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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Accompanying the document

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

Ex Post evaluation of the 2015 European Capitals of Culture (Mons and Pilsen)

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The European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) is a European Union initiative that pursues the objectives of safeguarding the diversity of cultures in Europe, highlighting their common features and fostering the contribution of culture to the long term development of cities. The action started in 1985 at the initiative of Melina Mercouri, at the time Minister of Culture of Greece.

Each year, two European cities from two different Member States of the European Union host the title. In accordance with the Decision establishing the ECoC action[1], the Commission is required to ensure an external and independent evaluation of the results of the European Capitals of Culture from the previous year. For the 2015 titles, Mons in Belgium and Pilsen in the Czech Republic were officially designated by the Council of the European Union. Mons based its application on the synergies between technology and culture while Pilsen intended to use its ECoC year to open up to Europe.

The conclusions of the evaluation indicate that the action remains highly relevant to the objectives of the EU. In particular, Mons and Pilsen saw their cultural offer greatly strengthened because of ECoC, which helped them diversify their cultural scene as well as the types of audiences for culture. Both cities used the ECoC year to help internationalise their cultural offer and raise the profile of culture in the city. For example, in Mons, new partnerships were concluded with the tourism sector and the corporate sector.

The action is efficient. In particular, the selection process enabled the selection of two cities with the capacity, resources and vision to implement ECoC in correspondence with the objectives of the action. Moreover, the funding provided by the Union (in the form of the EUR 1.5 million Melina Mercouri Prize) had a considerable leverage effect by stimulating the cities and their respective regions and countries to invest significant amounts in the ECoC programmes and associated infrastructure developments. Despite the different scale of budgets, Mons and Pilsen delivered their ECoC programme in an efficient way, as both used national and EU funds to implement cultural programmes of high artistic quality and of considerably greater size than the cities' "usual" cultural offering.

The action also proves effective against its objectives and achieved an impact that would not have arisen through the actions of the Member States alone, demonstrating a clear EU added value. The ECoC action is complementary to other EU policies and programmes. In particular, it has been reinforced by and added value to investments made the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The ECoC stimulated cities to use ERDF for investments in cultural infrastructure and gave greater impetus to the completion of those investments in time for the title-year. Finally, the effectiveness of the ECoC in 2015 is particularly strong in terms of the two cities maximising the opportunity to strengthen the local cultural organisations and strengthen citizen involvement (volunteering) and cultural participation.

Though it is too early to draw conclusions about the sustainability of the action, the legacy arrangements that are put in place in the two cities suggest that the impact of the action will remain visible in the medium term. The core team from the Pilsen 2015 Foundation is still in place and they personally drive forward the learning from the year. Mons has put in place very concrete plans for continuation activity including a Biennial starting in 2018, intended to be a major cultural date on an international scale that will be based on the values that brought about the success of Mons 2015.

[1] Decision No 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019, OJ L 304, 3.11.2006

The evaluation has also raised areas for improvements resulting in a set of recommendations both for the cities and for the Commission.