



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2027 in Portugal

Selection Stage

Expert Panel's report

Edited by

the international expert panel members

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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the selection phase of the competition for the European Capital of Culture in 2027 in Portugal. The competition is a European Union initiative, which started in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” has previously been awarded to three cities in Portugal, namely Lisbon in 1994, Porto in 2001, and Guimarães in 2012.

The Bureau for Cultural Strategy, Planning and Assessment (“GEPAC”), under the Ministry of Culture of the Portuguese Republic (the “Ministry”), acts as the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16th April 2014 (the “Decision”) and by the “Rules of Procedure – Competition for the European Capital of Culture 2027 in Portugal” (the “Rules of procedure”), adopted by GEPAC and published on its website.

In line with Article 2 of the Rules of procedure, a panel of twelve independent experts were established for the selection process. Ten panel members are appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions). Two members of the panel were appointed by the Ministry of Culture of the Portuguese Republic.

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

Pre-selection round

GEPAC issued a call for applications on 23rd November 2020 on its website: www.ecoc2027.mg.gov.pt. Twelve applications were submitted by the closing date of the call by: Aveiro, Braga, Coimbra, Évora, Faro, Funchal, Guarda, Leiria, Oeiras, Ponta Delgada, Viana do Castelo and Vila Real.

The panel met on 8-10th March 2022 for the pre-selection hearings and meeting. It recommended inviting the four bidding cities of Aveiro, Braga, Évora and Ponta Delgada, to

progress to the final selection stage. The panel's report for the pre-selection phase is published on the website of the Commission¹ and on the website of GEPAC².

The Ministry of Culture accepted the panel's recommendation and invited the four cities to submit revised applications with a deadline of 21st October 2022.

The four cities submitted their revised applications ("bid-books") by the deadline.

Between the pre-selection and final selection meetings, the following steps took place:

- All four cities had a virtual meeting organised by GEPAC with the panel's Chair and Vice-chair on 16th May 2022 to seek clarification of the recommendations in the pre-selection report.
- A delegation of four members of the panel took part in city visits on 28-30 November and on 2nd December 2022, in order to get *in situ* a better understanding of the candidacies as well as the level of ownership among the city's inhabitants and key stakeholders. They were accompanied by observers from the managing authority and the European Commission. The delegation reported back to the full panel at the selection meeting.

Panel meeting

The panel met in Lisbon on 5-7th December 2022. One panel member was excused for personal reasons. The Rules of procedure do not foresee the possibility of designating a substitute in such cases (Article 3, paragraph 1) and specify that, should the panel not reach consensus for recommending one city for the title, "the decision concerning this city shall be made on the basis of a vote by simple majority of the members of the panel, *who are present*"

¹ https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/ecoc-2027-portugal-preselection-report_v1.pdf

² <https://www.ecoc2027.mc.gov.pt/ecoc-noticias/detalhe-noticia?uri=225>

(Article 6 paragraph 9). The panel confirmed Beatriz Garcia as its Chair and João Seixas as its Vice-chair. Else Christensen-Redzepovic and Rossella Tarantino were elected by the panel as rapporteurs.

All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and submitted it to the managing authority. Representatives of GEPAC and of the European Commission attended the meeting as observers. The observers took no part in the panel's deliberations or decision.

At the selection hearings on 5th and 6th December 2022 in Lisbon, each short-listed candidate city presented its bid proposal in 45 minutes and answered questions from the panel in 75 minutes.

At a live-streamed press meeting on 7th December 2022, the Chair of the panel announced the panel's recommendation in the presence of the Portuguese Minister of Culture, Pedro Adão e Silva, and the Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Portugal, Sofia Moreira de Sousa.

In its assessment of the four short-listed candidate cities, the panel noted the general and specific objectives in Article 2 of the Decision and the requirement for the application of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2027 in Portugal to be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension created specifically for the title (Article 4). The panel assessed each bid against the six criteria outlined in Article 5 of the Decision:

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

In line with the specifications of the call, the panel assessed each short-listed candidate city on the basis of its revised bid-book and hearing against the objectives of the European Capital of Culture action and the criteria as specified above.

The city visits are not part of the assessment, but they are a precious help for all panel members to better understand the context and background of the ECoC applications.

In the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of its discussions during the selection meeting.

AVEIRO

The bid submitted by Aveiro, based on an overarching urban strategy, is aimed to transform Aveiro into a “future-proof city”, preparing the city for the next generations and for the unknown futures ahead.

The bid reaffirms the concept of the bid “**5th Element – Culture**” where culture is viewed as the necessary fifth element for promoting understanding and changes while the other four elements - Earth, Water, Air and Fire - have shaped Aveiro’s life. In particular, the bid strengthens the idea to be a cultural platform to experiment innovative practices and to respond to contemporary challenges in European urban contexts.

High attention is paid to the four transformative tools (Community Culture Club, Living Places Lab, Creative Change Academy, and Artistic Intelligence Factory) that are meant as capacity-building programmes, important pieces of cultural infrastructure, knowledge resources and an audience engagement driver.

In the second round, the regional dimension of the bid has been reinforced with the formal involvement of all 11 municipalities of the Aveiro Region.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city

- The long-term strategy of the city (2020-2030), which was approved in June 2019, is well laid out, has clear political support and aims to transform the city of Aveiro into an international platform for urban innovation.
- The analysis of the long-term effects has been further developed to a good standard, with clear cross-reference throughout the bid. Likewise, the panel appreciates the development of the regional dimension of the strategy.
- The ECoC programme is still closely aligned with the strategy and this is effectively detailed in the proposal.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan is well designed, with a clear identification of the objectives and quantification of some KPIs closely related to the different axes and initiatives, an appropriate plan for data collection (a baseline survey has been already conducted in 2021 and a new one is planned for 2024) and a clear distinction between the assessment of the results of the long-term strategy and of the expected results of Aveiro 2027.
- The evaluation plan is based on the theory of change, where the desired impacts are presented as elements of change well linked to the identified four areas of impacts (Cohesive, Sustainable, Democratic and Resilient city). Yet, the application of the theory of change is not sufficiently clear.

Cultural and artistic content

- The legibility of the cultural and artistic programme has been improved in the second phase: its layout is clear, with a detailed hierarchy of the projects sub-grouped into flagship, major and small projects per each theme. A transformation tool is also envisaged for each of the four themes.

- The design of the cultural programme is aligned with the urban strategy of Aveiro and with the objective of transforming Aveiro into a testbed to pilot innovative approaches to common urban challenges. Great emphasis is placed on the transformative tools, on the capacity building and on the process.
- The panel appreciates the search for innovation and best practices; in particular, it values the digital delivery programme, for its cutting-edge approach and for the wide cooperation and dissemination potential among the European Capitals of Culture; likewise, some outstanding projects, attracting some world leading thinkers and activists, were appreciated as well.
- The panel welcomes the idea of an ECoC that could be the cultural platform for innovative practices in urban contexts; yet, greater attention could have been paid to the curatorial work and the artistic component of the programme, which is not visible enough. In the description of the projects, the crucial issue the artists would like to explore is often elusive. In addition, the emphasis is placed more on the process and tools, while the outcome and events to be staged in 2027 are described in generic terms.
- The programme highlights some connections with the city's specific location, in particular with the amphibious nature of Aveiro and the environmental urgency linked to the lagoon and the associated risks of overflowing in the city. This shows some development since this first phase of the competition; however, the panel's view is that the connection between place and concept remains uneven.
- The regional breadth of the programme has been strengthened and this is valued well; however, part of the programme is to some extent based on events already existing in the region and the added value to the European Capital of Culture bid has not been sufficiently worked out. In addition, the process of the selection of the events that will complement the programme is not very detailed, in terms of criteria, budget and involvement of the local cultural scene.

European dimension

- The European and international dimension has been further developed to a satisfactory level. The scope and quality of the activities promote the cultural diversity of Europe, intercultural dialogue, and highlight common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European themes, with project examples that adhere to these objectives.
- European collaborative projects, networks, and organisations, including a wide range of other (candidate) ECoCs, are identified and incorporated into the programme.
- The strategy to attract the interest of the European and international public is solid and based upon placing Aveiro on the radar as a city exploring the path to becoming a future-proof city, which is quite in line with the European Union's Green Deal initiative, while also making use of the bid's Atlantic dimension and digital cultural content.
- There is evidence of a sound collaboration with Liepaja 2027 and other former Latvian ECoC 2027 candidate cities with (project) examples given. This also applies to possible collaboration with French candidate cities for the ECoC 2028 title.
- The European dimension has also been included in the risk assessment with accompanying mitigation scenarios, which shows that the importance of the criteria is clearly on the radar of the team.

Outreach

- The outreach plan is based on conceptually strong methodologies and tools such as the Community Culture Club or the Living Places Lab, that are expected to produce good community involvement dynamics. The panel welcomes the integration of diverse social groups, such as the programmes specifically dedicated to senior communities and other vulnerable groups.
- Nevertheless, some important guidelines of the outreach strategy, such as IDEA principles, still remain too vague; likewise, the flagship project "Breaking Walls" is

described in broad terms and does not give sufficient details of the envisaged initiatives.

- The panel values the digital platform “Culture 24” as a project with a great potential in terms of interaction with various audiences, both at local and international levels, backed up by a specific capacity-building programme on digital community involvement addressed to cultural organisations and artists.
- The programme gives evidence of an extensive involvement of schools, especially through the PAEMA and STEAM programmes. Yet, the panel was seeking more information on the mediation strategies and on the plan to foster a higher interaction between culture and the educational system.

Management

- The bid relies on a solid operational budget amounting to €56 million. The relatively high contribution of the City (€17,75 million covering 32% of the budget) is seen by the panel as evidence of a strong commitment from the City, approved formally and unanimously in December 2021.
- The panel welcomes as well the decision of the 11 municipalities of the Aveiro Region to increase their financial commitment from €3 million to €5 million.
- The fundraising strategy is well designed; the identification of a specific EU funds manager and sponsorship manager is appreciated as well.
- The marketing and communication strategy is well articulated, devising some cutting-edge tools to pilot new methods of participation to cultural events and new methods of rousing interest and engagement.
- The panel appreciates the decision to create a large-scale event in 2025 to test Aveiro’s management structure, capacity to deliver and programme developments.

- The governance structure has been improved since the preselection, by devising some specific procedures aimed to prevent conflicts between CEO and Artistic Director.
- On the other hand, the panel is not convinced about the decision to have a very wide artistic team (composed of 28 persons), as it could impede reaching the declared objective of strengthening the local cultural producers and artists.

Capacity to deliver

- The political support from the municipality for the application remains unanimous. The same applies to the other municipalities of the Aveiro region, which formally support the candidacy through the Alliance for Culture 2030.
- Cultural infrastructures are concentrated in the city centre, but with tangible plans to decentralise the cultural offer. The plans aim at improving existing cultural spaces and conditions, with well-defined projects, budgets and timeline listed. The panel also appreciates that almost all of the projects were to be completed before 2027, expressing some small concern about the plans for the Events Arena though, as the calendar presented indicated this would be finished in 2027, whereas at the same time it is to be used for several ECoC events.

Conclusion

The idea put forward by the bid of Aveiro to be a cultural platform for innovative practices in European urban contexts is compelling and has a potential for further exploration.

It is based on a solid long-term strategy, complemented by a sound operational budget, a unanimous institutional support and a solid network of European partners.

The panel appreciated the strive for innovation that distinguishes the programme, with specific reference to the digital delivery programme for its cooperation and dissemination potential among the European Capitals of Culture.

However, the curatorial work and artistic component is not evident in the programme: in the description of the projects, the crucial issue the artists would like to explore is often vague. The emphasis is placed more on the process and tools, while the outcome and events to be staged in 2027 as well as the calendar of the year are described in more generic terms.

Although the regional focus of the programme has been strengthened, the added value of the regional projects to the European Capital of Culture bid has not been extensively worked out.

The connection between the place and the concept still remains not very strong, except for the element related to the amphibious nature of Aveiro and all the challenges linked to the lagoon and to the risk of overflowing of the city.

The outreach plan is based on conceptually strong methodologies and tools, but it remains vague on some important and promising aspects such as the IDEA guidelines or the flagship project “Breaking walls” or on how to strengthen the cultural components of the existing educational programmes like STEAM and PAEMA.

Finally, the governance structure has been improved since the preselection, but the wide artistic team (composed of 28 people) envisaged in the delivery structure could contradict the declared objective of strengthening the cultural producers and artists at local and regional level.

BRAGA

The Braga bid entitled “**Time for Contemplation**” is a response to the disruptions, challenges, and changes of the current world. The bid is supported by seven municipalities in the area, as well as the regional government of Galicia in Spain and the metropolitan authority of nearby Porto, in order to create a contemporary European urban area that bridges cities and cross-border regions.

The concept of the bid is based on four main pillars: the Temple of Empathy, the Temple of Wandering, the Temple of Disquiet, and the Temple of Creation, which embody the dichotomy of the city. The bid is an invitation to all of Europe to join in the spirit of shared

‘Contemplation’, as Braga believes that culture is the key to keeping all doors from closing, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Time is the most precious commodity, and the bid seeks to remind people that we must take the time to contemplate and time to act so that we may continue to thrive in a world of constant change.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The Braga 2030 cultural strategy approved and adopted by the City Council on 30 October 2020 is a ten-year vision that invites citizens to find opportunities for a more active and meaningful participation in the overall development of the city. The updates since the pre-selection phase are mainly on the developments on linkages to the ECoC goals.
- The ECoC project plan is well embedded in the cultural strategy and the ECoC goals have been further sharpened to achieve long-lasting transformation.
- Baselines could be better refined. References to pre-existing materials are not considered sufficiently reliable as baselines. It was unclear to the panel if a thorough analysis had been conducted.
- The monitoring and evaluation plan is well formulated with extensive detail on indicators with well-linked impact areas, strategic goals, ECoC goals and specific ECoC projects. The panel found the plans presented to advance collaborations across many areas very appropriate.

Cultural and artistic content

- The narrative of the programme is persuasive. It is clear and consistent in its connection between the projects and the relevant temple/axe. The projects are well described and artistically convincing, with a focus on the key international question to investigate.
- The cultural programme is well embedded in the cultural strategy and addresses the objectives of ensuring a continuous thrive of people in Braga and Europe in a world of

constant changes. The capacity challenges of the independent sector operators are encountered with solid capacity-building programme segments.

- The very rich programme is however perceived as quite dense and lacking a sufficiently clear structure. The panel found it difficult to fully understand the flagships. Moreover, the panel felt that the six celebrations could be nested better in the programme.
- The process of choosing events and projects through consultations and open calls is explained satisfactorily and the attention paid to the need for flexibility in the programme in terms of responding to new global trends and affairs is positive. However, the criteria for project selection are not very clear.
- A wide and careful selection of artists and cultural organisations from different corners of Europe, Brazil and Africa is featured. The panel is pleased to find that 85% of the planned projects engage the Region, and more than 45% foster cross-border cooperation, bringing partners from Galicia and the North of Portugal together. The panel is particularly pleased to know that all projects have international partners.
- With the expanded territorial scope of the bid, the programme endeavours to promote European synergies for new models of cooperation in the Euroregion on cross-border cultural ecosystems.
- As the youngest city in Portugal and a UNESCO media arts city, the panel was anticipating a stronger involvement and empowerment of the young generations, even through a cutting edge digital delivery of the outreach plans.

European dimension

- The European and international dimension remains solid in both the concept and programme of the bid. The bid is clearly written from a European perspective, which the panel sees very positively. The question remains, however, whether the concept will have sufficient European resonance.

- The scope and quality of the activities clearly promote intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and highlight common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European themes with project examples given that adhere to these objectives.
- European collaborative projects, networks, and organisations, including a wide range of other (candidate) ECoCs, are identified and incorporated into the programme. The bid will also be a connecting bridge to the Americas and Africa, involving 27 countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean.
- There is evidence of a sound collaboration with Liepaja 2027 with project examples given. This also applies to possible collaboration with French candidate cities for ECoC 2028. Further, the bid lists and explains how the connections with European and transatlantic partners and artists contribute to the programme.
- The strategy to attract the interest of the European and international public is solid and in comparison with the pre-selection bid now also includes the component of ‘Celebration’.
- A twin city agreement with Santiago de Compostela has been signed that includes joint international projects and touristic development. The strategy also identifies three growing target groups that share an interest in longer stays.

Outreach

- Both in terms of concept and communication, the outreach structure is well laid out, confirming that this dimension is effectively among the main concerns and objectives of the entire process.
- The panel welcomes the analyses and the initiatives for the involvement of local communities and its several groups, in order to engage with the objectives and activities of the bid. Most particularly, the approach to audience development is excellent.

- There remained doubts on the effective engagement of some relevant segments, like the “invisibles”/less mobilised citizens. The models for auscultation appear to be more of a marketing and communication strategy than one of effective participation.
- The panel appreciates very much powerful outreach tools such as the Generation B27 youngster focus group, the collaborative platform, Democracy for Common Good project and the digital platform Future Ground project for sustainable existence. Notwithstanding some doubts remain on the effective empowerment and influence of some of these tools.
- The panel very much welcomes the attention of the project work with the relevant migrant communities in the candidacy.
- As a former European Youth Capital, the panel would have expected a stronger outreach plan with schools as well as stronger links between digital outreach and the younger generations.

Management

- The municipality of Braga doubled its investment in Braga2027 (reaching now around €9,7 million), which indicates its commitment to the bid. This brings the total operating budget to €48 million, which is a solid budget to implement a European Capital of Culture.
- The updated city financial contribution and the submission of the final bid-book were approved with a unanimous vote by both the Municipal Council on 12 September 2022 and by the Municipal Assembly on 30 September 2022. On a regional level, unanimous and formal support and commitment for budgets have been granted as well.
- The fundraising strategy for operating expenditure from EU programmes of €3 million is realistic; the strategy is well developed, possible sources very well identified and directly connected with the Braga27 projects. The fundraising strategy related to private sources is also well thought through.

- The delivery structure is sound and sustainable and the panel is convinced of its independence.
- Marketing, communication and media strategies are interesting and creative and the Circle of Friendship principle is a good initiative. The link to the well-established pilgrimage brand Santiago de Compostela is clever and offers a valuable overall framework.

Capacity to deliver

- The support for the bid and the city financial contribution to the ECoC project has been voted on unanimously. There is also a clear wider regional support from four neighbouring cities, as well as from the other 85 municipalities of the North Region of Portugal. On the Euroregional level, the bid has the support of the Regional Government of Galicia and the Eixo Atlântico do Noroeste Peninsular.
- All cultural infrastructure projects are budgeted for and the completion of infrastructure plans related to the implementation of the proposed ECoC programme is planned on being ready in time for the title year.

Conclusion

The Braga2027 ECoC bid is solid and written with a European perspective. This is reflected in all sections of the bid-book. The artistic vision is interesting and is translated well into the temples and projects. The narrative of “Time for Contemplation” understood as a process of transformation of our minds (contemplation) and our behaviour (action), aware of the perception of time that rules our lives, is convincing. However, the overarching concept of "Contemplation" does not appear to have been deepened much since pre-selection and so its EU resonance, in terms of message and language, is not as persuasive as it could have been in a European context.

The bid is rooted in the ECoC network and a number of European and international partnerships, combining arts, science, tech and tradition. The cultural, social and economic

long-term impacts in urban development, i.e. the need to counteract the unbalanced urban-rural development and a sound impact spread to the whole neighbouring municipalities, is however unclear. Regardless, the bid reinforces a central axis through Porto – Guimarães – Braga – Santiago de Compostela that may deepen centre-periphery borders.

The outreach plan contains many interesting outreach tools and a very good audience development plan - confirming that this dimension has been among the main concerns and objectives of the entire process. However, in some relevant parts, the structure of auscultation seems to read more like a strategy of communication and marketing than of effective participation and involvement. Further, the influence of the tools for the empowerment of the younger generations in the outreach plans remains somewhat unclear.

ÉVORA

The proposal, throughout all its chapters, is fully inspired by the philosophy of “*Vagar*” that intends to question the position of dominance of humans over nature and other humans, and invites to live life more calmly and be one with the universe.

The bid reaffirms the manifest intention to transform Évora into a living lab of *vagar* philosophy to discuss the Anthropocene paradigm and to understand the relations between humans, universe and nature, using the disruptive power of the arts and science. The programme is based on three lines: Space (about dominance and power), Time (about identity, knowledge and beliefs) and Matter (about creating artistic legacy).

The concept, which pervades all the dimensions of the bid and is translated into a strong artistic vision, has been deepened from the pre-selection stage to highlight the genuine connections with the local way of being and living and to enhance its relevance with respect to the pressing challenges Europe and humanity at large are facing.

In the second round, the bid counts on broader institutional support, extended to the whole Alentejo region, and on a higher budget, with the city of Évora doubling its financial contribution.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city

- The concept of '*vagar*' - meant as a different mind-set and way of living - has been further developed and is deeply embedded in all the sections of the bid, including the strategy and the long-term effects.
- The panel appreciates the capacity and courage to turn a stigma that has marked negatively the narrative of the city and region into a new philosophy that is deeply rooted in the place and that is able to respond to the social, cultural and economic challenges humans are facing now in Europe and beyond.
- The Cultural Strategy has been further developed with a thorough analysis of the specific challenges to inform the monitoring system and is formally approved. The Évora 2030 strategy is well presented, highlighting the clear links between the overarching vision to pivotal axes, the ECoC goals and the expected legacies and impacts. References to the European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus are very appropriate and give rise to tangible proposals closely linked to the European context.
- The bid provides a clear prospect of the desired impacts and outputs of the strategy and of the ECoC project, complemented with good measurements and specific references to data sources.
- No independent evaluation and monitoring body has been indicated so far: there is a declared intention to collaborate with the University of Évora, but the evaluation entity is to be selected on the basis of a public procurement procedure. The bid developed in a convincing way the meaning of '*success*', closely related to the values of '*vagar*' and to the culture-led social transformation it could engender. The panel appreciates the key questions and the search for new metrics to assess the experience of '*vagar*', but draws the team's attention to the requirement to have the evaluation entity in place in 2023 and the need to develop a detailed evaluation plan, taking benefit of the relevant know-how and methods already existing at international level.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme is built on a strong artistic vision inspired by '*vagar*' and on a consistent cultural strategy, with a persuasive European resonance. The panel notes and highly values the impressive progress of the programme made since the pre-selection stage in terms of artistic quality, European dimension and topical relevance.
- The reading of the overall programme is a fascinating exercise, as a compelling poetic narrative binds the different themes, ensuring a clearer layout and close consistency of all the projects with the overarching vision. Évora's cultural programme is an invitation to experience the diverse scopes of '*vagar*', tasting a new dimension of time, exploring a new harmonious relationship with the universe, starting new discourses on the relation between humans and nature or on the power dynamics between periphery and centre, making room for divergent ways of thinking.
- The projects are well described. They are conceptually very rich, but at the same time, easy to communicate and deeply rooted in the '*vagar*' philosophy. There is an accurate selection of artists and cultural organisations; some of them are well reputed internationally and can allure European audiences.
- The cultural programme does more than just combining the cultural (tangible and intangible) heritage and traditional arts forms with contemporary ones: it recovers and uncovers them as new and contemporary resources. An example of the good interaction between tradition and innovation and of a genuine adhesion to the new European Bauhaus is provided by the Fair project, aimed to rethink the popular *Feira* and to turn it into a more contemporary event, while respecting its traditional character of encounter between generations and between rural and urban.
- The design of the programme is very clearly outlined: 56 projects (covering 70% of the programme) are detailed in the bid-book, while further 22 projects will be defined on the basis of four open calls to be launched during the preparation phase, specifically addressed to schools, regional festivals with a special international edition inspired

from *'vagar'*, regional cultural producers and international cultural organisations. The budget and delivery timeline for each call are well defined.

- The bid gives evidence of the process of involvement of the independent cultural scene in the programme development and its contribution to the definition of the key themes of the bid, as well as to the design of a number of specific cultural projects. A call addressed to the local cultural producers is also envisioned in the preparatory phase, with the view to enabling them to scale up to the European level.
- The cultural programme is complemented with two tools of facilitation: the Cultural Resource Centre, to build and reinforce the capacity of the regional cultural scene, and the Vagar Academy, that will organise conferences on the different dimensions of *'vagar'*. Both tools have a legacy potential. The bid displays other legacy projects, such as the Centre for Contemporary Dance, although the connection between this Centre and the other relevant dance projects could have been made stronger.

European dimension

- The overall programme and all the individual projects have a high European relevance, in their invitation to explore questions or challenges that have a wide echo in Europe: for example, reflecting on the dominance of humans over space, land, animals or technology; or exploring the cultural traces left by the past and present transits of migrants.
- The open call addressing international cultural organisations in 2025 with a budget of €6 million is valued by the panel as evidence of a clear intention to strengthen the European dimension of the programme and to reflect on the most important issues currently facing the world.
- The scope and quality of the activities clearly foster intercultural dialogue and highlight common aspects of European cultures, heritage, and European themes with tangible project examples fulfilling these objectives. The richness of the cultural history in

Europe could be further highlighted, as some references are currently made to the events of the city and Portugal.

- The panel welcomes the intense strive made in the second round for enlarging the number of European collaborative projects. The programme lists a number of artists, cultural networks, cultural organisations – above all, in the performing arts sector and with some prevalence in France and Spain – and convincingly explains how the connections with European and transatlantic partners and artists contribute to the programme.
- A wide range of other European Capitals of Culture, mainly candidate cities, are identified and incorporated into the programme. A number of potential collaborative projects with French candidate cities for ECoC 2028 as well as with Liepaja 2027, are listed.
- The strategy to attract the interest of the European and international public is solid; the connection with the tourism communication strategy, aimed to convey the experience of '*vagar*' as a new touristic product, is promising. The plan relies as well on the lure of some renowned artists involved in the programme.

Outreach

- The outreach structure and strategies - namely "The Voice that Matters" - have been further developed to a very good level from the first bid-book. It is well laid-out, complemented by a detailed time plan with precise milestones, and presents a wide range of activities and methods to reach the goals of informing and giving the community a sense of ownership. Most proposals have a very good potential to activate cultural and civic dynamics.
- A hospitality programme is presented with the view to encouraging close relationships between permanent and temporary citizens, including the active mobilisation of the university students. This is valued by the panel as a positive effort to incorporate '*vagar*' in the tourist experience.

- The bid provides an accurate analysis of the reasons for the low rates of cultural participation and gives some valuable proposals to promote a higher access to culture.
- The panel emphasises the decision to define a relevant number of open calls addressed to different target groups as a way to reinforce the bottom-up processes and ownership of the bid and enlarge the scopes and scales for participation.
- The outreach strategy includes a wide-ranging plan to involve schools, which is well appreciated by the panel, also for its regional coverage. The Generation 2027 initiative, with expected relevant responsibilities, is valued as well.
- The bid could have given more detailed information about the digital outreach delivery programme to engage the European and international audience.

Management

- The Évora programme is based on a sound operational budget amounting to €45,7 million, with an increase of nearly €1,6 million compared to pre-selection.
- The panel appreciates the decision of the Municipality of Évora to double its contribution (€10,5 million, covering almost 23% of the budget), approved unanimously along with the Évora 2030 Strategy. This signals a strong commitment from the City. The contribution of the Municipality is complemented with a financial support of €5 million confirmed by CIMAC, at regional level.
- The strategy aimed to raise EU and private funds is to be further detailed. The budget does not envisage any contribution from the EU, except from the Structural Funds, while the private fund-raising plan identifies a realistic target (€1,2 million). On a positive note, a specific international training programme is envisaged to improve the capacity of the local stakeholders (both entrepreneurs and cultural producers) to raise private and European funds, not only for the year of the European Capital of Culture but also as a legacy project.

- The breakdown of the operating expenditure budget confirms to be very sound with 70% allocated for programming and a healthy priority of the expenses.
- As to the delivery body, the bid proposes the establishment of a private non-profit association, a new type of legal entity with respect to the pre-selection phase. Based on the outcome of a specifically commissioned study, this legal model is now privileged, as it couples efficacy with the participatory need to ensure the involvement of the founding institutions, the academia, civil society and companies.
- The contingency plan is well designed, based on a thorough analysis of the possible risks and accurate definition of mitigation effects. The panel valued as well the provision of a contingency fund of €3 million as a golden reserve to face price volatility.
- The international marketing and communication plan as well as the international media strategy are well designed.

Capacity to deliver

- The unanimous support by the City Council is confirmed in the second round, while the political commitment at regional level has been reinforced, with all the intermunicipal communities of Alentejo (Alto, Central, Litoral and Baixo Alentejo) signing a letter of endorsement of the candidacy. At the same time, the Alentejo Regional Council approved the Évora 2031 Strategy and identified Évora 2027 as one of the main projects in the 2021-2027 funding framework.
- The city can rely on a number of small suitable venues and has a good capacity to host big international events. The panel welcomes the plan to build a multi-use cultural centre with a capacity of 3,000 people and a stadium with a capacity of 12,000 seats to host larger-scale events. The regional cultural infrastructure complements Évora's capacity to deliver a programme of the scale and the scope of an ECoC. All the cultural infrastructure projects are accompanied by a budget, and are planned to be ready in time for the title year, although the financing model for the multi-use cultural centre is to be further detailed. The on-going investments in smart and sustainable mobility,

healthcare and tourism infrastructures will further improve the city's assets in terms of accessibility, social well-being and accommodation capacity.

Conclusion

The candidacy of Évora has been deepened and strengthened to reach the high standards of an ECoC programme, with an impressive improvement in terms of artistic vision and cultural value, European dimension and outreach capacity, at the same time clearly strengthening the regional commitment.

The concept of '*Vagar*' and its underpinning philosophy remains compelling and with a strong poetic power that pervades all the bid-book, including the cultural strategy and the anticipated impacts. This concept is genuinely rooted in the regional way of being and can resonate in Europe and beyond, for its manifest intention to address tangible challenges humanity is facing.

The concept is translated into a persuasive artistic vision and into a solid cultural programme, that is an invitation to experience the diverse themes of Space, Time and Matter that are the main dimensions of the universe '*vagar*' aims to reconnect humans with.

The programme and projects have a strong European resonance, in their call to explore issues or challenges that have a wide echo in Europe: for example, reflecting on the dominance of humans over space, land, animals or technology; exploring the cultural traces left by the past and present transits of migrants, starting new discourses on the power dynamics between periphery and centre or savouring a new dimension of time.

The scope and quality of the activities foster intercultural dialogue, with the engagement of well-reputed international artists and a diversified range of cultural partners.

The outreach programme envisions a clear strategy with relevant axes, like four open calls for projects and an articulated schools programme, thus contributing to ensure local and regional ownership, diversity and inclusion. Although the digital outreach plan should be detailed, the connection with the tourism communication strategy to convey the experience of '*vagar*' as a

new touristic product and the hospitality plan aimed to promote a closer relationship between residents and visitors are very promising.

The bid is strongly supported by the City of Évora, which doubled its financial contribution since the prosecution phase, while the political commitment at regional level has been reinforced with an endorsement from all the intermunicipal communities of Alentejo (Alto, Central, Litoral and Baixo Alentejo).

PONTA DELGADA

The Ponta Delgada bid presents itself as a bridge between Europe, the Americas and Africa, under the concept of “**Human Nature**”. It is through culture that the Azorean people communicate and establish relationships with others and with their landscape. This concept for the programme comprehends the exchanges between nature and culture, geography, history and landscape, allowing for experimentation and innovation.

The bid expresses the urgency of solidarity and genuine connection, creating a movement of going towards the other and making a cultural transformation happen. The metaphor of the archipelago is proposed as an alternative model to global thinking, aiming to prove that Ponta Delgada and the Azores are part of an interconnected whole with Europe and the world - a reference point and a compass of Europe.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The long-term 2030 strategy of the city that was approved in November 2021 at the City Council and in December 2021 in the Municipal Assembly - focusing on the Sense of Place; Cultural and Creative Sectors; Cultural Citizenship; and Global Archipelago - offers a strong convergence of connection between the cultural strategy and the ECoC programme.
- Since the pre-selection phase, the political commitment to the Ponta Delgada bid has been strengthened and for 2022 there was an increase in the funding for culture with plans of sustained increases for the coming years as well.

- Priority is on the development of initiatives focused mainly on the first two axes of the cultural strategy being the Sense of Place and the Cultural and Creative Sectors. The cultural strategy axes and the ECoC programme are well aligned with ECoC specific objectives.
- Less clear is the long-term cultural, social and economic impact, including urban development and tourism development that the title would have on the candidate city.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the title on the city and for disseminating the results of the evaluation are adequate, including longitudinal projects such as Cultural Footprint (initiated for the cultural strategy), but the independence of the central monitoring and evaluation team is unclear.
- Draft Indicators are identified, which is a good point of departure and a substantial development, but indicators are not yet sufficiently developed. The qualitative indicators, in particular, could be developed better. There is too much weight given to classic quantitative indicators, which do not provide enough grounds to capture the impact of delivering the powerful concept of “Human Nature”.

Cultural and artistic content

- The panel sees a strong advancement and development in the cultural and artistic programme since the pre-selection phase. The concept of “Human Nature” could have been perceived as vague, but it holds up well in the context of this proposal and it has improved considerably since the pre-selection stage.
- There are concrete cultural and artistic projects developed through participatory processes. The programme – which is divided into four Archipelagos, i.e. Archipelago of Creativity, Archipelago of Participation, Archipelago of Europe and the World and Archipelago of Nature – is well structured and comprises a vision of good participation with a lot of potential for further development. The panel much welcomes this

approach and applauds the transparency and openness in the inclusive approach to the development of the programme.

- The programme is based on a strong sense of place and on a crosscutting involvement of people and it is convincing in its broader European and international message. Of particular interest are the projects involving community (Archipelago of Participation) and nature (Archipelago of Nature). The programme provides room for amusement and joy, as well as for multiculturalism and openness.
- The uniqueness of being between the Americas and the European Union is a good opportunity for the latter to work on the edge, even if this Atlantic dimension could have been better investigated.
- The cultural and artistic programme could benefit from enhanced European dimension and relevance, which should be stronger and more embedded at this stage of the project.
- The panel was pleased to see the strong connection of the ECoC cultural programme to the long-term strategy. In this sense, the panel value the “Human Academy”, the capacity-building programme covering all the islands and addressed to a wide crosscutting audience, as well other projects, like “Connecting Dots and Futures”, that serve as collaborative platforms for the cultural scene and strengthen the connections between the nine islands.
- The digital aspects of the programme are referenced throughout the programme; however, the panel would have welcomed a deeper understanding of how European and international audiences will experience the programme online and would have liked a more strategic approach to digital presentation of the programme at this stage.

European dimension

- The European and international dimension has been further developed since the pre-selection stage. The scope and quality of the activities clearly promote the cultural

diversity of Europe and intercultural dialogue and highlight common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European themes with project examples given that adhere to these objectives.

- The programme contains European collaborative projects, networks and organisations, and a wide range of other (candidate) ECoCs, are identified and incorporated into the programme. The connections with European and transatlantic partners and artists contributing to the programme is well explained and the same goes for the way the bid strives to be a connecting bridge to the Americas and Africa.
- The strategy to attract the interest of the European and international public is now solid and based upon three axes that include amongst others presenting projects of international appeal, addressing European themes, a digital cultural and artistic platform as well as collaborations with tourism associations.
- There is evidence of sound collaboration with Liepaja 2027 with project examples given. This also applies to possible collaboration with French candidate cities for ECoC 2028.
- However, despite many good elements, the panel is of the opinion that the European dimension is not articulated and integrated in the overall programme in a convincing way.
- The European relevance was difficult to identify in a number of projects of the Archipelago of Nature. Also, the Archipelago of Europe and the World, while interesting *per se* and showing good intentions, is the least developed of all and does not fully reflect a European dimension, which should have been stronger at this stage of the competition.

Outreach

- The outreach programme has been substantially developed from the pre-selection stage. Strategies are well thought out and interpreted in the programme. The civic

movement involving more than 800 people to lay the ground for the Ponta Delgada2027 application through their manifesto is an appealing approach. In general, the wide and diverse auscultation and civic participation in the preparation of the overall candidacy is very positive.

- The programme is well structured and comprises an ambitious vision for outreach that, with its various aspects, offers much potential. One of the programme's archipelagos is quite fittingly the Archipelago of Participation. In general, the outreach programme contains several concrete cultural projects that, in the panel's view, have the potential to foster participatory processes.
- The programme also has interesting proposals for the inclusion of larger and disadvantaged audiences. Nonetheless, some vagueness remains on concrete strategies for the large parts of the population that are almost always outside of consumption and cultural practices.
- The inclusion and cooperation with schools is well reflected in the programming, as well as in the expectations expressed of co-governance and co-responsibility with the educational communities overall. It reveals a genuine desire for active interconnection.

Management

- The operating budget remains unchanged at €44,65 million, although there have been some changes in funding contributions from the relevant public authorities. The contribution from the Region is higher than the one by the City of Ponta Delgada, at respectively €6 million and €4 million. In particular, the City of Ponta Delgada contribution is perceived as rather low. The increases to the budget from both authorities is however seen as positive by the panel. The overall City budget for culture is not very high, at €1,8 million in 2021. The overall budgets were approved by majority votes in the City Council and in the Municipal Assembly in September 2022. Guarantees from the Regional Government were also given in September 2022.

- The fundraising strategy for operating expenses from the European Union is well developed. Potential co-funding sources are identified and the anticipated contribution from EU co-funding of €3 million is realistic. Setting up a support office for the local cultural and creative sectors on EU funding opportunities 2023-2030 is considered a positive action that will be of great benefit for the local stakeholders.
- The marketing, communication and media strategies are well developed with interesting and creative elements.
- The delivery structure is convincing and the contingency planning adequate.

Capacity to deliver

- The political support from the municipality for the application remains unanimous. A public and written declaration of support guarantees the commitment of the Regional Government.
- All the cultural infrastructure projects are accompanied by a budget and planned to be ready in time for the title year.

Conclusion

The Ponta Delgada bid reads unique and is well rooted in place as well as promising in its broader European and international message. The proposal demonstrates clear advancements since the pre-selection stage across all criteria. The programme is based on a strong sense of place and on a crosscutting and joyful involvement of people. It is well embedded in the long-term cultural strategy, has unanimous institutional support and a fair operational budget. However, the anticipated impacts are not clearly defined. The City contribution to the budget is considered low.

The outreach programme takes an insightful outside-in perspective and is explained well. The strategy for audience involvement is also good and the engagement of the young generations is well designed. Nonetheless, some vagueness remains on concrete strategies for the large parts of the population that are almost always outside of consumption and cultural practices.

The panel felt that overall the Ponta Delgada 2028 and Azores' conversation with Europe could have been more strongly reflected in the cultural and artistic programme. Further, although the uniqueness of being between the Americas and the European Union offers a good opportunity for the latter to work on the edge, this Atlantic dimension could have been better investigated.

The panel's decision

The panel was presented with four different bids from significantly diverse cities facing their own challenges and each with its own cultural strategies, proposals, and interpretations of the ECoC criteria. The panel recognises that the bids focused on themes and issues of great relevance and urgency for Europe and the world at large. All four bids had their strengths and weaknesses. The panel was looking, according to Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council, at the cultural programme specifically designed for the ECoC year and with a strong European dimension.

Considering the revised bid-books, relevant hearings, and the specifications of the call, the panel discussed the merits of each city against the six criteria. In the final discussion, they weighed the applications against one another and each panel member gave their own assessment of the criteria for the four cities.

The panel would like to congratulate all four candidate cities on the very high quality in their bids, which demonstrates a thorough and deep understanding of the European Capital of Culture action.

The strength of all four short-listed candidate cities presented the panel with a challenging task, causing an intense and significant debate. Ultimately, the panel could not agree on a single candidate. The Chair of the panel attempted to bring consensus by inviting panel members to list the four finalist cities in order of preference. There were three probing rounds with debates based on the bid-books and hearings of the four cities in response to the six selection criteria. Each round showed a strong convergence among the panel members, with a strong majority choosing the same city as the "first choice".

As consensus was not reached during the discussion, a secret ballot was put in place, as proposed by the Rules of procedure. In the first voting round, and confirming the probing rounds organised to back up the panel's deliberations, one city received the votes of a strong majority of the members of the Panel, and the panel could therefore reach a clear and final decision to recommend to the Ministry of Culture of Portugal to designate the **City of Évora** as European Capital of Culture in Portugal in 2027.

Next steps-Formal Designation

This report has been sent to the managing authority and the European Commission. Both will publish it on their websites. In accordance with Article 11 of the Decision, the Ministry of Culture will proceed to the designation of the ECoC 2027 in Portugal based on the recommendation contained in this report. It will then inform the European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions. This formal designation enables Évora to use the title “European Capital of Culture 2027”.

Melina Mercouri Prize

The panel recommends that the European Commission award the Melina Mercouri Prize to the designated city on the basis of this report. The payment of the 1,5 million Euro Prize is however deferred until 2027, 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 2026 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 continues to honour 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, in particular:

- 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 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) might attract formal media and social media attention far beyond what they are used to handling. This adds a special and new aspect to decision taking in the city over a 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 its own citizens, the Expert panel, the Ministry and the European Commission, 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 European Commission, in advance of decisions being made.

There are three formal monitoring checkpoints (autumn 2023, mid 2025 and autumn 2026) when the ECoC will meet with the panel under the auspices of the European Commission.

Prior to each meeting the European Commission will invite the ECoC to provide progress reports. The European 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 European 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 will expect the first progress report of Évora in late summer 2023 to take into account the comments in the assessment of the bid and the recommendations, as stated above according to the six assessment criteria.

Long- term strategy

- The panel recommends giving a high priority to the setting up of a baseline in order to properly assess the impacts of the ECoC project from the very beginning.
- Concerning the evaluation process, the panel highlights the need to select an independent evaluation entity with a proven track record in the peculiar research and evaluation areas pertinent to Évora 2027's scope of analysis. The panel recommends that the evaluation team be in place during 2023.
- Furthermore, the panel suggests developing the assessment of the *vagar* experience and of its understanding at local and international levels, taking full benefit from existing investigations on similar concepts and experiences across

Europe and from the knowledge, tools and metrics available at international level.

- The panel encourages continuing to work on the implementation of the cultural strategy and to further integrate it with the regional development strategy and ECoC bid. A communication activity to give the Évora 2030 strategy high visibility is suggested along with a dissemination plan to share the monitoring and evaluation results.

Cultural and artistic content

- While the layout of the programme is clearer now, pervaded by a poetic narrative that weaves together the different themes and levels, the structure with the second hierarchical level (called the *programme*) may prove difficult to communicate. The panel suggests simplifying it to facilitate the programme communication.
- This proposal builds on a genuine and transparent involvement process with the regional scene. The panel recommends that independent cultural operators be given as active a role as possible so that they can scale up to European and international dimensions.
- The panel recommends that forward-looking plans be developed for the legacy projects: Cultural Resource centre, Vagar Academy and Centre for contemporary dance.

European dimension

- The panel welcomes the intense strive made in the second round for enlarging the number of European collaborative projects. The panel recommends the involvement of the European and international artists and cultural organisations to continue to grow, with a wider coverage across Europe and beyond, considering that *vagar* is a philosophy that echoes some Mediterranean mind-sets, as stated in the bid.

- Likewise, the panel encourages Évora to step up the cooperation with Liepaja27 with a specific budgeted plan of joint activities.

Outreach

- The panel welcomes the inclusion of the *vagar* philosophy in the outreach plan and encourages keeping deepening it to inform the outreach strategy and projects in close connection with the monitoring and communication plan.
- In the further strive to increase access to culture to the less privileged groups and different minorities, the panel recommends identifying strategic partnerships with the third sector or informal social gatekeepers.
- The panel recommends attentive dedication to the creation and programming for the Cultural Resources Centre, considering its central role in the activation and networking of several outreach and learning projects.
- The hospitality programme incorporates *vagar* well in the tourist experience. The panel encourages the development of a plan to address the potential challenges of succeeding with ambitious tourism plans, such as the possible sharp rise in visitor numbers. A priority should be to protect the delicate social and environmental surroundings of Évora, while also expanding the *vagar* tourist experience to the entire region.
- The panel recommends to further detail the digital delivery outreach and communication plan so as to lure and engage young generations as well as European and international audiences.

Management

- The panel recommends proceeding in the setting up of the Association.
- Experience has shown that successful ECoCs use the first year after selection to establish all the governance, management and administration structures and systems. This allows the subsequent two years focusing on programme development in time for the full programme to be in place by mid-2026. The

following recommendations are also based on the experience of previous ECoCs.

- The panel strongly recommends that financial agreements with the funding institutions be signed in 2023, with a specific schedule for the assignments of the relevant funds. A detailed fund-raising plan to seek European and private funds is recommended as well.
- As to the delivery and governance structure, the panel recommends simplifying the composition of the executive committee (whose size could hinder its effective operation) and to ensure its role as being strategic and not executive, facilitative and financially accountable, while preserving the independence of the CEO and of the Artistic Director.
- Likewise, a simplification of the coordination work at regional level is highly recommended as well as a reinforcement of the regional outreach team to ensure good coordination with the 58 municipalities and to trigger civic engagement across the huge region of Alentejo.
- In the process of drafting the detailed recruitment plan up to 2027, the panel recommends allocating sufficient resources dedicated to capacity building/learning, facilitation, outreach and fund-raising.
- Great attention should be placed on the recruitment, through international open calls, of the posts of CEO and Artistic Director, which are expected to be filled by 2023. The calls for the senior posts are to be accurately designed so as to attract/retain highly skilled people with a great commitment to the project.

Capacity to deliver

- The panel appreciates the detailed plan and the ongoing investments intended to further improve the infrastructural capacity to deliver the planned ECoC programme. Experience from other ECoC shows that strong commitment to producing the necessary venues in time for the title year from the designated ECoC city and the institutions supporting the project is pertinent for the delivery of a successful ECoC.

In addition to the capabilities, merits and recommendations mentioned above, the panel encourages the city of Évora to deepen its collaboration with the other bidding cities and the wider artistic and cultural community in Portugal. The decision of the Portuguese Ministry of Culture to introduce a Portuguese Capital of Culture and to assign this title to Aveiro in 2024, Braga in 2025 and Ponta Delgada in 2026 before Évora 2027 provides a unique opportunity to intensify cooperation among the preselected cities and to offer to Europe the best of the fascinating projects presented in this competition, which will reflect internationally not only on Évora but also on the country as a whole.

Thanks

The panel members would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in this selection phase of the competition. The panel thanks the four preselected candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids. It encourages the city of Aveiro, Braga and Ponta Delgada to continue to build on the momentum created in the bidding phase. The connection between the strategy plan and the bid, the international network built, the institutional support, the mobilisation of the citizens and the competent bidding team are all excellent elements to continue with the development and implementation of their respective cultural strategies.

The Panel thanks as well the European Commission for its advice and the managing authority for its excellent administration.

Signed

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