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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Ex Post evaluation of the European Capital of Culture event 2007 (Luxembourg and Sibiu) and 2008 (Liverpool and Stavanger)

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. INTRODUCTION

This report is presented under article 12 of Decision n° 1622/2006/EC[1] of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019, 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 in accordance with the objectives and criteria of the action laid down in this Decision. The Commission shall present a report on that evaluation to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions by the end of the year following the European Capital of Culture event."

The evaluation exercise for 2007 and 2008 has been merged; however as of 2009 the evaluations will be carried out annually.

This report puts forward the Commission's position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation of 2007 and 2008 European Capital of Culture that can be obtained via the link below:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/index_en.htm

The external evaluation first evaluated individually the four European Capitals of Culture (hereafter "ECOC"): Luxembourg (LUX) and Sibiu (RO) in 2007, Liverpool (UK) and Stavanger (NO) in 2008. It then compared findings and reached conclusions valid for all four. Findings are based on data provided by the four ECOC, feedback from stakeholders, and policy and academic literature at European level.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE ACTION

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

The initial scheme of 'The European City of Culture" was launched at intergovernmental level in 1985[2] and later complemented by a "European Cultural Month".[3] On the basis of these activities, Decision 1419/1999/EC established a Community Action for the European Capital

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1 OJ L304 of 3 November 2006

2 The title "European Capital of Culture" was designed to help bring European citizens closer together. See Resolution of the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs regarding the annual organization of the 'European City of Culture' of 13.06.1985 http://eur-ex.europa.eu/Notice.do?mode=dbl&lang=en&lng1=en,en&lng2=da,de,el,en,es,fr,it,nl,&val=117538:cs&page=1&hwords=

3 Conclusions of the Ministers of Culture meeting within the Council of 18 May 1992 concerning the choice of European Cities of Culture after 1996 and the 'Cultural Month' http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:41992X0616:EN:HTML

of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019,[4] hereafter referred as "the Action". Member States were ranked in a chronological order of entitlement to host the event each year. European countries, which are not Member States could also apply, with no pre-defined chronological order.

Decision 1419/1999/EC was later replaced by Decision 1622/2006/EC[5] which has refined the objectives of the Action, modified the designation and monitoring process for the 2013 title onward and dropped the possibility for non Member States cities to apply for the title. It has introduced a two stage national competition with European criteria and monitoring meetings after designation, while the previous Decision let Member States decide which procedure to adopt to select the cities, with no subsequent monitoring.

In the case of 2007 and 2008, the proposed cities submitted their application including their cultural programme for the year to a European Selection Panel which recommended their designation to the Commission. In turn the Commission issued a recommendation to the Council of Ministers which formally designated the ECOC. Given the time-scale of ECOC implementation, preparation of which begins 6 years before the title year, the 2006 Decision maintains the application of the 1999 Decision to the ECOC for 2007, 2008 and 2009 and foresees transitional provisions for 2010-2012 events.

EU financial support is provided by the EU's Culture Programme. For 2007-13 it makes available a maximum of 1.5 million euro each year per ECOC.[6] For 2007 and 2008, the financial support took the form of a co-financing grant for specific projects covering part of the ECOC cultural programmes.

2.2. European Capitals of Culture 2007-2008

Consequently ECOC 2007 and 2008 fell under the selection procedures set by the 1999 Decision. LUX and the UK were entitled to host the ECOC event in 2007 and 2008 respectively. LUX proposed for the title the city of Luxembourg and its broader region ("Grande Région" (GR)), the UK, Liverpool after having held a national competition. In addition, RO (not yet a Member State in 2004) proposed Sibiu for 2007 and NO Stavanger for 2008. The selection process took place in 2003-2004. The European selection panel issued a report recommending Luxembourg and Sibiu for the 2007 title, and Liverpool and Stavanger for the 2008 title, while making recommendations to better achieve the proposed objectives. In 2004 the Council of Ministers formally awarded the title to the applicant cities, upon a Commission recommendation.

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4 Decision 1419/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 1999 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019 (OJ L 166 of 1.7.1999, p. 1). Decision amended by Decision 649/2005/EC (OJ L 117 of 4.5.2005, p. 20). http://www.europa.eu/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/1999/l_166/l_16619990701en00010005.pdf http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_117/l_11720050504en00200021.pdf

5 Decision 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 of 3.11.2006, p. 1). http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:304:SOM:EN:HTML

6 Decision 1855/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 the Culture Programme (2007-2013) (OJ L 372 of 27.12.2006, p. 1). Ref. Strand 1.3

3. THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

3.1. The terms of the evaluation

The Commission has entrusted Ecotec Research and Consulting to conduct the external evaluation[7] of the ECOC events in 2007 and 2008. The evaluation aimed at assessing the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of these four 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 external evaluation was accompanied by reports for each ECOC and provided conclusions and recommendations on how to improve the implementation of the Action. Given the fact that each ECOC only bears the title for one year, conclusions and recommendations concerning the cities were given in the form of "lessons learnt" in order to help future ECOC in their implementation.

3.2. Methodology

The four ECOC were evaluated individually, drawing in part on evaluations commissioned by the ECOC themselves. Data was gathered at two levels: a small amount of data at EU-level; and more extensive data from the ECOC themselves. The key sources included the policy and academic literature at the European level; the original ECOC applications, studies and reports commissioned by the ECOC, events programmes, promotional materials and websites; quantitative data supplied by the ECOC on activities, outputs and results; interviews of managing teams for each ECOC; a telephone survey of key stakeholders in each ECOC; and visits to each city. A comparative review and meta-evaluation exercise considered the conclusions emerging from all four ECOC, compared and contrasted approaches, and verified the quality of the research. Conclusions relating to the ECOC Action more generally were drawn from considering the evidence and conclusions emerging from all four ECOC.

3.3. The evaluator's findings

3.3.1. Relevance of the Action

The evaluation considered that the implementation of the Action had been relevant to Article 151 of the EC Treaty*:* the objectives of “developing cultural activities” and “promoting the European dimension of and through culture” have featured strongly in the Action. In addition, it appears from the evaluation findings that cities holding the ECOC title have over the years adopted a third broad objective that evaluators have defined as “supporting social and economic development through culture” although such an objective does not explicitly feature in Article 151 of the Treaty.

The preamble to the 1999 Decision first introduced an explicit reference to the development of culture and tourism and to the need to mobilise large sections of the population. These references were later strengthened in the 2006 Decision by the inclusion of explicit criteria relating to “fostering the participation of citizens” and "long-term development". Many ECOC have gone further in stating explicit social, economic or tourism objectives. The introduction of such objectives into the ECOC Action has both shaped and reflected broader trends in cultural policy.

However, the growing importance of these objectives has been accompanied by a debate about balance between whether culture should be supported for its own intrinsic value or as a means to deliver tangible, quantifiable returns on investment.

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[7] Framework service contract n°EAC/03/06 on evaluation, evaluation-related services and support for impact assessment

3.3.2. Relevance of the 2007 and 2008 ECOC

The evaluation considered 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 151. All four ECOC were strongly relevant to at least one of the three specific objectives of "developing cultural activities", "promoting the European dimension of and through culture" and "social and economic development through culture" and demonstrated some relevance to all of them.

Whilst all four ECOC were relevant to the objective of "developing cultural activities", this was most apparent in Stavanger; in the other three ECOC, this was seen through the lens of other overall aims, i.e. building a cross-border region (Luxembourg GR), raising the international profile of the city (Sibiu), and urban regeneration and inclusion (Liverpool).

All four ECOC were relevant to the objective of "promoting the European dimension of and through culture", primarily through their objectives of fostering co-operation with cultural operators, artists and cities in other Member States.

All four ECOC were also relevant to the objective of pursuing "economic development through culture", primarily through using the ECOC to improve the image of the city (the GR in the case of Luxembourg) and to the objective of pursing "social development through culture" through widening access to culture.

3.3.3. Efficiency of Governance

Consideration was given to the efficiency of the governance of the ECOC, including their organisational models, processes for selecting and implementing cultural activities and events, communications and promotions, and processes for raising finance.

All four ECOC faced difficulties in establishing efficient governance arrangements, particularly during the development phase. These difficulties related primarily to the challenge of establishing an organisational structure and building a team with the appropriate skills to implement the cultural programme. In each case, this required a wider set of skills and thus a different structure from the team that had prepared the successful application, albeit retaining most of the key individuals.

Issues that played an important role were: the need to balance artistic and political interests and to ensure that any new delivery mechanism was welcomed by the existing stakeholders as a co-operative partner; and getting the right mix of existing and seconded staff as well as new talent. Each ECOC did eventually establish an efficient governance structure, as was recognised by the majority of stakeholders.

The experience of 2007 and 2008 demonstrates that a new and independent structure is usually advisable, one that is carefully customised to reflect the political and cultural context of the city and, indeed, the country more generally. Another important lesson of 2007 and 2008 has been the importance of the evaluations commissioned by the ECOC themselves.

3.3.4. Efficiency of ECOC mechanisms at EU-level

A key consideration was the efficiency of the selection, monitoring and financial processes operated by the European Commission. Whilst the four ECOC expressed broad satisfaction with the way the European selection panel operated, it is too early to draw robust conclusions on the efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality of that process, as in their case the panel was only required to give a view on the absolute merits of each bid, rather than its merits relative to competing nominations, since there were none.

The 1999 Decision did not include a monitoring phase. Nevertheless the predominant view from three of the four cities is that such a function would have brought benefits. Indeed, this might have helped to highlight potential problems and allowed for earlier remedial action.

The Commission's promotion of networking between past, present and future ECOC was welcomed by all four ECOC.

The criteria for the €1.5m EU funding per ECOC were clear and the administrative processes not dissimilar to those of other EU programmes. Each ECOC received funding from the EU's Culture Programme for specific projects. The EU funding formed a very modest proportion of the total expenditure on the cultural programme of each ECOC. In view of the modest amount provided from the EU budget, the ECOC designation therefore has a very effective leverage effect.

The ECOC Action generates high demand from candidate cities, substantial investment in the cultural programmes and in the cities more generally and has a high profile in the media and with the public. It is doubtful that any other policy mechanism could have achieved the same impact for the same level of EU investment in terms of financial resources and effort. However, it needs to seen whether "returns" start to diminish in future years and whether alternative policy mechanisms are required, albeit drawing on many of the concepts underpinning the ECOC Action and the experiences to date.

3.3.5. Effectiveness in developing cultural activities

The evaluation considered the effectiveness of each ECOC in implementing its cultural programme and its impact on the long-term cultural development of the city. In each ECOC area a more extensive cultural programme has been implemented than would have been the case in the absence of ECOC designation. Many genuinely innovative projects and new commissions have been undertaken, across a broad range of cultural genres. Audiences for cultural activities have in general been far greater than in the years preceding the ECOC and, where evidence is available, it suggests a high level of audience satisfaction.

The cultural scene of each city is now more vibrant and more recognised nationally and internationally than previously. Whilst each cultural programme has featured many established international and national artists, a significant number of local cultural operators has been supported in each case. As well as enjoying greater profile and contacts, one of the most important benefits reported across all four ECOC is the greater professionalism and operational capacity of such operators. In many cases, the mere fact of working more closely with cultural institutions and authorities has enabled greater support to be provided than would otherwise have been the case. For example, increased public funding has typically been accompanied by practical help to enable smaller organisations to enter into contracts and account for grant funding more effectively.

Overall, each ECOC, and thus also the Action more generally, was broadly successful in achieving its objectives relating to the development of cultural activities during the title year. Of course, not every element of the cultural programmes was completely successful and some stakeholders were disappointed (such as some cultural institutions for whom the ECOC offered limited relevance), some local artists felt there was an undue bias towards international artists, and the expectations of some local cultural operators for financial and other support could not be met. But the Action has enabled four extensive cultural programmes to be implemented that include many exciting and innovative projects.

3.3.6. Effectiveness in promoting the European dimension of and through culture

The 1999 Decision offers no explicit definition of the "European dimension" and the criteria of the "European dimension" as set out in the 2006 Decision provide a lot of flexibility in interpretation. Perhaps as a consequence, the European dimension of the ECOC Action was interpreted in very different ways by the 2007 and 2008 ECOC. The evaluation therefore allowed for such diversity when considering the effectiveness of the ECOC in promoting a European dimension. Whilst all four ECOC were effective in implementing a wide range of activities with a European dimension, the nature of that dimension and the extent of effectiveness varied:

- the visibility gained by the title helped all four to be effective in generating a significant increase in tourism, although this had been an important objective for only two of them;
- all were effective in undertaking collaborations, co-productions and exchanges, although this activity was only extensive in Luxembourg GR; in the other ECOC, collaboration was peripheral to the main cultural programme and primarily took place only with the other title holder;
- similarly, all were effective in establishing transnational partnerships with other cities or regions, but this activity was only extensive in Luxembourg GR;
- three of the ECOC were effective in meeting their objective of attracting artists of European significance;
- in the other (Luxembourg GR), this was a less prominent objective although many European artists were attracted;
- activities related to "European history, identity and heritage already present in the city" were only extensively implemented in Luxembourg GR and Sibiu, although both were relatively effective;
- all ECOC gave only modest attention to the development of European themes and issues.

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

The evaluation found that all four ECOC were effective in achieving impacts related to economic, tourism and urban development objectives; tourism increased in all four cases and there is evidence of impact on the local economy; all four ECOC either directly funded cultural infrastructure and urban development investments or gave them greater impetus. However, it is not clear whether there is a limit to the extent that the ECOC concept can continually drive urban regeneration. In the future, it may therefore be that there are efforts to recover the purely cultural objectives of the early years of the ECOC, or that the concept needs to be revisited.

3.3.8. Effectiveness in supporting social development through culture

The evaluation considered the effectiveness of the ECOC in respect of the social dimension of the Action. There is evidence that each was effective in implementing activities intended to achieve social objectives, notably the widening of access to culture and participation in volunteering (particularly in Sibiu and Liverpool). There is also evidence of an increase in attendance at cultural events and participation in cultural activities, including amongst target groups (in the case of Luxembourg). Moreover, many new ways to involve such groups have been developed, for example, through the creation of new venues, the organisation of cultural events in different neighbourhoods and the creation of community arts projects. However, the social dimension of the 2007 and 2008 ECOC has consisted primarily of widening access to culture, rather than of cultural inclusion or social inclusion *per se*.

3.3.9. Sustainability

Finally, the evaluation considered the sustainability of the activities of the ECOC and their impact on the cultural governance and long-term development of their respective cities. Whilst the level of cultural activity has, naturally, decreased following the end of the title year, there is evidence in all four ECOC that many of the activities initiated in the title year have been sustained and, in some instances, public authorities have provided ongoing funding. There are also numerous examples of festivals, first initiated in the title year, continuing to be held in future years. In addition, there are many examples of cultural institutions and independent operators that are undertaking a higher level of activity than before the title year, although some opportunities have been lost in that respect.

The experience of 2007 and 2008 was that the end of the title year leads to the disbanding of the dedicated delivery agencies and inevitably some loss of the experience that has been built up. However, it is clear that the ECOC has brought about important shifts within the governance of culture within their respective cities. Not only is much of the experience retained (with many individuals remaining involved in the cultural governance of the city, having returned to their previous employers, e.g. municipalities, or taken up new posts, e.g. with cultural institutions); ECOC have also led to the introduction of new ways of working, new partnerships, and new strategies. In many cases, the ECOC has ushered in a new set of relationships between local municipalities and cultural operators, and pushed culture up the agenda of local political debate. Overall then, the ECOC have seen significant changes in the way cultural activities are brought about which have established new platforms for activity which are likely to be sustained into the future.

At this stage, it is too early to evaluate the sustainability of economic and tourism impacts. Whilst the 2007 and 2008 ECOC enjoyed increases in tourism and higher international profiles during their title years, there is a risk that these benefits will be difficult to sustain in current economic circumstances – though the title holders may, of course, enjoy more visitors than they would have done in the absence of ECOC designation and be in a better position to capture future benefits once the global economy recovers.

4. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSION

The Commission agrees with the overall gist of the recommendations by the evaluator, however it feels there is some duplication and therefore will implement a slightly modified formulation of the recommendations as outlined below, but which do not change their substance.

4.1. Efficiency of Governance

The Commission should recommend all ECOC to commission evaluations of the impact of their cultural programmes and associated activities.

4.2. Efficiency of ECOC mechanisms at EU-level

Future evaluations should consider:

- the efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality of the selection and monitoring processes introduced by the 2006 Decision;
- the continued value of the ECOC "brand", as viewed both by the title holders and by the wider world (media, cultural sector bodies and the general public); in the event that the

value of the brand is perceived to be diminishing, the Commission should explore alternative approaches and compare their relative merits with those of the ECOC.

4.3. Effectiveness in achieving economic, urban development and tourism impacts and in supporting social development through culture

In forthcoming debates, the European Commission should explore the extent to which the ECOC concept (and culture more generally) can (continue to) and should be used to stimulate

- urban regeneration and economic development or whether to return to an approach that is more about culture as an end in itself;
- the genuine social renewal of cities and outreach to all citizens, as opposed to merely widening opportunities for culture to already existing audiences;
- or whether to retain the flexibility for cities to strike their own balance

5. THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

The Commission shares the evaluator's overall assessment and accepts its recommendations as formulated in the section above. It is aware that the strength of each ECOC is rooted in its diversity and cultural uniqueness and will ensure that cities have enough latitude to implement the objectives of the Action (rec.1).

The Commission notes that most ECOC already have evaluation schemes covering all or parts of their cultural programme and will recommend overall evaluations at local level (rec.2). In order to promote the circulation of good practices, the Commission has supported a policy grouping where the comprehensive evaluation model developed by Liverpool 2008 is being further adapted to the needs of future ECOC.[8] The Commission will also have a closer look at the way structural funds are used and can be used by ECOC.[9] The Commission is pleased to note that new selection, monitoring and financing procedures set by Decision 2006 already go in the direction recommended by the evaluation findings. It will ensure that these new arrangements are properly evaluated in due course.[10] The Commission is well aware of the ECOC "brand": it provides guidance on its use through the ECOC guide to candidate cities[11] and will continue to monitor its use and the value of the brand.

The Commission will promote the exchange of good practices and highlight the experience of ECOC as a "laboratory" for urban development through culture. As for the inherent tension between the instrumental use of culture for social and economic purposes and the intrinsic value of culture for the European citizen, the Commission is persuaded that successful ECOC provide good examples of ways of reconciling artistic quality with socio-economic development (rec.3).

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8 http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/

9 Study on the contribution of culture to local and regional economic development as part of European regional policy http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc537_en.htm

10 2010 ECOC for monitoring procedures and the Melina Mercouri prize; 2013 ECOC for the full selection procedure, as set by Decision 2006

11 http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc629_en.htm