



Selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2031 in Spain

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The Expert Panel's report
pre-selection stage

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Introduction

This is the report of the expert panel (the “panel”) for the pre-selection phase of the competition for the European Capital of Culture in 2031 in Spain. The competition is a European Union initiative created in 1985. The title “European Capital of Culture” has previously been awarded to four cities in Spain, namely Madrid in 1992, Santiago de Compostela in 2000, Salamanca in 2002, and Donostia-San Sebastián in 2016.

The Ministry of Culture in Spain (the “Ministry”) acts as the managing authority of the competition, which is governed by the Decision n°445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 (the “Decision”) as amended by Decision (EU) 2017/1545, and by the **“Call for Submission of Applications For the Union Action “European Capital of Culture” for the Year 2031 in Spain”** adopted by the Ministry and published on the website of the Ministry.

In line with Article 2 of the Rules of procedure, a panel of ten independent experts was established. Eight panel members were 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. The Ministry issued a call for applications on 27 December 2024. Nine applications were submitted by the closing date of 26 December 2025: Burgos, Cáceres, Granada, Jerez, Las Palmas, Oviedo, Palma, Potries, Toledo.

Panel Meeting

The panel members met in Madrid 9-13 March. The panel elected Tanja Mlaker as its chair and Teresa Badia Dalmases as its vice-chair. All panel members signed a declaration of no conflict of interest and confidentiality and gave it to the Ministry ahead of the pre-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 pre-selection hearings 9-12 March each candidate city presented its case (30 minutes) and answered questions from the panel (60 minutes). The panel deliberations took place 12-13 March.

At a press meeting on 13 March, the chair of the panel announced the panel’s recommendation that the Ministry invites the cities of **Cáceres, Granada, Las Palmas and Oviedo** to submit a revised bid for the final selection.

Next Steps

The Ministry will arrange for the formal approval of the shortlist based on the recommendations included in this report (Article 8 of the Decision). It will then issue an invitation to the cities named on the approved shortlist to submit a revised application for the final selection.

The shortlisted cities are encouraged to take into account the panel's assessments and recommendations in this report.

The final selection meeting is scheduled to take place in Madrid at the beginning of December 2026.

Two to four members of the panel will do a one-day visit to the shortlisted cities just before the final selection meeting, in order to obtain more background information on the respective bids. Representatives of the Ministry and the European Commission will accompany the panel members as observers.

Thanks

The panel members would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in this pre-selection phase of the competition. The panel encourages all candidate cities to continue with the development and implementation of their respective cultural strategies.

The panel wishes to thank all candidates and everyone who contributed to their bids, the European Commission for its advice and the Ministry of Culture for its excellent organisation of the pre-selection meeting.

Assessment of the candidates

In its assessment of the candidates, the panel noted the general and specific objectives in Article 2 of the Decision and the requirement for the application 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 the commentaries that follow, the panel notes the main elements of their findings during the pre-selection phase. In reference to the cities recommended to be shortlisted, specific recommendations are made, in order to assist the pre-selected cities in the preparation of the final bid book.

The panel emphasises that its assessments of the candidates were based on the bid book and on the cities' presentation sessions during the pre-selection meeting. A city's history, its recent and current policies and its cultural offer may form a basis for the proposed

programme, but they are not relevant for the selection process. The panel's assessment and recommendation for the shortlist are also based on the analysis of the capacity of all candidate cities to make the required steps in order to win the ECoC title in the following months until the final selection meeting.

Burgos

The bid of Burgos for the European Capital of Culture 2031 centres on the theme of *Renaissance*, aiming to transform the city into a mediating European hub that bridges tradition and innovation, as an example for other medium size cities in Europe. The proposal focuses on four pillars: decentralising culture to include rural and urban areas, fostering intergenerational and inclusive participation, reinterpreting heritage through contemporary modes, and strengthening ties with European cities. The bid envisions Burgos as a laboratory for cultural solutions, connecting art, science, and technology to build a resilient and inclusive European cultural ecosystem.

The city plans to include the surrounding region in the European Capital of Culture 2031 bid, and to involve the entire province, including rural areas facing challenges like depopulation and ageing. Collaboration with the Provincial Government and existing rural development plans will ensure decentralised and accessible cultural activities. Located in the northern Spain, within the autonomous community of Castilla y León, Burgos is a mid-sized city with a population of approximately 176,000 residents, making it one of the prominent cities in the region.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- Burgos is currently updating its Plan for Culture 2026–2031, which builds on the previous 2011–2021 plan. This updated strategy focuses on decentralising cultural activities, strengthening cultural industries, and incorporating citizen governance in the cultural sector. The connection between cultural strategy and objectives of Burgos 2031 with various plans as policy instruments, impacts and programmes is well explained and linked to the programme lines. The strategy also includes plans for sustaining cultural activities beyond the title year. At the time of the application, the strategy was still under development, which limited the depth of alignment that could be assessed.
- The panel appreciated the detailed plans to strengthen the capacity of Burgos's cultural and creative sectors and to establish long-term links between cultural, economic, and social sectors, such as mapping of the cultural and creative industries, education and training programmes, *Cultural Industries Accelerator*, and *Creative Industrial Park*.
- The ECoC title is expected to transform Burgos culturally, socially, economically, and through urban and regional impact by e.g. strengthening the city's cultural ecosystem, reinterpreting its heritage through innovative expressions, and fostering inclusion and community cohesion.

- The monitoring and evaluation framework is well planned and articulated, and the evaluation benchmarks and KPI's are defined and linked to the Burgos 2031 as well as European objectives. The evaluation plan guarantees an independent role for the universities and international partnerships.

Cultural and artistic content

- The overall theme of the programme is *Renaissance*. It is meant as a synonym for renewal and reinvention but might prove challenging to communicate due to the historic era reference.
- The programme has four main pillars: *Extended City*, *Crossroads of Humanity*, *Living Community* and *Active Audiences & Horizontal Participation*. Three of the pillars have also three lines of action each. The programme presents the *Opening*, 10 flagship projects, several activities planned for 2031, and some activities in progress between 2025-2030. Besides short descriptions, the programme presentation also lists some potential collaborations. The projects are also presented in a schematic, monthly timeframe.
- The panel considers the programme solid with several interesting flagship projects. The artistic vision and theme have roots in the city, both in the history as well as in its current challenges. The programme structure is clear, although further clarity is required regarding activities that are already in progress on their specific nature in 2031.
- The local artists and cultural organisations have had a pivotal role in the conception and implementation of the cultural programme e.g. through open calls and several working meetings in the past two years.
- The proposed programme is diverse, participatory, and includes an interesting combination of artistic activities, but also culinary, science and technology. The heritage-meets-innovation approach is well thought and coherent throughout the programme. The panel also views the concept of a transdisciplinary matrix that unites art, science, technology and industry as an inspiring and ambitious objective, as well as one of the programme's innovative features. However, further clarity is needed on the methodologies and goals of this collaboration.

European Dimension

- The Burgos 2031 bid emphasises inclusive and collaborative initiatives such as the international *EU Confluences Festival*, creative residencies such as *Tradition* and *Renaissance*, and transnational projects like *Walkers* and *Threading Cities* in fostering cultural exchange, artistic mobility, and dialogue between European regions, generations, and disciplines.
- Shared European cultures, heritage, and history are highlighted through activities like the *Archaeologies of the Future* exhibition and the *World Congress on Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences*, which explore humanity's origins and shared heritage. Projects such as *Walkers* and *Threading Cities* celebrate historic European routes and connections, while the *Rebirth of the Cathedral Festival* reimagines iconic

European architecture as living cultural stages. The programme also addresses current European themes like sustainability, digital transformation, and social inclusion. Burgos leverages its unique assets such as the Atapuerca site with the first Europeans to tell a pan-European story, proposing an existential and essential European connection. The bid also talks about leading a movement of medium-sized European cities. However, the panel misses a clear strategy how these aspirations will be implemented through the programme.

- Three open calls have already provided collaborations with artists from nine European countries. The panel welcomes the specific reference to several projects involving European elements, as well as connections with European organisations, associations, networks and ECoC's mentioned in the bid. However, the level and status of the potential collaboration remain partly unclear.
- The strategy to attract the interest of a broad European public is still very general and should be further developed.

Outreach

- Citizen participation is in the core of the Burgos 2031 process through multiple channels, such as participatory mural, and three open calls engaging over 150 artists. The bid demonstrates substantial involvement of local stakeholders, and the panel welcomes the strong emphasis on cultural rights and the appointment of a Head of Citizen Participation.
- The bid emphasises inclusivity by creating accessible and participatory cultural activities for all citizens including young people, volunteers, marginalised groups, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. Initiatives like *The Art of Ageing* and *Playback* foster intergenerational dialogue and active participation, while projects such as *P-POL 947* and *Social Square* provide platforms for marginalised voices to share their stories and engage in cultural creation. The Burgos 2031 accessibility measures include sign language interpretation, Braille writing, sensory solutions, and easy-to-read formats to ensure universal access. Cultural volunteers will be trained to act as mediators, empowering citizens to take active roles in organising and participating in events.
- However, although the bid reiterates that the programme will identify specific audiences and that the commitment of the *Cultural Initiative* is to have a universal appeal, this remains generic and does not address the granularity or specificity of marginalised and disadvantaged groups.
- Audience development is tied to education through the *Recreational Time* project and planned school programmes, with a target of reaching 100% of neighbourhoods and 50% of provincial towns by 2031 through decentralisation and everyday-life integration, by bringing culture into streets, rivers, industrial areas, underused spaces and digital environments. Education is deeply embedded in the programme: schools are transformed into living laboratories, linking culture with science, environment, technology and European citizenship. However, the bid

does not provide sufficient insight into the objectives or implementation of these engagements.

Management

- Burgos 2031 governance is structured as a hybrid system, which combines institutional and participative elements. ProBurgos, an existing municipal entity driving the city's economic, cultural, tourist and industrial growth, represents the institutional dimension, while the Citizens Culture Council will be the public participation model. While the panel welcomes the aspiration for public participation, the complexity of hybrid governance requires strong coordination to avoid overlapping responsibilities.
- The organizational chart clarifies the collaboration and relationships within the organization partly. It remains complex and unclear how distinct roles for citizen participation, international relations, fundraising and communications will be positioned/related to the main governance. The panel notes as a significant concern the absence of clarity regarding artistic leadership — the bid does not clearly define the artistic director's role, responsibilities, or appointment process, which represents a structural gap in the governance model.
- The operating budget is € 31 million, with 68,7% allocated to artistic programme, 19,4% to marketing, 9,7% to staffing, and 2,3% to others. 85% of the funding is expected from public sources. There are no plans to create new cultural infrastructure within the programme. The panel welcomes that the private sponsorship strategy is based on a model already tested during Burgos's 2016 ECoC bid.
- Contingency planning is adequate and presented with mitigation measures addressing such risks as limited international reach and logistical difficulties.

Capacity to deliver

- The bid demonstrates unanimous political support, which appears sufficient at this phase of the competition. It indicates that adequate resources are available to deliver the ECoC.
- No major new cultural infrastructure projects are envisaged, however, improvements to existing facilities are being proposed.
- The city's assets are well established, with a solid hotel capacity already in place and tourism firmly integrated into the urban fabric.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Burgos is not shortlisted for the title of European Capital of Culture for Spain in 2031.

The panel recognises that solid plans have been presented across several areas of the Burgos 2031 ECoC bid. It appreciates the strong aspiration of Burgos to transform the city into a mediating European hub that bridges tradition and innovation by decentralising culture, fostering intergenerational and inclusive participation, reinterpreting heritage through contemporary modes, and strengthening ties with European cities.

The candidature demonstrates a strong commitment to citizen participation, presents a solid programme clearly aligned with the Plan for Culture, and maintains a coherent concept throughout the bid.

At the same time, the panel considers some areas underdeveloped and unclear, e.g. how the aspiration to lead a movement of medium-sized European cities will be implemented through the programme, the strategy to attract the interest of a broad European public, and generic nature of the Cultural Initiative commitment.

Cáceres

The Cáceres 2031 bid is built around the overarching theme of *Transcultura*, inspired by the UNESCO-recognised practice of transhumance as a metaphor for movement, exchange and transformation across territories and communities. The programme is structured through three dimensions - *ground, path, and cycle* - and framed by the values of peace, creativity and co-creation. Rooted in the wider territory of Extremadura's pasturelands and mountain landscapes, and in the ancestral knowledge of its communities, the bid presents culture as emerging from a living territory shaped by traditions and built on methodologies of collective creation and care. It positions culture as a process to respond to rural depopulation, social inequality and climate vulnerability.

Regional cooperation is central to the bid and formalised through a consortium involving the City Council of Cáceres, the Provincial Councils of Cáceres and Badajoz, and the Regional Government of Extremadura. Extremadura, with a population of 1.05 million inhabitants, is Spain's sixth-largest region by area but one of the least densely populated in Europe. It is among Europe's most rural and depopulated regions and has the lowest disposable income levels in Spain. The territory is framed as a symbol of the inequalities and fragilities of the European project. The bid frames this peripheral position as a distinctive contribution, presenting the territory as a laboratory for addressing shared European challenges.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The bid is anchored in the Cáceres Cultural Strategy 2026 - 2036, adopted in November 2025 and structured across two complementary levels: cultural arenas as priority areas of intervention and strategic axes that define the long-term vision.

The strategy identifies five areas of intervention and long-term impact goals, positioning the Transcultura programme as an integrated component within this framework.

- The relationship between the ECoC and the cultural strategy is well presented through a structured overview scheme that outlines roles, partners and actions, including international cooperation networks.
- The bid outlines five long-term impact goals linked to the expected contribution of the ECoC by 2031. These anticipated impacts are clearly described and connected to broader territorial transformation objectives across Extremadura, reinforcing the positioning of culture as a driver of regional development and cohesion.
- Monitoring and evaluation are conceived as a process across six phases extending beyond the ECoC year into the legacy period up to 2036 and guided by the principle of “measuring to transform.” The proposed evaluation structure includes the creation of the Council of the Mesta and a transformative group bringing together universities, policymakers, civil society and evaluation experts. The panel notes that the phrase 'measuring to transform' requires substantive unpacking - the bid should clarify what specific transformation is being measured, against what baselines, and by whom, before the framework can be considered operationally credible."

Cultural and artistic content

- The cultural programme of Cáceres 2031 is structured around the overarching concept of *Transcultura*, organised through three thematic dimensions - *ground, path and cycle*, each presented through an agora and linked to values of peace, creativity and co-creation.
- The bid sets an ambitious artistic vision centred on the transhumance metaphor, presented as a concept and a cultural model that celebrates diversity, uniting the ancestral with the contemporary, engaging with the periphery and turning it into a point of reference.
- However, the articulation of the artistic strategy is complex and would benefit from greater clarity, particularly on how the *Transcultura* concept translates into a distinctive curatorial direction across projects and how this framework can be communicated in a coherent and accessible way.
- The programme presents plans for 34 projects, including four flagship projects across the region spanning heritage, community-based cultural action, interdisciplinary practices and international exchange.
- The panel notes that a particularly strong aspect of the bid is the clear and well-developed approach to combining local cultural heritage and traditional practices with innovative and experimental artistic expressions, positioning heritage as a resource for contemporary cultural production.

- Local artists and cultural organisations have been actively involved in the conception of the programme, notably through an open call that generated around 200 proposals.

European Dimension

- The Cáceres 2031 bid positions Extremadura's experience of rural depopulation, climate vulnerability, migration, social inequality and digital divides within a wider European context. These themes are reflected in a range of proposed projects that promote intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding among European citizens.
- The bid uses the metaphor of transhumance to highlight common aspects of European cultures, heritage and history. Recognised as UNESCO Intangible Heritage, transhumance connects Extremadura with more than ten European countries where this complex system of land organisation is practiced.
- European cooperation is supported through a wide range of identified partnerships with cultural networks and organisations, as well as exchanges with past and future ECoCs. The panel notes a significant geographical imbalance in the European partnerships: collaborations with Central and Eastern Europe are largely absent from the bid, representing a weakness in the European dimension.
- The strategy to attract a broad European and international public includes initiatives such as an Ambassadors programme and digital storytelling actions, alongside cooperation with European networks and institutions. While these elements provide a general framework for outreach, the approach remains relatively underdeveloped in relation to the city's location and connectivity.

Outreach

- The bid demonstrates a commitment to the involvement of local citizens and civil society in both the preparation and planned implementation of the programme. Participation is structured through flagship initiatives such as *Generación 31*, which has been engaging young people aged 12 - 18 in cultural leadership since 2025, *Diversitas*, focusing on inclusive cultural participation for LGBTIQ+ communities, older adults and people with disabilities, and *Interplay*, supporting intergenerational collaboration.
- The distribution of activities beyond the city of Cáceres is significant to the bid and aimed to reach marginalised and geographically dispersed communities. However, the panel notes that addressing the operational challenges associated with delivering participatory programmes across a territory of this scale would benefit from further clarification.

- The overall audience development strategy places particular emphasis on youth participation and inclusive access to culture, supported by programmes such as *Escuela Europa* and the existing practice of offering many cultural activities free of charge in public spaces. While the bid recognises the importance of schools as entry points for wider family engagement, beyond references to initiatives such as *Cantata Europa*, the strategy linking education and school participation remains relatively underdeveloped.

Management

- The management structure of Cáceres 2031 is organised around the Cáceres 2031 Consortium, which brings together the City Council of Cáceres, the Provincial Councils of Cáceres and Badajoz, and the Regional Government of Extremadura as the legal and financial backbone of the programme.
- The operating budget amounts to €62.65 million (2026 - 2035), with 68% allocated to artistic programming and participation, 14% to marketing, 11% to administration, and 7% to contingency and evaluation. 92% of funding is expected from public sources and a capital investment plan of approximately €130 million is envisaged. The panel would have welcomed more insight on the strategy to secure the required capital investment.
- The level of municipal investment in culture is currently at 7.2% of the city budget and expected to be increased to 8.5%. The panel welcomes the public financial commitments, formalised and consolidated through annual budget approvals, from consortium partners covering the preparation phase, title year and legacy period.
- The organisational structure lacks clarity about operational roles and responsibilities. Further clarification would be beneficial regarding the functioning of the consortium, the composition of governing bodies, decision-making processes, staffing structures and key leadership roles.
- Contingency planning is adequate and presented with mitigation measures addressing financial, operational and political risks.

Capacity to deliver

- The bid demonstrates broad institutional and organisational support, with 129 organisations listed as supporting the candidature. Delivery is structured through the Cáceres 2031 Consortium, formally established in 2024.
- The delivery of the programme will rely primarily on existing cultural infrastructure, including theatres currently undergoing technical modernisation until 2027, the city's museum network and the extensive use of public spaces, parks and neighbourhoods as cultural venues.

- The bid is supported by a significant capital investment programme of approximately €130 million, largely independent of the ECoC operating budget and expected to be completed by 2030. These investments include extensions to the Museo de Cáceres, modernisation of the Extremadura Theatre Network, renovation of the historic centre and the creation of rural cultural centres across the region.
- The panel notes the ambitious scale of the capital investment plan. However, as parts of the infrastructure programme depend on EU structural funds, further clarification would be beneficial regarding the city's capacity to successfully mobilise and deliver this level of investment.
- Cáceres currently offers approximately 3,500 hotel beds, complemented by around 18,000 beds across the wider region, which improves overall accommodation capacity within the territorial model proposed by the bid.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Cáceres be shortlisted for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2031.

Cáceres 2031 presents a bid structured around the concept of *Transcultura*, positioning Extremadura's rural context, heritage and collective practices as a contribution to shared European challenges such as depopulation, social inequality and climate vulnerability. The bid is anchored in the Cultural Strategy 2026–2036 and supported by a multi-level institutional consortium. The programme demonstrates a strong approach to combining traditional cultural practices with contemporary artistic expressions and includes active involvement of local artists and communities.

Further development would be beneficial regarding the coherence of the concept across the programme, monitoring and evaluation structures, governance arrangements and the capacity to mobilise the planned infrastructure investment and strengthen the European outreach strategy.

Recommendations for Cáceres

- Ensure that reliance on volunteer involvement is balanced with adequate professional resources and structures, supporting fair working conditions for artists and cultural professionals.
- Further develop the monitoring and evaluation framework by clarifying the concept of "measuring to transform" and aligning its transformative claims with clearly defined indicators.
- Strengthen the curatorial coherence and communication of the concept to ensure a more consistent and accessible programme narrative.

- Broaden European participation, particularly by diversifying partnerships across a wider geographical range of countries and networks and develop a targeted partnership strategy with cultural organisations in Central and Eastern Europe, and demonstrate how the 'Transcultura' concept is relevant and accessible to audiences beyond the Iberian and Mediterranean sphere.
- Also further develop the strategy to attract a wider European audience, taking into account the city's location and connectivity.
- Enhance the transparency of participatory methodologies, clarifying how citizen input shapes programme development and decision-making.
- Validate and clarify financial support through the national authorities. Provide formalised written commitments confirming the allocation of operational funding and specify the mechanisms through which the funds will be disbursed, including the responsible institutions, the applicable procedures, and the expected timelines for their transfer to the city.
- Clarify the structure and intended implementation of the proposed citizens' budget.
- Strengthen outreach measures linking the programme more clearly with schools and education systems.
- Provide greater clarity on the organisational and governance structure, including roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes.

Granada

Granada's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2031 is built around the metaphor of the key—unlocking transformation through culture, science, and citizen participation. It aims to evolve Granada from a celebrated heritage city into a living laboratory for cultural, social, and environmental innovation. The programme is organised around four thematic Keys: Cultural Identity and Memory, Boundless Creativity, Culture, Environment and Wellbeing, and Peace, Democracy and Equality, supported by two cross-cutting actions: major events and the Granada Culture Lab.

Addressing the "Granada Paradox" — a city of rich cultural and research output yet facing youth outmigration, unemployment, and weak cultural economy links — the bid positions the ECoC as a catalyst for structural transformation of the cultural and creative sectors.

Located in Andalusia, southern Spain, at the foot of the Sierra Nevada, Granada's metropolitan area counts around 544,000 inhabitants across 34 municipalities and nearly 943,000 across the province's 174 municipalities. Home to the Alhambra, Generalife, and Albaicín UNESCO World Heritage Sites, it is also a leading university city. The University of

Granada, Europe's largest Erasmus destination, celebrates its fifth centenary in 2031 and extends the candidacy to Ceuta and Melilla, where it maintains campuses.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The bid is well anchored in multiple strategic frameworks — the Granada Metropolis Horizon 2030–2040 Strategy (unanimously approved by the Social Council and ratified by City Council on 31 October 2025), the city's Urban Agenda (September 2024), and the ERDF-backed Sustainable Urban Development Strategy approved in February 2025 — and the panel welcomes this layered strategic alignment and the clear positioning of culture as a cross-cutting driver of wider city development.
- The panel also welcomes the assignment of monitoring and evaluation responsibilities to the University of Granada, supported by a citizen science and Living Labs approach through the UGR MediaLab, which was presented as an appropriately independent and academically grounded foundation for impact assessment.
- The monitoring and evaluation framework, while structurally sound, lacks specific KPIs, baseline data, and measurable targets.
- The bid does not clearly explain what the ECoC will achieve additionally that the city's existing strategic programmes — the Urban Agenda, the ERDF strategy, the Horizon Strategy — would not deliver in any case.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme shows diversity across the four Keys — ranging from flamenco and trovo to digital art, participatory children's opera, astrotourism, and art-science collaboration — and the panel values the genuine ambition to serve a wide range of audiences and cultural forms, as well as the strong involvement of local cultural organisations and citizens in both the conception and planned delivery of the programme.
- The panel also recognises the distinctive science-and-culture signature of the bid, drawing on Granada's unique ecosystem of the Parque de las Ciencias, the IFMIF-Dones nuclear fusion facility, and the Institute of Astrophysics of Andalusia, as a genuinely original dimension that links the city's research identity to its cultural programme. This reveals a promising area for further development. However, the panel recommends a broadened approach with other science and culture initiatives in Andalusia to provide a more structured pathway for deepening transdisciplinary integration.
- However, the programme structure is overly complex — with four Keys, twelve programme entities, six Intervention Strategies, and two cross-cutting actions — and the panel is concerned that audiences and partners will struggle to navigate it.
- The panel further notes that the connection between the key metaphor, the slogan Knowledge–Inspiration–Transformation, and the individual programme content remains underdeveloped.

European Dimension

- The bid benefits from a strong institutional foundation for European engagement through the University of Granada — Europe's largest Erasmus destination, coordinating the Arqus Alliance of nine European universities — and the panel welcomes the concrete European projects already in place, including the *Shared Archives* initiative connecting Lorca's legacy with the Ibsen, Proust, and Frisch archives, and the *Radiolab Europe* cross-border digital project led by the UGR MediaLab, which builds a transnational digital radio ecosystem connecting university radio stations across borders.
- The panel also recognises the originality of the Ceuta and Melilla dimension, which gives Granada a structural presence on Europe's border with Africa and a direct connection to the migration realities shaping contemporary European debate, as well as the bid's connections with a wide range of ECoC cities past, present, and future.
- However, the strategy to attract a broad European and international public relies heavily on the Erasmus community and university alumni as ambassadors, and the panel considers this insufficient as a stand-alone international audience attraction strategy.
- The *Culture Moves Granada* mobility scheme, which runs from 2027 to 2031 and draws inspiration from the Culture Moves Europe programme, is innovative in approach but is presented without any operational figures like grants per year, budget allocation, selection criteria — which raises serious concerns about its implement ability.

Outreach

- The bid demonstrates a long-standing participatory foundation through *LabIN Granada*, which has generated 1,361 citizen proposals. In 2025, ten thematic working groups were established to further structure the process. This is complemented by a multi-layered accessibility commitment supported by partnerships with the ONCE Foundation and the Municipal Council for Disability, and the panel considers this one of the strongest outreach foundations in the competition at this stage.
- The panel also welcomes the Granada 2031 Children's Council as a genuinely promising initiative, the structural integration of the Citizen Participation Council within the governance framework, and the planned 2026 Study of Cultural Audiences with the University of Granada as a sound data-driven basis for local audience development.
- The link between the participatory process and specific programme content has not always been clearly demonstrated, and the Children's Council is inconsistently referenced across the bid rather than positioned as a structural element throughout.

- The audience development strategy for local and diverse publics is underdeveloped: priority groups and concrete inclusion targets are not sufficiently specified, and the long-term sustainability of digital tools, accessibility certifications, and educational initiatives beyond the ECoC year is not fully clear.

Management

- The Granada 2031 ECoC Consortium — formally established in early 2025 with founding members including the City Council, Provincial Council, University of Granada, and Chamber of Commerce, and with a Managing Director (Pilar Tassara Andrade) selected through open public competition and a Board of Commissioners of high standing — provides a solid and sound early institutional foundation.
- The panel also considers the total operating budget of €79.05 million with a 20% private funding target ambitious but mostly credible, noting an existing base of more than €950,000 per year in private cultural sponsorships and a €38.23 million capital expenditure plan drawing on confirmed ERDF, NextGen EU, and other public investment programmes.
- The organisational structure of the Granada2031 ECoC Consortium is presented in a comprehensible way. However, the selection process for key positions, especially the Artistic Director, should have been presented with more detail, including the profile and the relationship between artistic and management leadership.
- The marketing and communication strategy is currently underdeveloped, and the panel also notes that the 20% private funding target depends in part on the Events of Exceptional Public Interest (AEIP) tax designation, which has not yet been formally secured.

Capacity to deliver

- The panel welcomes the broad and deep political support underpinning the candidacy — unanimous backing from Granada City Council since 2015, endorsement from all 174 municipalities of the province, support from eight Rural Development Groups, and engagement of the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla — and recognises this as an exceptionally strong foundation for delivery.
- The existing cultural infrastructure is solid and well distributed across the city and province, including neighbourhood theatres in Zaidín, La Chana, Beiro, and Zona Norte, major venues such as the Federico García Lorca Centre, the Isabel la Católica Theatre, the Alhambra Theatre, and the Generalife Theatre, and the Alhambra complex itself as a world-class asset.
- The formal commitment of the Regional Government of Andalusia and the national government to the Consortium has not yet been secured, meaning approximately 46% of the planned operating budget depends on future political decisions, and the panel urges the city to address this with urgency.

- The risks of overcrowding during the title year, as well as the pressures on residents in a highly visited heritage city, are acknowledged in the bid but not yet adequately addressed in the contingency plan. The panel therefore expects a clear and detailed risk assessment covering these issues in the final bid.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Granada be shortlisted for the European Capital of Culture 2031. The bid offers a genuine and intellectually strong vision, grounded in an honest understanding of the “Granada Paradox” and supported by robust institutions — notably the University of Granada, a well-structured Consortium, and extensive citizen participation. The ambition to transform Granada from a heritage destination into a living laboratory for cultural innovation is both visible and credible.

However, the panel notes areas requiring further development before the final bid: greater programme coherence and simplification, the appointment of a suitably profiled Artistic Director, a stronger and more concrete European dimension, formalised financial commitments from regional levels, and deeper analysis of overcrowding risks in a heavily touristic city. The panel remains confident in Granada’s foundations, institutional strength, and cultural vitality, and looks forward to a richer, more refined final proposal.

Recommendations for Granada

- Simplify and sharpen the programme structure, reducing the number of layers and ensuring a clear, navigable curatorial logic runs through the four Keys; clarify the relationship between the *Key* metaphor and the slogan *Knowledge, Inspiration, Transformation*, and articulate what makes Granada's programme distinctively suited to 2031.
- Develop a significantly more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, including ECoC-specific indicators, baseline data, and qualitative as well as quantitative measures of transformative impact, and present a more explicit account of the added value and catalytic leverage that the ECoC title provides beyond the city's existing strategic programmes.
- Translate existing European partner networks into concrete co-productions and programme content, develop a strategic European audience attraction plan that goes beyond the Erasmus and diaspora channels, and strengthen partnerships with Central and Eastern Europe through existing assets such as the Arqus Alliance.
- Develop the *Culture Moves Granada* mobility scheme with full operational detail, including the number of grants per year, budget allocation, selection criteria, and a realistic implementation timeline running from 2027 to 2031.
- Present a clear plan for further development of the team, especially for the appointment of the Artistic Director, including timelines, candidate profiles, selection processes, and clarify the relationship between the artistic and management leadership of the project.

- The panel recommends that the *Celebrating Culture* axis be further developed in the final bid book, with a clearer artistic vision, curatorial rationale, and more concrete programme content.
- Secure formal written commitments from the Regional Government of Andalusia to join the Consortium.
- Validate and clarify financial support through the national authorities. Provide formalised written commitments confirming the allocation of operational funding and specify the mechanisms through which the funds will be disbursed, including the responsible institutions, the applicable procedures, and the expected timelines for their transfer to the city.
- Consolidate the Granada 2031 Children's Council as a structural and consistently referenced element throughout the full programme and clarify how it will contribute to programme development and implementation.
- Elaborate the risk assessment to address overcrowding, tourism pressure on residents, and infrastructure delivery timelines, and present concrete mitigation strategies for each risk scenario.

Jerez de la Frontera

Jerez's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2031 declares *Olé Europa!* as a call to cultural action echoing across Europe. It centres on revitalizing the city's rich cultural heritage while addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. The city aims to empower youth, promote inclusion, and decentralise cultural access across neighbourhoods and rural areas as well as transforming its historic centre and enhancing urban resilience.

Jerez is renowned for its flamenco heritage, sherry wine production, and equestrian traditions. As a historic frontier city, it serves as a vibrant crossroads between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, blending tradition with modernity. The bid emphasises regional cooperation by involving the entire Province of Cadiz, encompassing 45 municipalities and 1.2 million residents. Through the *45 Nodes and Around* initiative, the city plans to decentralise cultural activities, ensuring rural and coastal communities actively participate in the European Capital of Culture program.

Jerez is located in southern Spain, in the autonomous community of Andalusia, within the Province of Cadiz. It is a medium-sized city with a population of approximately 214,000 residents located in the Province of Cádiz, approximately 35 kilometres from the Atlantic coast.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The updated *Strategic Plan for Culture and Creativity* was approved in November 2025. The panel appreciates that it is interlinked with the *Urban Agenda 2030* and the *City Growth Strategy 2031–2035*, thus extending the vision beyond the title

year. The Strategic Plan identifies six key challenges and positions several ECoC projects to address each challenge.

- Jerez plans to strengthen its cultural and creative sectors through initiatives like the BodegART creative district, which will provide spaces for artistic creation, professional training, and cultural entrepreneurship. The city will also develop long-term links between culture, economy, and society by integrating its cultural strategy with the Growth Strategy 2031–35, and fostering collaborations with local businesses, educational institutions, and social services.
- The ECoC title is expected to have cultural, social, urban and economic long-term impacts, which are defined clearly. The ECoC will strengthen cultural infrastructure, revitalise the historic centre, and promote inclusion through accessible programs and youth empowerment initiatives, and the efforts will foster innovation, social cohesion, and sustainable urban development, ensuring a lasting legacy.
- The framework for monitoring is structured in four phases starting with baseline development in 2025-2027 and including long-term evaluation until 2035. The stakeholder groups have been identified, and the overall monitoring and evaluation work has been assigned to the Observatorio Atalaya led by the University of Cádiz. Although the KPI's are identified, the panel lacks clarity on how they were established as well as on the monitoring and evaluation methodology.

Cultural and artistic content

- The concept of the cultural programme is *Olé Europa!*, which serves both as a slogan and as a cultural movement, the voice of the South for Europe. The artistic vision is grounded in *duende*, the profound Andalusian inner spark of creativity and the communal flow that emerges when art is experienced collectively.
- The programme is divided into four programme lines: *Pulse*, *Roots*, *Meet*, and *Frontera*, and one transversal programme line *FlamencoGen*. It presents 32 projects or project entities with solid descriptions including lists of partners, although only a limited number are clearly identified European partners. The conceptual connection between the *FlamencoGen* and the four programme lines remained slightly unclear to the panel.
- The programme is solid, and the concept, vision, and structure are clear. The descriptions of the projects are concrete and draw an image of an intriguing and varied programme, which has a strong emphasis on flamenco heritage, Roma culture, and equestrian traditions.
- The local artists and cultural organisations have actively taken part in the conception of the cultural programme through different channels and methods. However, the panel is not convinced that there is enough local cultural capacity for the implementation of a high-quality, year-long programme.

- The programme contains ingredients for a diverse cultural offer, and there are several interesting crossover projects linking culture and technology. The heritage-innovation blend is compelling with projects such as *Fadenco* (Fado × Flamenco), *Talking Feet*, and *Terra Futura* going beyond just putting tradition on display.

European Dimension

- Jerez plans to promote European cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and mutual understanding through various initiatives such as *The Roma Caravan Journey*, which celebrates Roma culture and fosters connections across Europe, and *Minority Report*, which highlights the richness of European minorities through co-creation spaces and residencies. By integrating diverse cultural traditions, fostering cross-border artistic exchanges, and creating spaces for dialogue, Jerez aims to strengthen European unity and celebrate its multicultural identity.
- The panel welcomes the aspiration of Jerez to build its European story around the idea of the frontier — peripheral cities dealing with shared pressures like youth engagement, climate change adaption, and sustainable urban development. The bid fosters European integration through partnerships with other European Capitals of Culture and projects like *2031 km*, which maps the shared challenges and creativity of Europe's peripheral cities. Projects such as *Echoes of the Land* and *Cultural Hotspots* address current European themes. However, the panel considers that this ambitious concept is not fully integrated to or addressed in the programme.
- Jerez 2031 emphasises collaboration with European artists, cities, and cultural operators through transnational partnerships and joint projects. *FlamencoGen* features European artists and connects flamenco with other cultural traditions, such as fado, tango, and African tap. Projects like the *Roma Caravan Journey* and *2031 km* foster cooperation with cities across Europe, including past and future ECoC's. The SEA-EU university alliance and Culture Next membership add solid institutional weight.
- The strategy to attract European and international audiences remains underdeveloped and lacks the concrete operational details that the concept requires.

Outreach

- The panel appreciates the structured participatory model, referred to as the Agora model, which has been used as the main mechanism for community engagement and project development. It generated 96 ideas from 91 participants, which fed directly into 12 programme projects presented in the bid. The bid also outlines the establishment of a Cultural Council composed of 25 representatives from the

cultural and artistic sectors, which contributes to shaping the programme and engagement processes. However, success relies heavily on existing associative networks, with limited strategies for engaging persistently disengaged citizens.

- The outreach approach emphasises participatory programme design and the integration of communities identified during the engagement process. The bid identifies specific processes aimed at engaging marginalised communities and ensuring inclusive participation. Among these initiatives is the development of a *Culture Inclusion Protocol*, intended to guide the participation of underrepresented groups in the programme and related activities. Special focus is put on Roma communities, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ groups, prison inmates, and older adults. Tools include a 1-Day Culture Pass (for 18–31-year-olds), participatory budgeting, a volunteer plan, and digital ambassadors.
- The audience development plans focus on decentralising cultural activities to ensure accessibility across neighbourhoods, rural areas, and marginalised communities, while fostering early engagement with culture through schools and youth-focused initiatives. Education is deeply integrated through age-specific pathways, school-based laboratories and youth-led programmes, encouraging active cultural participation. The audience targets are ambitious — for example, an 80% reach in priority neighbourhoods — but the bid does not provide baseline data against which progress could be measured. Without this, the targets cannot be meaningfully evaluated.

Management

- The governance structure of Jerez 2031 builds on an established institution, the Andrés de Ribera Foundation, providing an existing legal and operational framework that will be enhanced for the capital year. An expansion of the Board and Cultural Advisory Board is planned for broad representation from public, academic, and civil society actors, supporting diverse perspectives in decision-making.
- The operating budget amounts to €35,8 million, with 69,8% for programme, 14% for marketing, 14% for wages, and 2,2% for contingency. 95% of funding is expected from public sources, and a capital investment plan of approximately €15,5 million is envisaged, of which €11.9M in ERDF grants was secured in October 2025. The sponsorship strategy has multiple layers and has already gained early interest with partners.
- The organisational structure is presented with a clear organogram. However, the panel was lacking information on the appointment process of the artistic director.
- Contingency planning is adequate and presented with mitigation measures addressing challenges such as lack of financial commitments, fragile local cultural ecosystem, and lack of facilities for contemporary trends.

Capacity to deliver

- The candidacy has a strong support from local and provincial institutions, political parties, the University of Cadiz, and the Chamber of Commerce of Jerez. Cross-party political support was confirmed in a Special Plenary on 18 December 2025.
- Although the panel welcomes the plans for BodegART, the information on the details of the infrastructural delivery plan is limited. Also, the capital budget of €15,5 million is tight considering that the BodegART covers €4,8 million leaving limited space for projects across 45 municipalities.
- The candidate city has an adequate and viable infrastructure to hold the title, both in terms of logistics as well as venues. However, the hotel and accommodation capacity isn't addressed in the bid.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Jerez de la Frontera is not shortlisted for the title of European Capital of Culture for Spain in 2031.

The panel acknowledges the solid plans in several areas of the Jerez 2031 ECoC bid as well as the strong aspiration of Jerez to be the voice of the South for Europe while revitalizing the city's rich cultural heritage and addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. The candidature presents a solid programme with strong emphasis on flamenco heritage and Roma culture, strong European projects such as the *Roma Caravan Journey* and *2031km*, and structured participatory model Agora for community engagement and project development.

At the same time, the panel considers some areas underdeveloped and unclear, e.g. how the aspiration of Jerez to build its European story around the idea of the frontier is integrated in the programme, the plan for drawing in international audiences and the number of international partners, as well as the lack of detailed information on how to realise the ambitious audience and inclusion targets.

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

The Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 2031 bid is built around the concept of *Geography Rebellion*, presenting the city's island condition and outermost location as a basis for rethinking Europe from its margins. The proposal positions culture as a tool for social experimentation, civic imagination and the defence of the right to the city, advocating for more just, inclusive, sustainable and democratic urban spaces. Structured around four strands: Urban Imaginaries, Living Together, Interwoven Identities, and Shared Futures, the bid seeks to use culture to respond to migration, inequality, social cohesion and

environmental challenges, while proposing island consciousness as a cultural force with relevance beyond the local context.

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria presents itself as a distinctive European city located in an outermost region of the European Union, with strong transatlantic links to Europe, Africa and the Americas. The bid frames this position not only in geographical terms but as a cultural and political contribution, asserting that Europe is also shaped from its edges and not only from its continental centres. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is the largest city in the Canary Islands with around 381,868 inhabitants in the municipality and approximately 600,000 in the wider metropolitan area.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The bid is anchored in the Strategic Plan for Culture 2026–2031 and is presented as the main policy framework underpinning the candidature. The strategy is informed by several research-based studies, including analysis of the city’s cultural infrastructure network and of the relationship between culture and wellbeing. The strategic framework is built around five strategic vectors: cultural rights, creative ecosystem, culture and wellbeing, territorial and social equity, and participatory governance.
- The bid positions the ECoC within this strategic framework and presents cultural rights as the overarching rationale for action. It also acknowledges the city’s dependence on tourism and argues for a more diversified model of development in which culture plays a stronger role. The panel notes positively the emphasis placed on cultural citizenship, awareness, talent development and capacity building, as well as the alignment with wider municipal and regional strategies and international policy references.
- The monitoring and evaluation framework is described through four broad dimensions and refers to international benchmarks, including the SDGs, as well as partnerships with academic institutions and networks. While the thematic orientation is clear, the relationship between the priorities of the Strategic Plan and the ECoC objectives would benefit from more concrete definition of the indicators that will be used for evaluation.

Cultural and artistic content

- The cultural programme of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 2031 is structured around the concept of *Geography Rebellion*, proposing a shift in perspective from Europe’s margins and positioning island territories as active contributors to European cultural dialogue. While the panel welcomes the conceptual framework of *Geography Rebellion*, the proposal would benefit from a stronger demonstration of how the notion of “rebellion” is translated across the programme and reflected more consistently at the project level.

- The programme is organised across four strands: *Urban Imaginaries*, *Living Together*, *Interwoven Identities*, and *Shared Futures*, complemented by the *Waves of Sea Breezes* moments taking place throughout the year.
- The bid presents 48 projects, subprojects and project entities extending beyond 2031. The programme is conceived as a multi-year process covering a wide range of artistic and cultural forms and places particular emphasis on themes such as cultural rights, inclusivity, urban space activation and youth engagement. A distinctive feature is the focus on cultural connections between Europe, Africa and the Americas.
- The bid demonstrates a structured and participatory approach to programme development, notably through the *Contribuye* open call, which generated more than 200 proposals from local and international contributors. Local artists and cultural organisations are strongly involved through advisory structures, co-design processes and thematic working groups.
- The programme also builds on existing festivals and cultural initiatives, with the intention of renewing collaborations rather than expanding the number of events. The panel notes that further clarification would be beneficial regarding how this process will ensure overall balance, coherence and artistic quality across the programme.
- The dialogue between local heritage and contemporary cultural expression is addressed at conceptual level, although the relationship between tradition and innovation would benefit from stronger articulation at project level.

European Dimension

- The European dimension of the bid is articulated primarily through the city's position as an outermost region in Europe and a historical point of connection between Europe, Africa and the Americas, positioning the island context as a platform for dialogue on migration, diversity, mobility and shared futures.
- The programme identifies several thematic areas of European relevance, including migration, climate vulnerability, insularity, cultural rights and social cohesion. These themes are well framed as shared European challenges and are reflected across a range of proposed collaborations with international partners, cultural networks and artists.
- The panel notes that European cooperation is well integrated into the programme and is supported through several partnerships with cultural organisations, previous and future ECoCs and networks spanning the Atlantic and Mediterranean contexts. The panel notes that engagement with Northern and Eastern Europe remains

limited, and the bid would benefit from a more geographically balanced European strategy.

- The strategy to attract European and international audiences is framed through tourism and Gran Canaria's international resident community. The panel would have appreciated further insight on how this strategy will be implemented in practice and how it will concretely address challenges related to sustainability, the quality of experiences and the ability to generate intercultural dialogue.

Outreach

- The bid demonstrates a strong and well-established culture of participation involving citizens and civil society in both the preparation of the candidature and the planned implementation of the programme. This is evidenced by the manifesto signed by around 2,800 organisations and professionals, the use of participatory processes such as the open call and participatory budgeting. The panel positively notes that citizen participation is presented as a methodological approach underpinning the bid.
- The outreach strategy is structured across three complementary levels: universal accessibility, active inclusion and equality. The bid builds on the municipality's long-standing participatory governance frameworks, with particular attention given to children, young people and older adults, supported by the city's involvement in international frameworks such as UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and the Age Friendly Cities network.
- The bid outlines a range of measures to create sustainable opportunities for participation in cultural activities, including partnerships with universities and the planned expansion of the Creative Education Network. The panel positively notes that 35% of the programme budget is allocated to strengthening the cultural ecosystem and supporting cultural and creative stakeholders.
- The strategy linking outreach with education is supported through partnerships with universities and schools and the expansion of the Creative Education Network.
- While participation is strongly embedded in the governance model and programme methodology, the panel would have appreciated more insight on how participatory processes will translate into long-term impact on decision-making structures and measurable improvements in access to culture.

Management

- The bid proposes an operating budget of €55.74 million, with 89% expected from public sources and 11% from the private sector, with 60% of the budget allocated to programme activities. The financial framework also includes identified European

funding sources linked to specific projects. Capital expenditure is expected to reach €31.61 million through renovation of infrastructure directly linked to ECoC projects.

- Although the strategy for private sector income relies on local foundations already active in the cultural and social field, the panel notes that this is not yet sufficiently developed and would have appreciated more insight on the mechanisms through which the targets will be achieved.
- The bid proposes a distributed co-governance model, with the intention to establish an independent public foundation in 2026 for programme delivery. The proposed Board of Trustees is expected to include representatives of funding authorities and civil society stakeholders. The panel notes that while this approach reflects the participatory nature of the bid, additional detail and an organisational structure would have strengthened the understanding of decision-making structures, stakeholder representation and operational responsibilities within the Foundation.
- The programme management model foresees the use of lump-sum agreements with milestone-based disbursement, offering autonomy to individual projects while maintaining accountability. However, this raises questions regarding overall programme coherence, quality control and leadership capacity, particularly considering the relatively small core team of 12 people envisaged for delivery.
- The marketing and communication strategy and contingency planning provide clear overall direction, appropriate to the pre-selection stage.

Capacity to deliver

- The bid demonstrates broad political support at both local and regional level, with the candidature evolving from a city-led initiative into a shared project for the Canary Islands.
- The proposal builds on a well-developed existing cultural infrastructure network, mapped through a detailed infrastructure study updated in 2024. The bid is positioned as a process of activating and transforming existing venues and public spaces.
- The city benefits from solid experience as a major tourism destination and from hosting large-scale international events, including preparations linked to the FIFA World Cup 2030.
- The infrastructure strategy identifies three ECoC-related cultural projects with secured funding, alongside targeted investments to strengthen creation, experimentation and production spaces, including the expansion of residency structures. Long-term maintenance and management plans for these infrastructures are confirmed.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Las Palmas de Gran Canaria be shortlisted for the title of European Capital of Culture 2031.

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria 2031 presents a proposal built around the concept of *Geography Rebellion*, positioning the city's outermost European location as a basis for reflecting on cultural rights, mobility, diversity and the role of island territories within Europe. The panel recognises the ambition of this concept and encourages the team to explore its curatorial potential more boldly in the next phase. The bid demonstrates strong political commitment, a solid cultural infrastructure base and integrated participatory governance processes. The programme also reflects a wide range of artistic practices and proposes strong European and transatlantic connections.

The panel would welcome further clarity on governance-related matters to help ensure readiness, effective delivery, and legacy.

Recommendations for Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

- Strengthen the alignment between the concept of *Geography Rebellion* and the programme by clearly articulating and embedding the "rebellious" perspective in the programme content.
- Reinforce the dialogue between local cultural heritage and contemporary artistic practices by further developing the relationship between tradition and innovation in the programme.
- Ensure that the proposed cultural leadership and governance model provides sufficient artistic coherence and operational capacity to support the delivery of the programme.
- Clarify how the city's position as an outermost region of the European Union is translated into concrete programme content and partnerships.
- Further develop the strategy for engaging European and international audiences, including by strengthening synergies with existing cultural visitors and new target groups.
- Explore the European dimension of participatory processes by clarifying how these initiatives contribute to intercultural dialogue and exchange at European level.
- Ensure that participatory processes are clearly integrated within the monitoring and evaluation framework, including through measurable indicators of participation and impact.

- Clarify the organisational structure, governance and decision-making protocols of the proposed Foundation to ensure readiness for implementation and legacy planning.
- Validate and clarify financial support through the national authorities. Provide formalised written commitments confirming the allocation of operational funding and specify the mechanisms through which the funds will be disbursed, including the responsible institutions, the applicable procedures, and the expected timelines for their transfer to the city.
- Present a detailed logistical and financial model demonstrating how European artists, partners and audiences will be enabled to participate in the programme, given the city's outermost region location.

Oviedo

Oviedo's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2031 is built around *Amabilidadá* — a concept expressed in Asturian language - meaning kindness, reimagined as a political and ethical philosophy for rebuilding democratic trust and social cohesion. The bid frames culture as a public infrastructure of care, addressing Asturias's challenges as an ageing, post-industrial region affected by demographic decline, youth out-migration, and rural depopulation.

Its cultural programme is structured around three Asturian-language concepts: *Orbayu* (connection and democratic resilience), *Abellugu* (shelter and inclusion), and *Sestaferia* (rural-urban cooperation and legacy). Together they encompass 29 projects spanning the performing arts, ecology, health and culture, democratic dialogue, minority languages, and community co-creation.

The transformation of the former La Vega arms factory into a cultural hub — hosting an audiovisual centre, a central library, and a performing arts complex, alongside a new Centre for Contemporary Creation — serves as the bid's symbolic and physical centerpiece for long-term regeneration.

Oviedo, capital of the Principality of Asturias with 220,000 inhabitants, is home to the Campoamor Opera House, two symphony orchestras, and the Princess of Asturias Awards. The candidacy extends across all 78 municipalities of Asturias and is supported by the region's airport, serving two million passengers annually.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The Oviedo Strategic Plan for Culture 2025–2035 (PECO 2035), adopted in December 2025 and structured around five pillars, provides a credible strategic foundation, and the panel welcomes the unanimous cross-party support it received in the City Council as a strong guarantee of continuity beyond electoral cycles.

- A monitoring and evaluation structure is outlined, led by an independent academic unit — the Cultural Economics team of the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Oviedo — covering cultural, social, economic, environmental, and governance impacts, and the panel welcomes this appropriately independent approach.
- The link between the five pillars of *PECO 2035* and the specific priorities that the ECoC bid seeks to advance is, however, partially underdeveloped.
- The long-term impacts are currently underdeveloped in the bid, and the monitoring and evaluation framework remains basic in the level of detail provided.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme presents 29 clearly described projects across the three programme strands, covering a wide range of art forms — from opera and symphonic music to experimental art, digital media, minority language projects, and outdoor rural installations — and the panel values the authentic rootedness of the programme in the life and cultural assets of the city and region. The highly symbolic theme, in combination with the transformation of La Vega — a former arms factory into a cultural infrastructure — has great relevance for current European challenges and discourse.
- The panel welcomes the strong role of local communities in the programme development. An open call generated 120 project proposals, more than a third of which were incorporated into the programme by a ten-person curatorial team drawn from both urban and rural Asturian scenes.
- However, the relationship between the overarching concept of *Amabilidadá* and the three Asturian programme strands would benefit from further clarification.
- The panel also notes that the programme, while strong in individual projects, does not yet demonstrate the bold, cohesive artistic vision needed to mobilise a broad European audience, and the Asturian-language titles of the three programme strands may present navigability challenges for European audiences.

European Dimension

- The bid makes a compelling argument that Oviedo's experience with deindustrialisation, demographic ageing, and rural depopulation is directly relevant to the wider European debate on social cohesion and democratic renewal, and the panel recognises this as a genuine conceptual strength that connects the bid to urgent shared European concerns.
- European cooperation is well articulated in the programme structure, with almost every project including at least one European partner. The panel notes with appreciation the *Falares* project connecting minority-language festivals and artistic communities across multiple European countries; the residencies hosting Ukrainian

and Palestinian artists under the *Abellugu* strand; and explicitly transnational projects such as *Democracy on Stage* and *Tributaries*.

- However, the overall narrative linking the programme to Europe is not yet convincingly articulated, and the strategy to attract a broad European and international public relies largely on institutional channels — networks, universities, and diaspora outreach — without sufficiently addressing what will give European audiences a concrete reason to visit Oviedo in 2031.
- The panel also notes that, as the bid itself acknowledges, Oviedo has limited experience in managing international cultural cooperation at this scale, and the city will need to demonstrate clearly how it intends to build this capacity in the period ahead.

Outreach

- The bid demonstrates a strong participatory foundation, involving a large number of stakeholder interviews, more than 1,000 people in open community meetings, neighbourhood forums across urban and rural Asturias, and 120 project proposals from civil society, and the panel welcomes the genuine breadth and depth of this process.
- The panel particularly appreciates the volunteering programme starting in 2026 — which, by framing older residents as cultural mediators, turns the demographic challenge of an ageing population into a cultural resource — and recognises the *Wellbeing Lab* and *Open Stages* projects as addressing disability and mental health as structural programme themes with real connections to health services.
- The issues identified through consultation are not always sufficiently connected to specific programme responses: loneliness, described as a major social challenge in Asturias, is addressed primarily through volunteering; the LGBTIQ+ community is mentioned without being linked to specific projects; and access to culture in rural areas is a stated priority without clearly delineated ECoC projects addressing it.
- The volunteering programme, while conceptually strong, remains under-specified in terms of numbers, training, coordination structure, and budget, and the panel notes that participation beyond the ECoC year is not yet fully presented.

Management

- The proposed operating budget of €66 million, spanning 2026–2034, reflects sound and appropriate priorities, and the panel welcomes the €115.5 million capital investment plan alongside the city's commitment to raising its annual cultural budget.

- The panel also notes positively that the existing cultural budget has been ring-fenced separately from ECoC funding, that the first private sponsor has already been confirmed, and that the fundraising strategy has been presented with a realistic scope.
- The panel welcomes the involvement of the Sekuens regional agency, which brings genuine expertise in EU structural funds to the bid, and considers the approach to leveraging EU funding for infrastructure — including the approach to leveraging EU funding for *La Vega* infrastructure— a credible and well-grounded element of the financial strategy.
- The governance structure requires further development: The organisational chart is not yet clearly defined and requires clarification, especially on the roles and responsibilities of the General Management Team, including the Executive and the Artistic Director. The transition plan from the current bid structure to the operational delivery phase has also not been explained.

Capacity to deliver

- The panel welcomes the broad political support achieved for this candidacy — the City Council is unanimous, all 78 municipalities of Asturias have endorsed the bid through the Asturian Federation of Councils, the Principality of Asturias is an active partner, and the University of Oviedo is engaged — representing a level of regional consensus that the panel considers a genuine and significant asset.
- The panel also welcomes the financial grounding of the *La Vega* project, with €20 million from the Just Transition Fund already secured, and notes the city's confirmation during the hearing that construction is underway and the facility is on course to be operational by 2030.
- The programme is, however, heavily dependent on the delivery of *La Vega*, and no sufficient contingency plan for programmatic delivery has been presented in the event of delays or partial realisation.
- The panel further notes that the relationship between the new *La Vega* facility and the two existing large-scale regional cultural centres within 30 kilometres of Oviedo — *LABoral* in Gijón and *Centro Niemeyer* in Avilés — has not been clearly articulated.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Oviedo be shortlisted for the European Capital of Culture 2031. The bid presents a compelling and timely concept: *Amabilidad*, as a philosophy of democratic care, offering a distinctive and emotionally resonant framework relevant to Europe's contemporary challenges. The programme shows deep local roots, strong community participation, and a credible strategic basis in the newly adopted *PECO 2035*. The transformation of *La Vega* from arms factory to cultural hub, combined with unanimous political support across Asturias, provides an outstanding foundation for implementation.

However, the panel notes that further development is needed before the final bid, particularly regarding the coherence and distinctiveness of the artistic programme, a further broadened European dimension, clearer governance structures, and effective management of infrastructure risks. The panel believes Oviedo possesses the cultural substance and political will to meet these challenges and looks forward to a strengthened final proposal.

Recommendations for Oviedo

- Articulate more explicitly how the ECoC programme connects to the five pillars of *PECO 2035* and how the title functions as a catalyst for the specific transformation objectives of the cultural strategy, with clear outcomes and measurable targets.
- Develop a significantly more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, including ECoC-specific quantitative and qualitative indicators, baseline data, and an evaluation timeline extending beyond the title year.
- Strengthen the coherence and distinctiveness of the artistic programme, clarifying the relationship between *Amabilidad* and the three Asturian programme strands, and ensure the programme can be communicated in an accessible and compelling way to European audiences.
- Develop a strategic and detailed European audience attraction plan, translating existing European partner networks into concrete co-productions and programme content, and broadening geographic partnerships to include Central and Eastern Europe.
- Clarify the organisational structure, including the governance chart, the respective roles of the Executive Director and the General Coordinator, and the transition plan from bid phase to delivery phase.
- Validate and clarify financial support through the national authorities. Provide formalised written commitments confirming the allocation of operational funding and specify the mechanisms through which the funds will be disbursed, including the responsible institutions, the applicable procedures, and the expected timelines for their transfer to the city.
- Present a detailed contingency plan for the programme in the case that La Vega infrastructure is delayed or only partially delivered and clarify how the new facility will complement the existing regional cultural offer.
- The panel encourages Oviedo to present a clearer plan in the final bid book for the use, governance, and long-term budget of the La Vega factory beyond the ECoC year.
- Specify the volunteering programme with concrete targets, training arrangements, coordination structure, and budget, and clarify how the participation model will be sustained beyond the ECoC year.

- The panel strongly recommends that Oviedo presents in the final bid, a concrete capacity-building plan with named international partners, a recruitment plan for international cooperation roles, and a specific timeline.

Palma

Palma's bid, titled *Mediterranean In Motion*, focuses on using culture as a transformative force to redefine tourism, regenerate urban spaces, and foster sustainability. The bid emphasises the Mediterranean as a method for cultural and urban innovation, aiming to position Palma as a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable European cultural hub.

Palma, the capital of the Balearic Islands, is a historic Mediterranean hub known for its rich cultural heritage, including Roman, Islamic, Gothic, and Modernist influences. As a major tourist destination, it plays a vital role in Spain's economy and serves as a crossroads of cultures, blending tradition, innovation, and hospitality.

Palma is located on the island of Mallorca, the largest of Spain's Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea, and it serves as the capital of both. Palma's bid for the European Capital of Culture actively involves regional cooperation with the Balearic Islands and the Council of Mallorca. The initiative integrates surrounding municipalities, cultural institutions, educational centres, and local communities into its programming.

Palma has a population of approximately 450,000 residents, making it one of the largest cities in Spain. It is a major cultural and economic hub in the region, renowned for its historical landmarks, vibrant arts scene, and tourism industry.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- Palma's cultural strategy extends beyond the European Capital of Culture year, ensuring sustainable cultural activities until 2036. Key initiatives include the *Palma 2031 Clause*, which mandates accessibility, a year-round cultural calendar, and open data, as well as transformative projects like the Palma Culture & Innovation Bay and Districte de les Arts. However, the relationship between the overarching strategic framework with the listed ECoC projects is not clearly articulated.
- Palma plans to strengthen its cultural and creative sectors by integrating them with education, tourism, science, health, and business. The bid mentions several transformative projects and initiatives, such as *Mediterranean Capacity Lab* providing training in cultural management, mediation, and sustainable production, and *Culture-Hospitality Mixed Fund* fostering collaboration between cultural industries and the tourism sector.
- The ECoC title is expected to transform Palma into a vibrant cultural hub, fostering knowledge production, accessibility, and community participation. It will drive social cohesion and aims to create a regenerative economy, mitigate tourism

seasonality, and attract talent and innovation. While the long-term vision sounds ambitious, the panel lacks specific targets post 2031.

- Although the bid refers to structures such as Mediation and Data Office, the monitoring and evaluation plan is underdeveloped for this stage.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme concept *Mediterranean In Motion* is an artistic and urban method, where tourism and connectivity are central to the narrative and the programme structure. The programme is organised through three axes: *Hospitality that Creates*, *A System that Cooperates*, and *Each Project Remains*, and organised by travel motivations: *A Learning*, *B Producing*, *C Connecting* and *D Care*. The bid places strong emphasis on methodology and process, including structured frameworks for project development. These motivations are unfolded in 16 programme lines. Each programme line presents 1-2 preliminary demonstration projects. In addition, 9 milestones project are presented with short descriptions.
- As the proposal focuses heavily on methodology rather than projects, and the exemplary, unconfirmed projects are described only briefly with very limited information, it is not possible to evaluate the artistic scope and quality of the programme nor to evaluate the variety of different art and cultural forms. It also remains unclear whether some projects already exist or will be created specifically for the title year.
- Palma2031 plans to involve local artists and cultural institutions in the process through e.g. digital platform palma2031.eu and open calls. However, as the project descriptions don't include information on artists, cultural institutions and other partners, it is difficult to estimate how this is reflected in the programme.
- Based on the bid, heritage layers going back to Roman times are linked with contemporary digital arts, art-science collaborations, and circular design. However, the explanation of how the programme will combine local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative and experimental cultural expressions lacks concrete examples due to the limited amount of information on the projects.
- Overall, the programme is very underdeveloped and artistically and conceptually insufficient. The programme structure is overly complex and constructed. The bid seems to be more a tourism-based methodology instead of an artistic concept and a year-long cultural programme created specifically for the title year, as the ECoC rules require.

European Dimension

- Palma positions itself as a model for other European port and island cities — places dealing with the same mix of overtourism, climate stress, migration, and heritage

pressure. The bid proposes three shared European structures: the *Mediterranean Young Lab* (training and exchanges for young people), the *Mediterranean Capacity Lab* (knowledge-sharing for cultural professionals), and the *Mediterranean Data Atlas* (open data on tourism and culture that other cities can use). Historical figures like Ramon Llull, Joan Miró, and Chopin — all connected to Palma — are used to frame a conversation about European cultural identity.

- The bid highlights common European cultures and heritage through projects like *Murallas de Luz*, which reimagines historic city walls as environmental and cultural landmarks, and *La Sibil·la 2031*, which celebrates shared European traditions in a modern, inclusive format. It addresses current European themes such as the green deal, digital transition, and social cohesion through initiatives like the *Mediterranean Data Atlas* and *Mediterranean In Motion Forum*. However, as the European dimension is framed primarily through the Mediterranean perspective, the panel questions how the wider European context is addressed.
- The programme primarily emphasises connections with Mediterranean territories, networks, and partners. However, these links are described in rather general terms, with only a limited number of specific cities and networks identified. In comparison, Northern and Eastern Europe appear less prominently represented, with only a single reference to a northern port.
- The strategy to attract the interest of a broad European and international public is underdeveloped.

Outreach

- The bid indicates that a participatory preparation process started in 2023 and included over 120 sectoral and community meetings to map the cultural ecosystem and identify structural needs. Community engagement runs through Neighbourhood Creative Councils, local bodies that co-design projects at district level. The Palma2031.eu participatory portal is used as a transparency and consultation platform. While the overall structure is presented as participatory and embedded within the community, it remains unclear which concrete projects or processes are expected to result from these participatory mechanisms and what are the tangible outputs of this engagement.
- Inclusive cultural participation is ensured through accessibility by default, integrating measures like sign language, easy reading, audio descriptions, tactile models, and universal design into all projects from the planning stage. The Palma 365 Card offers free or discounted access for vulnerable groups, and cultural activities are decentralised to neighbourhoods, markets, and public spaces to reduce barriers to participation. Additionally, training programs for mediators and volunteers ensure that cultural activities are accessible and meaningful for all, including people with disabilities and the elderly.

- However, the bid does not provide many details on how the most vulnerable groups will be effectively reached, beyond general commitments to accessibility. The bid does also not define clearly which the 'vulnerable groups' or 'groups with less access' are, and the indicators focus mainly on numbers of participants or activities, rather than measurable social impact on specific target groups.
- The *Palma 2031 Curriculum* integrates art, climate, and data into school education, with university links for older students, while the *Mediterranean Young Lab* focuses on engaging young people through seasonal schools, citizen science programs, and co-design workshops. *Laboratori Palma 2031* is expected to generate toolkits, protocols and manuals, but the bid lacks concrete examples of prototypes already implemented.

Management

- A public-private foundation Fundació Palma 2031 is proposed as the governance structure for the ECoC involving local government, island council and regional government. The panel finds the governance structure rather complex with potentially overlapping administrative layers and notes with concern that the implementing foundation has not yet been established.
- The operating budget amounts to €48,5 million, with 65% for programme expenses, 12% for promoting and marketing, 18% for salaries, overheads and administration, and 5% for others. 85% of funding is expected from public sources and a capital investment plan of approximately €274,7 million is envisaged for broader urban development plans, not only ECoC-specific infrastructural projects. The private funding is not conceived as traditional sponsorship, but rather as structural co-investment through the *Culture-Hospitality Mixed Fund*. However, given the limited information available on the *Culture-Hospitality Mixed Fund* - its formal structure, operational and strategic management - assessing its financial reliability remains challenging.
- The bid indicates that the management structure will be established in 2026 if the city is shortlisted and therefore does not provide details in this regard. In addition, there is limited information on the anticipated size and composition of the operational team. As no organisational chart is included, institutional relationships also remain unclear. About the CEO and the artistic director, the bid mentions that they will be selected through an 'international competition' in 2026, which is not sufficient information even for the preselection phase.
- Contingency planning is adequate and presented with mitigation measures addressing risks in four areas: cultural-artistic, social, economic-financial, and organisational.

Capacity to deliver

- The bid indicates support from different levels of local and regional government, although the formal status of political support from the Council of Mallorca and the Government of the Balearic Islands remains unclear, as the bid only states that they have 'expressed willingness' to co-finance the ECoC.
- Much of the investment predates the ECoC bid and belongs to existing urban development plans. It remains unclear which projects would not happen without the ECoC, and which infrastructures are essential to the cultural programme. The strategy linking tourism infrastructure with the cultural programme is not fully explained.
- The city has strong tourism infrastructure and experience hosting international visitors. The bid lists a dense network of cultural venues, and a functioning destination management organisation (Palma 365).

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Palma is not shortlisted for the title of European Capital of Culture for Spain in 2031.

Overall, the bid does not sufficiently meet the criteria requirements for pre-selection. The panel finds further development still needed in many criteria throughout the bid. In the core of the ECoC's eligibility criteria is the requirement that every bid must be based on a cultural programme with a strong European dimension. Thus, it is regrettable that the cultural programme and structure and the artistic concept as well as European dimension are highly underdeveloped.

As the bid states, Palma does not aim to increase the volume of cultural programming or attract more visitors, as they have enough both. Instead, the focus is on transforming the tourism system and cultural programming into a sustainable, meaningful, and participatory infrastructure. Understanding the local circumstances and needs, and the valuable principle to increase collaboration across sectors, the panel ponders if the ECoC with its strict criteria is the right platform to advance Palma's aspirations.

Potries

The Potries 2031 bid is built around the concept of *Pride of Villages*, positioning small rural communities as active contributors to European cultural life and advocating for stronger recognition of village-based cultural ecosystems within the European project. The bid presents Potries as a good example of how sustained cultural policies and culture itself strengthens social cohesion, sense of belonging, promote diversity, increase the

competitiveness of the cultural and creative sectors, protect and promote equality, active citizenship, rights and values.

With a population of around 1,000 inhabitants, Potries proposes a programme structured around three interconnected pillars: Memory (oral traditions), Craftsmanship (a 500-year ceramic heritage), and Landscape (water systems, agriculture and ecological restoration). Rooted in the wider La Safor comarca, including cooperation with nearby towns and villages such as Gandia and Oliva, the bid seeks to extend collaboration to small Valencian villages, minority-language communities and European ceramic networks.

Potries' candidature seeks to demonstrate that small villages can also contribute to shaping European imaginaries, highlighting the universal value of community-based culture and promoting a sustainable cultural model rooted in place, people and shared heritage.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The bid is embedded within a long-standing strategic approach to cultural development, with Potries already implementing Cultural Strategic Plans since 2017 and currently preparing its third Cultural Strategic Plan for 2027–2031, to be developed in dialogue with the ECoC candidature.
- The proposal presents 2031 as a culminating moment within a continuous policy framework, rather than a stand-alone event, with legacy actions expected to be integrated into the subsequent 2032–2036 strategy.
- The panel notes that limited information is provided on the local cultural and creative ecosystem, crucial to understand the strategic deliverables of the town in view of the ECoC objectives.
- The bid frames the ECoC year as a moment of shared pride, experimentation and intergenerational exchange between villages and cultures, aligned with the overarching concept. The bid highlights collaboration with neighbouring towns and villages although the role and level of engagement of partner villages would benefit from further clarification.
- The monitoring and evaluation framework is developed in collaboration with the University of Valencia (Econcult) and structured around a set of indicative impact dimensions aligned with Agenda 2030 and the Faro Convention. The panel notes that the plan could have benefitted from the specificities of the town's context and the objectives of the ECoC candidature for more tailored indicators.

Cultural and artistic content

- The cultural programme of Potries 2031 is structured around the overarching concept of *Pride of Villages*, combined with the methodology of "educreation", which brings together learning, participation and artistic production. The programme activates three layers of Potries' cultural identity: Memory, Craftsmanship and

Landscape and is articulated through three complementary axes: Extraordinary Culture, Ruralities and Cultural Diversity. The relationship between the three core and the three programme axes required clearer articulation.

- The artistic vision is clearly framed through the idea that culture emerges from everyday rural life and collective practices, addressing questions of intergenerational transmission, depopulation and environmental change.
- The programme presents 12 projects with subprojects, covering a range of artistic and cultural forms including oral memory archives, ceramics and craft-based practices, landscape interventions, festivals, artistic residencies and research activities. The panel notes the strong grounding of the programme in the tangible and intangible heritage of Potries, particularly its ceramic traditions, water-management heritage and agricultural landscapes. However, innovation and experimentation are less strongly articulated, and a significant number of projects focus on infrastructural development and capacity building.
- While the programme includes references to cooperation with other Valencian villages and European ceramic networks, the European dimension of individual projects remains limited.
- Local artists and cultural organisations have been actively involved in the conception of the programme through grassroots and collaborative processes. At the same time, only limited information is provided regarding the artists, partners and selection procedures for key initiatives.

European Dimension

- The bid positions small rural communities as active contributors to European cultural life and highlights shared challenges such as rural depopulation, ecological transition, cultural rights and linguistic diversity. In principle they are reflected in the programme's focus on memory, craftsmanship and landscape as common elements of European rural heritage.
- However, European cooperation remains somewhat aspirational with limited insight on European partnerships and collaborations. In particular, it would be helpful to provide more detail on the variety and scope of joint projects, as well as the nature of working relationships with partner organisations and other ECoC cities.
- The bid introduces the idea of a European rural constellation connecting small villages across the continent, offering an original perspective on the role of peripheral territories in shaping European cultural dialogue. The panel welcomes its potential contribution to broadening the understanding of European cultural cooperation beyond metropolitan centres.

- The strategy to engage a broader European audience remains limited at this stage. The proposal identifies target audiences interested in community-based culture, craftsmanship, landscape and sustainability; however, additional clarification would strengthen understanding of how Potries intends to attract artists and participants from a wider European context beyond its surrounding networks.

Outreach

- The bid shows a high level of citizen participation in both the preparation and the planned implementation of the candidature, structured through several participatory bodies. The panel appreciates the bid's strong culture of volunteering and civic engagement, with local associations also actively contributing to the design and delivery of programme activities. However, it is unclear how these participatory mechanisms will function after 2031 and whether they will have institutional support or longevity.
- A neighbourhood mediation system is foreseen as part of the implementation phase, with residents acting as intermediaries between programme management and the community, collecting feedback and facilitating participation processes during the title year.
- The bid refers to outreach to 31 municipalities in the surrounding territory. While the intention to extend participation beyond the village itself is clear, further insight on the nature of this engagement and the roles of partner municipalities is needed.
- The panel welcomes the Mobile Culture Programme, a cultural mediation unit bringing activities to residents who cannot easily access them, supported by social services and university students in art mediation.
- While the proposal refers to the involvement of schools and young people, no specific projects are defined, providing limited understanding of how their participation will be structured and sustained beyond the title year.
- Much of the participatory framework, including the artistic advisory team, relies on voluntary engagement; however, no structured volunteer programme is identified.

Management

- Potries 2031 proposes an operating budget of €1.9 million, complemented by €4 million in capital investment. 50% will be allocated to the programme, 45% to administration and 5% for marketing. Funding is expected to be obtained primarily from public sources (95%), with a limited contribution from private partners (5%).

- While the panel appreciates the coherent scope and scale of the proposed programme, it is not fully convinced that the allocated resources and the distribution of the operating budget will be sufficient to achieve the expected impact of a European Capital of Culture.
- The proposed management structure builds on the existing municipal administration, supported by a Capitality Council and a 12-member administrative structure during the preparatory phase (2026–2029), followed by a temporary autonomous body with three positions to oversee delivery during the title year and evaluation phase (2030–2032).
- The organisational structure remains relatively light in relation to the scope of the proposed programme and ECoC aspirations. The panel would have appreciated further insight on roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes, particularly regarding the temporary autonomous body and leadership structure, such as a general or artistic director.
- The management model relies significantly on voluntary participation and small-scale municipal capacity, and further clarification would be beneficial regarding staffing resources, operational continuity and the institutionalisation of governance and participation mechanisms beyond the title year.

Capacity to deliver

- A Municipal Council resolution committing to the candidacy was adopted on 22 December 2025, and support is also indicated from the Generalitat Valenciana, the Diputació de València, 15 surrounding municipalities and academic partners.
- The bid relies substantially on voluntary engagement but does not present a structured volunteering programme, including targets, training, or coordination structures. Given Potries' population of approximately 1,000 inhabitants, this gap raises substantive questions about the community's capacity to implement a year-long ECoC programme, even with support from the wider La Safor region.
- The bid builds on a modest existing cultural infrastructure, complemented by approximately €4 million in capital investment focused on adapting current facilities. The panel notes that the planning and delivery framework for the proposed infrastructure investments is not fully detailed and is not fully convinced that Potries has the adequate and viable infrastructure to hold the title.
- Although the surrounding region offers significant accommodation capacity (approx. 20,000 beds), supporting visitor demand beyond Potries, the bid provides limited information on visitor logistics and accessibility.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Potries is not shortlisted as European Capital of Culture in 2031.

The panel acknowledges the clarity of the *Pride of Villages* concept and recognises the strong commitment of Potries to culture as a driver of rural resilience, intergenerational exchange and territorial cooperation. The candidature presents a valuable perspective on the role of small villages in European cultural life. The bid presents a coherent locally grounded vision and demonstrates sustained municipal investment in cultural development, as well as meaningful community participation in the preparation of the candidature.

At the same time, the panel considers that the proposal remains limited in scale and operational capacity. In particular, the European dimension of the programme remains underdeveloped, and the bid would have benefited from stronger articulation of partnerships, the level of artistic ambition and experimentation, the clarity of governance structures and the adequacy of financial and human resources to deliver the proposed activities.

Toledo

Toledo's bid for the European Capital of Culture 2031 is built around the concept of Shaping Culture — positioning culture as the driving force shaping society, the city, and Europe's future. Drawing on Toledo's historic role as a crossroads of knowledge and translation, the bid envisions a new cultural and urban model that balances heritage and innovation, as well as the urban and natural environments.

The programme is structured around four axes — Interpret, Design, Renaturalise, and Coexist — comprising 32 projects across craftsmanship, performing arts, ecological regeneration, and community participation. It seeks to reinterpret Toledo's humanist legacy for contemporary Europe, strengthen craftsmanship and design as sustainable creative industries, and build a lasting collaborative cultural ecosystem rooted in citizen co-governance.

Embedded within the city's Strategic Cultural Plan Horizon 2030, the ECoC aligns with the €21.65 million Toledo Emerge infrastructure programme as its key legacy driver. Toledo, a UNESCO World Heritage city and the historic capital of Castilla-La Mancha, is internationally known as the "City of the Three Cultures." The candidacy extends across the region through the Living Plateau network, uniting municipalities such as Talavera de la Reina, Cuenca, Almagro, and Sigüenza, with unanimous regional political support.

Contribution to the long-term strategy

- The bid references the Strategic Cultural Plan of the City of Toledo Horizon 2030 and the Castilla-La Mancha Strategic Tourism Plan 2024–2030 as its strategic anchors, and the panel welcomes the concrete proposed investment — €21.65

million funding already approved in October 2024. The panel also welcomes the steady growth of the municipal cultural budget, which now represents 19.6% of the city's total budget, as evidence of genuine institutional commitment to culture as a long-term policy priority.

- The panel welcomes the Toledo Emerge programme as a vehicle for urban regeneration that directly links cultural investment with neighbourhood cohesion and the reactivation of vacant heritage buildings, and considers this one of the most concrete and credible legacy elements in the bid.
- The panel observes, however, that a formally approved cultural strategy is not yet in place at the time of application, and that the indication of which priorities of the broader cultural framework the ECoC is specifically seeking to contribute to remains underdeveloped. The monitoring and evaluation framework has not been presented with sufficient detail, including more tailored indicators and a clearly identified entity responsible for its implementation.
- The major flagship initiatives — including the *Design Biennial*, the *Artesanum crafts fair*, and the *Europa Vivere! Congress* — have been presented with sufficient detail including how they will be sustained beyond 2031 and identified responsible bodies, funding sources, and governance arrangements.

Cultural and artistic content

- The programme's concept of *Shaping Culture* is structured around four axes — *Interpret*, *Design*, *Renaturalise*, and *Coexist* — presenting 32 projects spanning craftsmanship, performing arts, ecological regeneration, and community participation. The panel notes several innovative projects and recognises that Toledo's density of registered artisan workshops provides a credible and distinctive foundation for the Design axis. The panel also values the programme's ambition to address themes of intercultural dialogue and ecological regeneration through participatory and community-based practices.
- The panel notes with interest the project *The Expanded Light*, which brings together generations of artistic practice in a meaningful dialogue between heritage and contemporary digital art.
- However, despite the focus on shaping culture and design, the programme lacks the richness suggested by the vision and does not yet fully explore the potential combination of local cultural heritage and traditional art forms with new, innovative, and experimental expressions.
- Furthermore, it remains largely unclear how the four programme axes are interconnected in practice through a consistent curatorial narrative.

European Dimension

- The bid frames its European dimension through Toledo's historic identity as a city of translation and intercultural exchange, referencing the School of Translators and a proposed European Network of Translating Cities. The panel recognises the intellectual strength of this framing and welcomes the collaboration with Malta 2031 on a crafts exchange as a promising starting point for transnational engagement.
- The panel also notes that the chosen themes of intercultural dialogue and coexistence are of clear relevance for a wider European debate on artificial intelligence, intercultural communication, and knowledge exchange.
- The panel considers, however, that the European dimension is currently underdeveloped.
- There is insufficient information on how Toledo's programme engages citizens of other European countries and fosters genuine two-way cultural exchange, including more diverse international engagement across a wider range of art forms.

Outreach

- The bid outlines a participatory approach through thematic working groups, public forums, and a network of neighbourhood cultural nodes — the *Baluartes de la Cultura* — with local ambassadors active since late 2025. The panel appreciates the civic engagement reflected in this approach, and welcomes the attention given to universal accessibility and the inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities under the principle of *Nothing about us without us*.
- The panel welcomes the rural outreach dimension, which connects Toledo to depopulating towns in Castilla-La Mancha through the *Living Plateau* network, and considers this a socially relevant and territorially ambitious element of the bid that reflects a strong commitment to addressing the challenges of regional depopulation.
- The *Network of Coexistence* and the programme as a whole currently provide insufficient information on how specific priority groups targeted and how engagement moves beyond consultation towards genuine co-creation.
- The panel also notes that the outreach strategy, including the volunteer programme - which could represent an important vehicle for civic engagement and community ownership of the project - is currently underdeveloped.

Management

- The proposed operating budget for Toledo 2031 is €31.2 million and an additional €29.45 million in capital expenditure is planned through the Toledo Emerge programme and EU Next Generation funds.

- The panel notes positively that the sustained growth of the cultural budget provides a credible indicator of the city's financial capacity to support ECoC delivery.
- However, the panel notes that the governance bodies and mechanisms are not yet fully developed. The three supporting councils — Institutional, Business and Patronage, and Social — are described as having an advisory role only, and insufficient information has been provided on how citizen and civil society voices will be meaningfully integrated into governance and decision-making beyond consultation.
- The marketing and communication strategy has not been presented with sufficient detail, including specific audience targets, a country-by-country international plan, and a more clearly articulated digital dimension.

Capacity to deliver

- The panel welcomes the strong cross-party political support at the city, provincial, and regional level, and notes that the Toledo Emerge programme — with €21.65 million already approved — provides a credible and concrete foundation for infrastructure delivery.
- The panel acknowledged with appreciation that the Royal Foundation of Toledo, which successfully mobilised €12 million for the El Greco anniversary in 2014, is among the supporters of the candidacy.
- However, the deliverables, timelines, and responsibilities of the planned infrastructure projects have not been fully or convincingly presented.
- The panel also notes that the Toledo 2031 Foundation, the body intended to manage the delivery of the programme, has not yet been established, and that no timeline for its creation, staffing structure, or recruitment plan has been presented — a significant organisational risk at this stage of the competition.

Conclusion

The panel recommends that Toledo not be shortlisted for the European Capital of Culture 2031. The bid did not sufficiently meet the criteria for pre-selection, requiring significant development across all six areas. The absence of a formally adopted cultural strategy and limited detail in several sections further weakened the case.

While the concept drew on Toledo's heritage and its identity as the "City of the Three Cultures," the proposal lacked a clearly articulated strategy, a distinctive artistic vision, and a convincingly European dimension. Despite local cultural vitality, civic engagement, and strong political commitment, the bid did not demonstrate Toledo's readiness or artistic ambition at a European level.

Nonetheless, the panel acknowledges that Toledo's rich artisanal heritage and initiatives like Toledo Emerge are strong assets. The momentum generated by the bid could still

foster a meaningful long-term cultural vision for the city and the wider Castilla-La Mancha region.

General recommendations

The following general recommendations apply to the shortlisted candidates.

There is a considerable step-change between the pre-selection and final selection bid books. Therefore, it is strongly advised that the shortlisted cities develop the bid for the final selection to meet the required quality level of a European Capital of Culture.

The panel expects significant progress in the final bid book to fully meet the **objectives and six criteria of the European Capital of Culture Action** as outlined in the Decision, reflecting the panel's recommendations.

Studying the evaluations of recent European Capitals of Culture (since 2013) and the monitoring reports of recently designated ECoCs will provide valuable insight. These are available on the European Commission website.

The panel also urges **the national authorities to promptly indicate the State financing share** or framework, at a minimum, for the ECoC 2031 as this information is crucial for the candidates to make accurate plans moving forward, and for the panel to assess the final bids.

In the panel's view, given the global challenges of recent years, a more comprehensive contingency plan with suitable alternatives should be an integral part of long-term planning of the ECoC. This presents a significant challenge, but also an opportunity to rethink and establish sustainable cultural models.

The final bid book essentially becomes, **de facto, a contract for the designated city**, outlining the artistic vision, objectives, projects, directions, financing, and management of the programme. Close adherence to the bid book is a key factor when the panel makes a recommendation to the Commission regarding the payment of the Melina Mercouri prize after the monitoring phase.

In the final selection bid book, the candidate must address all questions in the final selection questionnaire, included in Annex of the call for applications. For the next and final stage of the competition, the panel expects a considerably more developed section on the proposed artistic vision, cultural and artistic programme, and the European dimension.

The panel has a responsibility to protect the long-term brand of the European Capital of Culture programme. With the level of international attention now given to ECoCs, policy decisions across a broad range (not just cultural) may affect the city's reputation and, by extension, the ECoC image. The panel expects the candidates to be aware of this and take proactive steps to minimise negative international and national perceptions through policy changes, rather than relying on marketing or public relations efforts.

The panel would like to remind the candidates of the correct formulation of the European Capital of Culture title, which must not be referred to as "Capital of Culture" or any similar terms. It is important that the title is correctly used when communicating about the initiative to avoid any confusion and promote the action adequately.

The candidates progressing to the second stage should ensure that the bid book includes the following, in line with the final selection questionnaire:

- Clear commitments from all candidacy partners, demonstrated through projects and budget allocations.
- Clear project outlines, with named and committed local, national, EU, and international partners.
- A strong European dimension throughout the bid.
- Clearly developed outreach models.
- A clear organisational structure, including decision-making processes.
- A clear budget breakdown, with distinctions between operational and capital expenditure.

Contribution to the Long-term Strategy

A formally approved cultural strategy for the city must be in place before submitting the final bid book. The panel expects the final bid books to focus more tightly on the priorities of the cultural strategy that relate to the ECoC project, its expected outcomes, and how resources will evolve over the coming years. The cultural strategy should address the action plan and include plans for sustaining cultural activities beyond the title year. The expected legacy of the ECoC should also be clearly described.

An ECoC represents a transformational opportunity for a city. The pre-selection bid books generally outline why a city is seeking the title. These objectives should be clearly stated, as there is a tendency to perceive the ECoC as a panacea for every urban challenge. A critical area requiring further elaboration is the expected visible change in the urban landscape. The panel expects a more focused explanation of how the programme vision, themes, and activities will link to outcomes, and how monitoring and evaluation will contribute to long-term legacy. There are substantial literature and research available for cities to explore the cultural, urban development, and social benefits of an ECoC.

The evaluation section of the bid book should receive more attention in the final phase, particularly in relation to research for baseline data. The panel expects to see ECoC-specific success indicators. However, the monitoring and evaluation section should focus on priority objectives rather than merely compiling statistics and data. One priority should clearly address how the ECoC will meet the European dimension criterion.

Capacity building should be comprehensive, considering the needs of all cultural players as well as the hospitality industry. The cultural and creative sectors (CCS) should be

integrated into the cultural and artistic programme and linked to a mapping and needs analysis of the sector.

Cultural and Artistic Programme

The final selection will have a strong focus on the cultural programme. The panel recommends an open-minded and daring artistic approach, embracing new and experimental ideas. The vision presented in the bids could benefit from deeper consideration to clarify unique elements that specifically tie the concept to the city, rather than presenting a generic concept applicable to any European city. Consistency between the selected vision and all other elements of the bid must be ensured. Innovation and originality should be pursued not just in theory, but in practice.

The panel expects more details on the programme, its projects, and partners, differentiating between those who have committed to firm participation and those who are still potential partners. ECoC programmes typically cover a wide range of art forms, including creative interventions in social issues. The budget should outline each major project's budget, to provide the panel with an understanding of the balance between projects in the programme.

The panel recommends a more focused approach to digital cultural content as an integral part of the programme, rather than just relying on social media promotions. Additionally, more attention should be given to the sustainability of the projects - culturally, ecologically, socially, and economically - to ensure the legacy of the ECoC is substantial.

European Dimension

An ECoC provides a city with the opportunity to promote itself internationally, but this is only half the story. Developing European cooperation requires strategic partnerships with artists, cultural organisations, and institutions across Europe. These relationships should extend beyond former and future ECoCs, existing European cultural networks, or twin cities.

The European dimension is understood as a twofold process: it encompasses presenting the city's contribution to Europe's cultural diversity, while also offering opportunities to further deepen local citizens' understanding of that diversity and to strengthen connections with communities in other countries through cultural and related initiatives. The panel expects to see how the European dimension is concretely reflected in the cultural and artistic programme. This is what primarily differentiates an ECoC from a national city of culture.

The panel expects to see a significantly increased focus on European partnerships, including co-productions, co-curations, conferences, networking, and visiting artists. The shortlisted cities should encourage their cultural operators to engage actively with European cultural networks.

A key element of the European dimension is the ability to attract visitors from across Europe and beyond. The programme should be attractive and distinct from the typical tourist offers of the city or region. The panel advises the candidate to carefully consider

a strategic communication plan that aligns with the cultural and artistic programme and an international marketing vision.

Outreach

The audience development strategy should be much further developed in the final bids, including both online and offline measures and channels for all identified target groups. The final bid book should approach audience development from a long-term, strategic perspective.

Special attention should be paid to reaching harder-to-reach audiences, such as underrepresented communities with diverse cultural backgrounds, the elderly, people with disabilities, the LGBT+ community, and others outside city centres or temporarily in the city.

The panel expects the candidates to show how the audience development strategies of the main cultural organisations, independent operators and NGOs relate to the ECoC programme.

Management

New times of uncertainty demand new approaches to management. Special attention should be given to risk assessment in the final bid book, including a thorough analysis of the potential impacts of global challenges during the preparation and implementation phases.

Regarding management models, the panel recommends learning from other ECoCs' experiences while avoiding the direct adoption of pre-existing models. The delivery team will play a critical role in the success of the ECoC. The cities should clearly outline the best model for ensuring the quality and independence of the artistic management of the project, with consideration that much of the outlining of the cultural programme is made already during the selection phase. Recruitment processes and staffing arrangements from 2026 to 2031 should be well-defined, including plans for secondments, interns, and volunteers.

Marketing for an ECoC should go beyond standard information dissemination to include a compelling narrative of European importance. It is vital that marketing communicates the city's European message, aligned with the artistic vision, rather than focusing solely on city branding.

Capacity to Deliver

The candidates should confirm that the bid book, including the overall vision, concept, and financial commitments, has formal approval from the mayor, city and region, councils, and all political parties. The panel also recommends that the candidates and the national government have a shared understanding of the financial contributions.

The candidates are reminded that an ECoC requires a special programme for the year, in addition to the normal cultural offering. The panel expects detailed information on

managerial capacity, both in the city and region, to manage a programme of such depth and range. Capacity building should align with local and regional development plans and be planned comprehensively. The city should also plan strong capacity-building programmes to meet the scope of the ECoC, as it exceeds current local capacities. If projects are planned to be funded through competitive EU programmes, such as Creative Europe, this should be clearly indicated.

Information on urban development, infrastructure programmes, cultural heritage restoration projects, and new cultural venues is useful at pre-selection, but the final selection should focus on projects that directly impact the ECoC programme. The candidates should provide a timeline and realistic estimate for completion of these projects, as well as a plan B for ensuring timely implementation of the programme even in case of delays.

The final bid book should clearly indicate how these capital projects will be managed, including management structures, funds and planning.

Signed

Toni Attard (Rapporteur)

Teresa Badia Dalmases (Vice Chair)

Pablo Berástegui Lozano

Csaba Borboly

Roberta Ferrarini

Suvi Innilä (Rapporteur)

Erni Kask

Tanja Mlaker (Chair)

Matthias Ripp (Rapporteur)

Małgorzata Szablowska

April 2026

