Selection of the European Capital of Culture in 2024 in Estonia

The Expert Panel’s report
Pre-Selection Stage

Tallinn
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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 2024 in Estonia.

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Estonia (the “ministry”) is the managing authority of the competition which is governed by Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 (the “Decision”)¹ and by the “Rules of procedure – Competition for the European Capital of Culture 2024 in Estonia” – (the “Rules”) adopted by the ministry and published on its website².

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process in line with Article 2 of the Rules. Ten members were appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and the Committee of Regions). Two members were appointed by the ministry. The member who was designated by the Committee of the Regions dismissed from the panel in September 2018 and had not been replaced at the time of the pre-selection meeting.

The competition takes place in two phases: pre-selection (shortlisting) and selection. The ministry issued a call for applications on 29 November 2017. Three applications were submitted by the closing date of 1 October 2018 by:

Kuressaare, Narva, Tartu

Panel meeting

The panel met in Tallinn on 22-23 October 2018. The panel elected Mrs. Beatriz Garcia as its chair and Ms. Anu Kivilo as vice-chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality.

At the meeting each candidate, in alphabetical order, presented their case (in 30 minutes) and answered questions from the panel members (in 60 minutes).

At a press conference on 23 October 2018, the chair of the panel announced the panel’s unanimous recommendation that the Minister invites the following cities to submit revised bids for final selection (in alphabetical order):

Narva, Tartu

Next steps
The ministry will arrange for the formal approval of the shortlist based on this report (Article 8 of the Decision). The ministry will then issue an invitation to these cities to submit revised applications for final selection.

The shortlisted cities should take into account the assessments and recommendations of the panel in this report.

The deadline for submission of revised applications is 1 August 2019.

The final selection meeting will be held in Tallinn during the last week of August 2019.

Four members of the panel will pay a one-day visit to the shortlisted cities shortly before the meeting to obtain more background information. Representatives of the European Commission and the ministry will accompany the panel members as observers.

Thanks
The panel members would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in this pre-selection phase of the competition. In particular, the panel noted that the three cities have used the opportunity of the bidding process to reinforce their cultural strategies as well as the role of culture in their overall socio-economic development. This is already a significant potential legacy of the ECOC competition. The panel encourages all three cities, including Kuressaare, not just those short-listed, to continue with the development and implementation of their strategy.

The panel thanks all three bidding candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids, the European Commission for their advice and the Estonian Minister of Culture and his staff for their excellent administration.

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

The panel assessed each bid against the six criteria in Article 5:
- Contribution to the long-term strategy of the city
- Cultural and artistic content
- European dimension
- Outreach
- Management
- Capacity to deliver

The panel noted that not all the candidates had fully completed the formal approval of their cultural strategy at city council level. One of the most important features in the Decision for ECOCs from 2020 on is the requirement that cities have a formal and explicit cultural strategy. This is to ensure that the ECOC is grounded in a medium-term transformation of the city and its cultural life rather than a once-off festival.
In the comments that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their discussions. In the case of the two shortlisted cities, specific recommendations are made to assist them in their preparation of the final bid books. There are also common recommendations, which apply to both shortlisted cities.

The panel emphasise that their assessments of the candidates were based on the proposed programme set out in the bid book and presentation session. A city’s history, its recent and current policies, and cultural offer may form a basis for a programme but play no part in the selection process.

**Kuressaare**

Kuressaare presented their bid under the theme of “Connecting Cultures, Future Island”. The city planned to involve the island of Saaremaa and other islands from the West coast of Estonia – Muhu, Hiiumaa and Ruhnu. The aim of their ECOC proposal was to trigger rediscovery and the development of the city.

As far as the cultural strategy is concerned, a working group has been formed to devise its main goals, measures and activities for 2019–2030. A first set of expected cultural, social, economic and urban impact was provided. This is a positive step and deserves further and more specific elaboration.

The backbone of the ECOC cultural and artistic content is ‘search for futurism and the new wave’ based on legends of Kuressaare and Saaremaa. The panel recognises the potential of the concept, but this highly interesting idea was not sufficiently developed into a convincing vision and corresponding cultural projects. The whole programme approach was not specific enough to get an idea of the cultural and artistic ambitions of Kuressaare 2024.

The geographic position of the city is favourable for EU-cooperation according to the bid book. The panel notices a clear will to enlarge international connections and exchange as a plus. The European dimension is however not sufficiently elaborated within the city strategy and the artistic programme even for this stage of the competition. European themes are too narrowly focused on Creative Europe and similar programmes. The concept and strategy of how to attract European and international audiences is not visible. The cooperation with former and future ECOCs was mentioned but just in passing. In this sense, the bid proposal did not manage to explain how the ECOC would highlight the diversity of the European cultures as well as the features they share.

A first overview of the ECOC target groups was provided and included some national statistical data. The involvement of 13 thematic groups in the bid preparations is a very positive element but outreach and audience development elements were not sufficiently tackled in the proposal.

The suggested budget amounts to € 12 508 000 and relies entirely on the public sector funding, which is a major risk. Furthermore, the budget heavily depends on the financial contribution expected from the national government (€ 10 000 000) while the city/region would contribute a modest amount of € 2 508 000. The ECOC working organisation – as presented in the bid book – would be under the exclusive responsibility of the city council. The panel was not convinced about the management and governance structures, which were underdeveloped for this stage, in both the bid book and the presentation.

The bid indicates that the ECOC will build on existing infrastructure and cultural capacities. However, the capital investment plans are not sufficiently clear and sector
capacity building in order to ensure the efficient delivery of a project of the ECOC size and scale is hardly envisaged. Furthermore, the cultural sector was not adequately profiled in its needs and expectations regarding the ECOC.

Overall, the panel considered that the bid was under-developed. The panel appreciated the enthusiasm and energy of the project team as well as the artistic and storytelling elements featured in the presentation. The panel would like to encourage Kuressaare to capitalize on ECOC preparations and continue to invest in culture as key to its territorial development. The panel hopes that the work on the finalisation and implementation of a comprehensive cultural strategy, not reduced to a regional cultural tourism strategy, will be continued. The process would benefit from involving in a sustainable manner a wider range of stakeholders and the population of the whole territory.

**Narva**

Narva presented their bid under the banner of “Narva is next...”. The city has partnered with the entire region of Virumaa, signing cooperation agreements with 16 municipalities of two counties and a Memorandum of Understanding with Rakvere (ECOC 2011 candidate).

A comprehensive cultural strategy covering the period up to 2030 is under preparation and will be approved before the submission of the final bid book. Its draft includes some promising elements, which are in line with other parts of the application. Expected impacts with key performance indicators are provided. The strategy, in its present form, is however still too technical, missing a clearer narrative which can stimulate the engagement of the whole – including Russian and Estonian speaking – population. It seems that the challenge of Narva's split personality is not fully being confronted in this strategy.

The programme is based on three thematic pillars: River – Border – Bridge. The overlapping and contradicting identities created by the city's location at the border of the European Union offer a rich material for arts, in particular social and engaged arts. However, the proposed approach – built on the question of identities – is highly complex and bares the risk of well meaning, but not achieving the overarching goals of connecting. Therefore, related objectives should be clearly elaborated involving on an equal level playing field the different communities of the city. Easy access to these debates must be ensured to all language groups.

The aim is to include events and projects coming from outside into Narva and its region, but also to encourage local organisations to export and expand. The programming is based on principles of cooperation. The ECOC will encourage sustainability in the sector by introducing new processes, and not just projects and events. However, the vision and ideas of the cultural and artistic programme are not yet translated into a clear structure. In the next phase, the programme should clearly indicate local, national and international partners.

The bid book highlights the main European themes to be addressed by the ECOC. These include disrupted history, which is as a topic very relevant in Europe, especially for neighbouring countries. Other themes include borders, minorities, diversity, identity or post-industrial decline, which are also common to other cities and regions across Europe. The approach to attract international audiences from St. Petersburg as well as the cooperation with operators from other parts of Russia and other EU countries is not yet fully developed. There are first steps to increase international collaboration, for example...
with other ECOCs, yet this needs to be substantially intensified in the final selection phase.

Narva sees itself as a (brave) collaboration hub between East and West, which links the EU with Russia and Russia with the EU. It is however still unclear how this important but very complex and difficult issue is going to be translated into the ECOC strategy and programme. The overall idea of giving a voice and visibility to a city located at the border with Russia and in the outskirts of the EU is very interesting and would be in many ways an element from which Narva could be remembered as a thought-provoking ECOC. Yet the panel remained with the question: who “owns” and adheres to this idea in Narva and its surrounding region? This was made further apparent by the fact that many of the team delegates were from Tallinn. The panel would thus like to see a clearer involvement and profile of the local artistic and cultural institutions and NGOs in the preparation of the concept and the programme.

The civic engagement for preparing the bid was considerable. The creation of a youth advisory board, as well as the involvement of all age groups in volunteering and content creation are promising ambitions in terms of audience development. The goal is to prepare and implement a citywide audience development strategy. The panel also appreciated the inclusion of audience development in the capacity building activities. However, some central challenges require special attention in order to ensure the feasibility of the approach. Those challenges include defining marginalised groups, the problem of language (languages), connecting diverse local and regional communities, and building relationships with Russian populations on both sides of the border.

The proposed budget is €20m, with €10m expected from the national government, €7m from the city of Narva and €1m from the region while 6% would come from private sources. This seems feasible and realistic. Narva2024 will be managed by a new foundation, which is a right approach. The Foundation and the related supervisory and advisory boards are well defined, but the artistic and cultural guidance of the project is yet unclear at this stage. The panel notices professional outlines of the communication strategy, for example with clearly defined communication targets. However, the intercultural context, especially in relation to the plan to "bring Europe to Russia", needs to be carefully examined. The next phase needs to include development of a clear multilevel communication strategy. The panel would expect a clear and comprehensive risks assessment with contingency planning in the second phase of the competition.

The bid is supported by all local political stakeholders (including the governing coalition and the opposition) and regional partners. The capital investment in connection to ECOC is unclear.

Overall, the panel felt that the bid had the makings of a sound cultural offer. The panel did not yet see, however, enough content in the outline programme or its artistic vision to make an impact at European level. The geopolitical position of the city is the biggest opportunity but also a delicate challenge that needs to be carefully and strategically approached in the future at the programme, outreach and communication levels. Clear common goals supported by a wide range of the diverse city population need to be elaborated in order to maintain the potential for a successful ECOC.
Tartu
The leitmotif of Tartu 2024 is “Arts of survival”. The city plans to involve 19 municipalities of Southern Estonia located close to the Russian and Latvian borders. The Arts of Survival concept seek to make nature matter more in humanity, humanity matter more in arts, arts matter more in Europe and Europe matter more in the world for the sake of human survival on a surviving planet.

The KU30 cultural strategy of Tartu was passed unanimously by the City Council on 28 June 2018. It encompasses three major themes: Generations, Community and Environment. The ECOC is linked with the strategy, which is positive. The panel missed however clear information about the Tartu’s plans for effective and sustainable artistic and cultural development.

The programme has clear thematic focuses, which are well translated into related outlines for cultural projects and flagship events. These thematic focuses are translated into the following three programme strands: Tartu with Earth (Ecology before Economy), Tartu with Humanity (Forward to the Roots), and Tartu with Europe (Greater Smaller Cities). Each programme line will have two flagship events – one in Tartu, the other in the wider region. This is a very valuable approach to translate the ECOC idea in a wider regional context.

All three strands have potentially a strong connection with the European context as they are all related to very topical European issues such as the search for sustainable and environment-friendly living patterns or urban alienation. The strategic aim is to make the preparation, implementation and legacy of the Tartu2024 programme "Transversal", "Transnational", "Transgenerational", which is a very positive and promising direction. The panel noticed many particularly interesting and innovative smaller projects such as the beetroot washing machine exhibition or curated biodiversity. The programme seems to be rightly built on proposals coming from local artists and cultural institutions. ECOC is a chance for mutually stimulating local and international collaboration with the whole Europe and the panel would like to see this aspect more elaborated in the next bid book.

Most of the European themes mentioned coincide with global challenges, which is per se very interesting insofar as the European Union is impacted by these challenges. However, that may also come with the risk of having the whole programme overshadowed by global challenges without underlining their specific European elements. The project should therefore reflect sufficiently the European dimension not only in the environmental aspects highlighted in the bid book but also in the way it highlights the cultural diversity in Europe and our common cultural features.

The bid indicates some European partners, but the overall strategic approach in this regard could be further refined, for example regarding the neighbouring regions. The cross-border cooperation projects with neighbouring countries would be of asset to the programme. Its absence might diminish the attractiveness of the project for nearest international audiences. Although the projects include flagships and events with a clear potential, the panel would like to know more about Tartu's overall strategy to attract European and international audiences. The panel appreciated the plan to use the Melina Mercouri Prize as base for establishing a European Arts and Innovation Fund for Tartu.

The local population was fully involved in the development of the bid with meetings, conferences, the use of social media and the involvement of Tartu's neighbourhood societies. The bid book includes also good ideas on how to reach groups such as the middle-aged men and the international students. The audience development ideas –
while interesting – are however still too basic and need further development in the second phase, especially going beyond local audiences.

The proposed budget is €24,5m with €10m expected from the national government, €10m from the city and €1,5m from other municipalities of the region while 6% come from private sources. This is feasible and realistic. The management structures – which include an independent Tartu 2024 Foundation – follow many ECOCs good practices. The section on marketing presents a good overview of structural actions but misses a clear narrative and information about communication content that will differentiate Tartu 2024 from other cultural events in Europe. Capacity building plans – while an important element of the bid – are still too narrow and should therefore be further elaborated in the second bid, also in connection with legacy considerations.

Tartu’s city council unanimously voted for the decision to support the bid for ECOC 2024. The political support is further underlined by ECOC being included in a new coalition pact and budget for 2019 being already voted. Planned multiannual financial frameworks for culture in the city are a good step forward. The support of regional authorities is not clearly presented though. Future plans for the development of cultural infrastructures are well visible and well linked to the focus of the ECOC.

Overall, the panel felt the programme concepts and activities under development are dynamic and ambitious yet further work notably on the disruptive power of arts and culture for the protection of environment is needed. Tartu has clearly vast potential that offers strong base for an interesting ECOC. The ECOC programme should not only be interesting, but also exciting, engaging and unique in terms of its artistic vision. The European Dimension is partially developed and needs to be both broadened and deepened. The academic and creative industries potential is not sufficiently visible in the proposed programme and capacity building activities. The strategy for the creative industries should also translate and promote the values portrayed by the programme, i.e. fostering the development of green and social entrepreneurship.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations apply to the two shortlisted candidates.

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

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

A study of the evaluations of recent (since 2013) ECOCs and monitoring reports of recently designated ECOCs may also be of value. These are available on the European Commission’s ECOC pages.
General
The bid book at final selection becomes de facto contract for the designated city; it sets out the artistic vision and the key objectives, projects, directions, financing and management of the programme. Close concurrence with the bid book is a factor when the monitoring panel will recommend the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize.

In the final selection bid books, candidates must cover all the questions in the selection questionnaire included in Annex 1 of the call for applications. For the next and final stage of the competition, the panel expects a considerably more developed section on the proposed artistic vision, the programme and the European Dimension.

The selection panel (and the subsequent monitoring panel) has a responsibility to protect the long-term brand of the European Capital of Culture programme. Candidates should be aware that with the level of international attention now being given to ECOCs, policy decisions over a wide area (not just cultural) may affect the reputation of the city, and in turn the ECOC image. The panel would expect to see candidates being aware of this and taking steps to minimise international and national negative images of their city through policy changes rather than marketing/PR.

ECOC and Cultural Strategy
The panel will expect a tighter focus in the bid books of the final round. In their next bid books, cities should indicate the priorities of their cultural strategy, their target outcomes and how resources will be changed over the next few years. A city’s cultural strategy will normally be wider in scope than the objectives of an ECOC. Bid books should indicate more clearly which priorities of the broader cultural strategy the ECOC is seeking to contribute to. The expected legacy of the ECOC should also be envisaged.

An ECOC is a transformational opportunity for a city. The pre-selection bid books set out in general terms the objectives of why a city is seeking the title. The panel would expect a more focused (and shorter) explanation that can link to the programme vision, themes, activities, and through evaluation, to the outcomes in the subsequent legacy. There is considerable literature and research available for cities to see the range of cultural, economic and social benefits of an ECOC.

The evaluation sections of the bid books should be developed in the second phase and 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 four elements of the European Dimension criterion. Shortlisted cities may wish to involve management consultancies in addition to the more academic approach currently proposed.

Cultural and Artistic programme
The focus of the final selection is the operating programme between end 2019, when the ECOC will be formally designated and, in particular, the ECOC year of 2024.

A city’s previous cultural history and heritage and its recent and current cultural offer, may form a basis for this programme but plays no part in the decision. Many ECOCs in recent years have used the opportunity provided by an ECOC to address difficult issues from their 20th century past that still resonate today. The panel suggest candidates to re-
consider their approach to the appropriate topics from Estonia’s 20th century and use the opportunity to prepare for its future.

The panel will expect to see more details on the programmes, their projects and partners. The cities should set out their artistic vision, the programme and projects more clearly; differentiating between partners who have indicated firm interest and those who are still only potential or possible partners. ECOC programmes normally cover a wide range of art forms and include the increasing development of creative interventions in social issues. An approximate budget should be shown for each major project for the panel to understand the relative balance of projects in the programme.

The panel recommends a more focused and detailed approach to digital cultural content (not just social media promotions and inter-actions) as integral parts of their programme. This was under-developed in the bid books.

The cultural and creative industries (CCI) should be understood as transversal topic of the cultural and artistic programme and must be linked to a related mapping as well as a needs analysis of the sector. Capacity building should therefore also encompass the CCI.

Information on urban development and infrastructure programmes, cultural heritage restoration projects and new cultural premises is useful as background and context at pre-selection. The final selection will focus on the capital projects that directly influence 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.

**European Dimension**

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

The European dimension has a two-way direction. An equal focus is on seeking to broaden the understanding and awareness of the city’s own citizens on the diversity of cultures in Europe and linking through cultural and other projects with citizens in other countries. It is this focus on other cultures that primarily differentiates an ECOC from a national city of culture. An ECOC offers the opportunity for a city and its citizens to learn from others in an open way. One important legacy area is the creation of new and sustained partnerships between a city’s cultural players and those from other countries.

The panel expects to see a significantly increased focus on European partnerships: co-productions, co-curations, conferences, networking as well as visiting artists/performers. Most recent ECOCs have included European and international partners in well over half their projects. Cities should encourage their cultural operators to be active participants in European cultural networks.
One of the elements of the artistic criterion for the ECOC title is the ability to attract **visitors from the rest of Europe**. This programme has to have its attraction and that is why it is something else than the usual tourist offers of the city and region. The panel would expect to see these attracting programme ideas in the bid for ECOC 2024. The panel advises to think thoroughly over building a strategic communication plan for the ECOC project as well as to make a connection between the programme and international marketing vision.

**Outreach**

The **audience development** strategy and programme are expected to be much further developed in the final bid books including online and offline measures and channels for all identified target groups.

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

Special focus should be dedicated to those audiences that are more difficult to reach but being crucial for a new “cultural climate” in an ECOC city (e.g. minorities, the elderly, disabled, and people temporarily in the city). These are under-represented in the bid books at pre-selection. The bid books should cover the participation of schools, youth groups, (international) students, volunteers etc. and the capacity building of the creative art sector to approach audience development from the long-term and strategic perspective.

**Management**

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

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

The planned staffing arrangements from 2019 to 2024 should be outlined including secondments, interns and volunteers.

**Capacity to deliver**

Candidates should re-confirm that their bid book, including the programme and the financial commitments have the formal approval of the mayor, the city (and county if appropriate) councils and all political parties.

Both shortlisted cities have not convincingly explained their capacity to manage large cultural events. Candidates are reminded that the criterion for an ECOC requires a special
programme for the year in addition to the normal cultural offer. The panel expects more information on the managerial capacity in the city/region to manage the depth and range of an ECOC. The cities should also plan strong capacity building programmes as ECOC’s scope goes beyond current local capacities. If projects are planned to be funded from competitive EU programmes (e.g. Creative Europe) this should be indicated.

The final bid books should clearly indicate how potential capital investments crucial for the ECOC would be managed (management structures, state-of-play related to the EU-ESI-Funds such as the connection with the relevant Operational Programme, time line and public procurement). The capital investment crucial for ECOC should be presented with overall budgets and timeframes.

The hotels capacities should be re-examined and alternative plans should be developed.

The panel also wants to be sure that both candidates understand correctly the financial contributions from the national government.

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

Signed
Beatriz Garcia (Chair)
Anu Kivilo (Vice-Chair)
Sylvia Amann
Cristina Farinha
Suzana Žilič Fišer
Mikko Fritze
Ulrich Fuchs
Pauli Sivonen
Jiri Suchanek
Agnieszka Wlazel (Rapporteur)

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