



Nova Gorica European Capital of Culture 2025

Second Monitoring Meeting

Report by the ECoC Expert Panel

Virtual Meeting, May 2023

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared for the European Commission.
However, it only reflects the views of the authors, and the
Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be
made of the information contained therein.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Directorate Culture, Creativity and Sport
Unit D2

E-mail: eac-unite-D2@ec.europa.eu

*European Commission
B-1049 Brussels*

© European Union, 2023

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is regulated by Decision 2011/833/EU (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EU copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Attendance.....	4
Report from Nova Gorica.....	5
Discussion	5
Conclusions and recommendations	11
Next steps	14

Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 16 May 2023 between the Expert panel for the selection and monitoring of European Capitals of Culture, hereinafter referred to as “the panel”, and the European Capital of Culture team of Nova Gorica - Gorizia, one of the two designated European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) 2025¹.

The city of Nova Gorica was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2025 in Slovenia on 12 April 2021 by the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia on the basis of the recommendation included in the panel selection report²; its bid book is available on the Nova Gorica 2025 website³.

A first monitoring meeting took place on 7 October 2021 and the first monitoring report is available on the European Commission website⁴.

This report is addressed to the team of Nova Gorica - Gorizia 2025 and will be published on the same European Commission website.

Attendance

The Panel members:

Toni Attard
Jelle Burggraaff
Else Christensen-Redzepovic (Chair)
Marilyn Gaughan Reddan
Goda Giedraityte
Suvi Innilä
Anne Karjalainen
Hrvoje Laurenta
Jorge Cerveira Pinto
Rossella Tarantino (Rapporteur).

For Nova Gorica:

Samo Turel - Mayor Nova Gorica (ECoC title holding city)
Rodolfo Ziberna - Mayor of Gorizia (partner city)
Gorazd Božič – CEO “GO! 2025”

¹ The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union for the titles 2020 to 2023. The Decision provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the Panel. See:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG

² See selection report at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/culture/sites/default/files/ecoc2025-slovenia-selection-report.pdf>

³ <https://www.go2025.eu/en/>

⁴ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/chemnitz-and-nova-gorica>

Romina Kocina - Director of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Nova Gorica - Gorizia and Legacy Manager
Stojan Pelko - Programme Director
Neda Rusjan Bric - Artistic Advisor
Mija Lorbek - Chief of Nova Gorica Mayor's Cabinet.

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

Report from Nova Gorica

The organisation of Nova Gorica-Gorizia 2025 submitted a comprehensive progress report in advance of the virtual meeting, supplemented by an annex detailing the status of implementation of the projects included in the bid book. The report gives evidence of the advancement made since the first monitoring meeting in October 2021, according to the six evaluation criteria of the European Capitals of Culture action.

In particular, the report stresses the progress made to lay solid foundations for the project, with the creation of a programme delivery body under the name of "GO! 2025", the definition of a clear distribution of tasks and workflow between this body and the EGTC, in charge of cross-border cooperation, the designation of a new CEO and the enrolment of the key managers. The report emphasises the excellent cross-border collaboration that is creating a new sense and culture of being "one city" in two countries. The report also underlines the progress made in terms of the cultural and artistic programme, reflected in the signature of more than 80 contracts with leading partners in the first quarter of 2023 and in the start of the development phase of the EPIC project (the flagship project) and the Opening Ceremony. The programme is complemented by a new call for cross-border projects funded under Interreg ITA - SLO for an amount of 3 million euro (of a total amount of 7 million euro), aimed to create a new cross-border ecosystem.

The report underlines the strong support of the institutions manifested at the highest institutional level by the Presidents of Republic from both Slovenia and Italy on several occasions, giving substance and high visibility to the "borderless" narrative.

The report underlines that the planned public funds at the bidding stage are now all secured. However, further negotiations are ongoing to acquire additional resources (totalling around 6,5 million euro) that the team deems necessary to deliver the original bid book programme and recruit the personnel needed to do so. Finally, the report outlines the progress concerning the infrastructure plan, which in this phase is specifically focussed on the refurbishment of the so-called "ECoC district", a wide area including the square once divided by the border between Slovenia and Italy and the green belt. In particular, the plans concerning the EPIC centre have been revised with the decision to host the centre and the corresponding flagship exhibitions in the former railway warehouses and not in a brand-new venue as originally planned. This is due to the bureaucratic difficulties encountered in trying to have the building on a location straddling the two countries.

The presentation was opened by the newly elected Mayor of Nova Gorica who, alongside the Mayor of Gorizia, reiterated the strong political support to the project and emphasised as well the solid cooperation with the Slovenian Government. As an example, the latter adopted a decision of “public interest in the ECoC 2025 project” and allotted its 10 million euro contribution on August 31st 2022. Likewise, the Mayors confirmed a strong interest also from the Italian institutions at local, regional and government levels. During the presentation, the cooperation of the two cities “working as one” was stressed, with reference to the organisation of borderless events and to the urbanistic planning. Emphasis was equally placed on the importance of building a legacy in the cultural capacity to deal with the following three key issues in line with the bid: borders, wars and multilingualism. In this sense, in spite of the change of location, the crucial role played by the EPIC project was confirmed, in its quest for exploring history under different European and contemporary perspectives

Discussion

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

A. Contribution to the long-term strategy (“Long-Term Strategy”)

- The panel opens the session with a question on the timing of the implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan. The team underlines that they have recently started the collaboration with ISIG, an experienced institute specialised in international studies and evaluations, based in Gorizia. ISIG has started working with its counterpart in Ljubljana in order to produce the plan and identify the relevant indicators.
- The panel asks about the key impact objectives and success indicators of the ECoC project, also on the basis of the new insights gained in the preparation phase. The team indicates the creation of a conurbation between the two cities as the main success impact. The indicators that will measure this impact are defined in the new Urban Agenda 2030 recently approved in Nova Gorica: they will assess not only accessibility to culture, but also the capacity of the two cities to work together and to implement the green strategy designed in the bid book at regional level. In addition, the team underscores the importance of the enlargement of the cross-border cooperation area that also affects the audience development plan, considering the relatively limited demographic size of the two cities. The indicators are defined in the new Urban Agenda and in the Cultural Strategies of Nova Gorica and Gorizia that will be jointly updated in 2023. The baseline study will be conducted by the contracted institution and will produce its results in the autumn 2023.
- Closely related to the above question, the panel asks about the expected added value Nova Gorica - Gorizia 2025 can bring to the ECoC brand. The team underscores that the legacy of two cities working together as one beyond a national border will be the main message that they intend to convey to Europe. The capacity

to evidence that two cities, once divided by a border and difficult relations, are now transforming into a space for cooperation, coworking and co-creation has a strong European relevance. The team trusts that their project could be an example for other border cities in Europe.

- Regarding the question about the changes introduced in their strategy to face the challenges emerging from the pandemic (financing, audiences, artistic production mode), the team respond that they had to cope with the “borders” re-imposed by Covid during the candidacy process and had to adapt the second bid book several times. In the current preparation phase, the team is adapting to everyday changes.

B. Cultural and artistic programme

- The high number of contracts signed with the leading partners of the projects is very encouraging. The panel, however, would like to know the level of details in these contracts, in particular pre-production plans and associated budgets. The team explains that, prior to signature, each project was thoroughly checked by producers, so that the contracts indicate clear outputs for 2023, a financial plan for 2024 and 2025 and concrete results for 2025. Thus, even if they do not include pre-production plans, the contracts present a detailed financial plan and the output schedule.
- Regarding the envisaged online platform, which is presently under production, the panel requests further details concerning the virtual delivery of the programme; specifically, how many contracted projects also include an online fruition and about the provision of a specific financial allocation for virtual delivery. The team explains that the virtual platform will provide all the main information on the programme along with tourism information on the city and surrounding region. Some projects will be streamed to reach out to wider audiences and this will be tested in the autumn 2023. A reflection on how to monetize virtual participation to events is underway.
- Concerning the Opening Ceremony, the Artistic Advisor, who will be the director for this event, explains that it is scheduled to happen on 8 February 2025, which coincides with a national holiday (cultural day) in Slovenia. The Opening will be celebrated in both cities as being one, inviting the audience to enjoy it in every corner of the two cities. The year will be officially opened in Europa square that symbolically represents the no-border area.
- Whilst on the one hand acknowledging the capacity of the team for raising a new funding source of 7 million euro under Interreg, the panel seeks clarification about the type of projects that are to be selected under the first 3 million euro call. Specifically, considering that these projects will integrate the ECoC cultural programme, the panel asks about the artistic/cultural selection criteria, the link with the “borderless” concept and eligible beneficiaries. The team explains that the projects funded under the EU Italia-Slovenia cross-border Interreg programme are

intended to support cross-border cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture and social innovation. A dedicated funding line was introduced during the 2021-2027 programming period to support the ECoC project, promoting transversal activities and not specifically cultural activities. The intention is now - through the call - to provide an opportunity to invite citizens, institutions, associations and entities (also SMEs) from a larger area, including the Venezia province and the Slovenian region up to Ljubljana, to join the ECoC celebration. However, funding cannot be extended to other European countries. The team in charge of the selection of the projects of the call is to be composed of staff members from EGTC and "GO! 2025" in order to ensure the coherence of the projects with the ECoC programme and with the expected impact.

- Specific information is requested on the progress of the EPIC project, which plays a pivotal role in the programme. The team explains that they are aware of the crucial importance of the EPIC project and steps forward have been made accordingly: a curator coming from the Museum of Nova Gorica has been designated to lead the project and a curatorial team, composed by experts from Slovenian and Italian institutions, is in place. Thus, the team reassures that, despite the change of location, the concept of EPIC will be retained as explained in the bid book. The development and production of the exhibition is proceeding along with the construction of the venue. This allows them to design and build a tailor-made space according to the contents and needs of the exhibition.
- The panel raises some concerns about the risk of downsizing the cultural programme as designed in the bid book. These concerns are based on the fact that the budget allocated appears not to be sufficient to carry out the bid book projects (there is a shortage of 5 million euro) while new projects are added to the programme via open calls. According to the team, the Government is aware of this mismatch and there is a common understanding that the national contribution should be higher than the amount allocated to the ECoC in Maribor in 2012, to take account of inflation. In order to raise additional financial resources, some projects are now presented to other Ministries (education, tourism, sports or infrastructure). Under such circumstances, the team is still convinced it can implement the original bid book programme, although it has also elaborated B-plans.
- The panel asks about the involvement of cultural organisations from the rest of Slovenia, as recommended in the previous monitoring report. The team highlights that its strategy aims to empower the small but important institutions and NGOs of the two cities and connect them to nationally and internationally reputed institutions (public or NGOs), which can count on large international networks.

C. European dimension

- In light of previous recommendations, the panel wants to know how the team is monitoring the involvement of the European and international partners listed in the bid and fostering the participation of new European partners. The team underscores that a staff member was appointed for international networking, following the panel

recommendations. Furthermore, also upon a recommendation from the panel, a 3-day meeting with other twin border cities was organised last year and it will be repeated this year. Finally, the leading partners are mobilising their European networks and this reinforces the European dimension of the projects.

- The panel enquires about the progress in the engagement of international networks, cultural organisations and specifically of artists and about the need to focus on some parts of Europe with which to weave new cultural ties. The team responds that their work with European networks (such as ETC 2024 conference, Mediterranean Biennale of Visual Arts, Culture Action Europe) and with international festivals has enabled them to approach the whole of Europe. The team acknowledges that, because of their important cross-border focus, the European dimension was initially not broad enough in terms of geographical perspective. Yet, through the ECoC network, new links have been forged with some regions of Europe (as for instance Scandinavia or the Baltic countries). There is also an intention to cooperate with Middle Eastern and North African countries.

D. Outreach

- The panel seeks information on the capacity building activities dedicated to the local cultural community and thus the soft legacy of the ECoC project. The team points out that important progress was made over the last year in this respect. At present, meetings are organised on a weekly basis with the local cultural institutions and NGOs and, most importantly, their active involvement as partners in the projects has a “learning by doing” and “empowering” impact. In addition, as to concrete examples of skill development, the team supports local cultural organisations in their attempt to apply for EU programmes such as Creative Europe or in running international projects and producing large-scale events. Thus, the team is convinced that, generally speaking, people working for the ecosystem created by the ECoC (i.e. not only the people working for the ECoC organisation but also the producers involved in the delivery) will be the first soft legacy.

As for outreach, the team is learning from the experiences of other ECoCs, such as Novi Sad and Rijeka. In order to enlarge their audience, emphasis has been strategically placed on content-based communication. Furthermore, the Interreg SPF programme has enabled the team to reach out to new participants.

- The panel seeks information on how the team works on including socially vulnerable groups (including the LGBTIQ+ community), in particular the ones identified as targets in the bid book, namely young people, cross-border audiences and national minorities. The team responds that their inclusion work is based on concrete projects: for example, they are producing an exhibition with a blind photographer or a project on “invisible women ” dealing with women migrants living on the borders. The team reiterates that their key target audiences are still youth, cross-border audiences and national minorities on both sides (i.e. Slovenian minority in Gorizia and vice versa), while there is at present no specific project involving LGBTQIA+ community.

E. Management

- The panel seeks clarification about the 6 million euro allotted to the programme in 2023 while the ECoC programme is still in the development phase. The team explains that this large budget provision is not allotted to the bid book projects, but is connected to the new small cross-border projects funded under Interreg that will be part of the ECoC programme.
- The panel inquires about mitigation measures in place in connection with the significant shortfall of 1,5 million euro in the administration budget. According to the report, this shortfall might lead to a 30% cut in the number of staff members and therefore seriously jeopardise the delivery of the bid book programme. The team explains that this shortfall is due to the steep increase in the cost of staff. As part of their contingency plan, they encourage their leading partners to use their own staff to help deliver the projects and they work at ministerial level to find a solution.

The Mayor of Nova Gorica announces that an agreement is in the pipeline with the Ministry of Culture to secure the additional funds necessary to deliver the planned ECoC programme. There are also negotiations to receive an additional 20 million funding from the Government to enhance the cultural programme and relevant infrastructural projects. In addition, also at municipal level, budgets are being reassessed to raise extra funds. The Mayor of Gorizia underlines that, on the Italian side, there are discussions with the Italian Ministries of Culture, Tourism and External Affairs to raise the necessary funds. Both Mayors reassure that the budget shortfall will be covered and that the bid book programme will be implemented as planned.

- The panel investigates the private fund-raising plan, specifically any difficulty in reaching the target of 10% of the whole operating budget. The team explains that the private fund-raise has started earlier than expected and that it is already producing good results, so that they can anticipate that the target planned will be reached.
- As to the organigramme, the panel seeks clarification about outreach and international cooperation as well as about the workflow for communication activities. The team explains that efforts were made to simplify the overall complexity of the initial organisational structure, in line with the recommendation of the panel. An agreement was signed between "GO! 2025" and EGTC GO to define the distribution of tasks and workflow. As such, a Supervision Board composed by CEO GO, CEO EGTC, Programme Manager and Artistic consultant was set up to take all strategic decisions, also on Marketing and Communication. In addition, two cross-border teams were set up: one on the Programme (mainly constituted by the employees in the "GO! 2025") and the other one on Communication (with people from "GO! 2025" and EGTC GO). The team underlines that this latter meets on a weekly basis and also collaborates with both municipalities' media offices, in order to ensure a coordinated communication line on the ECoC project. As to international

relations, there is one responsible staff member in “GO! 2025” working with a counterpart in EGTC GO. The team admits that the outreach area is not covered in the organigramme; they rely on the collaboration with an external consultant, while most of the outreach activities are developed in the X Centre.

F. Capacity to deliver

- The panel inquires about the communications strategy for the years 2023 onwards, in particular the activities designed to address the whole of Europe and the coordination with tourism boards. The team explains that the communication plan in 2023 is mainly focused on 3 objectives: to build the capacity; to raise awareness on the cross-border project, especially thanks to the institutional initiatives of the Slovenian and Italian Presidents of Republic and Prime Ministers; to build media relations investing on content-based communication and not in advertising. The massive communication campaign addressed to Europe will start on 8 February 2024, one year ahead of the opening ceremony, and will be based on the contents of the programme. It will include important events with the Presidents of the Republic of the two countries and rely on the network of the Cultural Centres and Embassies of Slovenia and Italy across Europe. Emphasis will be placed on large events, such as the Frankfurt Book Fair or the Venice Biennale, to build awareness and lure media attention.
- The panel finally expresses concerns about the decision to stop the construction project of the EPICentre and to move it to the railway’s warehouses. A clarification on the reasons for such a decision is sought as well as on the impact that it can have on the flagship project. The team explains that the reasons for such a decision is the convoluted juridical system that implied a lengthy process of permissions and authorizations, causing a prolonged delay that hampers the timely construction of the EPICentre. “The remaining border is bureaucracy”. They envisage realising the ambitious architectural project of the EPICentre in a second phase. Therefore, they now put the emphasis on the development of a green ECoC belt, stitching the fabric of the cities together and on reusing existing buildings (such as the railways’ warehouses), in accordance with the values of the New European Bauhaus.

The meeting closed with some final remarks from the Mayor of Nova Gorica, who underscored once again that working as one city, in spite of - and also thanks - to differences between the twin cities, would be the project’s legacy. The Mayor of Gorizia underlined the opportunity to partner with other international events that would be held in Italy in 2025 (such as the Jubilee or Venice Biennale) or beginning 2026 (Winter Olympic Games) in order to attract a wider audience.

Conclusions and recommendations

The panel acknowledges the serious commitment and significant advancement made so far by Nova Gorica - Gorizia 2025 and draws attention to the following conclusions and recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The recent contract signed with the organisation responsible for the Monitoring and Evaluation plan and the new Urban Agenda 2030 approved by the city of Nova Gorica are considered as positive by the panel. Yet, the collection of baseline data is slightly lagging behind schedule and so it is necessary:

- To prepare a clear and rigorous timeline for the Monitoring and Evaluation plan, including dissemination events, and to intensify efforts in the collection of the baseline data so they can be published in the autumn 2023 as planned.

Recommendation 2

The panel appreciates the important steps made in the delivery of the programme. Yet, it expresses concerns about the current significant funding gap estimated by the team at 6,5 million euro to deliver the programme included in the bid book. In addition, the panel warns against the risk of diluting the content of the cultural and artistic programme as designed in the bid book, as the new projects funded under Interreg with significant (new) financial resources (totaling about 30% of the programme budget) are focused not only on culture, but also on tourism and social innovation. Therefore:

- The panel invites the Mayor of Nova Gorica, along with the Mayor of Gorizia, to intensify their negotiations to raise the additional funds necessary to deliver the original bid book programme, using in particular the excellent cooperation created at institutional level;
- The panel appreciates the joint programming work on Interreg to finance projects aimed to strengthen the cross-border cultural ecosystem and to reach out new participants. Yet, new transversal projects not focused on culture could overshadow the bid book programme and dilute its cultural and artistic content. In order to preserve this content, the panel recommends that the team should design the next calls under Interreg with a clear cultural dimension in line with the artistic concept of the bid book. Further, it is suggested to investigate the possibilities of involving cultural and social partners from other countries as well, where possible and in compliance with Interreg regulations;
- The panel encourages the team to elaborate a plan B in case the additional funds requested do not materialize, by adopting a “less is more” approach aimed to enhance the artistic quality and values of the original bid book;
- The panel appreciates that the team has already signed a high number of contracts; yet, it strongly encourages the team to also include the pre-production schedules so as to prevent risks in the delivery of the projects;
- The panel invites the team to continue to tap the potential of the virtual platform so that part of the programme can be viewed or experienced online.

Recommendation 3

The panel welcomes the new CEO and congratulates the team for having defined a clear tasks distribution and workflow, simplifying the complex management of a cross-border ECoC. It appreciates the wide institutional support at local, regional and national levels, which provides stability to the delivery structure. Yet, it raises concerns about the financial shortfall in the operational programme that could imply a cut in the planned human resources. In addition, the panel expresses some disappointment about the decision to move the flagship EPIC programme to the railway's warehouses, although it understands the reasons for such a decision, considering the strict schedule. Thus:

- The panel recommends intensifying the efforts to secure the necessary funds to ensure the recruitment of the planned personnel; and at the same time to explore alternative appropriate solutions to ensure the best operation of the delivery body.
- The panel encourages the team to place special emphasis on the completion of the refurbishment works in the ECoC area so as to celebrate the symbolic encounter of the two cities, cultures and communities, paying special attention to the venue of the EPIC programme.

Recommendation 4

The panel acknowledges the progress made in the outreach dimension with the creation of the X centre and the emphasis placed on the inclusion of disabled people. Yet, there is not enough staff to cover all outreach activities, as acknowledged during the presentation, while the engagement of further important target groups that risk being excluded from participating in the ECoC rejuvenating process could be very beneficial to the project. Thus, the panel invites:

- To cover all the outreach needs and have corresponding staff to implement a full-scale audience engagement programme to reach and give voice to all socially vulnerable groups from children to elderly people, from those living in poverty to refugees and LGBTQI+ community;
- To enhance cross-border collaboration on capacity building and audience engagement, avoiding a duplication of initiatives and tools in the two cities, as the building of one diversified community in two border cities could be a legacy and a European model; the rapid implementation of the volunteering plan could boost the process;
- To integrate the parameters of inclusion and diversity of community in the requirements for the projects.

Recommendation 5

The panel recognizes the progress made in international networking, through the recruitment of specialised personnel and closer connections with the ECoCs and some EU cultural networks. Particularly appreciated is also the endeavour to benefit from the experience of previous ECoCs.

- In order to ensure a broader European dimension of the programme, the panel suggests to take further steps and go beyond the cross-border cooperation (though this is a key element of the bid with a strong European relevance), extending the partnerships with artists and cultural organisations from other countries, through tailored artistic cooperation, so as to ensure more cultural diversity.

Recommendation 6

The panel values the serious commitment to enhance the “no-border narrative” and encourages Nova Gorica - Gorizia 2025 to be the test-bed and model for other border cities in Europe and in the world. In this perspective, the panel invites the team to:

- Invest in the communication strategy so as to reinforce the awareness of the borderless concept beyond the Slovenian and Italian scope, so as to ensure a European-wide coverage;
- Dedicate the utmost attention to the EPIC project.
- Intensify all the joint efforts to produce a “no-border space for cooperation, coproduction and co-creation” as a legacy model.

Next steps

The panel welcomes the relevant steps taken so far and remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

The panel asks to receive updated information from the team **by the end of November 2023** about the operational budget and the status of the cultural programme.

The Commission will call for the third and final meeting in the autumn 2024. At the end of the third monitoring meeting, the panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to grant the Melina Mercouri Prize to Nova Gorica 2025.

The conditions for the payment of the Prize are specified in Article 14 of Decision 445/2014/EU:

“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.

(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.”

The panel would like to thank the Mayors of Nova Gorica and Gorizia along with “GO! 2025” and EGTC GO for a very informative and frank discussion and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel's members

