

European Capitals of Culture 2007 - 2019

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The Commission presents its ex-post of the 2017 European Capitals of Culture (Pafos and Aarhus).

Its purpose is to assess the achievements of the two ECOC 2017 programmes in the relevant year, to establish a comprehensive understanding of the overall performance and to put forward conclusions, recommendations and lessons for future European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) title-holders, applicants and EU institutions.

Relevance and efficiency of the ECOC Action and the ECOC 2017

According to the findings of the evaluation, the two host cities have elaborated and implemented cultural programmes which were consistent with and relevant to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 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.

Pafos

Although Pafos's programme (***Linking continents – bridging cultures***) was narrower in scope than most past ECOC programmes (largely due to the small size of the city), it succeeded in emphasising the cultural heritage of Pafos in a European context, the (need for) interconnections between people within the city and beyond, as well as the need for intercultural dialogue. It has also helped both local and foreign audiences to learn more about Cypriot culture and become more familiar with other cultures and traditions.

Aarhus

Aarhus articulated a programme (***Let's Rethink***) with sharp long-term objectives, highlighting the diversity of European cultures and coherently interacting with the wider city development strategy; it focused on further increasing awareness and visibility of the city, attracting domestic and international tourists, improving its cultural infrastructures, increasing audiences and proactive citizens' participation in cultural activities. The programme also had an important regional dimension in the context of the newly created Central Denmark Region.

Projects

442 core projects were implemented in Aarhus and 168 in Pafos, most of them going beyond the two cities' usual yearly programming. Moreover, in Aarhus, 1200 international artists contributed to the programme and 79% of projects featured an international partner and/or a cultural exchange within Europe while in Pafos 29% of projects were international productions and a further 11% were collaborations between Cypriot and international artists. Both ECOC widened access to and participation in culture during 2017, although the evidence is stronger in Aarhus than in Pafos with a total audience of 3.3 million.

General conclusions

The Commission concludes from this report that the 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 which cannot, however, be fully assessed at the current evaluation stage as it is too early after the implementation of the ECOC year.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that ECOC remains an efficient EU Action providing good levels of returns at EU level for a relatively modest EU investment: the awarding of the title itself has a substantial leverage effect on the amount of funding that host cities dedicate to designing and delivering the ECOC cultural programme, and it is a significant generator of interest and financing from a broad array of stakeholders, including regional and national authorities and private contributors.

The Commission also concludes that the programmes implemented by the two 2017 titleholders were consistent with the objectives of the ECOC Action. They also helped strengthen the cultural capacity of the local cultural and creative sectors and their links with other sectors. The ECOC raised the international profile of Aarhus through culture, whilst in both cities the ECOC helped make audiences for culture more international.

Financing

The absolute value of the Melina Mercouri Prize, which is the only direct monetary contribution that host cities receive from the European Union, is modest (EUR 1.5 million per ECOC) in comparison to the overall costs of an ECOC: the operating expenditure of the ECOC 2017 were of approximately EUR 66.7 million for Aarhus and EUR 8.5 million for Pafos. At city level, both Pafos and Aarhus established strong and successful delivery mechanisms and governance arrangements, and both used mainly national, regional and local but also – to a smaller extent – EU funds to implement cultural programmes of high artistic quality that add up to their yearly regular cultural activities.

Regarding monitoring arrangements, the Commission points out it has an ongoing discussion with the panel on how best to ensure that future ECOC honour commitments made in their applications, in particular their financial commitments.

Recommendations

A limited number of elements of improvement have emerged from the assessment, such as 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, to 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, and to plan legacy at an early stage.