EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 21.1.2014
COM(2014) 10 final

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 2012 European Capitals of Culture (Guimarães and Maribor)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is presented under article 12 of Decision n° 1622/2006/EC[1], which requires that each year the Commission shall ensure the external and independent evaluation of the results of the European Capital of Culture event of the previous year and report on that evaluation to the other EU institutions by the end of the following year.

This report puts forward the Commission's position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation of 2012 European Capitals of Culture[2]. The full text of the evaluation, offering quantitative and qualitative evidence on the various points of this report, can be obtained at:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/evaluation-commissioned-by-the-eu_en.htm

The external evaluation first evaluated individually the two 2012 European Capitals of Culture (hereafter "ECOC"): Guimarães and Maribor. It then compared findings and reached conclusions valid for both cities and the ECOC Action.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE ACTION

2.1. The EU action for the European Capital of Culture event

The initial scheme of "The European City of Culture" was launched at intergovernmental level in 1985[3]. On the basis of this experience, Decision 1419/1999/EC established a Community Action for the ECOC event for the years 2005 to 2019[4]. Member States were ranked in a chronological order of entitlement to host the event each year. The countries enabled to host the event for a given year were expected to put forward cities and to submit their applications including their cultural programmes for the year to a European Selection Panel which recommended their designation to the Commission. The Council of Ministers formally designated the ECOC.

On 1 January 2007, Decision 1419/1999/EC was replaced by Decision 1622/2006/EC which refined the objectives, introduced a two stage national competition and monitoring process for the 2013 title onward. The new Decision also introduced monitoring meetings after designation, which ends up by the Panel making a recommendation on awarding a prize in honour of Melina Mercouri to the Capitals, provided that the designated cities meet the criteria laid down by Decision 1622/2006/EC and have implemented the recommendations made by the Selection and the Monitoring and advisory Panels. EU financial support is

1 OJ L304 of 3 November 2006.

2 Ex-post Evaluation of 2012 European Capitals of Culture, Final Report for the European Commission, entrusted in 2012 by the Commission to ECORYS UK Ltd under framework service contract n°EAC/50/2009 on evaluation, evaluation-related services and support for impact assessment.

3 Resolution of the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs regarding the annual organization of the 'European City of Culture' of 13.06.1985; http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:1985:153:0002:0003:EN:PDF

4 OJ L 166 of 1.7.1999. Decision amended by Decision 649/2005/EC (OJ L 117 of 4.5.2005).

provided by the EU's Culture Programme. For 2007-13 it makes available a maximum of € 1.5 million each year per ECOC. All designated cities as of the 2010 title have been submitted to the monitoring phase as defined in Decision 1622/2006/EC.

2.2. 2012 European Capitals of Culture

Portugal and Slovenia were entitled to host the ECOC in 2012 on the basis of the 2006 Decision, with transitional provisions set out in Article 14 of this Decision as concerns selection and designation.

Moreover, the 2006 Decision specifically states that for the 2010, 2011 and 2012 titles, the 1999 Decision would apply in respect of the criteria relating to the cultural programmes, unless the cities chose to base their programmes on the criteria in the 2006 Decision. Regarding co-financing and monitoring, the new processes set out in the 2006 Decision would apply from the 2010 ECOC titles.

The 2006 Decision introduced in particular a new EU funding mechanism for the ECOC in the form of the "Melina Mercouri Prize", to be awarded to designated cities before the start of the year, on the basis of the reports delivered by the Monitoring and advisory Panel, the role of which is to provide the cities with support and guidance from the day of their designation until the delivery of the title year, to take stock of and assess their preparations and to check that their commitments are fulfilled. This Prize was awarded for the first time to the 2010 titles and again to the 2011 and the 2012 titles.

In accordance with the transitional provisions of Decision 1622/2006/EC, the Government of Portugal decided in 2007 to recommend Guimarães for hosting the ECOC title in 2012 without organising a national competition. The Government of Slovenia decided to run a national competition to select the host city based on an open call for applications held in 2006 in which 4 cities participated and on this basis recommended the city of Maribor together with five partner cities. However, according to the external evaluation, there is a lack of consensus amongst the stakeholders consulted over whether the national selection process was conducted in the most appropriate or transparent way.

In its report of November 2008, the Selection Panel recommended that these two cities host the ECOC in 2012 while making recommendations to help the cities achieve their objectives. In May 2009 the Council of the EU formally awarded the ECOC 2012 title to Guimarães and Maribor. In its report of May 2011, the Monitoring and advisory Panel recommended that the Melina Mercouri Prize be awarded to Guimarães and Maribor[5].

3. THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

3.1. The terms of the evaluation

The evaluation aimed at assessing the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and likely sustainability and legacy of these ECOC against the objectives of the Action and against those objectives set by the ECOC themselves in their applications and during the implementation phase. The evaluation also considered the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the ECOC action as a whole.

3.2. Methodology

The evaluation was required to use the same model as in the 2007-11 evaluations to provide comparable data over time. A number of core criteria and indicators, linked to the hierarchy of

[5] See the reports of the Selection and Monitoring and advisory Panels at http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/capitals/past-capitals_en.htm

high-level global objectives of the action and its specific and operational objectives, were observed and measured wherever possible.

The two cities were first evaluated individually, based on primary data either collected during the fieldwork or provided by each ECOC, as well as the analysis of a range of secondary data sources. Primary data sources include qualitative interviews conducted during two visits to each city as well as by telephone. These interviews sought to gain a variety of perspectives on each ECOC, including those of the management teams, decision-makers at local and national level, plus key cultural operators and a range of partners involved in the delivery of ECOC. In addition, those responsible for ECOC projects were invited to contribute to the evaluation via an online survey. The secondary data sources include information in the original ECOC applications; studies and reports commissioned by the ECOC; events programmes, promotional materials and websites; statistical data on culture and tourism; and quantitative data supplied by the ECOC on finance, activities, outputs and results.

A comparative review then considered the conclusions emerging from Guimarães and Maribor, comparing and contrasting approaches, as well as identifying common themes and findings for the ECOC action as a whole.

4. THE EVALUATOR'S FINDINGS

4.1. Relevance of the ECOC action

The evaluation considers that the ECOC action remains of key importance and of significant relevance for the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, particularly Article 167, through contributing to the flowering of Member State cultures, highlighting common cultural heritage as well as cultural diversity and increasing cultural co-operation between Member States and internationally.

The ECOC action remains complementary to other EU culture initiatives, especially the Culture Programme 2007-2013 and the MEDIA Programme (and their successor under the proposed Creative Europe Programme). Importantly, it also contributes to achieving the objectives set for the European Agenda for Culture through promoting cultural diversity, developing international cultural links and increasing the role of culture in the long-term development of European cities. Moreover, the ECOC action complements other European programmes especially in fields such as youth, citizenship, education and training and regional development.

4.2. Relevance of the 2012 ECOC

The evaluation considers the motivation of the cities in bidding to become ECOC and the relevance of their objectives in relation to the objectives of the action and of Article 167. It also studied the process by which the motivation of the 2012 ECOC was converted into a set of objectives and the changes to those objectives during the development phase.

The evaluation holds that the two 2012 ECOC embraced the objectives of the action and customised them in line with their own particular contexts and priorities. The objectives and activities implemented by both ECOC were relevant to the main objectives at EU level. Both ECOC planned diverse cultural programmes and associated activities (e.g. communications, volunteering, etc) relevant to EU level objectives such as fostering cooperation between cultural operators, promoting the diversity of European cultures and highlighting the common features they share, fostering the contribution of culture to the long term development of cities, supporting the social and economic development of cities, fostering the participation of the citizens, enhancing the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offer in

cities, widening access to and participation in culture, strengthening the capacity of the cultural sector and improving the international profile of cities.

4.3. Efficiency of governance and management and capacity to deliver

The evaluation looked at the cities' capacity to deliver and the efficiency of the governance and management of the ECOC, including their organisational models, processes for selecting and implementing cultural activities and events, communications and promotions, and processes for raising finance.

Similarly to the evaluation of the 2007 to 2011 ECOC, the evaluation of the 2012 ECOC highlights that it is essential but can be challenging to establish an appropriate organisational structure and build a team with the appropriate skills to implement the cultural programme. This requires a broader set of skills and thus a different structure from the team that had prepared the original application. There is also the need to balance artistic and political interests and to ensure that any new delivery mechanism is welcomed by the existing stakeholders as a co-operative partner. A new and independent structure is usually advisable, one that is customised to the political and cultural context of the city.

The Guimarães City Foundation was established as a new organisation by the Ministry of Culture and Guimarães Municipal Council in 2009. The governance and management of ECOC was shared; the Foundation was responsible for developing the overall vision, communication and management and while an already existing organisation, A Oficina was responsible for implementing the cultural programme itself. In addition, one part of the programme, Intersecting Times, was managed and produced independently by a consortium of local associations. The evaluators note that although some difficulties were experienced during the development phase, the management and governance structures worked relatively well during the title year. It appears that the overall vision, objectives and programming principles for Guimarães 2012 did not change significantly between the application stage and implementation of the title year. The strong political support that Guimarães 2012 received from the city administration also contributed significantly to its success. This was reflected in the commitment to cultural infrastructure projects, support and close cooperation for the management team and significant support for the delivery of the culture projects. The ECOC was seen as a strategic project by the city administration and significant effort was devoted to ensuring its successful implementation.

In Maribor, the absence of a formal partnership or strong local leadership (in the context of multiple changes of Government) created a problematic situation throughout the development and implementation phases. The development phase was managed by a provisional secretariat set up by the municipality. Once the final delivery infrastructure was in place, a team was recruited relatively quickly which, according to the evaluators, had to 'hit the ground running'. The evaluation highlights a number of success factors in the delivery agency's approach to implementation, including the development of a new and coherent concept for the programme, extensive consultation with partners, operators and artists, but also the way that the Board and general management supported the staff and were able to protect their autonomy from external interference. The ECOC gradually built support from citizens, media partners and other stakeholders. However, most of the planned infrastructure improvements did not take place, which severely limited the range of venues and sometimes meant that planned activities could not be implemented. At certain points there was a real danger that the entire project would be jeopardised by the conflicts over institutional structures, funding commitments and infrastructure problems.

The experience of 2012, as in previous evaluations, highlights the significant challenges posed by the governance and management of ECOC and the role of political influences,

organisational uncertainty and staff turnover. This is perhaps inevitable due to the nature and time-scale of ECOC; but 2012 also highlighted the importance of the city and other authorities providing consistent support and showing strong backing and commitment so that any difficulties can be quickly identified and addressed.

At European level, the ECOC action continues to be very cost-effective when compared to other EU policy instruments and mechanisms, given the very modest EU funding available from the Melina Mercouri Prize. Although the Prize represented a relatively modest proportion of the overall ECOC budgets for both cities, the financial challenges facing each meant that it was highly appreciated in each case. In addition, the Prize has a strong symbolic value and recognises the progress made by the cities during the development phase.

4.4. Effectiveness in developing cultural activities and cultural and artistic content

The evaluation considers that the 2012 ECOC both succeeded in implementing cultural programmes that were more extensive, innovative and international (e.g. in terms of themes, artists/performers and audiences) than the usual cultural offering in each city. They explored new themes, highlighted the richness and diversity of each city's cultural offering, used new or unusual venues and reached out to citizens.

Maribor 2012 implemented an extensive and innovative cultural programme, including many completely new cultural activities with a strong emphasis on new forms of creative expression and interdisciplinary working, as well as a highly collaborative, participatory approach bringing international operators together with local organisations, artists and citizens.

Many of the activities were built around co-productions and collaborations. Maribor 2012's successful use of co-productions was partly a consequence of the lack of resources and time available to develop a comprehensive cultural programme in-house. However they managed to leverage the resources and expertise of external partners (for example the Cultural Embassies involving 80 organisations from 31 countries), while ensuring that the activities implemented were consistent with their own and EU level objectives for ECOC.

The final programme was a more coherent and structured reorganisation of the original concept. It included , briefly, hundreds of projects and an estimated total audience of 3,1 million in 2012 (and 4,5 million overall). This represents a significant increase in both the scale and the type of activities that are usually available to the citizens of Maribor. According to the evaluation, many stakeholders commented that the programme included a satisfactory balance between high and popular culture, including sufficient numbers of 'prestigious' events, but also a strong focus on participatory approaches and innovative content, including activities that combined artistic disciplines and experimental approaches, including use of new media.

Guimarães delivered a cultural programme incorporating many new and innovative cultural activities. The evaluation considers that it was successful in engaging city residents, attracting national and international visitors as well as increasing the offer of cultural experiences produced in the city. The focus of the cultural programme was on artistic creation in Guimarães. From the very beginning, the key stakeholders involved did not want to simply create a programme of festivals inviting the best projects created elsewhere, but decided to focus on strengthening artistic creation in Guimarães itself and contributing to the development of the artistic and creative capacity and potential in the city.

Guimarães' programme included, briefly, hundreds of events involving 25,000 artists and professionals. 15,000 citizens and 300 organisations contributed to the cultural events. The programme counted 1,000 new creations and included 700 artists residencies. 40 films were produced and there were 60 new publications and 100 international premiers.

The programme aimed to explore the city through artistic interpretations of different aspects of its past and present. For example, the cinematic programme was designed to rediscover the city's audiovisual heritage and the Art and Architecture programme addressed local identity and history, especially connected to the industrial heritage with social, economic and cultural dimensions.

4.5. Effectiveness in promoting the European dimension

According to the evaluation, the European dimension of the cultural programme in both 2012 ECOC was mostly related to the efforts to support transnational cultural co-operation and to support some internationalisation of the cities' cultural sectors. Whilst European themes were present in both cities these tended to relate to specific strands or individual projects rather than permeating the entire cultural programme.While it would have been clearly unrealistic to expect the ECOC title to have marked out Guimarães and Maribor as major European cultural destinations (at least not after the title year), the lack of intensive international promotion represents something of a missed opportunity in both cities even if the ECOC year had a positive impact on wider perceptions of both cities and tourism promotion. It appears that some 39% of visits to Maribor and partner cities in 2012 were solely due to ECOC. There was a 120% increase in visitors to tourist information offices in Guimarães and over 25% of visitors reportedly indicated that ECOC was one of the reasons they visited the city.

Finally, there was less extensive cooperation between the two ECOC than hoped, though there is limited potential for extending linkages in cases such as this where distances are great or there are no historical or cultural links.

4.6. Effectiveness in engaging the citizens and in outreach

The evaluation notes that one of the key success factors for both cities was engaging citizens. Guimarães 2012 received significant support, energy and active involvement from city residents, who saw the title year as one of the key milestones reinvigorating their city, enhancing its role nationally as well as increasing its visibility internationally. The communication style and logo were key success factors here. Maribor too eventually achieved high levels of awareness, participation and engagement and gradually built support from citizens, media partners and other stakeholders, to overcome early negative publicity and widespread scepticism. Furthermore, its programme included a range of activities exploring connections between culture, creativity and other fields, for example in the work of the University of Maribor linking research in different university faculties to arts and culture.

4.7. Effectiveness in achieving economic, urban development and tourism impacts

It was of key importance for Guimarães to invest in the capacity of the city, in order to contribute to economic and social development. Firstly, infrastructure investment was aimed at increasing the capacity of the city. Secondly, the programme focused on increasing the capacity of the local culture sector. Thirdly, a significant part of the cultural programme was dedicated to audience development, community engagement and bringing different cultural experiences to citizens. The evidence from the evaluation indicates that the ECOC had an effect on business development in the city, especially related to the service sector in the city centre. The strong political support that Guimarães 2012 received from the city administration, which saw the ECOC as a strategic project, was clearly an asset in this respect. In particular, the experience of Guimarães in 2012 demonstrates the potential of ECOC to be reinforced by and add value to investments made by the ERDF. Many previous ECOC have used ERDF funding for infrastructure developments, but in the case of Guimarães 2012 around 70% of the total funding came from the ERDF.

In Maribor, the original application placed great emphasis on using the ECOC to support urban, social and economic development and using culture to give a new impulse to the city, build new confidence among residents and create new connections to spur wider social and economic development. Although most of the infrastructure projects did not proceed, the city retained the aspiration to use the ECOC year as a means of supporting urban and regional development. This resulted in the development of a diverse range of activities aimed at revitalising city centres through culture. Several of the partner cities were very positive about their involvement in the ECOC year. It clearly had a major positive impact for the smaller towns, some of which attracted large numbers of visitors and developed confidence in their cultural assets and ideas for new types of cultural and tourism development.

The evaluation notes that both cities were able to point to increases in visitor numbers, which contributed significantly to local economic activity.

4.8. Sustainability

The ECOC is according to the 2006 Decision intended to "be sustainable and be an integral part of the long-term cultural and social development of the city". The evaluation considers that in both 2012 ECOC there is evidence of new cultural activities that will continue beyond the title year and new refurbished cultural facilities. In terms of sustained capacity for culture, there is greater experience and expertise as a result of the ECOC, as well as better networking and co-operation within the cultural sectors.

In both cities, cultural operators have gained valuable skills and experience and there are likely to be moderate effects in terms of enhancing the cities' cultural offer. Continued impacts on cultural governance appear unlikely however, reinforcing the need for long-term strategy to be incorporated in selection and monitoring processes.

In both cases sustainability appears far from secure, not least because of the uncertain economic situation. In Maribor, the political situation remains volatile, the economic outlook remains negative and lack of longterm planning or a legacy body (after June 2013) combined with reduced cultural budgets means that it will be difficult to maintain the recent increase in cultural activities or the increased levels of public engagement with culture. Guimarães has no long-term culture strategy in place, and the City Foundation that managed the ECOC will be disbanded at the end of 2013. However negotiations are taking place between the local authority, national Government and university on setting up a cooperative framework for ensuring the sustainability of governance structures. It is also likely that the local authority will be able to ensure the continuation of certain key activities.

5. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THE COMMISSION

The recommendations are based on the evaluators' considerations of the 2012 ECOC but relate to the implementation of the ECOC action as a whole. The evaluators note as well that a number of recommendations from evaluations of previous ECOC are still valid and relevant.

Recommendations include the continuation of the ECOC action as a high-profile and symbolic initiative of the EU, the need for transparent selection procedures at national level, the reinforcement of the monitoring measures aiming to provide support and guidance to the cities from an early stage as a way to better ensure regular progress in the development phase, a reinforced requirement for each ECOC to increase links with the other ECOC of the same year, the increased emphasis on the need for ECOC to establish their institutional arrangements in good time and to develop more concrete legacy structures and the introduction of more consistent evaluation procedures by the cities themselves. The

conclusions of the evaluation confirm that the ECOC title remains highly valued, generates extensive cultural programmes and significant impacts. The EU title and financial contribution have a considerable leverage effect, making it a cost-effective and efficient initiative.

The Commission shares the overall assessments and conclusions of the evaluation and accepts its recommendations.

The recommendations of the present evaluation are largely in line with the Commission's Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033[6].

Building on the strengths of the current scheme which is overall working well, the proposal retains its main features and general structure. Still, a number of improvements are proposed taking into account recommendations from external evaluations of 2012 and previous ECOC, and other considerations:

– The reinforcement of conditionality for the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize, recommended also in the evaluation of the 2011 ECOC, relating the Prize to the cities' progress in delivering the commitments made at application stage – with clearer and stronger conditionality criteria making the grounds on which the Commission can refuse the payment – and postponing the payment until into the title-year so that the Commission can make its decision on a more solid and informed basis;

– The introduction of a more explicit and comprehensive set of selection criteria with the view to increasing the transparency and fairness of the procedure, including related to the contribution of the ECOC to the long-term strategy of the city, the need for broad political support, governance or the feasability of the funding strategy;

– The encouragement for the two ECOC of the same year to seek to develop links and common projects as part as their cultural programmes because adding new working relationships to existing ones can be very beneficial for them even if – as rightly mentioned in the report – this can sometimes be a challenge when the two cities are geographically distant or have only few cultural and historical links;

– The encouragement for ECOC to undertake own research and studies on the results and impacts of the title year, translated into an obligation for cities to carry out an evaluation to better measure the achievement of their objectives.

Additionally, the Commission's proposal intends to improve the scheme by introducing a general objective related to the contribution of culture to the long-term development of cities, adding a third formal monitoring meeting three years before the year of the title and underlining the need for candidate cities to have a cultural strategy in place at the time of the application.

[6] COM(2012) 407 final