



# **Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2028 in the Czech Republic**

Final selection stage

Expert Panel's report

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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Panel Meeting .....	5
Broumov .....	6
Budweis .....	8
The panel's decision.....	11
Next steps-Formal Designation.....	12
Melina Mercouri Prize .....	12
Reputation of an ECoC .....	13
The monitoring phase .....	13
The panel's recommendations .....	14
Thanks.....	16
Signed .....	16



## 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 2028 in the Czech Republic. The competition is a European Union initiative which started in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” has previously been awarded to two cities in the Czech Republic, namely Prague in 2000 and Pilsen in 2015.

The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic (the “Ministry”), acts as the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 (the “Decision”) and by the “Rules of Procedure – Competition for the European Capital of Culture 2028 in the Czech Republic” published by the Ministry on its website.

In line with Article 2 of the Rules of procedure, a panel of twelve independent experts were established for the selection process. Ten panel members are appointed by the European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions). Two members of the panel were appointed by the Ministry.

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 August 2021 on its website: [Výzva k podání žádosti do soutěže o titul Evropské hlavní město kultury 2028 | mkcr.cz](https://mkcr.cz/vyzva-k-podani-zadosti-do-souteze-o-titul-evropske-hlavni-mesto-kultury-2028). Four applications were submitted by the closing date of the call by: Brno, Broumov, Budweis, and Liberec.

The panel met on 12-13 October 2022 for the pre-selection hearings and meeting. It recommended inviting the two bidding cities of Broumov and Budweis, to progress to the final selection stage. The panel’s report for the pre-selection phase is published on the website of the Commission.<sup>1</sup>

The Ministry accepted the panel’s recommendation and invited the two cities to submit revised applications with a deadline of 2 June 2023.

The two cities submitted their revised applications (“bid-books”) by the deadline.

Between the pre-selection and final selection meetings the following steps took place:

- Both cities had a virtual meeting organised by the Ministry with the panel’s Chair and Vice-chair, and in presence of the European Commission, on 12 December 2022 to seek clarification on the recommendations in the pre-selection report.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-11/ecoc-2028-czech-republic-preselection-report.pdf>

- A delegation of four members of the panel took part in city visits on 26 and 28 June 2023, in order to get *in situ* a better understanding of the candidacies and the level of ownership among the city's inhabitants and key stakeholders. They were accompanied by observers from the Ministry and the European Commission. The delegation reported back to the full panel at the selection meeting.

## Panel Meeting

The panel met in Prague on 29-30 June 2023. During the meeting, Else Christensen-Redzepovic was reaffirmed as the Chair and Petr Suska as the Vice-chair of the panel. Goda Giedraityte and Marilyn Gaughan Reddan were elected by the panel as rapporteurs.

All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and submitted it to the Ministry ahead of the 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 decision.

At the selection hearings on 29 June 2023 in Prague, each short-listed candidate city presented its bid proposal in 45 minutes and answered questions from the panel in 90 minutes.

At a live-streamed press meeting on 30 June 2023, the Chair of the panel announced the panel's recommendation in the presence of the Czech Minister of Culture, Martin Braxa, and the Head of the Representation of the European Commission in the Czech Republic, Monika Ladmanova.

In its assessment of the two short-listed candidate cities, 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) 2028 in the Czech Republic 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 based on its revised bid-book and hearing against the objectives of the European Capital of Culture action and the criteria as specified above.

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 its discussions during the selection meeting.

## **Broumov**

The bid is under the banner of a “Creative pilgrimage”. This is meant as an invitation to embark on “a journey that explores the resilience of communities such as Broumovsko in a modern European context”. It stems from the tradition of the local Benedictine monastery and “reworks new understandings of contemporary monasteries and modern ways of being alone & well, and with natural curiosity and fun, we work on safe & brave spaces with and inside resilient communities.” The cultural “programme is structured around three pathways that explore and deepen pilgrimage connections with the LAND, TIME and MIND through a variety of art forms.”

The bid includes the whole Broumovsko area with the Hradec Králové Region.

## **Contribution to the long-term strategy**

- The panel noted with satisfaction that both city and regional strategies are in place and aligned. Moreover, the panel acknowledged the strong regional dimension of the bid as well as the commitment at city and regional levels.
- It was encouraging to learn that one of the Broumov2028 team members was invited as a proactive member of the committee in order to ensure integration of Broumov2028 in the Cultural Strategy 2022–2032 (CS32), as well as facilitating exchanges of information. However, the description of how Broumov2028 is placed within CS32 is not entirely clear.
- The interaction between the urban strategy of Broumov and the regional strategies was presented, but the panel was not convinced with the information received on the urban impact.
- The panel appreciated the strategic cross-border connections with Poland; however, the role of the Polish partners was not sufficiently presented.
- The panel applauded the ambitious project to set up the first Czech organisation dedicated to cultural research (Culture ReHUB), but still lacked clarification on the degree of independence of the evaluation and monitoring organisation.

## **Cultural and artistic content**

- The panel was inspired by the concept of the bid from the pre-selection stage; however, the concept could have benefitted from more profound elaboration for the final selection stage. Themes such as spirituality, an investigation on a new model of monastery in the 21st century, inter-religious dialogue, and rituals could have been more extensively developed to create a stronger European appeal.
- The programme displays a promising potential and incorporates relevant European themes, with a clear alignment to the overall strategy and involvement of

reputable figures. However, according to the panel's assessment, while the projects enjoy relatively high budgets, many of them remain limited in scale and predominantly localised. As a result, they may not fully embody the ambition of a European level programme, potentially affecting their appeal to international visitors and the overall impact they can achieve.

- The panel appreciates the deep involvement of the local cultural scene from Broumovsko, but emphasises a need for wider connections of the cultural artists and organisations from all the Hradec Králové Region.
- While the panel appreciates the "Digital Wizard" as a very interesting concept and a crucial tool for implementing an ECoC in Broumov, the development and presentation of broader and deeper interactions with artificial intelligence and other advanced digital tools would have strengthened the concept.

## European dimension

- As already stated in the pre-selection report, the bid has a solid and genuine European dimension in its concept, in its themes, and in its corresponding programme.
- The connections with European partners have been further developed, yet the panel was not convinced by the number of the European artists involved as well as the geographical outreach of partnerships.
- The concept of a Digital Wizard, while intriguing, remains insufficiently developed in scope and practical implementation, leaving considerable uncertainty regarding how it will ultimately achieve the bid's ambitious goal of reaching 85% of the European audience through digital means.
- The panel welcomed the concept of "European Broumovs" as a significant legacy of the bid; nevertheless, the panel noted that further elaboration and detailed description were needed to fully grasp its implementation potential.

## Outreach

- In general, the panel was satisfied with the Outreach part of the bid, especially the Embracing programme. The collaboration with European universities, the links with schools and the European Youth Goals were convincing. However, at this stage of the competition, the panel would have liked to see a more elaborate audience development strategy.
- At this stage of the competition, the panel would have anticipated a stronger involvement of the Roma community, as well as a larger representation of citizens from the wider region in the bid.

## Management

- The panel believes that the budget (at 19,83 million EUR), though relatively low and on the decrease from pre-selection, has been well planned and confirmed by the city and the region as well as private sponsors.
- Capital expenditure has not been confirmed and the strategy for EU funding was not convincing.
- Even though open calls are foreseen, the panel was concerned that the operating budget did not leave enough room for further development of the programme.
- The communication and marketing strategy is well developed with a strong focus on Europe. Nevertheless, the panel contends that this strategy exhibited a deficiency in broader media engagement, extending beyond the scope of digital marketing.

## Capacity to deliver

- The City Council and the Hradec Králové Regional Government support the candidacy.
- The significantly limited capacity for accommodating tourists in Broumov, as previously highlighted in the pre-selection report, could be partially augmented by making use of the available accommodations in the surrounding region. In this regard, the panel commends the endeavours to enhance the transportation infrastructure, particularly the design of an improved bus transport system that connects Broumov with neighbouring villages of Broumovsko and the cities in Poland. Furthermore, the inclusion of comprehensive planning for walking and biking trails, in alignment with the creative pilgrimage concept, could have been further elaborated.

## Conclusion

The bid of Broumov has a strong and inspiring concept that is very connected to its place and has at the same time a European resonance. The programme is well laid out, closely linked to the City's Cultural Strategy, and designed as a call for action to be a creative pilgrim and to take part in a cultural journey.

The bid is based on a solid long-term strategy, complemented by a sufficient operational budget, unanimous institutional support, and a solid network of European partners.

The panel welcomes a convincing European dimension, which is the *raison d'être* of a European Capital of Culture. The panel especially appreciated the idea of European Broumovs, and it encourages the city not to abandon this theme as it is a strong legacy of the selection process.



While the panel appreciated the strategy to reach 85% of the European and international audiences digitally, the level of development, human resources and allocated budget for implementation left some doubts about the capacity to deliver.

## **Budweis**

The Budweis candidacy is presented under the title “Creating a (Perma)Culture Environment”, meant as a call to action to create “a synergy between artists, culture organisations, local residents and international guests”. In this way, the programme aims at cultivating an environment where change can thrive. The concept is rooted in the idea that Budweis is a city where the cultural landscape, natural environment, and culture have always coexisted in symbiosis. To achieve this ambitious goal, the candidacy is based on the three principles of CARE (enhancing cultural accessibility to all city residents and international visitors), CONNECT (increasing residents’ sense of belonging to their living environments, the region and Europe) and CREATE (encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration while promoting a culture of co-creation).

The bid of Budweis is presented in synergy with the South Bohemian Region.

## **Contribution to the long-term strategy**

- The Cultural Strategy 2023-2035 has been approved, and there is a clear vision with three priority areas defined (care, connect and create) that have been embedded in the concept of Budweis 2028 as guiding principles from the very start. The connections between the bid and the strategy are therefore very convincing.
- The panel welcomes the research carried out and the evaluation ambitions of the bid.
- The panel recommends that the evaluation team would be in place from 2024 in order to properly assess the impacts of the ECoC project from the very beginning.

## **Cultural and artistic content**

- The panel welcomes the further development of the overall programme under the bid’s theme and vision around culture and permaculture.
- The panel also appreciated the further development of the structure of the programme around three themes and nine objectives in a very systematic and clear way that can easily be communicated to a wider public.
- The programme is based on a very solid selection process, involving the selection team, artistic advisory board, and curators as well as open calls, which the panel sees as a positive element.
- There is strong evidence of local artists and cultural organisations in the programme, which should now be further strengthened through the development of more European partnerships.

- There is a well-developed focus on children and young people.
- Overall, the panel encourages Budweis to exhibit more courage and artistic boldness as the programme continues to evolve.

## European dimension

- The panel found the European dimension convincing. Many European partners were involved in the process and the projects with a clear description of how activities promote cultural diversity.
- The panel also welcomes the interesting links with Africa to be pursued as well as the exploration of the topic of post-colonialism, which has potentially strong relevance and resonance throughout the European Union.
- Finally, the panel welcomes the high level of engagement with other European Capitals of Culture.

## Outreach

- The audience development strategy includes online and offline measures and channels for all identified target groups. The panel welcomes the special focus that is dedicated to innovative institutions to work with those audiences that are more difficult to reach but are crucial for a new “cultural climate” to emerge in an ECoC city (e.g. locals, not familiar with culture, minorities, the elderly, disabled people, refugees).
- The panel noted the role and contribution of universities, which they regard as being well explained together with an elaborated capacity building programme.
- The panel welcomed the clear involvement of schools with a strategic approach to inclusion. Overall, the panel really welcomed the community engagement element across the programme as being very strong.

## Management

- The operating budget was set at 31.9 mill EUR, compared to 52.5 mill EUR in the pre-selection phase; overall, the total budget for the implementation of the ECoC title (capital + operating expenditures) slightly increased (by 4 mill EUR), but with a major shift of 23 mill EUR towards capital expenditures in the city and region.
- The panel is disappointed with regards to the significant reduction in operational budget from pre-selection stage to final selection stage. Whereas the current budget may fulfil the ambition of a European Capital of Culture, the panel recommends that the operational budget must not decrease any further and should be secured.

- It is important to underline that the cultural and artistic programme is at the very heart of a European Capital of Culture. Hence, it should not be confused with other non ECoC related urban and regional investments and/or infrastructure.
- Although the panel welcomed the well-thought-out fundraising strategy, it recommends that the European funding targets be more realistic in terms of amounts and timelines.
- Furthermore, the panel recommends that due attention should be paid to the currently available and emerging AI tools for programme production and delivery, communication, and marketing as well as all other relevant aspects related to the delivery of an ECoC.
- The panel strongly encourages a higher-level engagement with European media and that a comprehensive digital media plan be put in place to effectively communicate the European Capital of Culture programme.
- Overall, the panel believes that the management aspect of the ECoC project requires further development, in particular in the recruitment of the delivery team. It encourages the team to commence open call recruitment at pace.

## Capacity to deliver

- The panel welcomed the broad political support for the bid and took note of the timetable for planned infrastructure projects, indicating their expected completion before 2028. While the panel welcomed this ambitious timeline, it also recognized the potential risks involved. Consequently, the panel recommends the development of a solid plan B to address and mitigate any potential challenges in meeting these timeframes.
- The panel noted the reliance of EU funding to implement infrastructural projects and welcomed the contingency plans described by the team to mitigate risks should the EU funds not be secured in time.

## Conclusion

The candidacy of Budweis has been deepened, exhibiting improvements in artistic vision and cultural significance, which, nonetheless, could be further cultivated to embrace greater courage and boldness in the programming.

The concept and its underlying philosophy remain intriguing, evident in the essence conveyed throughout the bid-book, including the cultural strategy and the anticipated impacts.

The European dimension has been further developed since the pre-selection stage and the same applies to the outreach capacity, all while managing to reinforce the overall project despite budget cuts.

More attention could be given to reaching a wider section of the European media and on developing a digital media plan for the effective communication of the European Capital of Culture. Special care should be given to the recruitment of the delivery team.

## The panel's decision

The panel was presented with two different bids from significantly diverse cities each with their own strengths and challenges; each with their own visions, cultural strategies, and proposals for an ECoC in their city and region. The panel recognises that the bids focused on themes and issues of great relevance and urgency for Europe and the world at large. Both bids had their strengths and weaknesses.

Considering the revised bid-books and the final hearing the panel discussed the merits of each city's bid against the objectives and six criteria of ECoC action according to Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. In the final discussion, the panel collectively evaluated the applications against the formal criteria, ensuring a unified assessment for the two cities.

The panel would like to congratulate both candidate cities for their remarkable achievement in crafting their final bids, hosting city visits, and delivering presentations to the panel. The diligent efforts invested by the bidding teams to reach this stage of the European Capital of Culture competition are duly acknowledged.

The strengths and weaknesses of the short-listed candidate cities presented the panel with a challenging task, giving rise to an intense and significant debate and evaluation. Ultimately the panel reached consensus to recommend the city of **Budweis** as European Capital of Culture in the Czech Republic in 2028 to the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

## Next steps-Formal Designation

This report has been sent to the Ministry and the Commission. Both will publish it on their websites. In accordance with Article 11 of the Decision, the Ministry will proceed with the designation of the ECoC 2028 in the Czech Republic based on the recommendation contained in this report. It will then inform the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European Commission, and the Committee of the Regions. This formal designation entitles Budweis to carry the title "European Capital of Culture 2028".

## Melina Mercouri Prize

The panel proposes that the European Commission awards the Melina Mercouri Prize upon the designated city, taking into account the findings of this report. However, the payment of the 1.5 million Euro Prize is subject to deferral until 2028, in accordance with Article 14 of the Decision. This deferral is conditional. Towards the end of the monitoring process, in late 2027, the ECoC expert panel will provide an additional recommendation to the European Commission regarding whether to proceed with the payment.

The conditions for the payment are as follows (Article 14):

The prize money shall be paid by the end of March of the year of the title, provided that the designated city concerned continues to honour the commitments it made at the application stage, complies with the criteria, and takes into account the recommendations contained in the selection and monitoring reports.

The commitments made at the application stage shall be deemed to have been honoured by the designated city where no substantial change has been made to the programme and the strategy between the application stage and the year of the title, in particular where:

- a) the budget has been maintained at a level capable of delivering a high-quality cultural programme in line with the application and the criteria;
- b) the independence of the artistic team has been appropriately respected;
- c) the European dimension has remained sufficiently strong in the final version of the cultural programme;
- d) the marketing and communication strategy and the communication material used by the designated city clearly reflects the fact that the action is a Union action;
- e) the plans for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the title on the designated city are in place.

## Reputation of an ECoC

A city awarded the ECoC title receives considerable international attention extending well beyond the ECoC year. It has a responsibility to uphold the reputation of the ECoC brand for the benefit of previous, current, and future titleholders.

City administrations should be cognizant that the decisions they make, not only within the cultural sector but also in other domains, could potentially garner considerable attention from both traditional media outlets and social media platforms, surpassing the typical scope of public scrutiny they are accustomed to managing.

This adds another layer to decision making in the designated ECoC city on a wide range of issues that go beyond the cultural sector.

## 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 ECoC expert panel, the Ministry and the European Commission, on the other hand. 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 2024, mid 2026 and autumn 2027) 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, after consultation with the panel, 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 will expect the first progress report of Budweis in late summer 2024 to take into account the comments in the assessment of the bid and the recommendations.

### **Contribution to the long-term strategy**

- The panel recommends taking into account strategies to ensure more sustainable and environment-friendly practices in the cultural and creative sectors as well as to ensure gender balance, inclusion, diversity and representativeness, either in the project/content or in the way activities are managed.
- High priority should be given to the setting up of a monitoring and evaluation baseline in order to properly measure the progress of the ECoC project and assess its impacts from the very beginning. The panel recommends that the evaluation team would be in place from 2024.

### **Cultural and artistic content**

- The panel suggests developing the understanding of the PermaCulture concept at local and international levels, taking full benefit from existing investigations on similar concepts and experiences across Europe.
- The panel encourages the team to further develop the concept in the context of agriculture, climate change and greening policy, which are priorities at EU level today.
- The panel sees a real opportunity for Budweis 2028 to be a truly green ECoC and to develop tools that can be used throughout Europe in terms of sustainable delivery of large-scale cultural projects.
- The panel recommends that independent cultural operators be given as active a role as possible so that they can scale up to European and international

dimensions. It invites Budweis 2028 to be more courageous and ambitious in its programme, as an ECoC title-year is a unique opportunity to test new approaches, new formats, and new partnerships.

## European dimension

- The panel appreciates the significant effort made between the pre-selection and selection phases of the competition to increase the number of European collaborative projects. The panel recommends that the involvement of European and international artists and cultural organisations should continue to expand, reaching a much wider audience across Europe and beyond.

## Outreach

- The panel recommends that the team expands and enhances its digital delivery outreach and communication plan to attract a diverse range of European and international audiences, with particular focus on reaching younger generations.

## Management

- Although some capital infrastructure is important for the delivery of an ECoC, it is not the core of this project. The focus must be on the cultural and artistic programme, which has to be specifically developed for the European Capital of Culture of Budweis 2028.
- Experience has shown that successful ECoCs use the first year after selection to establish all the governance, management and administration structures and systems. This allows the subsequent years to focus on programme development, in time for the full programme to be in place by mid-2027.
- In the process of drafting the detailed recruitment plan up to 2028, the panel recommends allocating sufficient resources to capacity building/learning, facilitation, outreach, and fund-raising.
- Great attention should be placed on the recruitment, preferably through international open calls, of the posts of CEO and Artistic Director. It is advised that senior posts are accurately designed so as to attract/retain highly skilled people with a great commitment to the project.

## Capacity to deliver

- The panel strongly recommends having a contingency plan (Plan B) in place for the delivery of the required infrastructure for the ECoC. This precautionary measure ensures that potential challenges or unforeseen circumstances are adequately addressed, allowing for a smoother and more successful implementation of the event.
- In terms of contingency planning, prioritising the securing of funding, rather than reducing it, is of utmost importance. Adequate funding is essential for ensuring that the necessary resources are available to address any unexpected challenges or changes in circumstances that may arise during the planning and execution of



the ECoC. Having sufficient funding in place provides the flexibility and resilience needed to effectively handle any potential setbacks and maintain the overall success of the project.

In addition to the capabilities, merits and recommendations mentioned above, the panel urges the city of Budweis to further enhance its collaboration with the other bidding cities and the wider artistic and cultural community in the Czech Republic.

## Thanks

The panel would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in the selection phase of the ECoC competition in the Czech Republic. The panel extends its thanks to the two preselected candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids. Furthermore, the panel encourages the city of Broumov to continue building on the momentum created in the bidding phase. The vision and strategies outlined in the bid, the establishment of national and international partnerships and networks, the valuable institutional support, the mobilisation of citizens, and the expertise of the bidding team are all commendable elements that will facilitate the journey towards the desired transformation for Broumov and the region.

The panel also extends its gratitude to the European Commission for its valuable advice and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic for its excellent administration throughout the process.

## Signed

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