



EUROPEAN CAPITAL
OF CULTURE

**Selection of the European Capital of Culture in 2021
in a candidate country/potential candidate for EU membership**

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

**Brussels
January 2016**

Introduction

This is the report of the selection panel (the “panel”) for the pre-selection phase for the competition for the European Capital of Culture in 2021 between cities in candidate countries or potential candidates for EU membership.

The European Commission (the “Commission”) 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”)¹ and
- Rules of procedure – Competition of the European Capital of Culture in candidate countries/potential candidates issued by the European Commission and posted on their website in May 2015.

A panel of 10 independent experts was established for the selection process in line with Article 2 of the Rules. The members were appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and the Committee of Regions).

The competition is in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. The Commission issued a call for applications on 23 December 2014. Two applications were submitted by the closing date of 23 October 2015:

Herceg Novi (Montenegro) and Novi Sad (Serbia)

Panel Meeting

The panel met in Bucharest on 11 November 2015 in the premises of the Representation of the European Commission in Romania. The panel elected Mr Steve Green as its chair and Dr Suzana Žilič Fišer as vice-chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality. Representatives of the European Commission attended as observers but took no part in the panel’s deliberations or decision.

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).

¹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG

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

- contribution to the long term strategy of the city
- European dimension
- cultural and artistic content
- capacity to deliver
- outreach
- management

At the end of the meeting on 11 December 2015 the chair of the panel announced the panel's unanimous recommendation that the European Commission invite the following cities to submit revised bids for final selection (in alphabetical order):

Herceg Novi and Novi Sad

Next Steps

The European Commission will arrange for the formal approval of the shortlist based on this report (Article 10 of the Decision) and issue an invitation to the two cities to submit 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 will be communicated by the Commission to the shortlisted cities at a later date. It will probably be in September 2016.

The final selection meeting will be held in Brussels in October 2016.

At this stage in competitions in Member States there is a visit by 2 to 4 members of the panel to each shortlisted city. This is immediately before the final selection meeting. The visits do not form part of the formal decision making process of the panel but they do provide useful background information. The Decision makes no mention of such visits in Member States or in the competition for candidate countries/potential candidates. Article 6 of the rules of procedure for the specific competition between cities in candidate countries/potential candidates specifies that "no visits of the panel to the candidate cities are allowed before the final selection meeting". However the panel wish to visit Herceg Novi and Novi Sad. It hopes the Commission, and

the relevant cities, can make the visits happen. It is, in the view of the panel, important to maintain parity between ECOC selection in Member States and those in candidate countries and potential candidates. The latter only participate every three years so the administrative burden is not great.

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 the two cities have developed specific cultural strategies. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECOC competition. The panel encourages both to continue with the development and implementation of their strategy.

The panel thanks both bidding candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids; the European Commission for their advice and excellent administration.

Assessments of the candidates

Herceg Novi

Herceg Novi presented their bid with the concept of Frenemies.

The aim is “to help us navigate our way through a programme which brings a fresh perspective to the story of our region, our uniquely shared language and to the culture and art which has grown from it”. The proposed programme has three project lines: Peace of Art, Tales of the Bay and Mimosa Reflowering.

The forecast operating budget is €15m of which €9m is allocated to programme expenditure.

The programme has support of the mayor and city council of Herceg Novi. The mayors of the partner cities have informally given their support.

The panel appreciated the bid from a relatively small city, in partnership with neighbouring cities. The panel noted that the two-year-old cultural strategy was being refreshed with a growing realisation of the impact culture can have on the wellbeing and prosperity of the city. On a formal level the panel noted that a revised cultural strategy is due for approval in early 2016. It is mandatory for a city’s strategy to be fully approved before the submission of the final bidbook.

The panel recognised the importance of cultural tourism in the strategy and the comments that the discussions for the ECOC bid had been influential in revitalising the city's cultural strategy. ECOCs rarely focus on cultural tourism; this is normally a beneficial legacy rather than the principal focus. In the final bidbook the panel would expect a clearer differentiation between the city's tourism development agenda and the overlapping but not synonymous strategy for the ECOC. For example, the panel would expect the ECOC to include plans to develop the local artistic capacity (as well as the current focus on improving festival and artistic management capacity). At the same time the programme timetable of the ECOC could be geared to the shoulder and winter tourist seasons as a contribution to the tourist agenda of spreading beyond the high summer season.

The panel noted the intention to involve partner cities in the immediate area. It expects a more formal indication of support from their mayors and councils and a clearer expression of the role and consequent benefit to each of the cities. In multi-partner ECOCs the aim is to develop the cultural sector in each of the partners rather than seeing them simply as additional venues.

The panel appreciated the risk that the tourism development could result in gated communities with closed off exclusive sites, perhaps in heritage venues. It is unlikely the bid-team could prevent such commercial ventures and this highlights the need for the ECOC to focus on developing a local arts sector. The aim could be to develop the artists' communities (including the creative industries which are underplayed in the bidbook) into sustainable ventures. For example the panel would appreciate more information on the proposed Artists Waiting Rooms and their degree of inclusion.

The panel considered the outline of evaluation topics to be sound and especially liked the "hopes and fears index" and looks forward to more information.

There is a good concept underpinning the European Dimension: of fragmentation and conflict. There is a clear intention to ensure the programme is international in scope. The Frenemies and Language of Proximity projects encapsulate this concept. In view of the currently increasing level of cultural fragmentation in the EU the panel suggest that the bid-team explore possible partners beyond those currently considered. The Balkan area can form the foundation.

There was a good outline of possible co-operation with recent, current and forthcoming ECOCs. In particular the panel suggests Donostia San Sebastian, also a member of the World Bays network. The panel would also expect outline project proposals with the co-ECOCs in Greece and Romania.

The panel notes the listing of well-known international artists. In the final bidbook the panel expects less of an aspirational list and more concrete confirmation of artists who have indicated their participation. Equally importantly the panel would expect to see how an ECOC uses the opportunity to bring the artists in its city into European networks and partnerships.

The programme outline was limited in the digital field; there was little appreciation of the importance culture delivered and created digitally will be in 2021.

The bidbook records a sound start to the consultation with citizens and the cultural sector. The panel would expect that this will increase significantly in the development of the final bidbook both in depth and in scope, notably the “Citizen Board” project which looks promising. There are good plans for volunteers.

The panel appreciated the well-structured outline of activities during the ramp period from 2017-2020 which is linked to the outreach elements of the bid. As with the other aspects of audience development it needs a closer relationship with the programme rather than being seen as a separate entity.

The ambitious aim to use the ECOC as a catalyst to improve cultural education in schools throughout the country, in partnership with the relevant national ministries, is laudable.

The outline of the governance and management structures is adequate for this stage. The panel would expect an Artistic Director to have proven international experience. The panel is uncertain about the role of the Herceg Fest organisation. Its role appears to vary through the bid-book; clarification is needed in the final book.

The financial projections are sound at this stage. In the final bidbook the panel would expect the major funders (city, national government, partner cities, private sector) to be more concrete in their support.

Overall the panel felt the bid was realistic for a small city. It has innovative and intriguing elements in the programme which can be further developed. The risks are well thought through. The panel suggests that the bid team consider a route taken by other ECOCs in small countries and involves the whole country to a greater degree (eg Luxembourg, Pafos2017). An ECOC in Montenegro is an opportunity for the whole country as well as Herceg Novi as the lead ECOC city.

Novi Sad

The Novi Sad bid is presented under the banner of “Cult-Tour”. The objectives are set out as seven actions for the ECOC: a new identity, a new approach to participation and inclusion, new intercultural dialogue, new public spaces, new strengthened contemporary arts scene, a new financial solution and a new cultural and creative strategy. The programme is structured in four stages: Creativity Bastion, Youth Creative Polis, Danube Blues and Vojvodina on the Palm of a Hand.

The forecast operating budget is €9.948m of which €6.963m is allocated to programme expenditure. A feature of the forecast is that 83% is expected from the private sector.

The bid has the support of the mayor. The bidbook indicates the organising committee has members from the major political parties but it is unclear whether the current council has formally approved the bidbook.

The bidbook explained that the city does not currently have a cultural strategy; one is due to be approved by the city council in the spring of 2016. This is satisfactory for the pre-selection. The bid-team is reminded that an approved cultural strategy is a mandatory requirement before the submission of the final bidbook.

In the absence of a city cultural strategy the panel is unable to form a view of the contribution the ECOC may make towards the city strategy. This will need clarification in the final bidbook. The panel noted the work of members of the bid-team in the development of the city’s creative industries strategy and the team’s development of a Novi Sad 2021 Strategy.

The evaluation and monitoring section of the bidbook explained at length the process the bid intends to follow. It does not yet include any indicators or give an idea of what would constitute success. The panel expects the final bidbook to

offer concrete and prioritised indicators of a successful legacy which will focus the ECOC.

The European Dimension of the proposed programme was covered in the bidbook with an analysis of Novi Sad's history (its multi-ethnic demography), its past in Yugoslavia, the Danube connection and its links with ECOCs. There was a listing of international artists and organisations that have been approached. The panel considered the European Dimension to be considerably under-developed at this stage of the bid. There was little of an innovative approach. Many ECOCs now consider tackling awkward parts of their recent history, as seen in an international context. It was not evident from the outline of the proposed programme that the ECOC's activities would attract a wider European audience.

The bidbook explained the positive aspects of the living together of different communities; it does not take this further as potential model for other European cities. It did not consider that the four elements of the criterion would be met without a considerable re-assessment of this key part of being an ECOC. More on this area is set out in the general recommendations.

The outline programme was set out under a very general vision; which could apply to all and any ECOC or indeed any city. The panel seeks to see a vision for an ECOC rooted in a city's authenticity set within a European context.

The four stages are outlined with indicative projects. The panel did not discern flagship or leading events which successful ECOCs use to anchor their year, both locally and internationally. The Danube itself is almost a metaphor for Europe, going through twelve countries. The panel felt this stage could be significantly enhanced beyond the limited projects outlined.

The panel suggest the team re-visit the programme, which is the heart of an ECOC, and look to balance heritage and "looking back" themes with future looking. It is not easy to link the outline projects with the more innovative and sometimes radical aspirations raised earlier in the bidbook. In the final bidbook the panel expects projects to be set out with "why", "how" "with whom" "when" and "how much" clearly stated.

The impression given is less of an integrated society rather one in parallel, with showcasing a feature. The panel wondered if this was true.

The outreach section was impressive with a wide range of consultations with the cultural sector and with citizens in general. There was limited evidence of the engagement of NGOs or with artists/creatives who work in the social and educational sectors. The processes for engagement with schools were again set out at length. The panel was concerned that these activities in the educational sectors appeared to be focussed on explaining the ECOC. The panel noted the paragraph on audience development by cultural organisations and would seek further elaboration.

The proposed financial forecast gives the panel serious concern. Never before has an ECOC approached an 83% funding share from the private sector. This raises several questions which need significant explanations in the final bidbook. Firstly, why are the public authorities (city/region/national) investing so little into a title as prestigious as an ECOC? Secondly, are the private sector sources likely to be confirmed in any way before the final submission? With the recent experience of private sector funding of ECOCs in mind the panel finds it difficult to accept the risk of the proposed funding structure. The total budget is very small for an ECOC which needs to make an impact at European rather than local or national level.

The panel noted the extensive list of cultural infrastructure projects and the possible funding sources. In the final bidbook the panel would expect a firmer update on the likelihood of these progressing, especially given earlier comments on the funding problems of the city administration. The panel also would seek assurances from the city administration on the subsequent recurrent funding for such a considerable increase in cultural venues.

The panel notes the proposed governance structure. It seeks greater clarification on the decision making levels notably between the Foundation and the Steering Committee. It appears the Foundation could have many members; if it has decision making authority (eg over plans budgets, activities or appointments) a large body may not be the most effective during the implementation stage. The panel would expect a proposed staffing build up in the final bidbook.

The panel appreciated clear diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses and noted the prevalence of high and critical aspects.

Overall the panel felt that bid showed a considerable, open and honest analysis of the cultural situation in Novi Sad. It identified strategic opportunities to transform the city. The weakness is in transferring this strategic approach into a

programme to effect that change within the parameters of an ECOC with its strict criteria. The bidbook demonstrated the energy of the bid team and it will be needed to develop a strong case in the final bidbook.

Recommendations

The following recommendations apply to both candidates. The panel will expect significant changes in the final bidbooks to reflect these recommendations.

The panel consider that both cities need to develop their bids for the final selection in order to reach the required level of quality for such a demanding event as an ECOC. There is a considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection.

They are advised to study carefully the six criteria in the Decision and the comments in the assessments above.

A study of the evaluations of recent (since 2013) ECOCs may also be of value. These are available on the European Commission's ECOC pages.

General

The bid-book at 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 bidbook is a factor when the panel will recommend the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize.

In the final selection bidbook candidates must cover all the questions in Annex 1 (the "application form") in the call for applications. There are extended questions, compared to pre-selection, on the proposed programme and the financial plans.

ECOC and Cultural Strategy

Both candidate cities are developing wide-ranging cultural strategies outlined in the bidbooks. There was less information on priorities within the strategy and how resources will be changed over the next few years (rather than 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. Bidbooks should indicate more clearly which priorities of the broader cultural strategy the ECOC is seeking to contribute to.

The pre-selection bidbooks set out in general terms the objectives of why a city is seeking the title. The panel would expect a more focussed (and shorter) explanation which can link the programme vision, themes, the programme, and through evaluation, to the outcomes in the subsequent legacy. An ECOC is a transformational opportunity for a city.

The evaluation section of the bidbook should link directly to the objectives of the city in its bid and to the objectives and legacy of the ECOC programme itself. Both candidates should ensure that the evaluation section does not list too many indicators. The final bidbook should focus on the **priority** indicators for the ECOC (rather than those for the entire cultural strategy). One of the priority areas needs to refer to how the ECOC will meet the four elements of the European Dimension criterion.

Consideration should be given to the monitoring arrangements during the ramp-up period, 2016-2020, which can inform management on a timely manner to take action. Shortlisted cities may wish to involve management consultancies in addition to the more academic approach currently proposed.

European Dimension

The panel felt that this criterion was considerably under-developed in both bidbooks. At this stage the proposals are too inward looking in their local context in the city, the region and country. 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 Serbia or Montenegro, 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.

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. The panel expects to see a significantly increased focus on European partnerships,

(co-productions, co-curations as well as visiting artists/performers) and multi-year projects addressing issues of concern cross Europe, appropriate to each cities strategy.

The panel will expect more information on the proposed partnerships with the shortlisted cities in **Greece and Romania**. The panel would also expect to see further collaborations with the ECOCs designated for 2016-2020.

One of the elements of the criteria for the ECOC title is the ability to attract **visitors from the rest of Europe**. The panel would expect to see proposed ideas in the ECOC programme in 2021 (i.e. distinct from the normal tourist offers of the city and region) which meet this criterion.

Cultural and Artistic programme

The focus of the final selection is the **operating programme** between 2016, when the ECOC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECOC year of 2021. 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. The panel will expect to see considerably more detail on the programme and its projects. The two 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. Lists of internationally known artists are not helpful. 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 focussed and detailed approach digital cultural content (not just social media promotions and inter-actions) as integral parts of their programme.

Both cities could usefully explore the use of the arts in tackling social issues in their city; this is a growing area of ECOC activity.

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 on 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 would be useful.

Capacity to deliver

Candidates should indicate how their proposed structure is independent of possible party political changes between 2016 and 2021 and enjoys the support of all political parties in the participating municipalities and regions. The panel would expect that the relevant councils and executives would have re-asserted their support for the candidature by formally agreeing the final bidbook including the financial forecasts and commitments.

Both shortlisted cities need to explain their capacity to manage large one-off cultural events spread over a time period. In recent years the ECOC programme contains a considerable number of events in addition to the normal cultural offer in their title-year. The panel expects more information on the managerial capacity in the city/region to manage the depth and range of an ECOC.

Outreach

The **audience development** programme is expected to be much further developed in the final bidbooks including online and offline measures and channels for all identified target groups. At the moment the bidbooks are too general and outline theory rather than concrete plans for implementation. 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. minorities, people temporarily in the city beyond tourists). The bidbooks should cover the participation of schools, youth groups, volunteers etc in the city. The role and contribution of universities (beyond working on evaluation) could usefully be included.

The panel expects both cities to publish their final bidbooks on their websites both for public accountability and engagement. The bidbooks should be put online shortly before the final selection meeting. This is an element in the outreach criterion.

Management

If projects are planned to be funded from competitive EU programmes (e.g. Creative Europe) this should be indicated.

The **membership of governing boards** should be explained, with post holders (or positions) and the method of appointment.

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 bidbook. 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.

The final bidbooks 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, time line and public procurement).

The planned staffing arrangements from 2016 to 2021 should be outlined including secondments, interns and volunteers.

Signed

Steve Green (Chair)

Sylvia Amann

Cristina Farinha

Ulrich Fuchs

Jordi Pardo

Aiva Rozenberga

Pauli Sivonen

Agnieszka Wlazel

Suzana Žilič Fišer (vice-chair)

Brussels

January 2016