

Report
from the Pre-selection Panel Meeting

European Capital of Culture – Slovakia 2013

12th – 14th December 2007
Bratislava, Slovakia

Bratislava, January 2008

1. Introduction:

- The meeting of the selection panel was attended by 6 representatives of European institutions and 6 representatives of Slovak institutions and experts. The members of the panel elected Sir Robert Scott as the Chairperson of the panel and Martin Kováč as the Vice-Chairperson.
- This was the first time that a shortlist selection for a European Capital of Culture had taken place in this way and the meeting was held under the new rules and new EC legislation (EC Decision No 1622/2006/EC establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019 plus the Guide for Cities applying for the title of ECoC, the so-called Guidelines).
- All the candidate cities had had the possibility of consulting on the preparation of their applications with representatives of the European Commission and the Slovakian Ministry of Culture.
- With regard to candidate projects in France, Slovakia or any other country, the representatives of the Commission had said that every city had an equal opportunity to participate and prepare their own application, regardless of size. Cities would be selected according to the set criteria and the quality of the submitted project.
- The panel assessed the applications according to the legislation and criteria that had been provided to the cities in advance. The main aspects considered were:
 - o the European dimension of the project (its potential, cooperation with institutions, artists and experts, the reasons why a project would attract European citizens to visit the winning city, added value for Europe)
 - o involvement of its own citizens
 - o innovative benefits of the project for the city, the country and Europe
 - o long-term sustainability of the local cultural strategy and the implications of being chosen to be European Cultural Capital in this strategy
 - o originality of the project
 - o clarity of structures, finances and resources
 - o the written presentation of the application, circulated to the Panel in advance
 - o answers to questions from the Panel
- No city is ultimately named European Capital of Culture purely on the basis of what it is or what it does. It wins the title for its programme of special events and its innovative approach throughout the application process. A city is not chosen just by emphasising regular cultural events in the city or the architectural heritage of the city. Cities must therefore put their special features to use and demonstrate their genuine will to become ECoC with an original and feasible project that is coherent within the long-term local strategy of the City. Being chosen as ECoC is an opportunity to strengthen cooperation in the field of culture - on all levels, local, regional, national, European, international - and to provide outstanding support for dialogue at a European level.

In terms of the European dimension of the applications, the panel assessed whether the proposals fostered European cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities in all areas of culture, and whether they highlighted the richness of cultural diversity in Europe and brought the common aspects of European cultures to the fore. Within this dimension, the Panel appraised the extent to which the application supported the international mobility of persons working in the field of culture, the international movement of artistic and cultural works and products and supports intercultural dialogue.

The areas assessed in relation to the dimension of "The City and its Citizens" included support for local new initiatives and artists, the involvement of citizens living in the city and its surroundings, raising their interest and enthusiasm; it also addresses the question of raising the interest of citizens from abroad.

Ultimately sustainability and integration of the ECoC year in the long-term cultural and social development of the city was considered by the Panel to be crucial. The basis of every good candidature should therefore be to prepare an initial concept based on the objectives and criteria for the city as a whole and to have a very clear and realistic idea of what the city aims to do in each area. The project should represent a balance, using the characteristics of the city to be attractive at an international level, while stimulating enthusiasm in both the local and other populations.

- the panel made a detailed study of every submitted written application, assessing their compliance with the criteria and conditions of the ECoC contest
- the panel received a presentation from a delegation from each City
- the panel asked questions in discussions with each candidate City
- the panel considered which candidates should proceed to the second round of the selection procedure and at the end of the meeting of the panel the Chair and Vice-Chair announced the panel's recommendations at a press conference convened for this purpose at the Ministry of Culture

2. Comments of the panel applicable to all cities:

- Having familiarised itself with all the applications (both in written form and through the individual presentations of the applications before the members of the panel), the panel thanks all the cities for taking part in the project and for their efforts towards the all-round development of their city. In this regard it can be said that the application process has been beneficial for all the cities taking part. The submitted applications and the efforts made were also beneficial in terms of comprehensive local and regional development and the overall development of culture and tourism in the city and its surroundings.
- in many cases the submitted applications point to the urgent need to create and develop comprehensive city cultural policies and to build partnerships between all partners at all levels of public administration and the private sector in making culture more available and building a vision for the development of the city. Many cities have begun processes to provide sustainable support for the development of culture; either they have created their own grant schemes to support initiatives and mobilise actors in the area of culture and/or are preparing first steps towards long-term cultural strategies. The need was felt to overcome limited experience or previous non-cooperation among the cultural agents in the City and between these and the rest of urban and regional agents.
- Members of the panel noted a remarkable mobilisation of human resources in individual projects and also related activities in various regions of Slovakia.
- the submitted projects presented many ambitious proposals, not only on a Slovak scale but also at the international level.
- it was often stressed that culture management skills need to be further developed in cities and regions in Slovakia.
- it was often emphasised that setting priorities within the ECoC project was advisable.
- communications strategy issues were touched on in many cases.

3. Cities which the panel recommended did not proceed to the second round:

- Banská Bystrica**
- Bratislava**
- Dolný Kubín**
- Trenčín**
- Trnava**

The applications and presentations of these cities undoubtedly showed ambition and valuable ideas. They were all to be congratulated. The cities differed greatly in terms of size, location, international exposure, history, human resources and financial resources. Nevertheless they had all been able to submit substantial and very different applications. However, since the panel were required to make choices and to arrive at a short-list, these five cities were judged to have made a less successful match between the criteria and their proposals than the other four cities.

3a Comments and advice to all cities that did not proceed to the second round:

- To continue in the efforts that have been started, because these cities will remain natural leaders in the development of their regions and standard-bearers for innovation
- To prepare a long-term cultural strategy for their cities or city-regions
- To strive for excellence and to provide a challenging cultural climate which would attract outstanding creative individuals and industries, while at the same time motivating emerging new talents to stay and contribute to the development of the cities
- To use structural funds, that is EU funds intended for the development of territorial cooperation (interregional, cross-border and inter-state) or the development of human resources to support the elaborated project and project proposals of the candidates
- To cooperate with each other; for example, identifying common challenges, exchanging good practice, searching for expertise, inviting the national Ministry for Culture and the national association of municipalities to launch programmes to support them.

4. Cities which the panel recommended for inclusion in the second round:

- Košice**
- Martin**
- Nitra**
- Prešov**

4a Comments applicable to all cities proceeding to the second round:

- To make maximum efforts to achieve a successful candidacy in the second round.
- To make even stronger efforts to work with and for your citizens.
- To develop, in principle, strong ideas for cooperation with the winning French ECoC for 2013.
- To develop convincing organisational structures to complement independent and well supported implementing bodies which secure both project leaders with international experience and, thereby, safeguard artistic freedom.
- To demonstrate the importance of their projects for both their region and their country, particularly in a European context.
- Full and detailed information must be added to the projects, in accordance with "The Guide for Cities applying for the title of ECoC" particularly with regard to structures, funding, artistic processes and European credibility.

4b Comments applicable to individual cities proceeding to the second round:

Košice – Interface

- The project was presented by the project team accompanied by the mayor of the city
- The project demonstrated a comparatively high degree of innovation and a well thought through added value of the multi-cultural and European dimension (cross-border effects, Schengen, and minorities)
- The City would almost certainly need to set priorities in its final candidature file within the large number of projects
- The City would need in its final candidature file to consider the sustainability of its cultural strategy after 2013 including the expenditure. The cultural capital year should be considered as a launch ramp or catalyser of the long-term cultural development processes within the city and the region
- The issue of cooperation with a smaller competing candidate city in the region will have to be addressed

Martin – Touches and connections

- The project was presented by the mayor of the city accompanied by the project team
- The project was based on the importance of Martin in Slovak culture and history and offered new opportunities to formulate a new vision of the city
- The final candidature file might wish to develop the description and viability of structures such as the Acropolis – gallery of modern art, conversion of manufacturing halls into artistic and cultural workshops with various uses – which seems to be an opportunity to provide an impulse to urban revitalisation through the city
- There will be a need to highlight the artistic and innovative dimension of the project and the link to surrounding towns and regions
- The European dimension will need to be developed in the final candidature file. There are the real challenges of size and excellence to be further explored

Nitra – Multibrige of Culture(s)

- The project was presented by the project team accompanied by the mayor of the city
- The European dimension of the project is based on an attempt to interpret the historic legacy of Cyril and Methodius through modern forms and artistic cooperation. This will need to be underpinned by strong practical links to creators from other parts of Europe and independent links between operators.
- There was a sense of "daring" in the project as regards innovation and aspirations towards excellence which will need to be translated into realistic, achievable and communicable success. The intentions of the team will have to be reflected in an authentic way
- The final candidature file may need to consider more comprehensive involvement of the young generation in the preparation of the project, while at the same time strengthening the regional relations between the city and the surrounding territory
- The file may need to involve neighbouring communities and more deeply prove the participation of minorities in the project

Prešov – the Forgotten Jewel

- The project was presented by the project team accompanied by the mayor of the city
- The project was well prepared and presented with a clear structure, a high level of intended innovation and credible first steps to contribute to the European added value. However the financial solutions to high ambition will have to be addressed
- Cultural development in the context of a small city and region which has not yet profited as much as other regions from European integration was addressed convincingly. However, matters of scale and resources and priorities to address these challenges need to be considered in the final candidature file
- The final file will also need to demonstrate a strengthening of the interpretation of the European dimension of the project
- The issue of regional cooperation with a much larger competing candidate city will have to be considered

5. Next Steps

The final decision between the final 4 cities will be made in September 2008, when the panel will reconvene and meet the city delegations for a second and final time.

The panel expects that the cities may each wish to produce new printed material as part of a final candidature file. The panel will not be impressed if the cities go to excessive expense in preparing that file. The likely date for the call for this additional material will be the end of June 2008.

The panel reserves the right to issue a set of questions to the cities arising from the short-listing process. The questions would be the same for all cities.

It is very much hoped by the panel that some, if not all, of their number will be able to visit the 4 short-listed cities before the final selection to find out for themselves more about each of them and be able to get the feel of each city.

6. The Panel

Juraj Hamar
Dusan Katuscak
Katarina Kosova
Martin Kovac (Vice Chair)
Milos Mistrik
Svetlana Waradzinova
Danuta Glondys
Mary McCarthy
Mary Michalidou
Jordi Pascual Ruiz
Sir Robert Scott (Chair)
Gottfried Wagner