



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2028 in France

Pre-selection stage

Expert Panel's report

edited by

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March 2023

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the pre-selection phase of the competition for the European Capital of Culture in 2028 in France. The competition is a European Union initiative created in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” has previously been awarded to four cities in France, namely Paris in 1989, Avignon in 2000, Lille in 2004 and Marseille-Provence in 2013.

The Ministry of Culture of France (the “Ministry”) acts as the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by Decision n°445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 (the “Decision”) (DOC:32014D0445) and by the decree (“décret”) n°2021-1824 of 24 December 2021 (NOR:MICB2138082D) and the notice (“avis”) of 28 December 2021 (NOR:MICB2138117V) (as modified by the notice of 13 October 2022, (NOR: MICB2229044V)) adopted by the Ministry and published on its website together with the corresponding call for submission of applications.¹

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process, in line with Article 2 of the Decree. The European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions) designated ten members of this panel, while the Ministry designated two members. The members of the jury were then formally appointed by the order of 7 February 2023 of the Minister for Culture (NOR: MICB2303210A).

The competition takes place in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. The Ministry issued a call for applications on 31 December 2021. Nine applications were submitted by the closing date of 2 January 2023: Amiens, Bastia, Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, Montpellier, Nice, Reims, Rouen and Saint-Denis.

Panel Meeting

The panel members met in Paris on 28 February – 3 March 2023. One panel member was excused for professional reasons. The panel elected Rossella Tarantino as its chair and Anne Tallineau as its vice-chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and gave it to the Ministry ahead of the pre-selection hearings. Representatives of the Ministry and of the European Commission attended the meeting as observers. The observers took no part in the panel’s deliberations or decision.

At the pre-selection hearings on 28 February – 2 March each candidate city, in alphabetical order, presented its case (45 minutes) and answered questions from the panel (45 minutes). The panel deliberations took place on 3 March.

At a press meeting on 3 March, the chair of the panel announced the panel’s recommendation that the Ministry invites the following cities to submit revised bids for the

¹<https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Demarches-en-ligne/Par-type-de-demarche/Appels-a-projets-candidatures/Capitale-europeenne-de-la-Culture-2028>

final selection (in alphabetical order): **Bourges, Clermont-Ferrand, Montpellier, and Rouen.**

Next Steps

The Ministry will arrange for the formal approval of the shortlist based on the recommendations included in this report (Article 8 of the Decision). It will then issue an invitation to the cities named on the approved shortlist to submit revised applications for the final selection.

The shortlisted cities are encouraged to take into account the panel's assessments and recommendations in this report.

The deadline for the submission of revised applications is 3 November 2023 (tbc by the Ministry).

The final selection meeting is scheduled to take place in Paris the week of 11 December 2023 (tbc by the Ministry).

Two to four members of the panel will pay a one-day visit to the shortlisted cities just before the final selection meeting (week of 4 December 2023), in order to obtain more background information on the respective bids. Representatives of the Ministry and the European Commission will accompany the 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 all cities have used the opportunity of the bidding process to reinforce their cultural strategies as well as the role of culture and Europe in their overall social-economic development. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECoC competition. The panel encourages all candidate cities, including the ones that are not recommended for the short-list, to continue with the development and implementation of their respective cultural strategies.

The panel wishes to thank all nine candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids, the European Commission for its advice and the Ministry for its excellent administration.

Assessment of the candidates

In its 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).

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

- Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city,
- Cultural and artistic content,
- European dimension,

- Outreach,
- Management,
- Capacity to deliver.

It was not clear to the panel if all candidate cities had fully completed the formal approval of their cultural strategy at city council level. One of the most important features in Decision 445/2014/EU, governing the ECoC action from the 2020 titles on, is the requirement that cities have a formal and explicit cultural strategy. This is to ensure that the ECoC is grounded on a medium-term transformation of the city and its cultural life. Many of the strategies also seem to end before 2028, and the panel would therefore like to remind the candidates proceeding to the final selection, that the strategy should cover the ECoC year and include plans for sustaining cultural activities beyond the ECoC year.

In the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their findings during the pre-selection phase. In reference to successive cities, specific and common recommendations are made, in order to assist them in the preparation of their final bid books.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the bid book and on the cities' presentation sessions during the pre-selection meeting. A city's history, its recent and current policies and its cultural offer may form a basis for the proposed programme, but they are not relevant for the selection process. The panel's assessment and recommendation for the shortlist are also based on the analysis of the capacity of all candidate cities to make the required steps in order to win the ECoC title in the following months until the final selection meeting.

Amiens

Amiens presented its candidacy under the concept of "ALTER-NATIVE", a metamorphosis that aims to capitalise on otherness and cultural diversity through the affirmation of cultural rights and good living in a respected environment. The aim is to position Amiens and the Somme Valley as a prospective laboratory to get ahead of future challenges. The intent is to offer Europe a new development model for a rural valley impacted by industrial shocks, based on cultural and innovation projects attuned with nature and questioning human's relationship thereto.

Amiens is bidding for the ECoC together with the whole Somme Valley region, an area crossed by a 225 kilometre-long river and with 492,471 inhabitants throughout 470 municipalities.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The metropolitan area has a multidisciplinary strategy for 2020-2026. This does not, however, cover the ECoC year or the years beyond. It remained unclear if the City of Amiens had an approved cultural strategy in place and how it was integrated into the ECoC initiative.

- The panel considered the elements and aims of the concept important and relevant in today's context, such as the democratic revitalisation issues and the ecological approach. Yet, it has not been emphasised enough how these aims would be achieved in practice through the programme and actions presented, especially on a European level.
- The plans and projects for raising the capacities of the cultural and creative sectors were not sufficiently in-depth e.g. in the fields of cultural management, promotion, marketing and fundraising.
- Concerning monitoring and evaluation, a two-part evaluation plan was introduced, and external expertise has been sought from a network of universities. The panel would have liked to see more details on baseline data, conducting of the research and timeline.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme concept is ALTER-NATIVE, a global approach aiming at renewing our relationship with others and the environment, so as to generate a means of rebuilding through the arts, culture and heritage. The programme is based on three goal-directed axes and divided thematically also into three areas, which are PROXIMITY(S), CREATIVITY and HUMANITY. Each thematic area has a flagship project and few other projects presented at this stage, 16 in total.
- The programme includes many interesting projects, which are well defined and cover diverse genres and disciplines. The overall artistic vision is quite abstract and generic and could be difficult to communicate. Further, the programme lacks overall coherence.
- The bid describes an anticipated strong involvement of the artistic and cultural fields in the preparation and implementation of the programme. However most projects are marked to be steered and coordinated by the Amiens 2028 organisation or Amiens Metropole.
- The bid states a strong aspiration to achieve a metamorphosis at all levels, also between the local cultural heritage and new cultural expressions. However, the panel considered that very little emphasis was given to the local industrial heritage, which could be of interest in the long term.

European dimension

- There is a strong aspiration for European and even global significance in the bid, and the programme poses some interesting questions that could echo across the European Union, i.e. the capital/periphery question and the call for horizontality instead of centrality. However, there are only a few concrete examples how this would be achieved in practice.
- The city has conducted a welcomed sequence of consultations and reflections with ECoC cities and twin cities, aimed also to design collaborative projects. Yet

concrete examples of international cultural networks, artists and cultural institutions as potential project partners were nearly completely lacking.

- The strategy for attracting the interest of a wide European and international audience is well developed and based on past good practices and networks, as well as interlinking with recent, current and future major happenings such as the European Youth Capital in 2020.

Outreach

- The Amiens candidacy aims to reach a wide range of inhabitants, in particular the so-called 'excluded' populations – the dissocialised, elderly and isolated, and those alienated from artistic and cultural practices for socio-economic reasons. For that, a special tool has been planned: the first Local Contract for Artistic Education in France, which the panel sees as a very positive endeavour to be continued. Yet, the plan to reach minorities, schools and young generations is very elusive, and e.g. the LGBTIQ+ community is not mentioned in the bid.
- Two calls for projects, entitled Perspectives 1 and Perspectives 2, invited local artists and cultural operators to experiment and create participatory and inclusive cultural projects for the attention of inhabitants. The panel sees this as a positive element of the bid though the outcomes of the calls were not very clearly reflected in the projects presented.
- The strategy for the involvement and participation of all citizens combines three approaches: the Workshops of Creation, Inclusive governance and Green Theatres. The panel considered in particular the Green Theatres to have a strong potential for being a good platform to involve and empower people who live in remote and isolated areas. However, the descriptions of these tools were a bit vague.
- Being the youngest municipality in the Hauts-de-France Region with students representing 17% of the city's total population, and having hosted the European Youth Capital 2020, Amiens and the Somme Valley boast a strong legacy of cultural engagement work with schoolchildren and young audiences, which the panel considers an asset for Amiens.

Management

- Out of the total operating budget of 49,3 million euros, 96% is planned to come from various public sources: National Government (10%), City of Amiens (43%), Hauts-de-France Region (20%), European Union (8%), Somme Department (12%) and Somme Valley Inter-Council Partnerships (3%). Income breakdown between public and private funding is thus very realistic. The panel considers the high budget provision of the City of Amiens as a strong sign of commitment.
- Capital investment is 53,8 million euros with plans to construct three new cultural facilities as well as other infrastructure investments relevant for the implementation of the ECoC.

- The fundraising strategy for obtaining financial support from European Union programmes and funds is solidly developed and possible EU funding programmes are identified.
- An association is planned to be established for the delivery of the Amiens-Somme Valley 2028. Its main functions will be coordination, facilitation and support. The panel appreciates the strive for a wide horizontal governance, but underscores the necessity of a clear management responsibility and of an independent artistic direction.
- The marketing and communications strategy includes relevant points. However, the international marketing and communication strategy is not sufficiently explained.

Capacity to deliver

- The City of Amiens as well as all stakeholders involved support the candidacy unanimously.
- Amiens has a strong cultural life and infrastructure, and the bid clearly outlines the city's plans for cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure to be carried out as part of the ECoC action. The panel found positive the goal to achieve a clear reduction in the environmental impact of the cultural sites and to promote greater responsibility in their use.
- The Somme Valley seems to have a good capacity in terms of tourist accommodation and the recent tourist investment plan seems to have improved their quality.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Amiens do not proceed to the final selection phase.

The panel found the concept "ALTER-NATIVE" containing many relevant and good elements, but was not convinced that the set objectives would be achieved with the programme and activities presented, especially on a European and global level. The programme concept could be more concrete and coherent. The cultural and artistic programme had many interesting projects, but overall the programme should be artistically reinforced. The city has a rather strong cultural field and infrastructure with strategically selected focus areas, and the bid emphasised the wide involvement of the local artistic and cultural community in planning and implementing the ECoC. The status of the cultural strategy of the City of Amiens and its connection to the ECoC initiative were though not very clear.

The panel, however, recognises the broad support for the candidacy and the potential of the presented plans in regional development, and encourages the city and the surrounding region to continue their active work to reconnect the region and its actors to the European level.

Bastia

The bid involves the port city of Bastia and its 48,500 inhabitants as well as the 300,000 people living in Corsica. The regional dimension of the bid and its Corsican identity permeates throughout the candidature.

The bid's theme "*Beyond the island*" invites the Bastia and Corsica community to rise collectively beyond historical, geographical and societal determinisms and to join a plural dialogue with the Mediterranean world and the European continent. The bid aims to reactivate and extend tradition, by placing it in a modern context, to address Europe and serve its humanist ideal as well as to make art and culture the catalysts of new development dynamics.

Bastia's bid is underpinned by four motivations: 1) To share art and culture as widely as possible with all populations with the aim of social cohesion and inclusion; 2) To promote the uniqueness of Bastia and Corsican culture on a European scale and to affirm its contribution to European cultural diversity; 3) To sustainably transform the territory to make art and culture a driving force behind the development of Bastia and Corsica; 4) To mobilise the citizens of Bastia and Corsica in favour of the European ideal and its values.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The Planning and Sustainable Development Project, voted by the City Council in July 2021, has identified four operational axes based on three strategic commitments. Bastia City's plan to adopt a cultural development programme in March 2023 is welcomed as a very positive element by the panel as well. However, in its view, the five-year period is too short to adequately cover the ECoC preparation, implementation and legacy.
- The Bastia Corsica 2028 bid is driven by five main goals that are part of a long-term cultural strategy; however, the links between the strategy and the ECoC proposal are not clearly outlined. For instance, ambitious capacity building programmes are envisaged both in the strategy and in the programme, but the functional connection between them is not underscored.
- The bid intends to propose an original development model, in which Bastia would be the prototype and a source of inspiration for the various territorial levels of Corsica.
- An independent organisation is foreseen to lead the monitoring and evaluation plan, which the panel welcomes as a positive starting point. The monitoring and evaluation indicators presented (mainly quantitative) are satisfactory for this stage of the competition, though they would have benefitted from further development. In particular, the panel would have appreciated more qualitative artistic and cultural indicators.
- The panel appreciates that some long-term objectives (reaching out to young people, developing artistic vocations, elaborating a multi-sector creative fabric,

creating new master's degree programs at the University of Corsica, having an impact on tourism and mobility or strengthening European links) are stated, but regrets that they are not fully detailed yet.

Cultural and artistic content

- According to the panel, the concept has *per se* a strong potential, which could have been even stronger, had it been better linked to the island paradox (i.e. the contrast between being locally rooted and the aspiration to desire for elsewhere). As presented in the bid, it concentrates too much on Bastia and the island itself.
- The programme is divided into two parts: 13 flagship programmes and five axes for a total of 127 projects, including the involvement of existing festivals. A variety of artistic and cultural proposals (being in very different phases of development) represents the historical and contemporary reality of Corsica and invites artists and cultural agents to develop exchanges. However, the panel sees the concept and programme as being too complex and above all too fragmented. There is a lack of coherence in the overall artistic vision that would connect the flagship programmes and the projects in the various axes.
- The programme is based on many local actions, involving transient or indigenous populations. It is expected to result in inclusion and transmission through the reliance on a high number of "friendly" smaller-scale spaces. This local focus, which has clearly a value of its own, partly contradicts the declared objective ("to go beyond") and lacks a multidisciplinary approach. At the same time, the bid focuses on personalities rather than collectives or structures, which can be a problem in terms of a long-term strategy.
- The laboratories presented as one of the flagships, although having a strong potential for further development, especially for the local cultural scene, seem to have more a capacity-building role than developing programme activities.
- Although the bid is focused on the development and transmission of the Corsican cultural and artistic fabric, the panel considers that it explains too succinctly how the programme would combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with innovative and experimental modes of cultural expression, even for this initial stage of bidding.

European dimension

- Overall, the bid shows a good understanding of the European dimension, with clear links to the projects presented. Some of the axes are conceptually rich and pose questions that have EU resonance. However, it was not clear to the panel how the European dimension achieved through the ECoC title would transform from what were legitimately and significantly important Corsican projects into a European project led by Bastia Corsica 2028.
- The panel welcomes the intention to weave links between the cultural uniqueness of Corsica with "sister-cultures" in musical and vocal domains, as well as literary

or cinematographic sectors. At the same time, the panel notes that collaborations with EU partners are still in development and the geographical coverage is limited to Southern Europe, the Balkan area, Ireland and the Czech Republic (as co-host of the ECoC 2028 title). There is no mention of cooperation beyond Europe.

- The strategy to attract the interest of a wide European and international audience as well as the links between the cultural programme of Bastia-Corsica 2028 and ECoC title-holders are well developed and the programme contains interesting projects with a strong European dimension. The panel however questions if the overall programme has enough significance and attractiveness to reach a wider European audience.

Outreach

- The manifesto in support of the bid has gathered nearly 3,000 signatures, including almost all of Corsica's elected representatives. The panel also evidenced good involvement of the local population, civil society and cultural actors in the preparation of the bid through various methods as well as a solid plan for the next stage, nevertheless the panel sees a need of more profound connections to external (and especially national) partners.
- Schoolchildren are involved in the flagships programme and few other projects, such as Bastia passport, but the panel observes that the connections with schools are still of a very general nature.
- The panel considered that the strategy for involving marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the programme, including the flagships, was clear. However, the engagement of elderly people or members of the LGBTIQ+ community is presented sparsely. Accessibility of disabled people or the ones with reduced mobility is only mentioned, and needs to be further developed.

Management

- The City budget for culture amounts to 5,7 million euros or 6,5% of the overall municipal budget. The panel welcomes plans for raising it up to 10% in 2030 (9 million euros). However, it is not completely clear whether the city plans to also use part of its annual cultural budget to finance the ECoC project.
- The total operating budget (2023-2029) at 47,03 million euro is ambitious, but realistic. 87% of the budget is planned to come from public sources (respectively 14,74 and 20,4 million euros from the City of Bastia and the Territorial Collectivity of Corsica), while the remaining 13% will be covered by the private sector and commercial incomes.
- The distribution of operating costs is well balanced with 70% for the programme, 11% for promotion and marketing and a relatively high 19% for wages, general costs and administration.

- Numerous infrastructure projects are planned to be carried out with an overall budget of 184 million euros, but the panel notices that the commitments by the relevant authorities and the strategy to receive financial support from the European Union are not sufficiently detailed.
- The Bastia Corsica 2028 Association was created in December 2021 including the City of Bastia, the Agglomeration Community of Bastia, the Territorial Collectivity of Corsica and the University of Corsica.
- There is a clear contingency plan. Weaknesses are well identified with explicit actions to overcome them. However, the panel notices that global issues are not covered.
- A marketing and communication strategy is presented with a convincing four-part action plan. However, the strategy does not include plans to reach wider Europe and links to the tourism sector are not visible.

Capacity to deliver

- The Assembly of Corsica voted on launching the bid in 2021. In July 2022, there was a unanimous vote to support the functioning of the association.
- The city has a developed cultural life and has experience in hosting cultural events with international resonance. The bid outlines the city's plans for cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure to be carried out as part of the ECoC action. Most projects have a clear timeline with works to be finished before 2028.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are very good, as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Bastia do not proceed to the final selection phase.

The panel finds the overall bid would need more work at this stage of the competition and is not convinced that Bastia 2028 could manage to bring the programme to the high artistic standard and European dimension required of an ECoC in the short time remaining to the final selection. The concept of the bid has a strong potential that would have been even stronger had it been better linked to the island paradox. It is attentive to the local Corsican identity and invites to go beyond historical, geographical and societal determinisms and to join a plural dialogue with the Mediterranean world and the European continent. However, connections with the continent could have been presented more deeply. The bid contains many good elements that, given more time, could have been developed into an interesting ECoC programme. The panel recommends that the city of Bastia build on the good work it has started and continues its cultural journey.

Bourges

Bourges is presented in the bid as a relatively remote place in France that is not so well connected with and accessible from the rest of Europe. It is a relatively small city with little diversity of cultures, as there are many in France and in Europe; according to the bid book, more than half of the population in Europe and France lives in cities with less than 100,000 inhabitants.

The concept of the bid "*Territories of the Future*", built around four clear and strong key features, reflects this reality and intends to 'prototype new ways of cultural and city governance which will be genuine game changers for Bourges and [similar] cities' in Europe. Territories of the future are understood as cities 'on a human scale, agile, with new forms of governance that can go far beyond simple participation and focus on carbon balance'.

The city of Bourges is in the ECoC process strongly supported by three other partners - Centre Val de Loire Region, Cher Department and Bourges Plus conurbation, which all together have a population of almost 3 million inhabitants.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The City's Cultural and Heritage Strategy was unanimously adopted in October 2022. Based on an extensive analysis of needs and the feedback from inhabitants, this strategy has a 10-point plan based on three key axes. The regional cultural strategy, defined around 30 key points, is in place as well and connected to Bourges cultural strategy.
- The relation between the strategy and the bid is very clear and sound: the bid projects are catalysts for the developments envisaged in the strategy and the long-term objectives reply to specific local and international challenges.
- The expected long-term qualitative and quantitative cultural, social, urban and economic impacts are identified in detail and they are clearly connected with the programme lines and clusters.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation, with an emphasis on the causal analysis of effects, are well developed for this stage of the competition, but the involvement and participation of the citizens in this process needs to be more developed for the second phase. Partnering with University of Tours, Erasmus University Rotterdam and INSEAC is foreseen, but it remains unclear who will exactly lead the monitoring and evaluation process.

Cultural and artistic content

- The concept of the bid "*Territories of the Future*" is strong, clearly defined and relevant both on the local and on the European levels. It is inspired by the challenges and aspirations of the territory and embedded across the programme. It is built around four key features, which underpin the core of the long-term vision

and convincingly frame the cultural and artistic programme: *Innovative City Governance, City of Artists and Low Carbon Cultural Capital, A European Matrix of Territories of the Future and Cultural Rights in Europe*.

- The structure of the cultural and artistic programme is based on four programme lines (and nine clusters), which have a strong link to the above mentioned four key features, with respective challenges and aims: *Lots of Neighbours, The Language of Europe, On a Human Scale* and *Right Here Right Now*. However, it is the panel's view that the nine clusters in the programme structure is a level that might not be necessary. It is not as coherent and strong a part of the programme as the rest is.
- The programme presents 30 interesting projects with a strong European dimension, which make a firm commitment to low carbon impact and follows the 2030 climate objectives of the European Union. However, for the final selection stage, the programme could benefit from becoming more innovative, more daring and more ambitious (from an artistic point of view). Further, the programme could provide a clear(er) picture of what visitors will experience in 2028 as well as ensuring better balance between the various artistic forms and expressions.
- The involvement of local artists and cultural organisations in the development of the bid seems to be good despite the fact that only representatives of local cultural institutions and associations have been involved (the degree of involvement of individual artists who are not connected to institutions and organisations is unclear from the bid).
- The capacity to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions is appropriate.

European dimension

- The European dimension lies in the story Bourges wants to tell about the *Territories of the Future*, which means: making people in the territory of Bourges understand that Europe is their future and making Europe understand that it is necessary to turn to the territories where it is currently most contested, i.e. the so called "places that do not matter" or "remote places where Europe is the least present and often decried".
- All four key features around which the programme is designed have a strong European dimension, and in all four-programme lines the question of "what can Europe bring to Bourges and what can Bourges say to Europe" is posed.
- There is a solid list of European and global partners. Partnerships with several European networks and organisations are presented as being already established, which is a solid basis calling for further development.
- The four-strand strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public is clear and solid at this stage of the competition, but needs to be developed further for the final round.

- Some partnerships with other ECoCs have already been established, but for the final round, there is a need to provide more developed and concrete projects.
- Overall, the bid shows a deep understanding of the European dimension. For the final round, more activities need to be developed that better promote the understanding between European citizens and highlight the common aspects of European cultures, heritage, and history.

Outreach

- The involvement of the local population in the development of Bourges 2028 is appropriate, through five main well-defined participation phases: *Let's choose Bourges 2028 together, Let's imagine Bourges 2028 together, Let's innovate together, Fingers crossed together for Bourges 2028* and *Celebrating with Bourges 2028*.
- The online delivery structure of the programme based around a network of Micro-Folies is strong.
- The panel welcomes the establishment of the "European Citizen Council" as part of the Bourges 2028 governance structure.
- Some marginalised and disadvantaged groups are well identified with a clear plan for their involvement. Special attention will be paid to the elderly people (almost 25% of the local population) and people with physical, mental or economic difficulties. However, for the final selection attention should be given to identifying all minorities. The strategy for youth involvement is solid, with some specific measures like free entrance. However, the strategy mainly relies on already existing activities, and for the final round, it would be useful to have more examples of how the ECoC will be concretely connected with schools and young people.

Management

- The city has a significant annual budget for culture representing 16% of the overall city budget (i.e. 12,8 million euros) in 2022, which shows the strong commitment of municipal authorities to culture. It is planned to increase this percentage to 17% (or around 15 million euros) from 2029 onwards.
- The panel has some doubts that the Bourges 2028 operating budget of 40,2 million euros will be sufficient for the implementation of the programme and all other planned organisational activities. All the public authorities (with the exception of the State, as for all other candidates) adopted in 2022 a collective decision on the financing of the ECoC operating budget, which is a very positive development. Distribution of operating costs is balanced, with 65% of the budget allocated to the programme, 11% for promotion and marketing, a high 20% for salaries, overhead and administration and 4% for contingency.

- Bourges 2028 will be managed by an already established independent, non-profit association. The organisational structure is clear and simple and the composition of the Board of directors (from 2024) is well thought through. The panel welcomes the decision that at least two members of the Board of Directors have to be artists, and four additional members must have European citizenship other than French. The panel also welcomes the idea of creating the position of General Climate Administrator, as this is very much aligned with the overall goal of the bid, and the idea of targeting one third of the team to be European (non-French) citizens.
- Three additional bodies have been/will be created to support the future work of the Bourges 2028 association: A Citizen Council, A Bourges 2050 Endowment Fund and the informal organisation of the Matrix. At the final selection stage, it will be important to show how these various bodies are meant to enrich the ECoC project without adding additional layers of governance.
- The marketing and communication strategy is well detailed and developed for this stage of the competition. The communication objectives as well as the target audiences are clearly identified, and tools that will be used are the local, national and international media, social media, partnership with the Tourism and Territorial development Agency and cooperation with the partner cities.

Capacity to deliver

- The City Council of Bourges voted unanimously to support the plans for Bourges 2028 on 6 October 2022. The Centre Val de Loire Region, the Cher Department and the Bourges Plus Conurbation have shown their continuous support and have confirmed their financial commitments and their political support in writing.
- The city has a developed cultural life and has/will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme. The fact that several infrastructural projects are planned to be delivered in the ECoC year (2028) is considered by the panel as a risk, knowing all the uncertainties (and often delays) connected with such projects. Therefore, a plan B should be drafted in case delays take place.
- The absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation is good.
- As explicitly recognised in the bid, the city faces major accessibility difficulties. To address these difficulties, Bourges 2028 intends to design cultural mobility projects that correspond to the challenges of the ecological transition.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Bourges proceed to the final selection phase.

The panel views the concept as strong and relevant locally as well as for Europe and beyond. The bid has a strong European dimension and very good understanding of it. The panel invites Bourges to include more innovative and ambitious projects in the next phase of the competition in order to reach the high artistic and cultural standards required of an

ECoC programme and to attract people from all parts of Europe and the world. The programme and organisational activities are very ambitious, and it is important to see in the next phase if the operating budget will be realistic and sufficient to realise it all. Together with that, in the final round the Panel would like to see more developed methods for involvement of youth and various minorities, as well as the clarification of the participatory aspects in the governance and evaluation. The panel also underlines the necessity of drafting a clear and feasible plan for the delivery of the infrastructural projects, especially in the light of the fact that the completion plan for many of them is scheduled during the ECoC year (2028).

Clermont-Ferrand

The candidacy concept of Clermont-Ferrand is based on the geographic location of the city and the Massif Central. Inspired by Tolkien, Clermont-Ferrand presents itself as a middle ground between cities and rurality. Under the concept of "Middle-Earth, a capital of transition", the bid aims to be a cultural laboratory for the "Europe des Massifs" and beyond - a laboratory of the numerous shifting challenges of our societal transformations. It is an invitation to look at the region differently and to tell another story, becoming the foundation for a new model of society.

The bid has been prepared in a wide cooperation. More than 600 municipalities, 13 Departments (in particular the Puy-du-Dôme Department, where Clermont-Ferrand is located) and the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region support the candidacy of Clermont-Ferrand Massif Central 2028.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The City of Clermont-Ferrand has had a cultural strategy in place since 2015 including investment plans in the cultural structures until 2030. The strategy was defined through a wide participative process, entailing more than 3,000 people, and is closely aligned to the ECoC bid.
- The panel considers positively how the concept takes into account the reality of the Massif Central and its rural population in an inclusive manner. There are light and itinerant formats, dialogue between "urban" and "rural", and interesting links between the history of the territory and the environmental issues of the future, including mobility.
- During the long preparation period, strong partnerships have been built progressively around the ECoC initiative in the region and across different sectors. Together with the wide support for the bid by local cultural operators, this can create a cohesive effect in the long term.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan is expected to be carried out by an external, already selected organisation. It includes information on how baseline data is gathered and how future data is to be selected, but needs to be further developed e.g. in terms of the indicators. The panel found the idea of the Visitors Observatory interesting in its intent to collect data about the audience needs.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme is structured through years and seasons. The years proceeding to the ECoC (2024-2027) are “*The Apparent Calm*” before the eruption and “*The Rebirth*” taking place in 2028. The year 2028 is divided into four Major Crossings, one for each season. The bid presents approximately 30 projects, including the Opening and Closing, as well as some preliminary ideas. The narrative related to the volcano is convincing and conveys a good rhythm to the programme.
- The metaphor of Middle-Earth provides a poetic narrative to an artistic vision that sets out ambitious objectives and diverse levels of engagement. It is particularly strong in its ambition to focus on people rather than infrastructure, with an emphasis on innovation and contemporary practice. The panel found that this could open creative conversations across diverse communities, and that it highlighted a sense of urgency and relevance within the local and European contexts, yet drew on a strong element of playfulness and poetry to the programme.
- Despite the many positive aspects, the panel sees that the programme concept still has potential for further development e.g. in terms of its coherence. Also, whereas the direct reference to Tolkien’s Middle Earth is duly acknowledged and serves as an inspiring point of departure, there may be a risk that the programming or its branding are misinterpreted as a large-scale Tolkien project.
- The presented programme is solid and covers different artistic forms. Many of the projects have already a good list of partners nationally and internationally. However, the long-term impact of the projects is not always clear, and there could be more cutting-edge projects.
- Although regional cooperation of the ECoC can be a strength, the panel was concerned about the possible fragmentation of the programme if projects were distributed to a very large geographical area. The panel therefore encourages the candidate to pay attention to the proper visibility and impact of the programme especially in the core of the action, i.e. Clermont-Ferrand.
- Involvement of local artists and cultural organisations in the design of the cultural programme has been very solid, and plans for a participatory process in the future programme development already exist. The cornerstone of this structure was the General Assembly for Culture in 2015, where all stakeholders, including the residents of the region, expressed their desires, aspirations and proposals regarding the cultural programming.
- The bid included some clear examples on how the programme combines local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with innovative and experimental forms of cultural expressions. However, this should be more detailed in the next phase.

European dimension

- The candidacy aims to create larger European significance by creating a “Forum des Massifs” - a network of Europe’s mountainous and/or volcanic regions. The Forum will bring annually together representatives of the low European mountain range areas that suffer from isolation and difficulties in accessing culture. It is the panel’s view that this has a strong European resonance.
- There is a well-developed network with both designated and candidating ECoCs, with concrete examples of the nature of cooperation with each of them. The partners also include several twin cities as well as Czech ECoC candidates, and negotiations with EUNIC and other European cultural networks and organisations have started. However, in the next phase there should be more knowledge about the concrete partnerships with international artists and cultural institutions.
- Clermont-Ferrand also explores the ECoC as a laboratory of cultural research and development. The panel appreciates the idea of European People's University as part of this action, enabling audiences to actively participate in the definition of major exhibitions.
- The strategy for generating interest from a wider European and international audience is solid with examples of activities such as events, scenery and campaigns.

Outreach

- The involvement of the local population and civil society in preparing the ECoC bid has been very strong, starting from the General Assembly in 2015 and continuing with a survey of 3,500 people across the Massif Central and hundreds of bilateral meetings with partners. There are also good plans for the participation of both local artists as well as inhabitants in the implementation of the event. However, the roles of these groups should not get confused.
- Several participatory inclusion projects have already been developed or even realised, such as Effervescences (2017-2019), Altitudes in 2021, the MuMo x Centre Pompidou mobile museum and activities in “Les Manufactures” from 2024.
- Young people are in the centre of the bid in many ways, e.g. 10% of the programming budget has to be allocated to the young people. A Youth Assembly was set up for the candidacy, allowing young adult volunteers between the ages of 16 and 30 to meet. In addition, the audience development strategy for schools and universities is well developed.
- Opportunities allowing marginalised or disadvantaged groups to participate are not very well represented and will still need a strong elaboration.
- Audience development will be based on the Visitor Observatory, but it is not quite clear who is in charge of that and how the data will reach the ones who should use it.

Management

- The operating budget of 72,9 million euros is very sound and the planned revenues are balanced with 90% public and 10% private funding. The City's share is planned to be 16,5% with a further 16,5% planned to come from the Metropolitan area and 8% from the Region Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, although the financial commitments are not yet confirmed. Distribution of the operating costs is balanced with 60% dedicated to the programme, 17% to promotion and marketing, 18% to salaries, overhead and administration and 5% to others (including sustainable development and contingency provisions).
- The private sector revenue of 7,3 million euros (10%) of the total operating budget is high but achievable. The strategy to raise funds among the private sector is solid for this stage, but should be further developed for the next round.
- In total, 97,5 million euros is expected from the public sector for the infrastructure expenses. The value of cultural infrastructure investments is 69 million euros, out of which 54 million euros will be invested by the City and the Metropolitan Area regardless of the outcome of the competition.
- In addition, the strategy for obtaining financial support from European Union programmes and funds to cover infrastructure expenditure is relatively developed and some possible EU funding programmes are already identified.
- The marketing and communication plan is satisfactory for this stage of the competition. However, more details on how to reach an international audience could have been described. Moreover, collaboration with the local tourism agencies is not mentioned. The panel noted the opinion columns in the European press as an interesting idea.
- The organisational structure is not very clear and requires further development. Transition from the Association to Local Public Company is envisaged in 2024. The organisational structure along with the outreach strategy should take into account the wide regional coverage of the programme.

Capacity to deliver

- There is unanimous support for the bid from the City of Clermont-Ferrand. On a regional level, the candidacy counts on the support of more than 600 municipalities and 13 departments, as well as of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region.
- The city has a developed cultural life and has/will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are very good, as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.
- The bid clearly outlines the city's plans for cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure development to be carried out as part of the ECoC action. A number

of projects have a timeline that indicates that they are (potentially) going to be completed in 2028. This is worrisome as this is also the year the ECoC takes place. The panel therefore advises to draft a plan B for projects that are to be completed in 2028 in case delays take place.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Clermont-Ferrand proceed to the final selection phase.

There is a strong commitment to the bid, not only in the City but also in the larger surrounding region. The panel found the concept of Middle-Earth fascinating and interesting. However, it should still be further considered in order to avoid confusion concerning Tolkien's role. The bid has been planned in a very participatory process, and the programme itself has been designed by cultural institutions, independent artists and NGOs together with contacts from different parts of Europe and beyond, thus illustrating a high level of collaboration and involvement. Special attention is given to young audiences. The panel appreciated the wide regional coverage and the will to bring culture also in remote areas, but an adequate outreach plan should be provided. Further development should also be invested in the programming, especially in terms of projects with a potential to allure visitors from other areas of Europe. The operational budget is very sound, but the sponsorship strategy should be developed further in the second phase.

Montpellier

The bid states that Montpellier is one of France's most attractive metropolises, expected to receive 25% of France's demographic growth over the next two decades, and it boasts a strong cultural identity. Its unique heritage, the quality of its university and economic ecosystem and its cultural and sporting excellence makes it an especially attractive region today. Numerous diasporas are fully integrated into the city life and are a source of cultural richness and social cohesion.

The bid is based on the observation that thinking about the future can be a source of anxiety in today's world, if this does not include the sharing of desirable collective imaginations. Thus, the theme of the bid "*Collective imagination*" refers to social and individual achievements that are measured by solidarity and artistic practice and embraces differences and a renewed connection to our environment. The aim of the ECoC project is to reinforce the inclusion of Montpellier and its cultural players at the heart of Europe.

The partnership with the neighbouring city of Sète and Montpellier wide urban area is at the origin of the ECoC bidding endeavour. Together with the Occitanie Region and the Hérault Department, 10 regional partners are founding members of the bid association. In total 142 municipalities covering a population of 850,000 inhabitants are associated in this joint cultural action.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- Unanimously adopted, Montpellier's cultural strategy is clearly designed and articulated around six priorities that are well developed and presented. It shows the importance of culture in the development of the city. The ECoC programme is meant to act as a catalyst and accelerator for change as part of this strategy. The Montpellier 2028 bid is also aligned with the City's international policy roadmap (a strategic axis for the city), which was adopted in December 2022.
- There is a strong focus on the ECoC's urban and cultural impact (broadening of audiences, innovative cultural practices, transversality, etc.), while the socio-economic impact could have been worked out in more detail.
- An ambitious external evaluation process is presented, which will be conducted by universities and research groups. One of the desired impacts to monitor and evaluate focuses on political issues and on the capacity to devise public policies that adopt a horizontal structure, which the panel sees as an interesting topic rarely covered in such exercises. On a less positive note, there is a need to clarify the plan for gathering the (baseline) data needed to measure all the impacts identified.
- The capacity-building plan is focused on what are already strong sectors in the territory (audio-visual as well as connection between culture, sports and health), which the panel sees as potentially a sound approach to further highlight and reinforce excellence. Numerous structures and cultural and creative events are currently being developed. However, the panel notices that the capacity-building plan as presented seems to overlook some other goals declared, such as fostering emerging talents or new practices and strengthening the more fragile cultural operators. In addition, the activities for raising capacities in the fields of cultural management, promotion, marketing, fundraising etc. are not presented.
- The panel appreciates the willingness expressed in the bid to share the lessons learned through the ECoC actions by creating prototypes that can be shared on a European and international scale.

Cultural and artistic content

- The concept of the bid is to rethink our relationship with the future in a positive way by sharing "collective imaginations". While appreciating the ambition and relevance of the concept, especially in a context of climate urgency and acute geopolitical tensions, the panel thinks that it would benefit from strengthening its uniqueness and sense of place.
- The concept is based on three pillars - *Connect*, *Act*, and *Celebrate* - as well as three programme sections - *Water that connects us*, *Serial futures* and *Trans?*. All these elements are individually interesting and promising, but in the panel's view, the connection between them into a coherent and locally rooted programme structure is still lacking to some extent.

- The overall programme is very solid and contains approximately 30 projects of various sizes and diverse art forms and disciplines, including existing events of national reputation (*Festival de Radio France, Biennale des arts de la scène...*) that the ECoC project intends to develop at a more European and international scale. The panel welcomes clear examples of projects linked to the priorities of the cultural strategy, which is a good way to prepare legacy from an early stage.
- In line with the objective to breed the collective imagination, the elaboration of the programme was designed with more than 150 professionals, artists and associations, working on the major strategic priorities. Open calls were and will continue being used as valuable tools to ensure a diversity of ideas and projects and a strong ownership by the local cultural scene.
- On a less positive note, the way the programme intends to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with innovative and experimental forms, as presented in the bid, was considered to be further developed.

European dimension

- There is overall a good understanding of the European dimension. The bid addresses issues resonating at European level, such as climate change and its impact on water resources, European identity as the result of a process of constant transformation and migration, the need to promote a dialogue between generations and between the communities living together or interdisciplinarity (in particular between arts and sciences). The programme relies on the city's diverse local communities including the important Roma community, while also giving a place to other cultures, in particular from the nearby African continent.
- The panel welcomes the objective of having 85% of projects with a European and/or international dimension. Sound level of current and planned cooperation with other ECoCs is evidenced in the bid, underlying the reasons for collaboration with each partner. However, the bid would benefit from further development of these connections as well as European cultural networks, organisations and artists from Northern Europe.
- A number of international summits, meetings, networks and partners (in particular with Africa) are mentioned, which the panel welcomes as a way to contextualise the bid's ambition to use the ECoC as a vehicle to reflect on and contribute to the connection of the European Union with other parts of the world. Nevertheless a need to better tie this narrative with the overall programme and individual projects in the bid.
- The strategy to attract a wider European and international audience is very succinct and addressed mainly from a tourism point of view. It would therefore need further elaboration for the final stage of the competition.

Outreach

- The bid explains in a convincing way how the local population and civil society have been invited to contribute actively to the preparation of the bid. At the same time, the panel notes that an audience development strategy for the general audience is still missing.
- Almost half of the online survey participants stated they would like 2028 to be “rich in events”, “festive”, “sparkling” and “inspiring”. Whereas the bidding team is ready to fulfil this, the panel invites the team not to lose such important aspects of ECoC as global challenges, European values, capacity building issues, legacy, etc.
- The panel is pleased to see the long-term strategy’s tools planned for children and youth (for example, the creation of a label for young people's programming, the Children’s Municipal Council, etc.), and invites to continue developing them as well as reinforcing their inclusion in the next phase of the bid.
- The panel also appreciates the inclusion of the disadvantaged and marginalised population, the elderly people and the LGBTIQ+ community, the willingness to create/reinforce social links in the long term as well as the attention given to gender equality and equal pay policy within the Montpellier 2028 delivery team, but would be interested to learn whether and how this may be extended to organisations the Montpellier 2028 team will work with.

Management

- The annual city budget dedicated to culture has been stable over the past years, and amounted to 104,7 million euros (i.e. 9% of the overall city's budget) in 2022. There is no plan to increase it after the ECoC-year but to stabilise it at 10%.
- The total operating budget for the ECoC amounts to 62 million euros, and seems sound and appropriate to implement the range of activities foreseen. 87% are planned to come from public sources, with a high 41% from the City and a further 27% from other 142 municipalities, reflecting a strong commitment at local level. 13% of the budget will be covered by the private sector and commercial income, however, the fundraising strategy presented in the bid is not detailed, which the panel saw as a weakness.
- The distribution of operating costs is well balanced with 64% for the programme, 16% for marketing and communication and 15% for wages, overhead general and administration. An amount corresponding to 5% of the budget is also put aside for the contingency and emergency plan.
- Numerous cultural infrastructure projects are planned to be carried out, with an overall budget of 152,2 million euro, though it is not clear what will be done exclusively for the ECoC. The strategy for obtaining financial support from the European Union (for a total of 8,36 million euros) is well developed and based on long-term experience, with possible sources clearly identified.

- The organisational structure of the Montpellier 2028 Association presented in the bid book is somewhat complicated (with many Colleges, active and associate members etc.) and should be thoroughly rethought, but the panel marks the clear division of tasks between General management and Artistic directorate as a positive aspect of the structure.
- The marketing and communication strategy is well developed, including the volunteers' network, the ambassadors' network, the twin cities' network, and various methods of promotion.

Capacity to deliver

- The candidacy is unanimously supported by the City of Montpellier and the Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole as well as by all inter-municipal cooperation bodies. The local funding authorities are all members of the Montpellier 2028 Association and some (but not all yet) financial commitments have already been established.
- The city has a very developed cultural life and has much experience in hosting large-scale international cultural events.
- Culture infrastructure programme presented in the bid is very ambitious, yet limited indication is given on its sustainability. The development of infrastructure necessary to host the ECoC is focused on building on the existing projects and has a clear delivery date. The panel is worried though that quite a few projects are to be completed for the ECoC year in 2028, therefore a plan B should be drafted in case delays take place.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are very good, as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Montpellier proceed to the final selection phase.

It is a strong bid based on consultative processes in the city and region with relevant cultural and institutional stakeholders, with efforts to include the voices of people at all levels, and from various cultural backgrounds. The cultural strategy is aligned with the main development strategies for the city and region and the ECoC action is embedded within and effectively presented in the strategy. The long-term social and economic impacts could be better explained, but the cultural and artistic programme is aligned with the overall objectives of the bid. Ambitious and relevant concept of the programme, especially concerning climate urgency and acute geopolitical tensions, would benefit from strengthening its uniqueness and sense of place. The programme itself has very interesting elements and a sound European dimension, including close cooperation with Africa, contextualising the bid's ambition to use the ECoC as a vehicle to reflect on and contribute to the connection of the European Union with other parts of the world.

Nice

Driven by the urge to promote links, cooperation, new cultural practices, creativity and eco-responsibility, Nice's application for the European Capital of Culture 2028 title brings an artistic vision of hope and happiness through the concept of "*Connecting the unexpected*". It is a concept of enlightened, cooperative and solidarity-based human transformation, which could be led by approaching reality beyond prejudices and clichés, combining contrasts, embracing diversity and letting culture and art cultivate the unexpected

The bid is a cross-border cooperation endeavour covering a population of more than 832,000 inhabitants, which connects Nice and its metropolitan region of 51 towns together with its close neighbours - the City of Menton and the Community of the French Riviera as well as the Italian border cities of Cuneo, Ventimiglia, San Remo and Imperia.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The city's cultural strategy is "built on creativity and the power of culture to build a new human society that is more resilient to the climate challenge" and based on the three clear pillars - live, create, share. It is however unclear to the panel when the cultural strategy was adopted and the period it will cover.
- The bid is based on a cross-border cooperation between the Nice region and Italian border cities; this could have an interesting potential, but the rationale and the added value of this ambitious decision is not clearly explained.
- The bid book gives various examples of how NICE2028 will contribute to strengthening the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors and their relations with the economic and social sectors through the three above-mentioned pillars of the long-term strategy. In particular, "NICE2028 Ressourcerie" is an interesting capacity-building tool with a strong legacy potential.
- The impacts of the ECoC project on the artistic and cultural level, the economic level and in terms of the social and urban balance are well identified.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan is still in development, but it is overall well thought-through for this initial stage of the competition. It has four clear objectives, while some indicators and the main phases of the process are presented. A team of experts with the University of the Côte d'Azur at its heart is assembled to define the methodology, objectives, uses and tools.

Cultural and artistic content

- The concept "*Connecting the Unexpected*" aims to explore and reveal new artistic and cultural practices in light of the profound paradigm shifts we have been experiencing since the beginning of the 21st century.

- Though the concept is clear, the panel finds it very generic with a lack of both European relevance and a sense of place.
- The programme is divided into three axes - Journey, Vitality and Citizenship - and it is based on the rhythm of the four seasons. 31 projects are presented in the bid including several open calls and many existing events. As presented in the bid book, the programme with its individual projects is under-developed, even for this initial stage of the competition. Many projects are described in very general terms where topics have not been explored in much detail and potential partners mostly not identified. On the other hand, the panel considers the condition of eco-responsibility in all projects as very positive.
- Despite some relevant examples, the way the programme intends to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions is too general even for this early stage of the competition.
- It also appears that given the recognised late start of the application process in Nice, local artists and cultural organisations have not been involved in the conception of the programme to a sufficient extent. The plans to involve them in the further development of the application and later in the implementation of the cultural programme are also without convincing details.

European dimension

- Nice's bid responds to one of the most important and urgent European themes of adapting our societies and economies to the fight against climate change. It places "adaptation to the climate challenges through the power of culture and arts" at the heart of its candidacy. While this objective is highly relevant in a European context, more information on plans for translating these objectives into concrete action are missing. Overall, the European dimension of the Nice 2028 bid could have been much stronger.
- The strategy to attract a broad European and international audience to the ECoC is presented more from a tourism than an artistic programme angle.
- There are some contacts with other ECoCs, mainly on an intentional level. Thematic partnerships are planned with the cities that share the same challenges as Nice - culture and climate challenge, the relationship with borders and transition towards cultural, sustainable tourism.

Outreach

- The panel finds the "Winning Together" project aimed at 14,000 public employees and the NICE2028 Youth Engagement Programme aimed at mobilising young people between the ages of 18 and 24 very important and useful for the candidacy. Considerations regarding the creation of opportunities for the participation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups are however very basic. It is not completely clear how the ECoC intends to create opportunities for the 160 nationalities identified in the region.

- The audience development programme in schools is based on interesting existing activities such as *Nice 100% Culture at School*, but it is not clear how the ECoC will specifically contribute to additional participation in art and culture among youth communities.
- Participation is defined more as 'providing access' rather than a participatory process to fully engage in a creative way with diverse communities. Given that "the legitimacy of this candidacy is still questioned by the locals", more intense work on participatory processes would have been good.

Management

- The city has a high annual budget for culture (13,8% of the overall city budget, i.e. 104,2 million euros in 2022), which shows a solid commitment of the City authorities to culture.
- The total operating budget for Nice2028, at 50 million euros, seems appropriate though it is on the low side for a city the size of Nice. At 12 million euros (with further 3 million coming from the Metropolis level), the contribution from the City of Nice to the ECoC budget is also on the low side, especially when compared to the high yearly municipal budget allotted to culture. Other planned public contributors are the State at 7 million euros, the Region at 8 million euros, the EU at 2 million euros and other partners and associates at 8 million euros.
- The revenues expected from the private sector, at 10 million euros, make up a large proportion of the total operating budget (i.e. 20%), but the fundraising strategy is solid for this initial phase of the competition. The strategy is based on four clear axes and various tools and methods such as sponsorships, crowdfunding, donations, the drafting of a general Charter of Commitment of the Active Forces etc.
- The intended governance and delivery structure is clear. The Nice2028 Association will be created to carry out the project.
- The marketing and communication strategy is well developed and presented. Audiences as well as main communication objectives are clearly identified. The strategy envisages tools such as the development of synergies with all types of media on local, regional and international levels, the use of the 14,000 officials in the Nice Cote d'Azur Metropolis as NICE2028 ambassadors, digital communications, the resort to locals as the primary ambassadors, a network of tourism and hotel, accommodation and event stakeholders, outdoor advertising etc.

Capacity to deliver

- Nice's candidacy has broad and strong political support and sustainable commitment from the authorities, although the bid lacks further details on the scope of support.

- The city has a very developed cultural life and much experience in hosting large scale international events, and has/will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are very good, as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Nice do not proceed to the final selection phase.

Although there are some interesting ideas and plans, the panel finds this bid underdeveloped at many levels and the late start of the bidding preparation can be seen across the board. The concept is not polished enough to be totally convincing and innovative on a European scale, and the proposed artistic programme with its individual projects is still not developed enough at this stage of the competition. The bid does not sufficiently reflect the cultural link created with the associated cities in France and Italy. The involvement of the local artists, cultural and other organisations as well as the wider public in the development of the bid was modest, and the European dimension, which is the *raison d'être* of a European Capital of Culture, is not sufficiently developed.

Reims

The candidacy concept of Reims consists of three elements: *Blending*, *Caring* and *Gaming*. The concept of blending (inspired by the technique of blending, i.e. the combining of different grape varieties, used to create Champagne) can be applied to striking the right balance between the mind and the body, and between the diverse facets of a city, its zones, and its residents. Culture and art are conduits for caring that can be used as therapeutic tools for well-being and community building. Finally, the concept of gaming questions our relationships with digital technology, images, and innovation. Reims faces many modern challenges impacting local communities and it reflects socioeconomic and geographical disparities encountered by other regions in Europe. In its bid for the title of European Capital of Culture, the city wishes to reconcile these disparities and different faces of Reims and seeks to do so in dialogue with Europe and the world, in order to redefine an identity for the region and revitalise the community.

The bid has been developed in collaboration with local residents and institutions within the city of Reims, and has been put forward by the city of Reims along with 142 municipalities that make up Grand Reims. Reims 2028 is also working with two dozen partner cities in the Grand Est and Hauts-de-France regions.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The City of Reims has a cultural strategy in place for the period 2019-2024. It will be renewed in 2024 for a period of 5 years. The connection and articulation between cultural strategy and the ECoC is not very clear.

- Although the swot analysis stresses the needs and challenges of the cultural and creative sectors, plans and projects for raising capacities (e.g. in the fields of cultural management as well as marketing and promotion) are not presented, apart from the fundraising training which is briefly mentioned.
- The overview on the cultural, social, economic and urban development impacts of the ECoC process on the city is clear.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan is rather solid for this phase, including a rough timeline and description of the data to be collected and used. The monitoring and evaluation would be carried out by a wide range of operators, e.g. by independent firms and an academic committee set by the local university.

Cultural and artistic content

- The three conceptual pillars of blending, caring and gaming are being implemented in a four-pronged approach consisting of Huts, Houses, Cultural third places and Calls for proposals. The programme consists of 25 projects, divided under two entities: Exhibitions and Projects. In addition, the ECoC year would also be divided into three seasons.
- The panel found the overall concept fragmented and rather vague, although sympathetic. The three conceptual elements do not really form a coherent and solid concept, but would perhaps serve better as programme lines. Furthermore, the structure of the programming was considered very complex with several overlapping factors, and the division of the projects into different programme elements was not always very clear.
- The aim of Reims is to invite everyone to participate in the design and implementation of the ECoC year. The local artists and cultural organisations have been involved in the programme planning through the Houses, Huts, Cultural third places and Open calls, which the panel sees as a positive collective endeavour. However, it was not completely clear how much the local artistic and cultural scene had actually been involved in planning the individual projects for the bid, and how much the proposals came from the team, civil society or the inhabitants.
- The programme contains many interesting projects from various artistic and cultural fields. The projects are well described including several potential partners and they spread across the territory.
- On a less positive note, the description of how the programme combines local heritage and traditional art forms with innovative and experimental modes of cultural expression was considered too general with only one concrete example mentioned.

European dimension

- Reims wishes to enter into a dialogue with Europe in order to create new stories and a shared narrative between the residents of a local community and the

European community. The European dimension is explained through the three conceptual strands of Blending, Caring and Gaming.

- However, the panel missed concrete examples on how the current European themes would be addressed as well as information on how the different projects would highlight the common aspects of European cultures in practice.
- Highlighting European artists, collaborating with participants or cities from different countries, and transnational partnerships are well described, and there are calls planned specifically for European artists' proposals, which is another good element of the bid. Reims is a member of Eurocities and plans to also join networks such as Europa Nostra and EUNIC. In addition, the collaboration with the ECoC title-holders is on a good level. However, there is not much information about the concrete contents of these partnerships related to the ECoC initiative.
- The strategy for attracting interest from a wider European and international audience is well developed.

Outreach

- According to the team, the inclusion of residents across the region is the greatest strength of the ECoC bid. The Houses have hosted a substantial number of meetings and structured dialogue since the beginning of 2022, guided by artistic directors, and in total more than 1,000 inhabitants of the region and representatives of the civil society contributed to the construction and design of the bid.
- The panel found the idea of the Houses, Huts and Third places very strong, and a crucial part of the ECoC's legacy. In addition, the challenge to blend urban and rural has been partly met by the itinerant huts. The outreach plans for schools and related project examples were also solid. Broadcasting online 80% of the events in the ECoC year, on the most responsible channels, was considered an ambitious, good aim.
- However, a clear audience development strategy for the general audience was lacking, and elderly people were not involved in the plans in a participative way.

Management

- The operating budget of 60 million euros is sound. Out of this 79,4% is planned to be covered by the public sector and 20,6% by the private sector. The City of Reims' funding share of the operational costs is 13,65 million euros, while the State and the Grand Est Region are expected to provide each 12 million.
- The breakdown of the operational costs is solid with 68,3% dedicated to the programme, and the contingency plan (with a corresponding crisis management budget of 3 million euros) is considered strong.

- The private funding share is very high at 12,35 million euros (especially in percentage terms), and requires a strong sponsorship strategy to succeed. On the other hand, the region has potential for large-scale sponsoring, and some private funding has already been collected.
- There are solid plans for new infrastructures, e.g. concerning the cultural third places. The expenditure is estimated to be 24 million euros, with 50/50 funding shares for public and private sectors. Some major investments have already been made, with an accelerated schedule due to the ECoC.
- The marketing and communication plan is solid for this first stage of the competition and includes various methods like ethical, eco-responsible and evolving digital strategy, online delivery of the programmes, international network of ambassadors and various communication campaigns.
- The organisational structure is planned under an association, and plans concerning e.g. the recruitment principles are well developed.

Capacity to deliver

- The bid is supported by the Reims 2028 association, and the City of Reims and the Urban Community of Grand Reims are members of the association's Board of Directors ensuring local support for the project. However, the bid lacks detail on the scope and e.g. potential unanimity of the support for the candidacy.
- The city has a developed cultural life and has or will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme. The bid also lists a number of cultural, urban and tourism infrastructures that are to be carried out in connection with the ECoC process.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good, as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Reims do not proceed to the final selection phase.

The proposed concept, though interesting per se, needs further development, and its narrative weaving ties between the challenges, the concepts and the projects lacks coherence. The panel appreciated the idea of the Houses, Huts and Cultural third places. The description of the strategy for attracting interest from a wider European and international audience is solid, but the European dimension in general would still need further development. The audience development strategy for the general audience is lacking, although some of the outreach elements are solid and good. Despite the shortcomings in the bid, the objective to reinvent the identity of the city and its surrounding region through culture is a goal that the panel encourages to enhance also in the future.

Rouen

Rouen is a city of 110,000 inhabitants surrounded by a metropolis that is home to 500,000 inhabitants. The metropolis encompasses 71 municipalities, where one person in five is aged between 16 and 25.

The theme of Rouen's bid is under the title of "*Time to meander*" (in a reference to the movements of the Seine river), but conceptually it refers to the time for reconciliation. Both concepts are united by the relation to the river. The bid flows physically, geographically, historically, and ecologically between the banks of the Seine, which is the unifying theme for the vision. Reconciliation is imperative considering the social, climatic, and democratic emergencies the world is facing. Inspired by the Seine and its meanders, the programme for the ECoC creates a network across the bid area and opens to other rivers in Europe and around the world.

With Rouen as its core, this is a bid from the whole of the Normandy Seine, from Vernon-Giverny in the East to Le Havre and Honfleur in the West.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The Rouen Normandy Metropolis expressed its bidding intentions in a document that was unanimously approved by the Assembly of the 71 municipalities in a vote held on 31 January 2022. "Everywhere, for everyone and by everyone" are the guiding principles of the cultural policies of Rouen and its metropolis that will become the basis for a cultural policy in its own right, with 2030 as its objective, to be voted on in June 2023. The panel is interested in seeing the connection between this strategy and the ECoC project at the final round of the competition.
- Clear guidelines for the ECoC programme strategy are outlined (access to culture, with emphasis on young and non-audience; involvement of artists in the urban regeneration projects; importance of public spaces; revamping of the industrial wasteland and promotion of the partnership with business) with climate objectives in the foreground (industrial risk and rising water levels).
- Although the panel welcomes the idea of the Seine Assembly in principle, it is not easy to evaluate its role in the monitoring and evaluation process, as it is not clear who will lead the monitoring, what the timelines are and the role the Assembly can play with reference to civic monitoring or the use of data.
- A table with the "reconciliation indicators" is provided, defining the dimensions to be assessed. No quantification of the indicators is prospected at this stage yet. The ECoC's cultural, economic, urban, and especially social impact should be developed further. The panel encourages searching for clear links between cultural, creative and social sectors.

Cultural and artistic content

- The concept of the bid is clear and it is well reflected in the programme and its individual projects. It has a strong connection to the local area, its history and identity, but it also succeeds in being relevant on a European level.
- The programme is divided into three parts: 1) The long term, 2) Roaming the Roads and Rivers, 3) Here, there, and everywhere – and presents approximately 20 projects. 10 Ports of call along the river Seine will open onto ECoC's points of interest and main events.
- It is the panel's view that this is a solid programme with interesting and fresh project ideas, designed to be transdisciplinary, participatory, and inclusive. The project descriptions are clear and good, providing the panel with a good understanding of what is to be expected during the ECoC year. References to the strategy to which each proposal responds are especially appreciated, as this highlights the connection between the ECoC project and policy developments.
- Most of the programming will be implemented by local artists and cultural organisations with international artists alongside. However, the panel encourages presenting a stronger artistic involvement in the second round, emphasising open calls, artistic commissions, etc.
- Heritage and innovative expressions are explored via points of friction between industry and nature, urbanisation and rurality, port activities and resource exploitation, knowledge and doubt, etc. However, the concrete examples mentioned are not always very innovative.
- The panel welcomes prototypes programme from 2023 and the strong connection with science having a long-term reference.

European dimension

- The bid shows a clear understanding of the European dimension, covering all aspects of the criteria concretely and to the point.
- Documentation and presentation of long-term European and international partnerships, from conception to completion will start in 2024 with videos, podcasts, photo essays and more to provide avenues for observing and capturing collaborations. Rouen aims to give Europe faces and feelings, to talk about commonalities, to collectively invent utopias and write new stories, for example addressing past hidden memories, such as ports as slave trade past.
- Foreign audience strategy targets populations closer to home, respecting the principle of proximity and limiting greenhouse gases. This goes hand in hand with the slow-tourism philosophy, the time to meander, which is at the heart of the bid. Promotion of soft mobility and train travels as well as delivery content virtually via digital tools is also foreseen. The panel welcomes the idea to attract the 33 million tourists visiting Paris on a yearly basis to come to Rouen as well, but the strategy

to attract the interest of a broad European and international public would benefit from being explained by way of project examples.

- Rouen forges the tangible bonds of an open, peaceful Europe by working with European cities that share the concerns of the city, namely a dialogue of rivers. The panel appreciates the idea of establishing a River cities network, a European Youth network, but emphasises still sparse collaboration with other ECoCs, European cultural networks, international organisations and artists. This link should be strengthened during the second stage of the competition, with concrete examples of joint projects. Finally, cooperation with partners outside Europe is also very welcome.

Outreach

- The central aim of the bid is participation, in line with the guiding principles of the city's (and metropolis') cultural roadmap. Spaces for dialogue, cooperation, and co-building have been created to ensure that cooperative practices and citizens' participation will constitute the ECoC's most powerful legacy to future generations. While recognizing the value and relevance of such an instrument as Seine Assembly, the panel did not get from the bid a clear understanding of how it would be involved all along the cycle of the ECoC, i.e. in the design of the programme or specific projects, in the preparatory year and/or in the implementation phase.
- The panel appreciates strong involvement of the art and cultural community as well as local population and civil society in the planning phase of the bid, which allowed establishing a common diagnosis of the region. This is key to ensuring local ownership of the ECoC project.
- The ECoC audience strategy prioritises persons termed "impeded" or "non-audience" and especially young people. Consequently, it is planned that most of the programming will be extramural and free of charge. To address different groups of people, ECoC partners have been already identified, such as Youth support networks, Pupils of Public Education network, diasporas, the healthcare industry, etc. This is very welcomed by the panel; however, it also suggests preparing an Audience Development Strategy for the general audience.
- The links to schools are clearly described in the bid. Work is being done with the educational milieu, involving school-age audiences, such as for example EUROSCOL certification, project Archipel, the Wisdom Council, good collaboration with students, etc.

Management

- Both the City and the Metropolis have rather modest annual budgets for culture, at respectively 8,3 million euros (3,54% of the overall City's budget) and 23,6 million euros (or 5,12% of total Metropolis' budget). There is no plan for the City to increase its cultural budget after the ECoC-year in terms of percentage.

- The operating budget for the ECoC project is high at 80 million euros. 49% (i.e. 36 million euros) of the budget will come from the City and the Metropolis (with a decision already adopted in the Autumn of 2022), showing a strong commitment to the project. The State, the Region and other territorial entities are expected to give each an amount of 12 million euros, but commitments will come in the forthcoming period. It is not clear to the panel whether the City will use part of its annual culture budget to finance the ECoC project.
- 92% of the planned revenues are expected to come from the public purse, while 8% (6,4 million euros) would be provided by the private sector, which the panel sees as a balanced split. The strategy for gathering private funding is solidly developed; different types of partner companies have been identified, whereas supportive patronage with a club of patrons and hospitable business is planned to be created in 2023.
- The distribution of the operating budget is sound, with 65% for the programme, 15% for promotion and marketing and a high 20% for wages, general costs and administration.
- Three cultural infrastructures financed by public funds are to be carried out with an overall budget of 79 million euros. The financial breakdown of planned incomes to cover these costs is not provided, but the financing plans are being drafted and will mobilise a number of resources.
- Basic considerations regarding the delivery structure are presented, which are sufficient for this stage of the competition. A clear overview of the governance and implementation structure is presented, however, it remains unclear whether the CEO or also the Artistic Director will constitute the general management unit. Therefore, the panel expects the delivery structure to be elaborated for the final round of the competition.
- The risks are very well identified, with clear anticipatory or corrective actions to address them.
- The marketing and communication strategy is solid on a conceptual level, but would benefit from being further developed and elaborated in collaboration with the Normandy/regional Tourism Board, as only a limited number of tools and methods are presented.

Capacity to deliver

- There is unanimous support for the candidacy from the elected representatives in the area, involving Departments and the Normandie Region.
- The city has a developed cultural life and has experience in hosting international cultural events as well as having adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme.

- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good (with a welcomed focus on slow mobility options), as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.
- The bid clearly lists a number of cultural, urban and tourism infrastructure that are to be carried out in connection with the ECoC.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Rouen proceed to the final selection phase.

The bid is clear, ambitious, well thought out, with a solid programme including interesting and fresh project ideas, designed to be transdisciplinary, participatory, and inclusive. It has a strong local, national as well as European dimension throughout. Further, the bid has a strong concept that responds well to the many European cities based near rivers and facing similar climate challenges. It may be a challenge to communicate the overall concept of "Time to meander" to a wider audience in Europe and beyond, but the reconciliation concept communicates very well, considering the social, climatic, and democratic emergencies the world is facing. The regional commitment to the project is strong with also a strong community involvement. However, the panel encourages presenting a stronger artistic involvement in the final round, emphasising open calls, artistic commissions, etc. The marketing and communication strategy would also benefit from being further developed and elaborated in collaboration with the Normandy/regional Tourism Board.

Saint-Denis

Saint-Denis is the youngest territory in all of metropolitan France and a place where more than 135 nationalities are present and more than 150 different languages are spoken. The concept of Saint-Denis' bid is under the title "*Périphéries*", and aims at bringing a new narrative of European suburbs and peripheries. With "*Périphéries*", Saint-Denis "invites us to shift our gaze — to discover the European suburbs for what they are today and for what they can be, even more powerfully, tomorrow: lands of invention".

Together with Saint-Denis, eight other members of the Plaine Commune's intermunicipal group and the Department of Seine-Saint-Denis are involved, while the Metropolis of Greater Paris and the Île-de-France Region are associated.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The city's cultural strategy was unanimously voted on by the municipal council of the city of Saint-Denis in July 2022. It hinges on five clear axes, and is in force until 2032. The urban and metropolitan strategies are closely aligned, aimed to enhance the connection between the cultural strategy and the social and economic policies.
- The ECoC contributes to the cultural strategy through three cross-cutting development components that are necessary for the development of the 2028

programme: *Local capacity-building, Urban and cultural ecology, and (Inter)cultural democracy.*

- The capacity-building strategy for the cultural and creative sectors and the development of long-term links with the economic and social sectors are well thought through and developed around three well-presented axes and European cooperation. However, it is not entirely clear whether a comprehensive education and capacity building programme is part of the ECoC or the City Strategy.
- The long-term cultural, social, economic and urban development impacts of the ECoC are clearly identified and presented, although aspects of interculturalism and empowerment could be better emphasised.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan outlines a specific protocol with the identification of three circles of actors and actions (co-defining of modalities, data collection and analysis, supervision). The target groups that will be involved in the evaluation process are clearly defined together with specific data collection tools. On the other hand, it is not clear who exactly will conduct the evaluation and why the plan is annual.

Cultural and artistic content

- The overall artistic vision and its “*Périphéries*” concept are strong and clear. The playful elements of the word *Périphéries* (combination of two French words, the peripheries - *objects of a stigmatising discourse, territories that were once relegated*; and the enchantment - *of fairyland, a wonderful, poetic word, a magnificent spectacle*) also opens up interesting artistic possibilities. The panel finds that the concept has a strong sense of place with potentially high European relevance.
- The programme features three different phases: PULSE (what reveals us), SCRATCH (what shakes us) and FLOW (what binds us). Each phase has one flagship project and three programme lines, each of them having nine projects. In total, there are 27 projects and 3 flagship projects presented in the bid, which will be distributed through various Nugget sites across the entire ECoC area. The programme structure is clear, but many projects are described at a rather superficial and sketchy level, leaving much of the actual content under speculation. It is often not clear what visitors will experience and see, and which artforms will be used.
- The programming model is rather complex, with the aim of being participatory. In particular, High autonomous roles are given to different bodies (eight Colleges, a Programming Committee with 27 members, an Artistic programme coordinator, etc.). The panel was concerned about the coherence and artistic level of the programme that would ultimately materialise in 2028, as well as its realisation with such a dispersed decision-making model. The risk was also that it might end up as a major operation of disappointment management. Even though there will be an Artistic Director in charge of ensuring the programme’s overall coherence, there is a high risk that the outcome might not be in anybody’s hands and thus not a proper entity with high quality.

- Combining local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions is developed and appropriately connected to *Pulse*, *Scratch* and *Flow* phases.
- Local artists and cultural organisations have been involved in the conception of the candidacy and elaboration of the bid and its artistic programme through the Influence Councils, Artistic (and other) Colleges, Programming Committee etc.

European dimension

- The European dimension is well embedded in the bid, first through the multi-ethnic character of Plaine Commune, where more than 135 different nationalities live and more than 20% of its population is foreign nationality and “thus, it is a living, breathing example of diversity and intercultural dialogue”.
- Activities for highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European integration and current European themes are solidly developed for this stage, and based on different key objectives such as exploring European heritage; adapting to crises, conflicts and transformations; connecting peripheries across Europe and around the globe; mobility; urban and cultural ecology etc.
- A wide range of potential partners (organisations, networks etc.) from Europe and the world is foreseen.
- The strategy for attracting the interest of a broad European and international public is well developed and is based on strengthening cooperation with Parisian sites, participatory and sustainable tourism, large-scale events in the programme and heritage sites to discover.
- Cooperations with other ECoCs are developed and thoroughly presented with topics and project descriptions that match the concept of Saint-Denis.

Outreach

- The involvement of the local population and civil society in the preparation and implementation of the ECoC through eight Colleges, existing initiatives, volunteering platform and Assembly for the future(s) is respectable and participative.
- Marginalised and disadvantaged groups are identified, with opportunities for their participation.
- Strategies for young audience development are thought through. Methods and tools to be used include The Children’s Assembly (one of the eight Colleges), cooperation with schools and ECoC youth involvement protocol. For other target groups, the development of amateur art practices is considered, but the panel would have appreciated to see more how other audiences would be developed, especially those that are not used to consuming and/or creating art and culture regularly or at all.

Management

- The city's annual budget for culture is 4,8% and with the Plaine Commune's culture budget at nearly 19 million euros annually this appears adequate.
- The ECoC 2028's operating budget of 60 million euros is sound. A total of 49.2 million (82%) is planned to be covered by the public sector. The distribution of operating expenses is balanced, with 62% going to programme. Despite the fact that private sector revenue makes 18% of the total operating budget, the strategy for private sector involvement is convincing for the pre-selection stage.
- Various plans for infrastructure development representing an amount of 258 million euros are foreseen, but it is not entirely clear which of these projects are foreseen specifically for the ECoC.
- The non-profit association Périphéries 2028 as the delivery structure has already been established. The governance structure and the implementation approach are quite detailed at this stage, but also very challenging and based on complicated schemes and working patterns.
- There is a clear understanding of the strengths in the bid, but the weaknesses indicated in the contingency plan as well as how they could potentially be overcome should have been described in more detail, especially taking into account the impact of having to organise and host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2024.
- The marketing and communication strategy is well thought through and developed. Target audiences are identified and the strategy includes various methods like indoor and outdoor advertising, ambassadors, media (for the international medias special press relations agency will be engaged), website and social media, digital application etc.

Capacity to deliver

- The candidacy has strong and broad political support.
- The city has a developed cultural life, experience in hosting large-scale international events and has/will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are very good, as well as the absorption capacity in terms of visitors' accommodation.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Saint-Denis do not proceed to the final selection phase.

The panel finds that the bid has been constructed with a great deal of thought and consideration for inclusivity and participation, and it carries strong messages with both local and European resonance. However, at this stage, the programme lacks clarity, and

its potential is not effectively conveyed. Many projects are described in a basic way without a clear picture of what will actually be delivered before and during the ECoC year. The programming model appears complicated, and the pluralistic artistic curatorship, though it has its own value and relevance, could prove cumbersome. While recognising that this challenging model responds to a genuine strive for participation, the panel raises some concerns regarding its effectiveness. The bid in its foundation is overall solid with many intriguing elements. The panel recommends that the city of Saint-Denis builds on the good work accomplished to this point and continues its cultural journey.

General recommendations

The following recommendations apply to all four shortlisted candidates.

It is strongly advised that all shortlisted cities substantially develop their bids for the final selection in order to reach the required level of quality of a European Capital of Culture. There is a considerable step-change between pre-selection and selection bid books.

The panel expects significant progress in the final bid books to fully meet the **objectives and six criteria of the European Capital of Culture Action in the Decision** and to reflect the recommendations of the panel. Studying the panel's comments to all candidate cities in the assessments above may also be useful.

A study of the evaluations of recent ECoCs (since 2013) and monitoring reports of recently designated ECoCs may also prove valuable. These are available on the European Commission website.

The panel would also like to stress for the Ministry of Culture the urgency to indicate the State financing share for the ECoC 2028 as soon as possible, as this information will be crucial for the candidates to make accurate further planning.

General

In the panel's view, due to the global situation of the last few years, there is a need for a new approach to align culture and major yearlong events with this new world, notably new procedures and expectations. This refers to every level of operation, from artistic expression to administrative work. A more elaborated contingency plan with due alternatives should be an integral part of such long-term planning as the ECoC. This is a great challenge for us all, also for the bidding cities, but equally - an opportunity to reflect on new and sustainable culture models.

The bid book at final selection becomes, **de facto, a 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 at the end of the monitoring phase the panel makes a recommendation to the Commission regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize.

In the final selection bid book, candidates must cover all the questions in the final selection questionnaire included in Annex 1 of the call for applications. For the next and final stage

of the competition, the panel expects a considerably more developed section on the proposed artistic vision, the cultural and artistic 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 programme. 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.

The panel would also like to remind the candidates about the right formulation of the European Capital of Culture title, which is not Capital of Culture or other similar forms. It is important that the right form be used when communicating about the initiative in order to avoid confusion.

The panel would also like to request that all cities progressing to the second stage of the bidding process include the following in their bid books (in line with the final selection questionnaire):

- Clear commitment of all candidacy partners and commitments demonstrated in projects and budget lines.
- Clear project outlines, with named and committed local, national, EU and other international project partners.
- Strong European dimension throughout the bid.
- Clear and developed outreach models.
- Clear organisational structure including clear decision-making processes.
- Clear budget breakdowns with clarity between operational and capital spend.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

A formally approved city cultural strategy needs to be in place before submitting the final bid book. The panel will expect a tighter focus in the bid books of the final round: cities should indicate the priorities of the cultural strategy that are connected to the ECoC project, its target outcomes and how resources will be changed over the next few years. It is important to note that the cultural strategy should cover the action and include the plans for sustaining the cultural activities beyond the year of the title. The expected legacy of the ECoC should also be described.

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 objectives should be clearly put, as there is a tendency to perceive ECoC as a panacea for every city challenge. An important aspect that requires elaboration is the expected visible change in the urban landscape. The panel would expect a more focused explanation, which can link to the programme vision, themes, activities, and through monitoring and evaluation, to the outcomes in the subsequent legacy. There is considerable literature and research available for cities to see the range of cultural, urban development and social benefits of an ECoC.

The evaluation sections of the bid books should be given more attention in the second phase (especially research in order to establish baseline data) and the panel expects to receive ECoC indicators of success. The monitoring and evaluation should not be overwhelmed with (just) statistics and data gathering, though. The final bid book should focus on the priority objectives for the ECoC (rather than those for the entire cultural strategy). One of the priority areas should refer to how the ECoC will meet the various elements of the European dimension criterion.

Capacity building should be based on a wide understanding of specific capacity building needs of all kinds of cultural players and hospitality industry and services. The cultural and creative sectors (CCS) should be understood as a transversal topic of the cultural and artistic programme and must be linked to a related mapping and needs analysis of the sector. Capacity building should therefore also encompass the CCS.

Cultural and artistic content

The focus of the final selection is the operating programme between 2023, when the ECoC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECoC year of 2028. The panel recommends the four cities to have an open minded and daring artistic approach and not be afraid of new, experimental ideas. Deeper considerations on the visions presented in the bids could offer more clarity overall, including unique elements that tie the concept specifically to the city in question (instead of being a generic one that could take place in any European city). Consistency between the selected vision and all other elements of the bid must be ensured. Innovation and originality is required not only in theory but also – even more importantly – in practice. The panel will expect to see more details on the programme, its projects and partners. Indeed, the cities should set out more clearly not only their artistic vision, but also the programme and projects; 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 art forms 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 the programmes. Furthermore, more attention should be given to the sustainability of the projects – including cultural, ecological, social and economic wise – so as to ensure an expected substantial legacy of the ECoC.

European dimension

The panel recommends that all four cities revisit this criterion with great care. Although with a promising approach to this criterion, the proposals failed to engage fully with the challenges. That a city aims to 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 of the story.

Developing European cooperation requires strategic approaches and actual partnership with artists as well as cultural organisations and institutions throughout Europe. It cannot be limited to relations with other, former and future ECoCs, existing European cultural networks or twin cities.

The European dimension has a two-way direction. It is of course to present to the rest of Europe the city's contribution to European cultural diversity. However, 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 important to clearly demonstrate how the European dimension is translated into concrete projects in the cultural and artistic programme. It is this focus on other cultures that 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.

One of the elements of the European dimension criterion for the ECoC title is the ability to attract visitors from the rest of Europe and beyond. The 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 attractive programme ideas in the final selection's bid for ECoC 2028. The panel advises to thoroughly consider building a strategic communication plan for the ECoC project as well as to make a connection between the cultural and artistic programme and an international marketing vision.

Outreach

The audience development strategy for the ECoC 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 bids should approach audience development from a long-term and strategic perspective, using both online and offline measures.

A special focus should be dedicated to those audiences that are more difficult to reach but crucial for a new "cultural climate" in an ECoC city (e.g. minorities, the elderly, disabled, LGBTIQ+, people outside of city centres or temporarily in the city etc.).

The panel would expect to learn how the audience development policies of the main cultural organisations including independent operators and NGOs relate to the ECoC programme.

Management

New times of uncertainty require new approaches in management, too. Special attention needs to be dedicated to the risk assessment in the final bid book. This section should

include a thorough analysis of the impacts expected for the preparation and implementation phase of the ECoC, related to the current and possible global challenges.

The panel expects the four shortlisted cities, which all plan in their pre-selection bid books a considerable level of capital expenditure, to carefully investigate whether these investments are actually feasible.

As far as the management models are concerned, the panel recommends learning from other ECoCs' experiences, while not necessarily copying ready-made concepts.

The delivery team plays a key role in all ECoCs. The cities should address in a clear and well-informed way the best model to guarantee the quality and independence of the artistic management of the project.

The recruitment processes and planned staffing arrangements from 2023 to 2028 should be outlined including secondments, interns and volunteers.

The marketing of an ECoC should go beyond standard information dissemination tactics to include an attractive narrative of European importance and relevance coherent with the artistic vision. It is important to remember that the marketing of an ECoC is not only about city branding but mostly about a European message that the city is wishing to share with the rest of Europe and requires a thorough communication strategy.

Capacity to deliver

Candidates should re-confirm that their bid book, including the overall vision and concept and the financial commitments, have the formal approval of the mayor, the city (and department/region if appropriate) councils and all political parties. The panel also recommends that all candidates have common understanding and expectations regarding the financial contribution from the national government.

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 a programme of the depth and range of an ECoC. Capacity building should not be confused with the implementation of the cultural strategy, but it should be in accordance with local and regional development plans. The cities should also plan strong capacity building programmes, as ECoC's scope goes beyond current local capacities. If projects are planned to be funded from competitive EU programmes (e.g. Creative Europe), this should be indicated.

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 those infrastructural projects that directly impact the ECoC programme activities (e.g. a new cultural centre in a restored building that 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.

The final bid books should clearly indicate how those potential capital projects would 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).

Signed

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Jelle Burggraaff
Else Christensen-Redžepović
Jean de Loisy
Goda Giedraityte (Rapporteur)
Suvi Innilä (Rapporteur)
Anne Karjalainen
Hrvoje Laurenta (Rapporteur)
Marilyn Gaughan Reddan
Anne Tallineau (Vice-chair)
Rossella Tarantino (Chair)

Paris

March 2023

