

European Capitals of Culture 2007 - 2019

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In accordance with Decision No 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019, the Commission presents an ex post evaluation of the 2014 European Capitals of Culture (Umeå and Riga).

To recall, Sweden and Latvia were designated to host the ECOC in 2014. The panel finally recommended that Umeå and Riga be awarded the ECOC title in September 2009. In May 2010, the two cities were formally designated as ECOC for 2014 by the Council of Ministers of the European Union.

The evaluation explores **the implementation of the two 2014 ECOC throughout their lifecycle**, from their early inception through to their sustainability and legacy, and considers the impact of hosting the title in the two cities. In particular, it assesses their relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, draws individual and general conclusions emerging from these two ECOC and considers implications for future ECOC title-holders.

Main conclusions: the Commission concludes that the programmes implemented by the two 2014 titleholders were **innovative and consistent with the objectives of the ECOC action**. They reflected its European dimension, involved many local residents and stakeholders, brought culture to new audiences (through specific tools and strategies), raised the interest of citizens from abroad (albeit to a lesser degree than expected in Riga) and are likely to lead to some legacy (even in the absence of formal sustainability plans).

The evaluator stressed the following points:

- the two host cities saw the ECOC more as a cultural event strengthening and internationalising their cultural offering as well as promoting the cultural diversity and common cultural features of Europe, rather than an economic or social programme. However, Umeå and Riga also used their ECOC status to tackle other aspects of their respective city's development strategy, such as urban and regional development, employment, enterprise, tourism as well as general social cohesion policies;
- the delivery mechanisms set up to implement the ECOC generally worked well in both cities, although the lack of progress that both 2014 host cities made in attracting private sector funding through either direct support, sponsorship or advertising was noted;
- both cities delivered an extremely high volume of cultural activities in 2014 (in total, just under 500 in Riga under the motto "Force Majeure" and just over 1,000 in Umeå under the slogan "Curiosity and Passion"). Both ECOC also managed to design a wide ranging cultural programme which included a strong mix of cultural genres delivered throughout the whole year;
- both programmes worked hard to provide cultural content that appealed to a wide variety of different audiences, putting on performances and activities that can be classed as being popular, alternative or innovative in nature. It appears that respectively 71% and 76% of residents in Umeå and Riga attended an ECOC event while overall 1.6 million people attended ECOC activities in the Latvian capital.

The Commission notes, however, that deeper assessments of the extent of the **benefits produced against the costs incurred** will be useful to confirm the impact of the programme. It is now the responsibility of both cities to invest in research so as to better understand how they have optimised cultural, social and economic benefits and be able to demonstrate the impact of the title-year for the development of the city, thereby justifying the value of public spending.

In order to better capture such impacts, it would be useful for the two cities to have **longitudinal evaluations**, notably to confirm the efficiency of the public spending in the ECOC from a cultural, social and an economic points of view, and using a broader range of evaluative data to support the conclusions.

Recommendations: the report highlights a number of recommendations that emerge out of the evaluators' considerations of the two 2014 ECOC. These recommendations are mainly useful for and therefore addressed to future ECOC, highlighting the need for:

- political support at both city and national levels to gain stability;
- building a stable and effective team at an early stage in the development period;
- going beyond culture and connect the ECOC action with other aspects of the city's strategy including enterprise, social inclusion and physical development;
- the title-holders to generate "impact" data such as attendance figures, spend of visitors, satisfaction levels as well as wider economic impacts;
- actively pursuing wider participation in culture through dedicated strategies as well as the need for developing longer term plans to sustain their cultural offer beyond the title-year itself.

Lastly, the report recommends that the Commission develop **a compendium of all recommendations** from current and future ECOC evaluations and make these available to candidate cities to help them learn from past lessons and good practice. The Commission **recognises the relevance of all these recommendations** and will follow the evaluators' suggestion to produce a compendium.