

COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANDSCAPE CONVENTION
LANDSCAPE AWARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

9th Session – 2025-2026

APPLICATION FORM

State Party: Finland

Presentation

The Council of Europe Landscape Convention is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all aspects of landscape: natural, rural, urban and peri-urban. It represents an important contribution to the implementation of the Council of Europe's objectives. By taking into account the value of landscapes, with their natural and human components, the Council of Europe acknowledges that the landscape is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas.

The 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Reykjavík on 16 – 17 May 2023, recognised “the urgency of additional efforts to protect the environment, as well as to counter the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.” It committed the Council of Europe to strengthening work on the human rights aspects of the environment and initiate the Reykjavik process of focusing and strengthening the work of the Council of Europe in this field, as laid down in Appendix V of the Reykjavik Declaration on “The Council of Europe and the environment”.

Appendix V of the Reykjavík Declaration references the Landscape Convention to highlight that “landscape has an important public interest role in the cultural, ecological, environmental and social fields and is a key element of individual and social well-being, and that landscape protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone.”

Article 11 of the Convention establishes the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe. The Resolution [CM/Res\(2008\)3](#) on the rules governing the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008 at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, draws attention to the fact that Article 11 of the Convention institutes the Award and that it is in keeping with the work carried out by the Council of Europe concerning human rights, democracy and sustainable development.

Opened to the Parties to the Convention, the Award is intended to raise civil society's awareness of the value of landscapes, of their role and of changes to them. Its objective is to reward exemplary practical initiatives aimed at successful landscape quality objectives on the territories of the Parties to the Convention. The Award is conferred every two years and the files presenting applications must reach the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe.

At its meeting held in Strasbourg on 28-29 April 2008, the Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP) decided that applications should be submitted to the Council of Europe Secretariat through the Permanent Representations of the Parties to the Convention.

Each State Party to the Convention is thus invited to send by post to the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe Landscape Convention), no later than 31 December 2025, via its Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe, a completed application form in paper format, together with a digital copy on a USB key of the form and additional material.

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Please note that:

- participation to the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe is only open to local and regional authorities and their groupings and non-governmental organisations, as stated in the Resolution CM/Res (2008)3, Appendix, Article 2;*
- the application form must be completed in all its parts, in one of the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English or French);*

- *the materials submitted must be copyright-free, for use by the Council of Europe in communications aimed at promoting the Award or any other publications or activities relating to the Convention. The Council of Europe undertakes to cite the authors' names;*
- *files that are incomplete or fail to comply with the rules will not be taken into consideration.*

For further information please visit the Landscape Award section of the Council of Europe website:

[Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur le paysage / Site web officiel \(coe.int\)](#)

[Council of Europe Landscape Convention / Official website \(coe.int\)](#)

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I. STATE CONCERNED AND APPLICANT

1. State

Finland

Represented by	Ms Martina Reinikainen
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	+358295250484
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2. Applicant

Naapurinvaara village association

*Name of the local,
regional authority(ies)
or NGO(s)*

Local / regional authority project
☒ NGO Project

Website of the Applicant (if exists)

https://naapurinvaara.yhdistysavain.fi/

Represented by	Ms Iidamari Korhonen/ Naapurinvaara village association
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II. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJÉT

3. Name of the Project

Long-term management of the unique landscapes of Naapurinvaara and establishment of a landscape management area

4. Location of the Project

Municipality of Sotkamo, located in the Kainuu region in Northern Finland

5. Summary of the Project (10-12 lines)

The hilltop settlement of Naapurinvaara is a unique combination of balanced construction, valuable natural environments and extensive traditional rural biotopes. It is one of Finland's 186 nationally valuable landscape areas. The Finnish Heritage Agency has also designated the village of Naapurinvaara a nationally significant built cultural heritage site. Landscape has been systematically managed for decades thanks to the activity of landowners, farmers, grazing service entrepreneurs, and associations, as well as the support provided by the municipality of Sotkamo and the Kainuu Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Kainuu ELY Centre). In 2013, the Naapurinvaara village association proposed establishing a landscape management area under the Nature Conservation Act. The process for establishing a landscape management area was driven by local commitment and broad cooperation. The 2,762-hectare Naapurinvaara landscape management area was established in 2020, creating new opportunities for landscape management.

6. Photo representing the Project (high definition – JPEG 350 dpi) and name of the author of the photo please



Photo: Kimmo Rauatmaa

7. Website of the Project (if exists)

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III. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

8. **Start of the Project** month year
The project must have been completed at least three years previously

9. **End of the Project** month year
The project must have been completed at least three years previously

10. Partners	-Kainuu Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Kainuu ELY Centre) -Municipality of Sotkamo -Landowners -Local associations (e.g. hunting clubs, youth clubs, water cooperative)
11. Financing bodies	-Ministry of the Environment -Municipality of Sotkamo -Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centre) -The Finnish Heritage Agency
12. Central aims of the Project	

*What are the main objectives of the project regarding landscape?
How does the project contribute to the implementation of the Convention at the national level or transnational level?*

The hilltop settlement of Naapurinvaara is a unique combination of balanced construction, valuable natural environments and extensive traditional rural biotopes. A decision in principle by the Finnish government confirmed that it is one of Finland's 186 nationally valuable landscape areas. In addition, the Finnish Heritage Agency has designated the village of Naapurinvaara a nationally significant built cultural heritage site. Landscape has been managed for decades thanks to the activity of landowners, farmers, grazing service entrepreneurs, and associations, as well as the support provided by the municipality of Sotkamo and the Kainuu ELY Centre.

In 2013, the Naapurinvaara village association submitted an initiative to the Kainuu ELY Centre. It proposed a process aimed at establishing a landscape management area and preparing a related landscape management and use plan. The starting point for establishing and preparing a landscape management area was local enthusiasm and wide-ranging cooperation.

The main objectives of the Naapurinvaara landscape management measures and the establishment of the landscape management area were as follows:

- Prepare a landscape management and use plan for the area.
- Establish a landscape management area under the Nature Conservation Act. A landscape management area may be established to preserve and manage the beauty of a natural or cultural landscape, historical characteristics or other special values associated with it.
- Open up more opportunities for landscape management in the area.
- Promote the preservation and strengthening of the natural and landscape values of the area and the values of the built cultural environment and highlight them more visibly.
- Support the implementation of the plans concerning the area, the county and municipal land use plans, and the landscape management objectives of residents and landowners in the area.
- Strengthen the value of the landscape as part of regional development, cultural heritage and human well-being, for example through the development of village environments and communality.
- Make the landscape a visible and meaningful part of everyday life and increase the understanding that the landscape is an evolving entity that people can influence.
- Support a systematic and long-term approach to landscape management, especially with regard to traditional landscapes and cultural environments.
- Encourage active agency among residents and stakeholders by means such as inclusive planning.

The project supports the implementation of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention, especially in the following ways:

- Sustainable regional development: the project has delivered effective, tangible results in landscape management, conservation and planning. The project has involved preparing a landscape management plan, which has been implemented since the establishment of the landscape management area. The past and future measures will correct the damage to landscape features and improve the quality of the landscape. The project has taken into account the environmental, social and economic aspects and aligns with the regional sustainable development policy.
- Public participation: In accordance with the convention, the project has emphasised the participation of citizens and local actors in the planning and management of the landscape. The Naapurinvaara landscape management plan contains general and site-specific recommendations for landscape management. Landowners were involved in preparing the recommendations and are largely responsible for their implementation. The management recommendations can be used, for example, to prepare agricultural and forestry plans for specific farms.
- Practical implementation of the landscape policy: The project serves as an example of how the Landscape Convention's objectives can be realised at a local and regional level and provides a model that can also be applied in other European countries.
- Training and increasing knowledge: The project raises awareness of the value, significance and change of the landscape.

The project's operating method and results are transferable to the international context and can serve as a model for other countries and regions.

13. Type of the Project

Describe the nature/type of the project:

Does it focus on landscape protection and management, or does it involve landscape planning, or both?

Is the project related to specific measures or to a landscape public policy?

Is it implemented at a national level or a transnational level?

Tangible measures, such as landscape planning, management measures and the development of village environments, were taken during the project to establish the Naapurinvaara landscape management area. At the same time, the establishment of a landscape management area under the Nature Conservation Act also supports public policy concerning the landscape.

Examples of landscape conservation and management measures:

- Establishing a landscape management area: one of the objectives of the landscape management area established under the Nature Conservation Act is to protect a nationally valuable landscape
- Restoration and management of traditional rural biotopes: among other things, overgrown meadows in the area were cleared and grazing has been restored. Grazing previously gave rise to one of the features of the area's landscape, and further opportunities for grazing have been persistently sought.
- Opening views: views have been opened, for example, by clearing brushwood, overgrown field borders and shores of water bodies.
- Safeguarding the built heritage: the built heritage has been taken into account and the preservation of old buildings as part of the landscape image has been supported by, for example, renovation advice.

Examples of landscape planning activities:

- In connection with the establishment of the landscape management area, a management plan was drawn up for the area, specifying the values, development needs and measures for the area. The plan was prepared in cooperation with local actors. The plan is based on local knowledge of the landscape, cultural heritage and residents' views. It guides the practical care activities and long-term planning. The plan contains tangible measures for preserving, managing and developing the landscape.
- The starting point of the Naapurinvaara master plan, which entered into force during the project in 2016, was to take into account the national landscape values of the planning area and reconcile them with construction and other land use. The municipality of Sotkamo commissioned a separate landscape survey for the Naapurinvaara master plan.
- Inclusive planning processes were implemented in the area, and residents and stakeholders were involved in defining the future of the landscape.

These activities not only preserve and manage the existing landscapes; they also actively plan for their develop in a sustainable and community-led manner.

The management measures implemented in the area and the establishment of a landscape management area serve as a practical example of how the principles of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention can be implemented at a local level. The establishment of a landscape

management area also supports the landscape work and regional development strategies of the Kainuu Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Kainuu ELY Centre) and the municipality of Sotkamo.

The project is implemented at the national and local levels, but it is strongly linked to international objectives, in particular the Council of Europe Landscape Convention. Although the activities focused on a specific region and its local communities, the approach and practices are also internationally applicable and can serve as exemplary examples for other European countries.

14. Outcome

What are the effective and measurable results of the project on the landscape?

The project that sought to establish a landscape management area for Naapurinvaara and the subsequent measures have yielded wide-ranging positive effects on the landscape.

Impactful and measurable impacts on the landscape during the project:

- **A landscape management plan has been developed:** The landscape management plan provides a tangible tool for managing and developing the landscape over the long term. The plan is a document that guides the activities and can be used, for example, in land use planning.
- **The 2,762-hectare Naapurinvaara landscape management area was established in 2020.**
- **The landscape has become more open:** Management measures, such as clearing bushes and thinning shoreline trees, have opened out important views. They are central to the village image and are perceived as a calling card for the area.
- **Traditional landscapes have been brought back under management:** Naapurinvaara has several habitats created by traditional grazing or mowing, i.e. traditional rural biotopes: pastures, woodland pastures and meadows. Some of the areas have very long histories as pastures, dating back to the time of slash-and-burn agriculture. Without management, these areas will not be preserved. Overgrown meadows were cleared during the project. By the end of the project, more than 70 hectares of traditional rural biotopes had been brought under management by means such as grazing and mowing.
- **Biodiversity has increased:** Twenty-seven endangered or near threatened species were identified in the area, including moonwort, a near threatened meadow plant species. Previous surveys identified 556 butterfly species in the area. When grazing ended, the species entered a rapid decline, but habitats have improved through grazing and mowing. Once grazing resumed, the species began returning to the area. The area also contains numerous other valuable biodiversity sites, which were taken into consideration when planning and managing the area.
- **Invasive species have been controlled:** The fertile Naapurinvaara land is highly susceptible to certain invasive species, and Indian balsam in particular has become a problem. As its vegetation spreads, it harms the diversity of the landscape and species in the area. The spread of invasive species, such as Indian balsam, ramanas rose and garden lupine, has been prevented systematically by teams of volunteers and

based on surveys. Long-term work has been done to remove invasive plant species, such of which had spread extensively.

- **The preservation of the built heritage has been supported:** The preservation of culturally historic buildings has been supported, for example, by providing renovation advice and information on building renovation grants. Renovations in the area include stone barns, the roof of an AIV forage silo tower, the roof of a balcony access block and the old school. The renovations were implemented partly with built heritage management grants from the ELY Centre and grants from the Finnish Heritage Agency.
- **Communal participation was encouraged and environmental awareness has increased:** Village residents have actively participated in landscape management efforts, surveys and events. For example, efforts to encourage school pupils and their parents to uproot Indian balsam plants have taken place 3–4 times, combining landscape management and environmental education.
- **The area has been developed:** The signposting along the outdoor trail network has been modernised as part of the municipality of Sotkamo's "Stick to the path" project.

The objectives of establishing a landscape management area included promoting the preservation and strengthening of the natural and landscape values of the area and the values of the built cultural environment and highlighting them more visibly. The establishment of the landscape management area aimed at long-term impacts, and this objective has been achieved excellently. **The following impacts and measurable effects on the landscape have been realised since the landscape management area was established:**

- **Acceptance as an OECM:** Naapurinvaara was accepted as an area that supports biodiversity (an OECM) in autumn 2025. Naapurinvaara is the first individual approved area in Finland. In accordance with the criteria set for OECM areas, Naapurinvaara safeguards nature values in an efficient and long-term manner, even if the area is not an actual protected area. OECM status is a recognition of the work that has been done and a sign of trust in the continuity of the work.
- **Landscape management measures by volunteers:** Management measures in accordance with the landscape management and use plan have been carried out, for example, by volunteers. Among other things, brushwood has been cleared and invasive species have been prevented through voluntary work.
- **Restoration of traditional rural biotopes:** the restoration of traditional rural biotopes has continued. For example, in summer 2025, a traditional rural biotope site that had not been managed was mowed and cleared.
- **Preservation of the built heritage by renovation:** renovations in the area include the roof of the outbuilding, restored using the traditional method, the roof of an old barn along the road, and the old log bridge. The renovation of the old school continued and was completed.
- **Combating invasive species continues:** The harmfulness of invasive species is better understood in the area and actively prevented. In addition to the villagers' own activity, the municipality of Sotkamo has already implemented the prevention of invasive species in the area for six summers.
- **Development of the area:** The area will be developed sustainably. In 2025, a traditional garden, which is a bank of traditional plant species, was built near the village school. The species bank serves as an attraction and a way to present local, traditional garden plants, which are recommended to replace invasive species. Favouring traditional plants in gardens is one way of preserving the area's landscape values. The species bank has both perennial and woody plants. The species bank is

maintained by the municipality of Sotkamo. The sports bank is also used as a teaching and learning environment. In addition, school pupils have built insect hotels in connection with the species bank. In 2025, a new information board about landscape management was prepared for the start of the outdoor trail network.

- Landscape management plan: The new aim of the village association is to draw up a plan for landscape management measures for several years and thus inspire landowners to participate more in landscape management.
- Survey for landowners: A survey on forest use is being planned for landowners to find out whether they would like to participate more in landscape management through forest management choices.

As a result of the project, the landscape has been preserved as open, diverse and valuable in terms of cultural history. The results can be measured, for example, in the surface area of traditional rural biotopes brought under management, the number of invasive species prevented, the number of participants, and through zoning.

IV. RESPECT OF THE CRITERIA OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE AWARD

15. Sustainable territorial development

Is the project part of a sustainable development policy?

Does it contribute to the enhancement of environmental, social, economic, cultural or aesthetic values of the landscape? How?

Has it successfully countered or posed a remedy to any pre-existing environmental damage or urban blight? How?

Does it respond to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss? How?¹

The project is part of the sustainable development policy. It combines ecological, social, cultural and economic perspectives with landscape design and management. Naapurinvaara is an attractive and vibrant residential area (approximately 400 inhabitants). About ten farms and several other companies operate in the area. In particular, the project supports the vitality of local communities, the preservation of biodiversity and the fostering of cultural heritage – all key areas of sustainable development.

The project promotes the strengthening of environmental, social, economic, cultural or aesthetic values of the landscape in the following ways:

- Environmental values: Traditional landscapes have been managed and biodiversity supported by, for example, restoration and grazing of meadows and pasture areas.
- Social values: The project has utilised participatory planning processes that strengthen communality and local identity.
- Economic values: Part of the beauty of Naapurinvaara is based on grazing and mowing, which together with the environmental support agreements, are also an aspect of modern agriculture and a part of the vitality of local agriculture. Landscape management can also support nature tourism and local entrepreneurship, which brings vitality to rural areas. It has been observed that the number of tourists has increased as a result of the increased awareness of the establishment of the landscape management area.
- Cultural values: The project has supported the preservation of cultural landscapes and built heritage and recognised their importance as part of local history and identity.
- Aesthetic values: The project's improvements to the landscape image, opening up views and developing village environments will increase the visual attractiveness of the area.

The project has successfully prevented overgrowth of the landscape, which is one of the key landscape challenges, especially in rural areas.

- Overgrown meadows and bushes have been cleared to restore open landscape spaces and improve biodiversity.
- The restoration of grazing has revived traditional land use practices and prevented the closure of the landscape.
- The restoration of village environments has prevented deterioration in the landscape model and increased the attractiveness of the areas.

¹ Appendix V to the Reykjavík Declaration

The project has responded to the triple planetary crisis, especially by combating biodiversity loss, which is one of the project's key themes. The management of traditional landscapes, support for biodiversity and prevention of invasive species are directly linked to the preservation and restoration of valuable species' habitats.

16. Exemplary value

Can the project be considered of exemplary value? Why?

Which are the good practices that it implemented? Which of these practices are considered of exemplary value at the national or transnational level?

The project can be considered of exemplary value, as it provides a practical model of how the landscape can be managed and developed in an inclusive, local and sustainable manner. The project successfully combines the ecological, cultural and social dimensions of the landscape, and its approach can be widely applied in different regions of Finland - and also internationally.

Particular examples include:

- A participatory planning process that genuinely involves local residents and stakeholders.
- A comprehensive examination of the landscape, taking into account both physical and experiential values.
- Concrete results, such as a landscape management and use plan, measures taken based on it, managed traditional landscapes and increased landscape awareness.

Good practices in the project include:

- Public participation: Involving residents in on-site observations and discussion about the landscape.
- Locally-oriented landscape plans: The plans are based on the area's unique characteristics and the views of the community.
- Cooperation between authorities and communities: Cooperation between the village association, the Kainuu Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Kainuu ELY Centre) and the municipality of Sotkamo has played a key role in the success of planning and implementation.
- Management of traditional landscapes: Practical measures, such as restoring grazing and clearing meadows, support both the landscape and biodiversity.
- Highlighting the link between the landscape and well-being: The project has increased the understanding of the importance of the landscape in people's everyday lives and well-being.

17. Public participation

Does the project actively encourage the public's participation in the decision-making process? How?

Which stakeholders were involved, and how and when were they engaged? When did the active public consultation and dialogue take place, and in what form?

Is the project in line with the wider policies implemented by national, regional or local authorities?

The project has actively encouraged the public to participate in decision-making. The resident events, workshops and dialogue with local actors implemented in connection with landscape management planning played a key role in the project to establish a landscape management area. These have been central to the preparation of the landscape plans. Public participation was seen as a way to strengthen local identity and landscape relationships and ensure that the plans meet the needs and values of local residents.

Public participation has been a cross-cutting principle of planning. The project's planning process was built to enable local residents, landowners, associations, the Kainuu Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (Kainuu ELY Centre), municipalities and other stakeholders to participate. The parties involved were included in the early stages of planning, and their views have been taken into account in the content of the plans. Active consultation has taken the form of workshops, surveys and discussion events. This has enabled the plans to reflect the area's uniqueness and meet local needs.

- The members of the project's steering and planning teams for the preparation of the landscape management plan were chosen so that they could participate in the planning based on their own special expertise and local knowledge with the most multidisciplinary approach possible. These groups met actively around the village, both in the field and around the table, planning and participating in public events and activity days.
- A survey on landscape management was organised for permanent residents, holiday residents and other landowners in the planning area. A total of 194 surveys were posted around the area, a newspaper bulletin was produced, and the survey was also available online through a link to the village association's website and Facebook pages. Forty-seven responses were received.
- During the project, public events and activity days were organised to encourage villagers to participate in planning and practical landscape management work. The topics of the events included locally-oriented gardening, building maintenance, and combating invasive species. The events usually welcomed 10–20 participants.
- In autumn 2018, the Kainuu ELY Centre requested opinions and statements from landowners in the planning area and cooperation organisations in the field on the establishment of the landscape management area and the draft landscape management and use plan.
- The application to become a landscape management area and related public events gained good visibility in the area's newspapers, radio and regional TV news.
- Landowners have leased traditional rural biotopes for grazing. Some landowners have cleared traditional rural biotopes (five grazing areas with more than 10 landowners).

The active participation of the public in decision-making processes has continued even after the establishment of the landscape management area.

- The landscape management monitoring group established by the municipal board of Sotkamo steers the landscape management in the area. The monitoring group also includes the Naapurinvaara village association and several other stakeholders operating in the area. The mayor chairs the group. The monitoring group was established in 2020. The group decides how to use the landscape grant that can be awarded by the ELY Centre.
- The village association submits an annual proposal to the monitoring group on what landscape management measures will be carried out the following year. The plan is reviewed at the annual meeting of the village association and at the board meeting.

The project is aligned with the policies of national, regional and local authorities. It supports the programmes and strategies of the ELY Centres, regional rural development programmes and the objectives of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention. The landscape plans have been prepared in cooperation with the authorities and they support broader objectives, such as preserving the cultural environment, promoting biodiversity and sustainable land use.

18. Awareness-raising

Is the project effectively increasing public awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of human development, consolidation of European identity, or individual and collective well-being? How?

The project has been effective in raising public awareness of the value, significance and change of the landscape. The starting point in the landscape management measures of Naapurinvaara and in the preparation of the use and management plan is that the landscape is not just a visual background but an active part of people's everyday lives, cultural identity and well-being. Preparing landscape plans using inclusive methods has highlighted local residents' views on the landscape and strengthened their relationship with their own living environment.

The project and the follow-up measures inspired by it to improve landscapes have promoted the well-being of individuals and communities, for example by supporting the local identity related to the landscape, appreciation of cultural heritage and a sense of community. Measures related to landscape management, such as volunteering, public events and operating days, have increased the understanding of the landscape's values and its impacts on the quality of life.

The principles of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention have been central to the planning process. In this way, the project also supports a broader European concept of the landscape, in which the landscape is seen as a shared cultural heritage and a source of well-being.

V. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Together with the printed version of the Application form, additional material in digital format should be included in one USB key, and returned by post to:

*Secretariat General of the Council of Europe
Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law (DG I)
Directorate of Social Rights, Health and Environment
Department for the Reykjavík Process and Environment
Council of Europe Landscape Convention
9th Session of the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe
F-67075 STRASBOURG, Cedex*

- Text (20 pages max.): *PDF format*
- Photos (10 max.): *JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- Posters (2 max.): *PDF format high definition or JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- Video (5 min max.): *mpeg 2 format - It is recommended to present a video (even of amateur quality).*

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