



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2029 in Poland

September 2024

The Expert Panel's report Selection stage

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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the selection phase of the competition for the European Capital of Culture in 2029 in Poland. The competition is a European Union initiative that started in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” has previously been awarded to two cities in Poland, namely Kraków in 2000 and Wrocław in 2016.

The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland (the “Ministry”), acts as the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by Decision n°445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 (the “Decision”) and by the “Rules of Procedure—Competition for the 2029 European Capital of Culture title in Poland” adopted by the Ministry and published on its website.

A panel of 12 independent experts was established for the selection process, in line with Article 2 of the Rules of Procedure. The European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission, and Committee of the Regions) designated ten members of this panel, while the Ministry designated two members.

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

Pre-selection round

The Ministry issued a call for submission of applications in November 2022. A total of 12 cities submitted their applications at the pre-selection phase. On the 27th of October 2023, the panel recommended inviting the cities of Bielsko-Biała, Katowice, Kołobrzeg, and Lublin to progress to the final selection stage. The panel’s pre-selection report is published on the websites of the European Commission and of the Ministry. The Ministry accepted the panel’s recommendation and invited the four cities to submit final applications with a deadline of 1st of August 2024. The four cities submitted their final applications (“bid-books”) by the deadline.

A delegation of three members of the panel participated in city visits from the 16th until the 20th of September 2024. One visiting panel member could not take part in the final city visit on 20th of September due to illness. The delegation was accompanied by observers from the Ministry and the European Commission. The delegation reported to the panel at the selection meeting.

Panel meeting

The panel members met in Warsaw on the 23rd, 24th, and 25th of September 2024. One panel member was excused for professional reasons. The panel confirmed Suvi Innilä as its chair and Agata Wąsowska-Pawlik as its vice chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and gave it to the Ministry ahead of the final selection hearings. 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 decisions.

At the selection hearings on the 23rd and 24th of September 2024, each candidate city, in alphabetical order, presented its case (in 45 minutes) and answered questions from the panel (in 75 minutes). The Chair of the panel announced the panel’s recommendation at a public event, live streamed on the social networks of the Ministry, on the 25th of September in the presence of the Polish Minister of Culture and the Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Poland.

Thank you

In this regard, the panel members wish to extend their gratitude to everyone who participated in the selection phase of the competition. The panel specifically observed that the four cities utilised the bidding process as an occasion to strengthen their cultural strategies and emphasise the significance of culture and Europe in their socio-economic progress as a whole. This is already a substantial potential legacy that the ECoC competition has produced.

The four candidate cities are firmly encouraged to continue developing and implementing their respective cultural strategies. The panel wishes to extend its gratitude to the cities and all those who made contributions to their proposals. Additionally, it extends its appreciation to the European Commission for its guidance and the Ministry for its flawless coordination and the 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) 2029 in Poland to be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension created specifically for the title (Article 4). The panel assessed each bid against the six criteria outlined in Article 5 of the Decision:

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

In line with the specifications of the call, the panel assessed each short-listed candidate city on the basis of its revised bid-book and hearing against the objectives of the European Capital of Culture action and the criteria as specified above. A city's history, its recent and current policies, as well as its cultural offer, may form the basis for the proposed programme, but they are not criteria in the selection process.

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

In the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their findings during the selection phase.

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.

In the case of the selected city, specific recommendations are made, to assist it in the implementation of its ECoC project.

Bielsko-Biała

Bielsko-Biała's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2029 is centred on the theme "Weaving Wellbeing," a concept that reflects the city's commitment to fostering social cohesion, cultural participation, and environmental sustainability. The metaphor of weaving symbolises the collaborative, community-driven approach at the heart of the programme, while wellbeing represents the ultimate goal—a dynamic, evolving state achieved through cultural and social innovation.

The core vision of the bid is to empower individuals and communities by integrating culture into the daily life of the city. Through a process of co-creation, Bielsko-Biała aims to enhance the wellbeing of its residents by fostering a sense of agency, identity, and belonging among citizens. This holistic approach acknowledges the complex and multifaceted nature of wellbeing, which includes mental health, environmental care, and social justice.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

- Bielsko-Biała's long-term cultural development strategy, adopted by the City Council in June 2024, demonstrates a clear ambition to enhance the city's cultural landscape. This strategy, focusing on seven key values—artistic, European, social, urban, economic, policy, and symbolic—shows alignment with the city's ECoC 2029 goals.
- The establishment of the Urban Culture Institute in early 2024 is a positive step, with its pivotal role in cultural programming and ensuring the longevity of the ECoC's legacy.
- The proposed new cultural venues—such as the theatre, welfare centre, multifunctional arts centre, and mountain centre—reflect the city's strong commitment to enhancing its cultural infrastructure, which the panel can only applaud.
- The city's vision to maintain "Weaving Wellbeing" as a lasting theme is admirable, and the proposed "Institute for Creativity" provides an innovative approach to sustaining partnerships with the business and cultural sectors. However, the panel noted that more information about the continuation of specific initiatives beyond the ECoC year and the funding mechanisms needed for their sustainability would further strengthen this vision.
- Lastly, Bielsko-Biała's detailed evaluation plan, stretching from 2025 to 2035, underlines a strong and very long commitment to measuring impact, which is very much welcomed, though it would have been even more convincing had the methodology to monitor the increase in wellbeing among the citizens been more clearly explained.

Cultural and Artistic Content

- The programme is very thoughtfully structured around three thematic lines—*Awareness*, *Society*, and *Surroundings*—each of which unfolds through sub-themes - imagination, skills, knowledge, identity, community, freedom, nature, urban and digital space. These thematic lines allow for a diverse cultural experience that bridges various disciplines and forms of expression, contributing

to the richness of the artistic vision.

- Among the 31 well-articulated projects in the bid, initiatives like "Pan-European Herstories" and "Street Art Academy", highlight the city's ambition to blend cultural heritage with contemporary narratives. These projects creatively combine traditional and modern expressions, offering a perspective that strongly resonates with broader European themes.
- Local and international partnerships have been presented, ensuring that both the city's artists and those across Europe have a role in shaping the cultural programme. The inclusion of European artists, particularly in projects like "*100x100 Tapestry*," highlights the collaborative nature of the bid, reinforcing a shared European cultural heritage. However, the panel expressed concerns about the overall programme consistency, posing a risk to a coherent artistic vision.
- The planned open calls for additional projects further demonstrate the city's commitment to keeping the programme dynamic and inclusive, allowing room for ongoing innovation. However, the panel noted that the programme's division into multiple thematic fibres, while conceptually strong, could benefit from more streamlined communication to ensure its core messages are accessible to a broad audience.
- The role of the "*Storyteller*" in maintaining cohesion across projects is relevant and very welcomed, and this approach will be vital in ensuring that the overarching theme of "*Weaving Wellbeing*" is reflected consistently throughout the diverse cultural offerings.

European Dimension

- Bielsko-Biała's programme thoughtfully addresses key European themes such as democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, and intercultural dialogue. By highlighting shared cultural heritage and encouraging cross-border collaborations, the programme reflects a strong commitment to European integration. Overall, the European dimension is strongly visible throughout the entire bid-book.
- The city has successfully cultivated partnerships with European artists and cities, with initiatives like the "*Street Art Academy*" and "*100x100 Tapestry*" standing out as exemplary collaborative projects. Additionally, Bielsko-Biała's involvement in the *Culture Next network*—which connects ECoC candidates and title holders—positions the city as part of a larger European dialogue on sustainability and cultural participation.
- The bid-book lists several valuable partnerships with artists and organisations from across Europe. Notably, the bid includes collaborations with 13 future ECoCs, ensuring that the cultural exchange extends beyond 2029. Projects such as the *Institute for Creativity* are planned to sustain long-term partnerships, fostering ongoing cultural programming with these cities.
- Bielsko-Biała's efforts to attract a broad European and international audience through collaborations with regional and national tourism organisations are promising.

Outreach

- Bielsko-Biała’s programme demonstrates a strong commitment to community participation, offering multiple open calls and workshops that invite local artists and residents to shape the development of various cultural projects. This inclusive approach is reinforced through initiatives like the *"Weaving Mill of Creativity,"* which fosters collaboration among amateur, semi-professional, and professional artists, ensuring that all skill levels are involved in the city’s cultural narrative.
- Efforts to engage marginalised groups, including refugees, LGBTQIA+ communities, and individuals with disabilities, are notably present in the programme. These initiatives are designed to create a sense of belonging and cultural expression for those who might otherwise face barriers to participation.
- Several projects, such as the *"Community Forest,"* focus on improving mental health and wellbeing, particularly for young people and vulnerable groups. By creating public spaces that connect wellbeing with nature, the city has addressed the important link between cultural engagement and personal health.
- The panel appreciates the focus on engaging young people through projects like the *"Street Art Academy"* and cultural workshops, though it also noted that there is potential for further strengthening youth and children's involvement. Specifically, deeper integration of schools and youth organisations in the decision-making process would enhance the programme’s appeal to younger audiences. The city has acknowledged this point and highlighted that upcoming open calls will aim to address this gap by providing additional opportunities for youth to be more actively involved.

Management

- The management of Bielsko-Biała’s ECoC programme is led by the Urban Culture Institute, which is supported by several advisory boards focusing on critical areas such as sustainability, technology, and European cooperation. This comprehensive governance structure demonstrates the city's commitment to the programme's effective management and alignment with key priorities. However, the addition of an advisory group including representatives from economic, social, and institutional organisations would have further reinforced transparency and enhanced engagement with relevant stakeholders.
- The *"Storyteller"* role, responsible for maintaining coherence across the cultural projects, is an interesting and creative solution to ensuring that the overarching theme of *"Weaving Wellbeing"* remains consistent throughout the programme’s varied offerings.
- The ECoC programme’s budget of €67.5 million, with €33.32 million allocated specifically for cultural activities, demonstrates the city’s significant financial commitment to the ECoC. With 64% of the operating budget already secured, the city has a detailed plan to raise additional funds from private sector sources and EU grants. The fundraising strategy is ambitious, and continued efforts to

secure commitments from private sponsors will be key to ensuring the programme's financial stability.

- The staffing plan, which includes both local and international hires, aims to attract experienced professionals to key roles.
- Bielsko-Biała has proactively developed contingency plans to address potential risks, such as delays in infrastructure or reductions in EU funding. The identification of alternative venues and the flexibility in reallocating budgets provide a solid foundation for managing unforeseen challenges.

Capacity to Deliver

- Bielsko-Biała has garnered strong political support for its ECoC bid, with unanimous backing from the City Council and endorsements from regional authorities. This widespread political endorsement lays a solid foundation for the programme's successful delivery.
- The city's plan for new cultural infrastructure, including the development of a theatre and multifunctional arts centre, demonstrates its commitment to enhancing its cultural landscape. These venues are expected to be completed ahead of 2029, and alternative locations have been identified to mitigate potential delays.
- Bielsko-Biała's prior experience in hosting large-scale cultural events and festivals supports its ability to manage and deliver a complex programme such as the ECoC.
- The city has also designed a strong volunteer programme, with roles available for both local and international volunteers, which is commendable.

Conclusion

Bielsko-Biała's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2029 presented a compelling theme, "Weaving Wellbeing," deeply rooted in the city's historical identity and its aspirations to foster social cohesion, cultural participation, and environmental sustainability. The bid clearly demonstrated a commitment to long-term cultural development, with a strong integration of European values such as democracy, human rights, and environmental sustainability.

However, after careful consideration, the panel decided not to recommend Bielsko-Biała for the European Capital of Culture 2029 title. Several key factors contributed to this decision.

While the programme is rich in content with a diverse range of cultural activities, the panel expressed concern on its overall consistency, posing a risk to a coherent artistic vision. This complexity could potentially hinder effective engagement with both local and international audiences. Additionally, the wide range of cultural activities, though ambitious, raised concerns about the overall coherence of the programme. The diversity of projects made it difficult to ensure a consistent artistic vision throughout, posing a risk of fragmenting the cultural narrative.

Financially, the city's reliance on private sector funding was seen as overly optimistic. The panel also noted the significant portion of the budget allocated to personnel costs.

Furthermore, the reliance on external EU funding added an additional layer of uncertainty, especially in the event of delays or changes in funding.

Finally, while the bid incorporated several European themes, the strategy for attracting a broader European and international audience lacked clarity.

Katowice

Katowice's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2029 revolves around the theme *Play!*, which symbolises creativity, inclusivity, and the idea of transforming culture into a joyful, engaging process. The concept is designed to break barriers and involve all residents of the Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolis (GZM), fostering local and European cultural connections. The programme builds upon four key pillars - *Gardens*, *Gigs*, *Games*, and *Growth* - each representing a unique dimension of cultural and social engagement.

Katowice's bid emphasises collaboration, with many initiatives being developed in collaboration with local and international partners. It also highlights the importance of engaging marginalised communities and prioritising accessibility, with a commitment to the Metropolitan Charter for Accessible Culture.

The proposed cultural programme includes many flagship projects, from large-scale international festivals and exhibitions to community-driven artistic interventions, with a focus on fostering intercultural dialogue and celebrating local heritage in a European context.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

- Katowice's long-term cultural development strategy, adopted in May 2024, outlines four key objectives: increasing participation, fostering creative cooperation, reimagining public and cultural spaces, and revitalising the city's cultural image. These objectives are well integrated into the city's ECoC programme, reflecting a strong alignment with its broader urban strategy.
- The ECoC programme is an essential part of Katowice's efforts to transform its post-industrial identity and create a lasting cultural legacy beyond 2029. This includes initiatives to develop green spaces, promote sustainable cultural activities, and enhance social wellbeing through cultural engagement.
- While the city has put forward a robust plan for monitoring and evaluation, including clear KPIs and long-term assessments stretching to 2035, the panel noted some concerns about the clarity and consistency of the proposed cultural long-term vision.
- The panel also highlighted that the strategy could benefit from further development, particularly in terms of ensuring that the long-term cultural vision remains coherent and impactful across all levels.

Cultural and Artistic Content

- Katowice's cultural programme is structured around four main pillars - *Gardens*, *Gigs*, *Games*, and *Growth* - and four sub-themes: *Personal Playlist*, *Fair Play*,

Total Immersion and *Re: Play*, each reflecting different dimensions of cultural engagement and interaction. This approach blends local traditions with modern experimental expressions, showcasing the city's commitment to cultural diversity.

- With over 100 flagship projects, the programme offers a wide range of initiatives, highlighting subcultures such as video games and parkour, as well as amateur artistic movements like brass bands and miners' painters.
- The bid's focus on inclusivity, particularly through playful and interactive projects such as "*Let's Play*," aimed to attract younger participants and foster greater cultural participation.
- While the programme was ambitious and demonstrated creativity, the panel raised concerns about the depth of the artistic vision. The potential of gaming and play as transformative tools for cultural engagement, while promising, could have been more fully explored to shift from passive consumption to active creation, addressing also fundamental issues like the dark side of gaming.
- Additionally, with 40% of the programme still under development, questions about the completeness and coherence of the overall vision persisted.

European Dimension

- Katowice's bid highlighted cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, positioning the city as a key hub for European artistic exchange. The programme featured collaborations with European artists, integrating their contributions into the broader cultural framework. Additionally, Katowice's involvement in the *Culture Next network* positions the city as part of a larger European dialogue on sustainability and cultural participation.
- The "*Play!*" theme effectively aimed to foster European engagement, encouraging cross-border cooperation and dialogue. Projects like "*True Colours*" and the "*History of Video Games*" exhibition stood out as examples designed to attract a wide European audience.
- However, the panel felt that the European dimension of the bid could have been strengthened by offering more detailed examples of how local traditions would connect with broader European cultural narratives.
- Despite the examples mentioned above, the overall strategy for attracting a European and international audience was not entirely convincing in its ability to engage the broader European cultural market effectively.

Outreach

- Katowice's outreach strategy focused on extending cultural activities beyond established zones, aiming to engage communities that are traditionally excluded from such initiatives, which the panel welcomes. Significant efforts were made to include non-professional and marginalised groups, with notable projects like the "*Kato4U*" youth centres and a particular emphasis on Deaf culture.
- More than 250 stakeholder meetings were held, ensuring broad community involvement in the development of the programme. This approach highlighted the city's commitment to making culture accessible and inclusive for all, fostering

- a sense of ownership within the community.
- The long-term legacy of the outreach programme was built around community ownership, with a focus on ensuring that residents view themselves as active participants and creators of their cultural environment. This was designed to encourage continued engagement with the city's cultural life well beyond 2029.
 - However, while youth participation was mentioned, the integration of schools and higher education institutions could have been more clearly defined in the cultural programme, which would have enhanced the overall outreach strategy.

Management

- Katowice's ECoC programme amounts to €48.59 million, including €34 million for the cultural activities. This includes contributions from public partners and private sponsors. The fundraising strategy was thoughtfully planned, although there were some concerns regarding the full realisation of private sector funding.
- The governance structure aimed to be well-defined, with clear roles for the ECoC office within the "City of Gardens" institution. However, concerns remained about potential risks and a lack of clarity in this integration. The decision to implement a multi-curator model instead of a single artistic director was seen as an innovative step towards democratic and participatory decision-making.
- Furthermore, the internal selection process for key leadership roles raised some concerns, particularly regarding the potential limitation of opportunities for bringing in fresh external perspectives.
- Comprehensive contingency plans were outlined, providing provisions for handling potential delays in infrastructure or funding shortfalls.
- While the management plan included strategies for cross-sectoral collaboration, the panel felt that more detailed information on partnerships would have further strengthened the bid's management framework.

Capacity to Deliver

- Katowice's ECoC bid received strong political support from both the City Council and the Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolis (GZM), which represents 41 municipalities. The city's experience in hosting major cultural events, such as its designation as a UNESCO City of Music, further underscored its capacity to manage large-scale programmes.
- The bid provided clear timelines for the development of key infrastructure projects, including the "Gaming and Technology Hub," which was set to be delivered in phases and fully operational by 2029.
- However, there were some doubts about whether the proposed management team of 70 staff members, with only 10% of the budget allocated to wages and administration, would be sufficient to manage and deliver such a complex and wide-reaching programme.

Conclusion

Katowice's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2029 showcased several notable strengths. The "Play!" theme creatively promoted cultural engagement, inclusivity, and joy, while making strong efforts to involve local communities and marginalised groups. The blend of local traditions with modern cultural expressions and the governance structure and involvement of local artists demonstrated Katowice's commitment to fostering long-term cultural development and community ownership.

While Katowice's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2029 was ambitious and well-considered, the panel identified several areas that raised concerns, ultimately contributing to the decision not to recommend the city for the title. The diverse range of cultural projects presented, though impressive, prompted questions regarding the ability to create a cohesive narrative that connects the various elements of the programme. Similarly, the "Play!" theme, while conceptually strong, could benefit from further exploration to fully demonstrate how it could shift cultural consumption towards active participation.

There were also observations about the cultural programme's overall coherence: with 40% of the programme still under development, further detail was necessary to address how these projects would coherently address the overall vision. This raised questions about the feasibility of delivering a fully realised and impactful artistic vision. Additionally, the financial framework, particularly the reliance on private sector funding that had not yet been fully secured, generated concerns.

In terms of the European dimension, although the bid included notable partnerships and projects, more detailed examples were needed to illustrate how these collaborations would foster meaningful exchanges. Moreover, the strategy for attracting a broader European and international audience could benefit from more innovative approaches to enhance the bid's reach across Europe.

Kołobrzeg

Kołobrzeg's bid for European Capital of Culture 2029 revolves around the theme "I Sea You," which celebrates the city's connection with the Baltic Sea, while addressing broader issues of ecological preservation, social inclusion, and cultural diversity. It emphasises the importance of smaller cities in shaping Europe's future, proposing a "Small Centre of the World" where local identity and environmental awareness drive European integration. The programme is structured around four storytelling circles—Source, Body, City, and Sea—that explore local identity, ecological challenges, cultural heritage, and social inclusion through artistic collaboration with residents and international partners.

Kołobrzeg's bid positions itself within a larger European context, promoting unity, ecological responsibility, and the shared history of migration. It aims to include marginalised groups, such as seniors and minorities, while addressing the challenges of overtourism by promoting sustainable tourism practices.

The city plans to establish the Institute of Deep Culture to ensure long-term engagement with its themes, focusing on cultural sustainability, ecological dialogue, and the development of cultural infrastructure as a legacy.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

- The city's strategy of cultural development has been laid out in the "Programme for Cultural Development of Kołobrzeg 2030+" under the slogan "Small is beautiful". It spans well identified priority areas: local identity and local community; a city by the sea threatened by ecological disaster; tourism; active ageing. The panel views an alignment between the priority areas of the strategy and the ECoC 2029 programme circles.
- The expected long-term impact of the ECoC is described in a sound way and includes a raised sense of connection in municipal and regional communities, improved ecological awareness, and raised awareness of the city's attractiveness among European nationals. On the other hand, it remains unclear how issues of over-tourism and ecological challenges of the Baltic Sea, identified as areas that the ECoC title can leave a long-term impact on, will be achieved.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are sound, showcasing a clear overview of studies to be performed at different stages. However, the panel would have liked more precise information on the organisation or experts to carry out the evaluation and the exact KPIs that will be measured.

Cultural and Artistic Content

- The bid for Kołobrzeg's European Capital of Culture 2029 presents a detailed artistic vision on the concept of "I Sea You". It is based on linking six elements (continuance, interaction, rooting, remembrance, enhancement, and *naturising*) with an invisible thread of connections (networking) to define the central idea of the ECoC 2029 in Kołobrzeg – the Celebration of culture. Whereas the panel appreciated the poetic conceptualisation of the programme, it remained unclear on how this would be communicated effectively to a wider European audience.
- In total, 46 projects are presented in the programme section with a programming budget of €15.4 million, equivalent to 67% of the total budget.
- The artistic vision resonates well with the city's identity and many projects communicate this on a local level. However, the panel would have liked to see stronger and wider connections with European partners.
- The programme, organised around its four storytelling circles (Source, Body, City, and Sea), showcases an eclectic and diverse range of cultural offerings, reflecting a strong creative vision. However, the panel raised concerns about whether the allocated budgets are sufficient to meet the ambitious goals set out for these projects.
- Additionally, while many proposals present compelling ideas, several remain at a conceptual stage. The panel noted the importance of further developing concrete implementation plans, particularly as a limited number of organisations and partners are currently involved in the execution of these projects.

European Dimension

- The bid highlights the city's historical role as a crossroads of migration and cultural exchange, and it proposes a variety of projects that foster dialogue and collaboration across European borders. Interactions with European partners,

particularly those along the Baltic Sea, are a focal point of the programme.

- While the bid includes several promising European collaboration projects, such as the notable Hansa network, there is an opportunity to further strengthen the strategies on how Kołobrzeg as ECoC will actively engage diverse European communities in a more sustained and meaningful way throughout the programme.
- The bid explores common European challenges such as ecological threats, migration, and social inclusion, positioning Kołobrzeg as a microcosm for broader European issues. The panel noted, however, that the bid could have benefitted from more concrete details on how underrepresented communities will be included in the programme.
- Kołobrzeg's bid emphasises the creation of long-lasting partnerships with European cities and institutions. While the intention is clear, more concrete examples of how these connections will be implemented or developed before, during, and after the ECoC year would have strengthened the bid.
- The bid aims to attract a European audience through high-profile events such as the Sidonia Opera and the I Sea You Orchestra Project, while digital strategies will ensure broader accessibility for international viewers. The city's strong focus on ecological awareness also appeals to pan-European concerns, positioning Kołobrzeg as a cultural and environmental hub.

Outreach

- The bid emphasises the importance of the ECoC year for the citizen's identity formation through engagement with diverse cultural, religious, and worldview perspectives. The panel welcomed the establishment of a Community Cultural Council entrusted with the responsibility for drafting the Programme for the Cultural Development of Kołobrzeg 2030+.
- The project aims to enlarge audiences, focusing on enhancing relationships with current cultural officers and engaging new stakeholders through initiatives such as free admission and reduced-rate tickets for selected groups. Yet, although the team is aware of the necessity/challenge to involve tourists in the transformative cultural programme, the strategy to engage them is not sufficiently detailed.
- Educational engagement is a strong aspect of the bid, with primary and secondary school students actively involved in pre-selection through exhibitions and competitions, supported by ECoC coordinators appointed in every school and ambassadors from the Youth Municipal Council.
- The bid demonstrates strong community involvement, particularly with diverse groups, including LGBTQIA+ representation, and has seen significant participation through an open call for artistic activity projects, with over 130 submissions primarily from residents. On the other hand, the bid lacks detail on future participation, and the strategy for volunteer engagement is underdeveloped.

Management

- The ECoC programme's budget amounts to €23 million, with €15.41 million allocated specifically for cultural activities. The financial strategy proposed in the bid-book is sound, with a clear focus on securing funding from a diverse range

of funding streams, including private sector partnerships and EU programmes. 50% of the budget from the public purse will be allocated by the city.

- The Kołobrzeg Institute of Culture and Promotion, responsible for the delivery of the ECoC, has already been established with the tasks of managing director and programme director clearly outlined.
- The communication plan is comprehensive, with a focus on promoting Kołobrzeg's unique cultural identity and its connection to European themes. Digital platforms, media partnerships, and collaborations with European institutions are key components of the strategy.
- While the management plan is strong, the panel would have welcomed more detail on how local cultural stakeholders will be supported and trained in relevant culture management topics.

Capacity to Deliver

- Kołobrzeg City Council passed a resolution on 17 July 2024, confirming its ongoing support for the city's ECoC bid and its willingness to allocate the necessary budgetary resources for the programme in each financial year. There is broad political backing from local authorities, including the Kołobrzeg City Council, regional governments, and the Marshal's Office of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship.
- The bid lists significant investment in upgrading cultural infrastructure, such as the renovation of the Fuse Tower, Lighthouse, and Kołobrzeg's amphitheatre, which will serve as key venues for the ECoC programme. While the plans for investments in cultural infrastructure are clear, with well-defined budgets and timelines committing to completion before the start of the ECoC year, more detail on contingencies in case of delays would have been helpful.

Conclusion

Kołobrzeg's bid for European Capital of Culture 2029, inspired by the theme of "I Sea You," presented a creative and locally relevant vision, emphasising the city's deep connection with the Baltic Sea and its ecological and cultural heritage. The bid demonstrated a clear vision for fostering community involvement, with a strong focus on engaging groups like seniors and the LGBTQIA+ community. Educational initiatives were also well developed, with schools playing an active role in the process. The city's emphasis on sustainability and ecological awareness aligned well with contemporary European priorities.

While the bid for Kołobrzeg showcased many strengths, there are areas where further exploration could enhance its overall impact. While the bid aligns with the city's broader cultural development goals, the panel noted that the approach to addressing long-term issues like over-tourism and ecological challenges in the Baltic Sea could have benefitted from further clarification. The monitoring and evaluation plans were well articulated; however, additional details regarding leadership roles and specific KPIs would provide clarity.

While the artistic vision of "I Sea You" showcased significant poetic depth, the panel felt there was potential for broader engagement with a European audience. Most projects appeared to emphasise local aspects, and there were opportunities to strengthen connections with European partners to enhance their impact. Additionally, the budget

allocations for the projects could benefit from further refinement, and providing more detailed implementation plans would have helped clarify their feasibility.

Lublin

Lublin's bid for European Capital of Culture 2029 is encapsulated in the theme of RE:UNION, which emphasises the reintegration of fragmented communities, cultures, and values in the face of the global challenges of climate change, war, and social division. The city's bid identifies its unique position as a multicultural crossroad between East and West, proposing itself as an ideal platform to foster dialogue, cultural exchange, and community building. The programme envisions Lublin as a hub for social change, with culture as the catalyst for promoting European values of solidarity, democracy, and human rights.

The RE:UNION theme manifests in three main programme areas: "Community", which focuses on rebuilding bonds within Lublin and across Europe; "Habitat", which explores the relationship between people, nature, and digital realities; and "Borders", which challenges the concept of boundaries, both physical and metaphorical. These areas are proposed to serve as frameworks for artistic, educational, and social projects aimed at fostering inclusivity, intercultural dialogue, and creative expression.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

- The city's strategy of cultural development has been laid out in the "Lublin 2030+ Culture Strategy" and has unanimously been adopted on 23 May 2024. It spans well identified priority areas: access to culture, cultural education, cultural workforce, Lublin (in) 2030, artistic output, and creativity.
- The strategy has been developed through dialogue with the local cultural community and residents and is aligned with the city's main strategic document, Lublin Strategy 2030. The panel considers that there is a strong alignment between the priority areas of the strategy and the ECoC 2029 objectives of the city.
- The expected long-term impact of the ECoC is described in a very detailed overview, showing clear outcomes and impacts with well identified indicators and data sources.
- The plans for monitoring and evaluation are strong, showcasing a robust assessment based on reliable baseline data. The bid provides clarity on the design and implementation of the research process based on the *Theory Driven Impact Evaluation Methodology*.
- A clear timeline is in place with actions to be carried out annually until 2031. Dissemination will take place via reports and two research conferences.

Cultural and Artistic Content

- The bid convincingly presents a programme that is designed to have a lasting legacy, contributing to the long-term cultural and social transformation of Lublin, while strengthening the city's cultural infrastructure, audience development, and international partnerships.

- The panel positively notes the strong involvement of local artists, particularly through the newly-built Consortium – Union of Lublin Cultural Operators as a gathering of main public cultural institutions and some NGOs, in playing a pivotal role in the co-design and implementation of the programme.
- The programme seeks to mobilise culture to discuss contemporary issues that also resonate on an EU level, and this is highly relevant: the relationship between the geopolitical centre and periphery, sustainability, freedom of movement, and migration.
- It also implements authentic approaches towards cross-border cooperation.
- The total programme budget is healthy with an investment of €33.1 million, which is equivalent to 72% of the operating budget.
- In total, the budget allocation for the presented projects is almost €20 million. An additional 20% (€6.6 million) is reserved for an open call for concepts to extend existing city events with modules directly connected to the concept of RE:UNION. The remaining 20% will be allocated to projects devised between 2025 and 2028 by young residents. While the panel welcomes this allocation of costs, leaving space for a further development of the programme, it would have appreciated receiving more clarity on the process and criteria of the calls.
- Project descriptions include clear goals and values underlying the programme, an indication of the level of the budget, a list of partners, and some indicators such as the expected number of participants.

European Dimension

- Lublin's bid emphasises its role as a cultural crossroad between Eastern and Western Europe, with various projects aimed at promoting European diversity and fostering intercultural dialogue. Initiatives like the RE:UNION Congress and international festivals highlight the city's commitment to European unity and addressing contemporary challenges through culture. In addition, Lublin is dedicated to creating opportunities for European artists to collaborate, ensuring a strong international presence in its activities. The city's engagement in broader European discussions on sustainability and cultural participation further reinforces its commitment to these shared goals.
- The bid underscores common European values such as democracy, solidarity, and human rights. These themes are woven throughout the RE:UNION programme, with significant events planned to mark the 25th anniversary of Poland's EU accession and discussions on Europe's future.
- The bid provides clear project examples that highlight the common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history, as well as European integration and current European themes. Initiatives to foster intercultural dialogue are robust, emphasising the reintegration of societal bonds across Europe.
- Lublin's bid outlines extensive European collaborations, with networks such as IETM, Aerowaves among many others, and partnerships with cities across Europe. The city is already engaged in active cooperation with other ECoCs and cultural institutions. However, details on some ongoing or planned projects with ECoCs such as with the two candidates for the 2029 title in Sweden, Uppsala and Kiruna, remain sparse.

- Whereas the programme aims to attract a broad European audience and presents digital strategies that ensure wide accessibility, the panel notes that more robust marketing and digital strategies are required to reach a wider and broader European audience.

Outreach

- Among the many sources that contributed to the programme's inception were the 3,000 aspirations of the city's residents and the 500 projects that were submitted through an open call. Local communities and international artists also participated. Additionally, €1.5 million in grant competitions was utilised to co-finance more than 150 initiatives.
- Over 100 pro-social, educational, and inclusive projects were submitted by residents, focused on disadvantaged groups.
- 5 different 'Special Unions' have been established, bringing together various stakeholders, including cultural practitioners, cities and towns in the region, businesses and enterprises, universities and colleges, and young people. The bid smartly built on the experiences from the previous city's bid for ECoC 2016, the 700th jubilee of Lublin, and the European Youth Capital 2023.
- Reaching new audiences, removing barriers to participation, and ensuring inclusivity, especially for those at risk of exclusion, have been identified as priorities to secure accessibility in the ECoC programme. The panel noted that while the goals for school involvement are ambitious and well-intended, they lack the necessary detailed planning.

Management

- The budget for the ECoC programme, at €46 million, is realistic and well-structured, with a focus on sustainability and contingencies for long-term impact. It includes €33,1 million for cultural activities.
- The bid presents a clear fundraising strategy that includes support from the public and private sectors, as well as EU funding. The panel welcomes the financial contribution of universities towards the programme, amounting to 9% of the total budget. Private sector investment is forecasted at 15%, equivalent to €7 million through financial contributions, amongst others, from the Business Union.
- Strong contingency plans are in place for financial risks, with €1.5 million allocated for cultural projects under the programme.
- Lublin's organisational structure for ECoC 2029 is clearly defined, with an Advisory Board to monitor the implementation process. The roles of the CEO and Artistic Director are outlined, with plans for transparent, competitive appointments. The organisational design ensures strong independence of the Artistic Director working alongside a wide-ranging team of professionals.
- The structure emphasises cooperation between city authorities, cultural operators, and European partners. The structure also establishes positions for horizontal priorities: accessibility, gender equality, interculturality, and environment. The panel would have liked to see structures that ensure safe

spaces and the highest ethical standards for all individuals involved in the ECoC during the preparatory phases and throughout the year of Lublin2029

- The bid proposes a complex process management structure that brings together all major stakeholders, which include cultural institutions, the consortium Union of Lublin Cultural Operators, independent artists circles, citizens, and city, regional, and national representation. Whereas the panel welcomed this participatory approach, it would have appreciated further clarity on how the proposed structure will effectively fulfil its function to ensure it adds value to the implementing organisation and to the programme.
- The bid-book highlights the experience of the delivery team, with several experts in the field of ECoC and cultural management involved. However, the bid does not go into detail about capacity-building for local cultural operators, which could have been elaborated further.

Capacity to Deliver

- There is continuous political and financial support for the candidacy from the City Council of Lublin. The candidacy is further supported by several unions working across entire sectors.
- The bid was unanimously supported by the City Council on 25 May 2023, with the budget for the ECoC adopted on 14 December 2023 in the Multiannual Financial Forecast and further amendments made on 27 June 2024.
- On 19 June 2024, the Lublin Voivodeship Sejmik unanimously supported the bid.
- Whereas planning permits have been secured for several of the infrastructural projects, others are still in the planning stage and reliant on additional funding.

Conclusion

Lublin's bid for the European Capital of Culture in 2029 on the theme of RE:UNION, demonstrates significant strengths. The bid aligns strongly with the city's cultural development and long-term strategy. Positioned as a multicultural crossroads between East and West, Lublin's bid presents a sound vision on how its artistic and cultural programme can foster dialogue and cultural exchange, promoting European values. The programme is structured around three key areas: Community, which rebuilds bonds across Lublin and Europe; Habitat, which explores relationships between people, nature and digital realities; and Borders, which challenges physical and metaphorical boundaries.

The programme resonates on European levels and addresses contemporary European challenges, such as sustainability, migration, and freedom of movement. The strong community involvement in the design of the bid and its implementation envisions a legacy that addresses pressing contemporary issues through culture and the arts. Supported by a robust budget, Lublin's bid demonstrates extensive European cooperation, strong community involvement, direct involvement of the artistic community, and commitment to address accessibility for disadvantaged groups. It also gives special attention to reaching new audiences and removing barriers to participation. Lublin's bid enjoys unanimous political and financial backing from the City Council, with strong support from unions and regional authorities.

Overall, the Lublin 2029 bid displays considerable strengths across the ECoC objectives

and criteria, albeit with some shortcomings. The panel recommends that the bid of Lublin be selected as European Capital of Culture 2029 in Poland. Recommendations for preparing Lublin 2029 for the title year can be found at the end of this report.

The panel's decision

The panel was presented with four high-quality but also very different bids from significantly diverse cities, each with its own interpretations of the ECoC criteria. The bids tackled issues of significant urgency for Europe and the world at large. All four bids had their strengths and weaknesses. The panel was looking, according to Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, at the programme specifically designed for the ECoC year and with a strong European dimension. The panel debated the merits of each city against the two objectives and six criteria, and then in the final discussion, the applications were weighed up against each other.

Each panel member weighed his/her own interpretation of the criteria against the four cities with their bid-books, presentations, questions, and answers. **The panel reached a decision by vote to recommend to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland to designate Lublin as European Capital of Culture 2029 in Poland.**

This report has been sent to the managing authority and the European Commission. Both will publish it on their websites. In accordance with Article 11 of the Decision, the Ministry will proceed to the designation of the ECoC 2029 in Poland based on the recommendation contained in this report. It will then inform the European Parliament, Council, Commission, and Committee of the Regions. This formal designation enables Lublin to use the title "European Capital of Culture 2029".

Melina Mercouri Prize

The panel recommends that the European Commission award the Melina Mercouri Prize to the designated city based on this report. The payment of the €1.5 million prize is, however, deferred until 2029, in line with Article 14 of the Decision. It is conditional.

The ECoC Expert panel will make a further recommendation to the European Commission in late 2028 at the end of the monitoring process on whether to make the payment. The conditions for the payment are as follows (Article 14):

- The ECoC continues to honour its commitments made in the application;
- It complies with the criteria;
- It takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports;
- There has been no substantial change to the programme and strategy set out in the bid-book, in particular:
 - The budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-level programme and at a level consistent with the bid-book;
 - The independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;
 - The European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final programme;

- The marketing and communications strategy and material clearly reflect it is a European Union action;
- Plans for monitoring and evaluation are in place.

Reputation of an ECoC

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

The monitoring phase

Once an ECoC has been designated, it enters the “monitoring phase” (Article 13 of the Decision). Under the auspices of the European Commission, the panel will work with the ECoC to ensure the quality of the ECoC brand and to offer advice and experience. **The bid-book at final selection becomes the de facto contract** between the designated city, on the one hand, and its own citizens, the Expert panel, the Ministry, and the European Commission, on the other hand. It has an important role in the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize.

The panel will expect a close alignment with the bid-book during the preparation phase and during the ECoC year. Significant variations from the bid-book should be discussed with the panel, through the European Commission, in advance of decisions being made. There are three formal monitoring checkpoints (autumn 2025, mid-2027, and autumn 2028) when the ECoC will meet with the panel under the auspices of the European Commission. Prior to each meeting the European Commission will invite the ECoC to provide progress reports.

The European Commission will indicate areas that specifically need to be addressed in the reports. In addition, the panel may decide, with the agreement of the European Commission, to visit the city to observe progress. The panel’s reports after all three meetings will be published on the European Commission’s website. The ECoC may decide to publish its own progress reports in the interest of transparency.

The panel’s recommendations

The designated ECoC now moves to a transition period from a set-up suited to a bid campaign to the more formal ECoC delivery structure that is independent of local city administration.

The panel expects Lublin to develop cooperation with other bidding cities and the wider artistic and cultural community in Poland. The ECoC in Poland in 2029 provides a

national opportunity, which will reflect internationally not only on Lublin but also on the country.

The panel will expect the first progress report in autumn 2025 to consider the recommendations and comments in the assessment of the bid, as stated above and below.

Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy:

- Strengthen EU relationships: Lublin's role as a cultural crossroads between East and West provides a unique platform for fostering European cooperation. The panel encourages Lublin to develop a comprehensive plan that ensures the sustainability of partnerships with EU networks and cultural institutions, extending beyond the ECoC year. This will ensure the lasting impact of the programme and its contributions to Lublin's cultural ecosystem.
- Define the post-2029 Vision: To solidify Lublin's long-term legacy, the panel recommends clearly outlining key outcomes and cultural legacies expected ten years after the ECoC. Establishing measurable goals for cultural transformation will allow Lublin to demonstrate its commitment to lasting change and ensure the benefits of the title extend well beyond 2029.

Cultural and Artistic Content:

- Simplify programme narrative: The panel recognizes the depth of Lublin's programme; however, a more streamlined narrative would enhance its coherence. By refining the thematic lines, Lublin can ensure that the programme remains accessible and engaging to a diverse audience, reinforcing its impact across all cultural sectors.
- Clarify the role of Open Calls: To enhance transparency and ensure the consistency of new projects with the overall theme, the panel suggests further clarifying how projects emerging from open calls will be integrated into the programme. Developing clear criteria for these calls, especially for those involving European partners, will maintain coherence and strengthen the European dimension of the bid.
- Ensure feasibility of large-scale projects: Given the ambitious nature of Lublin's programme, the panel encourages reviewing the feasibility of delivering large-scale projects to ensure resources are allocated efficiently and that all projects can be successfully executed within the timeframe.

European Dimension:

- Enhance European collaborations: Lublin's emphasis on fostering cross-border cooperation is commendable. To ensure these collaborations result in lasting partnerships, it is recommended that future efforts focus on providing more detailed plans for how these projects will evolve and strengthen over time, helping to solidify Lublin's role in European cultural networks and ensuring a meaningful impact.

- Strengthen the marketing strategy: To attract a broad European audience, the panel suggests that Lublin develop a more compelling marketing approach. This strategy should integrate both digital and traditional methods to maximise outreach and engage diverse European communities.

Outreach:

- Engage non-audiences effectively: Lublin's commitment to inclusivity is a significant strength. The panel suggests developing targeted strategies to involve non-audiences, including those who are typically disengaged from cultural activities, to ensure that programming is both accessible and engaging for all communities.
- Expand capacity-building initiatives: To ensure the sustainability of Lublin's cultural development post-2029, the panel encourages expanding capacity-building programmes for local cultural operators. These initiatives should focus on equipping cultural leaders with the skills necessary to sustain and grow Lublin's cultural ecosystem in the years following the ECoC title.

Management:

- Clarify governance scheme and stakeholder roles: It is recommended that Lublin further clarify the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders within its well-defined governance structure. Also, it is critical that the governance structure promotes a more collaborative and inclusive management approach and ensures a gender-equality approach, especially in the selection of key managers and curators. The panel noted that the current structure could benefit from better internal communication channels and enhanced team cohesion.
- Ensuring safe spaces and ethical standards for Lublin2029: The panel underscores the vital importance of safe spaces and the highest ethical standards during the preparatory phases and throughout the year of Lublin2029. All individuals involved in the European Capital of Culture, whether team members or collaborators, must be free from sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination.
- Develop contingency plans for funding shortfalls: To safeguard the successful delivery of infrastructure projects and cultural initiatives, the panel recommends preparing a contingency plan to address potential funding shortfalls. This plan should outline alternative strategies for securing additional funding from both the public and private sectors.

Capacity to Deliver:

- Reinforce local and regional support: To ensure the long-term success of the ECoC programme, the panel suggests reinforcing commitments from local and regional authorities. Documenting these agreements and establishing fallback options will provide a solid foundation for the programme's success, even in the face of unforeseen challenges.

Signed

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Goda Giedraityte
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Jorge Cerveira Pinto (Rapporteur)
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Rossella Tarantino
Suvi Innilä (Chair)
Toni Attard (Rapporteur)

Warsaw, September 2024

All panel members (signed)

