

# European Capitals of Culture:

## The selection panels explored Part 1

Steve Green

What do *Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia* have in common? Read on.

The European Capitals of Culture programme has amassed a vast library of reports, evaluations, articles, thesis, dissertations and media commentary since its launch in 1985. One area has been mostly overlooked: that of the selection panel. The longest article appears to be by Klaus Patel <sup>1</sup>in 2013, but this needs seriously updating let alone challenging, not least as he did not expect the programme to continue beyond 2019!

So how does the panel work, how are its members chosen and importantly, who are they? This article looks at the panel's membership; a later one will explore the contents of their reports.

I chaired the panel for three years of my five years membership (2012-16). Confidentiality means I can't disclose what happened in the meetings themselves (at least not in an identifiable way, the Chatham House rule). The membership of the selection panels is in the public record. Reports of its meetings since 2007 are on the European Commission's website <sup>2</sup>. Reports of almost all of the earlier meetings from 2001 are also on various websites. The reports contain the names of the panel members.

The selection of an ECOC has changed over the years and falls into four phases. I will ignore the first period, the ECOCs from 1985 to 2004. The reason is clear: there was no selection panel. Cities were proposed by their national governments and the EU culture ministers agreed an order, often after some trading of years but not cities. The UK held a two stage open competition for the 1990 title; the final choice of Glasgow was taken by civil servants in the Office of Libraries and Arts (the forerunner of a Ministry of Culture). The polite negotiations between culture ministers over the selection broke down in 1997. Seven cities, supported by their governments, put themselves forward for the 2001 title. The Netherlands opposed Valencia as another

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<sup>1</sup> K K Patel Journal of Common Market studies Vol 51 pp 538-534. 2013

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture\\_en#](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en#)

Spanish city, Santiago de Compostela, was one of the nine ECOCs planned for 2000. The selection was delayed, Rotterdam, eventually being designated.

The affair was a contributory factor in the EU deciding to formalise the selection and the programme in 1999<sup>3</sup>. The “Decision”, to use the EU jargon, came into effect with the selection in 2001 of the ECOc in 2005. The objectives, criteria and procedures have been subsequently in 2006<sup>4</sup> and 2014<sup>5</sup> and a couple of minor adjustments since to bring in EEA/candidate countries and to re-organise the 2020-2021 ECOCS because of the pandemic. In all three Decisions the order of countries was fixed in advance. In all cases the panel makes a recommendation to the national ministry and the EU institutions.. The formal legal designation changes over time but need not concern us here. The panel’s recommendation has always been accepted (eventually in the case of Germany for 2026).

A feature of the ECOc programme is that the formal Decisions increase in length exponentially every time. The sections on the Selection Panel are a good example.

The 1999 Decision introduced the concept of the Selection Panel.

*The selection panel shall be composed of seven leading independent figures who are experts on the cultural sector,*

The 2006 Decision expanded on the panel members requirements:

*The selection panel members shall be independent experts with no conflicts of interest with regard to the cities which responded to the call for submission of applications, and with substantial experience and expertise in the cultural sector, in the cultural development of cities or in the organisation of a European Capital of Culture.*

And in the 2014 Decision the Panel now warrants its own half page section with 8 clauses. I will come back to some of the operative ones in this article.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A31999D1419>

<sup>4</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006D1622>

<sup>5</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02014D0445-20210101>

Each Decision changed the composition of the panel:

<b>Decision</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Dates of Meetings from/to</b>	<b>ECOC</b>	<b>Members nominated by EU institutions</b>	<b>Members nominated by host ministry</b>
1999	1	2001-2008	2005-2012	7	0
2006	2	2008-2014	2013-2019	7	6
2014	3	2015-	2020-2033	10	Up to 2

“Phase” is the shorthand I will use in this article. I include all meetings of the panel in all three phases up to the February 2021 pre-selection meeting for the 2027 ECOC in Slovakia.

The most important procedural change came from Phase 1 to Phase 2. In Phase 1 member states selected their city candidates and sent their nominations to the panel for comments. In only two cases (For the 2005 title Ireland sent 4 candidates for selection; in 2010 Germany sent 2 candidates and the panel also chose between Kiev and Istanbul). In all other cases the member state simply sent one choice. Hardly a “Selection” Panel but their comments were often very sharp.

In 2003 the UK held a two-stage selection competition with 12 candidates and an independent panel for the 2008 title. It used its own 11 point criteria. The Culture Minister did not realise the winner of the competition, Liverpool, needed to be designated by the EU. The Selection Panel duly met with Liverpool team in 2004 and issued a sharp report.

In Phases 2 and 3 all bids went directly to the panel with a two stage process: pre-selection (shortlisting) and final selection. Ministries of Culture became the administrative agent but had no role in selection. In Phase 3 they have the formal role of designating the Panel’s recommendation.

The method of the selection of panel members is opaque. It is organisationally clear but not at an individual level.

Four EU institutions are involved:

- The European Council (in effect the culture ministries);
- the European Parliament (in effect the Education and Culture Committee),
- the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) and

- the Committee of the Regions.

In Phases 1 and 2 the institutions nominated 2+2+2+1 and in Phase 3: 3+3+3+1. There is a rota system so there is a change of 3 or 4 members every year. Normally panel members are appointed for 3 years but this can be renewed. Each institution follows its own, not disclosed, procedures. There was a slight degree of clarity in the early years of Phase 1: the Council nominees came from the two countries holding the EU Presidency of the year.

In Phase 3, the current phase, the European Commission invites people to apply to join a “pool” from which the institutions are supposed to select. The most important qualifications include 8 years’ experience and expertise in the cultural sector or at least over 5 years in ECOC or similar experience, no conflict of interests with candidates and available for the heavy workload. Only EU citizens may apply.

Member states, in effect the ministry of culture, or equivalent, have their own methods of selecting their members on the panel. Only Croatia as far as I know went to an open call and selection for their two members.

The selection panel members are also members of the monitoring panel which oversees ECOCs from designation to just before the ECOC year. I am not dealing with this aspect in this paper.

### **So who are the members?**

There have been 64 meetings of the panel since 2001. The EU institutions have nominated 66 people and 102 have been nominated by members states. The figures are not comparable as the latter are only appointed for their own national selection: I will briefly come back to them later in the article. In the meantime the focus is on the members nominated by the EU institutions.

Of the 66, 39 appeared on panels in Phase 1 and 28 of them only attended one meeting. As the panel only met once a year and for a defined ECOC year this is not surprising. Only from 2007/8, were the members nominated for multi-year membership (which overlapped with Phase 2).

Phases 2 and 3, (the ECOCs from 2013 (Marseilles/Kosice) to Pre-selection Slovakia in February 2021) have seen 36 panel members. Nine also appeared in Phase 2 so there have been 27 new members appointed since.

## Let's explore the diversity of the 66 panel members 2001 to 2021.

Diversity is one the EU's core values and it has many policies and projects seeking to meet its aspirations. Equal fairness measured in many different aspects underpin the dream. How has the ECOC selection panel measured up?

Not perhaps surprisingly all members have been white: no panel member appears to be from a minority. A reflection of the whiteness of EU Commissioners, staff and Parliamentarians and of the more senior reaches of the European cultural sector.

There has been progress on gender. In Phase 1 only 9 of the 39 members were women. In Phases 2 and 3 the number has increased to 16 compared to 20 men. The last 10 appointments have been split 5-5. In 2020 the panel was 7 women and 3 men; in 2021 it is 5-5.

The geographic spread makes interesting reading. By member state:

- 7 Finland
- 6 Austria, France
- 5 UK
- 4 Germany, Poland, Spain
- 3 Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal
- 2 Belgium, Luxembourg, Romania
- 1 Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Sweden

And to answer to the question posed at the top of the article: *Croatia, Cyprus, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia* have had no nominees from the EU institutions since their accession to EU.

The table is somewhat misleading. Italy and Sweden have had no nominees since 2004 with none in Phases 2 and 3.

It is slightly harder to establish the **occupation** of panel members but a reasonable attempt here. I've focussed on the job the person had when selected for the panel. Many had more active artistic careers earlier in their careers and had moved into management or academe by the time they were on the panel. There has been a distinct trend since 2001 away from practising artists, of varying disciplines and managers of public sector cultural institutions towards consultants and cultural project managers in the NGO sector. Occupations include:

- 3 former Ministers of Culture (UK, France and Luxembourg,)

- 18 directors etc of public cultural institutions (museums, galleries, theatres etc)
- 8 Cultural consultants; cultural NGO/Festival directors
- 7 mayors and local government politicians (Committee of Regions nominees)
- 6 Academics; artists of varying disciplines
- 4 international cultural organisations
- 3 central government civil servants;
- 1 private sector business director.

One factor probably influencing the change is the increased workload of a panel member. In Phase 1 the work was relatively limited: one or two applications to read and one meeting a year. The work increased in Phase 2, with pre-selection and final selection meetings (and 2 monitoring meetings). For Phase 3, the Commission estimated a workload varying between 26 and 38 working days a year. That is a probably an understatement given the time needed to adequately review a bid book. It is moreover almost up to 2 working months a year: a long time to be available. One reason why the trend has been to those on freelance/running own work/organisation/project basis. It is noticeable in recent years how many members are also working on other EU funded projects/activities. Meetings by Zoom have at least reduced the travelling time!

Now lets turn to the actual members, the 66. The number of **meetings** has increased considerably since Phase 1 so a direct comparison is not useful. Of the 8 meetings in Phase 1 Gottfried Wagner attended 4 and Danuta Glondys 3 alongside the 21 who attended a single meeting.

In Phases 2 and 3 the number of meetings increased: 2 ECOCs a year and a pre-selection and final selection meeting for each. In Phase 3 every third year has a third ECOC from outside the EU. So it is easier to clock up attendances! The list of those attending more than 20 meetings; all spent 5 or 6 years on the panel.

- 27 Cristina Farinha (PT), Agnieszka Wlazel (PL)
- 26 Sylvia Amman (AT)
- 24 Suzana Žilič Fišer (SI)
- 23 Manfred Gaulhofer (AT)
- 22 Jordi Pardo (ES), Steve Green (UK)
- 21 Danuta Glondys (PL)

20 Ulrich Fuchs (DE)

If we look at the **geographic** spread in terms of meetings attended by members from a country we get another picture. In terms of meetings attended the leading list is:

73 Austria (6 members)

59 Poland (4)

52 UK (5)

42 Spain (4)

35 Germany (4)

29 Finland (7), Portugal (3)

24 Slovenia (1)

23 Romania (2)

17 of the 66 panel members have themselves been **senior managers of ECOCs**. Others have been associated with bidding candidates. Indeed every panel since 2005 has had at least one member with this hands-on ECOc experience.

Every panel selects its own **chair**; the convention is the same person chairs the pre-selection and final selection meetings for an ECOc so the list shows the number of ECOc selections:

8 Bob Scott (UK) (12 meetings)

7 Steve Green (14 meetings)

6 Manfred Gaulhofer (12 meetings)

2 Bob Palmer (UK), Sylvia Amman, Cristina Farinha, Jiří Suchánek (CZ),

1 José Antonio Jáuregui (ES), Gottfried Wagner (AT), Charlie Hennessy (IE), Jeremy Isaacs (UK), Agnieszka Wlazel, Aiva Rozenberga (LV), Beatriz Garcia (ES), Paulina Florjanowicz (PL).

Almost half of the ECOc selection meetings were chaired by British members of the panel before the UK left the EU in January 2020. (29 out of 59); a number sadly which will not increase for some time.

Turning now to the **“national”** members; those selected by the host ministry for each ECOc. This only applies in Phase 2 (with 6 members) and in Phase 3 (with up to 2).

The workload on nationally selected members is less: they are only involved in the pre-selection and final selection of the ECOC of their country. They are now also members of the subsequent monitoring panel. So over a period of 5 years preparation and attendance for one meeting a year.

On four occasions the national ministry selected members who had had previously been members selected by the EU institutions (Frédéric Flamand (BE), Jacek Purchla (PL), Jordi Pascual (ES) and Anu Kivilo (EE)). In terms of occupation the members follow the path of the “EU nominated members” with leading institutional managers slowly being replaced with consultants and festival/NGO directors. One former minister of culture (Bulgaria) and several who have been awarded their countries Order of Merit or similar.

The Commission, in its discussions with ministries of culture, seeks a gender balance. In Phase 2 of the 14 countries involved only Cyprus fielded an all-male group. In Phase 3 so far only Romania has nominated two women (which led to controversy in the country). Greece, Hungary and Slovakia nominated two men.

So far Ireland and Lithuania have decided not to select members and Luxembourg only appointed one person. Cyprus, Malta and Estonia included non-nationals in their nominations.

### **Some thoughts**

Surprisingly few people have been members of the panel (The EU nominated part). It is a small panel and the 3 year, renewable, nature of the appointments means membership grows slowly. With only 36 new members since 2008, and a third of them ex-ECOC, it is not surprising outsiders consider it a closed shop. The positive side is of retained experience and expertise; the main risk is of the emergence of a “group-think” in the interpretation of the criteria. A point I’ll take up in a subsequent article.

The geographic balance could be improved. As well as the six member states who have not provided any member, Italy and Sweden appear long overdue to have members. Italy does not host a ECOC until 2033 so there is time to fit an Italian on the panel. Sweden is rather trickier as pre-selection for the 2029 title will be in 2023, which would be the second year of an appointment starting in 2022.

There have been only two meetings where a member nominated by the EU institutions was part of a panel selecting a ECOC from their own country. In 2007 two Finns were on the panel reviewing Turku. One did not turn up and the other refrained from questioning the Turku delegation. An experience never repeated until the Austrian



selection in 2020 when it caused no problem. It will happen again when the ECOC in 2027 in Portugal is selected.

The increased workload now associated with the panel membership will put off many potential applicants. Alternates were nominated in the early years of Phase 1 but this fell into disuse. “No-shows” are relatively rare. I will come back to the workload point in my later article on the operations of the panel.

The panel works in English, from bid-books to discussions to reports; this requirement could also restrict potential applicants although the Commission will not doubt balk at the cost of interpretation.

The nomination system is opaque and only partially opened with the new “pool” arrangement. The call for applicants indicated that the approved list would be public once contracts completed but I can’t find it. At least the four EU institutions should publicise their own procedures and lets hope they do not choose anyone not in the pool or hastily added.

Not all ministries publicise the panel members in advance of the selection meetings. Slovakia is a welcome exception in February 2021 (in the same way Germany put all the bid books of the shortlisted cities online well before the final selection meeting. Transparency is always better.) With ten members the ECOCs website should follow the example of the Slovak website announcement. The new French Capital of Culture explains both the occupational requirements of a panel and the CVs of its current members.<sup>6</sup>

Mention of the new French Capital of Culture leads on to seeing how other Capitals/Cities of Culture manage their selections. Currently in 2021 there are 25 programmes underway worldwide. <http://prasino.eu/2021/01/08/capitals-and-cities-of-culture-in-2021/>

They fall, for selection purposes, into these categories:

- Competitive Selection, independent panel: Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia, France, East Asia (China and Korea), UK, Finno-Ugric, London Borough, Belarus (?), Krasnoysk, Ukraine, EU.
- Location of political meeting location/country: ASEAN, Community of Portuguese Language Countries,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://capitale-culture.fr/presentation-du-jury>

- Country by rotation by political order or member countries/cities, closed national selection of city: South Asia (SAARC), Ibero-American, Africa
- National/regional government/organisation selection: East Asia (Japan), Eixo Atlântico, Arab, Islamic, Turkic World, Commonwealth of Independent States,
- Direct discussion with private organiser: American, Catalan.

The selection meeting for the China city in the East Asia City of Culture 2020 was inspiring! Just look at those bid-books! <https://culture360.asef.org/news-events/six-chinese-cities-vie-2020-culture-city-east-asia/>

This paper has looked at the history, structure and members of the Selection Panel. The next paper will consider the operation of the panels through the words of its reports since 2001.

Steve Green

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[www.prasino.eu](http://www.prasino.eu)

[capitalsofculture@gmail.com](mailto:capitalsofculture@gmail.com)

@stevegreen39