European Committee of the Regions

Preparing for the European Capital of Culture Action post-2033 from a local and regional perspective

What is the European Capital of Culture?

- The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) is a **flagship EU initiative** that highlights the richness and diversity of cultures across Europe. Each year, selected cities are nominated to deliver cultural programmes with a strong European dimension.
- The initiative supports **cultural development**, **urban regeneration** and **international cooperation**, strengthening a **shared sense of European identity**.
- The ECoC is currently under review to shape the **post-2033 framework**.

Introduction to this study

- This study explores the future of the ECoC Action beyond 2033, focusing on its **evolution** and **long-term relevance**.
- It places local and regional authorities (**LRAs**) at the centre of the analysis, recognising their key role in the Action.

The objective is to assess how the initiative can better support cultural, social and economic development, formulating policy recommendations that can orient the Action beyond 2033 and define the most effective approach for actively involving LRAs throughout the entire process.



Creative Europe

Methodological approach

Desk research

Online survey

53 answers

Interviews

8 interviews

Workshop

17 experts

The role of LRAs in the ECoC Action

LRAs are **central** to the planning, coordination and delivery of the ECoC programme.

They **bring together** cultural actors, institutions and local communities.

Their role goes beyond culture, linking the initiative to **broader development strategies**.

They foster **participation** and **long-term vision** at place-based level.

Their engagement is key to ensure **lasting impact** beyond the title year.



Economic, territorial and social impacts of the ECoC Action



The ECoC generates **economic benefits**, especially through tourism and the strengthening of the local cultural and creative sectors.



It supports **urban regeneration** and the **revitalisation** of public spaces. The initiative strengthens links between cities and their surrounding areas.



It promotes **social inclusion**, **participation** and **community engagement**.



It enhances **cultural exchange** and reinforces the **European dimension.**

Institutional, financial and administrative challenges for LRAs

LRAs operate within **complex governance systems** involving multiple levels.



Limited financial resources can constrain LRAs' ambition and implementation capacity.



Ensuring **long-term political commitment** remains a recurring challenge.



Coordination amongst diverse stakeholders requires significant effort.



Balancing immediate delivery with long-term strategy is often difficult to achieve.



Looking towards the future of the ECoC Action

A foresight outlook was carried out as part of this study to explore **two contrasting scenarios** for the future of the ECoC Action:

- a **pessimistic** scenario, in which the initiative risks becoming a purely **financial instrument with limited societal impact**, and
- an **optimistic** scenario, where participating in the **ECoC** is a **catalyst for systemic transformation**.



These scenarios were discussed during a participatory workshop involving **experts**, **academics** and **representatives** of past, present and future **ECoC cities**:

- X Weak participation, low local ownership
- X Social impact is limited, exclusion persists
- X Fragmented vision, weak European dimension
- X Short-term gains, poor legacy impact
- X Limited cultural-educational integration
- X Youth are disengaged, ageing gaps widen
- X Social fragmentation, cohesion is reduced
- X Technology is misused, digital risks increase

- ✓ Strong participation, active citizen engagement
- ✓ Inclusive policies improve well-being and cohesion
- ✓ Strong shared European cultural identity and sense of belonging
- ✓ Long-term growth through cultural investment
- ✓ Culture shapes education
- ✓ Youth are empowered, intergenerational dialogue is strengthened
- ✓ Strong cohesion enhances social stability
- ✓ Digital innovation supports inclusion and sustainability

Key considerations for the post-2033 ECoC framework

The **ECoC** is a **powerful tool** for **cultural**, **social** and **economic development**, with strong potential to support **long-term**, **place-based transformation** in cities and regions. At the same time, the evidence collected from LRAs shows that the future relevance and effectiveness of the initiative to produce lasting impact beyond 2033 will depend on clearer **strategic orientation**, a reinforced **European dimension** and sustained **multi-level engagement**.

COMMUNICATION, VISIBILITY AND LEGACY-BULDING

- Improved visibility and public outreach, to encourage adequate political backing and citizen awareness
- Integrated place-based cultural strategies, to leverage culture as a driver of broader societal well-being and development, helping to secure a lasting ECoC legacy

FINANCING AND GOVERNANCE

- More structured role in governance and decision-making
- Stable institutional arrangements at local level before, during and after the title year
- More flexible Melina Mercouri Prize and establishment of contingency funding to cope with unforeseen events

MULTI-LEVEL SUPPORT AND COOPERATION

- Stronger strategic and operational support from Member States throughout the ECoC application process
- Establishment of a structured platform for exchange and capacity building amongst ECoC cities, including non-selected cities

PARTICIPATION, SELECTION AND INCLUSIVENESS

- Measurable participation requirements for cities
- Greater transparency, inclusiveness and strategic balance in the selection process
- Review of the eligibility and participation criteria, to facilitate cross-border and transnational applications

© European Union, 2026. Partial reproduction is permitted, provided that the source is explicitly mentioned. More information on the European Union and the Committee of the Regions is available online at http://www.europa.eu and http://www.cor.europa.eu respectively.

Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 101 | 1040 Bruxelles/Brussel | BELGIQUE/BELGIË
Tel. +32 22822211 | e-mail: visuals@cor.europa.eu | www.cor.europa.eu
@EU_CoR | /european.committee.of.the.regions
/european-committee-of-the-regions | @EU_regions_cities

Read the study

Publications Office of the European Union
PDF
QG-01-26-026-EN-N
ISBN 978-92-895-4048-3
DOI 10.2863/7953072