European Capitals of Culture 2007 - 2019

2005/0102(COD) - 25/04/2018 - Follow-up document

This Commission report constitutes the ex-post evaluation of the European Capitals of Culture 2016 (Donostia San Sebastian and Wroclaw).

According to Decision 1622/2006/EC, Spain and Poland were the two Member States designated to host an ECC in 2016:

Donostia San Sebastian's candidature was entitled 'Cultura para la convivencia' (Culture for coexistence) and had a strong local connotation: it was drawn up on the basis of the city's recent past, scarred for decades by terrorist activities. The focus was on promoting qualitatively different projects dealing with sensitive issues such as violence or terrorism in order to help citizens reconcile with their past.

Wroclaw's candidature was based on the overall concept of ‘cultural metamorphoses’ which served as a metaphor both for the historical transformation of the city and for current processes of cultural and social change (including globalisation, immigration, EU enlargement and the growing role of digital communications). The slogan of the programme was ‘Spaces for beauty’ because the intention was ‘to create spaces within which to restore the presence of beauty in public life and daily habits’.

Main conclusions: according to the Commission, the programmes implemented by the two winning cities for 2016:

- **were innovative and consistent with the objectives of the ECOC Action** as regards Union's contribution to the ‘flowering of the cultures of the Member States’. Hosting the ECOC also contributed to economic and social developments in the two cities, particularly within the urban context;
- **reflected its European dimension** (in particular Wroclaw, to a lesser extent Donostia San Sebastian as the ECOC in the latter was much more focused on local residents);
- **involved local residents and stakeholders** (in San Sebastian 60% of projects involved local people in some ways and there were 10 493 hours of volunteer time while Wroclaw designed activities aimed at specific groups), on the other hand, local cultural operators experienced a remarkable network expansion: almost 80% of the organisations involved in the year cooperated with other organisations;
- **both used national and EU funds** (e.g. European Regional Development Fund) to implement cultural programmes of high artistic quality and of considerably greater size than usual;
- **brought culture to new audiences** through specific strategies (such as "Waves of Energy in Donostia San Sebastian and ‘MikroGRANTY’ in Wroclaw);
- **may lead to legacies both physical** (in the form of new or refurbished cultural and logistic infrastructures, as it happened in Wroclaw) **or intangible** (by creating a space and vehicle that helped communities talk about, understand and come to terms with past differences and helping the city and its residents coexist with one another in the future, as it happened in Donostia San Sebastian) although a proper legacy planning is lacking in Donostia San Sebastian.

The ECOC Action is relevant and complementary to a variety of EU policies and programmes, impacting not just cultural stakeholders but also those related to **employment**, enterprise (as an instance, 14% of firms from the cultural and creatives sectors in Wroclaw were involved in the ECOC, i.e. about 450 out of

+3 000 firms, while 52% of them felt that they had derived commercial benefits from the ECOC and 40.7% reported an increase in turnover during 2016) or tourism (an extra 50 000 international tourists stayed in Wroclaw's hotels in 2016 compared to 2015).

Recommendations and perspectives: on the basis of the report, the Commission concludes that **ECOC Action remains relevant at EU level** as well as greatly valuable for host cities, and generates extensive cultural programmes with positive outputs and impacts. This confirms that the winning cities are implementing cultural programmes that are **broader and innovative** than their usual annual cultural offer, with a strong European dimension and involving local citizens as well as international visitors.

Another issue arising from the external study – partly in line with the findings of previous ECOC evaluations – is the **lack of baseline data**. The co-legislators recognized this difficulty. In adopting Decision No 445/2014/EU, which will apply to the ECOC titles 2020 to 2033, the European Parliament and the Council decided to **displace the burden of the evaluation from the Commission** to the title-holders as the latter are the main funders and beneficiaries of the ECOC Action, and are better placed to collect all the data necessary.

After eight similar annual evaluation exercises - each covering two different ECOC cities - the external study includes only a limited number of recommendations which complement the recommendations made in previous years and endorsed by the Commission, in particular the need to:

- establish institutional arrangements in good time,
- build a stable and effective delivery team benefitting from a strong political support,
- ensure national buy-in and involvement,
- ensure the right balance between control and artistic independence,
- keep the commitment of cultural stakeholders,
- embed European co-operation into the cultural programme while also actively pursuing widening participation in culture,
- plan legacy at an early stage.

The Commission agrees with the evaluator's overall recommendation that the **ECOC Action should continue**, and Decision No 445/2014/EU already foresees such a continuation until 2033. It will also explore how **big data** can be better addressed in its guidelines for evaluation as also recommended by the evaluator.