



# **Bad Ischl**

## **European Capital of Culture 2024**

**First Monitoring Meeting  
Report by the ECOC Expert Panel**

**Virtual Meeting, September 2020**

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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

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## Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 25 September 2020 between the panel and Bad Ischl, one of the three European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2024<sup>1</sup>. Bad Ischl was nominated as the European Capital of Culture 2024 on 12 December 2019 by the Austrian Federal Chancellery, on the basis of the recommendation included in the panel selection report<sup>2</sup>; its bidbook is available on the Bad Ischl 2024 website<sup>3</sup>. This report is addressed to the SKGT 24 GmbH institution (delivery entity of the ECOC year in Bad Ischl) and will be published on the European Commission's website<sup>4</sup>.

## Attendance

### The panel members:

Sylvia Amann, Cristina Farinha (Rapporteur) and Agnieszka Wlazel, appointed by the European Parliament 2018–2020;

Paulina Florjanowicz, Dessislava Gavriloova (Chair) and Pierre Sauvageot, appointed by the Council of the EU 2019-2021;

Beatriz Garcia, Jiří Suchánek and Jelle Burggraaff, appointed by the European Commission 2020–2022;

Alin Adrian Nica, appointed by the European Committee of the Regions 2019-2021;

Dominik Nostitz-Rieneck, appointed by the Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Public Service and Sports.

### For Bad Ischl 2024

MEP & Chair of Supervisory Board SKGT 24 GmbH  
Mayor of Bad Ischl  
Interim CEO SKGT24 GmbH  
Three members of the Artistic Directory and Programme Development  
Communication & PR, Evaluation & Monitoring

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, Public Service and Sports.

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<sup>1</sup> The European Capitals of Culture action is governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and the Council for the titles 2020 to 2033, which provides for three formal monitoring meetings between designated cities and the panel. See: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L\\_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.132.01.0001.01.ENG)

<sup>2</sup> See selection report at: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/ecoc2024-austria-selection-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.salzkammergut-2024.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BB02\\_A4Hoch\\_WEB\\_70dpi-13.11.pdf](https://www.salzkammergut-2024.at/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BB02_A4Hoch_WEB_70dpi-13.11.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en)

## Report from ECOC Bad Ischl 2024

Bad Ischl 2024 submitted in advance of the meeting a comprehensive progress report. It outlined in detail the activities of the organisation since their official nomination in December 2019. The report dedicated specific chapters to the long-term strategy and outreach; the programme; the capacity to deliver and management; and the milestones for the project development. In addition, it presented several annexes featuring: a detailed projects' list; an update on the recently established GmbH Foundation and the constitution of the Supervisory Board; the 2020 budget; the personnel plan for 2020; EU funded projects; and the info tour 2020 poster.

A few days before the virtual meeting, Bad Ischl 2024 delivered an approx. 25-minute-long video that included statements from the Mayor, the team and the Chair of the Supervisory Board. One by one, in their working settings and on their ways through the city, they described in a clear way how they approached their own roles and activities during the pandemic and tried to mitigate its negative effects. The team stated its confidence in the ECOC's high relevance at this very moment, given that tourism and culture, which are at the heart of any ECOC, are the most negatively impacted areas of activity. The engagement of the tourism boards, which will act as core stakeholders, demonstrates the recognition of this project's importance to the region. Moreover, the reiterated support of all 23 municipalities involved and the close link to the ECOC family across Europe, despite physical distance, were also praised.

### Discussion

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

#### [Long-term cultural strategy and outreach](#)

The panel started by asking how Covid-19 affected one of the project's main goals, i.e. the need to find solutions to challenges resulting from hyper-tourism. The report stated that, due to the Covid-19 crisis, the situation had changed, since tourism from East Asia drastically dropped, whilst the region saw a significant increase in domestic visitors. In this turn, how is the strategy being redefined and adjusted to the new realities?

- The team confirmed the report's statement that instead of Asian tourists, the region had been taken over by domestic day-trippers in May, provoking much pressure on the existing mobility infrastructure in this Alpine area, causing severe traffic jams. There was an overall decrease of 33% in the number of overnights in the region (a 42% decrease in the village of Hallstatt). The tourism boards from the three regions covered by the ECOC project are represented in the board of the new SKGT 24 GmbH institution. The change brought by the pandemic has reinforced the need to invest in a mid-term strategy for tourism, now even more important than before. A meeting is scheduled for late autumn to define further actions. The Bad Ischl 2024 team remains convinced that cultural and slow tourism are the best alternatives for the region.

Still on the effects of the pandemic, the panel wanted to know how the digital strategy would be adapted for the build-up years but also in view of the ECOC (and the pandemic) legacy, particularly regarding programme and outreach strategies.

- The answer focused on the existing challenge to increase the project's digital component within what is still quite an analogue region. The team said some audience groups were

not familiar with digital means and Covid-19 had made it more complex to reach out to them. Beyond outreach, the digital issue also concerns the programme and is part of the development action plan. They are willing to integrate a digital expert to specifically support the team in this area. All the projects that are now being developed, such as the collaboration with the African Capitals of Culture or African partners, are fully conceptualised in the digital space. It is a big challenge that gives the team the chance to re-think the whole programme with this need in mind.

The panel asked for further clarifications regarding the establishment of the “Evaluation Working Group”, and the evaluation profile developed this September together with the LiquA Institute from Linz. It also wanted to know whether contacts had been made with other institutions in the region; when data collection was supposed to start; what progress had been made to address the baseline challenges; and how the team intended to capture outreach figures for example. The need to combine a quantitative and qualitative approach was also underlined.

- The team re-confirmed the complexity of obtaining baseline data in the region, but also their awareness about the importance for such a regional and rural ECOC to leave a legacy of improved data intelligence. They are cooperating with several institutions in this respect - they mentioned LiquA and the Institute of European Ethnology of the University of Vienna, amongst others. The team assured that they had concrete plans on evaluation with a strong qualitative approach. The ECOC evaluation and research will be integrated into the curriculum of a group of university students from 2021 to 2024 and beyond. Students will go to the region to collect data and do field research. Notably, the “feeling of Europeanness” will be studied in the region in a longitudinal way starting in 2021. Activities will feed into the evaluation model. The students involved will start collecting baseline data in the summer semester 2021 to be given to the Evaluation Working Group.

The panel asked what the team’s understanding of the term ‘outreach’ was and how the team intended to address outreach targets via the different capacity-building/school initiatives. For instance, how broadly will schools be reached out and how specific are the diverse schools’ priorities? What target groups are prioritised in the cases of the Culture School, the School of Cultural Policy, the School of Wow and the School of Art & Craft?

- The team underlined that the goal of their long-term strategy was to connect “places” and “people”, to give audiences capacities to be an active part of the salty family (a reference to the overall motto of the ECOC year) and to bring in a diversity of people. In this respect, the capacity-building plans are considered crucial. Their major priority is on accessibility and transparency. Therefore, they have prepared an easy-to-read short version of the bidbook as a first step to help the general public understand the key concepts of “inclave” (meant to replace today’s “enclaves”) and “salty family”. Moreover, the cooperation with the radio station will continue, spreading the knowledge and info needed. The second priority is to build partnerships, with schools, adults education centres, etc. As a third outreach endeavour, they intend to develop connections even further, such as the cooperation with previous ECOC Matera 2019 and partners from nine European schools of arts and crafts.

### Programme

The panel enquired how the team kept in touch with its various project partners and communicated with artists and citizens who have submitted new proposals, since the report states that the programme has been on hold since April 2020 and that no formal decisions will be taken until the Artistic Director is appointed.

- It was confirmed that the programme team was suspended for three months, although two out of the seven team members kept on working. A member of the Artistic Directory and Programme Development took over the international communication. The team was brought back on board in mid-July to do parallel jobs, such as drafting the monitoring report and communicating with partners. Some partners remained very positive whilst others proposed new expanded ideas or came out with budgetary changes to their projects. In addition, two new projects were brought in to strengthen the programme. At the international level, on the other side, it was to some degree much easier to communicate than with locals, since a great majority of potential partners were sitting at home in front of their screens, with much fewer appointments. So the development of the European and international dimension had been in this way facilitated. The team took part in the get-together webinar with the African Capitals of Culture and African cities; and the ECOC family also met in three online meetings organised by Elefsina (whose planned in situ event had to be cancelled). They are also part of a Creative Europe funded project “Collective Moves: Libertaria Lab and Performance” with Veszprem 2023 and are partnering with Matera 2019, based on the Open Design School concept. Despite some standstill, a lot happened at the international level. It is now time to bring it all together. In regards to the question on how to communicate with new project proposals before the new Artistic Director is appointed, the team answered that they had collected and categorised all the proposals, though no decisions would be made before mid-2021.

The panel was also interested in knowing the further changes that the team envisaged in terms of programme development so as to cover the consequences of the delays caused by the pandemic, in particular, the plans to adapt the most affected programme lines – ‘Impact of (Hyper)Tourism’ and ‘Flow to Retreat’ – to the new circumstances.

- The team stated that the need for a “Flow to Retreat” somehow became a kind of national hunger, as their region witnessed last summer, and they expected a similar situation to happen again next winter. The approach is focused on what is going to happen, figuring out how to adjust, notably via open calls. The team is keen on learning by doing and learning from others, staying flexible, investing in doing more projects for the public space and with a digital component. Finally, the team said that there had been no postponements and no significant changes so far.

The panel enquired about the European and artistic dimension and mission (over tourism/regional development priorities). How to secure these dimensions if the project management involves such a high number of organisations implementing the programme and the company stakeholders mostly involve administration and tourism? What methodologies, values and managerial processes can be put in place to secure the European dimension as well as an ambitious artistic content?

- In November, the team will have two lead managers, and each team member will potentially become an ambassador to specific regions in accordance to his/her different networks. Communication on a regional level is important, but they also want to reach beyond. So they will try to establish new formats, like the ‘New Salt Podcasts’, planned for the end of 2020. This format will allow them to reach locals but also visitors at an international level. In this way, they intend to make sure diverse interest groups get in touch with the salty family and their vision of the inclave.

Furthermore, the panel asked how the ECOC could support the cultural and creative sector in Austria and Europe in these difficult times.

- The team recognised that the pandemic hit this sector hard, with all events being cancelled from April on and only re-starting in the summer. The ECOC team knows

firsthand the negative impacts of this crisis. In this context, they are exchanging experiences and supporting each other. They are in touch with the sector, though for now they have given no financial promises for potential new opportunities. They are waiting for the Artistic Director to take it step by step. In regards to the European level, despite the distance, they feel very much together in this challenge. The ECOC family has proven to be of a huge benefit, they have exchanged experiences with Galway and Rijeka, but also with the three ECOCs 2021 and others, which has been very helpful.

The panel wanted to know more about the progress of the project “What happened to..”, which evolved a lot between the two selection phases and has now got the potential to become a model action on provenance research in relation to art lost during WWII. It asked whether it was planned to involve partners from other countries than Austria and Germany, notably countries that have experience in searching for their stolen art.

- The Programme Developer in charge clarified that the project had been on hold. However, recent meetings took place with the Austrian History Museum; and they will collaborate with the German Lost Art Foundation. They intend also to explore links with France, where the topic is important. They want to make it bigger and involve more European partners, but the project is still in its initial phase.

#### Capacity to deliver

The panel was concerned about the conditions and capacity of the local cultural and entertainment scene and asked what, at the political level, the strategy was to ensure that entrepreneurs in this field would survive the crisis.

- During the summer, the city council supported an alternative cultural programme, which gave artists the stage and benefitted the economic, cultural and tourism sectors. This programme included around 100 events, some shifting to outdoors spaces. It was extremely well received by all and contributed to prevent economic collapse, especially in Bad Ischl, as far as hotels and restaurants were concerned. Meetings are also taking place to discuss the winter cultural programme, based on the new sanitary restrictions in place and the learning gained from the summer experience. The city is confident that it can also deliver a successful winter programme. Not everything can move outdoors this winter season, so they will open up their large spaces for events, such as the congress centre.

The panel wanted to know more about the expectations of the tourism industry in view of the huge changes in the nature of tourism resulting from the pandemic.

- The team recognized the need to start working on a new tourism model. The industry starts understanding that part of the new domestic (including from Tyrol) and border countries tourists spend more time and money, which is of higher value for the local economy. On the other side, the increase in day-trippers brings mobility challenges, notably the need to strengthen public transport solutions, giving also the possibility of taking bikes on trains, for instance.

#### Capacity to deliver and management

The panel sought clarification on the financial situation of the project, most notably the state of affairs of the support from the three Länder and the agreements with the Federal Government, as well as the contacts and developments planned for this autumn.

- The Chair of the Supervisory Board explained that already at the time of the selection and nomination process, these stakeholders had made their first financial commitments. Two of the Länder are on board of the new institution, namely Styria and Upper Austria. Talks are scheduled with the new Secretary of Culture in Vienna, the Federal Chancellery and the new head of the Culture Department from the Provincial Government of Upper Austria. The team ensured that there was good communication between the ECOC and regional and national authorities.

Moreover, financial agreements were already sealed with the tourism boards, as well as with Styria. In Upper Austria, it is not concluded yet due to a political change, but it is expected for late autumn. At the end of 2019, the province of Upper Austria committed to EUR 3M. Initially, the goal was to finalize all these agreements before summer, now they are expected to be concluded this autumn. The issue is already being discussed in the relevant committee of the Upper Austria Parliament. Discussions are ongoing and soon they will have all capacities to act. The team believes all financial agreements will be kept, so as to achieve the planned “1/3 solution” between the Federal State level, the provincial level and the local level.

The panel asked about what the team learnt in the last few months and its expectations in terms of key staff recruitment: what is the desired structure for the team, so that it remains locally loyal, but international at the same time?

- The Chair of the Supervisory Board answered that the decisions on the staff structure would be taken in the beginning of October during the General Assembly. The recruitment procedure for the leading positions is almost finished. The team will be strengthened in terms of competences. The region feels it has to counter the crisis; the ECOC is considered an essential element of their recovery plan. The two most affected sectors (i.e. tourism and culture) are at the core of the ECOC bid. They see the ECOC as a gift to live up their European dimension, a catalyst for recovery.
- The interim CEO explained that the decrease in tourism overnights due to the pandemic had been instrumental in triggering out a joint collaboration and effort to build up the ECOC, as reflected in the financial agreements made with tourism entities. They now have a closer partnership and will propose mobility solutions. Regarding the recruitment issue, they need a good mix between locals and people external to the region. They will also hire external experts who will fill in the gaps and needs identified.

The panel wanted to know why the stakeholders had not been able to find a solution to continue preparations in the late spring and summer. The milestones presented in the progress report do not seem to envisage an intensification of the work in 2020 and 2021. What is the strategy to catch up for the lost months? Isn't there a clear need to increase the number of team members?

- It was explained that all contracts ended in April 2020 when the funding basis (a LEADER project) ended. They admitted that they had been too optimistic when expecting the company to be legally established by 1 May. Other solutions were not figured out, since they would have required formal decisions also dependent on the establishment of the company. In addition, during the lockdown, it was not allowed to make city council meetings, so they did not manage to get the needed formal decisions. They are confident they will be back on track again by the start of 2021.

Finally, Bad Ischl Mayor affirmed she was confident that the ECOC process in these build up years would not be affected negatively. The city council's role is that of an “info

point” that holds the collective spirit of the region together. She also pointed out that she was not in the Supervisory Board, where other political parties have instead their seats, so as to allow more cohesion among the 23 communities.

The panel asked for clarifications regarding the staffing state of affairs. What is the situation now regarding the positions needed? What is the planning? How many will they be in 2021?

- It was described that the management officer had started when the opening of the new headquarters took place, to take care of the organisational structure. The interim-managing director (CEO) will remain until the end of 2020. There are currently six employees and two external experts. Two more will be added.

In this area, the panel still wanted to understand why the existing contracts would be over by the end of 2020.

- It was explained that this was a mere formal legal issue; and that the necessary decisions would be taken in October to solve it.

It was also asked how the team would work with the external experts invited to select the projects? How will these external experts understand the aims and priorities of the ECOC?

- It was said that external experts would be selected to come in for intensive “conclaves”, focusing on areas that will be decided by the team according to its needs. They are looking for advisory expertise, but the idea is not to change the programme. They are planning to have an early conclave early January.

Moreover, the panel asked a question about the unclear situation in regards to the artistic leadership, having in mind that during the selection phase it was announced that the group of three artistic leaders would be enlarged to have an artistic committee of seven people. What will be the roles of the artistic managers of the bidbook? Will the Artistic Director operate on an equal footing with the CEO?

- The team explained that when they started working on the establishment of the delivery structure during the transition phase, they encountered legal barriers to create a collective artistic leadership – making it more realistic that only one person should formally assume the leadership. However, in practice there will be five people constituting the artistic council alongside two managing directors, the CEO and the Artistic Director.

The panel asked why no formal decisions would be taken before the official nomination of the Artistic Director in view of the collective solution described above.

- It was explained that the task of the Artistic Director would be to work with all team programme members, bringing in new input and competences. The recruitment aimed at finding someone who can be passionate and cooperative with the existing team, with a strong ability for teamwork. Nevertheless, it was stated that as the upcoming Artistic Director would assume legal and financial responsibilities for the team, they preferred not to make decisions before the position was appointed.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The panel acknowledges the serious commitment and the relevant steps being taken by Bad Ischl SKGT 2024, yet draws attention to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1**

The focus on reflecting on and finding an alternative tourism model for the region has proven to be of even more relevance (also European wide), in the context of the present pandemic, which has dramatically hit the tourism industry. The panel welcomes the work done at this level, notably in view of the plans for improving mobility in the region, as well as the achievements regarding the involvement of diverse tourism boards.

- Make sure the ECOC team's roles and responsibilities regarding the tourism development goals are kept within the implementation of the artistic and cultural programme of the ECOC project, despite the recognised need to closely accompany developments in this field.

- **Recommendation 2**

The panel considers the emphasis on and ambition to gather qualitative data in a longitudinal way as valuable, however it remains crucial to specify clearly what it involves. Moreover, although the partner institutions selected are sound, there is a need to ensure a good balance between research needs on the one hand, and evaluation and monitoring needs on the other hand. Indeed, there is a certain overall vagueness in the milestones presented, regarding the evaluation and monitoring plans.

It is of added value that the existing limitations in the region in regards to baseline data are recognised. However, what matters is achieving the adequate cooperation within the region to allow for access to data and to cultivate the practice of data collection and gathering. It is insufficient to rely on students to gather the data as a long-term solution.

- Clarify the capacity and responsibilities of the evaluation dedicated staff person – who currently also takes communication in charge. The linkages to all institutions involved will require a lot of attention with the view to align the work on ECOC priorities.
- Outline more specifically and in due detail the evaluation milestones, including description of concrete evaluation projects.
- Make clear how to achieve the needed regional cooperation – and capacity-building – regarding the collection of baselines.
- Clearly define outreach targets and make sure they are referred to in a separate section for monitoring purposes, so that progress can be monitored.

- **Recommendation 3**

The panel acknowledges the engagement put into keeping the ties with existing European and international partners and the ECOC family, despite the pandemic restrictions. Nevertheless, the European dimension of the programme is expected to be enlarged, increasing the number and diversity of European and international partners, as well as making sure these interactions are communicated to the regional and local audiences.

- Strengthen contacts with European cultural networks – that might be most suited for the various project's needs – so as to enlarge the panoply of European and international partners.

- Make sure the European dimension is clearly underlined and communicated by all the ECOC partners and collaborators and turned into clear messages for the regional and local audiences.

- **Recommendation 4**

The panel was convinced by the good awareness demonstrated, and the right mixed approach followed (with analogue and digital communication tools), by the team to reach out to local and European audiences and partners.

- Keep a good balance between the local/analogue and digital/European strategies and use digital formats to allow interaction between local and international audiences (and provide translations where necessary).

- **Recommendation 5**

The panel wondered whether there would be a certain disconnection between the ECOC team's work and the concurrent cultural life in the city and region.

- Clarify and communicate the links between the city and region's regular cultural life and the ECOC developments and programme. Invest in a good and stable re-connection with the local arts, culture and creative sector in the city and region, making sure the ECOC may support their work in these complex times.

- **Recommendation 6**

The panel noticed a mismatch between the formalities required from a legal point of view and the needs of the ECOC project implementation. It has affected the staffing progress, causing delays in the development of the project.

- Enlarge the team as soon as possible and ensure it can work in good conditions and move forward swiftly in the implementation phase. This includes, notably, legal and labour frameworks, and number and profiles of team members.

In particular, regarding the artistic leadership, the reiterated intentions to have a collective artistic committee (as mentioned in the bidbook), with several members in charge of artistic choices and programme, seems now to be in contradiction with the legal requirement of nominating one single Artistic Director (whose recruitment is now being finalised).

- Clarify the hierarchical and functional roles of the artistic team. Make a clear distinction between the two leadership roles, i.e. CEO and Artistic Director.
- Revise the staffing plan, defining clearly the competences needed for implementation, and ensure that the personnel growing needs are matched and in line with legal requirements and budget availability. Design the company's overall organigram, clarifying relationships, decision-making procedures, responsibilities and roles.

- **Recommendation 7**

There are good and promising prospects regarding the support from the regional and national levels. Yet, SKGT 24 needs to finalise agreements with all involved authorities in order to stabilise its budget. This is of crucial importance, in particular having in mind that the pandemic may impact this process negatively. Moreover, the team needs stability to work and to be able to support the sector in finding answers in the current crisis.

- Give highest priority to conclude the financing contracts with the region of Upper Austria and with the Federal State still in 2020 to ensure a high-quality implementation of the ECOC and to ensure operability of the ECOC structures.
- Revisit the investment plan, including public and private fundraising strategies and expectations.

- **Recommendation 8**

The panel considers that once the needed formal legal decisions are taken, the company should reflect and revise the overall planning ahead in order to adjust timings and needs, most notably in order to overcome the time lost during the confinement.

- Revise the milestones ahead for the full project implementation, in realistic terms, resetting overall timings and needs for a smooth but steady implementation.

## Next Steps

The panel welcomes the serious efforts put into the project and good prospects ahead and remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

The Commission will call for a second monitoring meeting in 2022.

In the meantime, the panel invites you to continue working on the recommendations stated above. We would like to receive an update regarding the staffing and funding plans by early 2021.

The panel would like to thank the Mayor of Bad Ischl, the Chair of the Supervisory Board and Bad Ischl 2024 team and other contributors to the monitoring report and ECOC project as such for a very informative and frank discussion via digital means and looks forward to the next developments of the European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel's members

