

European Capitals of Culture 2007 - 2019

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The Commission presents its ex Post evaluation of the 2009 European Capital of Culture event (Linz and Vilnius), in accordance with Decision 1622/2006/EC establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) event for the years 2007 to 2019. The report puts forward the Commission's position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation of 2009 ECOC.

The report sets out the background to the ECOC and recalls that EU financial support is provided by the EU's Culture Programme. For 2007-13 the latter makes available a maximum of EUR 1.5 million each year per ECOC. For 2009, the financial support took the form of a co-financing grant for specific projects covering part of the ECOC cultural programmes. Austria and Lithuania were entitled to host the ECOC in 2009 and they proposed Linz and Vilnius respectively.

The external evaluation: the evaluator considered the following issues:

- the relevance of the Action to Article 167 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU;
- 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;
- 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;
- efficiency of the selection, monitoring and financial processes operated by the Commission;
- the effectiveness of each ECOC in implementing its cultural programme and its impact on the long-term cultural development of the city;
- the effectiveness in promoting the European dimension of and through culture;
- the sustainability of the activities of the ECOC and their impact on the cultural governance and long-term development of their respective cities.

Main recommendation from the evaluation and Commission's comments: the Commission agrees with the overall gist of the recommendations by the evaluator, which are very close to the recommendations issued following the 2007-2008 ECOC evaluation.

Efficiency of Governance: the Commission will recommend that all ECOC commission evaluations of the impact of their cultural programmes and associated activities.

Efficiency of ECOC mechanisms at EU-level: the Commission agrees that future evaluations should consider:

- the efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality of the selection and monitoring processes introduced by the 2006 Decision as well as their impacts on the quality of the event;
- 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.

Effectiveness in achieving economic, urban development and tourism impacts and in supporting social development through culture: the Commission will explore the extent to which the ECOC concept (and culture more generally) can (continue to) and should be used to provide incentives to cities to stimulate, for their long term development :

- 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

Sustainability: the Commission will continue to find ways to promote the sustainability of the impact of ECOC, based on the experience to date.

Conclusions: the Commission concludes 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 highly cost-effective and efficient initiative. The Commission shares the evaluator's overall assessment and accepts its recommendations. It notes that most ECOC already have evaluation schemes covering all or parts of their cultural programme and will continue to recommend overall evaluations at local level. In order to promote the circulation of good evaluation practices, through the EU Culture Programme the Commission has supported a policy grouping which adapts the comprehensive evaluation model developed by Liverpool 2008 further to the needs of future ECOC. The Commission's guide for candidate cities has also been updated to include a section on evaluation. Furthermore, to mark the 25 year anniversary of the ECOC, the Commission organised a conference in March 2010 which focused on legacy and evaluation of the event.

Concerning the recommendation that future evaluations should look at the efficiency of ECOC mechanisms set by Decision 2006 and the recommendation that future debates should explore the various roles of the title the Commission has launched an evaluation on the new arrangements, which is due to be completed towards the end of 2010. Furthermore, an on-line public consultation is being launched in autumn 2010. These will both feed into the preparation of a Commission proposal for the initiative beyond 2019, which will seek to ensure that the initiative remains as attractive, relevant and effective as possible. These issues were also discussed at the 25 year anniversary conference mentioned above.

Concerning sustainability, ensuring long-term effects from the event is already one of the criteria in the 2006 Decision and will continue to be a key consideration in the reflections of the prolongation of the initiative. Furthermore, the Commission already stresses the importance of embedding the event as part of a long-term culture policy strategy and will continue to do so.