

European Capital of Culture

Novi Sad 2021

ECOC Panel's Letter in follow-up of an in-situ visit by members of the Monitoring Panel

June 2018

To Nemanja Milenković, CEO, Novi Sad 2021

Dear Nemanja Milenković,

In October 2017 a delegation of Novi Sad 2021 presented its 1st monitoring report to the European Union's Panel in charge of the European Capitals of Culture selection and monitoring in Brussels. In its monitoring report, the Panel stated its assessment and recommendations and invited Novi Sad 2021 to submit an update on its cultural programme as well as a document referring to the panel recommendations by end of March 2018. We acknowledge receipt of the requested documents. On 13th of June 2018 a monitoring visit to Novi Sad took place. It was attended by the panel members Suzana Zilic-Fišer and Sylvia Amann as well as by a representative of the European Commission, Gérald Colleaux. We thank you for hosting this delegation and providing further insight in the current status of preparation of Novi Sad – European Capital of Culture 2021.

Building on these backgrounds, the panel would like to draw the attention of the Novi Sad 2021 on the following feedbacks and recommendations:

- The panel welcomes the efforts made with regard to the long-term cultural strategy of Novi Sad. The publishing of the document in English has the potential to further widen participation and knowledge transfer – with ECOC cities and beyond. The responsibilities for the implementation are clarified and are within the cultural department of the city of Novi Sad.
- The cooperation with other ECOC cities is well-structured with a strong focus in South-East-Europe. The European dimension became a priority for the selection of projects to be included in the programme – a promising element. Further considerable efforts are made: participation in different EU projects, cooperation with reconciliation partners and also at international level. Such efforts to involve and cooperate with a wide range of European partners from different cultural and geographic backgrounds must continue.
- The panel congratulates the city of Novi Sad for holding the title “European Youth Capital 2019” and welcomes the efforts to build synergies regarding the established platform and to continue cooperation after 2019. Efforts to build on different requirements regarding differences in the projects but also to build on common needs, such as volunteering, became specifically visible during the monitoring visit and this is a promising approach.
- The Culture Bus Line especially with Timisoara is an interesting concept which could also build on the experience gained with the cultural train between Berlin and Wroclaw 2016.
- The cultural and artistic programme: the overview annexed to the report provides a good insight in the current status of preparation and the programme structure. The team

presented further the updated programme strategy and structure during the panel visit. The range of productions from the foundation will not comprise more than 10% - a reasonable objective. An overview of own productions, co-produced projects, commissioned projects and labelled projects will be prepared in the nearest future and will further define the related programme budget and production requirements. The expected wider range of labelled projects will require a framework of cooperation, support and control in order to ensure implementation in conformity with the bid book, on time and in an appropriate quality. Contractual frameworks are equally important in this context. The structure of the programme and the related flagship projects are getting clearer and clearer. The team revealed the first ideas for the opening which should take place on 31.12.2020 and 13.01.2021. This dual approach bears opportunities and risks which should be further discussed and dates should be coordinated with the planned opening of the two other 2021 ECOCs.

- The set of targeted calls for key parts of the programme is a reasonable approach to systematically build further the programme. The criteria reflecting inter alia on European dimension and sustainability are appropriate. The team further highlighted gatherings of previous and future ECOCs which will be organised in Novi Sad in July 2018 – a good opportunity to develop common cultural and artistic projects.
- The panel underlines the importance of integrating digital components into the ECOC programme implementation and communication. The planned working group “Creative Industries and IT Consortium” is promising to develop a structured approach. The work achieved so far for a better integration of creative industries is promising with regard to the building up of networks in Serbia. The city of Novi Sad has developed – in the framework of the related national activities – its own strategy for the CCIs. The foundation confirmed during the visit that a mapping and a CCI strategy for the city of Novi Sad is now in place. However, this work strand could better benefit from integrating further the European networks and know-how in the field of creative industries. Based on the exchanges with CCI stakeholders during the monitoring visit, the exchange with the Europe-wide network “European Creative Hubs” is recommended.
- Capacity building as a transversal element in the programme is well established, the related sustainability aspect appropriately understood. The capacity building activities comprise different cultural stakeholders including public institutions and NGOs. The focus is on strategic topics like audience development or the further building of partnerships. Novi Sad is also a partner of the EU-funded project “Lab for European Project Making”. Participants during the panel members’ visit explained how they use the know-how gained e. g. for the local cultural centres development like the Silk Factory.
- The efforts to invest in intercultural dialogue become visible in the report and will be now implemented under the umbrella of the pillar Intercultural City. The team re-confirmed the cooperation strand with Osijek – an important element for reconciliation.
- Considerable efforts are under way to cover many aspects of an audience development strategy. However, a comprehensive audience development strategy document seems not to be available yet for the implementation of Novi Sad 2021. Baseline values are planned to be collected with the support of the contractor for evaluation. The area of audience development is one topic to further focus on with regard to baselines, target groups

definition and specific approaches as well as implementation tools and responsibilities (organisational chart).

- The panel would like to highlight the “Cultural Education Methodological Centre” – as a local hub for culture in education – and is looking forward to the reporting of advancement and results during future monitoring meetings. The investment in the further training of arts teachers is a good starting point. The early interconnection with the regular educational system will be required in order to achieve sustainable effects for this crucial area of long-term cultural development.
- Marketing activities are still under preparation. The foundation aims at continuing working with the slogan of the 4 bridges as it is argued to be in line with a strong local identification (population and Novi Sad 2021 team). Furthermore, Novi Sad 2021 prepares currently a communication strategy, but has not yet appointed a communication manager (planned for autumn 2018). Communication team members are in place. The communication plans presented during the monitoring visit are still in the making and will need further reflection and development. An earlier appointment of the head of communication should be equally considered. Accordingly, a more efficient and substantial communication would take place, with relevance for programme projects.
- The comprehensive document of planned infrastructures provides a good overview of the wealth of the investments planned to upgrade the urban landscape and the cultural facilities in the city. During the monitoring visit several infrastructures and some ongoing refurbishment activities were presented to the panel members. The current time plan is very ambitious and a revised implementation plan taking into account potential delays in construction and/or funding should be elaborated. Related interlinks with the cultural programme must be equally taken into account.
- The management structures are well in place and reasonable distinctions are made between political, strategic and operative responsibilities. As the management board bears the responsibilities of a Council, a related change of name should be considered. The panel welcomes the close cooperation with the Serbian Ministry of Culture and further decision makers on regional and local level. The updated organisational chart provides deeper insight in the organisational structure of the foundation. During the visit, the team spirit of the staff and management became visible – a working spirit which should be maintained for the future implementation of the project. It will also require a careful management of the human resources regarding work load to ensure motivation and sustainability of engagement. The management should also have a clear focus on the core business of the foundation – i.e. the implementation of the ECOC.
- The revised budgetary overviews are reflecting the different financial needs in the ramp-up years and for the ECOC year – an important step forward. The panel especially welcomes the efforts planned to secure budgetary means for 2022. However, several elements in the budget must be updated or further developed: the budget line “Others” comprises inter alia planned income from crowdfunding (since 2017) which have never been realised. If a decision for crowdfunding is done, related provisions in staff and marketing must be foreseen. In the opposite case, the budget line must be revised accordingly.

- Securing EU funding is challenging as it is a city in a candidate country. Additional efforts to secure EU-funding for the capital investments harm the required focus of the foundation on the development of the programme for the ECOC year. The foundation participates in several EU-co-financed projects (Interreg, Europe for Citizens) and plans to assist local cultural operators to further engage in EU-funding programmes. The related capacity building programme to increase access to EU funds for cultural operators is a valuable approach.
- Fundraising strategies can be expected to be further professionalised due to the engagement of two experts. The elaboration of a related strategy is an appropriate way forward.
- The legacy strategy for Novi Sad 2021 and how current activities will feed long-term sustainable effects for the cultural development of the city are well-addressed by the Rule of 4 Ps and the Rule of Precondition guiding the programme development for the ECOC. The concept of Holding for the time after 2021 including the management by team members of Novi Sad 2021 of some specific cultural venues is an interesting model.
- The settings for monitoring and evaluation are still in the making. Some preliminary documents and plans were presented during the monitoring visit. The evaluation topic will require considerable further development – by also taking into account the wealth of experience in the context of the European Capitals of Culture as well as beyond. Furthermore, the foundation must ensure an evaluation context that guarantees the full independence of the evaluators from the foundation.

Based on this analysis and the information gathered during the monitoring visit, we have understood that several recommendations from the monitoring report are currently under implementation and we congratulate the team for the achievements reached so far. In addition, we invite the team to continue to work on the 12 recommendations from the first panel monitoring report and also on the following additional recommendations:

Recommendation 13: The audience development activities should be more strategically developed and summarized in a specific document.

Recommendation 14: Efforts are needed for a comprehensive communication approach related to staffing and strategy development – taking into account the digital communication fields.

Recommendation 15: The timelines for ongoing and future capital investments needs to be carefully revised and interlinked with a sound financial plan.

Recommendation 16: Develop a clear focus on the core elements of the European Capital of Culture for the work of the foundation and define cooperation for wider cultural development questions with the stakeholders concerned in an open dialogue.

Recommendation 17: To further development the evaluation settings that would guarantee full independence of the evaluators from the foundation.

Recommendation 18: Steps towards clear programme strategy with the production plan should be taken in the nearest future. Furthermore, the plans for the collaboration with the cultural operators and the plan for the implementation of the programme should be established within the next months.

We thank you for all the efforts made so far and wish you a fruitful and successful continuation of the preparation of the European Capital of Culture 2021 in Novi Sad.

(signed) Sylvia Amann

Rapporteur of the European Capital of Culture selection and monitoring panel

(signed) all members of the ECOC Expert Panel