

R&D-Report

ECoC Bodø2024: Cultural Projects as Pathways to Legacy

Veronika Vakulenko
Alena Nelaeva

Nord University
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ECoC Bodø2024: Cultural Projects as Pathways to Legacy

Veronika Vakulenko, Associate Professor in Management Accounting, Nord University
Business School

Alena Nelaeva, PostDoc, Nord University Business School

**Monitor2024
2025**

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Abbreviations

EC – European Commission

ECoC – European Capital of Culture

EU – European Union

KPI – Key Performance Indicator

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Executive summary

This report is prepared by the Monitor2024 team.

The report investigates how projects funded and implemented under the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) Bodø2024 contributed to the programme's strategic objectives, and what kinds of impacts and legacies they created or set in motion. In total, 114 projects were analysed, with in-depth case studies of three strategic focus areas, *UNG2024* [Young2024], *Frivillig2024* [Volunteers2024], and Ecological Economics, alongside a sample of pre-selected projects spanning visual arts, gastronomy, cultural heritage, festivals, nature, and installations.

The study is guided by a theoretical model that conceptualises cultural projects as dynamic processes moving from inputs (resources, motivations, networks), through processes (implementation, cooperation, participation), generating outputs (events, skills, visibility), which under supportive conditions may translate into impacts (empowerment, community cohesion, sustainability), and eventually into legacies (new institutions, durable practices, policy change). This framework provides an analytical lens for assessing how cultural initiatives evolve and where their long-term significance lies.

The findings reveal that Bodø2024 projects:

- Mobilised highly diverse and often fragile resources, with volunteers, personal networks, and modest funding streams forming the backbone of implementation.
- Functioned as experimental arenas, where processes were adaptive, collaborative, and often unpredictable, requiring leaders to embrace flexibility and improvisation.
- Generated outputs that went beyond events, e.g., building competencies, strengthening self-confidence, and expanding networks for individuals and organisations.
- Impacts are context-dependent: successful in some municipalities or sectors, less so in others, reflecting the embeddedness of projects in local governance, economic, and community structures.
- Future legacies most clearly visible where outputs were anchored institutionally, such as the introduction of ecological economics in secondary schools, the establishment of *Frivillig Bodø*, and youth networks from *UNG2024*. Yet legacies remain fragile, conditioned by resource scarcity, municipal cutbacks, and dependence on a small number of committed actors.

A cross-cutting insight is that success cannot be reduced to attendance or media visibility alone. For some project leaders, success meant packed venues; for others, it was when a young participant asked, “When will we do this again?” Success emerges as a distributed

phenomenon, co-constructed by organisers, participants, and communities, and is best understood through a combination of qualitative narratives and quantitative indicators.

The study also highlights critical challenges: difficulties in attracting sponsors in Bodø's not yet established tradition of cultural philanthropy, limited project management capacity among artists, untransparent communication in early phases, and concerns about sustaining momentum after 2024. These findings underline that impacts and legacies should not be taken for granted; they are contingent upon structural conditions, leadership, and long-term political will.

The report concludes that Bodø2024 demonstrates the potential of cultural projects to act as catalysts for long-term regional change when embedded in supportive ecosystems of resources, governance, and participation. For future ECoCs, the lesson is the following: cultural legacies are not automatic outcomes of investment, but emergent properties of ongoing networks, negotiations, and everyday practices. Policymakers should therefore integrate cultural initiatives with economic and social policies, support volunteerism and youth engagement, and provide stable frameworks for sustaining achievements beyond the cultural year.

Disclaimer: The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to all respondents who accepted the invitation to participate in this research, helped in refining the interview guide, and shared their experiences related to Bodø2024. We are also grateful to the Reference Group for their valuable comments, which helped strengthen and improve this report.

“Cultural legacies are powerful forces. They have deep roots and long lives. They persist, generation after generation, virtually intact, even as the economic and social and demographic conditions that spawned them have vanished, and they play such a role in directing attitudes and behavior that we cannot make sense of our world without them.”

Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background: the inception of Bodø2024 and its program

The news that a Norwegian city will act as the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) appeared in 2019, when the European Commission accounted the winner-cities for 2024, which were Bodø, Tartu (Estonia) and Bad Ischl (Austria). For Bodø2024 receiving the ECoC title marked the occasion of the first city north of the Arctic Circle, representing a distinct case from European cultural landscape. Its application, structured around the concept of ARCTICulation, cultural production was positioned as an instrument for regional transformation. The implementation of Bodø2024 saw this ambition translated into a structured yet diverse cultural programme organized around five seasonal “chapters”, reflecting the Arctic’s natural rhythms:

1. *Here Comes the Sun* celebrating the return of light, Northern reawakening.
2. *Spring Optimism* focusing on youth, hope, and European solidarity.
3. *Midsummer Madness* with idea of the intensity, collectivity, and cultural events.
4. *Autumn Storms* on reflection, discourse, political and environmental engagement.
5. *Arctic Light* concluded with nuance, memory, and transformation.

This program was created to reach eight strategic objectives, which should have functioned as both guiding principles and orientation for projects implemented under the Bodø2024 programme (Table 1). Thus, forming and following these strategic objectives was important to the increased coherence across the programme, aligning local, regional, and European cultural goals through the overall Bodø2024 project implementation.

Table 1. Objectives of Bodø2024 and potential contribution of Bodø2024 projects*

Strategic objective	Aim	Anticipated role of projects
1. Reverse the image of Nordland	Rebrand the region as culturally vibrant	High-profile, media-visible projects; international artistic collaborations; educational and capacity building initiatives for local population (with specific focus on youth).
2. Widen the cultural production base	Foster regional and interdisciplinary creation	Support for local creators, residencies, co-productions.
3. Engage disengaged groups	Ensure cultural access and inclusion	Outreach; participatory forms of culture; rural and community-led events.
4. Use unusual spaces	Expand the geography of culture	Performances and installations in public, natural, or non-traditional venues.
5. Create web of cultural hotspots (especially for young people)	Decentralise infrastructure, focus on youth	Youth-led hubs; school partnerships; distributed networks.
6. Internationalise cultural offer	Deepen European cultural integration	Incoming/outgoing exchanges, EU projects, mobility funding.
7. Support cultural professionals	Build sustainable careers in culture	Training, mentorship, cross-sector collaboration.
8. Promote freedom of expression	Ensure pluralistic and critical cultural content	Projects exploring social justice, indigenous voices, democratic themes.

* developed based on the Bodø2024 Application (2018)

Bodø2024 formulated its objectives fit to the local setting based on the Guidelines developed by the European Commission (EC). These Guidelines outline a hierarchy of objectives relevant to the ECoC initiative (EC, 2018).

Table 2. ECoC hierarchy of objectives (EC, 2018)

General Objectives (GO)								
Safeguard and promote the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlight the common features they share, increase citizens' sense of belonging to a common cultural space (Go1), and foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities (Go2).								
Specific Objectives (SO)								
SO1: Enhance the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offering in cities, including through transnational co-operation			SO2: Widen access to and participation in culture		SO3: Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector and its links with other sectors		SO4: Raise the international profile of cities through culture	
Operational Objectives								
Stimulate extensive cultural programmes of high artistic quality	Ensure cultural programmes feature a strong European dimension and transnational co-operation	Involve a wide range of citizens and stakeholders in preparing and implementing the cultural programme	Create new opportunities for a wide range of citizens to attend or participate in cultural events	Improve cultural infrastructure	Develop the skills, capacity and governance of the cultural sector	Stimulate partnership and co-operation with other sectors	Promote the city and its cultural programme	Improve the international outlook of residents

As shown in Tabel 2, among the general objectives, Go2 states that the goal of ECoC is to foster the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities. In this context, the projects developed and delivered under ECoC become particularly important for a region, as they strengthen the capacity of cultural sector, its interlinkages with other sectors locally and transnationally.

In parallel, the development of Bodø2024 unfolded against a shifting local and regional financial condition. The period leading up to the cultural year was marked by increasing financial pressure on both the municipality and cultural institutions, including budget cuts, rising operational costs, and reduced public funding. These constraints shaped the conditions under which the cultural programme was designed and implemented. For instance, the mobilisation of volunteers, civil society organisations, and cross-sector networks considered as particularly important in enabling the programme to achieve its ambitions despite limited financial resources.

This context helps explain why several of the strategic objectives, such as strengthening cultural capacity, widening the production base, engaging disengaged groups, and supporting cultural professionals, were especially significant for Bodø and Nordland. The ECoC programme provided a platform for experimentation, collaboration, and community mobilisation that could serve as a basis for long-term development, in line with EC's emphasis on culture as a driver of sustainable urban transformation.

1.2. Introducing Bodø2024 projects

In the context of Bodø2024, we defined a project as *a formalised cultural intervention, comprising one or more events, with a designated leader, budget, timeline, and declared aims, enacted under the umbrella of Bodø2024*. Projects, thus, served as operational units through which the strategic objectives and programme logic of Bodø2024 were enacted. Analysing them enables to assess how well strategic objectives were translated into practice.

The cooperation with the Bodø2024 team in defining and understanding projects developed gradually from 2023 onwards. As Monitor2024 team, we experienced that the understanding of projects has been evolving and was thus highly dynamic. Together with the Bodø2024 team, we reconsidered and refined projects' parameters and started to experience a growing complexity. For example, a project could include several sub-projects (as was in the case with Ecological Economics) or take a form of a single large event (such as the Opening Ceremony) which, despite encompassing multiple activities, counted as one project. In our analytical work, Monitor2024 team sought to find structure in these categories and build a hierarchy that could both capture the organic logic of Bodø2024 and provide a more static framework for analysis. This process led us to propose a schematic hierarchy of arrangements (see Figure 1): Bodø2024 as an organic entity but requiring a more systematic categorisation to describe and evaluate its internal logic.



Figure 1. Hierarchical structure of Bodø2024 arrangements

Figure 1 provides a visualization of the organisational structure of Bodø2024 projects. At the top level are the projects (Project₁ ... Project_n), which represent the main formalised cultural interventions under Bodø2024. Some of these were large and strategic, such as the key focus areas (UNG2024 [Young2024], Frivillig2024 [Volunteers2024], Økologisk

Økonomi [Ecological Economics]). On the left side, the figure shows how the Sámi perspective functioned as a transversal dimension. Rather than being confined to one project, Sámi voices, rights, and traditions were integrated across multiple projects, sub-projects, and events.

Many projects consisted of sub-projects, which in turn generated multiple events, the most visible expressions of Bodø2024 for the public. However, not all projects followed this full structure; some consisted of a single large-scale event (such as the Opening Ceremony), while others operated as ongoing programmes spanning several smaller activities.

Importantly, the Figure 1 serves as a simplified representation. In practice, Bodø2024 projects were far more complex and dynamic. Several projects, sub-projects, or events could belong simultaneously to multiple key focus areas – for example, youth-led activities intersecting with *Frivillig2024* or ecological initiatives. Furthermore, there were also independent projects outside of the key focus areas, emerging from the application-defined programme, open calls, or partnerships developed during the cultural year.

This layered and overlapping structure reflects both the organic development of Bodø2024 and the analytical challenge faced by Monitor2024 in classifying and evaluating the programme.

In total, 114 projects were funded and implemented under Bodø2024. These projects varied considerably in size and scope, ranging from small-scale artistic interventions to large, multi-annual initiatives. They can be grouped into several categories:

- **Projects under four key focus areas** (cross-cutting spanning throughout the year):
 1. *UNG2024* engaging youth as creators, audiences, and leaders.
 2. *Frivillig2024* mobilising volunteers, international dimension and civic participation.
 3. *Økologisk Økonomi* exploring sustainability and ecological thought.
 4. Sámi perspective highlighting Sámi voices, rights, and traditions.
- **Application-defined projects** – included in the original bid book and aligned with five seasonal chapters. Some projects were grouped, in case they were happening under same theme or period (for example, Our Dancing Days included such sub-projects as International dancing days; Polsdans; Moving Cities; Utopia and some others).
- **Emergent projects** – new initiatives developed in the years leading up to 2024, often reflecting partnerships, evolving needs, or opportunities (for instance, Kyiv Soloists, a Ukrainian chamber ensemble that found refuge in Bodø after the outbreak of war in 2022. They were supported by Bodø2024 and the Arctic Philharmonic).
- **Granted projects** (from open calls) – Bodø2024 issued calls inviting local cultural actors and citizens to apply. This gave community-driven initiatives a chance to enter the official programme and strengthening participation of local audiences.

Studying projects allows us to evaluate how strategic objectives were operationalised, resources mobilised, and what can be their anticipated impact. The following section introduces the theoretical and methodological approaches used to explore their structure, content, and impacts.

1.3. Conceptual approach for projects' analysis

Based on the objectives set out by Bodø2024 (Table 1) and the EC (Table 2), this report develops a conceptual model that explains how increased access to art and culture may lead to long-term social change. In particular, by exploring the role of cultural projects in this change. Cultural development is seen as the primary mechanism for achieving this. To structure this change, we suggest an Input-Process-Output processual model (see Figure 2), which reflects how investments in culture are expected to produce long-term social outcomes.

- » **Input:** resources allocated to art and culture, including funding, international collaboration, and artist residencies etc through ECoC Bodø2024.
- » **Process:** activities leading to a rise in quantity and quality (supply) of local cultural offerings, leading to higher public engagement (demand) with cultural events and initiatives.
- » **Output:** improved capacities, more cultural engagements, greater participation, recognition of the city and ultimately positive city development, making people willing to stay in this city.

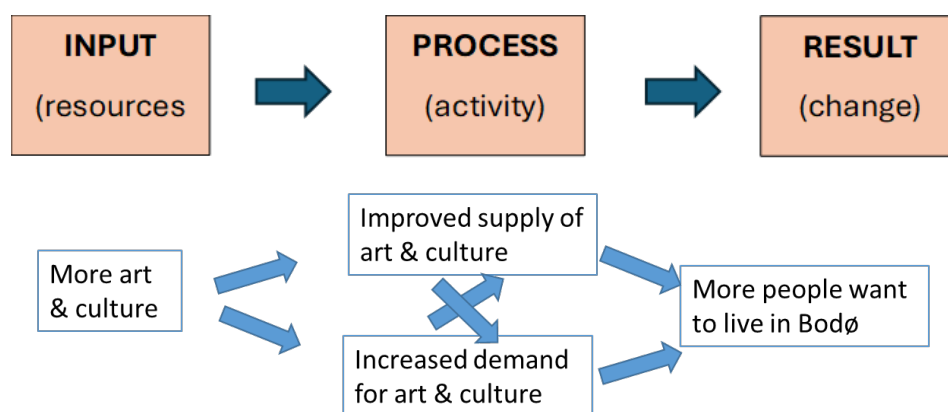


Figure 2. The model for the evaluation of Bodø2024

As local and international artists co-create new cultural experiences, both professionals and the public gain access to a wider range of artistic offerings. This contributes to strengthening the cultural infrastructure and enhancing the region's social vitality, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of supply and demand. The model assumes that cultural projects function as catalysts within this cycle, enabling continuous cultural growth and community development.

The EU's policy framework highlights that an ECoC should be embedded in a long-term cultural strategy capable of producing long-term cultural, economic, and social impacts. Thus, legacy planning becomes an important component for organizing ECoC (Garcia & Cox, 2013). A widespread approach includes allocating resources for ensuring continuity and transfer of responsibilities to organisations that can sustain the momentum. In practice, this has prompted cities to adopt strategic legacy planning, for example, by making sustainability a criterion in the selection of activities for the hosting year (European Commission, n.a.). Thus, an assumption behind our conceptual model is that projects act as important catalysts of the process of reinforcing supply and demand cycles allowing continuous growth and development. To understand how cultural projects contribute to short-term and long-term goals, as city development, well-being and place attachment, we draw upon literature on cultural management, urban development and formation of legacy. Figure 3 visualizes the extended model applied to projects' analysis.

Projects have become a major form of organising cultural activities, particularly within publicly funded cultural programmes such as ECoCs. Cultural projects seem to possess a sort of hybridity, since they are associated with a high level of complexity and fluidity of interconnected cultural events (Jung et al., 2024) and, at the same time, incorporate distinctive features of projects like possess-defined leadership, allocated budgets, and clear timelines (O'Toole, 2005), with objectives tied to the production of cultural and social impacts. Such project-based approach is used when planning cultural interventions, allowing organisations in the field of arts and cultural management to respond to dynamically shifting contexts, experiment with forms and contents, and engage diverse stakeholders into co-production of events.

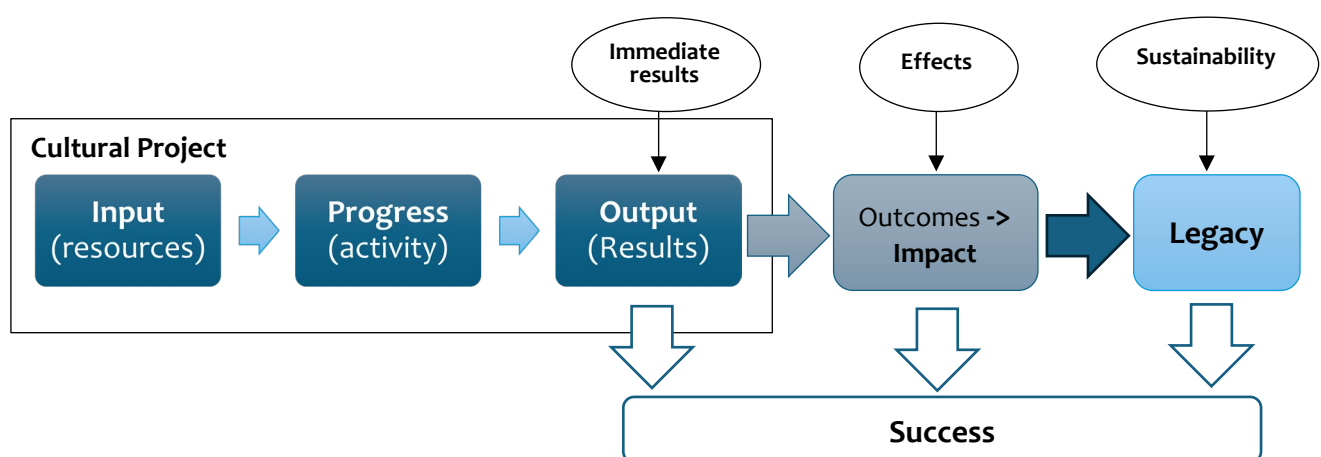


Figure 3. The conceptual model applied to projects' analysis
(authors elaboration based on Garcia & Cox, 2013; Montague, 2000)

Figure 3 refines the initial model by extending it beyond immediate short-term outputs to consider impacts and legacy. While outputs capture the direct, short-term results of cultural projects, outcomes, impacts and legacy reflect deeper and longer-term changes. We define the main categories as:

- **Outputs** are tangible, immediate results of project activities: new productions, exhibitions, events, audience numbers etc. They can usually be captured through quantitative indicators (e.g., attendance, number of artists involved, media coverage).
- **Outcomes** represent a gradual change in a condition of a policy, system, behaviour or attitude (Clark, 2019). This term is often used to express the medium-term results, which further lead to the impact.
- **Impacts** move beyond immediate and medium-term results and describe the broader cultural, social, and economic effects associated with the project. Impacts are often more diffuse and require mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) to assess effects of a project. Garcia & Cox (2013) identify the following types of impacts:
 - o Cultural impacts may include increased cultural vibrancy, higher visibility for local artists, networks expansion or diversification and continuity of cultural offerings.
 - o Social impacts can manifest in greater community cohesion, local perceptions and sense of pride, or enhanced cultural participation among previously underrepresented groups.
 - o Economic impacts often refer to tourism trends, job creation in the creative sector, or improved city economy.
 - o Political and policy impacts can be visible through increased political engagement, government's commitment in terms of financial support, positioning cultural policy within the local governments planning process etc.
- **Legacy** refers to the sustainability and durability of these impacts over time. A legacy is established when benefits of cultural projects continue after the event year (Liu, 2019) and become embedded in local institutions, practices, and collective memory. For example, new cultural infrastructures may remain in use, partnerships formed during the ECoC may lead to future collaborations, and heightened civic identity may translate into long-term place attachment.

Importantly, for this report, we focus on the most observable changes in 2024 reflecting either direct project results or the first signs of broader impact. Treating outcomes as a separate category now would risk conceptual overlap and double counting, reducing the analytical clarity of the evaluation. For conceptual and, as a result, methodological precision, this report therefore focuses on: outputs (short-term, measurable results), impacts (broader effects already visible or emerging), and legacy (structures and practices likely to persist). A meaningful assessment of outcomes requires more time to pass and should be addressed in a follow-up evaluation 12–24 months after the event.

The EC explicitly frames legacy as a key criterion of success for ECoCs (European Commission, n.a.; Garcia & Cox, 2013). Legacy planning requires cities to ensure not only that projects deliver outputs and impacts but also that mechanisms are in place to sustain

them (e.g., post-event funding, institutional support, or community-driven follow-up initiatives).

Thus, the success of cultural projects cannot be measured only by short-term outputs, it should also be evaluated by their capacity to generate impacts and contribute to legacy. In practice, this means that success can have multiple forms as:

- Artistic success (artistic expressions, innovation, quality of cultural production).
- Audience success (participation, inclusivity, engagement of new groups).
- Network success (local and international partnerships, collaborations, institutional strengthening).
- Legacy success (enduring infrastructures, continued practices, strengthened local identity and international positioning).

By extending the Input-Process-Output processual model and linking outputs towards impacts and legacy, Figure 3 highlights that projects should not be perceived as temporal cultural interventions, but as potential catalysts for long-term sustainable urban and cultural transformation. Furthermore, we explore how success is formed in different types of cultural projects differentiating between short- and long-term emergence of success. It is important to note, that success is not a fixed or universally positive term. We understand success as something that can be represented as both positive and negative effects, depending on the context and perception. As we explain further in this report, our interviews with project leaders explored their own definitions of success - what it means to them personally - and whether they felt they had achieved their intended goals.

1.4. Methodological approach for projects' analysis

To measure effects related to Bodø2024 and EC's objectives, Monitor2024 team developed a comprehensive list of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The full list contains over 100 KPIs; all of them are captured with various data that Monitor2024 team has collected and presented in dedicated reports (see Appendix I for overview of reports). In this specific report we address the following KPIs related to Bodø2024 projects (Table 3).

Table 3. Selected KPIs for projects' analysis

KPI	Description	Purpose
OCE002	Outgoing cultural travel	Measures mobility of artists and staff
OCE008	Internships abroad	Tracks skills development through transnational exposure
OCE009	Incoming visits	Evaluates internationalisation and exchange
OEE008	Mobility scholarships	Access and inclusion in cultural careers
SUP001	Share of co-financing	Financial sustainability and partnership diversification
SUP003	EU funding acquired	European alignment and external resource mobilisation

The KPIs allow us to monitor project contributions in terms of mobility, internationalisation, skills development, and financial sustainability, thereby linking

project-level practices to the broader objectives of Bodø2024 and the ECoC initiative. However, quantitative indicators alone cannot capture the complexity of cultural projects. To complement them, we introduce qualitative dimensions covering project management, capacity building, legacy, and success. For this, we employ a qualitative case study methodology in which each project is treated as a structured cultural intervention and examined as a unit of analysis. Each project is evaluated in terms of its:

1. Alignment with Bodø2024 and EC objectives. How clearly are project goals linked to ECoC objectives?
2. Governance and organisation. Who leads the project and with what capacity?
3. Funding and resource mobilisation. How diverse and sustainable are the resources?
4. Internationalisation and mobility. What forms of transnational collaboration are evident?
5. Impacts and legacy potential. Is there a post-2024 continuation plan or institutionalisation?
6. Success narratives. How do project leaders define and perceive success?
7. Learning and adaptation. What challenges emerged and how were they managed?

These analytical categories were operationalised through an interview guide that balances general framing questions with project-specific ones. Table 4 summarises the guiding structure and demonstrates how questions were linked to the conceptual model presented earlier.

Table 4. Interview guide for projects' analysis

Overall questions	Menu of specific questions	Theme	Link to the conceptual model
1. What was the purpose of your project?	What is the motivation? What are the main objectives? How they contribute to Bodø2024 and EC objectives?	Alignment with Bodø2024 and EC objectives	Input
2. How did project implementation go?	How big is your budget? How is it formed?	Funding and resource mobilisation	Input
	Who is working in your project management team? Do they have cultural education? Do you think having cultural professionals is critical for your project?	Governance, organisation and human resources	Input and Process
	Do you have any incoming and outgoing travels related to cultural cooperation? Do you have any internships, scholarships, research grants for outgoing travels? What internationalization means for your project?	Internationalisation and mobility	Process
3. Which results did you achieve? Did you reach what you planned?	Continuity of your project after 2024?	Impacts and legacy	Outputs Impact Legacy Success
	What do you consider successful?	Success narratives	
	What were the main challenges and lessons learnt?	Learning and adaptation	

By linking interview questions to conceptual categories, the evaluation directly connects project-level inquiry to the overarching model of cultural development (Figures 2 and 3).

The evaluation of Bodø2024 projects draws upon a diverse range of qualitative data sources and instruments, selected to ensure both depth and breadth of insight into project processes and results. These include:

- Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with project leaders and team members, allowing for an in-depth understanding of project goals, management structures, challenges, and reflections;
- Surveys run among organisers and participants to gather broader perceptions of involvement, impact, and cultural relevance;
- Secondary data, including the broad range of project documentation;
- Field observations and media reviews, used to capture real-time dynamics of project delivery, public reception, and contextual nuances;
- Internal administrative data provided by the Bodø2024 team.

Our sample includes projects under four key focus areas, as well as granted projects and other selected projects from the Bodø2024 application. To ensure diverse sample we included projects of different scales, locations around the whole region, and cultural themes. Data were collected in two distinct phases, each designed to capture different stages of project development and implementation. An initial pre-test phase in summer 2023, which focused on piloting interview instruments, testing analytical categories, and refining research questions. The main data collection phase spanned over 2024-2025, during which in-depth qualitative data were gathered through individual and focus group interviews, documentation review, and observations across a diverse set of projects at various points in their lifecycle. In particular, the main phase followed as:

- ⇒ *January-April 2024*: selection of projects and getting in touch with leadership.
- ⇒ *April-June 2024*: gathering data from key focus areas projects and those completed.
- ⇒ *September-December 2024*: remaining and recently granted projects.
- ⇒ *January-February 2025*: focused on legacy and concluded initiatives.

Qualitative data were coded thematically using NVivo, following the conceptual model categories while allowing inductive coding of emergent themes. To enhance robustness, the research employed methodological triangulation, systematically comparing and cross-referencing insights across interviews, surveys, observations, and documents. This strategy mitigates potential bias, provides a multidimensional understanding of project outcomes, and strengthens the credibility of this report.

1.5. Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. After the introduction to Bodø2024 context, conceptual and methodological approaches to analyse projects under the Bodø2024, we present the empirical analysis of selected projects. The empirical section provides evidence from projects under four key focus areas, selected application-defined projects and some projects from open calls. We finish with discussion and main takeaways from this report.

2. Projects

2.1. Project under key focus areas

2.1.1. UNG2024

Overview

UNG2024 was one of the four core strategic priorities under Bodø2024 and played a pivotal role in the city's successful bid to become ECoC. Framed as an ambitious youth programme with long-term developmental goals, it was designed to strengthen youth engagement through culture and creativity across the Nordland region. The project responded to structural demographic challenges, notably the outmigration of youth from Northern Norway, by investing in initiatives that could increase “*bolyst*” (the desire to live and stay locally) among young people.

The overarching goal of UNG2024 was to make Bodø and the broader Nordland region more attractive for youth. Thus, the work of UNG2024 was focused on three interlinked focus areas:

- The development and consolidation of youth meeting places.
- Competence building and creation of learning opportunities.
- Ensuring youth participation at all levels of planning and realization of cultural life.

As visualized on Figure 4, key events during 2024 included UNG Opening, *Hjertebank* youth festival, Open Art Festival, and UNG *Finale*, culminating in a distributed youth programme that ran parallel to the main Bodø2024 programme calendar.

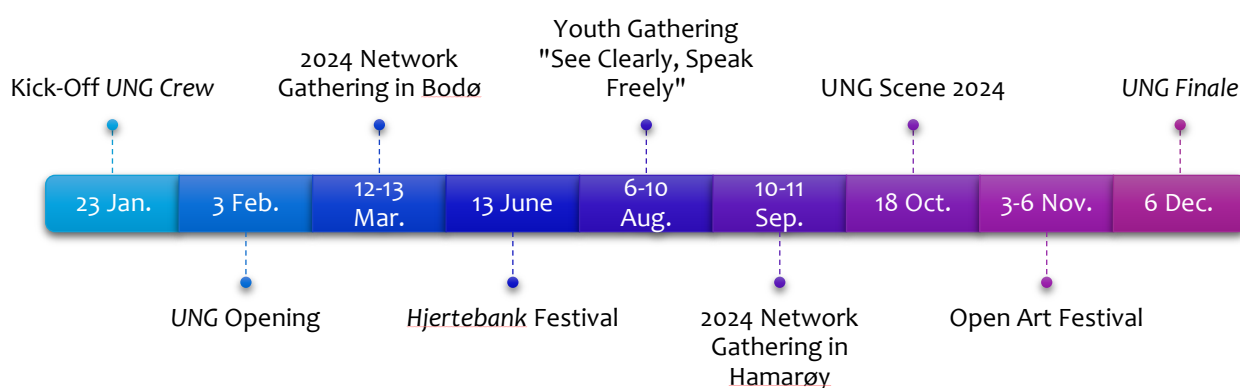


Figure 4. UNG2024 major events in 2024

The project was managed by a team, with Charlotte Nyheim Eriksen serving as project leader during 2021-2024, supported by coordinators and project staff. The structure was designed to model youth-centred governance, with a 13-member youth board (ages 13–19) meeting weekly over three years to steer the project's direction.

UNG2024 served as a base for establishing several networks and substructures:

- UNG Crew grew from 20 to 200 members, offering entry points for youth into technical, creative, and organisational roles.
- 2024Team and Ung Kultur Teamet created permanent structures for collaboration among municipal youth workers and cultural professionals.
- 2024Nettverket, with over 200 members from across Nordland, hosted six regional gatherings for peer learning, strategy exchange, and capacity-building.
- Nordlandsteamet ensured coordination across 10 municipalities, integrating local realities into the programme's implementation.

UNG2024 has reportedly produced the following outputs:

- › Received 210 project applications through open calls and supported 77 projects across 21 municipalities, distributing NOK 4 million (approx. 350 000 EUR) in funding.
- › Reached over 10,000 young people through public events and activities.
- › Established good digital presence with nearly 5,000 followers across TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.
- › Created new cross-sectoral professional and volunteer networks involving over 300 young people, and more than 200 youth workers across the county.



Hjertebank youth festival / Photo by David Engmo / Bodø2024

Insights from granted projects under UNG2024

Key findings: empowering youth through cultural co-creation and community attachment

- **Youth empowerment through co-creation**
UNG2024 projects actively involved youth in planning, decision-making, and artistic choices, fostering ownership, confidence, and a stronger sense of local belonging.
- **Cultural activities as anchors for “bolyst”**
UNG2024 events created meaningful experiences that contributed to young people’s desire to stay in their communities, offering both anticipation and shared memories.
- **Resource challenges and sustainability risks**
While UNG2024 funding enabled project launch, limited financial and human resources – especially due to municipal budget cuts – threatened long-term growth.
- **Collaboration as a key enabler**
Successful projects relied on partnerships across municipalities, businesses, and civil society, demonstrating the value of cross-sectoral cooperation in youth cultural work.
- **Legacy through micro-level impact**
Project leaders emphasized that even small outcomes (like youth asking for repeat events or gaining new skills) can seed lasting cultural habits and contribute to long-term regional development.

From the opening of calls for applications in 2023, 210 applications were received from whole region (22 million NOK – approx. 1,9 million EUR). NOK 4 million were allocated to different projects across region, resulting in 77 funded projects. Figure 5 shows locations, where projects under UNG2024 were funded. The projects were assessed by youth committee and selected the projects which got funds. It was also the youth who made the criteria for the calls.

To deepen the understanding of how UNG2024 functioned in practice, two focus groups and an individual interview were conducted with a total of six project leaders who had received funding under the programme. The projects varied in size from 40 000 to 140 000 NOK (approx. 3 500 to 12 100 EUR) and were delivered in Bodø and in smaller cities around Nordland. Such selection of projects offered a variety of experiences about local cultural production, youth engagement, and potential for continuity of projects. The analysis below is organised around the three main interview questions reflecting the described conceptual framework.



Figure 5. Map of UNG2024 funded projects

from: <https://www.bodo2024.no/om-ung2024>

What was the purpose and resource base of your project?

Project leaders consistently described their initiatives as rooted in a desire to empower youth, address gaps in existing cultural provision, and create opportunities for active participation and co-creation. The intention was not only to deliver cultural content to young people, but to develop it with them. This participatory dimension was highlighted repeatedly:

“The goal was both to show the performance and to inspire young people to realize their own ideas.”

“We arranged technical workshops for them. They also helped choose the artists – who we could afford, who they thought were cool to bring in.”

Such reflections show that participation extended beyond passive attendance: youth were engaged as co-creators and decision-makers, shaping both content and process.

Another significant motivation was the desire to foster a stronger sense of *bolyst* (meaning “desire to live in a place”) among young people. This connection to community well-being was articulated clearly:

“... I think that when you have a positive event that young people can look forward to – or look back on – it gives them a desire to stay here. It gives meaning to everyday life, and it gives them something to talk about when the summer holidays are over.”

At the start of their projects, leaders combined small Bodø2024/UNG2024 grants, municipal funding, and private foundations with additional sponsorship from local businesses. Human resources were largely drawn from volunteers, youth clubs, and schools, while prior experience and networks (e.g., international gaming contacts or established municipal cultural infrastructure) provided crucial know-how and legitimacy. This mix of financial support, volunteer labour, and existing networks formed the core input base for launching their initiatives.

Thus, cultural projects served not only as entertainment, but as a source of belonging, anticipation, and everyday meaning. By giving young people visible roles, positive memories, and shared experiences, projects aimed to strengthen local identity and attachment. Taken together, these narratives highlight that the purpose of the projects went beyond staging events. They sought to embed youth more deeply in the cultural and social fabric of their community, nurturing both agency (active involvement) and place attachment (*bolyst*).

How did the process of project implementation go?

One of the most debated aspects of project implementation concerned financial resources and the ability to attract sufficient funding. Several project leaders noted that support from UNG2024 helped in turning their ideas into reality. As one leader reflected:

“We had the idea for the project even before UNG2024. But after talking to someone in the organization, I was told that our project was actually a good fit [to apply]. It was then considered by the [UNG2024] youth committee, who gave us support.”

At the same time, several respondents pointed out that limited allocations constrained what they could achieve:

“Honestly: if I had received support for four courses, it would have made a big difference from previous years. But I only got support for one course, and it’s the same I’ve done for three–four years already. It didn’t feel new. With four courses, we could have developed it into something much bigger – maybe made exhibitions, built something over time. We could have had street art, outdoor projects – it would have been really cool. But we only got one course, so it was nothing more than usual.”

Still, one of the most critical issues, which influenced projects’ implementation and continuity, was the local governments’ budgetary cuts in general and for culture in particular. This was supported by several strong concerns:

“A big challenge is that Bodø municipality has less money to distribute for cultural purposes. There have been specific cuts that affect recruitment to cultural life. It is difficult to say right now what the effect will be, but it forces other actors to take responsibility. However, it is not a desirable development that commercial actors take over functions that previously belonged to the municipality. The general picture is that it is more difficult financially for municipalities across the country. Culture is often the first thing to be cut, because it is not a statutory task. In our case, we have had to apply for support from many different places. We received a little from the county, but not from the municipality, from which we have received small sums in the past. This means that there will be fewer local funds available, even though state support schemes still exist.”

“For our part, we have known the challenge of finances. We did the project with minimal remuneration. We were covered by UNG2024 and some support from the county council, but the salary was symbolic. It is not sustainable over time.”

The leaders also stressed that cultural projects need not only money, but time and staffing in order to grow and endure:

“Culture is important – in both boom-and-bust times. Youth are the future, and that often means a little more money in the wallet. Supporting an event for youth is easier to sell than something for adults. I have yet to get a single politician to say no when I ask to host something in their municipality. The only thing we lack is more time, more employees and more resources.”

Adding an international dimension was another aspiration, but one that most small-scale projects lacked the capacity to realise:

“We were encouraged to apply for different funding schemes, including from the EU, but for our project – which is a practical music production course – international collaboration would have required more planning and capacity than we had. We knew there were funds linked to international cooperation but chose to keep it regional. We only had space for a few participants anyway, so it was most natural to focus on our own region.”

On a more positive note, project leaders emphasised the role of collaborative structures in enabling implementation. Mobilising resources through partnerships that bridged the public actors, business sector, and civil society was seen as crucial:

“We often work in what could be called a tripartite collaboration with the municipality, business sector, and volunteers.”

“Then we can say to the young people: the reason you got five meals, free accommodation and participation is because the business community and the municipality have contributed. The businesses want the young people to stay in the area, and the municipality wants local activity.”

This illustrates that UNG2024 not only enabled project delivery, but also created conditions for expanded networking, co-creation and future collaboration, factors needed for sustainable cultural development.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that while financial and human resource constraints significantly shape the scope and sustainability of projects, UNG2024 also served as a platform for resource mobilisation and new partnerships. By fostering networks across sectors, UNG2024 supported project delivery as well as created foundations for future collaboration. This is a factor closely tied to the long-term legacy of cultural initiatives.

Which results did you achieve? Did you reach what you planned?

Several project leaders reported achieving (and in some cases exceeding) their intended results. Often, projects not only reached planned goals but also generated unanticipated levels of engagement and momentum, creating pathways for continuation beyond 2024:

“We’re planning a next round in Beiarn, and it will continue in 2025 and beyond.”

Beyond event delivery, participants described their projects as valuable experiences in capacity building, both for themselves and for the young people involved. They highlighted gains in confidence, leadership, and professional competence:

“I’ve learned an incredible amount – and it hasn’t scared me off. We’re continuing this for at least three more years.”

“Yes! The whole process has definitely built capacity for us as a company. From application writing to implementation and reporting – we’ve learned a lot.”

Another leader reflected on how their project fostered dialogue and new forms of interaction with youth audiences in different cities around Nordland:

“What was interesting for me were the conversations we had with the youth after the performance. There was actually a big difference between the experience in Bodø and in Mo i Rana. In Bodø it felt more like a school assignment, while in Mo the youth came because they wanted to – and that shaped the conversations. We first visited them at school and had a session, and then they came to the performance. Afterwards we discussed together. That gave me a feeling of really connecting closely with the young people. That experience – of creating contact and dialogue in that way – I will definitely take with me further.”

For some, projects also bridged personal interests with professional development:

“I have a bachelor’s in music technology and am now doing a bachelor’s in economics and administration – so this project hit right in the middle of my interests. It combined music and project management. I learned a lot from organizing this, and it gave me the desire to continue working with similar projects. Maybe not this exact camp in the same format, but the experience is worth gold.”

These experiences indicate that UNG2024 facilitated not only event delivery but also capacity building and individual development. At the same time, project leaders became more aware of their target group – youth:

“One important thing I have learned is that we must get even better at reaching young people who stand a bit on the outside. Youth who may not participate in the social community and who have found security in a digital reality – for example, gaming. I have previously said that we should reach these young people, but it is challenging.”

Sustaining momentum also emerged as a critical concern, highlighting how fragile cultural gains can be without long-term planning and resources. Leaders pointed out that while UNG2024 and Bodø2024 generated a sense of cultural vitality – “suddenly Bodø became a cultural city” – they feared this could fade quickly if not consolidated into lasting structures:

“UNG2024 and Bodø2024 have created momentum [...] The question now is whether we can maintain it, or if it was just a flash. Budget cuts threaten much of what has been built up.”

Here, legacy is understood not only as infrastructure or cultural visibility but as the ability to maintain energy, participation, and belief in culture as a collective project. Without this continuity, the gains of 2024 risk being remembered as a “flash” rather than transformed into a sustainable cultural trajectory. Other reflections reinforce this long-term perspective. From one side, leaders stressed that cultivating cultural habits among youth requires time and ongoing commitment, from another side, they mention that it is hard to prove the intangible effects to politicians.

“Another challenge was getting young people to come. I live in Oslo, where there is already a strong culture of participating in cultural experiences. In Bodø we had to work to get youth to see theatre. [...] Building cultural habits takes time – and requires effort.”

“From a political or economic perspective, it is difficult because people often think in numbers and concrete results. Culture and youth work are difficult to quantify. You cannot always show the value now – maybe only in 10 years, when someone moves back, starts a family, or becomes part of the local community. It requires people who are willing to stick with it. [...] It is more about capacity and perseverance than large budgets.”

These statements underscore that, for project leaders, success is inseparable from legacy formation. While immediate results - such as full events or positive feedback – do matter, true success lies in whether projects seed long-term change: inspiring young people, building cultural habits, and embedding cultural activity in the everyday life of the region.

When leaders say that success is reached if “the youths ask ‘when will we do this again?’”, if “someone was inspired by our performance, then we have succeeded” or if even “two or three get inspired and take it further, then that’s more than enough”, they are pointing to sustainability at the micro-level, i.e., continuity of participation, skills, and identity. These micro-successes accumulate into the kind of macro-legacy envisaged by ECoC policy: a cultural ecosystem that endures beyond the event year, strengthens local identity, and continues to generate cultural and social value.

In this way, the leaders’ accounts reflect on how outputs (activities, participation) translate into impacts (capacity, habits, inspiration), and ultimately into legacy (sustained momentum, cultural attachment, and long-term development).

Results aligned with Bodø2024 objectives and Monitor2024’s KPIs

According to the findings from the survey among UNG Crew, UNG2024 contributed to several Bodø2024 strategic objectives and KPIs (see Table 3). It is important to note that only objectives for which we have empirical evidence are included. Several of the Bodø2024 strategic objectives fall outside the scope of what the data captures, either because they target other population groups or concern institutional or infrastructural developments. We, therefore, report (in this section and for all future related to other projects) alignment only for the objectives and KPIs that can be meaningfully assessed using the available data.

Alignment with objectives of Bodø2024

Objective 1. Reverse image of Nordland
Objective 3. Engage disengaged groups
Objective 5. Create cultural hotspots, especially for youth
Objective 7. Support cultural professionals
Objective 8. Promote freedom of expression

Objective 1: Reverse image of Nordland and Objective 5: Create cultural hotspots especially for youth

UNG2024 contributed to repositioning Nordland as an attractive and dynamic region by enabling young people to lead cultural projects. Through festivals, workshops, and youth-led arenas, participants ownership of planning and implementation, thereby challenging stereotypes of the region as peripheral or stagnant. This links to KPI OCE002 and KPI

OCE009 focused on both-sides mobilities. By fostering both outward mobility of youth and the attraction of new audiences into local cultural arenas.

Objective 3: Engage disengaged groups

Actively included youth from across rural municipalities and non-engaged demographics, with over 50% of UNG Crew having no prior engagement with local youth services. For around 15% of UNG Crew members, the experience of being in the UNG Crew team was their first experience of being a volunteer. This reflects KPI SUP001 (Share of co-financing) by fostering the spiting of volunteering amongst youth and building their recognition of importance of in-kind contributions.

Objective 7: Support cultural professionals

Fostered skills development, volunteer management, and peer-to-peer training, strengthening youth cultural competence and employability. More than 50% of UNG Crew members answer that they want to contribute to the development of Bodø, and 40% mean that participation in Ung Crew gave them an opportunity to get to know the local environment, provided good work experience and new networks. The overwhelming majority of UNG Crew members have participated at least once in organizing an event, helped with photo, video, decorations, graphic design, and catering on UNG2024 events.

Objective 8: Promote freedom of expression

Included thematic programming on youth voice, democracy, and inclusion. This also connects to KPI SUP001 (Share of co-financing), as youth-led projects often depended on diverse funding sources and partnerships to make such activities possible.

While the overarching analysis of UNG2024 shows achievement of substantial results, the report now turns to the perspectives of those directly responsible for delivering youth-led cultural projects: the project leaders who received financing through the open-call funding scheme under UNG2024. While the section above presented the structural and strategic dimensions of UNG2024, next section dives deeper into the lived experiences of cultural leaders, those who used funding, frameworks, and youth engagement to get into concrete, place-based interventions. Their reflections offer a grounded perspective on what it means to organise cultural projects in a distributed, youth-centred programme, and they illuminate aspects of input-process-output process that are often not fully captured in formal reporting.

Drawing on interviews conducted in 2024 with leaders of six youth-focused projects, the following section synthesises their experiences, with attention to resources needed, implementation process and achieved short-term results and long-term effects.

2.1.2. Frivillig2024

Overview

Frivillig2024 is the second strategic priority under Bodø2024. The ambition of *Frivillig2024* was not simply setting the aim to increase volunteer engagement, but also to build a framework for cultural and civic development initiative locally. Positioned at the intersection of participatory governance, cultural democracy, and community resilience, the project aimed to enhance the visibility, capacity, and integration of voluntary actors across the Nordland region.

Within the original Bodø2024 application (2019), volunteering was placed as an integral part of the outreach strategy presented as both a core delivery mechanism and a means of public co-ownership. This was planned to be achieved by empowering minorities to become actively engaged into local cultural life. As the application states, “*our different communities wish to contribute to 2024 with their own culture, not just consume the culture of the majority*” (Bodø2024, 2019 p. 71). This framing positioned *Frivillig2024* as a civic platform that would mobilise residents from across demographics (e.g., immigrant communities, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and children and young people) and geographies (with international background and those living in distant areas of Nordland region), transforming audiences into agents of cultural production.

Frivillig2024 was set to become a flagship volunteering initiative led by Nicole Natalie Furnes from Bodø2024 and established to strengthen the voluntary sector in Bodø and Nordland before, during, and after ECoC year. The initiative implemented through four main components:

1. Nordland *Frivillignettverk* (Nordland Volunteer Network): A regional volunteer network established to strengthen cooperation between volunteer centres and coordinators across Nordland.
2. *Frivilligforum* (Volunteer Forum): An inclusive platform gathering volunteer teams, organisations, and informal initiatives in the municipality to share practices, co-create events, and build capacity.



Frivillig på Værøy / Photo by Arina Karbovskaia / Bodø2024

3. *Bodøs Internasjonale Foreninger* or BIF (Bodø's International Associations): A network of international associations aimed at supporting intercultural engagement and integrating new residents into the cultural life of the region. It served as an arena for building connections, sharing experiences, and collaborating on joint goals and activities such as *Barnas internasjonale dag* (Children's International Day) and *Internasjonal uke* (International Week).
4. *Frivillige i Bodø2024* (Volunteers in Bodø2024): A pool of volunteers who supported Bodø2024 activities in a wide range of ways throughout the cultural capital year.

By the close of 2024, *Frivillig2024* had mobilised a substantial base of networks and volunteers:

- » 14 associations joined Bodø's International Associations.
- » 650 volunteers engaged in the Volunteer Forum, representing 243 organizations.
- » 502 volunteers registered in the Bodø2024 volunteer pool.

Volunteers contributed to Bodø2024 in a wide variety of roles, ranging from event hosting, setting up arenas, catering, and decoration to care and support functions, transport, craftwork, and the pilot role of “cultural friend” (*kulturvenn*), designed to include more people in cultural life. This diversity of roles ensured that participation was accessible to people with different skills and interests.

The volunteers were considered “ambassadors” for Bodø2024. In return for their contributions, volunteers were invited to dedicated gatherings and celebrations, given food and drink while on duty, and in some cases received free tickets to Bodø2024's own events. For many, participation was described as a “once in a lifetime opportunity” to take part in Northern Norway's largest cultural project, while also gaining experience, networks, and CV-enhancing skills.

Frivillig2024 has continued beyond the ECoC year through the establishment of *Frivillig Bodø* (<https://www.frivilligbodo.no>), a voluntary association founded in spring 2025. The aim of *Frivillig Bodø* is to sustain and further develop the networks and activities created under *Frivillig2024*, ensuring continuity in volunteer engagement and cross-sector collaboration.



International Festival / Photo by Arina Karbovskaia / Bodø2024

Insights from other volunteering organizations participating in Frivillig2024 initiatives

Key findings: building inclusive communities through volunteer-driven cultural participation

- **Volunteering as a tool for inclusion and outreach**
Frivillig2024 strategically used cultural volunteering to engage marginalized groups (immigrants, youth, elderly, and people with disabilities) emphasizing social inclusion.
- **Dual resource logic: financial inputs and symbolic rewards**
While volunteers were central to implementation of projects, the initiative depended on structured funding, coordination, and partnerships. Volunteers were motivated by gaining networks, skills, and meaningful experiences rather than monetary compensation.
- **Capacity building and professionalization**
Frivillig2024 developed handbooks, training tools, and international collaborations (e.g., *Vologram*) to professionalize volunteer coordination, offering recommendation letters and EU-standard recognition for volunteers.
- **Uneven integration and participation challenges**
Although events fostered visibility and community among minority groups, some participants noted limited engagement from the broader local population and challenges in sustaining volunteer capacity under financial pressure.
- **Legacy through networks and new traditions**
The most enduring outcomes were new relationships, cross-cultural connections, and long-term structures like *Frivilligforum* and BIF. These networks are expected to continue beyond 2024, though their sustainability depends on stable resources and trust.

To gain a deeper understanding of how *Frivillig2024* performed, interviews were conducted with the *Frivillig2024* leader (Nicole Natalie Furnes) as well as with representatives from two volunteering organizations actively involved in the initiative. The selected organizations represented different stages of maturity: one was relatively young (established around three years ago), while the other had seven+ years of experience. This combination provided insights into how *Frivillig2024* supported both emerging associations seeking visibility and established ones looking to expand or sustain their activities. The analysis is structured around three guiding questions: the purpose of the projects, the process of implementation, and the results achieved.

What was the purpose and resource base to get engaged into Frivillig2024?

The overarching aim of *Frivillig2024* was described as *outreach*, to use culture as a means to include new groups, such as elderly, immigrants, youth, and people with disabilities, into community life. As *Frivillig2024* leader explained:

“The inspiration and the reason why we have this project is outreach ... the EU wants us to use culture to reach out to new groups ... I think that volunteering is a great opportunity to engage people in society and include people.”

This quote points directly to the *purpose dimension* of the conceptual model’s input stage: *Frivillig2024* was not simply about mobilising helpers, but about strategically embedding volunteering within the wider ECoC goal of social inclusion. At the same time, the interviews highlight that volunteering is resource intensive, requiring significant organizational and financial inputs. As *Frivillig2024* leader stressed:

“I think people often underestimate how many resources are required for volunteering. The funding has been also distributed to municipalities to support events like Children’s Day, with allocations made in proportion to the number of citizens.”

Here, the focus is on that volunteering depends on more than goodwill – it requires systematic funding streams, coordination capacity, and local partnerships. This expands the traditional view of “free” volunteer labour by acknowledging the hidden costs of infrastructure and facilitation. Volunteers themselves were also described as a core resource, substituting for paid employees in many cases:

“For the project [Bodø2024], of course, we could have hired employees to do everything. But that would cost a lot, so we rely on volunteers to help us out.” (leader Frivillig2024)

The challenge, however, is that volunteers cannot be “paid” in the traditional sense without undermining the very definition of volunteering. Instead, organizations must demonstrate non-monetary benefits such as skills, networks, and unique experiences:

“You cannot live off being a volunteer because the moment you get money it's no longer volunteering. [...] But the benefits are like network and competency and the amazing experience of seeing an event from the inside.” (leader Frivillig2024)

This highlights the dual input logic: financial resources sustain structures, while volunteers are motivated by symbolic, experiential, and relational rewards. An important initiative of Frivillig2024 was the micro-funding scheme that provided small but significant resources across the whole Nordland region:

“In 2024, every association could apply for NOK 24 000 (approx. 2 100 EUR) from Bodø2024 to buy equipment for their events. We are also working to arrange this in the wider Nordland region. It will take place in nine municipalities this year. We contacted volunteer coordinators across Nordland and gathered them for inspiration and networking. Now it is happening, and they want to continue in the future as well. I think it’s amazing that, as a result of this program, we can celebrate children all over Nordland together.” (leader Frivillig2024)

This reflects how financial micro-inputs combined with network-building enabled broader regional engagement. The quote also illustrates how resource provision (funding and networking) became an input that could trigger sustainable practices beyond the ECoC year.

From the perspective of participating organizations, the purpose of engagement often lay in strengthening community ties and gaining visibility. For younger associations, Frivillig2024 offered legitimacy:

“It gave us an opportunity to be seen and to be part of a larger network.”

For more established organizations, the motivation was less about recognition and more about deepening cross-association collaboration:

“Getting to know each other across associations and nationalities also gives us an opportunity to communicate our activities and open up to others.”

How did the process of project implementation go?

The implementation of *Frivillig2024* was shaped by both the specific Norwegian tradition of voluntarism and by international learning through the ECoC network. In Norway, volunteering is closely tied to the concept of *dugnad* – a cultural practice of collective, unpaid work for the common good. Traditionally, neighbours come together to build, repair, or organize something for their community, and while this is unpaid, it is seen as a moral and social obligation that reinforces belonging and trust. This *dugnadsånd* (spirit of *dugnad*) is a cornerstone of Norwegian civic life, making volunteering a normal and expected part of participation in society.

As the project leader emphasized, this cultural backdrop shaped how *Frivillig2024* was designed and understood:

“Volunteering is so different in every country.”

“In Norway, volunteering is something really unique. Dugnadsånd, that’s something Norwegian. But for instance, in Tartu they only have NGOs and now they of course have volunteers helping out at their events, but they don’t have people doing this effort for free as we do. They have people that can help out in case of a fire or Red Cross, people being paid for it, working with it. It’s more like, I help locals in my community.”

Another important process dimension was internationalization and capacity building. *Frivillig2024* was both inspired by and contributed to learning across the ECoC network:

“I think most countries do the part of volunteering that is about recruiting volunteers, people to help out at specific events. It’s really important to get to know your people – general advice is to build connections with the institutions.” (leader Frivillig2024)

“Vologram is this international year project we have applied for together with Tartu to professionalize volunteering. And this is the type of volunteering where they contribute at events, like Parken, like our hub of 400 volunteers. We have made this book for volunteer coordinators, a handbook, a manual, and also one for team leaders – like how to be a team leader and how to be a volunteer coordinator. Because there is no education and there are no formal courses to do it. So we’re trying to make this education, but not education. [...] The volunteer coordinator and team leaders can make recommendation letters for volunteers, where they can also map how they have progressed during their volunteering. And this will have EU standards and will be used not only in these countries but shared with the rest of Europe. So volunteers can actually show a real professional recommendation letter.” (leader Frivillig2024)

These initiatives show that the implementation process was not limited to delivering events in Bodø but also included building new professional infrastructures for volunteer management. *Frivillig2024* contributed tools and standards that could be adopted across Europe. This outward orientation also led to new collaborations with future ECoCs:

“For instance, ECoCs of 2026 got in touch because they were really inspired by BIF and want to make something themselves. They also want to make an international center in their city – that is also my goal, to have this as a result of Bodø2024. And then we say yes to cooperation.” (leader Frivillig2024)

In addition to capacity-building and international cooperation, the process also relied on providing infrastructure and arenas for voluntarism locally. Frivillig2024 created spaces where associations could not only participate but also lead cultural programming:

“Stormen library and concert hall – for Children’s International Day, there was not a day with such a diversity in the library as at Children’s International Day. And why is that? That is because the associations themselves are making the events. They’re not just invited to come and see. They are making the events and they’re bringing their own culture to the library. I hope we can do even more of that also in the future with these associations.” (leader Frivillig2024)

Beyond event spaces, practical support such as free access to office facilities was another enabling factor:

“We also offer the third floor¹, of course, where volunteer associations can be for free. For the third floor, if I need additional money, I can go to small sponsors and ask for not money, but something very concrete – some natural support.” (leader Frivillig2024)

Taken together, these accounts show that the process of implementation involved adapting a uniquely Norwegian model of voluntarism, developing international learning structures, and creating local infrastructures that empowered associations to act as cultural producers. These mechanisms reflect the process stage of the conceptual model: transforming resources and purposes into concrete forms of cultural participation.

Which results did you achieve? Did you reach what you planned?

In general, Frivillig2024 produced positive outputs: large numbers of volunteers, visible events, and new arenas for civic participation. Beyond the numbers, the initiative also advanced values of equality, inclusion, and capacity building.

One important result was the way volunteering fostered equality across social groups, creating spaces where personal status was not anymore important:

We worked with an idea “that their status, what they’re working with, their title does not matter when they’re volunteers. Everyone is equal when we volunteer, and actually a person can have more status than this rich guy because they have the competency – they know how to carry this fence in the right way, not to break their back. They have the right competency.” (leader Frivillig2024)

Volunteering also created arenas of integration, particularly through BIF, where diverse groups could co-organize events:

¹ The third floor – an initiative under Frivillig2024 which regards offering the free locales to the voluntary associations for meetings and organizing their activities.

“BIF gatherings are so important. Working with integration and inclusion of their societies, bringing their societies together. So we just support them and try to make this community of Bodø’s International Society and also make events together like Children’s Day on 1 June, International Week, and we’re going to celebrate 17 May together.” (leader Frivillig2024)

A further positive result was the creation of synergies with other priority programmes, particularly UNG2024. Networks built across youth initiatives, communications, and hospitality were seen as long-lasting structures that extend beyond one-time events:

“Frivillig and UNG are cooperating. ... I believe that the most important thing in Bodø2024 is the capacity building and the networks we build together. Of course, we do a lot of one-time happenings, the opening ceremony [...]. It was amazing, [...] but the networks we build, they will live on for many, many years. Of course, the memories from the opening will also live on, and the impression. But I think that these networks are even more important.” (leader Frivillig2024)

At the same time, project leaders acknowledged challenges in sustaining volunteer engagement. Because volunteering is unpaid, building trust and offering non-material rewards became central:

“It is a challenge to get people to believe in your vision. It’s about communications. Again, I don’t offer volunteers anything material, money – not usually. So that’s of course hard. [...] I 100% rely on the trust from the volunteers because they’re not paid. I have to build relationships and build trust. [...] With volunteering you offer something else, immaterial. Network, a bigger purpose, I think. A lot of the people that come volunteering, like helping out at events, they really love this city. They really want to contribute and make this a great year for our city. I think that is really inspiring.”

From this perspective, legacy is not only about structures but also about sustaining relationships, skills, and traditions, which is still an ongoing effort:

“Legacy is the networks – it’s the people remaining in the networks and all the competency that is there.” (leader Frivillig2024)

“We have established some networks and some new traditions in this county – that’s kind of cool. But the most beautiful thing is of course the relations between people, and maybe some people who would never have met. Like people across socioeconomic backgrounds, and also between different cultures.” (leader Frivillig2024)

Both young and established organizations highlighted the role of leadership in achieving these results. As one established organization noted:

“I must say I was really impressed with the work. She (leader Frivillig2024) spends a lot of time and energy on follow-up, sending emails, reminders, or making calls. She does the best she can.”

At the same time, critical reflections emerged. A young organization appreciated the new contacts but argued that a true culture of volunteering is not yet institutionalized in Bodø, pointing to limited inclusivity of local people and narrow programming:

“First of all, it is good that different communities met. ... At least there is a basic familiarity now, that I know there are people who can somehow represent their community. ... Unfortunately, I don’t see

that this culture of volunteering they want to develop will actually grow, because there is still financial inequality.”

“For International Food Festival, we cooked food, made our dishes, everything was beautiful and interesting for those international organizations participating. But when I looked around, a very small number of those present were Norwegians. It was our cuisine, our communities, we met and socialized among ourselves, and that is good. But there was no real contact with the locals. I didn’t like that, because it seemed that for the locals it really didn’t matter.”

An established organization also voiced concerns about capacity overload, as activities under Frivillig2024 emerged as extra, stretching their limits:

“There was so much about food and arrangements – who will cook? None of us had time for that. Preparing 200 or 400 portions ...”

They also warned about the fragility of voluntarism under financial pressures and time constraints:

“It is not easy ... because there is less and less capacity and time for volunteering. ... Cuts in resources mean you have to run faster and faster to do your job ...”

Results aligned with Bodø2024 objectives and Monitor2024’s KPIs

Importantly, Frivillig2024 was not conceived as a one-year activation tool, but as a long-term investment in building social infrastructure, a strategy for embedding participatory cultural engagement throughout the region.

Objective 2: Widen the cultural production base

Alignment with objectives of Bodø2024

Objective 2. Widen the cultural production base

Objective 3. Engage disengaged groups

Objective 7. Support cultural professionals

Objective 8. Promote freedom of expression

This was achieved by fostering participatory initiatives where volunteers were active contributors, shaping events through their skills and cultural input. As Frivillig2024 leader emphasized, volunteering redefined status and competency, showing that “everyone is equal when we volunteer.” Moreover, international collaboration with other volunteering organizations improved knowledge sharing and competence improvement. This aligns with KPI OEE008 (Mobility scholarships) and OCE009 (Incoming visits) by building access and inclusion into cultural careers through experience-based learning.

Objective 7: Support cultural professionals

Volunteering under Bodø2024 provided experience-based learning, training opportunities, and networking. Initiatives like the Vologram and volunteer handbooks equipped coordinators and team leaders with tools to professionalize their work. Volunteers also gained recommendation letters and new skills, building capacities relevant for cultural and civic careers. These efforts connect to KPI OCE008 (Internships abroad) and KPI SUP003

(EU funding acquired) by fostering transnational exposure and attracting external resources for capacity-building.

Objective 8: Promote freedom of expression

By giving minority associations platforms to showcase their heritage and perspectives, *Frivillig2024* expanded cultural representation. Events organized by immigrant-led associations made visible voices that are often marginalized in mainstream programming, even if full integration with the majority population was uneven. This links to KPI SUP001 (Share of co-financing) by diversifying partnerships through collaboration with immigrant associations and minority-led initiatives.

Objective 3: Engage disengaged groups

Frivillig2024 created arenas like BIF, where immigrant communities organized and led events such as Children's Day and International Week. These activities strengthened belonging within minority groups and offered arenas for visibility, though some interviewees noted that integration with the wider local population remained limited. This reflects KPI SUP001 (share of co-financing) by increasing in-kind contribution of international and minority groups in local cultural life.



International Children's Day / Jamal Khawaja / Bodø2024

Importantly, *Frivillig2024* tried to become a long-term investment in social infrastructure. Networks such as BIF, *Frivilligforum*, and the Nordland Volunteer Network are expected to continue beyond 2024, with the creation of *Frivillig Bodø* in 2025 providing an organizational vehicle for sustaining momentum. At the same time, participants cautioned that institutionalizing a culture of voluntarism requires stable resources and trust. The legacy is therefore best understood in terms of structures as well as the relationships, competencies, and traditions of equality that were seeded during the ECoC year, aligning with KPI SUP001 (financial sustainability and partnership diversification).

2.1.3. Økologisk Økonomi

Overview

Ecological Economics was introduced as one of the four strategic priorities of Bodø2024, reflecting the ambition to embed sustainability, dialogue, and alternative economic thinking into the local society and culture. The initial concept was framed in Bodø's ECoC application as both a practical method within the organisation and a forward-looking cultural leitmotif, linking culture, ecology, and economy in ways that address some of the most pressing challenges of our times (Bodø2024 Application, 2018, p. 21).

At its core, ecological economics assumes that economic activities are in constructive interplay with the cultural and natural effects that emerge out of them (Jakobsen, 2018), thus, prioritising quality of life and ecological balance over conventional measures of growth. As Ecological Economics' coordinator and Nord University Professor Ove Daniel Jakobsen explained during the interview, ecological economics represents *“a way of thinking that emphasises interaction, dialogue, and bottom-*



Local Food for Local Markets / Bodø2024

up engagement, where people take part in shaping their own local communities.” According to the Ecological Economics' coordinator, *“this approach was recognised by the European panel as highly relevant”*, strengthening Bodø's application offering a novel perspective compared to other ECoCs.

The initiative was structured around five interlinked projects that illustrate how ecological economics could function in real life:

1. **Local Food for Local Markets** – strengthening regional food systems and short supply chains.
2. **Dialogue Society** – promoting civic dialogue and community participation. This included utopia workshops (*utopiverksted*) with both adult and young people, where participants were invited to envision the future, they wanted. These formats served as a participatory practice engaging municipalities, schools, and civil society.
3. **Ecological Economics in Schools** – introduced as a programme subject in Bodø upper secondary school, making it the first of its kind in Norway.

4. **Conference on Critical Perspectives on Established Economics** – highlighting links between economy, nature, culture, and health.
5. **In collaboration with Re** (a competence center within recycling and creative processes with knowledge about the environment, recycling and redesign directed towards people and the planet), they worked to explore connections between economy, culture, environment, and human well-being.

Taken together, ecological economics in Bodø2024 was envisioned as both a knowledge-building effort (through Nord University, conferences, and school programmes) and a practical community tool (through local food projects, networks, and workshops). By positioning culture as a driver for sustainability, Bodø2024 sought to become a best-practice example in Europe of how ecological economics can be applied within the cultural sector.

Insights from projects under Ecological Economics

Key findings: rethinking growth – building sustainable futures through dialogue and local action

- **Alternative development through dialogue and local engagement**
Ecological Economics project promoted a shift from growth-based models to community-rooted development, emphasizing dialogue, shared values, and bottom-up participation across diverse groups.
- **Educational innovation and youth involvement**
The programme introduced ecological economics as a high school subject, supported youth utopia workshops, and developed teaching modules through international partnerships, fostering long-term learning and awareness.
- **Resource-efficient and collaborative implementation**
Projects operated on modest budgets, relying on partnerships with municipalities, schools, and civic organizations. This diversified resource base reflected the ecological principle of resilience through interconnected systems.
- **Tangible local structures and international recognition**
Initiatives like the Bodøsjøen local food market and eco-region collaborations created lasting infrastructures, positioning Nordland as an Eco Region and enhancing its international profile.
- **Long-term legacy orientation**
Rather than focusing on short-term impact, Ecological Economics aimed to seed enduring cultural and ecological practices, with many projects designed to continue beyond 2024 and inspire future regional development.

The following analysis draws on two interviews with the Ecological Economics coordinator, as well as several reports and publications produced under the programme, complemented by coverage from the official Bodø2024 webpage. Together, these sources provide an intriguing view of how ecological economics was conceptualised, implemented, and experienced in practice and what were the main results achieved through these interventions.

What was the purpose and resource base of the project?

The overarching purpose of Ecological Economics within Bodø2024 was to provide an alternative way of thinking about development by embedding the economy in ecological and cultural contexts. As the coordinator explained, “*Ecological economics is a type of*

economy where you root into the economy within an ecological and cultural context”. This vision sought to move beyond conventional growth models by fostering interaction, dialogue, and bottom-up engagement: *“Ecological economics is a way of thinking that is based on interaction, dialogue... one of the points here was to initiate processes that would create more contact between the different people in the different local communities”*. In other words, the projects were designed both to challenge existing systems and to raise individual awareness of the interconnections between nature, culture, and human well-being: *“The point is to think at the structure, system level... and the other is at the individual level – consciousness”*.

This motivation aligned with the broader ECoC bid framing, where Bodø2024 described ecological economics as aiming to prioritise:

“Societies where quality of life is more important than growth in consumption, where the economy respects ecological limits, and where fair distribution is a core value”.

This ambition was translated into five interlinked project ideas. The ambition behind these was not to replicate large-scale or growth-oriented initiatives, but to sustain smaller, community-based practices: *“The point is not to have huge farms... but small units.... how do you manage to make them viable?”*. Youth-focused utopia workshops complemented these activities by inviting youth as a central group of participants to imagine futures linked to local values and sustainable practices, for example through the gathering at Svartisen glacier. *“It is important that we engage the future generation and listen to their wishes and thoughts about the future”* (Bodø2024, 2024).

In the school programme, for example, students learned about sustainability and cooperation: *“You learn the basic principles of circular economy, and how to collaborate over competition. You better understand how the earth and nature have an intrinsic value ... useful skills to include in the calculation when ... [you] are going to work in business in the future”* (Bodø2024, 2023).

In terms of resources, the projects operated on a modest but diversified base, relying on Bodø2024 support, host organisations, and collaborative partnerships. Most of activities required minimal funding: *“Ecological economy in school, zero expenses. ... Dialogue ... is paid where we will have utopia workshop”*. Others, like the conference, involved more substantial costs such as travel and accommodation. Financing was typically shared among inviting actors, which were municipalities, neighbourhood councils, and civic organisations, illustrating the collaborative model: *“It is financed by those who invite... not necessarily a municipality... often district committees or organizations of various kinds”*.

Overall, the resource base was characterised less by large budgets than by a combination of institutional support, communities’ engagement, and partnerships across municipalities, business, and civil society. This diversified mix reflects the ecological

economics principle that resilience and vitality emerge from interconnected systems rather than reliance on a single funding stream.

How did the process of project implementation go?

Implementation of Ecological Economics projects under Bodø2024 was characterised by experimentation, collaboration, and adaptation to local contexts. Rather than being a single top-down programme, it unfolded through multiple subprojects that tested ecological economics as both an educational tool and a practical method for community engagement.

Importantly, this work was not developed from scratch. The coordinator had already practiced and promoted ecological economics as both a research field and a civic movement, publishing and organising activities in Nordland before Bodø2024. As he explained,

“The goal of vibrant vitality is in Bodø2024's application... but we had been working on it long before. Bodø2024 gave us the opportunity to make it much more vibrant than it otherwise would have been.”

As was briefly mentioned above, funding and resource mobilisation varied between different projects. Some projects could be realised with minimal resources, such as the school programme where ecological economics was introduced as an elective subject. Others required direct financial support for travel and accommodation, particularly conferences in smaller municipalities: *“The conference in Værøy... we have to pay for accommodation and travel there. That has to be covered”*. In several cases, external partners and EU-linked schemes helped supplement resources. For instance, through collaboration with Re, the joint Ecology Squared project, co-funded by the EEA–EØS funds (2014-2021). With partners in Bodø (Re Innovasjon, Nord University, Bodø videregående skole) and in Czech Republic (Secondary School), the project developed four teaching modules on sustainability, entrepreneurship, and cultural dialogue. As reported:

“The project has involved developing 3 teaching modules for high schools in the Czech Republic and one for the university – all four with a main emphasis on sustainability, entrepreneurship, working with attitude changes and increasing the competence of pupils, students and teachers”.

This partnership contributed to internationalisation of ecological economics but also adapted the modules to Norwegian contexts, ensuring long-term educational integration.

When it comes to governance and organisation of the projects, it was led by Nord University's Centre for Ecological Economics and Ethics, working closely with local schools, civil society organisations, and Bodø2024. Importantly, the team did not primarily consist of “cultural professionals” in the conventional sense. As the coordinator noted, to foster the real dialogue, it was crucial to get people with various backgrounds engaged:

“More bottom up ... commitment among the population to develop their own local community. People from all possible sectors have come together, young and old, people in work, people out of work, immigrants, representing foreign cultures of all kinds. And this has led to us developing such a common understanding, a common value base. That is the first part of a utopia workshop - we find common values. And based on these values, we then develop projects that are then initiated by those who are part of this utopia workshop”.

Internationalisation and mobility were important part of Ecological Economics projects' implementation. Links were established with the International Network of Eco-Regions, positioning Nordland as a northern eco-region case. Based on this collaboration, Master's students could get an opportunity to travel abroad for fieldwork in Italy. Bodø and Værøy (for the conference) hosted international delegates (from Budapest, Italy, South Africa) as well as national ones from Trondheim and Bergen. These exchanges deepened understanding of sustainability challenges across different contexts and underscored how ecological economics could become a common European language for addressing both environmental and social pressing challenges.

Beyond mobility, Ecological Economics was interlinked with other strategic priorities within Bodø2024. With UNG2024, collaboration centred on youth utopia workshops, including the gathering at Svartisen glacier where young participants developed future visions. With Frivillig2024, synergies were found in the emphasis on civic engagement and the co-creation of events. Sámi knowledge traditions were also included. As Ecological Economics coordinator stated:

“It is not only the Sámi, but also the indigenous peoples' understanding of the connection between humans and nature that is central to ecological economics. Nature is not just a resource store for economic activity – it is a living space, and we are part of this living nature that has its own value. That is why indigenous understanding is so important: it reminds us that we must live in harmony with nature. The economy must be built within such a living understanding of nature, and culture likewise”.

These connections reinforced the idea of ecological economics as a transversal framework seeing synergies with several initiatives under Bodø2024.

Which results did you achieve? Did you reach what you planned?

Ecological Economics under Bodø2024 produced a several tangible and intangible results that extended well beyond the cultural year. Across its subprojects (dialogue workshops, local food markets, school curricula, and international conferences) the initiative contributed to fostering new practices, networks, and long-term structures.

One of the most visible results was the implementation of “økologisk økonomi” as a program subject in the high school, an achievement in Norway, as the Ministry and the Directorate of Education were positive and approved the program plan. The Ecological coordinator notes:

“It’s pretty amazing that they’ve managed to do it in collaboration between Nord University, Bodø2024 and Bodø High School. Because it’s not every day that you come up with new subjects at a school”.

Teachers and students embraced the subject, and national rollout is now being considered, supported by two forthcoming textbooks.

Dialogue-based approach proved impactful, though with varying intensity across municipalities. Utopia workshops were organized in over 20 municipalities; hundreds of participants engaged in defining shared values. While some places experienced strong ripple effects, in others the outcomes were less pronounced. Overall, however, the process was described as highly positive, generating increasing interest and new requests from additional communities to host similar workshops.

“Many places had done very well, and other places of course had not had as much of a ripple effect afterwards. But overall, this has been a very positive thing that we have been getting requests for from more and more places”.

This process empowered citizens to take co-responsibility for their communities and stimulated local initiatives, demonstrating bottom-up democratic engagement.

Local food and eco-region collaborations also created lasting structures. A local marketplace in Bodøsjøen was established, connecting farmers, cultural actors, and the public: *“So we have started a project in Bodøsjøen... There will be lots of farmers delivering their goods and there will be lots of activities, including local culture. Dialogue is connected to the local food project”* (Ecological Economics coordinator). This reinforced food security, cultural identity, and short-distance supply chains, and helped in placing Nordland on the European map as *“Scandinavia’s only Eco Region”* (Ecological Economics coordinator).

Finally, the results should be understood as a long-term process rather than a single-year impact. As the coordinator emphasized:

“The point here is that all those projects are designed to go into the future after December 2024. So we say that when we get to December or January 2025, that’s when it really starts. Then we will have as many tests that will then contribute to Bodø and Nordland becoming a region where a number of constructive, positive projects have been initiated that are inspired by many ideas from Europe, but which will also contribute to giving inspiration back again. That is what I understand the point of a Capital of Culture, that is, that we will experiment with the development of local or regional culture, both inspired by everyone around us, and that we will give inspiration back”.

This perspective highlights that the true aim of ecological economics was not limited to achievements within 2024, but to lay the groundwork for long-term regional development. Thus, the results are defined more by their potential to shape enduring cultural and ecological practices in the years that follow.

Results aligned with Bodø2024 objectives and Monitor2024's KPIs

Ecological Economics contributed to several of Bodø2024's strategic objectives, positioning sustainability and dialogue as central dimensions of the cultural year. Its results can be directly linked to objectives and Monitor2024's KPIs:

Alignment with objectives of Bodø2024

Objective 1. Reverse the image of Nordland

Objective 2. Widen the cultural production base

Objective 3. Engage disengaged groups

Objective 8. Promote freedom of expression

Objective 1: Reverse the image of Nordland

Hosting conferences in Bodø and Værøy, and welcoming partners from Italy, Budapest, South Africa, and Norway, helped to strengthening Nordland's international profile. Nordland became the first Scandinavian Eco Region. These activities support KPI OCE002 (Outgoing cultural travel) and KPI OCE009 (Incoming visits) related to master students' travels out. Moreover, the dialogue with local communities allowed forming a new vision among them about the ecological development of their region making it more attractive to live in.

Taken together, Ecological Economics delivered visible outputs, such as school curricula, dialogue processes, and food markets, but also contributed to reaching long-term legacy. By combining local focus with international partnerships, and by blending capacity building, community dialogue, and ecological practice, it contributed to the core ECoC ambition of building sustainable cultural and social infrastructures beyond 2024.

Objective 2: Widen the cultural production base

Initiatives such as the Bodøsjøen local food marketplace and collaborations with the International Network of Eco-Regions broadened the scope of cultural production by linking food culture, sustainability, and civic dialogue. These projects mobilised a wide range of actors (farmers, businesses, municipalities and others) diversifying the resource base. This contributes to KPI SUP001 (Share of co-financing) and KPI SUP003 (EU funding acquired).

Objective 3: Engage disengaged groups

Utopi-workshops engaged participants across age, social, and cultural backgrounds, including youth and immigrant groups, in shaping shared visions for the future. These participatory arenas illustrate how ecological economics functioned as a tool for inclusion and community empowerment.

Objective 8: Promote freedom of expression

By embedding Sámi and other indigenous perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature, the programme promoted cultural rights and alternative worldviews, expanding the spectrum of voices represented in Bodø2024.

2.1.4. Projects under Sámi perspective

Overview

In general, a Sámi perspective was intended to be included in various projects and events under the Bodø2024 cultural program. Certain projects with clear Sámi perspective were included into the application already, as *Ságastit2024* or *Beigke Biehteme – Who Owns the Wind?*. As Maria Hernes, the Sámi coordinator in Bodø2024 team mentioned during our interview, their goal was to help project leaders who wanted to highlight Sámi heritage in doing so. Main focus was put into addressing language issues and developing educational projects, addressing controversial issues as *Fornorsking* (Norwegianization - policy aimed at replacing the language and culture of indigenous peoples by the language and culture of the Norwegian majority), or tensions around environmental issues, as Fosen case, and highlighting cultural heritage of indigenous peoples, as unique handwork, songs (joik), and traditions.

It must be acknowledged here, that while the Bodø2024 cultural program has highlighted a range of Sámi initiatives, Sámi communities are not monolithic. Differences in language, regional identity, and political priorities (such as views on the Sámi Parliament or land rights) can lead to internal tensions. Additionally, the relationship between Sámi groups and ethnic Norwegians has historically been shaped by assimilation policies and ongoing debates about cultural recognition and resource management. These dynamics continue to influence how Sámi projects are perceived and implemented within broader Norwegian society.

Sámi projects included both one-time events and events that spanned several weeks and spanned various genres: folk music concerts, theatre performances, art and crafts exhibitions, local food offers, nature experiences, sport events, festivals, conferences and workshops. Many of the projects engaged youth and children as well.



Samisk kulturuke / Bodø2024

Key events of 2024 are as follows:

- In February 2024, Sámi cultural week took place, when many events were built around opening ceremony, as well as opening ceremony itself had a quite comprehensive Sámi dimension. Sámi cultural week included theatre productions,

movies, exhibitions, concerts, and tasting menu in local restaurants inspired by traditional Sámi food.

- During the whole year, Nordland Museum engaged as a place for dissemination of indigenous peoples' cultural heritage. The major productions were built around Sámi architecture (*Girjegumpi*, happened in May-June), traditional handwork (*Håndverksbiennalen* in June-August), contemporary art (*Sápmi Triennale* in August-October), costumes and craft traditions (*Skakke folkedrakter* in October-December), and Sámi ceremonial drums (*Ruoktot* in November-December).
- NAISA (Native American and Indigenous Studies Association) is an international conference that came to Bodø in June, 2024. The conference attracted over 2000 attendees in 2019 (NAISA, 2024).
- CONIFA – Women World Football tournament for states, minorities, stateless peoples and regions came to Bodø in June, 2024.
- *Giellabiellje* – conference on Sámi languages and Sámi youth took place in June, 2024, where the questions about the future of Sámi languages were discussed.
- Music festival *EKKO/HÁDDIDUS* with Sámi artists was organized in September, 2024 with children and youth as the main focus group.
- Sámi languages week took place in October, 2024, with the main aim to raise the status of the Sámi languages and increase knowledge about Sámi language and culture throughout society.

Individual Sámi-related events were happening during the year under bigger projects, as ARCTICulations of Faith, Heritage Dialogues, Cabins of Culture, etc.

Main outputs of projects under Sámi perspective:



Opening of Bådåddjo Museum / Photo by Arina Karbovskaia / Bodø2024

- › 11% of the whole cultural program followed Sámi perspective.
- › Sámi-related events attracted around 20,000 participations².
- › Most projects were organized in Bodø with some events organised in Sortland, Narvik, Hamarøy, and Rana.
- › Over 800 cumulative event-days.

² The term “participations” that is mentioned here and is used throughout the report means that one person could have participated in several events.

Insights from Sámi-related projects

Key findings: strengthening Sámi voices – cultural collaboration, representation, and legacy

- **Promoting Sámi culture and language through artistic collaboration**
Sámi projects aimed to raise awareness of Sámi traditions, language, and history, often addressing sensitive topics like Norwegianization and encouraging emotional engagement. Bodø2024 provided a platform that legitimized these efforts.
- **Networking as a critical enabler**
Collaboration across institutions was essential, especially for smaller organizations lacking resources. Networking enabled access to technical expertise, performers, and production infrastructure.
- **Challenges of representation and competency access**
Project leaders faced difficulties in correctly representing diverse Sámi cultures and finding qualified local artists, often needing to recruit nationally or internationally to meet project needs.
- **Capacity building and technological innovation**
Participation in Bodø2024 strengthened institutional capacity and encouraged experimentation with new formats and technologies for indigenous storytelling, laying groundwork for future collaborations.
- **Shifting public awareness and funding priorities**
Increased visibility of Sámi issues led to greater public interest and easier access to funding. Projects contributed to changing perceptions of Nordland as a culturally inclusive region.

We have conducted interviews with four different institutions, as well as the Sámi coordinator under Bodø2024, and Bodø2024 organising team. The four institutions represent various sectors (theatre, movie, performing arts, and exhibitions), are in different parts of Northern Norway, and are diverse in their scale³.

What was the purpose and resource base of your project?

All project leaders express very similar motivations to promote Sámi language and culture, discuss controversial issues, and work with audience and change people's perspective on Sámi people and traditions.

"We try our best to demystify how to do Sámi cultural events. Because there is a motivation in turning the picture around a bit". (Bodø2024 Sámi coordinator)

"So the project [was built] around three dimensions: one was to raise the discussion around the green shift; the second was to highlight and raise the profile of the Southern Sámi language by using it as a performing arts language; and the third was to strengthen us as an institution". (Theatre representative).

As was mentioned above, all four institutions have different resource base, which forced them to rely on networking to a various extent. For example, the smallest institution in our sample expressed that it was impossible for them to even begin with bigger productions without networking:

³ Importantly, the photos included into this section do not necessarily represent the projects, which we describe as empirical cases.

“It would not have been possible for us financially or in terms of production to create such large performances if we had not collaborated with other larger theatres, which have more production resources”. (Theatre representative).

While for other, bigger institutions networks means more equal collaboration, when institutions bring their resources together to produce something:

“They have stages, technology, and infrastructure to show performances. And we have a competence center that can help with professional support”. (Performing Arts representative).

How did the project implementation process go?

When we touch upon internationalisation, we see that in general, project leaders see many benefits in collaborating across borders, however, many point out that it is a major issue of time and efforts, especially for smaller institutions. For Sámi-related projects it is expected to collaborate with Nordic countries, where the Sámi population lives (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia), and with countries with indigenous population or ethnical minorities (Estonia, Australia, Canada, USA, New Zealand, etc.).

Regarding challenges with the projects' implementation, the major initial challenge comes from sensitivity of the topic. Due to reasons mentioned above, as difference in language, regional identity, and political priorities, even if project leaders want to articulate on Sámi-related topics in their projects, they are afraid to do it, as they are not sure how to do it in a correct way and not to offend anyone. The fact that there are at least four different Sámi cultures in Northern Norway, each associated with a distinct language and traditional lifestyle, makes it even challenging to raising it correctly and finding right representatives:

“The Norwegianization process is something that lies like a shadow in what we do. Not quite the same as 'white guilt' in the US, but comparable. So people are very careful with asking questions because they are afraid of stepping on my toes. They are afraid of representing wrong. There is not much knowledge among the general population about the Sámi. And that is where the fear of contact comes in”. (Bodø2024 Sámi coordinator).

However, project leaders stress that since attention to indigenous people was clearly marked already in the application, they did not have to argue for its importance, therefore it was easier to raise controversial issues:

“I have to say that that is precisely what is so grateful about Bodø2024 that there was a focus and a light on the Sámi that was already there, and that you didn't have to prepare space for it. That there was a place for Sámi. That should be a given when you are in Sámi areas, but it is not a given. (One of the performances) it was a love story, so it weaved together a woman fleeing Eastern Europe after World War II, and a young man fleeing the boarding school where he was to be Norwegianized. It was a story that many people reacted very emotionally to. Queen Sonja was at that performance, and she cried too”. (Theatre representative).

Another major issue that organizers faced was with access to competencies in the area. Both, project leaders and Bodø2024 point out that it is often necessary to invite people from other regions of Norway and even internationally to find a suitable performer.

“I've talked to a lot of people who say that there are a lot of artists from the Lule and Pite Sámi areas who could have been on stage. It depends on what you mean by artists. For established artists who can represent in that way and do and say the things she can, I don't know about, anyway”. (Bodø2024 Sámi coordinator).

“It's a criticism you can understand when you say it's wrong Sámi. It would have been really cool if there were local artists at that level. There aren't any. Sorry”. (Bodø2024 organising team).

However, as the respondents mentioned, by the end of 2024, local people became more aware of different Sámi cultures, they have started asking questions and they have better understanding about challenges of indigenous people.

Which results did you achieve?

In the frames of legacy question, we have also talked about capacity building and how collaboration with Bodø2024 went. Capacity building for our respondents meant mainly collaboration with other institutions and the opportunity to develop their professional qualifications, or new technical approaches through projects. While legacy is a more overarching idea to promote Sámi culture and language and help indigenous people express themselves.

“It is clear that we have strengthened the institution just by being able to collaborate with the other theatres at this level. And we have really achieved that through Bodø2024”. (Theatre representative).

“So what was important in this project was to explore other formats and new technology to tell about Sámi traditions in new ways. We will use this methodology to continue working on producing new content with other indigenous peoples, to explore indigenous storytelling internationally”. (Movie representative)

Despite big challenges with implementation of Sámi projects, participants as well mean that from the other side the overall situation with Sámi projects is changing. For example, it was easier to apply for funding for Sámi projects, since Bodø2024 has already attracted attention to indigenous people through the application and put it into agenda. Therefore, funding support institutions might have prioritised Sámi projects:

“We received grants from all the ones [funding sources] we applied for. So, I think that Bodø2024 sets a brand that both meant that maybe we were prioritized in these application rounds as well. But also, that maybe this thing with the Sámi art is also prioritized. Because it is an important part of the common Nordic culture, really. So, there are more projects coming, and I am working on many things”. (Museum representative).

Results aligned with Bodø2024 objectives and Monitor2024's KPIs

Based on in-depth interviews with project leaders, we summarize how Sámi projects contributed to Bodø2024 objectives:

Objective 1: Reverse the image of Nordland

By lifting Sámi perspective and attracting attention to issues of indigenous people, Sámi projects have contributed to changing image of Nordland towards a more inclusive and open region, as Sámi projects created arenas for dialogue and helped build awareness around Sámi issues. As Sámi project leaders mention themselves, Bodø2024 year helped them raise important topics and communicate them to the public.

Objective 2: Widen the cultural production base and Objective 7: Improving careers and pathways for cultural professionals

Networking opportunities that project managers received during implementation of their projects contribute to more collaboration, and strengthen capacity of existing cultural institutions, improve skills of cultural workers and create new jobs, which contributes to financial sustainability and partnership diversification (KPI SUP001).

Objective 3: Engage disengaged groups

Sámi projects created cultural arenas, where people can share experiences and engage in dialogue around Sámi cultural heritage, language, and traditions, therefore addressing issues of cultural diversity and isolation of indigenous people.

Objective 6: Make cultural offer more international

Sámi projects, initially international as Sámi people live in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, attracted huge international interest from audience and artists, promoted its cultural projects in several world's largest physical and virtual arenas (e.g., Venice film festival, Netflix, Walt Disney) and collaborated with other indigenous people around the world, through incoming visits and outgoing cultural travel, all of which creates sustainable links with European artists and institutions (KPIs OCE002, OCE009).

Objective 8: Promote freedom of expression

Controversial issues that were discussed during 2024, including a highly debated Norwegianization process and activism of indigenous people against Norwegian government, shows the projects' contribution to freedom of expression.

Alignment with objectives of Bodø2024

Objective 1. Reverse the image of Nordland

Objective 2. Widen the cultural production base

Objective 3. Engage disengaged groups

Objective 6. Make cultural offer more international

Objective 7. Improving careers and pathways for cultural professionals

Objective 8. Promote freedom of expression

2.2. Selected projects

Overview

In this part, we present findings from selected projects under Bodø2024 and explore how they contribute to Bodø2024's objectives. In total, we had interviews with the leaders of 6 different projects of different scale and location in the region. The 6 projects represent the following different pillars of culture: visual arts, nature, gastronomy, festival, cultural heritage, and sculptures/installations⁴.

Insights from the selected projects

Key findings: scaling culture – local innovation, global collaboration, and lasting networks

- **Diverse motivations with long-term regional impact**
Selected projects aimed to foster accessibility, audience engagement, sustainability, and regional development, ranging from food mapping and cultural heritage to alternative art practices and youth inclusion.
- **Mixed experiences with Bodø2024 cooperation**
While many praised Bodø2024 for enabling international collaboration, funding access, and volunteer support, others noted unclear communication and non-transparent strategy in early engagement processes.
- **International collaboration as a driver of capacity building**
All projects benefited from international partnerships, which enhanced professional networks, brought global expertise to Nordland, and created lasting connections beyond 2024.
- **Implementation challenges due to scale and resources**
Project leaders faced logistical, financial, and managerial challenges, especially with scaling up, navigating procurement, and managing outdoor or international events. Media coverage was also seen as insufficient.
- **Strengthened networks and professional growth as legacy**
Selected projects led to increased competence in project management and writing funding applications, expanded local and international networks, and laid foundations for future initiatives and regional cultural resilience.

What was the purpose and resource base of your project?

There were several important motivations behind the selected projects:

- The festival producers wanted to make an event that *“will be free and accessible for everyone”*.
- The Nature and Visual Arts projects defined their motivation as *“a need to create a meeting place for artists and the audience”*.
- The Sculptures/installations project leaders wanted to show that there can be an alternative way of using materials that many perceive as waste.
- The Gastronomy project had several big motivations and first of all aimed to create *“a map of all food producers in Nordland and describe what kind of offers they have”*, also *“to stimulate increased recruitment within the industry, i.e. the food industry”*.

⁴ Importantly, the photos included into this section do not necessarily represent the projects, which we present as selected empirical cases.

from production management to serving staff” and finally “to promote Nordland as an international food and tourism destination”.

- Finally, the Cultural Heritage project was motivated by the idea to institutionalise existing international relationships inside the project by building a recognized cultural route.

Thus, there were long-term motivations for city and region development, connecting with audiences, building capacities for artists and performers, and creating new jobs.

When discussing their available resources, project leaders expressed concern about their inability to find sponsors in the city, as well as their limited budget and financing opportunities. These constraints prevent them from hiring additional personnel and limit the overall scale of the project:

“We haven't been successful in finding sponsors, because I think it's so unknown in Bodø, sponsors don't understand what you get in return. In Bodø we never had a tradition of it. For that tradition to be built, we need to have a closer dialogue. But those in business in Bodø, they must have a desire for there to be meeting places in the city”. (Visual Arts).

“I work here 20%, so once a week. It's very, very little, actually. Yes, so I do the administration myself, accounting, marketing, communication, everything. Actually everything. I work a lot for free”. (Visual Arts).

How did the project implementation process go?

During discussion of processes or activities under the projects, we received many insights on how project leaders cooperated with Bodø2024 team, importance of international cooperation and capacity building, and what were the challenges during project implementation.

Regarding cooperation with Bodø2024, there were different reflections, from negative to very positive experience. From the positive side of the cooperation, the project leaders highlighted. First, the overall awareness that such a big initiative attracted towards the region:

“I think the local project that we took up to an international level could not have happened without Bodø2024, for sure”. (Cultural Heritage).

Second, knowledge of Bodø2024 team about different funding and networking opportunities and opportunities that project leaders received from this:

“We worked for a long time without knowing that there were advisors in Norway who were paid by the EU to work and advise in relation to Creative Europe initiative. She helped us a lot and I have never worked with such large applications and formulations”. (Sculptures/installations).

“What we have experienced is that good initiatives and opportunities have emerged from the Bodø2024 organization, for example regarding the “EU-Japan fest” scheme and there were opportunities for us to enter into collaboration with Japanese actors”. (Gastronomy).

Third, importance of Frivillig2024 project, that helped to find volunteers for the projects’ events:

“So I would say that perhaps what I have been most impressed with was the Volunteers and that we have had volunteers involved in things”. (Sculptures/installations).

From the negative side, some project leaders mentioned untransparent procedure of engagement of cultural professionals to Bodø2024 projects, thus after Bodø received ECoC status and before the beginning of the cultural year. They mean that it was unclear for the performers if Bodø2024 were looking for specific performers to engage in specific projects, or whether performers should have come up with ideas. Thus, there were some missing in strategy and process communication.

“It has been extremely frustrating for so many in the region, because the [strategy] has been very unclear. A great deal of collegial frustration out there due to the lack of clarity in the [strategy]”. (Nature).

A big part of the interviews touched upon international cooperation and benefits that it brought to the projects. Each of the selected projects engaged in some form of international cooperation, which contributed to their capacity building - either through joint project implementation or participation in actual performances, and in most cases this cooperation continues after 2024.

“It’s capacity building around everyone [national and international partners] who was involved in that production because no one has done anything like that before”. (Festival)

“We have worked a lot with young people. In some of our projects, there have been students from Finland, Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Iceland. We are dedicated to supporting recruitment in the food industry and we know many companies in the region and internationally that can inform you about where it might be good to take an internship and create good networks for young people. I think there were around 20 nationalities who came and visited us at one event. And we are talking about professionals from different fields. It could be chefs, it could be producers, it could be food journalists, farmers, fishermen ... Who came here and shared their expertise and built networks with our local players”. (Gastronomy)

In some projects important aim was audience development, especially if the project is new for the city and the region:

“This year we have hired writers who write texts about each exhibition. Which you can take with you for free. And we have also made small, short films where the artists talk about art. It is a communication measure that will make it easier for people to come here without having a long art education, but that you will be able to understand more”. (Visual Arts)

Project leaders faced many challenges during the implementation phase. For many, their 2024 projects were larger in scale than usual and involved a broader network of partners, which added complexity. The Bodø2024 team themselves noted during meetings with the Monitor2024 team that many project leaders were not adequately prepared to manage projects of this size. The main issues stemmed from a lack of experience among artists in project planning. Particularly in drafting budgets, estimating total project costs, clarifying the role of Bodø2024, and understanding production and logistics nuances, especially with planning winter outdoor events. Leaders organizing international events especially highlighted logistical difficulties, as well as cultural and language differences that further complicated the process. A lack of resources, as mentioned earlier, was among the most frequently cited problems. This often led to the need to downscale projects, abandon international collaborations, or reduce the number of planned events. Finally, many expressed dissatisfaction with the local media's coverage of cultural events. There was a general lack of attention to the cultural sector, and the few articles that did appear tended to lack critical engagement - focusing instead on basic facts and statistics from the events.

"One of the biggest challenges is tendering processes. How on earth do you make these procurements? There's nothing to measure it against. We have never done something like this before". (Festival)

"What has been the biggest challenge, perhaps, is that it has been a very, very organic project. We had a plan when we went into it and then along the way it has developed and branched out much more than we anticipated. That is positive and shows that the activities we have planned have created even more activities. But that makes project management more challenging". (Gastronomy)

"The main challenge is perhaps with the media, because newspapers don't want to write about visual art, show criticism, they don't mention it. So we send press releases every time, but it never makes it into the newspaper. And I think that's challenging, because it's a channel for not only promoting, but explaining and chewing and inviting people in. So I think it's really difficult that the media hasn't taken their responsibility and been able to test if so in 2024". (Visual Arts)

"If you're looking for failure, the real failure is that now, due to the municipal economy, everything that has been built up so hard is going to die". (Nature)

"No one discusses that the sound team stood outside at six in the morning cutting off the plugs because they were full of salt, and stood outside in the wind soldering new plugs to plug in the speakers, which then have to go up, and then it starts blowing again, then they have to go down, and then you have to do the same thing again. It's a whole novel just to describe the technical challenges". (Festival)

Which results did you achieve?

The final part of our interviews was about projects' success and legacy. Project leaders agree that Bodø2024 attracted much attention to the region, which translated in increased tourism and international activity. Many leaders talk about strengthened existing networks with local partners, and new national and international networks that will

continue to grow after 2024. Some leaders note their increased capacity in writing applications for external funding, and in general understanding of project management.

“I think perhaps one of the most important things has been that many of the major art institutions have had both annual meetings and conferences. There have been lots of people from Oslo and all over the country. And it has been really important for a lot of people who have come here for tours or have had receptions or that we have been able to meet these institutions. And feel that we are part of the rest of the country, really”. (Visual Arts)

“I think we collected approximately 100 international articles and reports, in Europe and the States. The other thing is the amount of people who came to see the performances. We had four performances, and they were all full. So that was a success”. (Cultural heritage)

“The combination of new contacts, new opportunities, new friendships. It is a success because synergies arise”. (Nature)

“We have reached a lot of children and young people, and everything was free. Through the projects we have had throughout 2024, other actors have discovered us, and we have had some other projects that were not directly related to Bodø2024. We are working towards a larger project now, where volunteer teams, associations, and local communities would collaborate and they would create projects themselves, instead of someone in the municipality saying, 'this is what we should work on'. Because then you have ownership and local democracy to contribute to”. (Sculptures/installations)

“We know that there are many actors that we have worked with, who have gained new networks, gained new partners, developed new products based on the work we have done. We also gained increased competence within the organization, especially in this regard with project work and application writing and access to new financiers, which will be important for us going forward. We experience that we have gained a greater role as a development actor within the county municipality”. (Gastronomy)

Results aligned with Bodø2024 objectives and Monitor2024's KPIs

Based on the interviews we can summarize how selected projects from Bodø2024's application contributed to Bodø2024 objectives:

Objective 2: Widen the cultural production base and Objective 6: Make cultural offer more international

Project leaders consistently stressed that Bodø2024 enabled them to scale up their projects to national and international levels. Cultural heritage projects, for instance, established international routes and attracted audiences abroad, while gastronomy projects welcomed professionals from 20 countries. Visual arts and festivals connected with national institutions and hosted international delegates. These activities strengthened local anchoring while creating new partnerships, which contributes to financial sustainability and partnership diversification (KPI SUP001).

Alignment with objectives of Bodø2024

Objective 2. Widen the cultural production base

Objective 3. Engage disengaged groups

Objective 6. Make cultural offer more international

Objective 7. Improving careers and pathways for cultural professionals

The international exchanges, whether through outgoing cultural travel (KPI OCE002), incoming visits (KPI OCE009), or opportunities for internships and mobility scholarships (KPIs OCE008, OEE008), clearly enriched competence and capacity.

Objective 3: Engage disengaged groups

Youth focus and inclusion: Several projects explicitly targeted children and young people. Sculpture and installation projects engaged volunteers and students, visual arts projects developed new communication tools to reach broader and younger audiences, and gastronomy initiatives worked with students from Nordic countries to promote recruitment in the food sector. These activities enhanced connections with disengaged groups by lowering thresholds for participation and creating pathways to professional futures.

Objective 7: Support cultural professionals

Many leaders reported improved skills in project management, budgeting, and application writing, with some successfully accessing new EU-linked programmes. This demonstrates a direct contribution to improved careers and pathways for cultural professionals and to the broader goal of internationalisation. By engaging with Creative Europe advisors and experimenting with joint funding applications, projects contributed to the growth of EU-funded initiatives (KPI SUP003).

In sum, the preselected projects show how Bodø2024 not only delivered cultural experiences but also left behind strengthened networks, new skills, and institutional learning. Together, these outcomes contribute to a more resilient cultural ecosystem in Bodø and Nordland, with measurable progress on Bodø2024's objectives and KPIs.



Lysvandring / Photo by David Engmo / Bodø2024

3. Main takeaways

Looking across *UNG2024*, *Frivillig2024*, Ecological Economics, Sámi related projects and other selected projects, a key insight is how Bodø2024 functioned as an enabling framework: it provided resources, legitimacy, and a shared narrative, while the projects themselves embodied diverse approaches to participation, sustainability, and cultural production. By analysing them through the Input–Process–Outputs–Impact–Legacy framing (Table 5), we demonstrate immediate contributions and the long-term systemic effects.

Inputs: diversity of resource bases

Each initiative drew on different resource configurations. *UNG2024* and *Frivillig2024* relied heavily on human resources (youth and volunteer mobilisation) supported by small grants and logistical infrastructure. Ecological Economics was rooted in academic expertise at Nord University and expanded through additional external funding. Sámi projects supposedly benefited from increased attention to the themes of indigenous people, which helped ensure needed financing and networks. The preselected projects, by contrast, leaned on artistic or entrepreneurial expertise, with Bodø2024 serving as a financial and symbolic backbone. A recurring theme is that money were scarce, but legitimacy and networks functioned as key inputs, showing that cultural innovation does not necessarily require large budgets but rather the right connective infrastructure. New collaborations emerged as opportunities unfolded; volunteer functions expanded as needs changed; and several projects adjusted their scope in response to new partners or shifting contexts. This fluidity made the programme richer and more responsive, allowing Bodø2024 to incorporate emerging ideas, cultural impulses and civic engagement throughout the implementation period. At the same time, the dynamic nature of programme growth introduced some challenges: boundaries between projects were often blurred, with overlaps in activities, target groups and organisational roles. Recognising this organic development is therefore essential for understanding both the strengths and the complexities of the cultural year, and it underscores the importance of flexible planning and adaptive evaluation models in future ECoC initiatives.

Processes: participation is the key

All projects foregrounded participatory methods, though in different ways. *UNG2024* operationalised co-creation, with young people designing, planning, selecting and executing cultural events. *Frivillig2024* embedded participation into volunteering structures, extending the Norwegian dugnad tradition while opening new spaces for inclusion of minorities and international associations. Ecological Economics used dialogue and *utopi*-workshops as tools for shared value formation and democratic expression, illustrating how abstract concepts of sustainability could become grounded in local practice. Sámi projects engaged audience participation by addressing controversial

themes through emotionally charged content. The preselected projects experimented with new artistic and organisational processes, from cross-border exchanges to collaborative installations. In every case, participation played a very important role in project execution, aligning with the ECoC vision of culture as a means of civic empowerment.

Outputs: tangible and intangible

The outputs illustrate the potential of cultural ecosystem “shaken up” by Bodø2024. Many youth-led projects produced under *UNG2024* and *Frivillig2024* mobilised hundreds of volunteers across networks. Ecological Economics established Norway’s first high school subject in the field. Sámi projects succeeded in raising themes that had long been absent from the public agenda, while preselected projects delivered high-profile exhibitions, performances, and festivals. These outputs matter as tangible products as well as become visible markers of “hidden potential”, as each demonstrated that local actors could deliver at scales or qualities not possible before Bodø2024.



Music on Display / Photo by David Engmo / Bodø2024

Table 5. Analysis of Bodø2024 projects based on the conceptual framing

Name	Project			Impact	Legacy
	Input	Process	Outputs		
UNG2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dedicated funding from Bodø2024. -Youth open-call scheme -UNG Crew with volunteers. -Support structures for project leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Youth-driven project design. -Co-creation with youth in courses, artist selection, and event organisation. -Balancing limited financial resources with creativity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Granted 77 projects across 21 municipalities, distributing NOK 4 million in funding. -Reached over 10,000 young people through public events and activities. -Digital presence with nearly 5,000 followers across TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. -Many youth-led events, workshops, performances, internships, and scholarships. -Creation of cultural meeting places and youth networks across municipalities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Empowerment of young people through ownership of cultural processes. -First experiences with volunteering and cultural work for many participants. -Improved project leadership capacities. -Broader visibility of youth culture. -Strengthened regional identity and sense of belonging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Momentum for youth cultural engagement beyond 2024 (institutionalized as a part of Bodø municipality structure). -New networks that could persist if supported. -Trained youth with skills in project management and cultural production. -But vulnerable to funding cuts and need for support from municipal budgets.
Frivilling2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organisational infrastructure (<i>Frivilligforum</i>, BIF, volunteer pool). -Financial micro-support for associations. -Bodø2024 training and coordination. -Traditions of <i>dugnad</i> as cultural backdrop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Recruitment and management of over 500 volunteers. -Creation of new arenas for collaboration (forums, networking, "<i>Mat og mingling</i>"). -Cooperation with cultural projects to provide staffing and hospitality. -Integration of minority associations. -Emphasis on equality among volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -650 volunteers. -243 organizations. -14 international associations organized under BIF. -Hundreds of events supported with volunteer contributions. -Development of manuals and systems for volunteer management. -Shared visual identity and common arenas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased visibility and legitimacy for minority associations. -New cross-cultural encounters and friendships. -Strengthened capacity for volunteer coordination. -Demonstration of voluntarism as a resource-intensive but powerful inclusion tool. -Synergies with UNG2024 and other projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establishment of <i>Frivillig Bodø</i> in 2025 to continue networks. -New traditions such as International Children's Day. -Ongoing demand from municipalities for volunteer forums. -But challenges of sustainability due to municipal cuts, uneven institutionalisation of voluntarism, and risk of volunteer fatigue.
Ecological Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Academic expertise from Nord University and the Centre for Ecological Economics and Ethics. -Bodø2024 funding and platform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Development and organization of teaching for high school students. -Organization of meetings with local food producers. -Participatory methods like <i>utopia</i> workshops in 20+ municipalities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -New school subject <i>Økologisk Økonomi</i> piloted at Bodø upper secondary school. -Local food market in Bodøsjøen. -Multiple dialogue workshops creating local initiatives. -International teaching modules through <i>Ecology Squared</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Raised public awareness of ecological alternatives to growth-oriented models. -Engaged youth in imagining sustainable futures. -Enhanced competence in municipalities and schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Institutionalization of ecological economics in education (potential national rollout of the school subject, textbooks in development). -Durable local networks around food, dialogue, and sustainability.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Partnerships with schools, municipalities, and Re Innovasjon. -External EU/EEA funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Integration of Sámi and indigenous perspectives. -International exchanges (eco-regions, student mobility, conferences). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Conference attracting international researchers and practitioners. -Travels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strengthened Nordland's position as Scandinavia's only eco-region. -Integration of cultural, ecological, and economic thinking in practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Long-term mindset shift emphasizing quality of life over growth. -Bodø positioned as a European reference point for ecological economics.
Sámi perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased attention to Sámi theme. -Increased financial support. -Limited access to competences in the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Events raising controversial themes. -Challenges with articulation due to sensitivity of the topic. -International cooperation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased number of Sámi-related events. -International collaboration with other groups of indigenous people. -Surge of attention from international society. -Events for children and youth. -Development of new technology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Greater awareness about Sámi history and traditions. -Enhanced understanding of controversial issues as Norwegianization policy and activism of indigenous people. -Demystification of Sámi traditions. -Capacity building through cooperation with national and international partners. -Creation of new cultural arenas for expressions and dialogue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improved social inclusion, democracy, and freedom of expression. -Lasting partnerships across sectors. -Improved opportunities for cultural professionals. -Worldwide attention to Sámi heritage.
Selected projects from application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Limited financing. -Lack of human resources. -Attention towards the region. -Limited experience with project management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Access to Bodø2024 knowledge and network base. -Limited understanding of Bodø2024 strategy. -International cooperation. -Lack of attention to the cultural sector from the media. -Technical challenges with outdoor winter events, international events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased number of incoming and outgoing travels (performers). -Experience with internships abroad. -Experience with EU funds application. -Increased cultural activity in the region. -Increased mentions in international media. -New local, national, and international partners. -Increased attention from local public sector. -Free events for children and youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased competence with management of larger projects. -Capacity building through international cooperation. -Audience development. -Increased awareness about EU funding opportunities and application process. -Building local democracy. -Engaging children and young people in cultural life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lasting networks with local, national, and international partners. -Increased share of EU funded projects. -Improved opportunities for cultural professionals. -Building attractive region for children and young people. -Establishment of Bodø2024 legacy AS, with purpose to improve Bodø and Nordland's international cooperation, as well as to help the cultural sector apply for international support schemes.

Impacts: building capacity, inclusion, and reputation

The impacts of Bodø2024 projects can be aligned with the key strategic priorities, which were outlined in Bodø2024 application. The projects collectively contribute to each of these priorities.

Children and young people. This strategic priority focused on fostering cultural development and participation among children and youth, encouraging them to explore their own ideas and take part in project implementation. The *UNG2024* initiative empowered a new generation of cultural actors, many of whom reported transformative experiences that boosted their confidence and skills. The UNG Crew initiative engaged young people in volunteering and co-producing events, strengthening their sense of belonging and building capacity. Numerous other projects targeted children and youth, increasing the visibility of cultural activities for this group, exposing them to diverse cultural experiences, and enhancing their participation in cultural life.

Connections and capacity. This priority underlines a capacity-building program based on three pillars: competency (skills to survive and thrive), character (personal growth and resilience), and culture (connections, shared history and values). First of all, we can name impacts from *Frivillig2024* and Ecological Economy projects, that contribute strongly to achieving this objective. *Frivillig2024* created new arenas for inclusion and helped normalize volunteering as a social practice, connecting previously disengaged groups and fostering resilient society. Ecological Economics raised awareness of alternative economic models and positioned Nordland on the European eco-region map, significantly impacting its future as an eco-destination. On this issue in particular, other selected projects in the program have also contributed strongly, for example Feeding Europe project that is already working on a spin-off project - European Region of Gastronomy. International collaborations and networks that were a vital part of most projects, make a strong impact to enhanced connections with international cultural institutions and individual performers, and strengthened capacities of local performers.

Audience development. Bodø2024 aimed to engage previously unrepresented groups by making culture more attractive, accessible, and affordable. Here again, *UNG2024* and *Frivillig2024* activities played a crucial role in engaging young people in co-creating the cultural program and building a vibrant volunteering community. Moreover, we have underlined how selected projects have engaged in audience development by offering free events and using diverse communication tools to reach broader audience. Sámi-related projects had a notable impact by creating cultural spaces for expression and dialogue. These initiatives increased public awareness of Sámi history and traditions and deepened understanding of sensitive issues such as the Norwegianization policy and indigenous activism.

City and community development. This priority sets focus on including cultural and social development goals into city planning strategies, specifically by promoting the value of dialogue and creating spaces for conversation. The dialogue workshops of Ecological Economics project were especially impactful, helping Bodø and Nordland engage citizens in discussions about a sustainable future. Selected projects under the program, as Arts of Democracy, demonstrated the instrumental value of dialogue and contributed to the development of a democratic society. Across these initiatives, dialogue was not only intra-community but also cross-cultural, bringing together participants with different generational, geographic, and cultural backgrounds. In combination with Sámi-focused projects and volunteer-driven arenas such as *Frivilligforum* and BIF, this helped create new meeting places where different groups could interact on more equal terms, laying foundations for more inclusive local democracy.

Freedom of expression. The final strategic priority aims at giving room for cultural freedom, tolerance, and freedom of expression. Here, Sámi-related projects bring the most critical impact, by raising sensitive and controversial aspects of Norwegian - Sámi history. Bodø2024's application explicitly reserved space for such projects, giving organizers legitimacy and resources to tackle challenging themes and amplify their positive impact. Impact of *Frivillig2024* cannot be underestimated here as well. By engaging disengaged groups, as minorities and young people in cultural activities, *Frivillig2024* contributed to building tolerance and gave legitimacy for minority associations.

Legacy: from title year to structural change

Legacy is where the long-term value becomes most visible. While this is still too early to conclude on the legacy of Bodø2024 and its projects, we can already indicate some of the potential ways for its development. For instance, UNG2024 has left behind networks of youth leaders and enhanced employability pathways. *Frivillig2024* institutionalised itself as *Frivillig Bodø*, seeking for the continuity for volunteer networks. Ecological Economics embedded itself in education and community practice, ensuring that its ideas would survive past 2024. Sámi projects have enriched society and promoted social inclusion, while also attracting global attention to the topic and to local cultural actors. The legacy of the preselected projects is more fragile: while they created important results, their legacy is threatened by limited municipal resources and the risk of one-off visibility without structural anchoring. Nevertheless, the establishment of *Bodø2024 Legacy AS* in spring 2025 reflects the municipality's and county's commitment to supporting the cultural sector in enhancing international cooperation and visibility. Bodø2024 Legacy AS aims to make Bodø and Nordland better at international cooperation, as well as to help the cultural sector apply for international support schemes. This contrast highlights an important note: legacies depend not only on creativity but on embedding structures into institutions and communities that can sustain them.

Thus, the pathway from input to legacy was not linear. Several project leaders reported significant challenges that conditioned impacts and threatened long-term sustainability. For example, financial limitations (some youth projects surviving only on symbolic remuneration), risk undermining volunteer infrastructure due to budgetary cuts, lack of sufficient resources and professional capacity to manage international collaborations, leading to frustrations with administration, unclear communication, and media neglect. These challenges illustrate that impacts and legacies cannot be taken for granted. They are contingent on structural support, governance, and the ability to secure resources beyond the cultural year. Without these, even the most innovative projects risk becoming temporary without demonstrating potential effects.

By mapping these cases onto the conceptual framework, Bodø2024 demonstrates how a cultural capital year can be more than a festival of events. It tried to function as a cultural ecosystem focusing on capacity-building and synergies: leveraging relatively small inputs into participatory processes that generated outputs, translated into impacts, and (where successful) laid the groundwork for enduring legacies. As several quotes support this:

“Legacy is the networks – it’s the people remaining in the networks and all the competency that is there.” (leader Frivillig2024)

“The combination of new contacts, new opportunities, new friendships. It is a success because synergies arise”. (leader of the project on Nature)

“It’s capacity building around everyone [national and international partners] who was involved in that production because no one has done anything like that before”. (leader of the project related to Festival)

“People from all possible sectors have come together, young and old, people in work, people out of work, immigrants, representing foreign cultures of all kinds. And this has led to us developing such a common understanding, a common value base.” (leader of the sub-project Ecological Economics)

Importantly, the comparison shows that while *all projects produced outputs and impacts*, only those with clear institutional foundation (schools, volunteer organisations, academic centres) or strong community buy-in developed strong legacies. This finding aligns with broader ECoC research, which stresses that sustainable legacies emerge when participation is institutionalised, not episodic.

We can conclude with a brief Legacy Outlook, that the title year created numerous opportunities for a sustained legacy, particularly through new networks, emerged synergies, new arenas for dialogue, a growing participation culture and strengthened capacity among cultural managers. We also note that the city and county municipalities, despite facing accumulated budget challenges, institutionalized several important initiatives developed under Bodø2024, which have contributed to long-term value creation. On the other side, the potential for long-term value could have been even greater

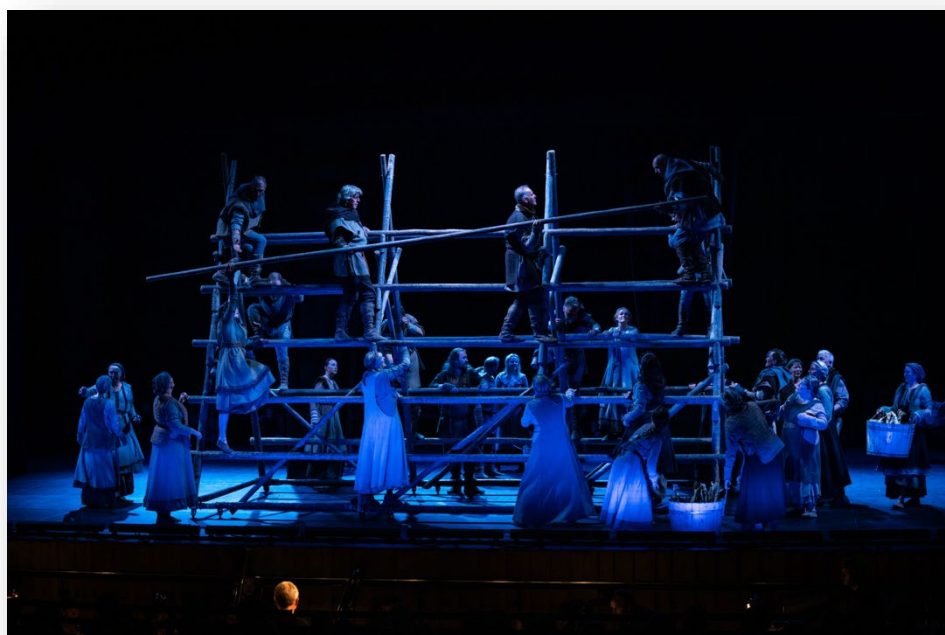
if certain challenges had been addressed more effectively and in a timely manner. These include limited financial and human resources, the lack of pre-established infrastructure, issues in cooperation with Bodø2024 (such as unclear communication and a non-transparent strategy), and insufficient media coverage. This quote perhaps best captures the issues described above:

“What we’ve got is funding to maintain the bridge we’ve already built. That’s perfectly fine - but it’s not enough to start driving cars across it, let alone a train”.

The meaning of cultural projects’ success

From the perspective of project leaders, success was never just about delivering events on time or filling auditoriums. Instead, success was framed as a more relational and process-oriented outcome: youth who gained confidence to take cultural ownership, volunteers who discovered their contributions mattered, or citizens who saw their local communities differently because of what they co-created. In this sense, success was experienced as empowerment, belonging, and continuity, qualities that often escape conventional performance indicators but were repeatedly highlighted in our interviews.

Across all cases, what emerges is that success in Bodø2024 was neither uniform nor easily quantifiable. It was contextual, rooted in the lived realities of leaders and participants, and emotional. Success meant making a difference, when young people felt inspired, when volunteers discovered new connections, when ecological ideas gained credibility, or when cultural projects forged lasting contacts. In this light, the projects of Bodø2024 show that success is best understood not as an endpoint, but as a catalyst for legacy formation: the creation of capacities, networks, and practices that can carry culture forward in Nordland long after 2024. Vidar Thorbjørnsen



Querini Opera / Photo by Vidar Thorbjørnsen / Bodø2024

4. Conclusions

4.1 Summary of main takeaways

Our conceptual model (Figure 3) framed cultural projects as processual chains, beginning with inputs (resources, motivations, networks), moving through processes (co-production, collaboration, experimentation), and generating outputs (events, competencies, visibility). These outputs can, under supportive conditions, translate into impacts (social cohesion, participation, identity formation) and eventually legacies (durable structures, cultural habits, new institutions). This framework allowed us to probe not only *what happened* in Bodø2024, but also *how* projects moved (or sometimes failed to move) along these trajectories. The empirical material largely supports this model but also takes it further.

First, inputs proved more hybrid and fragile than it might be theoretically expected

Project leaders consistently emphasised the dependence on volunteer labour, fragmented funding, and personal networks. Unlike conventional cultural policy, where institutional stability dominates, Bodø2024 relied on a distributed, precarious resource base. This supports ecological economics' insight that resilience emerges from diverse and interconnected inputs rather than from singular resource streams. At the same time, it highlights the limits of resource mobilisation in contexts marked by municipal cutbacks and weak sponsorship traditions.

Second, processes were rarely linear but unfolded as iterative, adaptive experiments.

Instead of straightforward implementation, many projects evolved organically, branching into unforeseen directions (as in gastronomy and ecological economics) or scaling down due to constraints (as in several open-call projects). This resonates with theories of cultural projects as “emergent systems” rather than fixed plans. Our analysis shows that success often depended on leaders' ability to embrace this fluidity, transforming unpredictability into new opportunities.

Third, outputs need to be understood relationally, not only as discrete events.

While Bodø2024 produced hundreds of performances, exhibitions, and workshops, project leaders themselves often pointed to less tangible outputs: new friendships, enhanced skills, or stronger self-confidence among youth. In theoretical terms, this complicates measurement-oriented approaches to cultural value, suggesting that *outputs are not endpoints* but gateways to deeper impacts.

Fourth, impacts were uneven and contingent, aligning with our theoretical expectation that they depend on context.

In some municipalities, *utopiverksteder* sparked ripple effects of civic participation, while in others they left little trace. *UNG2024* empowered youth networks across the region but struggled to sustain engagement in places with

limited capacity. *Frivillig2024* professionalised volunteering but also revealed inequalities in who can afford to contribute unpaid labour. These variations underline that cultural projects are embedded in local ecologies of governance, economy, and community – and their impacts cannot be generalised without attention to these conditions.

Fifth, legacies emerge less as fixed outcomes than as potentials. Consistent with our model, long-term effects depended on whether outputs were institutionally anchored and politically supported. The introduction of ecological economics into upper secondary education, the establishment of *Frivillig Bodø*, and the continuation of youth-led projects are examples of outputs evolving into legacies. At the same time, several achievements remain fragile, vulnerable to budget cuts, volunteer fatigue, or lack of media visibility. This underscores a broader insight: legacies are not simply “delivered” by an ECoC year but must be deliberately cultivated through strategic planning, follow-up structures, and continued resourcing. Whether legacy planning in Bodø2024 was sufficient cannot be fully assessed within the scope of this report; however, the observed variation in the title year sustainability suggests that future ECoCs would benefit from more explicit and systematic planning for post-event continuity.

Finally, our findings nuance theoretical debates on the meaning of success. As discussed in Section 1, success in cultural projects is multi-dimensional, ranging from artistic quality to audience development, network-building, and legacy formation. Bodø2024 confirms this plurality: for some leaders, success meant sold-out shows; for others, it was a youth asking when the next workshop would be. These narratives suggest that a narrow focus on quantifiable indicators (attendance, media coverage) risks missing the richness of cultural value. Instead, success must be conceptualised as a distributed phenomenon, co-constructed by different stakeholders, and best captured through the interplay of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

In summary, the Bodø2024 projects are well-suited to the input–process–output–impact–legacy framework, while also challenging us to treat these categories not as linear steps but as fluid, overlapping dynamics. They demonstrate that cultural projects act as catalysts for long-term change when embedded in supportive ecosystems of resources, governance, and community participation. Yet they also show that impacts and legacies are conditional, uneven, and fragile, shaped as much by structural constraints as by visionary leadership. The key lesson is that cultural legacies are not guaranteed outcomes of investment, but emergent properties of ongoing networks, negotiations, and everyday practices.

4.2 Implications for policymakers

After demonstrating cultural projects’ potential of acting as a catalyst for long-term urban and cultural transformation, we highlight the following recommendations for

policymakers. These specific steps will help to sustain and facilitate short- and long-term contributions of Bodø2024 projects.

- Focus on involvement of young people as co-creators of cultural initiatives. Giving young people opportunities to participate in project management and implementation builds future capacity, fosters a sense of belonging and ownership, and strengthens local engagement. As highlighted in the report, youth volunteering can be a central strategy.
- Support smaller cultural initiatives, especially outside Bodø, as investing in decentralized projects contributes to regional development and ensures cultural activity is accessible across Nordland.
- Facilitate stronger connections between public/private sectors and cultural actors. Create meeting places and collaborative platforms to link municipalities, businesses, cultural institutions, and individual performers. Closer cooperation can lead to increased funding and sponsorship opportunities.
- Support cultural workers with necessary training in external funding (how to apply, identify relevant sources, etc.) and project management (estimating project budget, manage production nuances, and build international networks).

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Appendix I. List of reports by Monitor2024

Accessible at: <https://site.nord.no/monitor2024/nyheter/>

1. Baseline Report - Monitor 2024: Effects of Bodø as European Capital of Culture 2024
2. Inception Report - Conceptual Foundation for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Bodø 2024: Project Monitor 2024
3. Bodø2024: Simulating Best-case and Worst-case Scenarios
4. Understanding the Narrative of “Bodø 2024”: An AI-assisted Analysis of the Discourse in Norwegian Media (2023-2025)
5. ECoC Bodø2024: Should I stay, or should I go? - Settlement Intentions Among Adolescents in Nordland
6. Bodø2024: Understanding Impacts Through Program Events
7. ECoC Bodø2024: Cultural Projects as Pathways to Legacy
8. ECoC Bodø2024: Individual and Organisational Perspectives on Volunteering
9. ECoC Bodø2024: Artists and cultural workers expectations and experiences
10. ECoC Bodø2024: Students settlement intentions and their use of art and culture
11. Bodø2024 through the voices of the Peoples Jury
12. When a City Speaks Online: Citizen Discourse on the Bodø2024 Year
13. Tracking Change: The Cultural and Economic Impact of Bodø2024
14. Updated Simulation of Potential Effects of Bodø 2024 European Capital of Culture for development of Bodø municipality by 2036
15. Culture as Catalyst: Assessing Bodø2024 European Capital of Culture