



Novi Sad European Capital of Culture 2022

**Third Monitoring Meeting
Report by the European Capital of Culture Expert Panel**

Virtual Meeting, October 2021

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Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 29 October 2021 between the panel and the team of Novi Sad, one of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2022. Novi Sad was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2021 in a candidate country in January 2017 on the basis of the recommendation made by the ECoC Expert panel in its Selection Report¹. Its bid book is available on the Novi Sad 2022 website².

The first monitoring meeting was held on 10 October 2017 in Brussels³, followed by a monitoring visit on 13 June 2018 by two panel members, and the second monitoring meeting on 4 June 2019 in Timisoara⁴.

In December 2020, upon a proposal by the Commission, and taking into account the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the preparatory work of all three ECoC title-holders in 2021, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Decision postponing - among others - the ECoC year in Novi Sad from 2021 to 2022⁵.

This third monitoring report is addressed to the Novi Sad 2022 team and will be published on the European Commission's website⁶.

Attendance

The Panel members:

Else Christensen-Redžepović, Suvi Innilä (Rapporteur) and Jorge Cerveira Pinto, appointed by the European Parliament 2021–2023;

Dessislava Gavrilova, Paulina Florjanowicz and Pierre Sauvageot, appointed by the Council of the EU 2019-2021;

Jelle Burggraaff and Beatriz Garcia (excused), appointed by the European Commission 2020–2022;

Alin Adrian Nica (Chair), nominated by the European Committee of the Regions 2019-2021.

For Novi Sad:

- CEO of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Member of the City Council of Novi Sad in charge of culture;

¹ See selection report at https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/files/ecoc-2021-final-selection-report_en.pdf

² <http://novisad2021.rs/en/bidbook/>

³ See the report at https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/files/ecoc2021-novisad-monitoring_en.pdf

⁴ See the report at <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/ecoc-2021-novi-sad-second-monitoring-report.pdf>

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020D2229>

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/fi/node/746>

- Chairperson of the Steering Committee of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Programme Director of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Chief of the Cabinet of the CEO of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Head of the Curator Team of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Head of the Programme Development Department of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Head of International Relations of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Head of the Communications and Marketing Department of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Public Relations Team Manager of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation;
- Internal expert for monitoring and evaluation;
- External Evaluator of the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture project from the University of Novi Sad.

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and the Serbian Ministry of Culture.

Report and video presentation of Novi Sad 2022

Prior to the meeting, the team of Novi Sad 2022 submitted a comprehensive written report, outlining its activities since the second monitoring meeting in June 2019 as well as the present status of the preparations. Before the virtual meeting, Novi Sad 2022 delivered a 20-minute-long video as a substitute for the regular presentation that could not take place because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The main points made included:

Long-term cultural strategy

The City of Novi Sad is currently implementing the third two-year-long action plan of the Strategy of Cultural Development 2016-2026 that was launched prior to the ECoC nomination. The priorities from the Cultural Development Strategy and Novi Sad 2022 bid book are coordinated and integrated through tight cooperation between the Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture Foundation, City Administration for Culture, and Member of the City Council in charge of culture.

The present action plan focuses on the title year and takes into account also the recommendations of the panel in its previous reports. One of the key activities is the Open Call for Co-Financing European Projects by the City Administration for Culture.

Since the last monitoring report, the Foundation has finished Project 33, a 12-month-long process of capacity building in cooperation with the City Administration for Culture and

UNESCO Department at the University of Arts in Belgrade providing five-year-long strategic plans for all cultural institutions in Novi Sad.

The Foundation has established a system for internal and external evaluation to support evidence-based monitoring and evaluation. In order to keep the evaluation process independent, the Foundation opens calls annually for expert evaluators who are selected based on expertise and field of work.

Cultural and artistic content

In the past two years, the focus of the programme work has been on involving local artists together with a team of art curators. Following the recommendations made by the panel previously, the Novi Sad 2022 team has established a mechanism for continuous processes of involving and dialogue with local cultural institutions and NGOs. Over 5000 local and international artists have participated in the programme so far, and all local cultural institutions are involved in the programme.

The programme narrative of Novi Sad 2022 stems from the *4 New Bridges* slogan, which represents the idea of building new bridges of cooperation and exchange between artists and organisations locally, nationally and internationally. The four programme bridges are symbolically named after the bridges in Novi Sad, i.e. after the values the city wishes to develop. Each bridge is divided into two programme arches, which are defined within specific timeframes in order to communicate their ideas, context, and messages.

Since the last monitoring meeting, there have been four open calls for complementing the programme, but also for supporting the local artists to offset the negative effects of the pandemic. In the shift of the years 2020-2021, the Foundation launched four open calls for project proposals that would become part of the official programme in the title year. These calls resulted in additional projects, in particular in the literature and publishing sector (under-represented in the bid book) or from local organisations and institutions (but without funding from the Foundation).

Outreach

The outreach process has been implemented using a wide range of methodologies of audience development. One of the main activities in this process since the last monitoring meeting was an open call 'Audience in Focus', which was intended for the audience development of cultural institutions. In total, 21 institutions received grants to develop their audience approach that spanned from increasing audiences, deepening relationships with existing audiences and attracting people with different socio-demographic profiles.

Management

Since the submission of the first monitoring report, there have not been changes in the legal structure of the Foundation established by the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad for implementing the ECoC project. There have neither been significant changes in the organisational structure compared to the last monitoring report, except for the introduction of several new operational positions, predominantly in the Marketing and Communications Department. At the moment, the Foundation has 109 employees (89 full-time and 20 part-time), which means a significant increase in the number of staff members.

At the time of the meeting, the Amendment of the Decision on Financing Novi Sad 2022 project was still pending - it was to be adopted by the City Assembly during October 2021. According to this Amendment, an amount of EUR 6,5 million, excluding the Melina Mercouri

Prize, is planned to be allocated to the ECoC project in the years 2022-2024, which exceeds the amount planned in the bid book.

Capacity to Deliver

Novi Sad 2022 has had a strong and continuous political support at different levels of territorial governance from the beginning of the project. There have been certain financing delays at the Provincial level, but according to the report, significant steps have been made to solve this problem. In terms of infrastructure works, the amount of allocated funds is expected to double by the end of 2022 compared to the plans presented in the bid book, rising up to more than EUR 75 million. By now, more than 40 000 square metres of spaces for culture, including a concert hall and eight cultural stations, have been built or renovated.

Discussion

During the subsequent discussion, the panel sought clarification on certain issues and offered experience and advice. Topics discussed included the following:

The panel wanted to know what have been the greatest challenges and achievements so far, after winning the title.

- The team responded that their biggest achievements are related to the four p's: people, places, programmes and processes. In all these areas, successful projects have been realised with expected long-term impacts. One of the biggest achievements is also the team itself, the fact that quite many of them have been working with the ECoC continuously since the beginning and acquired new skills that will be useful for them and the whole community.

Long-term cultural strategy

The panel wanted to know how the continuance of the positive development would be ensured after 2022, in terms of high quality international artistic work, new events and the level of public funding for culture. The panel also wanted to get specific examples of how the city and the community would continue benefiting from the investments in the future. There was also a question concerning the collaboration with artists from the area of Kosovo*.

- The team emphasized the strong political support at all levels, as well as a wide cooperation that had brought immense results. This wide cooperation will continue also after the title year on the basis of a long-term strategy plan, which already exists. There is also a strong aim to continue the international cooperation generated in the European projects.
- In terms of the ECoC legacy, the team pointed out that two long-term platforms, such as Kaleidoscope, had already secured financial support for the years 2023 and 2024, meaning after the title year. Even more long-term projects are expected to emerge before the end of 2022.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

- Also, the infrastructure works related to the ECoC are seen to have a strong legacy role. Platforms such as the cultural stations and the creative district are expected to remain and evolve further after 2022. New investments are expected to emerge even after the title year alongside with public financing for those infrastructural projects that will not be finished by the end of next year.
- According to the team, a political decision has already been made, that the foundation would remain after 2022 to maintain the new spaces and long-term projects.
- The Novi Sad ECoC project has also inspired the programme of National Capital of Culture, one of the legacies of the ECoC in Serbia after 2022.
- Concerning the question regarding a possible cooperation with artists from the area of Kosovo, it was confirmed that this kind of cooperation did take place.

Cultural and artistic content

The panel was interested in knowing the reason why only 30 out of 170 bid book projects made it to the final programme. The panel also asked whether there had been challenges in managing the expectations due to many open calls, and what the plans were to ensure that a visitor arriving to Novi Sad next year would encounter ECoC every day from the opening to the closing.

- On the first point, the Novi Sad 2022 team answered the figure was not correct. Indeed, as it emerges from the annex to its progress report, 85 bid book projects are part of the programme, while 29 already took place previously and 18 were transformed into and/or merged with other projects. There are still unresolved issues with 12 bid book projects. Finally, only 35 projects will not be implemented because original applicants decided to withdraw themselves from the programme, most of the time because the organisations did not have the capacity to implement a given project, or they were shut down, or the expected co-financing did not materialize due to the Covid situation. The high amount of terminated projects was the reason for organising new open calls aiming to supplement the programme.
- It was stated that the team had taken the issue of managing expectations very seriously. They have had meetings and discussions with the projects. However, there have not emerged many problems in this regard. One reason for this might be that all cultural institutions and also many NGOs and individual artists are involved in the programme, so even if their proposal was rejected, their other project might be part of the programme. Also, the decisions were made by an expert board with a solid reputation.
- The team cooperates closely with the tourist offices of Novi Sad and Serbia in order to communicate the programme to the visitors. During the pandemic, they have concentrated on regional promotion, but there are several plans for promotional packages and campaigns for international visitors, too. The plan is also to do branding so that all visitors entering the city will grasp the ECoC.
- Furthermore, the programme arches have been arranged to the yearlong time frame consecutively, thus establishing a coherent entity time wise.

European dimension

The panel wanted to hear if the intention of including a European partner in 95% of the projects, stated in the final bid, had been achieved. Additionally, the panel wanted to know about promotion plans towards wide European audiences and in respect of the changed reality, caused by the pandemic. The panel also asked about the place of the European Union in the overall programme and the theme of Europe in general in the communication and how the citizens and visitors will see and feel Europe in Novi Sad next year.

- The team stated that the goal to have European partners in 95% of the projects had been achieved, with partners from nearly all European countries. Compared to the situation prior to the ECoC designation, when only 13% of the cultural field announced to cooperate with international partners, this can be considered a significant result.
- Concerning the strategy to allure visitors, the team responded that several international promotion campaigns would be launched in November. The aim is to have 30% more tourists in Novi Sad in 2022 compared to 2021. However, this is difficult to estimate, due to the on-going pandemic situation.
- Despite the high participation figures for the virtual programme solutions during the pandemic period, the team stated a strong hope that all planned events could take place live in 2022, even with some limitations.
- The Novi Sad 2022 logo includes the EU flag for making it very clear that this is a project funded by the EU. Many signs and event programmes are written in both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets and sometimes also with English translations. The aim of introducing the English language alongside Serbian is to reach out to international audiences, but also to make the outside world more tangible in Novi Sad.
- The team emphasized that the common European values were also infused into the programme. Every programme arch includes European themes such as multiculturalism, feminism, the non-discrimination of marginalised groups and the future of Europe; issues being tackled within the programme by a wide range of European artists. The European values are presented in all promotions, not only in relation to the programme but also in other ways.
- Concerning the question about measuring whether the people in Novi Sad will feel more European after the year, the team stated that measuring the impacts of the title would include internal and external evaluations. The evaluation will continue until 2024, and several evaluation points are related to the European dimension.

Outreach

Acknowledging the high amount of work made in audience development, the panel wanted to hear what the team would want people of Novi Sad to remember from the ECoC year in ten years' time, and what the main challenges were in digital audience development.

- The team responded that especially the infrastructural projects would live on as very tangible reminders of the ECoC year. Projects such as the cultural stations and the creative district will continue to have an impact on people, different audiences and target groups as well as artists and the creative sector.
- According to the team, the ambition is that everything will change after the ECoC year, considered as the beginning of a new "now". The identity of Novi Sad as an

ECoC is expected to remain for many years to come, and this will be supported by utilizing the visual elements of the ECoC also after the title year.

- Concerning the digital transformation in audience development, the team is discussing this topic within the ECoC network, learning from each other.

Management

With quite many changes in the management team's key positions since the last monitoring meeting, the panel wanted to know why these changes were made in the very last phase of the preparation process. Questions also emerged about the strategic partners, both in terms of their financial and/or programme involvement. As it was stated in the report that several negotiations with the potential strategic partners were still open, the panel also wanted to know the role of the strategic partnerships in the present budget allocation. In addition, the panel wanted to know about the risk assessment in relation to the pandemic, as well as about possible plans to ensure that the ECoC team's capacity and skills would be captured and utilized after 2022.

- The team stated that the changes in the staffing were partly caused by natural development, as some of the key people moved on to other working opportunities. Regarding the roles of the Programme Director and the Head of Marketing and Communication, people with a different profile and skills were needed for the production phase than for the planning phase. The team also saw that new people had brought new energy to the "old" team.
- However, the team also underlined that a majority of those people who won the title were still in the team, the average age being 30. One of the strong legacies of the ECoC will be the know-how and grown competences of the team itself.
- The role of the strategic partners was seen as very important, also financially as the partners have brought their own budgets along to the cooperation. The contracts with the strategic partners are made for three years' terms.
- Regular assessment of required measures is being made through on-going internal evaluation. Risk evaluation and contingency planning has been made also in relation to Covid. Even though the strong hope is that the events and projects can take place as planned and mainly live, all projects have been asked to ensure that they have alternative plans for possible Covid-related situations.

Recommendations

The panel appreciates the good work done by the Novi Sad 2022 team, and the strong political and financial support for the project. The panel noted that the programme and its European dimension are very strong, and that the team clearly comprehends the ECoC concept. The panel was especially pleased to learn about the high amount of international cooperation in the programme and the great efforts for audience development. For the coming months of work, the panel wishes to recommend the following:

- Ensure to have solid contingency plans for rapidly changing situations, and update the risk assessment regularly according to the new challenges.

- Pay due attention to the digital transformation in areas such as digital audience development, and seek cooperation with relevant European and global players who advance in this field.
- Although there are plans and commitments for maintaining the work and legacy in the years 2023-2024, it is advisable to consider the ECoC legacy also with a longer perspective as early as possible, ensuring the continuance of the positive development and the impacts of the investments.
- Utilize the potential of the ECoC year operating as a bridge between artists and people and even painful issues for finding common understanding.

* * * *

Based on the report submitted by Novi Sad 2022 as well as the hearing with the team, the panel considers that the conditions regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize, as specified in Article 14 of Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, are met. Consequently, the panel is pleased to propose to the European Commission that Novi Sad receives the Melina Mercouri prize.

The panel would like to remind Novi Sad 2022 that, in line with Article 14, its marketing and communication strategy and its communication material have to clearly reflect the fact that the European Capital of Culture is a Union action, as well as that, in line with Article 16 of the same Decision, it will have to draw up its own evaluation report of the results of its ECoC year and transmit it to the European Commission by 31 December 2023.

The panel would like to thank Novi Sad 2022 for a very informative and interesting meeting and looks forward to a successful realisation of Novi Sad European Capital of Culture project in 2022.

(Signed) all attending Panel's members

