

European Capitals of Culture 2007 - 2019

2005/0102(COD) - 11/06/2019 - Follow-up document

This Commission staff working document sets out the findings and methodology of the ex post evaluation of the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) Action for 2017.

Article 12 of Decision No 1622/2006/EC requires that the Commission ensures the external and independent evaluation of the results of the ECOC from the previous year. The purpose of the yearly evaluation, which the European Commission carries out since 2008, is to assess the achievements of the Action in the relevant year, to establish a comprehensive understanding of the overall performance and to put forward conclusions, recommendations and lessons for future ECOC title-holders, applicants and EU institutions.

This working document summarises the findings of the external evaluation of the implementation of the ECOC 2017, including the selection and monitoring procedures and the operational delivery by the two hosting cities, namely Pafos in Cyprus and Aarhus in Denmark.

The aim of the evaluation is not to lead to any change in the regulation governing the ECOC Action. Indeed those rules were changed in 2014 on the basis of an ad hoc interim evaluation of selection and monitoring procedures of European Capitals of Culture, but the new rules only apply for cities designated as ECOC for the years from 2020 to 2033. It is therefore impossible to use the outcomes of the evaluation of the two ECOC 2017 to draw conclusions on the new legal basis as this new Decision doesn't apply to these two ECOC title-holders.

Methodology

In order for results to be comparable with previous evaluations, the methodology for this evaluation closely followed the approach adopted in previous assessments of the Action, with focus being placed on research at city level and, in particular, on the gathering of data and stakeholders' views from both Pafos and Aarhus. The main evaluation sources included, *inter alia*: EU level literature; ECOC level literature from Pafos and Aarhus: original bids and applications, internal reports linked to the application, monitoring or evaluation processes; quantitative data: where available, evidence linked to each ECOC was collected in relation to budgets and expenditures, projects' numbers and types and an open public consultation.

Selection and monitoring

Cyprus and Denmark were entitled to host the ECOC in 2017. The selection is then in two phases: a pre-selection phase (candidate cities are reduced to a short-list) followed by a selection phase (one city is recommended for the title). A panel of thirteen members – six of whom nominated by the Member State concerned and the other seven by European Union institutions and bodies (European Parliament, Council, Commission and Committee of the Regions) – examined the bids from candidate cities.

In May 2013, the Council officially designated Pafos in Cyprus and Aarhus in Denmark on the basis of the panel's recommendation.

The monitoring process culminated with the panel making a positive recommendation to the Commission on awarding a EUR 1.5 million prize in honour of Melina Mercouri to both cities after the last monitoring meeting. The Melina Mercouri prize was therefore awarded and paid by the Commission (under the EU Creative Europe programme) to the two ECOC in the autumn 2016.

Main findings

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.

Conclusions

The Commission concludes that the ECOC Action is highly valued by the hosting cities that can obtain positive impacts during the year, as well as during the preparation phase. The action also remains relevant at EU level. However, the long-term impacts of the two ECOC 2017 cannot be assessed at this stage, as it is too early after the implementation of the ECOC year.

The Commission also concludes that the programmes implemented by the two 2017 title-holders were consistent with the objectives of the ECOC Action.

However, the Commission considers that the scope and length of the yearly evaluation it carries out does not allow consideration of the long-term impact of ECOC. It is therefore willing to review such impact as part of the evaluation exercise foreseen in Article 16 of Decision No 2014/445/EU. This evaluation shall focus on placing all past European Capitals of Culture in a European context, allowing comparisons to be drawn and useful lessons to be learned for future European Capitals of Culture, as well as for all European cities.