



Comments of Faro2027 (Faro's application for the European Capital of Culture) **on the "The Expert Panel's report– pre-selection phase for the selection of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2027 in Portugal"**

Opening note

Faro's candidacy for the title of European Capital of Culture carried out a powerful process of exchanging ideas and proposals that involved an unprecedented amount and diversity of partners and the community.

The result of this process is a vision of Faro's development in the context of the Algarve, Europe and the world. This view is reflected in the *bidbook* for the title of European Capital of Culture 2027, [which was made publicly available by faro city council](#).

The expert panel that issued the report on the pre-selection process makes considerations to Faro's proposal, some positive and some negative.

This document aims to comment on this assessment, in particular by highlighting the issues that, in Faro2027's view, should be safeguarded for future memory.

The [jury report](#) is available on the process website, although incomprehensibly the Ministry of Culture has not translated it into Portuguese.

Introduction and contextualization

In April 2022, the European Commission issued the expert panel report for the pre-selection phase of the competition for the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in Portugal. The competition is an initiative of the European Union. The pre-selection phase consists of the presentation of a proposal (*the bidbook*) where candidate city's answer a standard questionnaire and a after a 45-minute interview with a panel of experts appointed by European institutions and the Ministry of Culture, takes place.

In Portugal, 12 cities submitted their applications. Four of them were selected for the final selection phase. The municipalities of Aveiro, Braga, Évora and Ponta Delgada were invited to review their proposals for the final selection of 2027.

In view of this result for Faro, this document aims to comment on the panel's statements in its report, seeking to safeguard, for future memory, the position of Faro's candidacy in relation to the panel's report.

The scope of this analysis is limited to Faro's bidbook and to the panel report, although other documentation has been used, namely the Faro Strategic Plan for Culture, PEC Faro 2030.

Moreover, this review does not make a comparison between Faro's bidbook and the bidbooks of the other candidate cities, and the interest of this document is focused on the consistency between Faro's purpose application and the interpretation made by the panel.

This review is not intended to question the panel's decision. Faro2027's application is aware of the evaluation assumptions and respects the decisions taken and, above all, congratulates the cities that have passed

to the selection phase, for the work they developed.

This review is organised in different sections: general comments, contribution to long-term strategy, cultural and artistic content, European dimension, outreach, management and capacity to deliver.

General comments

- ❖ We emphasize that the narrative has been understood. It demonstrates the need to fight the dependence on mass tourism, as well as the *concept of fluid placemaking**;
- ❖ The significance of the production of fluid places and the urgency of place were positively highlighted in the report. However, it is not entirely perceptive whether the protection of our landscape as a means of combating climate change, a topic of European and global relevance, has been perceived by the jury;
- ❖ The intention to talk about poverty in the region is recognized; however, the jury understood that its potential has not been fully exploited. For this theme, the bidbook had, in the cultural program, a dedicated pillar that dealt with the social consequences of mass tourism, as well as explicit considerations in the dissemination and communication strategies;
- ❖ The region's involvement has been recognised in its all, current state and cross-border relevance.

**Fluid placemaking was the concept and mechanism used throughout the bidbook of Faro's candidacy.*

Contribution to long-term strategy

- ❖ The panel recognizes the importance of the cultural strategy and the ability to develop regional alignment in strategic terms for culture and creativity for the long-term development of Faro and the Algarve. The Panel also recognises plans for the implementation of a capacity-building programme;
- ❖ The panel clearly identified the fluid placemaking concept for "turn the tide and shape gentle landscapes " as a way to drive an urgent realignment of the region and combat dependence on mass tourism through culture, nature, heritage, society and the economy. In addition, the panel noted that it understood the region's commitment to culture;
- ❖ Faro2027 disagrees with the observation made in the report on the lack of clarity of how the list of impacts aligns with strategic priorities. The panel states: "(...) Faro 2027 establishes four strategic objectives: care, exploration, sharing and connection; but the plan for the period beyond 2027 remains uncertain." It seems to us an unlogical expectation: the objectives are those of the ECoC, contributing to those of the cultural strategy, which is the strategy that continues beyond 2027. The same frame of thought can be used to the point that the refers to the legacy plans;
- ❖ The jury wanted a more cohesive alignment of impacts with strategic priorities and evaluation plans, something that is usually developed in the second version of the bidbook, as can be seen in recent application processes.

Cultural and artistic content

- ❖ The panel effectively identified the principles and partnerships reflected by Faro's 2027 application. In addition, the bidbook conveyed the idea that the ECoC should not be seen as an isolated and large-scale cultural initiative, identifying social changes as its underlying objectives. Finally, Faro 2027 highlighted its collaborative approach with cultural partners to develop the program;
- ❖ The panel's feedback highlighted uncertainty about the number of proposals included in the bidbook and concern that the program could result in local or marginal initiatives. The ECoC should be framed in a larger social and cultural strategy; the issues in this section only required the development of an overview and a description of the initiatives, something the bidbook does. The concern that the programme could result in local/marginal initiatives is inconsistent with the jury's observation in the conclusion, highlighting the good examples of a European approach in the projects presented;
- ❖ It is quite unusual (we do not find this reference in other recent reports) the way the panel questioned, in such detail, the form and criteria used to select projects for the bidbook, especially after the broad capacity of interaction with the cultural and creative sector (and not only) has been proven through various formats of participation;
- ❖ The programmes presented is the result of identified needs and, as such, one would expect that their results could contribute to the resolution, decrease or just generate a debate on these needs, despite the question of this depth are usually addressed in the second bidbook. We understand the comment that projects are "marginal or local" as a preconceived reading of a tourist destination, usually

associated with various entertainment activities that the bidbook clearly does not represent.

European dimension

- ❖ Strong European relevance has been recognised. *"For example, the theme of mass tourism and its socio-economic dimension, a key issue in this part of Portugal, has a clear potential for new development as a strong European theme."*;
- ❖ The European dimension part of the report has only a critical observation, the rest of them agrees that the expectation of European themes, partnerships and dissemination has been met. The panel understood that the millions of tourists who visit Faro (Algarve) every year are not identified as a target group in co-creation and knowledge sharing. Our understanding is contrary: not only are tourists referred multiple times in this section but also in the whole bidbook, in fact "tourist" is the 6th most frequent term in the bidbook and "tourism" occupies the 1st place;
- ❖ We have clearly stated that visitors are part of the co-creators, for example: *"Apart from tourists, we would like to reach new people, especially in the digital domain."* or *"Closely aligns the aspirations of those who live, migrate, work and visit Faro"*;
- ❖ It is not clear to us how the jury understood/ evaluated the concept of fluid placemaking, given that they criticized the strategy of involvement of tourists. There may have been a lack of understanding and preconceived ideas that do not recognize how Faro wants to change its relationship with tourism for the better.

Outreach

- ❖ The panel considers the participation of more than 3000 people in the consultation process for the construction of the application was a good effort and recognizes good principles in terms of engagement;
- ❖ Civic engagement can always be more developed. This does not invalidate the great capacity for involvement that the Faro2027 process had. Regarding the inclusion of marginalized groups, the bidbook identifies poverty as the main issue affecting a well-identified set of disadvantaged groups (the Roma community; the community living on the barrier islands, migrants, people with disabilities and the elderly). This is indeed a strong point, because we clarify that there has been a recurrent attempt to involve these groups, either through the auscultation processes or through pilot projects;
- ❖ The comments on the lack of evidence of effective participation of schools is difficult to understand, especially as the jury itself highlights in its report, initiatives led by young people such as the pilot project Capsula. In several proposed projects (e.g. "The Myth of the Ria Formosa") or others put into practice (e.g. "MIMOMO.FARO") the principles of youth involvement have been clearly achieved;
- ❖ The observation that *"guarantees of effective participation or even co-governance by civil society continue to lack"* seems to imply an expectation of a centralised strategy of school involvement that would not be expected at this stage;
- ❖ The effective participation or even co-governance of civil society is clearly evidenced for a very participatory approach that is described in the involvement strategy. The governance model identified in

Chapters 5 and 6 clearly affirms this intention and was clarified during the presentation to the jury;

- ❖ The transversality of a true sensitivity was highlighted, namely the use of sincere attention to people.

Management

- ❖ The feedback from the management strategy was overall positive. Just a comment was made about contingency planning "*not being entirely convincing*", a remark that we recognize and understand. In this area we describe past principles and experiences (EU funding, 365 Algarve, and Network Cultural Programming) that set a solid precedent, but we recognize that this was not enough to give a stronger picture. However, the panel acknowledged plans for a regional education and training program;
- ❖ The municipality's historic decision to increase its investments in culture to 10% per year was underlined;
- ❖ The budget presented was described as realistic;
- ❖ The development of knowledge in terms of attracting European funds has been recognised;
- ❖ The structure presented for the Management of the ECoC was considered relevant;
- ❖ The panel recognises the link between the communication strategy and the engagement strategy;

Capacity to deliver

- ❖ Broad [political support for the](#) project was recognized;
- ❖ [The capacity to deliver of Faro 2027 has been positively](#) evaluated in terms of public support, accessibility, absorption capacity and experience with large-scale national and international events. A note was made about the capacity in closed spaces not being clear: "*emphasizing only the expansion and requalification of the Municipal Theater*". The jury did not value other projects, such as [the requalification of the Fábrica da Cerveja](#) and other spaces mentioned in the presentation. In light of the Portuguese reality, [this commentary of the jury is incomprehensible](#), and/or possibly demonstrates a lack of understanding about the cultural ecosystem of the south Portuguese/European/Mediterranean, [which works very much through outdoor cultural events and in the public space – equivalent in social, economic, cultural meaning to events in closed spaces](#);
- ❖ The observation *that "a stronger interaction between culture and tourism is necessary, aiming not only to welcome tourists in the best way during the ECoC year, but also to provide for new forms of sustainable tourism"* [make us uncomfortable](#) because refers to an idea of sectoral dependency which, as can be seen by other observations of the jury, or by the candidatas's own guide, it is not desirable. [Culture and creativity can be tools at the service of territorial development, but they should not be seen as the processes of the tourist economy.](#)

Conclusion

The expert panel that decided to pre-select the candidate cities for the European Capital of Culture 2027 defends that the answers to the application questionnaire should be simple. Although the Faro 2027 application covers the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions of a CeC and those of the Faro context, some responses were considered underdeveloped, even if the issue was raised elsewhere in the bidbook.

The panel seems to try to find an imbalance between past experiences and Faro's future ability to host an ECoC, *despite a well-developed set of principles, values and vision, as well as the emphasis placed on the city's ability to implement large-scale initiative.*

The expectation of a high level of governance, engagement and participation seems *too strict for a pre-selection phase*, where a large number of key planning activities are still underway. As much as the Guide recognizes that cities can receive the title of ECoC regardless of their size and project budget, *the expectations are those of a territory with highly consolidated cultural policies, with long-term guarantees and a stable and large-scale cultural policy.*

Some conservatism was also evident in the observations on tourism. *Despite the clear set of values and principles for a new perspective on tourism*, experts considered that change should be structured through mechanisms beyond consultation and invitation to participate in the city's cultural strategy. *This is contradictory to the clear statement that the analysis and evaluation are only carried out on the basis of the bidbook.*

Although the *level of programming presented did not differ from other*

applications, the only existing reference to "entertainment" in the entire report is in the evaluation of Faro. This is, in our view, a good example of how preconceived ideas about tourism influenced the jury's analysis.