

European Capitals of Culture 2007 - 2019

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The Commission presents a report setting out the external evaluation of the results of the European Capital of Culture event in 2012 and the Commission's position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation.

To recall, the two 2012 European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) were **Guimarães** (PT) and **Maribor** (SI).

European Capitals of Culture 2012: these two cities were entitled to host the ECOC in 2012 on the basis of the 2006 Decision, which 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. 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.

Main conclusions: in general, the experience of 2012 highlights **the significant challenges posed by the governance and management of ECOC** and the role of political influences, organisational uncertainty and staff turnover. 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.

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.

The evaluation stresses the importance of fostering the participation of citizens in order to make the initiative a success.

Recommendations : building on the strengths of the current scheme which is overall working well, the report proposes a number of improvements that may be summarised as follows:

- **the reinforcement of conditionality for the payment of the Melina Mercouri Prize**, 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 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, related to the contribution of the ECOC to the long-term strategy of the city, and the need or broad political support, governance or the feasibility of the funding strategy;
- **encouraging the two ECOC of the same year to seek to develop links** and common projects as part as their cultural programmes – this can sometimes be a challenge when the two cities are geographically distant or have only few cultural and historical links;
- **encouraging 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.