

European Capitals of Culture 2007 - 2019

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This report presents the ex post evaluation of the 2015 European Capitals of Culture (Mons (BE) and Pilsen (CZ)).

It aims to communicate the findings of the external evaluation of the 2015 European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) and the actions that the Commission will put forward in follow up to them.

Characteristics of the cities selected: in accordance with the Decision No 1622/2006/EC, Belgium and the Czech Republic were entitled to host the ECoC in 2015.

The overall theme of **Mons 2015** was "where technology meets culture" and the ambition was to put the city on the European map as a symbol of **economic restructuring** based on a successful alliance between culture, tourism and **new technologies**.

The motto of **Pilsen 2015** was "Open up!" and expressed the city's ambition to use its ECoC year to open itself up towards Europe and other external influences.

Main conclusions:

1) Relevance of the ECoC action and the two 2015 ECoC: according to the findings of the evaluation, the two host cities saw the ECoC mainly as **a cultural event strengthening and internationalising their cultural offering** as well as promoting the cultural diversity and common cultural features of Europe. The ECoC year included a cultural programme that was more extensive, more innovative and more European in nature compared to the usual cultural offer in the two cities. The evaluation highlights that Mons and Pilsen also used their ECoC status to tackle other aspects of their respective city's **development strategy**. As a consequence, many of the activities delivered in 2015 were highly relevant to the two cities' overall political agendas.

2) Efficiency: overall, the **ECoC action was implemented efficiently at EU level**. Both cities also benefited from the monitoring arrangements at EU level and from the informal support given by the monitoring panel and the European Commission. At the same time, the very modest funding directly provided by the EU (in the form of the Melina Mercouri prize) can be said to have had a considerable leverage effect by stimulating the two cities – but also their respective regional and national authorities – to invest considerable sums in their ECoC programmes (approximately around EUR 72.8 million in the case of Mons and EUR 18.2 million in the case of Pilsen) and in associated infrastructure developments (EUR 143.5 million for Mons and EUR 48.6 million for Pilsen).

3) Effectiveness: the ECoC action in 2015 has proved effective against the objectives set for it at EU level, as well as the objectives set by the cities holding the title. The action has achieved an impact that would not have arisen through the actions of Member States alone. Their designation as ECoC attracted additional resources, including from private sponsors (more than EUR 2 million in the case of Mons and EUR 1.175 million, i.e. 6,4% of the total budget in Pilsen). It also attracted greater media coverage. Furthermore, the ECoC title enhanced local pride in the city and an increase in national and international tourist visits: a five-fold increase in tourist visits registered in Mons tourist office during 2015 and a total of 1.4m visitors in Pilsen.

The ECoC title gave the two cities the opportunity to strengthen local cultural organisations, encouraged them to work with one another more than they did previously and helped capacity building. These benefits

would have been unlikely to arise to the same extent in the absence of ECoC designation; in that sense, **the ECoC action has generated clear European added value.**

4) Sustainability: both 2015 ECoC genuinely thought and planned for sustainability and legacy. They were both keen to ensure that ECoC lasted more than one year in terms of its benefits and impact. In both cities, another long-term legacy has been around how the programmes have attracted a new type of audience to experience and enjoy culture.

Main recommendations: the Commission concludes that **the programmes implemented by the two 2015 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 strategies (in particular in Mons, to a lesser extent in Pilsen) and have a planned legacy both physical (new cultural venues) and intangible (in the form of a biennale in Mons, and in the form of increased capacity and cultural offer in both cities).

The **recommendations addressed to the cities** include the need to **ensure continuation of people and cultural structures**, the need to think carefully about new cultural buildings, and the need to confirm and communicate key events as early possible. The evaluator also encourages **small cities** not to be deterred from bidding for the ECoC just because they have a relatively small budget.

The report **recommends that the Commission continue with the action** but that it revises the guidelines for evaluation for the cities, and the application form and progress report requirements, in order to ensure that cities provide baseline data on the situation prevailing at the time of application and during preparation.

The evaluator also recommended undertaking more extensive publicity related to the award of the Melina Mercouri prize, as well as research into the long-term impacts of the ECoC.

The Commission considers that these recommendations are feasible and will add value to the current implementation of the action.