challenges addressed by Mr Józsa is the less efficient use of many historical buildings in the city's historical centre, which are currently occupied mostly by civil servants, instead of being used for tourism and related purposes. The Cube project (interactive IT knowledge centre and exhibition space) should help to open new perspectives in this respect. He also stressed that he feels a very strong support from the national Government. The expected financial contribution from the national level could reach 140 million EUR, including the railway connection with Budapest that should be anticipated because of ECoC project. This support could be strengthened through the appointment of a national commissioner dedicated to the ECoC project.

Discussion

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

The panel acknowledged the efforts made by Veszprém 2023 with regard to the application to the UNESCO Music City Network. Even though this activity may help to enhance European cooperation and stimulate the interest of audiences, this additional activity might take away the attention and energy from the European Capital of Culture's core programme.

- **Recommendation 1:** The panel understands that the initial impulse for the candidacy for UNESCO Music City title came from programme partners outside the Veszprém 2023 core team. This could result in an interesting synergic effect (such as a city's music development strategy etc...) having Veszprém 2023 as a supportive institution. The panel recommends however that Veszprém 2023 reflects on the energy put in this and other similar additional projects, and reminds that it is essential for the success of the ECoC project to stay on track – in compliance with the bid-book.

The panel sought clarification on the evaluation plans and more specifically the role of the civil society panels (i.e. the Veszprém and Balaton panels). The Veszprém 2023 team explained that the Veszprém panel could be considered as a laboratory or a focus group used for further development of the programme and communication while the Balaton panel will be mainly used for real-time monitoring purposes.

The panel tackled the issue of cooperation with the university. The Veszprém 2023 team openly admitted that putting in place an effective and comprehensive cooperation with the university is one of the main current challenges. The university is at present mostly involved in a project basis and the team is looking for the best solution.

- **Recommendation 2:** The panel recommends that Veszprém 2023 should allocate appropriate human capacities in order to maintain the position of a trustful and respected partner for the university. The panel also encourages

the university to contribute to the ECoC project on a multiple level basis both financially and in-kind.

The panel asked about the intended ratio between self-produced, co-produced and outsourced projects of the Veszprém 2023 programme.

- **Recommendation 3:** Although the panel was assured that only a minority of the projects would be under the production responsibility of Veszprém 2023 (the figure of 40% own productions mentioned in the report might be considered too high under some circumstances), the panel would like to underline the importance of ensuring capacity building within the local cultural and creative sectors also, in view of the legacy of the ECoC project. Accordingly, the production plan is connected to expectations in terms of staff, what should be clearly reflected in the organisational chart.

Issues concerning administration and contract signing were also discussed. The panel was informed that in October 2019 three staff members joined the programming team to boost the implementation process, which is a positive development. The panel also welcomes the ambitious plan to have 50% of projects contracted by mid-2021.

- **Recommendation 4:** The complex task of contracting needs to be carried out with the highest priority as it is a crucial element in maintaining good relations with both local and international cultural operators. The city administration shall contribute with its own internal legal and administrative capacities in order to set up an effective framework that complies with the national and EU legal systems.

The panel is pleased to hear that local cultural operators have been involved in the process of preparation of the capacity-building programmes.

- **Recommendation 5:** The decentralised capacity-building structure could be considered as an interesting and effective tool, but at the same time, the panel highlights the importance of coordinating these activities in order to support the collaboration across the cultural sector and the ability to evaluate capacity-building programmes.

The panel wanted to know more about the Music Strategy of the City of Veszprém 2019 – 2030. It welcomes the assurance that it embraces all kinds of music genres and will also support amateurs and youngsters. This activity might help to develop an independent scene and create a network of entertainers.

- **Recommendation 6:** The panel encourages the team to go forward with the intended incubation process. Public open call and clear (and if possible not too bureaucratic) administration process shall be designed for participants/applicants.

The panel asked about the Future Lab project and noted that this project, founded by Ars Electronica, is very specific and has been developed by its founders for many years. The Veszprém team explained that Future Lab shall be considered more as an inspiration and a working label for this project, and that it shall be further developed on the basis of workshops involving, among others, experts of Ars Electronica.

Another question was about the unclear situation regarding the venues for the film festival planned in 2020. The Veszprém 2023 team underlined that this pilot project, designed to build ECoC team's capacities, is still in an initial phase.

The panel asked about the potential establishment of an international artistic board for Veszprém 2023 in order to enhance the European dimension and artistic quality of the programme and was pleased to hear that this option is being considered.

The marketing and communication strategy was discussed and the panel observed that not only the final product needs appropriate communication, but also the ECoC process can be used to send positive and motivating messages towards both the wider public and the professional audience.

The panel asked clarification about the role of the new national commissioner for the European Capital of Culture. The role of this new position was described as a State level support that could help prevent any obstacles that may arise in the course of the ECoC preparation.

- **Recommendation 7:** The panel appreciates the establishment of such a position and kindly reminds about the need of a transparent and clear communication of this step towards key stakeholders, while maintaining the autonomy of the artistic direction in the design of the programme.

The panel also noted that although the reconstruction of the Veszprém arena will not take place, as no national funding will be provided for this project, the existing arena could still be used for cultural purposes, even in its present capacity and state.

One of the major issues at this stage of the ECoC project is the recruitment process that was questioned by the panel.

- **Recommendation 8:** The discussion on team recruitment brought to light the unclear financial situation. The panel fully understands that less than one year after the designation of Veszprém as ECoC 2023, the staffing process cannot be completed. Yet, the fact that the budget for 2019 has not been properly secured by the national Government gives worrying signals for potential future delays. The panel informed Veszprém 2023 that many former ECoC projects faced critical situations due to the lack of financial support from the national level.

Next Steps

The panel acknowledges the solid work carried out by Veszprém 2023 since its nomination and appreciates the efforts invested to build up the foundation's strategic approach towards the involvement of regional stakeholders, the promising progress made in terms of infrastructural projects as well as the solid support from the City.

The panel wants to draw special attention to the required efforts to establish a working organisational structure, rapid staffing process, procurement procedures plan and to securing national funds and governance.

The panel therefore invites Veszprém 2023 to submit an update - integrating planning on staffing and contracting (a plan for both programme partners and suppliers of services, PR, marketing etc.) by May 2020. This document should also include a

related budgetary overview (both soft operation and investment projects related to ECoC).

The panel recommends that the team should stick to the ECoC bid-book and the selection report, which both provide directions for the ECoC strategic developments. The panel puts itself at the disposal of Veszprém 2023 for any questions, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a second monitoring meeting in mid-2021, and the panel hopes that the Mayor of Veszprém will be able to attend the meeting in order to debate directly with the panel.

The panel would like to thank Veszprém 2023 for the very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to the next developments of its European Capital of Culture project.

All panel members (signed)

