



Selection of the European Capital of Culture in Austria 2024

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

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Introduction

The Austrian Federal Chancellery, Division Arts and Culture (the “Federal Chancellery”) is the managing authority of the competition which is governed by Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 as amended by Decision (EU) 2017/1545 of 13 September 2017 (the “Decision”)¹ and by the “Rules of procedure – Competition for the 2024 European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in Austria” – (the “Rules”) adopted by the Federal Minister for the EU, Arts, Culture and Media and published on the Federal Chancellery’s website².

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection procedure in line with Article 2 of the Rules. Ten members were appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and the Committee of Regions). Two members were appointed by the Federal Chancellery.

The competition took place in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection.

Pre-selection round

The Federal Chancellery issued a call for applications on 9 June 2017. Three applications were submitted by the closing date of 31 December 2018 by: Bad Ischl, Dornbirn and St. Pölten.

The panel met in Vienna on 29-31 January 2019 and recommended to the Federal Chancellery three cities (Bad Ischl, Dornbirn and St. Pölten) to progress to the final selection stage. The panel’s report is published on the websites of the European Commission and the Federal Chancellery³.

The Federal Chancellery accepted the panel’s recommendation and invited the three cities to submit revised applications with a deadline of 13 October 2019.

All three cities submitted their revised applications (“bid-books”) by the deadline.

A delegation of the panel (Beatriz Garcia, Anja Hasenlechner, Alin Adrian Nica and Dominik Nostitz-Rieneck) visited all three cities on 6, 8 and 9 November 2019, spending one day in each. They were accompanied by observers from the Federal Chancellery and the European Commission. The delegation reported to the panel at the selection meeting.

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 See at:

<https://www.kunstkultur.bka.gv.at/documents/340047/637829/Rules+of+Procedure.pdf/8ab7296a-424e-4d62-95ca-b3af95423d09>

³ See at:

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/content/expert-panels-report-pre-selection-stage-selection-european-capital-culture-2024-austria_en

Panel meeting

The panel met in Vienna on 10 and 11 November 2019. The observers, from the Federal Chancellery and the European Commission, took no part in the panel's deliberations or decision. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality. On the 10 November, the panel confirmed Cristina Farinha as its Chair and Dominik Nostitz-Rieneck as Vice-chair.

At the meeting, each candidate based on an order established by drawing, presented their case (in 45 minutes) and answered questions from the panel members (in 75 minutes). Delegations had ten members: two were led by the Mayor, one by the CEO.

The Chair of the panel announced the panel's recommendation at a press conference after the meeting on 12 November 2019 in the presence of Mr. Alexander Schallenberg, the Austrian Minister for the EU, Arts, Culture and Media.

National context

2024 will be the third time Austria hosts an ECoC after Graz in 2003 and Linz in 2009. The criteria for an ECoC have changed considerably since then. They now embrace a deeper and wider scope of the role of culture in the city and European development. A particular new requirement is for a city to have a formal cultural strategy including the ECoC project. This ensures that the ECoC is an element in the progress of a city and not a one-off event. It therefore enhances the importance of sustainable legacy. The selection of an ECoC is based on the programme specifically set out for the ECoC year in the bid-book and not on the current cultural offer in a city.

The panel recognised three strong bids reflecting different socio-cultural contexts in the respective areas and the considerable proposal improvements and developments realised between the pre-selection stage and the final selection. The panel noted that all three cities have further used the opportunity of the bidding process to reinforce their cultural strategies as well as the role of culture in their overall socio-economic development. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECoC competition. The panel encourages all cities to continue with the development and implementation of their strategies.

Assessments of the candidates

The panel assessed each candidate against the objectives of the ECoC programme (Article 2 of the Decision) and the six specific 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 emphasizes that its assessments of the candidates were based on the proposed programme set out in the bid-book and the presentation session. A city's

history, its recent and current policies, and cultural offer may form a basis for a programme but play no part in the selection process.

Bad Ischl

The candidacy of Bad Ischl 2024 is placed under the motto of “SALT.WATER” and proposes highlighting four dimensions: “The Power of Tradition”, “Impact of (Hyper-) Tourism”, “Flow of Retreat” and “Strengths of Counterculture”. The interconnections of the programme pillars have been strengthened for the final bidding phase and a stronger consideration of environmental issues was introduced. The overall budget available for the operating costs was increased to € 30 million and capital expenditures are at € 1 million. The city of Bad Ischl with the Salzkammergut area submits a proposal based on a wide partnership with local municipalities from the Federal States of Styria and Upper Austria in an integrated urban-rural approach.

Long-term cultural strategy

A cultural strategy (“Kultur macht den Unterschied – Kulturvision 2030”) was adopted and it is in the course of implementation at the level of a region covering 23 municipalities in Salzkammergut (SKGT). It reflects the cultural needs of the whole Salzkammergut area, including partners from the Federal States of Upper Austria and Styria. Beyond this innovative partnership – a first in the Austrian context – this integrated approach and related regional tourism strategy is forward-looking.

The potential of the ECoC project as an asset for long-term strategy implementation is convincingly articulated. The existing sustainable cooperation framework of the EU-LEADER regions is of added value. The cooperation in the region beyond political background is important but bears the risk of divide, especially during election periods. In addition, capacity-building activities for local politicians are announced, but not sufficiently defined yet.

The overall setting for the implementation of monitoring and evaluation is convincing. The indicators are clearly described, feasible and quantifiable. The inclusion of culture and environmental indicators is a valuable addition to the monitoring and evaluation plans. However, the collection of baseline data will be challenging as regular and consistent data gathering in the region has not been carried through. The bidding team is, however, aware of this risk.

Cultural and artistic content

The cultural and artistic programme was further developed since the pre-selection phase and offers a strong and clear narrative. The framework of the four themes is distinctive, meaningful and exciting. The overarching theme of “inclave” is convincingly translated into the different programme elements.

Recommendations from the panel in the pre-selection phase regarding the need to rework the more difficult moments in recent history, namely WWII, were addressed in a satisfactory matter. The dark moments of Austrian history are a very important topic, which is well covered in the programme. Proposing a wide provenance research project for lost art is highly appreciated (“What happened to...?”). However, further elements need to be addressed (e.g. the involvement of the young Austrian Jewish community and the need to establish partnerships with more institutions dealing with these topics throughout Europe). The proposed work in the context of hyper-tourism has the potential

to be of considerable added value for many other EU regions facing similar challenges. The plan to develop a more sustainable culture tourism strand for the region is anchored in the need to replace, or considerably alter, the currently mass-tourism oriented strategies into more locally culturally sensitive and sustainable ones. The programme strands on counterculture and power of tradition are planned in a solid manner. The programme comprises information on the estimated costs of the proposed projects. However, larger projects like the New Salt Festival need further careful elaboration and without intensive work on audience development prior to 2024, it might turn into an expensive one-off event.

The capacity-building that is presented as part of the cultural programme relies on four pillars: under the head of the SKGT culture schools (pillar one) are planned the Cultural Management School, the School of Art and Craft, the Salzkammergut Kulturschule while the museums development programme, the Open Culture Centre and Welocally, an online platform for exchange and cooperation, are three further pillars. This offers a comprehensive approach with substantial potential for legacy.

The integrated way of programme development is reflected in the transversal involvement of artists, scientists and a wide range of additional stakeholders. The projects are deeply rooted in local communities, which may lead to the risk of downplaying the need of wider exchange. The territorial coverage of the whole region is well achieved.

Traditional cultural activities are combined with a wide range of new inputs, including digital applications while the proposed ECoC opening could be mentioned as a good practice approach. However, related implementation details and budgetary frameworks require further attention.

European dimension

The European dimension builds on the concepts of “compassion” and “empathy” perceived as essential features for intercultural dialogue and key elements of contemporary European debates. Major European themes are convincingly translated into a rural “Cultural Geography”. The latter offers an innovative approach, which touches also on related and not yet fully developed EU and national cultural policies. The reference to the 30th anniversary of Austria’s membership to the EU in 2024 is another very positive element of the bid.

Partnerships with other European Capitals of Culture are already in place, but the full potential of these collaborations is not yet fully explored. This refers also to the general focus on the closer EU neighbours and the German-speaking countries. Yet, the topics covered in the bid-book are important for the whole of Europe and allow for a much wider partnership strategy. The involvement of artists from East Asia in the projects related to over-tourism reflects well the main countries of origin of those people visiting the region’s tourism hotspots and is an interesting element with potential for a wider impact. However, a deeper analysis of the cultural rights of tourists is still needed. The current debates focus on local inhabitants, which is an appropriate starting point. The outreach to European audiences needs further reflection regarding the new target group of sustainable and cultural tourists.

Outreach

The outreach activities are based on a solid involvement of the local population during the bidding phase using a wide range of different methodologies. This bottom-up

initiative clearly builds on local communities, including young people in design and production.

The establishment of an audience development strategy based on the assessment of needs is an appropriate approach. The creation of the position of 'Education Ambassador' as a link between schools and the ECoC programme as well as a support mechanism for regional schools and a way to enhance culture and arts activities for pupils is an innovative idea. Educational culture programmes are designed in a co-creation process with schools. This strategic way of thinking becomes visible throughout the whole outreach chapter by the means of involving strategic partners, linking outreach activities to the proposed programme and considering outreach indicators in the evaluation framework.

The involvement of volunteers is carefully thought through and covers a wide range of different backgrounds. The volunteer strategy involves sponsor's employees, students, but also elderly people through the Silver Salzkammergut task force and unemployed people. The intentions of involving people with dementia and Alzheimer are noticeably inclusive proposals. The idea for a 'cultural buddy' has the potential to break down barriers for accessing cultural activities.

This inclusive and barrier-free programme has a strong starting point but could be also supported by investment in the accessible public transport and buildings.

Management

The management and governance structures as well as the budgetary frameworks are detailed in section 5 of the bid-book.

The delivery structure is "Bad Ischl-Salzkammergut Kulturhauptstadt 2024 GmbH" (short: SKGT24 GmbH). The plans for the delivery structure's composition and organisation were further developed since pre-selection. The Supervisory Board composition is balanced between the city, the region, the sponsors and the national government with the Mayor of Bad Ischl as chair.

The proposed organisational framework is more complex, which is explained partly by the fact that a whole region is bidding. The intended establishment of a common limited company co-financed by all involved cities and municipalities is an element providing the most needed long-term stability for a sound implementation of an ECoC.

The proposed budget and its split between the different chapters is professional. The involvement of the private sector in co-financing of the ECoC is under way. However, the overall estimated private contribution of € 1 million is far too conservative considering that not only local and regional companies can be addressed. While appreciating the focus on EU funds for financing cultural infrastructures, the Panel considered it rather too optimistic.

Instead of an Artistic Director, the candidate proposes a European Artistic Directory Board (EADB). It consists of seven members and is the top governing body of the artistic and cultural production. The board acts conceptually free and independent but has to meet the budgetary figures set by the General Director. Women and men will be equally represented in this Board, the same rule applying to leading positions such as Executive Producers.

These proposed decision-making settings are innovative. Replacing the common model of one artistic director with an artistic board might generate added value and reflect a

contemporary agile and participative approach. It would also allow combining bidding team members with newcomers for a sounder transition from bidding to implementation phase. However, unclear settings include the sequences of mandates. The way of operation of a "European" Board is not totally clear. The ECoC team is well established, and shortcomings identified in the pre-selection phase were convincingly addressed.

The marketing slogan is "Culture is the New Salt". The candidate established a marketing cooperation with Salzkammergut Tourismus Marketing GmbH, which covers the marketing and communication strategy. All published materials will carry the appropriate EU branding. Marketing messages are simple, coherent with the ECoC mission and clearly based on a storytelling approach. The European and digital dimensions of marketing an ECoC is not yet addressed in a satisfactory way.

Capacity to deliver

There is a political support from the involved cities and municipalities, and the budget is approved. The mayors further confirmed their full support. A majority of the 23 municipalities in the region have already confirmed their participation. Further municipalities are invited to join the ECoC under the condition that they co-finance; this is an appropriate approach for a limited period of time to keep positive local dynamics.

The budgetary framework is not yet fully stable, as some of the regional co-financiers conditioned their support to the selection of Bad Ischl as European Capital of Culture. The involved cities and municipalities have approved budgets for the ECoC, and the financial commitment of the regional tourism board is an additional asset and stabilising factor.

Cultural infrastructures are in place related to the requirements of a larger part of the programme activities. However, capital investments are not yet planned into full detail. Tourism facilities are already in place.

Summary

A very solid bid based on an integrative strategic framework covering a wider area of central Austria under the lead of the city of Bad Ischl. The programme builds on a comprehensive bottom-up approach translating important themes including hyper-tourism – relevant for the bidding region – with high relevance for other European and international stakeholders. The proposed outreach activities are of very high quality. The proposed narrative has the potential to touch both local and international audiences. Remaining challenging elements comprise the widening of the European dimension beyond Central Europe and the German-speaking countries; the negotiations of financial support, the complex framework involving several Federal States; as well as the requirement for more solid planning for the proposed cultural reconversions of some infrastructures.

Dornbirn

Dornbirn 2024 aims to generate an "Outburst of Courage" and implement a programme based on three programme lines: "Polis Mind", "Reality Disruption", and "No Frontiers". These thematic focal points remained unchanged since pre-selection. The total budget for operational activities is € 46 million, and € 29 for capital expenditures. The partnership for the bid encompasses the cities of Dornbirn, Hohenems, and Feldkirch, as well as the

adjacent region of the Bregenzerwald. Further cooperation is planned with partners from the Bodensee region.

Long-term cultural strategy

The cultural strategy for the city of Dornbirn, "Dornbirn 2030", is in place, and neighbouring partnering cities Hohenems, Feldkirch and Bregenzerwald have joined in. Despite this important step forward, the wider vision for a long-term cultural cooperation after the title year in the Rhine valley is not fully put in place. This affects negatively the potential for legacy. Good elements in the strategy are the intended urban transformation, the ecological awareness (green events and green museums), the centre for cultural creators and the integrated approach with reference to local mobility and transport. Furthermore, the ECoC year is well embedded in the strategy. The digital strategy for Vorarlberg is another strong connecting point.

Evaluation is professionally planned and it includes many innovative elements such as new approaches for the visualisation of data and results, involving artistic interventions. However, their feasibility raises questions. The set of indicators proposed is adequate.

Cultural and artistic content

Major discrepancies were spotted between the programme outlined in the bid-book and the final hearing of the team, which focused ostensibly on another central topic: "feminism". This new thematic emphasis is not fully translated into the proposed cultural and artistic projects and in the existing programme, where mainly prominent male artists were promoted. Furthermore, the programme lacks a coherent thread beyond a general emphasis on social transformation. More locally sensitive and less provocative extreme artistic tools might have contributed better to generate the desired changes in the perceptions and values of the local population. The links with the local heritage are clear, but key projects like the museum of industry seem unfeasible. The house of literature is another interesting and professionally designed project. The digital studios are also a strong element of the bid, with potential for legacy. Many of the proposed implementation activities are, however, still in a preliminary stage and related cost estimations are not provided. The wider potential in terms of cross-border cooperation in culture and arts was not used.

The involvement of local cultural operators and artists raises further questions. This relates also to the changing thematic foci between the bid-book submission and the final presentation. Furthermore, the call for projects was very small, providing only little budget for the applicants.

The capacity-building programme is valid but still at an early development stage.

European dimension

The European dimension is planned to be addressed through the main themes of digital art, migration, female share in arts and culture, and engagement for a humanistic Europe. While these topics are relevant in and for Europe, no overarching and specific European narrative becomes visible. Related questions specifically relevant for a border region are not further elaborated. The female thematic is discussed in the bid-book in a very specific (and restrictive) manner – i.e. women not working full-time due to a lack of childcare facilities. This is a difficult approach for generating a wider European debate.

The Europe-wide networking activities of some of the key cultural partners like the Jewish Museum are impressive, but the European outreach to networks and other

European Capitals of Culture is not yet at a mature stage. Border partnerships (with Switzerland, Germany and Liechtenstein) are not specified. Of added value is the mention of Europeana – the European digital library. The plans to reach out to a wider European audience remain fragmented.

Outreach

The number of clubs and associations mentioned is impressive and provides a huge potential for cooperation and volunteering. The volunteer potential in particular is quite strong and it has been proven during the organisation of GYMNAESTRADA 2019, which involved thousands of volunteers. However, the related plans seem to be only in the making and few formal agreements have been concluded. The involvement of non-native Austrian communities is still very limited and related project proposals do not fully reflect the European state-of-the-art. Recent civic movements in Vorarlberg e.g. for the better integration of refugees arrived in the region during the past years, are not involved.

The organisation of focus groups was a good starting point to better understand the needs and perceptions of the local residents, but the tools for involvement need to be developed considerably.

Some interesting ideas are mentioned, like the Culture Tandem app, but the audience development – based mainly on project quality and educational programmes – was not yet satisfactorily developed.

Management

The budgetary settings are well established and sound. Related plans to attract further EU means are realistic and well defined. However, the specific budget proposed for the independent scene might turn out to be hard to implement.

The organisational structure is professional, and the engagement of a full female team is a strong symbolic message on the regional and EU level. However, the existing structures are fragile to fully cope with all the needs for a good preparation and implementation of an ECoC.

The plan to keep in the implementation phase the key staff that has worked on the bid so far is a valid approach per se, but limiting the opportunity for new perspectives and the availability of specific competences different from those for the bidding process.

The digital marketing plans are well developed. The overall marketing narrative with the main messages is in place. However, the chosen thematic angle is not convincing.

Capacity to deliver

The bid benefits of a good support from the local political level and related decisions were formally taken. The regional government promised support.

The proposed new cultural infrastructures are meaningful for an ECoC and related plans outlined. The accessibility of the Rhine valley and the Bregenzerwald area are well-established comprising air, rail, highway and waterways. Tourism facilities are in place to cope with the needs.

Summary

An interesting bid covering the far west of the Austrian territory in the border region with Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Germany, based on a sound budgetary setting, many innovative approaches in evaluation as well as digital activities. The full female team is a strong message to Europe and to the bidding region. Major challenges include considerable discrepancies in the communication of the main artistic and cultural programme narrative and only fragmented involvement of the local communities and further stakeholders. The proposed European themes are relevant, but the specific situation as “a small Europe” close to three other countries inside and outside the EU was not sufficiently explored.

St. Pölten

The thematic leitmotiv of St. Pölten ECoC 2024 candidacy is “Rescaling Distances” and covers three main routes or programme strands: “Come Closer” (social distances), “The Long Now” (temporal distances), and “Changing Rooms” (spatial distances). The concept of reducing distances remained unchanged from the pre-selection phase. The total budget available for operating activities is the same since the submission of the first bid-book, reaching a total of € 60 million. Capital investments are expected to be at € 36 million. The bid of St. Pölten covers the wider region, which should transform to a common Cultural Region in the course of the preparation and implementation of the European Capital of Culture project.

Long-term cultural strategy

The “Cultural Strategy St. Pölten 2030”, approved in September 2019, provides a very good basis for future cultural development of the city. The strategic approaches are based on serious research and complementary documents e.g. the “Guidelines for Public Space” and they are of substantial value. The concept of tackling the problems of mid-sized cities, although relevant for many cities in Europe, was too broad and not explored in a distinctively enough manner. It was not perfectly clear for example if the cultural strategy provides the right answers for all the strata of population that are typical for these smaller urban places. The Cultural Region idea became less visible in the selection phase. The long-term strategy regarding the relationship with nearby Vienna – a key part for cultural development in the city of St. Pölten – remains fragmented and many dimensions of integrated planning are not addressed. The highlighted cooperation with the Vienna tourism board is a relevant achievement but only a starting point.

The ECoC is well anchored in the long-term cultural strategy and includes a clearly presented ‘Compass’ concept. The provision of an elaborated plan B for delivery is evidence of thorough and professional planning.

The plans for evaluation and monitoring are conceptually very strong. However, at the current stage, the set of indicators and the plans for the elaboration of baselines is less convincing. The proposed innovative approaches – such as participatory / resident-led evaluation – are important, but difficult to implement successfully.

Legacy plans from the city of St. Pölten for the time after the ECoC are not fully clear.

Cultural and artistic content

The cultural and artistic programme was considerably better structured for the final selection phase and the three programme strands were clearly conceptually articulated and visualised in the bid-book, which makes them easily understandable for a wider audience.

The Main Station approach including a digital dimension is a forward-looking idea connecting with European partners. The Children.Art.Lab is a valuable new initiative with a potential for St. Pölten to become an important player in the European children cultural scene. Addressing specifically the Jewish heritage and culture is an asset of the programme. The creative industries projects are interesting, and the way they are conceptually rooted in traditional craftsmanship is original. Still, they lack wider perspective and vision beyond a mere design-led approach. The Sonnenpark proposes original community-involving concepts that put an accent on ecology. While several programme elements have a development potential, the wider coherence of the projects proposed with a specific and targeted European narrative is not made fully visible. In addition, projects' ideas presented in the bid-book are not always in an advanced development stage. Current archaeological practices in the city require further research and exchange with experts.

The involvement of the local cultural operators is substantial and some of the projects benefit of high-quality artists' engagement, including those from neighbouring countries.

The capacity-building approach of CulturalChangeCampus is ambitious, but the proposed complex structure might prevent full impact. The implementation settings remain vague.

European dimension

The European dimension is anchored in six main topics related to European History, European Neighbours, Nature & Climate, Places, Migration in the sense of Mobility and European Diversity. The six topics however did not fully translate into a clear and coherent European narrative. These very broad themes are also difficult to relink to the cultural and artistic programme. The main and specific messages of St. Pölten to Europe remain unclear.

The Museum of European Integration is an interesting but challenging and unclearly presented concept. Cooperations with European partners are very much focussed on Central Europe, and not stretching out enough to Europe as a whole.

The exchange with other ECoCs has started, but the full potential for common projects and exchanges is not exploited.

The reflection on how to involve a broad European audience needs to be further developed, to include also a strategy to involve the international audience present in Vienna, beyond international tourists.

Outreach

The outreach activities involved a wide range of locals during the preparation phase. In this respect, the main legacies are: The Children.Art.Lab and the CulturalChangeCampus. Professional outreach activities include the involvement of schools in the preparation and implementation, the launch of open calls, the planned activities for a broader cultural participation of people with special needs and the older generation.

The wider cross-sectoral cooperation was not sufficiently defined and the added value of the broad scientific community in the city and region was not enough explored.

The general principles for an audience development strategy are in place and the plans for an own related department are a good starting point. However, the related plans, beyond education and co-creation activities, lack further concretisation.

Management

The budgetary framework is considerable and the proposed budget for a potential plan B is substantial. The staff costs are high compared to other ECoC projects and related explanations were not fully convincing.

The organisational structure is already established, which provides further stability to the project. The current team was considerably enlarged with members, partners and service providers who are Vienna-based, which raises questions regarding their sustainable involvement in the local development of the city. No incentives structure for a long-term commitment of this external staff to the city has been presented.

The proposed leadership combining a broader team was not convincingly argued, as the fact that so far all the conflicts could be solved constitutes no guarantee for the future. The unanimity decision-making principle might lead to standstill and conflicts between the members of the team.

The marketing plans regarding the digital domain are good, but wider marketing plans are not yet put in place. ECoC leitmotif: "Europe at Home – Rescaling Distances" and appeal: "You only need to change direction" do not translate into appealing and clear marketing narrative.

Capacity to deliver

The bid relies on a strong local and regional support, and related commitments have been voted timely. However, the panel was unable to further clarify organisational support of local and regional decision-makers regarding implementation and legacy issues.

The city, which is only a 25-minute drive from Vienna, benefits from excellent accessibility and a wide range of tourism facilities – also in the city of Vienna – which can be used by visitors. Furthermore, plans to enlarge also the city's hotel infrastructure by 2024 are already in an advanced stage.

The cultural infrastructure requires improvement and related plans are being put forward. However, the concrete status of negotiations after first agreements with the private owners of parts of the proposed infrastructure as well as related legacy plans could not be clarified.

Summary

A solid bid embedded in a long-term cultural strategy, a promising budgetary framework, a clear programme structure as well as professional bottom-up activities involving many locals and schools. The artistic programme is built on the involvement of many high-quality artists from Lower Austria, Austria and other European countries with a special focus on the neighbouring area. The digital elements in the programme and marketing

are a further asset of the bid. An important shortcoming concerns the capacity for the bid's core narrative – and its proposed cultural and artistic programme – to translate into a powerful and fully engaging European narrative of relevance across the continent. As it stands, the bid's core vision is still heavily conceptual and, despite it being of critical relevance at a local and regional level, it can easily fail to connect with other parts of Europe. The regional concept became less visible than a pre-selection stage and the long-term perspectives of some of the cultural infrastructural projects based on privately owned buildings are not fully clear.

The Panel's Decision

The panel was presented with three distinctive bids from three different cities and adjacent regions facing their own challenges and each with its own interpretations of the ECoC criteria. The bids had many strong points as well as some weaknesses. The panel was looking, according to Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council, at the programme specifically designed for the ECoC year.

After the presentations, the panel debated the merits of each city against the six criteria and then in the final discussion the applications were weighed up against each other.

Each panel member weighed their own interpretation of the criteria against the three bids with their bid-books, presentations, questions and answers, augmented by the feedback from the visits.

The panel reached consent on a single candidate in the first round by secret ballot.

Following the panel vote, the panel recommends that the Federal Chancellery designates as the 2024 European Capital of Culture in Austria, the city of

Bad Ischl.

Designation

This report has been sent to the Federal Chancellery and the European Commission. Both will publish it on their websites. In accordance with Article 11 of the Decision, the Federal Chancellery will designate Bad Ischl to hold the title of ECoC 2024 in Austria based on the recommendation contained in this report. It will then inform the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Committee of the Regions. This formal designation enables Bad Ischl to use the title "European Capital of Culture 2024".

Melina Mercouri Prize

The panel recommends that the European Commission award the Melina Mercouri Prize to the delivery structure of Bad Ischl 2024 based on this report. However, the payment of the €1,5m Prize is deferred until 2024, in line with Article 14 of the Decision. It is conditional. The ECoC Expert panel will make a further recommendation to the European Commission in late 2023 at the end of the monitoring process on whether to make the payment.

The conditions for the payment are as follows (Article 14):

- The ECoC honours its commitments made in the application;
- It complies with the criteria;
- It takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports;
- There has been no substantial change to the programme and strategy set out in the bid-book;
- The budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-level programme and at a level consistent with the bid-book;
- The independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;
- The European Dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final programme;
- The marketing and communications strategy and material clearly reflect it is a European Union action;
- Plans for monitoring and evaluation are in place.

Reputation of an ECoC

A city awarded the ECoC title receives considerable international attention from the selection recommendation and extending well beyond the ECoC year. It has a responsibility to uphold the reputation of the ECoC brand for the benefit of those previous titleholders and future ones. City administrations should be aware that decisions taken (and not just in the cultural sector) may attract formal media and social media attention far beyond they are used to handling. This adds a special and new aspect to decision taking in the city over wide full range of issues much beyond culture only.

The monitoring phase

Once an ECoC has been designated, it enters the “Monitoring Phase” (Article 13 of the Decision). Under the auspices of the European Commission, the panel will work with the ECoC to ensure the quality of the ECoC brand and to offer advice and experience.

The **bid-book** at final selection becomes the *de facto* contract between the designated city, on the one hand, and the Expert panel, the Federal Chancellery, the European Commission and its own citizens, on the other hand. It has an important role in the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize. The panel will expect a close alignment with the bid-book during the preparation phase and during the ECoC year. Significant variations from the bid-book should be discussed with the panel, through the Commission, in advance of decisions being made.

There are three formal monitoring checkpoints (normally autumn 2020, mid 2022 and autumn 2023) when the ECoC will meet with the panel under the auspices of the Commission. Prior to each meeting the European Commission will invite the ECoC to provide progress reports. The Commission, after consultation with the panel, will indicate areas that specifically need to be addressed in the reports.

In addition, the panel may decide, with the agreement of the European Commission, to visit the city to observe progress.

The panel's reports after all three meetings will be published on the Commission's website. The ECoC may decide to publish its own progress reports in the interest of transparency.

The panel's recommendations

The designated ECoC now moves to a transition period from a set-up suited to a bid campaign to the more formal ECoC delivery structure that is independent of local city administration. The panel expects Bad Ischl to develop cooperation with other bidding cities and the wider artistic and cultural community in Austria. The ECoC in Austria in 2024 provides a national opportunity, which will reflect internationally not only on Bad Ischl but also on the country as a whole.

The panel will expect the first progress report in autumn 2020 to take into account the recommendations and comments in the assessment of the bid as well as the recommendations below.

The recommendations refer to the content of the proposed programme:

Cultural strategy

- The work continues on the implementation of the cultural strategy and further arrangements are made for integration between policy areas (culture / urban development / innovation / social and transforming tourism industries). All documents are published to ensure transparency.
- The investments in the existing social cohesion are continued and enhanced in the EU-Leader framework, across borders of Federal States, to train and support local policy makers as important partners for the implementation of the ECoC and a full understanding of the cultural dimensions of regional development.
- The ECoC 2024 impact assessment is detailed with monitoring tactics, the baseline figures are defined and first attempts to outline the specific targets are made. KPIs include European sources of information like Eurostat for example.

Cultural and artistic content

- The highly relevant main topics and programme strands require beyond the well-rooted local participation and involvement of a wider population in order to build up a wide range of meaningful projects for the wider European audience.
- An open communication approach is required to cooperate with the wide range of programme partners in a professional and transparent manner.
- High budget projects require special attention of the team and value for money should be analysed at a very early stage and potential plan B should be elaborated.
- The digital dimension of the ECoC should be further considered in order to reach out to all kinds of audiences including the younger part of the European

population who has no direct access to local analogue culture and communication formats.

- To continue to develop the capacity building programme under the banner of cultural and artistic dimension and by these means enlarge the understanding of learning beyond the formal parts; and to ensure appropriate space settings for these activities early in the implementation phase.

European dimension

- The scope and quality of activities promoting the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue and greater mutual understanding between European citizens as well as highlighting the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history are secured, deepened and developed.
- The cooperation and artistic exchange gains in dimensions covering the whole territory of the European Union and including a European dimension in literally all projects. To build on the good practice with the involvement of artists from Asia to further work with cultural partners from main countries of origin of tourists in the region.
- The enlargement of exchange and knowledge-transfer on the dark side of the local history with other regions and cities equally concerned, as well as with related scientific and cultural organisations in Europe and beyond.

Outreach

- Work continues to ensure social cohesion, involvement of all strata of the population and collaborative spirit in line with ECoC mission and vision.
- ECoC audience development strategies and plans for local, regional and international audiences are developed. A special focus to be dedicated to reach out to European and international audiences and to required digital outreach.
- Audience development and community engagement are included in capacity building activities.
- To ensure access to the region by innovative mobility concepts and accessibility – a special challenge to be addressed for the more rural parts of the ECoC region.

Management

- The appointment of the artistic board in order to ensure continuity and innovation at a very early stage of the implementation phase.
- Information about the registration of the Bad Ischl 2024 organization and its statutes are publicly available.
- Clarification of the national level financial involvement is necessary and the funding timeframe and conditions allowing smooth implementation of the ECoC need to be agreed with all stakeholders as soon as possible. Decisions makers in Austria should be aware of considerable negative consequences related to late decisions on budgets.
- The elaboration of a comprehensive fundraising strategy covering the wider territory and including a wide range of potential sponsoring partners. Good practices from previous ECoC could be used.

- Clarification of the specific roles and added value of the proposed European board.
- The strategies and copyright issues including authorship rights of related merchandise and services are developed and publicly communicated.
- The communication message (including a European dimension) is clearly articulated for use by the ECoC team and other relevant stakeholders.
- Issues of security are addressed.
- Issues of data protection are addressed.

Capacity to deliver

- Ensure regional leadership in order to cope with diverse expectations and internal cohesion needs.
- The tourism offer and communication for the region continuously reflects the new concepts on cultural and sustainable tourism.
- To keep positive local dynamics regarding further municipalities wishing to join the ECoC, but to set a related deadline for early in 2020.
- The planning for the required adaptations of cultural infrastructures must be speed up and related procedures launched.

Thanks

The panel wishes to place on record its thanks to the Minister, the staff of the Federal Chancellery, ably supported by DG EAC of the European Commission, for their efficient management of the competition.

Signed

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