



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2025 in Germany

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

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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 2025 in Germany. The competition is a European Union initiative created in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” had previously been awarded to three cities in Germany: Berlin in 1988, Weimar in 1999 and Essen for the Ruhr in 2010.

On behalf of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz), the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States (Kulturstiftung der Länder) acts as the managing authority (the “managing authority”) of the competition, which is governed by Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 (the “Decision”)¹ and by the “Rules of procedure – Competition for the European Capital of Culture 2025 in Germany” – (the “rules”) adopted by the managing authority and published on its website².

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process, in line with Article 2 of the Rules. Ten members were appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions). The two German members of the panel were appointed by the Länder and the Federal Government of Germany, respectively.

The competition takes place in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. The managing authority issued a call for applications on September 24th, 2018. Eight applications were submitted by the closing date of September 30th, 2019 by:

Chemnitz, Dresden, Gera, Hannover, Hildesheim, Magdeburg, Nürnberg, Zittau.

Panel meeting

The panel met in Berlin on 10-12 December 2019. The panel elected Sylvia Amann as its chair and Alin Nica as its vice-chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality.

At the pre-selection hearings on 10-11 of December, each candidate city, in alphabetical order, presented its case (in 30 minutes) and answered questions from the panel (in 45 minutes).

At a press conference on 12 December 2019, the chair of the panel announced the panel’s recommendation that the Chair of the Conference of the Ministers of Culture (Kulturministerkonferenz) invites the following cities to submit revised bids for the final selection (in alphabetical order):

Chemnitz, Hannover, Hildesheim, Magdeburg, Nürnberg.

¹ See at:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG and <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32017D1545>

² <https://www.kulturstiftung.de/das-nationale-auswahlverfahren/>

Next steps

The managing authority 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 should take into account the assessments and recommendations of the panel in this report.

The deadline for submission of revised applications is **31 July 2020**.

The final selection meeting will be held in Berlin on 21-23 September 2020.

Four members of the panel will pay a one-day visit to the shortlisted cities shortly before the final selection meeting, in order to obtain more background information on the respective bids. Representatives of the European Commission and the managing authority 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 in their overall social-economic development. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECoC competition. The panel encourages all cities, not just those short-listed, to continue with the development and implementation of their respective cultural strategies.

The panel thanks all eight bidding candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids; the European Commission for its advice and the managing authority for its excellent administration.

Assessments of the candidates

In their assessment of the candidates, the panel noted the general and specific objectives in Article 2 of the Decision and the requirement for the application to be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension created specifically for the title (Article 4).

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

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

The panel noted that not 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 2020 on is the requirement that cities have a formal and explicit cultural strategy. This is to ensure that the ECoC is grounded in a medium-term transformation of the city and its cultural life rather than in a one-off festival.

In the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their discussions during the pre-selection meeting. In the case of the five shortlisted cities, specific recommendations are made, in order to assist them in the preparation of their final bid books. As a matter of fact, there are also common recommendations that apply to all five shortlisted cities.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the proposed programme set out in the bid book and on the cities' presentation sessions during the pre-selection meetings. 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 step changes to win the ECoC title in the following eight months until the final selection meeting.

Chemnitz

The bid of Chemnitz was under the motto **"Aufbrüche. Opening Minds. Creating spaces"**. Based on its history, made of a series of major changes, the city wants now to learn jointly with Europe from fractures and contradictions of the past and evolve towards unity in plurality and a new future-focused identity.

The City Council adopted in January 2019 its new cultural strategy for 2018-2030 under the title "Making Space for Culture". This strategy resulted from a solid participatory approach involving diverse stakeholders from the cultural, academic, business and political communities. The bid integrates 24 surrounding municipalities. This regional cooperation will lead to the drawing up of a strategy for the entire region, which the panel sees as an asset. However, this wider process was not sufficiently clear at the time of pre-selection, notably in terms of objectives and timetable. Moreover, the approach to regional cooperation could go beyond the mere programme and translate better into the governance model, in order to ensure full participation as well as legacy. In general, the cultural development plans spanning the Chemnitz Strategy 2040 are solid and well anchored onto the urban development vision for the city and region. According to the panel, the goal to invest in public spaces and the priority given to the cultural and creative industries are relevant. There are also good prospects for sectoral capacity building, most notably regarding international mobility. The capacity-building programme would, however, benefit from wider mission and targets, including plans to train the city administration staff in key areas, such as the approach to working with public space. Moreover, the ECoC legacy strategy was not sufficiently developed yet. The evaluation plans include a convincing participatory approach for the definition of indicators, though not detailing expected social impacts so far. Outcomes and results have not been sufficiently formulated at this stage either.

Chemnitz intends to re-invent itself as an urban laboratory for European revival. It intends to link its various actors and network them with one another as well as with Europe. The ambition to change the city image through a European approach is quite relevant, though not yet transcribed into a clear narrative with corresponding topics and related partners. The bid does not tackle the significance and consequences of the Summer 2018 protests

from a European perspective. It fails to include a plan to debate with and learn from others in this regard, including international artists and other European cities. Additionally, the panel would like to stress that the use of humour in connection with former totalitarian regimes and related philosophers is a challenge that needs to be handled with all due care. As a good starting point to develop a solid European dimension, there are already links with peer cities and other ECoC host cities, notably in terms of knowledge transfer exchanges. There are also strong and meaningful connections with Manchester and the UK. However, cross-border cooperation, such as with neighbouring Czech Republic and Poland, has not been explored sufficiently. Furthermore, the programme does not include convincing highlights to attract European and international visitors and this would need to be boosted for final selection.

The cultural and artistic programme rests on three pillars: Work, Spaces and Tracks. It interprets art as a process, reflected in the slogan "Moving the City". It is divided into three main concepts: Wind of Change, Urban Colours and City in Flow. The programme caters well to the existing dynamics of both the cultural institutions and the independent scene. Yet, the artistic vision is not standing out sufficiently to produce an outstanding programme with international attractiveness. In particular, there is no artistic vision to discuss and re-interpret the Summer 2018 events. The 13 projects described cover a variety of themes, which is a positive element. However, the programme does not yet explore fully the potential combination of local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new innovative expressions. As a result, more work is needed to provide a coherent artistic vision in connection with the proposed projects.

From the very start, the bid has benefitted from a strong political backing with a nearly unanimous vote within the city council in January 2017. The bid also enjoys support and involvement of the region and Saxony State levels. The existing cultural infrastructure is quite good. The foreseen capital investments, which include notably a new cultural quarter as well as improvements in the riverbanks, will contribute to urban development. The intention to further promote sustainable solutions for mobility in the region is also an asset.

The level of engagement in the development of the strategy and the bid evidences a convincing bottom up approach. Project ideas were discussed with a large array of citizens, notably in the context of micro-projects. Initiatives such as the "The Friends of Chemnitz 2025" are also relevant. The candidate has involved the population and civil society through various interesting initiatives and plans to involve them during the title year through monthly cultural meetings as well as cultural ambassadors and micro-projects. It seems that outreach work enjoys a long-standing tradition in the city, with corresponding investment in improved accessibility to city museums for children and youth. The bid proposes special measures towards schools, disabled people and immigrants. The strategy to involve schools and the programme's link to education need, however, further enhancement.

As Chemnitz already has an active audience development process in place, the panel would like to see more clearly in the final bid book what will change thanks to the ECoC project and what is the strategy to reach the new objectives planned in terms of outreach and audience development.

The proposed operating budget of € 60,234,00 is a solid basis. However, the contribution expected from the Federal Government (56% of the public sector's income) is too high. The contributions from the different stakeholders should be more balanced. More attention should also be paid to the financial commitments post-2025, in order to ensure good legacy. The contingency planning needs refinement. There is no risk assessment. It appears from the bid book that the City does not intend to increase the part of its overall budget dedicated to culture in the period after 2025, keeping it at around 6.5%. The

organisational chart needs clarification, notably at the leadership level, to ensure strong artistic vision and direction, the team's artistic independence as well as clarity and efficiency in decision-making. The recruitment and staffing plans are missing. Finally, the "Aufbrüche" slogan is generic and does not offer a clear message for marketing purposes - notably for international audiences - and should thus be re-considered.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Chemnitz proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel found that the bid was based on a strong bottom-up process integrating relevant cultural players and infrastructures. The cultural strategies of the city and the region foresee long-term investments interlinked with coherent urban development plans. However, the cultural and artistic vision and programme need to be developed further so as to address more concretely and adequately the city's challenges - including the Summer 2018 events - with a clear European narrative and international partners. The capacity-building programme should empower the administration staff (including security forces), the cultural sector and citizens in order to help them seize the ECoC project to deal with these challenges. Marketing and communication plans should translate these efforts and allow for wider visibility and dialogue. Moreover, a legacy strategy needs to be thought through.

Dresden

Dresden presented its bid under the theme of "**Neue Heimat**". The city has a well-developed cultural scene but acknowledges a need for innovation and a shift from a traditional cultural approach into a more transdisciplinary and decentralised cultural landscape.

A first cultural development document was produced in 2008 and an updated plan was drafted, after consulting citizens and specialists. The document was still in the making at the time of pre-selection and was planned to be presented to the city council. The plan includes measures to further support the development of the cultural sector in Dresden. It intends to adhere to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which is a positive element. The city is also willing to develop an alternative image as a tourist destination. However, those plans are not yet concrete. The programme for the ECoC year in 2025 is expected to add cultural value to the entire region, as an urban-rural cooperation can further help to mitigate asymmetric developments between the city and its surrounding areas. The level of regional involvement in those plans is unclear, though. It is therefore difficult to see in what way and to what extent the ECoC project would add value to the cultural development of Dresden and its region. The application hardly envisages capacity building measures to ensure the efficient delivery of a project of the size and scale of the ECoC. The evaluation prospects are technically promising. However, it is not clear what Dresden will evaluate, as indicators referring to two focal points of Dresden's X-culture (a key element of its bid) are not clearly formulated.

Dresden believes that focusing on its urban society will allow for developing exemplary and scalable future-oriented possibilities for a free and peaceful European coexistence, Europe as Heimat. Yet a plan to establish a prototypical cultural landscape of X-culture in Dresden was not convincingly presented. Even though contacts with other European Capitals of Culture have been established and some other interesting partners from afar are mentioned, the panel considers that the European dimension is underdeveloped. The international partners and projects mentioned, e.g. regarding the opening event, are

interesting. However, the application does not explain how they are rooted in the “heimat” concept and how they connect to the diverse cultural communities living in the city. Finally, according to the panel, the connections between local and European issues are not sufficiently articulated, even for the pre-selection phase.

The cultural and artistic programme consists of four strands: Heimat – Common Ground (how different generations of Dresden’s people understand their Heimat – and how they want to redesign it), East and West (European integration with St. Petersburg and Coventry in the core of the programme), Power of Strangeness (burgeoning multiculturalism within the city and a look at Dresden’s colonial past) and Neue Heimat X-Culture (depicting current transformations in European society). The projects dedicated to the Elbe river, water and sustainability are considered highly relevant and worth being pursued. Participation is identified as a core artistic concept, but it is not clear if - and how - the curated and non-curated parts of the programme will be linked together and transformed into a coherent and attractive proposition of European relevance and interest. A coherent artistic vision is also missing. Additionally, the team could not explain clearly how the topic of democracy (that the panel found very important) would be addressed from a cultural and artistic content point of view. The panel was surprised that the city was not building on, or re-examining, its significant and world-known tangible and intangible heritage as part of its ECoC project. Regardless of the technical and legal fact that such heritage is prominently not the City’s, but the State’s property, it is a significant missed opportunity to develop a project of the magnitude of an ECoC without including all the city’s (and the region’s) major cultural assets. Finally, the panel also misses reflection upon or reference to the city’s loss of the UNESCO World Heritage title.

The application was unanimously approved by the city council on 4 July 2019. The city has an excellent infrastructure to host big cultural events. Yet the capital investment plans (especially as far as the establishment of so-called “third places” is concerned) are not sufficiently clear. The Robotron canteen is an interesting investment and is worth being further developed.

The panel noticed good initial conditions in terms of outreach as the city already features a large number of accessible barrier-free cultural spaces and venues. The bid book includes good additional ideas, for example, the establishment of a youth curatorium and a showroom for projects presentation. However, the distinction between plans related to the general cultural development of the city and the ones that are ECoC-specific is hardly visible in the bid book.

The operational budget amounts to € 70,600,000, which provides for a solid financial base for the ECoC preparation and implementation. The split between the suggested contributions from the various levels of territorial governance seems quite realistic. The ECoC organisation – as presented in the bid book – would be under the exclusive responsibility of the city council, which may suggest a top-down approach to the whole process. The management and funding of the non-curated part of the programme was not convincingly presented as it failed to include mechanisms ensuring artistic quality and relevance for the overall ECoC project. The marketing plans, even if supported by other institutions’ budgets, are too modest to implement the city’s aim to develop an alternative image as a cultural destination. The bid failed to address convincingly the challenge - recognised by the bidding team - to ensure the visibility of the ECoC in the already very active artistic life of Dresden.

Conclusion

The panel does not recommend that the bid of Dresden proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel recognised the city's capacity to create and implement significant artistic programmes. However, it considered overall that the bid was under-developed. The local and European dimensions were not well balanced, as - according to the panel - features of local cultural development prevailed. The need for the ECoC title and its legacy was not clearly articulated. The panel would like to encourage Dresden to capitalise on the ECoC preparations and continue to invest in non-institutional culture as an important element of the city's territorial and social development. The panel hopes that the endeavours to finalise and then implement a comprehensive cultural strategy will continue. The process would benefit from involving in a sustainable manner a wider range of stakeholders and the population of the whole territory as well as from broadening the perspective through European expertise and an enriching international cooperation.

Gera

"Catching the Updraft" is the bid title of Gera. After over 100 years of history as an "industrial and workers' city" that lived through various political conditions and burdens, the city intends to open up a new chapter, in which new stories will be brought together. It intends to use the ECoC project to make these stories stronger and give them wings.

A Cultural Networking Plan 2030 has been produced with the participation of the cultural operators of the city and surrounding towns, which is a positive development. The neighbouring area of East Thuringia, including its various towns and districts, has been taken on board through the establishment of an informal cultural consortium named "Regionet". The bid book includes a good and detailed description of the city's historic background and profile. However, the way the cultural strategy was developed and approved was not clarified. Moreover, there is no clear need analysis regarding the current state of affairs and future perspectives. In this respect, no long-term vision, including a defined set of goals (notably in terms of ECoC legacy) was duly developed. With regards to evaluation and monitoring, despite some relevant goals and partners, the bid lacks a methodology to collect and analyse data, notably ensuring the availability of baseline studies.

The bid refers to relevant European topics such as migration, integration and the interesting idea of a new humanism. It reveals many stories worth telling, which may constitute a good basis for a European dimension, such as the Wismut art collection and the sarcophagus of Henry Posthumous Reuss. It also considers that the city provides a good stand for internationalism with already existing diverse international links, suggesting further international and interdisciplinary exchanges via grants and residencies as well as some multilingual promotion measures. There is also an intention to connect to Slovenian ECoC candidates, as well as to Pilsen in the Czech Republic and Timisoara in Romania. Yet the application remains mostly inward looking, as the European narrative does not come out clearly. The referred valuable topics and links did not entail a solid concept and vision for an extended European dialogue.

The programme is based on four central perspectives: Following Wind, EastWind, Westwind and Updraft. It will rightly concentrate on the city centre, districts and diverse locations in the region - the monthly Cultural Zones. The central events area will be the "Culture Mile" aiming at revitalising the city centre and networking among cultural institutions and the independent scene. The "Cultural Mile" project proposes many interesting venues and highlights. Yet it lacks a clear programme-conducting line. It also misses a solid capacity building to ensure the expected networking and empowerment of the whole cultural scene. The potential resulting from the prestige of Otto Dix, the Wismut company story and art collection - to be assembled in a new venue called "the Depot" -, as well as the region's

natural heritage are relevant elements to constitute a strong artistic and cultural offer. However, they were not combined into a consistent top-level programme line capable of attracting international visitors.

The valuable regional consortium gathered around the bid - the "Regionet" - is well translated onto good political and financial support. The infrastructure planning features a valid list of cultural venues renovation works, yet the future Depot creation and sustainability was not considered. The mobility and accommodation infrastructure as well as the necessary improvements were not convincingly presented.

The bid results from a fair bottom-up initiative. In terms of engagement, several tools and dynamics have been put forward, notably regular meetings with citizens, information events, artistic projects and workshops, as well as an online campaign aimed at getting school kids and students on board. There is also a relevant intention to promote joint work between educational establishments and the local cultural scene. The planned youth advisory board to be established for programme development is also an asset in view of the envisaged model of a "city of youth culture". However, the audience development strategy is still at the level of aspirations and the tools used are focused on past and heritage, missing a clear digital strategy as a means to engage the younger generation.

The proposed operational budget amounts to € 38,000,000, which is reasonable. However, the budget is unbalanced between the diverse stakeholders. In particular, the city contribution only amounts up to 13% of the whole budget, which does not ensure its commitment. The application also lacks a serious private fundraising strategy while 8% of the budget is planned to come from this source. With regards to organisation, the candidate did not present an articulated governance structure, just some committees and boards without clear relationship or hierarchy. The AUFWIND slogan strategy is promising, but still too generic, despite good intentions to integrate grassroots in marketing plans.

Conclusion

The panel does not recommend that the bid of Gera proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel felt that the regional networking and cohesion put forward for this bid were a very important basis for a solid cultural development. Gera's many stories, spanning Otto Dix and the Wismut art collection, but also its unique natural heritage, constitute a great potential that may put the region onto the cultural map of Europe. However, at this point, the application does not yet feature a high profile artistic and cultural programme with a strong and clear European narrative. The ECoC role and legacy for the city were not convincingly devised. Similarly, the financial and organisational settings lack a clear structure and adequacy for the implementation of such a project. The panel was not convinced about the infrastructure and the intended cooperation with surrounding accommodation offer, needed for a large-scale project such as the ECoC.

Hannover

The leitmotif of the Hannover 2025 bid is "**Agora of Europe - here, now, everyone for Europe!**". Hannover sees itself as a city of balance, in harmony with itself, the contrary of a city of extremes.

The cooperation with the Hannover Region (21 towns and municipalities) is already well developed and the region considers itself a model (the only example in Germany) of how to design a shared living space bringing together a city and its surrounding local councils. However, new concepts are needed to promote collaboration between the existing cultural institutions of the city, the State of Lower Saxony, the Hannover region and the independent cultural scene.

The city is currently working on a long-term cultural development plan, based on a detailed analysis of its own strengths and weaknesses. This is a joint process with the ECoC preparations to interlink both documents, which is the right approach according to the panel. Both structural and social developments take into consideration aspects of sustainability, digitisation, audience building and internationalisation. However, the strategy still needs to be finalised and adopted by the relevant public authorities. Evaluation is professionally planned with credible impacts listed. The panel expects to hear more about "Upgrade Hannover" - a capacity-building programme that is currently developed in consultation with relevant sectors.

In general, the idea of Europe as a peace project as well as the mission of encouraging European cities to strengthen Europe are a promising starting point for the development of a solid European dimension. But, at this stage, the interesting idea of using local reference points to trigger off through artistic interventions a wider European debate is still too vague. The proposal for multilingual communication and information is a very valuable asset in terms of European dimension. However, according to the panel, the cultural diversity that is present in the city has not been clearly reflected into the cultural and artistic programme. The artistic creativity expressed in the form and drafting style of the bid book should, in the second stage of the competition, focus on developing a clear and coherent artistic concept with a corresponding appealing European narrative.

The Agora concept is to be experienced via the four pillars of the programme: 1/ Agora of Europe (a newly built 'village' in the centre of the city); 2/ Europe on Stage (a number of both existing and new temporary local Agoras scattered across the city and the region); 3/ Europe on Line (a digital communication platform based on European values of freedom and community spirit); 4/ Europe at Home (reviving Hannover's historic tradition of private salons). The programme has a clear structure with summer 2024 pre-opening and four "circles", each with a different thematic focus (not yet developed) and reflection space between them. But, in the panel's view, the concept of Agora, although straightforward and thus easy to understand, is too open and therefore not clearly leading to a coherent cultural and artistic programme, a powerful narrative and clear aims or outcomes. In the current stage, the programme lacks real substance, as the bigger projects are just ideas, not yet well thought through. For example, the programme strand under the title "Green city" address important urban and cultural topics, but lack concrete information on feasibility.

The majority of the political parties of the local council and the president of the region support Hannover's bid for ECoC 2025. Due to frequent changes in the local government, the support of local, regional and Lower Saxony authorities should be firmly confirmed in the second round. The city possesses an excellent infrastructure to host the ECoC.

The bid book has a strong focus on facilitating engagement of citizens in the ECoC's preparation and implementation, which is a positive element. Good examples include the Aufnahmestand network, with almost all major players in the independent cultural scene involved, the revitalisation of neighbourhood culture hubs and the promotion of artistic ways of involving citizens. The audience development ideas - while interesting - are however still too basic.

The suggested budget is sound with operating expenditure planned at € 80m. The contribution of the State of Lower Saxony (18m) is still pending, but the strategy to attract private funds is promising and has already started to bring results. The plan to assign just 10% of the overall operating budget for wages seems low. Capital investment is not planned as the existing infrastructure is solid, but new needs may emerge from the cultural development process of early 2020. The marketing ideas are promising, but it is not clear what messages ECoC wants to convey in terms of the European dimension.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Hannover proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel felt that Hannover presented a strong team and that the bid had a huge potential offering a solid base for an interesting ECoC and the possibility to achieve significant impacts at European level. The presentation and the bid book itself show a capacity to present important and relevant topics in an interesting and artistically inspiring way. Yet substantial work is needed on the ECoC programme to propose a clear and coherent artistic vision with an exciting, engaging and unique narrative that may be appealing for local, national and European audiences. The European dimension needs to be clarified and deepened. The potential of the academic and creative industries is not sufficiently visible in the proposed programme, and capacity-building activities should include the various sectors of the city to be engaged in the ECoC delivery. Moreover, the team needs to further develop the project, having in mind the need for a stronger and recognisable long-term legacy.

Hildesheim

Under the motto **“re[’ru:]ting Hildesheim: Beets, Roses and the Meaning of Life”**, Hildesheim intends via the ECoC to reboot to a more proactive mind-set mode that will take them on a journey looking for the hidden treasures in the city, the countryside, Europe and the world.

The city’s cultural strategy 2030 was approved in June 2019 and features relevant visions and goals. It was developed collectively with diverse stakeholders. The strategy was well informed by the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The ECoC role is well embedded in the cultural strategy. The regional involvement process is convincing, with a good commitment of the district regarding the cultural development strategy that is now in preparation for 2020. The strategy rightly combines urban design, community building, cultural activity and entrepreneurship. It builds on the local networks and stakeholders. In this respect, the creative industries strategy intends to strengthen the existing dynamics, notably to extend them to the rural areas. The capacity-building proposal is substantial, including a large-scale learning process in which a Cultural Hub will pool the activities and provide space for artists and young creative entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the ECoC legacy for the city and region still needs clearer strategy and outcomes. Moreover, the relationship with neighbouring Hannover, notably how to benefit from the potential - but also challenges - of being close to such a cultural metropolis, was not addressed. Finally, the evaluation and monitoring prospects are sound at this stage, rightly involving the good expertise existing in the local university in the field of cultural policy and management.

The bid proposes relevant European discussions, notably on peace, co-existence, integration and diversity. It also foresees intercultural and interreligious dialogue. There is a very good range of European partners, taking advantage of the many existing twin cities partnerships in the region as well as linking to several ECoCs, in particular those from Germany. The promotion of incoming and outgoing mobility, the participation of some international artists and partners, such as those from Nigeria and North Africa, as well as good plans to collaborate with European networks are assets. Yet, the European dimension requires further exploration, in order to become a clear narrative and dialogue. It lacks the integration of an artistic vision into the European topics. The proposal regarding the creation of a "boring cities network", risks highlighting (instead of changing) perceptions of the city at home and abroad. Therefore, the role and objectives of such a project should be carefully weighted. Even though the option for positioning the city and region as a high quality artistic and cultural experience destination is relevant, the programme highlights supposed to attract European and international audiences need to be more daring, as they do not stand out now.

The proposed re-rooting process stands on three programme strands: Beets & Roses, the Apparent & the Unseen, and the Meaning of Life. The programme rationale is interesting. It intends to create novel cultural forms and places of meeting and interaction. It also aims to provide experimental and discursive opportunities for a wide participation in a complex cultural exchange. The link to agri(culture) and its associated message is relevant and well reflected within the strategy. There is a good involvement of the local cultural independent scene. However, despite references in the programme, the city and region are not exploring their own potential at the heritage level, most notably its UNESCO World Heritage Site historic churches and the collections of the Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum, as well as the Bauhaus heritage. These contents and stakeholders are relevant international highlights and need to be explored much further. Moreover, the relevant UNESCO documents, especially the site's management plan, need to be taken into account. The related option to debate religion and spirituality is interesting but should be tackled in a broad and multi-perspective sense through a daring artistic vision and proposal.

The city and district of Hildesheim together with all 17 district municipalities voted in favour of supporting the bid. However, despite this cultural coalition, there is no political consensus from all parties towards the bid. A balanced support from all political parties should be aimed at in view of a stronger capacity to deliver. The capital investments are relevant, spanning cultural, tourism and urban development and mobility infrastructure - with priority on sustainable transport. Accessibility and accommodation facilities are convincing, including unusual offers, such as sleeping in gardens and shops.

The bid results from a clear civic approach demonstrated by the Circle of Friends 2025 initiative. The audience development strategy is very well conceived, based on solid needs research. There are good prospects regarding the tutoring of cultural institutions by experts as well as the initiative to empower artists from vulnerable or marginalised groups. Several interesting actions and means such as the VolunBeds, VolunTable and VolunCamps, the specific budget for youth projects, to be curated and implemented by youngsters, provide various opportunities for diverse citizens to engage. The capacity-building programme for the population, including the free English classes' proposal, is also an asset. The intercultural and interreligious plans are relevant. Yet, the city's cultural diversity still needs to be further translated onto the programme and the governance of the ECoC.

The proposed operating budget amounts to € 54,200,000, which is a solid basis. However, the financial situation is fragile, due to the debt situation the city is facing, which has actually frozen the cultural budget for the last few years. As the city contribution is relatively low - € 5,000,000 - corresponding to only 10.82% of the total public income planned to cover operating costs - there is a high budgetary risk, if other levels of

governance do not fulfil on time their financial commitments in time. On the other hand, it is reassuring that the city, the district, and the municipalities have guaranteed their financial contribution in binding decisions. It is then crucial that there is a good mitigation of the financial risk, while the contingency planning was actually not proposing solutions at this level. Regarding the governance, and despite the valuable proposal for the creation of a Citizens Board, among other features, the organisational chart remains unclear and underdeveloped. The staffing and recruitments plans are also missing. With regards to marketing, the approach is standard - while learning from other ECoCs and the language concerns are assets. The bid needs a more liveable and attractive marketing and communication narrative.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Hildesheim proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel was convinced by the cultural strategy spanning relevant regional involvement and integrating a coordinated urban development vision, while the ECoC role is clearly expressed. The associated strong capacity building programme including the sector professionals and institutions, but also the citizens, as well as the creative industries strategies are also important assets. The engagement and audience development procedures are sound. The re-rooting process for the region proposed by the programme contains promising concepts and reflections. Yet the European narrative and the artistic vision need to stand out more clearly and daringly, while building up more steadily on the rich local heritage that should not be ignored. The political consensus and financial support are at the moment weaknesses of the bid that require further effort, notably at the contingency planning level to mitigate the resulting risk. The governance and organisational structures require more thorough reflection and planning. The suggested plan "to make Hildesheim a role model cultural region" is not well translated into the suggested activities and programme of the ECoC.

Magdeburg

Magdeburg presented its bid under the title "**Out of the Void**". The city is perceived as a solid but unexcited grey city, lacking public spaces, and as the unknown capital of Germany's most deprived federal state. The ECoC is expected to get the city out of this void and transform it into a liveable, vibrant international city. The city of Magdeburg applies by itself, but includes the surrounding area, recognising that the city cannot dissociate from its surrounding countryside.

A new cultural strategy is being developed in tandem with the ECoC application on the basis of the existing cultural strategy (2010–2020). The new strategy adds to the existing strategy one focus on, and branding as, Performing Magdeburg as well as issues related to the development of the creative industries. Moreover, a series of working groups resulted in an urban development Master Plan, setting out the spatial framework for the city centre. Yet despite good intentions, the regional involvement in the bid, including nearby towns such as Halle, is not clear in terms of programme and governance. Evaluation planning is already quite well developed, with cultural, social, economic and urban development impacts well listed. Identified problems, such as a weak cultural profile, a small and struggling independent scene, brain drain towards close-by Berlin, and cultural institutions facing a paradigm change, indicate the need for a much stronger capacity-building programme that goes well beyond the Opening Access platform and MD Youth Lab proposals.

In the panel's view, the will to expand and enlarge international connections and exchange is clearly a plus and a good element for developing the bid's European dimension. However, the panel considers that the European dimension is not sufficiently elaborated within the city strategy and cultural and artistic programme for 2025. The European themes to be addressed as part of the ECoC project are not clearly presented in the bid. This is all the more surprising because the legacy of the Magdeburg City Rights provide the city with an immense asset. It offers a vast ground and reference point to discuss relevant EU Issues such as the making of the modern city, the use of urban space, spatial planning, or citizenship and the role of people in the city shaping. The bid's concept and strategy to attract European and international audiences are not very convincing. The prospects in terms of cooperation with former and future ECoCs are very good, but they are just a starting point.

Three programme strands are planned: 1/ Force of Attraction (projects addressing the social and mental voids); 2/ Nature of Space (addressing the urban voids and nature); 3/ New Frequencies (addressing the artistic voids). The cultural and artistic programme discusses themes connected to the Elbe River, such as water biodiversity and food production. In general, music, sport and cultural heritage will also be in focus. The artistic vision is, however, not sufficiently developed yet and the programme lacks clarity, depth and a clear European dimension. The ambition of creating a vibrant and international city life has not yet been translated into exciting artistic plans and projects, building in particular on existing talents. The potential already available in the city's creative industries community, most notably in the music field, but also with regard to science and technology, seems not yet used. Moreover, the panel had doubts about the "out of the void" concept, as Magdeburg has the tendency to underline its shortcomings and difficulties very much. More optimistic and future-oriented elements containing for example humour (already noticeable in the "cool" style of the photographs included in the bid book) could counterbalance pessimism and the culture of blame. The panel felt that the general vision of the Magdeburg team was based solely on a German, as opposed to a really European perspective. The ECoC project should not only be about the needs of the hosting city, but also about European ideas, European citizens and European artists; and this should be clearly translated into the ECoC programme.

The bid is supported by all local political parties and the city has been clearly committed to the ECoC project since 2011. A working group was set up with representatives of different departments of the city administration, various ministries and the Magdeburg 2025 team to discuss ECoC issues on a regular basis. This further illustrates a solid commitment.

The focus on participation is clearly visible in the preparatory phase of the bid book, as there were numerous consultations and surveys. Some of them are already leading to positive results, such as the opening of KUBUS 2025 for public activities. It is however not clear if other sectors for example universities were also included. Audience development was rightly planned in the cultural strategies and evaluation plans. However, there are some inconsistencies in this regard. An involvement and profile of the local artistic and cultural institutions and NGOs in the preparation of the concept and the ECoC programme was not clear for the panel.

The proposed budget is € 66,250,000, indicating a good financial situation. The private sponsorship looks promising, as some companies have already provided financial commitments. The panel encourages a greater use of EU funding opportunities such as Creative Europe for example. Significant capital investment, in this case coming mostly from EU regional funds, has already been voted. The management structure is satisfactory, but the role of the cultural sector in the Supervisory board should be secured. The

communication strategy is not sufficiently developed, as the city needs to build, or rebuild, its image.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Magdeburg proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel felt that the bid had the makings of a promising cultural offer. The panel did not yet see, however, enough content in the outline programme or its artistic vision to make an impact at the European level. The panel would like to underline that the medieval Magdeburg Rights relate to civic rights and the concept of a liveable city, which are still today quite topical issues at European level. It regrets that this aspect was underplayed in the bid book. The link between the city's past (heritage and immense influence of the Magdeburgian Rights on Europe) and today's development ambitions could be strengthened. It is expected that in the second phase Magdeburg, while making an honest assessment of its weak and strong points, will build on its strengths, opportunities and prospects. There are already positive steps in this direction, e.g. a good starting point for developing creative entrepreneurship as well as a committed and competent team. In order to get "out of the void", and to be noticed in Germany and Europe, Magdeburg needs a more daring approach and cutting edge ideas for its European Capital of Culture processes and projects.

Nürnberg

The title of Nürnberg's bid, "**Past Forward**", represents the need to look to the many lessons to be learnt from the city's turbulent past with a view to taking them into an open future of necessary changes. The aim is to work together with the people of the city and the region, in order to develop a new concept of the city and of Europe - a place for humanity and togetherness, a place to experiment and a laboratory for culture and the arts.

The city's cultural strategy 2030 was approved in January 2018. The process involved policy makers and many other stakeholders. It was based on an extensive network mapping of cultural operators in the whole surrounding area. There is good potential for the involvement of the metropolitan region in the bid. However, the type and range of its participation has not been presented. In fact, the role of the ECoC in the city's and the region's cultural development process would need to be clarified further. The establishment of a coordination office to support the strategy's implementation is a good measure. The city's digitisation strategy and the prospects for the provision of new spaces - as the Alte Feuerwache - for the creative industries, including the plans for music and gaming sub-sectors, are sound. Yet, besides intending to offer good conditions for start-ups, the bid lacks a comprehensive capacity-building programme for the cultural sector, notably its long-standing institutions. Moreover, the ECoC legacy for the city, including in terms of European dimension, requires clearer objectives and strategy beyond the proposed laboratories for discussion. Regarding evaluation and monitoring, adequate baselines have already been created - notably via the use of the European Creative Cities Monitor, which is a positive development. And there are good yet still underdeveloped prospects regarding the goals, indicators and methodology. In addition, the need for a long-term evaluation perspective beyond 2026 should be considered.

The European dimension is well interwoven in the bid process - drawing its strategic aims from the EU New European Agenda for Culture. The chosen topics are crucial and of importance for a rich European debate. The bid proposes interesting projects reflecting on

the city's Nazi past, notably the rallies and its architecture as well as, on the other hand, the war crimes trials and the city's connection with international humanitarian law. Yet while the Nazi past is recurrent, the link to humanism and international law unfortunately gets lost in the programme. Furthermore, another promising European topic is gaming and playfulness/toys. The intention is to invest in a European capital of games, based on the city's heritage in the toys industry. However, overall, relevant due bridges between all the essential European topics proposed are lacking, as there are links to be explored between totalitarianism, humanism and gaming. The transcultural goals are promising. Yet the city's cultural diversity is not transcribed onto the programme so far. There are good links and projects with Ljubljana and Slovenia - the culture bus and M.I.L.K. - as well as with other ECoCs. Furthermore, Nürnberg is an active member of the Culture Next Candidate Cities Network. However, the potential for cooperating with twin cities and existing networks is missing, notably with Prague and Krakow. The LAB Europe is also an interesting format to address European main issues but it is insufficient as a legacy.

The programme's three strands are: Embracing Humanity, Exploring Reality and Evolving Community. Its structure soundly proposes new creative spaces and specific projects for all strands. The topics featured are again relevant, even though the artistic vision does not stand out properly and needs to be more daring. The three strands rightly give voice to the war past. But the post-war period, the "play and marketplace" dimensions should assume more relevance and permeate the three strands. Indeed, the relevant craftsmanship and digital dimension topics were not fully explored.

With regard to the new spaces associated to the projects, the prospects to develop an open participatory process for the renovation of the Kongresshalle to be dedicated to arts and culture are promising. On the other hand, the investment planned for the Nazi party rally grounds structural conservation and development into a learning and meeting venue is a considerable investment (€ 85.000.000). Therefore, it requires special attention regarding its specific links to the ECoC project as the message these works will convey must be well thought through in accordance with remembrance policy. Thus, these project's purpose and function should be clarified.

The bid has solid political and financial support from all levels of governance. It also ensures due provision for good means of accessibility and mobility as well as accommodation facilities. Therefore, the capacity to deliver is strong. The cultural infrastructure development is substantial, but would require a more precise timeline and budgeting.

The bid presents good prospects and mechanisms for wide participation and audience development. The approach soundly ought to base the programme on close communication and collaboration with the people of the city. In this respect, it provides opportunities and locations for encounters and exchanges and for a transformation of the existing relations between cultural institutions, public space and the different communities. The process includes relevant tools such as surveys and the NUE2025 civic initiative. It also insists on accessibility, as all of the cultural institutions will work intensively on established forms of cultural mediation and work in close contact with the Disability Council. Diverse cultural communities, including LGBT and homeless, are referred to, but not yet significant in terms of projects nor governance. The regional dimension of audience development is not yet sufficiently addressed. Moreover, the role of the university though acknowledged is not yet significant in the bid.

The bid proposes a € 85,000,000 operating budget, which is quite a solid basis for an ECoC. It also shows the will to considerably increase the city's investment in culture - 22.2% between 2019 and 2026. High expectations from the private sector (€ 7,500,000) are yet feasible and backed by strong fundraising prospects. On the other hand, the governance and organisational structure is missing; and staffing plans are generic. When it comes to

marketing, there are some good elements, notably the planned work with the Nürnberg Convention and Tourist Office (CTZ) as a key partner to work closely with the region and tourism sector and to develop specific strategies for different target groups. Still the slogan and messages are generic and would need to be further developed into clear and distinctive messages for attracting local and international audiences.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that the bid of Nürnberg proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel felt that the bid benefited from a strong political and financial commitment based on a strong cultural strategy development for the city and the region, even though the ECoC legacy needs to be further reflected and planned. The participation and outreach process is also extensive and convincing. Furthermore, the topics proposed for the artistic and cultural programme have a high European relevance. However, they still need to be further coordinated, exploring their full potential at a European and artistic level. The issues of totalitarianism, humanism and gaming are a good ground for a daring vision and programme that should be presented within a coherent joint approach. The investment plans in the Nazi rallies grounds should be given special attention. All Nazi legacy settling projects should be prepared with a strong sensitivity of the matter. Moreover, the governance and organisational outlook were underdeveloped and it should be clearer what could be expected after the ECoC year.

Zittau

The leitmotif of Zittau for the 3-Country Region 2025 is "**365°LIFE**". The ECoC will cover a rural region far away from large metropolitan centres in the border triangle between Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland.

The city of Zittau adopted cultural policy guidelines in May 2019. It is currently mid-way in the process of developing its cultural strategy. This process also takes into consideration the "Guidelines for Cultural Development" of the cultural area of Lower Silesia Upper Lusatia. The bid book provides quite generic information in this regard. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between the general cultural development and the specific ECoC-related objectives. The development vision for Zittau and the 3-Country Region was not clearly presented. Capacity building is not described in the bid book, which is a significant weakness, especially given the ambitious plan to involve in the ECoC project three neighbouring, but very different, countries. The bid presents some preliminary plans for evaluation as well as initial ideas for external partner institutions in this regard. The idea to study economic, ecological, social and cultural influences of the ECoC project - though interesting - is unclear and the European dimension is not taken into account in the expected impacts. However, it is clear from the application that the city has made positive steps towards developing its cultural profile and these steps are worth continuing.

Zittau with the 3-Country Region has a great potential to build on an already existing, formal and non-formal, cross-border cooperation. The potential of the geographical and social scope of the ECoC project was not clearly operationalised though. The application intends to develop collaboration between the three countries, but this ambition is not visible in the ECoC-related actions and artistic plans. No (convincing) explanation was given on the selection of "partner countries" for the cultural and artistic programme. Consequently, the panel was not able to assess in which way these partners could support or strengthen the ECoC's mission. European themes addressed by the ECoC are not satisfactorily explained and there is no visible strategy to attract European and international audiences (even from the neighbouring countries). The panel felt that the

experience of past and present ECoCs was not carefully studied to inform Zittau's bid preparations. The idea to extend collaboration with twin cities is a positive element, but also a very standard approach.

According to the panel, the whole programme approach was not specific enough in the application to give an idea of the cultural and artistic ambitions of Zittau 2025. The conceptual guidelines: "Remember", "Learn", "Experience" and "Create" are, in general, appropriate, but the themes of '365°LIFE' and '365°EUROPE' are too enigmatic. The plan to invite in 2025 one different country every month to present itself does not guarantee a coherent artistic programme, nor does it expand the international collaboration of regional and local artists. Twelve thematic focus points, instead of providing an opportunity for showcasing European diversity, may contribute to strengthening cultural stereotypes. The proposed programme structure is too basic for the ECoC project, even at pre-selection stage.

The bid is supported by a letter of intent signed by 20 community and municipal partners so far. And Zittau was confident that there were more to follow. The commitment of the regional authorities is, however, unclear. There are some bold capital investment plans with the transformation of the vacant Robur industrial plant into a place for memory and dialogue, the creation of a European Creative Centre and the idea to ask 12 architects to develop innovative concepts for 12 empty lots. Those ideas are worth developing and implementing. In terms of accommodation and transport facilities, the panel was not convinced of the capacity of the candidate city and the region to absorb a potential increase in the number of visitors resulting from the ECoC title.

The panel appreciates that the local population expressed the wish that the city applies for the ECoC title in a referendum and a preceding junior referendum. The citizens contributed with project ideas and formed a Friends association, which is a clear signal that the local population is looking for cultural opportunities. Another positive step is the organisation of a regional ideas conference with participants from both the independent and the institutional art scene, as well as from the educational, political and economic sectors of the whole cultural area. This approach is a very positive and appropriate. However, it has not yet been translated into concrete ECoC plans. In terms of audience development, there are already existing opportunities for disadvantaged groups and a will to involve minorities. But, in general, audience development ideas are too basic and do not go beyond approaching local audiences.

The proposed budget is € 45.710.000. The contributions expected from the Free State of Saxony and from the national Government amount respectively to € 22.270.000 and € 20.000.000. Those contributions are quite high, bearing in mind that the application involves stakeholders not only from one, but from three countries. The contribution from the city of Zittau is minimal at € 1.010.000 (i.e. 2,3% of the income to be received from the public sector) while there is no indication regarding the potential contribution from the two other countries involved. Plans for capital investment are high – € 185.790.000 –, but feasible due to the potential use of EU regional funds. The management structure is not coherent with the cultural and artistic programme and the concept of involving three countries. The marketing and communication plans reflect rather current regional practice than aspects related to the visibility of a project of the size and scope of a European Capital of Culture.

Conclusion

The panel does not recommend that the bid of Zittau proceeds to the final selection phase.

The panel acknowledged the important work done in this border region since 1945 and the will to exit the current regional comfort zones. Zittau has important stories to tell about cross-border difficulties and cooperation, which the whole of Europe could learn from. The panel appreciated the enthusiasm and energy of the project team, the commitment of the mayor as well as the artistic and storytelling elements featured in the presentation. However, it considered that the bid book was underdeveloped. The local potential (for example, strong cultural players in the region) was not fully reflected in the ECoC plans. In the panel's view, the region does not seem to have yet the capacities needed to deliver a yearlong ECoC of the expected size and scope. The panel would like to encourage the team, the city of Zittau and the 3-Country Region to capitalise on the ECoC preparations and continue investing in culture as a key element in their territorial development. The panel hopes that the endeavours to finalise and then implement a comprehensive regional cultural strategy will continue, with the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders (especially the cultural sector) and the population of the whole territory.

Recommendations

The following recommendations apply to all five shortlisted candidates.

The panel considers it necessary that all shortlisted cities develop their bids for the final selection in order to reach the required level of quality of such a demanding project as the European Capital of Culture. There is a considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection. The panel will expect significant changes in the final bid books to reflect these recommendations.

The shortlisted candidates are advised to continue studying carefully the **six criteria in the Decision** and the specific comments to all candidates in the assessments above.

A study of the evaluations of recent ECoCs (since 2013) and monitoring reports of recently designated ECoCs may also be of value. These are available on the European Commission's ECoC web page.

General

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 the monitoring panel will recommend the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize.

In their final selection bid books, 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 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.

ECoC and cultural strategy

A formally approved city cultural strategy needs to be in place before submitting the bid book. The panel will expect a tighter focus in the bid books of the final round. In the next bid books, cities should indicate the priorities of the cultural strategy, its target outcomes and how resources will be changed over the next few years. A city's cultural strategy will normally be wider in scope than the objectives of the ECoC. Bid books should indicate more clearly which priorities of the broader cultural strategy the ECoC is seeking to contribute to. The expected legacy of the ECoC should also be envisaged.

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 panacea for every city challenge. The panel would expect a more focused (and shorter) explanation that can link to the programme vision, themes, activities, and through evaluation, to the outcomes in the subsequent legacy. There is considerable literature and research available for cities to see the range of cultural, urban development and social benefits of an ECoC.

The evaluation sections of the bid books should be developed in the second phase 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. Shortlisted cities may wish to involve management consultancies in addition to a more academic approach.

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 industries (CCI) 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 CCI.

European dimension

The panel felt that this criterion was promising, but considerably under-developed. At this stage, the proposals are too much looking at the surface of the challenges. The teams were too focused on their cities' image and relations within Germany and/or German speaking countries. The panel would wish to see a greater deepening and widening of programmes to ensure a more relevant **European dimension**. That a city is in Germany, in Europe, has (or can have) a vibrant cultural offer, and will market itself in Europe, is not in itself a strong interpretation of the European dimension. An ECoC enables a city to promote itself internationally but that is only half of the story. The European dimension - though not being present in daily politics - often links to wider debates. Selected cities must be able to handle those debates in a professional manner, as they obtain more visibility.

The European dimension has a two-way direction. An equal focus is on seeking to broaden the understanding and awareness of the city's own citizens on the diversity of cultures in Europe and linking through cultural and other projects with citizens in other countries. It is this focus on other cultures 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 attracting programme ideas in the bid for ECoC 2025. The panel advises to thoroughly think over building a strategic communication plan for the ECoC project as well as to make a connection between the programme and international marketing vision.

Cultural and artistic programme

The focus of the final selection is the **operating programme** between end 2020, when the ECoC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECoC year of 2025. Many ECoCs in recent years have used the opportunity provided by the ECoC to address difficult issues from their 20th century past that still resonate today. This is especially relevant given the fact that ECoC 2025 will mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and the end of Nazi regime in Germany. The panel suggests candidates to look at their past with present-lenses ensuring respect for the victims and proper commemoration, as well as using the ECoC as an opportunity to prepare for the future.

The panel will expect to see more details on the programme, its projects and partners. The cities should set out their artistic vision, the programme and projects more clearly; differentiating between partners who have indicated firm interest and those who are still only potential or possible partners. ECoC programmes normally cover a wide range of 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 their programme. Furthermore, attention should be given to the sustainability of the projects - including cultural, ecological, social and economic wise - so to ensure an expected substantial legacy of the ECoC. This was under-developed in the bid books.

Capacity to deliver

Candidates should re-confirm that their bid book, including the programme and the financial commitments, have the formal approval of the mayor, the city (and county/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 federal Government.

None of the shortlisted cities has convincingly explained their capacity to manage large cultural events. Candidates are reminded that the criterion for an ECoC requires a special programme for the year in addition to the normal cultural offer. The panel expects more information on the managerial capacity in the city/region to manage the depth and range of an ECoC. 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 **the capital 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 potential capital investments crucial for the ECoC 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). The capital investment crucial for ECoC should be presented with overall budgets and timeframes.

The hotel capacities should be re-examined and alternative plans should be developed if needed.

The panel would like to see concrete local, regional and European legacy aspirations.

Outreach

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 or people temporarily in the city). The bid books should cover the participation of schools, youth groups, (international) students, volunteers etc. and the capacity building of the creative art sector, in order to approach audience development from the long-term and strategic perspective.

The panel would expect to learn about the audience development policies of the main cultural organisations including independent operators and NGOs. The role and contribution of universities (except evaluation work) was underplayed in most of the pre-selection bid books.

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.

Management

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

The **General and Artistic/Cultural Directors** play a key role in all ECoCs. The selection, preferably through an open international call, of these posts before the candidates' appearance at the final selection meeting, will be to their advantage. This is especially important for the Artistic Director as, unlike many such appointments, the artistic vision is already set out in the bid book. The same applies if a candidate proposes a collective artistic leadership. It is acknowledged that the appointments may be conditional on the outcome of the competition.

The recruitment processes and planned staffing arrangements from 2021 to 2026 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.

Signed

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