



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

April 2022

The Expert Panel's report
pre-selection stage

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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the pre-selection phase of the competition for the European Capital of Culture in 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 Guimaraes 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”) – adopted by GEPAC and published on its website. GEPAC issued a call for applications on 23rd November 2020 on its website: www.ecoc2027.mc.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.

Panel meeting

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process, in line with Article 2 of the Rules. The European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions) appointed ten members of this panel, while the Ministry appointed two members. Two panel members attended the meeting virtually. Beatriz Garcia has been elected as a chair and João Seixas as a vice chair of the panel.

All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and submitted it to the Ministry during the pre-selection meeting. Representatives of the Ministry and of the European Commission attended the meeting as observers. The observers took no part in the panel’s deliberations or decision.

The competition takes place in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. At the pre-selection hearings on 8-10th March 2022, each candidate city, in alphabetical order, presented its case in 45 minutes and answered questions from the panel during a 45 minutes period.

At a live press meeting on 11th March 2022, the chair of the panel announced the panel’s recommendation that the Ministry invites the following cities to submit revised bids for the final selection (in alphabetical order):

Aveiro, Braga, Évora, Ponta Delgada.

Next steps

GEPAC will arrange for the formal approval of the shortlist based on the recommendations included in this report (Article 8 of the Decision). It will then issue an invitation to the cities named on the approved shortlist to submit the revised applications for the final selection. The shortlisted cities are encouraged to take into account the panel’s assessments and recommendations in this report. The deadline for the submission of revised applications is 21st

October 2022 (to be confirmed by the Ministry). The final selection meeting is scheduled to take place in Lisbon on 5-7th December 2022. Two to four members of the panel will pay a one-day visit to the shortlisted cities just before the final selection meeting, in order to obtain more background information on the respective bids. Representatives of the European Commission and GEPAC will accompany the panel members as observers.

Thanks

The panel members would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in this pre-selection phase of the competition. In particular, the panel noted in particular that all cities have used the opportunity of the bidding process to reinforce their cultural strategies as well as the role of culture and Europe in their overall social-economic development. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECoC competition.

The panel wants to highlight the high number and quality of the bids submitted as well as of the importance of the corresponding strategic development processes implemented in the candidate cities, making its choice of proposing only a short-list of cities for the second round a difficult one. This reflects a dynamic and diversified cultural landscape in Portugal and a rising awareness that culture is a sound investment for improving our living environments.

The panel encourages all candidate cities to continue with the development and implementation of their respective cultural strategies. The panel would like to thank all twelve candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids, the European Commission for its advice and GEPAC for its excellent administration, interpreters and technical team.

Assessments of the candidates

In its assessment of the candidates, the panel noted the general and specific objectives in Article 2 of the Decision and the requirement for the application 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 the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their findings during the pre-selection phase.

Not all bidding cities had fully completed the formal approval of their cultural strategy at city council level. One of the most important features in Decision 445/2014/EU, governing the ECoC action from the 2020 titles on, is the requirement that cities have a formal and explicit cultural strategy. This requirement is to ensure that the ECoC is grounded in a medium-term transformation of the city and its cultural life.

The panel noted that most candidate cities had underdeveloped to severely underdeveloped European dimensions in their bid. The European dimension is the *raison d'être* of a European Capital of Culture and must be at the heart of a bid.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the bid book, the city's presentation and Q&A sessions during the pre-selection meeting. A city's history, its recent and current policies and its cultural offer may form a basis for the proposed programme, but they are not criteria in the selection process.

In reference to successful cities, specific and common recommendations are made, in order to assist them in the preparation of their final bid books. The panel's assessment and recommendation for the shortlisted cities are also based on the analysis of the capacity of all candidate cities to make the required steps in order to win the ECoC title in the following months until the final selection meeting.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the panel that all cities progressing to the second stage of the bidding process include the following in their bid books (in line with the final selection questionnaire):

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

It is also the recommendation of the panel that all those attending the presentation be active participants in either the presentation and/or subsequent questions and answers session. Further, it is recommended to clearly state who in the presentation team are from within the bidding team and who are externals. A further recommendation for presentations is to respect a private sphere between the presentation team and the panel. The panel underlines the prohibition of photos, video or sound recordings during deliberations and inside the deliberation room while the panel is still present.

AVEIRO

The City of Aveiro presented its bid under the concept: *5th Element - Culture*, claiming that four elements - Earth, Water, Air and Fire - have shaped Aveiro's existence. Culture is viewed as the necessary 5th element for changes. The cultural and artistic programme is built on the idea of the Dream Box, made up of four tools, namely *Living Places Lab*, *Creative Change Academy*, *Community Culture Club* and *AI-Artistic Intelligence Factory*. The four tools have four roles; they are capacity-building programmes, important pieces of cultural infrastructure, knowledge resources and an audience engagement driver.

The Aveiro 2027 bid is a joint initiative of the Municipality of Aveiro, CIRA - Aveiro Intermunicipal Committee, the University of Aveiro (UA) and AIDA-CCI - Commercial and Industrial Chamber of Aveiro.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- Aveiro Cultural Strategy 2030 (approved in 2019) is aligned with the main development strategies for the city and the region; it incorporates 10 challenges and 12 strategic goals which are very well articulated and clearly connected with the main ECoC vision being presented – in particular around the concept of STEAM.
- The Strategy has expanded into the region via the Regional Alliance for Culture 2030 (approved in 2021), which is aligned with the Strategy for Territorial Development of the Aveiro Region, including plans for sustaining culture beyond 2027 (with or without ECoC 2027 title).
- The ECoC action is clearly aligned with the Strategy, and this is effectively presented in the proposal.
- The monitoring and evaluation plans respond adequately to the outlined vision, strategic goals and desired impacts.
- On a less positive note, the long-term cultural, social and economic impacts could be better explained.
- It is not entirely clear how the 12 strategic goals address the 10 challenges to produce coherent outcomes.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The programme has many very interesting features. In particular, the connections made between the programmatic elements and the capacity and impact-building tools is well designed. However, the panel would have liked to see more details on this, presenting clear examples.
- The programme was developed through diverse methodologies of collaboration and co-design with a wide range of people, which the panel views as a positive element.
- From the Q&A session, the panel learnt that the ten municipalities mentioned in the bid book will share programmes in capacity-building, common participatory programme, a common international programme and will also host projects on a rotational basis. The involvement of these municipalities should be described in greater detail in the final bid.

- Though quite valuable and relevant, the gift package “Dream Box” seems a little complicated in its approach. A simplification of the design/structure might make communication easier.
- The concept of the four elements is not specific to the place and could be applied to any location. It is also not unique in a European context. The combination and connection between the concept and the project on the other hand is very evident in terms of programme coherence with meaningful, interesting projects and with a solid European dimension. The team has indicated that despite an open call and good co-creation model that is already in place, they will appoint an Artistic Director.

European dimension:

- The European and international dimension is tackled satisfactorily. European cultures, heritage and history as well as European integration and current European themes are synthesised well with the objectives. European projects, networks and organisations, including other ECoCs, are identified and incorporated in the programme.
- The panel sees an intrinsic connection between the content of the programme and the European dimension of the action.
- There is evidence of sound cooperation with short-listed Latvian cities for ECoC 2027 as well as candidating French cities for ECoC 2028. Existing connections with European and transatlantic partners and artists will be further developed.
- The panel recommends developing more projects that foster a stronger European mind-set of the people in Aveiro and the region.

Outreach:

- Great care was taken to ensure the inclusion of the local people in the process. Nonetheless, for the next phase, the panel would like more details on the effective intervention of the local agents.
- There is a good attempt to include the general public and marginalised as well as disadvantaged groups in the programme.
- Although commencing the volunteer programme already in 2023 might seem a bit early, it is a worthwhile exercise.
- The panel seeks clarification on the criteria for the open calls initiatives and whether the calls are also directed towards artists and with activities in the surrounding region.
- The IDEA principles (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) are good but the panel would like to see these more developed.

- There are good schools' programmes. They are well thought out and seem to be led by the schools themselves. There is evidence of good co-creation models.
- The panel would like to see more clearly how the programme will ensure complete integration with most diverse social groups, for instance, how will seniors participate and collaborate with artists?
- More evidence of the involvement of educational communities for early-school children is sought.

Management:

- The city's culture budget is sound and has increased in the past five years, reaching €4,6M in 2021, with additional funding of €1,6M allocated from the budget 2022-2025 to help the recovery of cultural agents post Covid.
- A legacy budget of €8,25M per year is planned post 2028, including €2,25M for ECoC legacy programmes.
- The overall operating budget looks realistic, with a high contribution from the City at €17,75M. However, as for all short-listed cities, the panel requests clarification on the innate and specific conditions applied to the €25M from the ERDF as well as other EU and national funding.
- It might be worth considering bumping up the budget for the “cultural programme” and “marketing and communication” and lowering the budget item on “wages, overheads & administration”. 5,25% towards “other costs” should be explained.
- The financial commitment from the region is quite low at €3M and the panel therefore questions the level of commitment from the region to the bid.
- The panel is not convinced that CEO and Artistic Director sharing the decision-making power is the best governance structure - especially not in instances of severe disagreements.

Capacity to deliver:

- The City Council has unanimously supported the candidacy along with 10 other municipalities of the Aveiro Region (they formally supported the candidacy through Alliance for Culture 2030).
- Aveiro has a developed cultural life and has/will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme.

- Cultural infrastructure is concentrated at the city centre, but with plans for infrastructural development in every neighbourhood of the city and region through a network of new multifunctional spaces.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good, as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.
- Aveiro has experience in hosting large events.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Aveiro proceed to the final selection phase. It is a strong bid based on consultative processes in the city and region with relevant cultural and institutional stakeholders and with efforts to include the voices of people at all levels. The cultural strategy is aligned with the main development strategies for the city and region and the ECoC action is embedded within and effectively presented in the strategy. The long-term cultural, social and economic impacts could be better explained. The cultural and artistic programme is aligned with the overall objectives of the bid. The programme has very interesting elements and a sound European dimension. More clarity is sought on how the programme will ensure complete integration as well as involving educational communities for early-school children.

BRAGA

The concept of the bid - *Time for Contemplation* - tells that there is time to contemplate and opportunity to act. The theme responds well to a disruptive, challenging and changing world. The dichotomy, which characterises the city, is expressed on the four pillars of the cultural and artistic programme: *Temple of Empathy; Temple of Wandering; Temple of Awakening; Temple of Creation*. The bid draws on new models of a contemporary European urban area that bridges cities and cross-border regions. Thus, the bid is supported by seven municipalities in the area as well as by the regional government of Galicia in Spain and the metropolitan authority of nearby Porto.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- More than 3000 people/agents have been consulted or have participated in discussions on the role of culture in the city over 2018-2020, reflecting the concept that “culture is everyone's business”.
- The Braga 2030 Cultural Strategy (approved in 2020) is built on both tradition (cultural experience and local way of living) and contemporary artistic creation. It is also aligned with Agenda 21 for culture and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It emphasises the pivotal role of culture for the achievement of the SDGs and underlines global concerns as well as European values.

- There is alignment between the Cultural Strategy and the ECoC programme in terms of cultural, social, economic and urban development impacts, for the title-year in 2027 but also, importantly, for beyond.
- The ECoC 2027 monitoring and evaluation plans relate to the ambition to create a new Cultural Observatory, which is *per se* a laudable endeavour. Similar organisations in Galicia and Latvia are mentioned. However, greater clarity is needed as to how the Observatory may materialise and which its referent points are.
- The ECoC 2027 themes, goals and projects are well laid out with clear indicators set out.
- At this stage, the emphasis is mainly on quantitative indicators. This seems to overlook important qualitative aspects related to spirituality and contemplation (while these are essential elements of the application). Many of the indicators listed do not link to clear methodologies. This is acceptable at the pre-selection stage but it should be further developed.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The concept of the bid book - *Time for Contemplation* - is clearly expressed and presented.
- The main goals of the concept, revealed through four actions - *Time for sharing and embracing / Time for rediscovering and reuniting / Time for questioning and inspiring / Time for daring and empowering* - communicates well.
- The programme is developed through diverse methodologies of collaboration and co-designed with a wide range of people, covering local, national, European and transatlantic partners.
- Independent sector operators struggle with a lack of entrepreneurial and innovative skills as well as international connections, therefore strong capacity building programmes are developed, which the panel is pleased to hear.
- The collaboration with seven regional municipalities is well performed; the challenge will be to explore new and different ways of further developing this collaboration.
- A wide range of thematic diversity is presented. There is good coverage of genres, as well as cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary projects.
- The programme has a good balance between heritage and innovations, traditional and contemporary arts.

European dimension:

- The bid has a solid European dimension in its concept and programme.
- Cooperation with European and global partners - cities, cultural organisations, artists and festivals from around the world - is extensive and convincing. The level of cooperation is sound and represented in the scope of the cultural and artistic programme.
- The team is very apted to the digital transformation and amongst other digital elements inherent in the programme, the team is building digital strategies for reaching young people across Europe and the world. On a less positive note, the strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public in a non-digital way could be further developed.
- The panel would like to understand more clearly how the programme can attract people of Braga to experiencing and celebrating the European cultural diversity in the city and the surrounding region and feel more European.

Outreach:

- Various groups of communities were addressed with the help of different methodological tools that are well presented. Furthermore, a digital strategy will be used for micro targeting. The panel suggests that engagement of marginalised and disadvantaged groups can be further addressed as for example LGBT+ community or youngsters.
- The bid pays attention to the audience that does not normally participate in cultural activities. Bottom-up processes with those citizens – engaging them in conversations about their thoughts and ideas offering new insights (positive as well as negative) - were conducted and the result has been valuable for the bid design. The panel has some hesitations about the model of auscultation on the effectiveness of participation and involvement.
- Open calls for artists and cultural operators were launched; projects were selected by a carefully recruited team of external curators' sources from within a broad perspective of artistic expressions. Nonetheless, for the next phase the panel would like to see how these calls go beyond the city to also include the surrounding region.
- The Local Advisory Council meant to be a platform to assist, monitor and follow-up on the Braga 2027 bid and ECoC implementation process is an interesting model in theory for ensuring layered voices in the development of the project. It is not clear to the panel how this Council is placed in relation to the Teatro Circo de Braga and how the team will work with the Council in the next phase.

Management:

- The organisational structure chosen for implementing the ECoC programme is Teatro Circo de Braga, a municipal company for culture. A special task force (managed by a CEO) will be established to execute the ECoC within the Teatro Circo and will also deliver the legacy activities as part of the company's regular cultural programme. While the governance scheme of this task force is clearly laid out, its relations with the other departments of Teatro Circo should be better investigated and described.
- The panel would like to underline the importance of full independence of the special task force delivering the Braga 2027 ECoC.
- Communication is meant to be accessible, dedicated to different interests of people and addressing both local and international audiences.
- The city budget for culture has a reasonable level and has increased over the years since 2017 to amount to €8,2M in 2021. It is planned to reach €10,7M by 2028.
- The overall operating budget looks realistic. However, as for all short-listed cities, the panel requests clarification on the innate and specific conditions that will apply to the €25M from the ERDF as well as other EU and national funding.
- The contribution to the budget from the City of Braga is not high at just €5M and the contribution from the Region is absent in the budget, which may indicate a low level of commitment especially of the latter.
- Capital expenditure for cultural infrastructure has already been incorporated in the last multiannual investment plan approved by the City Council. Together with that, there is a private investment in a new contemporary art museum.
- The city's risk assessment is well thought through.

Capacity to deliver:

- The City Council supported the candidacy (and its financial contribution to it); however, this was not a unanimous decision. The regional involvement and commitment to Braga ECoC 2027 is not clear and would need to be clearly demonstrated in the final bid.
- Braga has a developed cultural life and adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme.
- Braga has experience in hosting large-scale events.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good, as well as absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Braga proceed to the final selection phase. The bid is clear, ambitious, well thought out, with a good balance of contemplation and action. It has a strong local, national as well as European dimension throughout. Further, the bid has a strong concept that responds well to the many local, European and global challenges and changes of our time. Local, national, European and international partnerships are well presented and cooperation at this stage is solid and convincing. The artistic programme is simple and complex at the same time. It may be a challenge to communicate the overall concept of *Contemplation* to a wider audience in Europe and beyond, but the four actions and corresponding projects communicate well. The programme feels very connected to its place, while still evoking a strong local and European dimension. The regional commitment to the project, however, remains unclear and should be fleshed out further.

COIMBRA

The programme aims at focussing (metaphorically) on five streams that interact and move the city in five directions uniting in a *Stream of Change*. The concept is attentive to the local identity and coherent with the need to combat the clichés that stigmatise the city. It intends to create a centrality for the city and region and to rejuvenate the city. The *Stream* is being identified as “*the third bank of the river*”; “*the spirit of coffee*”; “*books & stones*”; “*breakthroughs*” and “*windows to the world*”. The theme attempts to build on the past of the city to rebuild its future, which is a valuable programme approach. The candidacy encompasses 19 municipalities.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- From the bid book, it was unclear if the city has a long-term strategy in place that is signed by the City Council. At the Q&A session, the panel was informed that a document had been unanimously signed three years ago.
- It is unclear from the bid book and the Q&A session how the strategy will be rolled out. The timeframe for the cultural strategy is not clear, in particular whether it will go beyond 2027.
- The current cultural strategy aligns with the Agenda 21 for culture and is translated into four actions. How the ECoC 2027 programme is embedded in the cultural strategy is imprecisely described and remains unclear to the panel.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the title are not yet developed; however, it was indicated by the team at the Q&A session that there would be a plan for monitoring and evaluation, should the city move to the second stage of the competition, and that an external company is engaged to work on this.

- Indicators are identified and include environmental, climate and urban factors in addition to cultural indicators, as the aim is achieving a transformation of the city and not limited to cultural development.
- The outlining of desired impacts is adequate at the pre-selection stage – although there is not sufficiently convincing information about how these impacts may materialise.
- Further, there is only reference to a few quantitative indicators. It is unclear whether any qualitative assessment is to be conducted. It is also unclear whether the University is involved in any of this.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The programme approach is good with the five streams that come together to tell the story of the city. The three areas underpinning the programme include education/training, ecological and social. It is a good strategic approach to the development of the programme. Each of the programme streams highlights actions, outcomes, impact and partners. This is a solid element in the bid.
- The *Virtual Coimbra* project is excellent. It builds on the learnings of hybrid delivery during the pandemic. This is something that could be further developed in other areas of the programme, making it thus a stronger programme in terms of audience experience. There are also a number of good examples of both online/hybrid projects ensuring good experiences and access for audiences who cannot travel.
- However, the programme is at a very early stage of development, though it heads in a good direction with audience and capacity-building in mind. At the current stage of the programme, there are overall plans, lists of objectives and ideas for action. A more compact programme with descriptions of content and cooperation partners locally, nationally and internationally would have been required at this stage of the competition.
- Further, the programme lacks diversity with regard to genres and forms of expressions.
- The programme still needs a lot of work to be clearly defined and developed to its full scale, presenting goals and expected results.

European dimension:

- The conceptual development of the programme is lacking a deep European dimension, which is the *raison d'être* of a European Capital of Culture
- Common European themes such as climate change, the pandemic, civic society and the Portuguese heritage diaspora are mentioned; however, the panel does not see how this translates into specific cooperation and co-creation projects with diverse local, national, European and other international partners, organisations, institutions and networks.

- Some international partners are indicated, but it is not clear how they were selected, nor the nature of the cooperation or the level of commitment at this stage.
- A candidate city is requested to cooperate with other ECoCs. The bid book mentions a list of ECoCs and expresses an intention to cooperate. It is, however, not clear with which ECoC cities Coimbra 2027 has been in contact and agreed on some level of cooperation and co-creation.
- The panel would have expected to see more concrete collaboration with international partners, even at this first stage of the competition, as building international relations and co-creating project ideas is very time consuming and cannot be limited to the hypothetical time between the two stages of the competition; the panel finds it doubtful that Coimbra 2027 would be able to bring the European dimension to a level required of an ECoC in the time remaining to the final selection.
- A European dimension can be about what Europe can contribute to an ECoC, but it is also about what an ECoC can contribute to Europe. From the application, it was unclear to the panel how Coimbra 2027 would address the latter aspect.
- Although the city is expressing great interest in international visitors, there is no clear strategy presented in the bid to attract the interest of a broad European and international public.

Outreach:

- It seems from the bid book and the hearing that the programme has been developed without strong community commitment though the panel understand that, in particular, working meetings with various agents (political actors, institutional representatives and those “*citizens of Coimbra who spontaneously wished to talk or GT called upon*”) did take place, as well as some public sessions.
- There were calls to the city's creative minds for ideas, but it is unclear to the panel if and/or how these calls effectively influenced the programming. The panel was concerned that with no open calls for specific project proposals having been conducted at the pre-selection stage there would not be enough time to efficiently involve the local community for the final round of the competition.
- A wide range of marginalised community groups and nationalities are recognised, which is a positive element. However, there is no clarification on how they will be engaged on a practical level.
- The panel is unclear about the level of effective regional interconnections / cultural strategies and dynamics in the surrounding region.

Management:

- The percentage of the city's annual budget for culture in the past five years is relatively low at 3,5% and has been fluctuating up and down, without showing a clear pattern. However, the panel takes note of the stated intention to increase the level of cultural spending for the years after the ECoC-title.
- The overall operating budget looks realistic and sound, with reasonable contributions expected from the City and the Region, respectively at €8,2M and €4M. In particular, the anticipated part of the budget allotted to programme expenditure, at 70%, is encouraging.
- A Foundation will be set up to deliver the ECoC in Coimbra, but only generic considerations are provided on the concrete governance model.

Capacity to deliver:

- The Pact for the City, unanimously approved, is mentioned as a political guarantee of the ECoC project. The Intermunicipal Community of Coimbra Region (CIM-RC) also approved a resolution to support Coimbra's application - signed by 19 municipalities. The panel, however, was uncertain about the financial guarantees from all partners.
- Coimbra has experience in hosting large-scale events.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good, as well as its absorption capacity with regard to tourist accommodation.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Coimbra does not proceed to the final selection phase. The panel finds the overall bid underdeveloped at this stage of the competition and is not convinced that Coimbra 2027 could manage to bring the programme to the high artistic level and European dimension required of an ECoC in the short time remaining to the final selection. The concept of the bid works well. It is attentive to the local identity and coherent with the need to combat the clichés that stigmatise the city. It aims at creating a centrality for the city and region and to rejuvenate the city, which has a lot of potential. The bid contains many excellent elements that, given more time, could have been developed into an interesting ECoC programme. The experiences gained and networks built nationally as well as internationally in this pre-selection phase could prove very beneficial if choosing to pursue an alternative opportunity. The panel recommends that the city of Coimbra build on the good work it has started and continues its cultural journey.

ÉVORA

The Évora programme is structured around three themes, which are the main dimensions of the overall concept of *'Vagar'*: *Space, Time and Matter*. Within these themes, there are various sub programmes and within those sub programmes there are various projects. The Évora

programme takes the Alentejo term *vagar* and reinterprets it as a challenge to humanity. The bid states that *'each of us needs to come into contact with Vagar and all its unfulfilled potential. Although ancient, that mindset is now more relevant than ever'*. The proposed projects take their inspiration from Évora's relevant past, as well as from its contemporary challenges - most of them fundamental to Europe's future as a whole. The mix of projects respond strongly to the particularities of the Alentejo region whilst striving to also reach a European dimension. It is a bid by both the city and its surrounding area, the Alentejo region.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The Évora cultural Strategy is based on a clear vision, i.e. a city with regional centrality and national and European reach. However, it is not completely clear how the whole Alentejo region will be fully involved in the process and the title year.
- The Évora Strategic Plan 2030 was approved in 2021. Its focus and ambition are for the city of Évora (and the region of Alentejo) to be a place of culture, or rather of cultures (plural form). It identifies a set of "cultural centres" as urban anchors to highlight and strengthen the city's broader cultural capacities.
- The city has had a long tradition of developing and implementing cultural strategies, as the first one dates back to 1999. The current strategy runs up to 2030.
- The strategy was built through consultation, and it is expressed clearly, linking four dimensions of vision with strategic interventions and the way the ECoC intervention contributes to each, which the panel sees as convincing.
- The ECoC programme appears therefore to be aligned with key dimensions of the strategy.
- The bid includes adequate references to how the capacity of cultural and creative sectors may be enhanced. Current weaknesses are recognised and realistic plans to advance links with economic and social sectors are presented. References to the European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus are appropriate, while also placing proposals in a European context.
- The candidate stated that the cultural sector is still struggling to achieve greater international recognition and impact (lack of know-how, structured policies etc.). There are some theoretical plans for strengthening this sector, but the panel would like to know concrete plans and activities for overcoming this issue.
- The proposed monitoring and evaluation framework is also strong, appropriately organised around process, governance, achievements, results & impacts. It is valuable to see reference to a specific organisation with a proven track record in research and evaluation, the Public Policy Monitoring Unit at the University of Évora. The measures proposed, however, do still read vague and it is as yet unclear what 'success' may look like. This needs careful development for the final round of the competition.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The poetic concept – *Vagar* – reflects a way of living and Alentejo’s intangible heritage, and the urgent need to transit to a “slow living philosophy”. The concept of *Vagar* is transversal to the whole candidacy and expressed by time (identity, knowledge and beliefs), space (power) and matter (impulse). It is no doubt a concept that is relevant in a rapidly changing world. The challenge remains if it will be possible to communicate the notion of *Vagar* outside of Portugal.
- Overall, the structure of the programme is clear and well laid out.
- The cultural programme does more than combine the cultural heritage and traditional arts forms: it recovers and uncovers them as new and contemporary resources. This comes across strongly, a rich ancient heritage, a revisit of past to the present.
- There are many interesting projects in the programme, but at the current stage of the programme, the projects might be rather small for the target groups and for alluring European audiences.
- The programme and outreach aspirations are inherently intermingled. In combination, they call for the voices of artists, institutions, communities, children, marginalised groups, international partners etc. The panel would like to understand more clearly the process of co-designing the programme with these voices and looks forward to seeing this reflected in the final round of the competition.
- The panel recommends open calls for projects to ensure outreach, inclusiveness and ownership of the bid.

European dimension:

- While the concept of *Vagar* may have local declinations in other parts of Europe, have relevance in post Covid societies and have resonance European-wise in the context of the New European Bauhaus and Green Deal, the European dimension of the bid must be further developed on several accounts and thus needs careful attention for the final round of the competition.
- The list of European partners has a high number of academic and scientific partners (part of the network of Évora University), while the artistic and cultural organisations are still underrepresented on a local as well as European and international level.
- It appears that Évora 2027 has been in contact with quite a few ECoCs, trying to find concrete areas for cooperation.
- The programme displays very few Central, Eastern European and trans-Atlantic partners. The panel recommends developing this aspect of the bid for the final round of the competition.

Outreach:

- The outreach programme has interesting proposals for the activation of cultural and civic dynamics such as the “*Voice that matters*” programme. However, the corresponding strategic and governance instruments need to be further developed, for a wider and more permanent conjunction with the local and regional society.
- Open calls and bottom-up processes need to be clearly reinforced in the final round of the competition.
- While there are several references to school participation projects, the panel would like to see this important area unfold in more detail for the final round of the competition.
- The panel would like to see the regional outreach strengthened, both in terms of institutional support/pacts, as well as in terms of other regional cultural agents' involvement.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has increased over the past five years, which is encouraging. The increase of the part of the total budget allocated to culture to 8% post title year (as against 7,7% in 2021) seems rather modest at first sight, but it is fair, as current levels also include resources for the rehabilitation of cultural facilities and built heritage.
- The operational budget is sound; however, the financial contribution from the City is rather low at €5M, just equalling the one expected from the Region.
- As for all short-listed cities, for the final round of the competition, the panel requests clarification on the innate conditions that will apply for the €25M ERDF funding as well as for the €8M anticipated contribution from the National Government.
- The breakdown of the operating expenditure budget is very sound with 70% allocated for programming and a healthy priority of the expenses.
- The panel would like to see final decisions from funding authorities with regard to investments in the cultural infrastructure as well as for the operating expenditure.
- With regard to the balance of power between the CEO and the artistic director, it remains unclear who makes the final decision in cases of severe disagreements
- The digital components are addressed throughout; however, for the final bid digital plans need further development in terms of production and communication.

Capacity to deliver:

- The candidacy was unanimously approved by the City Council, as well as the Municipal Assembly through the Évora 2031 Strategy. Political support and commitment for the candidacy also comes from the 14 municipalities of Central Alentejo. All municipalities have signed the Cultural Commitment of the Central Alentejo, which defines the political strategy for culture in this sub-region, and The EIDT - Integrated Strategy for Territorial Development of the Central Alentejo for 2030, identifies Évora 2027 as a significant opportunity to increase the cohesion and prominence of Central Alentejo.
- Overall, the panel would like to be reassured that the necessary infrastructure for delivering a programme of the high standard expected of an ECoC will be ready in time for the title year.
- The city has many small suitable venues and has some experience with organising and managing big international projects such as the Sustainable Tourism Forum, however it lacks venues for larger-scale events. This needs to be addressed.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility as well as the absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation are appropriate.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Évora proceed to the final selection phase. The panel views the concept as strong and relevant locally as well as for Europe and beyond. The programme will need additional work to reach the high standards of an ECoC programme. The panel also recommends diversifying the range of partners locally, nationally and internationally. For the final round of the competition the panel expects the bid to demonstrate more deeply the European dimension, which is the *raison d'être* of a European Capital of Culture. Open calls for projects should be reinforced and outreach programmes developed further to ensure local and regional ownership, diversity and inclusion.

FARO

The concept of the bid book – *Turn the Tides. Shape Gentle Landscapes* – clearly reflects the need and wish to change (just like water shapes the margins), valuing the region and its citizens and combating mass tourism dependency. The change sought for centres in culture, nature, heritage, society and economy. The artistic programme is presented under the concept of Fluid Placemaking, which puts emphasis on a “sense for this location”. The programme is built around four key parts or elements: *The North and the South, Nature in Transit, Give and Take, Floating Spaces*. There is a clear and demonstrated recognition of Faro and the region's vulnerability and ECoC 2027 as a lifeline for urgent change. Faro 2027 bid is strongly supported by the 16 other municipalities of the Algarve joined in the Association of the Municipalities of the Algarve.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The Strategic Plan for Culture, “PEC Faro 2030”, was approved in 2020. It intends to contribute to Europe’s and international agendas from the perspective of local changes on four thematic areas: cultural landscape, creative competencies, creative economy and creative participation. Each area has associated cultural programmes.
- The ECoC 2027 project intends to accelerate the vision in the PEC Faro 2030 and is included as an additional programme in the overall strategy. Faro 2027 sets itself four strategic goals: care, explore, share, and connect; but the plan for the period beyond 2027 stays unclear.
- On top of the local strategy, there is a strong regional commitment with culture, and it appears that the ECoC 27 candidacy led to the first joint document on cultural development between the municipalities of the Algarve region in the autumn 2021, which is aligned with the regional strategic agendas and the Municipal Master Plan.
- Long-term impacts indicated refer to the challenge of having an economy that depends on mass tourism. At present impacts are presented as an independent list and it is not sufficiently clear how they align with strategic priorities – although this could easily be resolved. This is an area to be developed further.
- There are plans to deliver capacity-building programmes to assist the cultural ecosystem.
- In terms of evaluation, the proposal refers to specific partners and referents, but it does not offer detail about actual monitoring and evaluation plans or on the way the evaluation may link to desired impacts and strategic priorities. The reference to evaluation as a ‘learning opportunity’ and the ambition to develop self-assessment tools and to involve citizen participation are welcome.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The principles of the cultural programme – i.e. the value of authenticity, the new ways of cultural participation, the building of capacity, creative mixing, and culture as part of sustainable urban solutions – are based on a new wave of place makers and power to combat poverty and low participation.
- The programme is built from a process of consultation and inclusion consisting of conversations, action-based pilots and citizen-led projects as well as an open call that resulted in the submission of 70 artistic proposals. No information was however given on how many of them had ultimately been included in the bid book and what the criteria for choice were.
- The programme in general still lacks new and specific approaches, without which it may result in local and rather marginal projects’ delivery and the objectives stated, in particular in terms of reducing poverty and promoting positive social change, may not be attained.

- The capacity to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions is not given sufficient consideration.
- All cultural partners mentioned in the bid book have been contacted and are confirmed in principle, which is positive.

European dimension:

- Many projects included in the programme have European potential creative partners and Faro 2027 has also contacted post ECoC and legacy teams to learn from them and ensure transfer of their best practices in the development of their own programme.
- Topics that are both relevant to Faro, but also prevalent and urgent in most other European cities, are intended to be addressed and discussed such as the boundaries of Europe, the threats resulting from climate change and rising water levels, the connection between tourism and poverty, etc. For instance, the topic of mass tourism and its socio-economic dimension, a key issue in this part of Portugal, has an obvious potential for a further development as a strong European theme.
- Consideration has been given to a hybrid delivery of projects to include digital/online experiences involving both local and European partners, such as the *Europe at Home* project. This can further develop the capacity of Faro 2027 to address a European and international audience.
- European communities that want to co-create and share knowledge with local inhabitants have been identified as a target group, but not the 5 million tourists visiting Faro every year. The panel thinks this may be a missed opportunity because one of the main goals of the bid is to be the ECoC that found a creative way to embrace mass tourism.

Outreach:

- Civic engagement could have been further developed to include marginalised and underrepresented groups. There is a lack of evidence of a broader direct relationship with various agents and socio-territorial dimensions.
- A number of pilot projects have been developed and delivered by youth (for example, project *Capsula*), but evidence of effective activation of schools and education communities is missing.
- While there is a welcomed recurrent reference to poverty as a priority issue to tackle, the way this would be addressed in the context of the ECoC is not explained in a convincing manner.
- The bid book indicates that more than 3000 people have been consulted, which the panel sees as a good endeavour, but the existence of a specific and convincing

strategy for participation and involvement is not fully demonstrated. While there are some good principles in terms of engagement, it is not clear how they would be activated.

- Outreach sensitivity ('sincere attention', etc.) show to be quite crosscutting, especially in social and territorial/regional terms. But there remains a lack of guarantees for effective participation or even co-governance by civil society, in addition to the more traditional events and activities.

Management:

- The overall operating budget of €46,3M is confirmed. The annual budget of the city allotted to culture was nearly €5M in 2021 and has been fluctuating up and down over the last five years, without showing a clear pattern. However, the panel takes note of the stated intention to increase the level of cultural spending to 10% of the overall city budget for the years after the ECoC-title (it was 9,6% in 2021).
- The overall operating budget at €46,3M looks realistic, with relatively high contributions expected from the city and the region, respectively at €10,6M and €6,0M.
- Consideration has been given to the management and administration of funds. The team seems to be building capacity in this sphere through participation at Creative Europe projects.
- A Company will be created to deliver the ECoC in Faro, and some basic and relevant considerations are given regarding this structure.
- There are five strategic investments in renovation of cultural infrastructure, which will be carried out until 2028. The City Council has unanimously approved a decision to allocate funds.
- The communication and marketing strategy – with a reference to sincerity – nicely links with outreach principles.
- The contingency planning is not fully convincing, especially in terms of remedies to overcome the weaknesses identified.

Capacity to deliver:

- The City Council has unanimously supported the candidacy. The association of the Municipalities of the Algarve consisting of 16 municipalities also supported the candidacy.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good, as well as absorption capacity in terms of tourists' accommodation.

- The commitment of the regional municipalities is demonstrated; however, there is a necessity of a stronger interaction between culture and tourism, aimed not only to host in the best way the tourists during the ECoC year, but to envisage new forms of sustainable tourism.
- Faro is experienced in hosting large-scale national and international events. However, capacities for hosting large-scale indoor programs is unclear, emphasising just expansion and requalification of the Municipal Theatre (with the biggest number of seats - 1000).

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Faro does not proceed to the final selection phase. The panel emphasised the strength of the long-term strategy and determined territorial identity. However, there is a lack of explicit links between strategic and ECoC objectives, desired impacts and evaluation plans. The panel also valued the sense of place and the intention to address poverty in the culture programme. However, the potential of this was not exploited to the full. Diversity has been evident through the presentation, as well as good examples of European approach in projects were revealed. However, there remains a lack of clear understanding between the proposed events/entertainment, the cultural artistic activities and the overall strategies and concepts.

FUNCHAL

The concept of the bid book - *Beyond the map, a common ground* - underlines the peripheral geographical situation of the city and of Madeira Island (which is seen as “both idyll and exile”). It is a European territory of historical acculturation and, as such, of connections to dozens of other European territories. New generation of artists and cultural agents and “digital nomads” in town (as well as emigrants) help position the city and the archipelago internationally. The application involves the city and the region of Madeira. It is presented under the banner of one of the outermost regions of the European Union, as an attempt to extend Portugal and Europe beyond the continental map and to become a permanent exhibition of the outermost realities.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The Strategic Plan of Funchal Culture 2030 was approved in 2021. It aims to promote change and development in the city. Its priority goals, however, are not described in the bid book.
- The city is already developing a strategic and long-term investment in the cultural sector, as well as growth in international cooperation with other European cities (and other peripheral territories).
- The ECoC 2027 is meant to contribute to the construction of the next strategic plan for culture Funchal 2050. However, there is no indication as to how the current cultural strategy relates to the ECoC project and how the latter would be instrumental in

enhancing the capacities of the cultural sector and leading to long term impacts in any specific dimension. It seems that the team considers the Strategic Plan of Funchal Culture 2030 and the ECoC project as the same endeavour, while the strategy should in essence be bigger in scale and scope and the ECoC project should be an element addressing some priorities of the larger strategy.

- More than 1500 people were involved in Funchal 2027 and the Strategic Plan of Funchal Culture 2030 preparation in 2019-2021 via open calls, listening posts, etc.
- The proposal does not offer sufficiently precise or informed reflection as to how Funchal would approach its own monitoring and evaluation plans, or what capacity exists to deliver this in order to capture the impact and legacy of their ECoC year. The team confirmed during the hearing that monitoring and evaluation was one of their biggest gaps.
- No clear data was provided on long-term cultural, social and economic impact, including urban development.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The bid outlines a number of projects, but overall, the programme lacks a cohesive vision and coherence. A few global initiatives are presented, which are thoughtful and rather interesting, but it appears that an important part of the program is still left for two additional open calls.
- Moreover, as there is not enough clarity about the partnerships or delivery partners or cultural operators for the various projects, it is difficult to understand the projects' delivery methods or types. The panel was also unsure about the relevance of the concept of "positive discrimination", aiming to invite only 9 outermost regions in the EU as a way to help Funchal creating deeper connection and more visibility in continental Europe.
- There are (too) many traditional events, conferences, exhibitions, and references to famous people who used to visit the island. However, this does not represent the diversity of contemporary expression and capacity to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions.
- There is good intent to have digital initiatives, linking culture and digital technologies. Panel was also satisfied by the intention of paving the way between Art, Science and Technology for artists and audiences.

European dimension:

- The European dimension is undeveloped even for this stage of the competition, though the applicant indicates that the open calls published to develop the ECoC 2027 project triggered submissions that included 87 international partners from 18 countries.

- There is a wish to reach out to the outermost parts of Europe, which is *per se* a very interesting endeavour with a strong European relevance as these regions do contribute to the diversity of cultures in Europe but are not sufficiently visible on continental Europe. However, the bid does not articulate in a practical way how Funchal 2027 would remedy this lack of visibility. Furthermore, partnerships with the rest of the European Union are not named and are underdeveloped.
- There is a lack of project or programme outcomes, which would for example ensure Funchal's collaboration with its sister cities in Europe.
- The panel is not convinced that the programme presented would help the people in Funchal and Madeira to experience and celebrate the diversity of cultural expressions existing in Europe and feel more European.
- There is no information upon connections with touristic networks across Europe.

Outreach:

- The outreach proposals are unbalanced.
- On the one hand, and on a positive note, an open call was launched and led to almost 50 projects in the proposal.
- On the other hand, and more problematically, there is insufficient evidence that an effective involvement of civil society did happen.
- There is little information on the outreach programme in terms of process (for example who has been involved and how this can be further developed). While it is mentioned that the same 1500 persons and entities had been consulted for the preparation of the strategy and the bid book (which is a solid starting point), there is no evidence of a specific and robust strategy for civic participation and involvement.
- The panels' view is also that the innovative idea of intervention and involvement via the FX27 PROTOCOL project is more exclusive than really participatory and interactive.
- The strategy for audience development, and in particular the links with education and schools, is not properly described.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has increased over the period 2017-2021 from just over €2,0M to €6,2M with a stated intention to maintain this trend after 2027. This is a positive development.
- The bid indicates an impressive figure of €84,97M for the operating budget of Funchal 2027 for the period 2021-2027, with a high contribution from the City at around €25,8M.

The direct revenues from commercial initiatives, patronage and crowdfunding are assessed at €18,75M, which the panel considers as very ambitious.

- The bid is not very clear of the costs related to the ECoC project.
- The bid book does not include a table for capital expenditure, but has on page 32, a table called “Operational expenses” mentioning an amount of €84,97M for “Total Project” and an amount of €60,52M for “Total operational expenditures”, leading the panel to believe that the difference between the two amounts is the money for capital expenditure.
- There is no marketing and communication strategy outlined.
- There is no contingency planning.
- The governance and delivery structure are not spelled out.

Capacity to deliver:

- The City Council has unanimously approved the candidacy. There is also full and unequivocal support from the Regional Government of Madeira.
- The city’s absorption capacity in terms of tourists’ accommodation is very good.
- Lack of balanced investment in culture, logistic capacity, structural gaps in coherent support strategies for professional artists and cultural agents, structural gaps in communication with international audiences and lack of infrastructure for large cultural initiatives are highlighted as major shortcomings. Clear and precise plans/activities to overcome these weaknesses are however not presented.
- The city’s experience in hosting large and/or international level events as well as its cultural profile are not clearly demonstrated.
- Delivering an ECoC at the highest European professional standards requires a critical mass of capacities with the right skills at the right time. With the capacity at hand in Funchal, the panel is concerned about the capacity to deliver an event of the scale and scope of an ECoC.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that Funchal does not proceed to the final selection phase. There is lack of evidence of the presence of many voices in the design, development and potential delivery of this project. Despite significant weaknesses in addressing formal criteria of the bid book, the proposal offers an interesting narrative worth developing. It opens the question about ‘what is Europe’ and ‘where does it end’ beyond the continent. There are some very good intentions, especially regarding the outermost areas of Europe and the potential deriving from digital and technology programmes. The experiences gained and networks built nationally as

well as internationally in this pre-selection phase could prove very beneficial if the city chooses to pursue alternative schemes. The panel recommends that Funchal build on the good work it has started and develops these further.

GUARDA

The concept - *Re/Generations Envisioning the Rural Metropolis* - stands both for the territory (*Territorial Regeneration*), for the community (*Demographic Regeneration*) and for nature (*Ecological Regeneration*). The bid is presented as a truly regional aspirational programme. The ECoC programme will be organised across the territory in both urban and rural areas centred on 19 weeks of intense cultural activity, from February to November, each lead by one of the municipalities currently involved in the candidacy. The spatial approach to delivery is a very ambitious and interesting way to work. The city or rural metropolis - based on the idea of collaboration and cooperation ignoring municipal borders - is presented as a way and a manifesto for dealing with climate change in Europe, as well as with other major challenges like territorial depopulation and devitalisation.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The City Strategic Plan for culture is aligned with the National Plan for the Arts and the 2030 Regional Culture Strategy. It has not been adopted yet.
- Another plan, called the “ECoC Candidacy Strategic Plan”, was also prepared with various stakeholders, pointing to concrete future actions of European dimension such as a European Mobility Programme for Cultural Fruition, a Cultural InterRail, a European Cultural Cohesion Fund, a Cultural Observatory and a Digital ECoC.
- The Cultural Strategy 2030 and its articulation with the ECoC 2027 would have needed to be developed and clarified.
- Culture has been identified as a key tool in re-envisioning the territory as an alluring *rural metropolis*, a *rural renaissance* opposed to the economic inequality and lack of quality of life in highly populated urban areas.
- There is a welcomed convergence between this vision and national ambitions expressed in the Portugal 2030 Strategy. The ECoC 2027 proposal and legacy envisaged are aligned with the identified needs for the development of Portugal’s interior.
- Evaluation and monitoring plan is still to be elaborated. There is a vision presented, including indicators of evaluation, however implementation is still unclear.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The programme is built with local, national and European partners, allowing them to further include others who wish to join on the journey of programme development.
- The panel agrees upon good intentions with regards to the slow and careful approach to the development of the programme. However, it would like to see clear partnerships in the delivery. Although Cultural Partners and their European networks are put at the centre of the programme, none of the organisations are mentioned, except that there are 500 of them in the region.
- Cooperation, collaboration and co-creation will be key factors to deliver the programme, however the implementation of this principle is unclear.
- There are many diverse and experimental projects presented in the bid book, mainly addressing climate change through culture, which is very positive. However, there is a lack of a “wow factor”, which would help make the title-year exceptional and memorable. Such projects as 19 Cultural EcoParks or 1000 Creative Residencies are very interesting and ambitious; however, the majority of the projects do seem underdeveloped.
- The capacity to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions is not clearly presented.
- The panel thinks that the itinerant programme between the 19 municipalities involved bears some risks as it depends on a good model of (public) transport to be widely accessible and an efficient scheme of communication, which still needs to be developed. There is also the associated risk of a lack of overall consistency and coherent artistic vision.

European dimension:

- The European dimension is underdeveloped, with a distinct lack of European partners. As an example, there are just a few former or future ECoCs mentioned, but with no clear partnerships.
- The main strategy to attract a European audience is based on “sustainable tourism”, stimulating people from all over Europe to come and learn new approaches to everyday cultural practices in a context of disruptive transitions. This concept still lacks practical elaboration in regard to the cultural programme of the ECoC.
- The panel is not convinced that the programme presented would help the people in Guarda and its surrounding region to experience and celebrate the diversity of cultural expressions existing in Europe and feel more European.

Outreach:

- For the preparation of the bid book, a diversity of auscultation and civic participation actions has been developed; however, it is not fully presented in numbers and final results.
- The network of cultural partners was born from a series of open calls. This is an inclusive method. However, more details are needed to understand what the actual expectations of active participation and co-governance are.
- There is a good framing of the issue of activation of the various universes of public – with special emphasis on the various most marginalised groups such as young people, migrants, health, seniors, LGBT+, etc.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has been on the increase over the past five years, which is encouraging, but it is still modest at around €1M. The city pledged to raise its current annual budget for culture by at least 50% after the completion of the ECoC, which the panel sees as a strong positive signal.
- The operational budget is ambitious at €53,8M; there is a strong contribution from the various municipalities involved at €11,8M, while the financial contribution from the Region is more modest at €3M.
- The breakdown of the operating expenditure budget is sound with 64% allocated for programming and a healthy priority of the expenses.
- The municipalities involved in the ECoC project are not just supporting but also meant to host ECoC events, each being offered the ‘presidency of the ECoC 2027’ for a full week. The role of cultural staff and teams in the 19 Municipalities seems to be in a supportive one. The panel emphasises that in terms of long-term development, their inclusion in the programme team is extremely important.
- There is an effective and clear involvement and commitment of the region in the ECoC 2027 programme as well as relevance of an ECoC impact for the whole region of Beira Interior. However, the role of the cultural staff in the regional municipalities would have needed to be further clarified in the delivery of the project, as the panel saw this role as key for a successful ECoC year.
- The relationship between the CEO and the Artistic director was not clearly stated. The panel has not been convinced about self-governance of decisions regarding artistic issues.

Capacity to deliver:

- Guarda's Municipal Assembly has unanimously approved the candidacy. There is also institutional and financial agreement with 16 other municipalities from the region as well as inter-municipal organisation CIMBSE.
- There will be six capital cultural investment projects in Guarda with a total budget of €8.5M. Guarda's Municipal Executive has approved commitments to cover capital costs for the projects.
- Although there are (or will be) diverse cultural facilities within the city and region, their capacities for hosting ECoC are not sufficiently described, as well as cultural life, organisations, etc.
- The city has limited experience in hosting large-scale international events.
- Accommodation structure as well as capacities within the city and the region are not sufficiently described. There are just a few hotels in the whole region (but plenty of alternative offers).
- The candidate stated a lack of adequate public transport such as high-speed trains or airports. Road connections are good.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Guarda does not proceed to the next stage of the selection process. The experiences gained through this regional engagement and commitment in this pre-selection phase could prove very beneficial if choosing to pursue alternative European schemes and opportunities that better suit the goal of these regional relationships and its legitimate aspirations for territorial revitalization. The panel recommends that the Guarda develops the concept of Rural Metropolis further and builds on the good work it has started with the region.

LEIRIA

The concept for Leiria is to *Curate the Commons*. It denotes both sense and sensibility, promoting co-belonging and co-responsibility, under a stimulating narrative. It is based on the need to *curate, recognize, relink, weave, care, imagine and sustain*. The programme seeks recognition of a common, European-based narrative that implies all citizens – “*Built by European ordinary people and addressed to everyone*”. It aims to ensure citizens participation in the management of public space. The bid is led by the city of Leiria, but also involves a constellation of municipalities and institutions of a much wider geographical area that are covered by the Rede Cultura 2027 network.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The Municipal Strategic Plan for Culture for the Municipality of Leiria 2030 was approved in 2021. It corresponds to a new paradigm of ‘making culture’ and a new governance model.
- A Rede Cultura 2027 (RC2027) network has been established, involving 26 municipalities, and a Manifesto was produced and signed in 2019, understanding culture as a powerful element of the reaffirmation of Europe. The constitution of the network relies on a long-term perspective linked to the vision of territorial development. However, its links with the strategy are unclear.
- The way the ECoC action is included in the strategy is also unclear, as the statement in the bid book that the former has a structuring role in the latter is somewhat elliptic.
- The proposal refers to a range of desired impacts and indicates the adoption of the ‘Theory of Change’ approach in order to capture them. It is however unclear how impacts relate to overall city strategic objectives and specific ECoC objectives.
- The plans to develop long-term links between cultural and creative sectors and the economic and social sectors need to be better explained.
- The integrated Monitoring and Evaluation system – Common Cultural Observatory - is at its early stages. Evaluation questions dimension: coherence, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, equity and impact. The sections on the proposed strategy, the expected impacts and the monitoring and evaluation approach do not seem sufficiently connected.

Cultural and artistic content:

- There are six programmatic strands, which “*develop into action research lines*”, understood as frames to be filled in through open calls and co-creation.
- In the view of the panel, the programme is in this way both layered and complex and needs to be simplified.
- The approach and methodology for developing the programme is interesting and fresh, as it is meant to compile it in a way that promotes co-creation and that is bottom-up, with much leeway given to the organisations responsible themselves. It is designed to allow open calls within the projects and continuous growth by listening further to cultural operators.
- However, the programme is underdeveloped and needs to be strengthened with core cultural and artistic projects at this stage. Although there are several interesting projects in the programme already (e.g., Opening), there are more structures based on a project idea and aiming at organising open calls for the actual project or projects around those ideas.

European dimension:

- Common European values, themes or topics are mentioned as essential guidelines for the programme development, i.e. hospitality, democracy and citizenship, education and sustainability, the importance of tangible and intangible heritage, the nature-culture relationship. This is welcome, but the panel does not see how this translates concretely in the six programmatic strands of the overall programme.
- While there is clear intent to further develop European connections and partnerships within the overall programme, only very few examples are given of practical cooperation already developed. For instance, there are just a few former or future ECoCs mentioned, and with limited partnerships.
- The panel was therefore left with the impression that clear and defined European partnerships were not in place at this stage.
- It is difficult to understand why EU citizens would travel to experience the programme presented, as it is very local in its focus, which is also a beautiful strength, but not representing the idea of an ECoC.

Outreach:

- Outreach intentions are quite good, and the involvement of the cultural agents is well visible, evidencing a consolidated history of building cultural strategies and preparing the application. Division into four consequent areas (mapping, listening, programming and management) looks good from a conceptual point. However, some doubts remain about the solidity of this process and effective participation, as no sufficient explanation was given on governance/auscultation coordination and instruments, as well as on the corresponding inclusion in the cultural programme.
- Diverse groups are referred to: immigrant communities, refugees, LGBT+, decolonized generations, elderly people, territorially isolated communities, people with disabilities, etc. There is an interconnection with several proposed projects; however, their participation could have been better explained.
- Various projects in conjunction with 21 school groups and the National Arts Plan are presented, but once again, it would need better explanation to measure the true recognition of these connections.
- Audience development plan is underdeveloped for this stage.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has been on the rise from 2017 to 2021, to reach €9,3M in 2021, and there is a stated intention to increase the figure after the ECoC year based on a new “distribution key” depending on the number of inhabitants.

- The overall operating budget looks realistic, with a strong focus on “programme expenditure” (70% of the budget) and a prominence of “promotion and marketing” (17,5%) over on “wages, management and overheads” (12,5%), which the panel welcomes.
- The contribution to the budget from the City of Leiria is high at €13,1M, showing a strong commitment, while the financial contribution from the remaining 25 municipalities is estimated at a rather low level (€2,3M).
- There are limited considerations regarding the delivery structure of the ECoC 2027 in Leiria though there is a declared (and welcomed) intent to ensure sustainability and recognition of the territory's existing capacity.

Capacity to deliver:

- Leiria’s Municipality has unanimously approved the Municipal Strategic Plan for Culture. Leiria and the other 25 municipalities of the region together with some other institutions signed the 2019 Manifesto for cultural collaboration, including its Article 3 on Leiria’s application for European Capital of Culture 2027.
- Leiria has a developed cultural life and strong cultural stakeholders and is experienced in hosting large-scale events.
- There are various plans and programmes within the cultural strategy as well as the ECoC programme for strengthening the capacity building of the cultural sector, which would reinforce the capacity of the local and regional cultural players to co-design the title-year.
- Planned capital expenditure is very low, at €1,2M as the intention is more on using venues and spaces that already exist and repurposing abandoned buildings. The application therefore relies on investments that are already planned in all municipalities. The panel sees that as a strength, because it reveals a long-standing endeavour in favour of culture.
- In terms of accessibility, road connections are good, a high-speed rail network is foreseen (The Rail Plan 2030) and there are plans for overcoming limitations in public road transport connections, namely between the territory’s innermost municipalities.
- The city’s absorption capacity in terms of tourists’ accommodation is good.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Leiria does not proceed to the final selection phase. The team demonstrated real passion and commitment to the development of this project. The experiences gained and networks built in this pre-selection phase could prove very beneficial if choosing to pursue an alternative opportunity. The panel recommends that the city of Leiria

build on the good work it has started in both its network and civic engagement and continue its cultural journey.

OEIRAS

The programme concept is presented as *We, the People of Europe*. It is a series of perspectives that places Cultural Democracy at the centre of cultural programme development. The strategy aims to open spaces and create opportunities for citizens to be part of meaningful decision-making power in the creation, production, distribution and enjoyment of culture and seeks to create a shift from passive audience to active participants in culture. Oeiras '27 will be organised through a network of small, local, open, connected but scalable experiments of new cultural and social projects built through the mobilisation of its citizens, a living lab, and a collective effort. As an approach, this is a very interesting method of programme development, very inclusive of wider society and engaging. The project intends to be built together with the other 17 municipalities in the surrounding greater Lisbon region.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- Oeiras Cultural Strategy 2022-2032 is approved, developed with the Lisbon University Institute – to make culture the central driving force of the municipality's next development cycle. It is linked to a long-term strategy for the urban and global development of Oeiras. Culture will be integral to the future Municipal Master Plan as a structuring element. The ambition is also to achieve a wider metropolitan cultural ecosystem – working on developing common regional mechanisms and programmes.
- There are various and developed plans and programmes within the cultural strategy as well as the ECoC programme for strengthening and capacity building of the cultural sector. Strengthening the cultural and creative sector is an essential part of the Oeiras 22-32 Cultural Strategy.
- The main strands include “green and blue city”, building citizenship, socially valuing culture, strengthening the creative ecosystem, preserving and enhancing cultural heritage, projecting Oeiras at a national, European and international levels.
- The application includes a broad list of impacts in all key areas but, at the moment, they read mostly like a list. Additional clarity is needed to see how they link to their strategic goals and the specific vision of the ECoC programme
- Monitoring and evaluation plan is in collaboration with the Independent University of Lisbon, to be implemented by an independent team within the future Oeiras's Association.

Cultural and artistic content:

- *We, the People of Europe* as a concept, though *per se* interesting, is underdeveloped for this stage of the competition. It should be noticed that most of the proposed cultural

projects do not clearly present respective planned partnerships or collaborations. They are also presented in an extremely generic way, making their assessment difficult.

- The programme concept - translated into five ambitious strands (*We the Dreamers, We the Curious, We the Storytellers, We the Restless, We the Ancestors*), each subdivided into two themes - is too complex and the panel has concerns as to how this will be communicated to the general public.
- 'Cultural Democracy' is the heart of the project in terms of co-creation where collective decision making in the design and development of projects is evolving through the co-creation process. The panel appreciates this endeavour, as it is in line with the overall ambition to revitalise the cultural ecosystem of the city and the surrounding area. It is also an active way to involve a variety of local agents. However, this is also a very challenging structure, and the panel did not see how the coherence of the programme would be ensured.
- It is difficult to understand what the programme would look like in 2027 and what the audience locally, in Europe and online will effectively experience.

European dimension:

- There is a welcome intention to build the programme around EU shared democracy (with references to key dates in the recent history of Portugal and European construction project) as well as shared EU values. The European dimension is, however, underdeveloped and European partners in practical partnerships are unclear.
- There is some reference to projects being discussed with other European Capitals of Culture, but there is insufficient detail as to how developed these are for this stage
- The overall approach to the European Dimension requires some further thought and development.

Outreach:

- Schools are central to the further development of the project. Schools will become cultural spaces and places of co-creation and presentation of work.
- It is still unclear how marginalised groups will be directly engaged although there are some good examples of engagement.
- There remains a lack of evidence in terms of expected active collaboration with the surrounding metropolitan region and with the cultural dynamics of other territories and municipalities.

- Overall, the outreach and engagement programme is somewhat underdeveloped for this stage. More details would be much welcomed in terms of outreach organisation, instruments and methodologies, expected governance for the coming years.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has been on the rise from 2017 to 2021 (with the exception of 2020), to reach €10,1M in 2021. The City Council has made a commitment to increase its municipal budget for culture from 2021 to 2027 to €12,5M.
- The overall operating budget looks realistic, with a strong focus on “programme expenditure” (75% of the budget) and a slight prominence of “promotion and marketing” (13%) over on “wages, management and overheads” (12%), which the panel welcomes.
- The contributions to the ECoC budget from the City of Oeiras and from the other municipalities in the region are high at respectively €12,5M and €8,5M, showing a strong commitment.
- A Fundraising strategy has also been put in place to include potential investment from private sources including science and tech companies, as their expected contribution is relatively high at €5M; however, these are not formal commitments at this stage.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council and municipal assembly have unanimously approved the candidacy. At a regional level, all other 17 municipalities of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, have shown their strong and concerted support for the Oeiras '27 bid. Also, the CCDR-LVT (Lisbon and Tagus Valley Regional Development Coordinating Committee) has confirmed its formal support for the bid.
- There are large investments in infrastructures and programmes going ahead, in line with the cultural strategy, and there will continue with or without the ECoC 2027 title. The City has committed to empower the cultural sector in its ambitious strategy to build or requalify many of its important cultural infrastructures and venues by 2027.
- Oeiras has/will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme and is experienced in hosting large-scale events.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good. City's absorption capacity in terms of tourist accommodation is not described but the panel has no doubt that they exist in this wide metropolitan area.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Oeiras does not proceed to the final selection phase. The panel highlights the importance of the long-term strategy in place and the willingness to achieve a wider metropolitan cultural ecosystem. The panel appreciates the reference to the EU shared values and democracy as guiding principles to develop the ECoC programme. However, the European dimension is underdeveloped, and partnerships are not in place at this time. It remains unclear what the audience will experience in 2027. There is a good and strong conceptual approach to co-creation and co-design and the panel would certainly encourage the team to further develop this way of working. It is also good to see that the City intends to go ahead with its large investments in infrastructures and programmes independently from the outcome of the ECoC competition.

PONTA DELGADA

The programme is presented under the concept – *Human Nature* – meaning culture and place and reflecting the region's profile and the wish to have a word in Europe (“Where Europe begins”). Transversal idea of “archipelago” (of participation), a meeting point (multicultural dialogue and cooperation) between Europe, the Americas and Africa. Human Nature is about a city, an island and an archipelago, an alternative model to global thinking. Azorean culture is born out of their intimate relationship with Nature. It is through culture that they communicate and establish relationships with others and with the landscape. The concept for the programme comprehends the exchanges between nature and the culture, geography, history and landscape and through the richness of their traditions allows them to be open to the world as a living laboratory of experimentation and innovation.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- The Cultural Strategy 2030 and ECoC 2027 bid developed in parallel (giving continuity to the Ponta Delgada 2014-2020 Development Strategy, which already foresaw the ECoC 2027 application).
- The implementation of the Cultural Strategy will gradually prepare spaces and skills to host ECoC 2027, which the panel sees as a good gradual development.
- The Cultural Strategy has set out key priorities: *Sense of Place; Cultural and Creative Sector; Cultural Citizenship; and Global Archipelago*. Nature's four programmes strands of the ECoC 2027 project are archipelagos whose impacts contain Cultural Eruptions, Social Shakes, Economic Waves and Urban Development New Winds. The panel sees a strong convergence and connections between the two.
- There are plans and programmes within the cultural strategy as well as the ECoC programme for strengthening and capacity building of the cultural sector.

- The desired Impacts are adequately outlined and cover all key dimensions. There are plans in place for monitoring and evaluation – Cultural Footprint, implemented by the Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences of the University of Azores and Nova University. The plan aims to align with international frameworks at European and UN level - including SDG, as well as the Cultural Strategy. This is appropriate.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The programme is strong, and it is built by community and artists through civic engagement, resulting in a high level of local rootedness.
- There has been a demonstrated bottom-up approach with artists and cultural organisations leading on programme.
- The programme has clearly defined projects for this stage with named partners and collaborators along with delivery timeframes. A digital strategy has been considered, entitled *Waves of Culture*; it will allow audiences throughout the world to experience the programme online, which is important given the physical limitations of the Archipelago.
- The programme is cleverly structured around three seasons, each to accompany a different cycle of culture, nature and spirituality. It resonates well with the concept and will be a useful communication tool.

European dimension:

- Ponta Delgada 2027 intends to address issues that are central to Europe, such as isolation/centrality, migration and the integration of past, present and future on a humanistic venture promoting cultural democracy. These issues are both anchored in the local context of the Archipelago and can strongly resonate across Europe, while being quite relevant in our times.
- There has been good engagement and learnings gained from previous European Capitals of Culture including contact made with future European Capitals of Culture and other bidding cities.
- There is a good intent to create space for the Latvian City that will share the ECoC title in 2027 to develop an artistic programme within the overall programme, which is a welcome proposal.
- There is a demonstrated clear intent to have a strong European dimension. A number of European partners have already been engaged and contacted with a number of transnational partnerships planned; however, this needs to be developed further.

Outreach:

- The relationship with the surrounding region – the Azores archipelago, with its 9 islands and the vast maritime territory – is strongly evident, both in strategic and programmatic terms. The bid book demonstrates a previous and future involvement and regional interaction considerably active, with partners from the various islands, and from varied organisations and structures.
- Consideration has been given to schools, pilot projects are already underway.
- The bid was born from a citizen-led process signed by 800 local people in a manifesto, in what is a clearly praising process.
- The programme is built in a bottom-up approach to development with consideration being given to including local people in the projects as well as communities and international organisations.
- A comprehensive diversity of auscultation and civic participation instruments and actions has been developed. However, these governance actions need to be further deepened for the following phase.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has been fluctuating over the period 2017 to 2021, with a sharp decrease in 2020 and 2021 (at just under €2M) due to the difficulties generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a concern for the panel. On a more positive side, there is stated intention from the City of Ponta Delgada to strive to increase its funding for culture to 9% of its total budget, i.e. €3,8M by 2028.
- The overall operating budget looks realistic at €44,6M, with a strong focus on “programme expenditure” (66% of the budget). There is also a relatively high percentage (16,6%) for the cumulative items “Wages and Salaries” and “Organisation Expenses”.
- The contributions from the City of Ponta Delgada and from the Government of the Azores are relatively modest at respectively €1,6M and €2,9M. There is therefore a strong, and potentially risky, dependence on the contributions to be received from the National Government and the State-Secretary for Tourism. In this regard, as for all short-listed cities, the panel requests clarification on the innate and specific conditions that will apply to the €25M from the ERDF as well as other EU and national funding.
- Appropriate consideration is also given to the delivery structure, which will be a non-profit cultural association, and to the contingency planning.
- The public financial authorities have demonstrated their support and commitment regarding capital expenditures, namely the Government of the Azores, Ponta Delgada Municipality and other Municipalities of the Azores.

Capacity to deliver:

- The city council and municipal assembly have unanimously supported the candidacy. Ponta Delgada Municipality built a bridge with the Government of the Azores, which co-promotes the project, and with all the other eighteen Municipalities of the Azores, which have signed a partnership agreement supporting the bid.
- Ponta Delgada has a developed cultural life and has/will have adequate and viable cultural infrastructure to deliver an ECoC programme while acknowledging the physical limitations of the Island. Consideration has been given to ensuring sustainable tourism in a relevant manner.
- The team acknowledged that the island would have physical limitations of logistics and numbers; therefore, a digital programme entitled “Waves of Culture” will ensure that audiences who cannot travel to Ponta Delgada and Azores will experience performances and events online.
- Ponta Delgada is experienced in hosting large-scale events.
- The city’s absorption capacity in terms of tourists’ accommodation is good.

Conclusion:

It is the recommendation of the panel that Ponta Delgada is shortlisted and progresses to the final selection phase. The extensive bottom-up approach to the design of the programme is very welcome and is well developed for this stage of the bidding process. The Programme concept is very strong, distinctive, rooted in an authentic sense of place and relevant for these times. The proposed European Dimension is promising and has the potential to make a noticeable difference to our understanding of Europe. For the final round of the competition, the panel expects the bid to demonstrate more deeply and specifically its capacity to deliver on its European aspirations.

Technical note: The panel wishes to emphasise that according to the ECoC Action Decision No 445/2014 the ECoC title is reserved to “cities”, irrespective of their size that may involve their surrounding areas. It is therefore important to keep in mind that an ECoC is about a European city but it can be a city in a regional context. The panel would like to underline that it regards the city Ponta Delgada as the bidding city and the Azores as the regional context. This must be reflected in the branding throughout the candidacy and should Ponta Delgada win the ECoC title the branding must remain Ponta Delgada and the Azores and not Azores alone.

VIANA DO CASTELO

The programme for Viana Do Castelo is working under the motto ‘*Viana, A Sea Of Culture*’ and is organised under three axes of *Sea, Identity* and the third of *Letters, Arts, Artists, Crafts*, axis having its own projects. The candidacy is seen as a process of reflection, dialogue and

participation, with the ambition of empowering the city for the challenges of the 21st century. Against this background, the central objectives are to consolidate the city as a place of cultural and artistic creation, as a place of dialogue between cultures and as a place of education for a more committed citizenry. Viana do Castelo intends to involve first the district of which it is the capital as well as the remaining municipalities of the sub-region of Alto Minho, and then extend to the Northern region as a whole.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- There is no specific cultural strategy in place, though some effort has been made to include cultural governance linked to the Strategic Plan of Viana do Castelo 2010-2020; the proposal refers to the culture specific priority areas in this Plan.
- There is no specific indication of the way the ECoC action fits within the established strategies.
- The proposal refers to the value of culture, in general, but it does not include any specific reference as to how to enhance the capacity of the cultural sector or how to better link it to economic and social sectors, however during the presentation the team did suggest that the bid is related to the economic strategy of the city. There is a connection between ECoC and the development of the city with the traditional arts, ethnography being very important to their identity.
- The Monitoring and Evaluation proposal is vague at this stage. Further, it is not sufficiently clear how indicators may be used to address the vision for the ECoC programme and the city's cultural strategy specifically.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The Sea is clearly an inspiration for this programme, but the concept needs to be further developed. The programme is underdeveloped and lacks a clear focus and clear curatorial approach.
- Though there are some very interesting individual projects reflecting the vitality of local traditions, as well as local tangible and intangible heritage, there is no overall a clear and coherent artistic vision and strategy for the cultural programme.
- There is a lack of evidence of artists and cultural operators in the design and development of the programme. However, the traditional arts are emerging very strongly as a key resource for the programme.
- The capacity to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions is not clearly documented.

European dimension:

- The European dimension is underdeveloped, there is a lack of evidence of European engagement and European partners in the programme. As an example, there are limited references of contact or collaboration intended with former, present or future European Capitals of Culture.
- There is a clear desire to share the local folklore of Viana do Castelo and share with the rest of Europe as a living legacy. However, it is unclear how the concept of the Viana do Castelo ECoC bid can be translated and resonate in Europe.
- Extremely limited considerations are given to the strategy to attract the interest of a wide European and international audience.
- The panel is not convinced that the programme presented would help the people in Viana do Castelo and its surrounding region to experience and celebrate the diversity of cultural expressions existing in Europe and feel more European.

Outreach:

- The outreach and engagement programme is very underdeveloped for this stage.
- There is a lack of demonstrated civic engagement and broader inclusion of wider society in the design and development of the programme; however, there has been some engagement with certain sectors of society especially in the migrant and Roma communities.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has been slightly on the increase over the last five years to reach €4,8M in 2021. There is a commitment by the City to dedicate 5% of its total budget to cultural activities, institutions, and infrastructure by 2028, as opposed to just over 4% in 2021.
- The overall operating budget indicated in the bid book is modest at €14,0M but does reflect the programme proposed. 80% of the budget is planned to go to programming while a modest envelope of under €0,7M will be dedicated to marketing and communication.
- The contribution from the City, at €6,3M, is relatively high, showing commitment. On the contrary, the regional commitment remains unclear at this stage with a financial contribution from the sub-region of Alto Minho estimated at €0,7M. The contribution from the National Government, at €2,8M, is also at a rather modest level. However, the candidate indicates that it may reassess the sources of Government funding in the case it advances to the second round of the competition.
- The considerations on contingency planning and the marketing and communication are minimal.

- The delivery structure will be based on a multi-stakeholder model, with the involvement of multiple cultural agents of the municipality.

Capacity to deliver:

- The City lists a number of cultural facilities and proposes to highlight the use of these during the programme implementation. However, apart from the capacity of the Cultural Centre of Viana do Castelo of 3,000 seats, the capacities of the other venues are unclear.
- Political support and sustainable commitment from the local and regional authorities is not sufficiently described.
- The cultural life, profile and organisations of the city are not sufficiently described to give a clear sense of their capacity to implement a full-year event of the scale and the scope of a European Capital of Culture.
- The city's experience in hosting large and/or international level events is not sufficiently described.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good. There are plans and projects to increase the city's accommodation capacity.
- Delivering an ECoC at the highest European professional standards requires a critical mass of capacities with the right skills at the right time. With the capacity at hand in Viana do Castelo, the panel is concerned about the capacity to deliver event like ECoC.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Viana do Castelo does not proceed to the final selection phase. It remains unclear how the concept of the Viana do Castelo ECoC bid, which highlights some strong assets of the city and its surrounding area especially in terms of traditional arts, can resonate in Europe. The experiences in this pre-selection phase could prove very beneficial if choosing to pursue alternative opportunities. The panel recommends that the city of Viana do Castelo build on the good work it has started, especially in the area of inclusion and outreach, and consolidates its endeavours to reinforce the cultural and creative sector within the 2030 horizon.

VILA REAL

The Vila Real programme is presented under the concept, *Moving Mountains*, a coherent metaphor inspired both by the region's landscape and its designation of Trás-os-Montes (*Beyond Mountains*), and the strength, determination (*overcoming all difficulties*) and hospitality (*no frontiers*) of its communities. It is based on the assumption that Vila Real's values and land reflect the same struggles and celebrations as the rest of Europe. The intention

is to ensure that the lines of actions are built on ideas of culture, education, sustainability, achievement, active participation, inclusion and creation. As highlighted in the bid, the application for the ECoC 2027 title would not make sense without considering the 19 municipalities of the surrounding Douro sub-region in Northern Portugal.

Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city:

- Vila Real's cultural strategy is based on an integrated strategy in which culture is both means and ends in achieving long-term goals (2030). At present, there is no separate or bespoke cultural strategy as such.
- There is a regional municipal strategic plan in place for 2030, the Douro 2030 Strategic Plan, which further underpins the application, as well as an Action Plan.
- Regarding the linkages between the local cultural objectives and the ECoC action, the main statement is the claim that Vila Real's core cultural strategy aim is to 'Move Mountains'. This corresponds with the ECoC slogan, but it is not sufficiently specific as a strategic plan, nor linked to monitoring or evaluation objectives.
- Part of the long-term legacy is to ensure that local citizens are active cultural citizens recognising what it is in the region. This is a positive aim but, at this stage, this is not sufficiently supported by milestones or a specific impact plan.

Cultural and artistic content:

- The programme presents a strong sense of place and people. However, the projects are still underdeveloped at this stage. Projects are presented as a broad set of concepts, which will be further developed through further consultation.
- It is intended to engage cultural partners and communities to work together to create projects responding to the concepts building towards a programme for ECoC where, as an overall vision, everybody has a place in culture and the programme is based on an idea that embraces challenges that can be transformational with some projects planned to extend beyond the title year.
- The Project '*Long Live Inland Regions*' is very interesting. 27 rural areas in 27 countries will share an event co-created by them as a team where one person from each area is part of the creation team, a wonderful concept that the panel applauds.
- The capacity to combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions is not clearly documented.

European dimension:

- The European dimension is underdeveloped and has yet to commence in terms of European engagement and partnership development.
- There are no connections with European Capitals of Culture, past, present or future.
- The Pan-European *Long Live Inland Regions* project mentioned is a very interesting European Project. The project is underdeveloped. However, this is a strong concept and a very interesting one, which should be further explored and enhanced.
- There is a desire to develop a European Library as a significant legacy and outcome. The Library will be a live European Knowledge sharing space.
- The panel is not convinced that the programme presented would help the people in Vila Real and its surrounding region to experience and celebrate the diversity of cultural expressions existing in Europe and feel more European.

Outreach:

- The outreach of this application is explained too vaguely. A number of interesting ideas are mentioned, but there is little evidence for the materialisation of these ideas. There is no clear strategy for interaction and governance activation with the society diverse groups
- Culture and Education are intertwined in a number of initiatives and are to be further developed through a series of pilot projects but there is little evidence of the participation of schools and communities.
- There is a high illiteracy in the community and one that the project hopes to address through a series of projects built on the connection between generations. There is a strong sense of consideration for older people in a number of planned initiatives.

Management:

- The city budget for culture has been steadily increasing over the last five years (except in 2020), reaching €4,8M in 2021. There is no indication about how much the City intends to spend on culture for the period after the ECoC year.
- The overall operating budget amounts to €32,4M, with a strong prominence given to cultural programming (75% of the total). 10% of the budget is expected to come from the private sector, but the description of the strategy to attract private funding is very short.
- The financial contribution from the City, at €7,4M, is relatively high, showing commitment, while there is no contribution expected from the region.

- The considerations on contingency are not convincing, as a list of weaknesses is identified but with no indication of corresponding measures to address them.
- The delivery structure envisaged at this stage is limited life foundation covering the period 2023-2028.
- Digital transition is being considered in many different contexts. The team highlighted the importance of digital in their bid book. QR codes will be created for the possibility to project the programme for other places in Europe. There is also consideration being given to create sound maps of the landscapes to the isolated population in an attempt to break the silence and distance for them. These are positive endeavours, which the panel welcomes.

Capacity to deliver:

- Vila Real Municipal Council as well as the Vila Real Municipal Assembly unanimously approved the candidacy. Douro Intermunicipal Community (CIM Douro) unanimously declared its support for this candidacy.
- The city's assets in terms of accessibility are good.
- There is commitment to deliver two infrastructure projects within the existing municipality budgets; however, the Library project will require much more substantial investment.
- The City's absorption capacity in terms of tourist accommodation seems good.
- Vila Real's experience in hosting large and/or international level events is not sufficiently described.

Conclusion:

The panel recommends that the bid of Vila Real does not proceed to the final selection phase. The panel strongly recommends that the good work continues and that Vila Real considers the development of the European Library project as a significant legacy of its bidding process. The Project 'Long Live Inland Regions' is very interesting. 27 rural areas in 27 countries will share an event co-created by them, as a team where one person from each area is part of the creation team, a wonderful concept that the panel applauds and strongly recommends is a project worth developing further.

General recommendations

The following recommendations apply to all four shortlisted candidates.

The panel would like to emphasise the considerable step-change between proposals at pre-selection stage and those at final selection. The final selection phase offers an opportunity for

shortlisted candidates to consolidate their bids and to improve the level of quality throughout. The panel expects significant progress in the final bid books to reflect the expanded **six criteria in the Decision** for final selection cities and the recommendations of the panel.

A study of the evaluations of recent ECoCs (since 2013) and monitoring reports of recently designated ECoCs may also be of value. These are available on the European Commission's ECoC website.¹

General

Since 2020, Europe and the world has entered into a new reality as a consequence of COVID-19, climate changes and a new geo-political crisis. The new reality is causing major disruptions, anxiety, fear and limitations. In the panel's view, there is a need for a new approach to align culture and major yearlong events with this new world, notably new procedures and expectations. This refers to every level of operation, from artistic expression to administrative work. A more elaborated contingency plan with due alternatives should be an integral part of such long-term planning as the ECoC. This is a great challenge for us all, also for the bidding cities, but equally - an opportunity to reflect on new and sustainable culture models.

The bid book at final selection becomes, *de facto*, a contract for the designated city. It sets out the artistic vision and the key objectives, projects, directions, financing and management of the programme. Close concurrence with the bid book is a factor when at the end of the monitoring phase the panel makes a recommendation to the Commission regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize.

It is the responsibility of the panel (which functions as both the selection and subsequent monitoring panel) to safeguard the European Capital of Culture brand. Candidates should be aware that with the level of international attention now being given to ECoCs, policy decisions over a wide area (not just cultural) may affect the reputation of the city, and in turn the image of the European Capital of Culture Action. The panel expects the ECoC candidate and title cities to take all possible steps to minimise negative and potentially harmful international and national issues connected to their city.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

A formally approved city cultural strategy needs to be in place before submitting the final bid book. The panel expects very focussed bid books and presentations for the final round: cities should indicate the priorities of the cultural strategy that are connected to the ECoC project, its target outcomes and how resources will be changed over the next few years. The expected legacy of the ECoC should also be described.

An ECoC is a transformational opportunity for a city. The pre-selection bid books set out in general terms the objectives of why a city is seeking the title. The objectives should be clearly put, as there is a tendency to perceive ECoC as a panacea for every city challenge. An important aspect that requires elaboration is the expected visible change in the urban landscape. The panel would expect a more focused (and shorter) explanation, which can link to the programme vision, themes, activities, and through monitoring and evaluation, to the

¹ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/culture-in-cities-and-regions/european-capitals-of-culture>

outcomes in the subsequent legacy. There is considerable literature and research available for cities to see the range of cultural, urban development and social benefits of an ECoC.

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

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

Cultural and artistic programme

The focus of the final selection is the operating programme between 2022-2023, when the ECoC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECoC year of 2027. The panel recommends the four cities to have an open minded and daring artistic approach and not be afraid of new, experimental ideas. Deeper considerations on the visions presented in the bids could offer more clarity overall. Consistency between the vision selected and all other elements of the bid must be ensured. Innovation and originality is required not only in theory but also – even more importantly – in practice. The panel will expect to see more details on the programme, its projects and partners. Indeed, the cities should set out more clearly not only their artistic vision, but also the programme and projects; differentiating between partners who have indicated firm interest and those who are still only potential or possible partners. ECoC programmes normally cover a wide range of art forms and include the increasing development of creative interventions in social issues. An approximate budget should be shown for each major project for the panel to understand the relative balance of projects in the programme.

The panel recommends a more focused and detailed approach to digital cultural content (not just social media promotions and interactions) as integral parts of the programmes. Furthermore, more attention should be given to the sustainability of the projects – including cultural, ecological, social and economic wise – so as to ensure an expected substantial legacy of the ECoC.

European dimension

The European dimension being the *raison d'être* of an ECoC the panel expects to find Europe at the heart of all final bids and permeated throughout the cultural and artistic programmes. The panel expects to see a continuous focus on European partnerships: co- productions, co- curations, conferences, networking as well as visiting artists/performers. Cities should encourage their cultural operators to be active participants in European cultural networks.

Although with a promising approach to this criterion, some proposals failed to engage fully with the challenges. The teams focused mainly on their cities' image and relations within Portugal and/or the neighbouring regions whereas the panel would like to see a deepening and widening of the programmes that ensures a more embracing European dimension. That a city aims to market itself in Europe, is not in itself a strong interpretation of the European dimension. An ECoC enables a city to promote itself internationally but that is only half of the story.

Developing European cooperation requires strategic approaches and actual partnership with artists as well as cultural organisations and institutions throughout Europe. It cannot be limited to relations with other, former and future ECoCs, existing European cultural networks or twin cities, which has been understood in most of the final selection bids.

The European dimension has a two-way direction. It is of course to present to the rest of Europe the city's contribution to European cultural diversity. But an equal focus is on seeking to broaden the understanding and awareness of the city's own citizens on the diversity of cultures in Europe and linking through cultural and other projects with citizens in other countries. It is important to clearly demonstrate how the European Dimension is translated into concrete projects in the cultural and artistic programme. It is this focus on other cultures that primarily differentiates an ECoC from a national city of culture. An ECoC offers the opportunity for a city and its citizens to learn from others in an open way. One important legacy area is the creation of new and sustained partnerships between a city's cultural players and those from other countries.

One of the elements of the European dimension criterion for the ECoC title is the ability to attract visitors from the rest of Europe and beyond. The programme has to have its attraction and that is why it is something else than the usual tourist offers of the city and region. The panel would expect to see these attractive programme ideas in the final selection's bid for ECoC 2027. The panel advises to thoroughly consider building a strategic communication plan for the ECoC project as well as to make a connection between the cultural and artistic programme and an international marketing vision.

Outreach

The audience development strategy for the ECoC is expected to be much further developed in the final bid books, including online and offline measures and channels for all identified target groups. The bids should approach audience development from a long-term and strategic perspective, using both online and offline measures.

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

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

The role and contribution of universities (except engagement in evaluation) was underplayed in most of the pre-selection bid books.

The panel appreciates the ideas for the involvement of schools that are already present in all four selected cities. However, all final bids should show a strategic approach (in relation to the ECoC and not just current practices) that illustrate how schools are linked to the ECoC project.

Management

New times of uncertainty require new approaches in management, too.

Special attention needs to be dedicated to the risk assessment in the final bid book. This section should include a thorough analysis of the impacts expected for the preparation and implementation phase of the ECoC related to the ongoing pandemic, economic and geo-political crisis focussing on the main issues to be addressed in 2022-2023.

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

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

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

The recruitment processes and planned staffing arrangements from 2022 to 2028 should be outlined including secondments, interns and volunteers.

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

Capacity to deliver

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

Candidates are reminded that the criterion for an ECoC requires a special programme for the year in addition to the normal cultural offer. The panel expects more information on the managerial capacity in the city/region to manage a programme of the depth and range of an ECoC. Capacity building should not be confused with the implementation of the cultural strategy, but it should be in accordance with local and regional development plans. The cities should also plan strong capacity building programmes as ECoC's scope goes beyond current local capacities. If projects are planned to be funded from competitive EU programmes (e.g., Creative Europe), this should be indicated.

Information on urban development and infrastructure programmes, cultural heritage restoration projects and new cultural premises is useful as background and context at pre-selection. The final selection will focus on those infrastructural projects that directly impact the ECoC programme activities (e.g., a new cultural centre in a restored building that becomes a focal point for community arts projects contained in the programme). A timeline for these projects and the realistic estimate of completion should be given.

The final bid books should clearly indicate how those potential capital projects would be managed (management structures, state-of-play related to the EU ESI-Funds such as the connection with the relevant Operational Programme, timeline, and public procurement).

Signed

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