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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Ex Post evaluation of the 2017 European Capitals of Culture (Pafos and Aarhus)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is presented in accordance with Article 12 of Decision No 1622/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community Action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019¹, which provides that the Commission ensures each year an external and independent evaluation of the results of the European Capital of Culture event of the previous year² and reports on that evaluation to the relevant EU Institutions and bodies.

The findings and methodology of the ex post evaluation are presented more comprehensively in the accompanying Commission Staff Working Document.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE ACTION

2.1. The EU Action for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC)

Since the launch – at intergovernmental level – of the European City of Culture in 1985³, the scheme grew into a fully-fledged EU Action in 1999⁴. It is currently governed by Decision No 445/2014/EU⁵, but cities which were designated as ECOC for the years up to 2019 are regulated by Decision No 1622/2006/EC.

The ECOC Action is designed to highlight the richness and diversity of cultures in Europe and the features they share, thereby encouraging a greater mutual understanding among European citizens. It is also meant to stimulate a long-term culture-based development of cities in the broader perception of the term, which entails socio-economic impacts, strengthening of cooperation between cultural operators, artists and cities in Europe, as well as local (and foreign) citizens' involvement and participation in culture.

2.2. The selection and monitoring of the ECOC 2017

In accordance with Decision No 1622/2006/EC, Cyprus and Denmark were the two Member States entitled to host an ECOC in 2017.

The two-phased selection processes (shortlisting and final recommendation) were carried out in parallel by the relevant authorities of these two Member States (i.e. their respective Ministries of Culture). A panel of thirteen members – six of whom nominated by the Member State concerned and the other seven by European Union institutions and bodies – examined the bids submitted by candidate cities on the basis of the objectives and criteria laid down in

¹ OJ L 304 of 3.11.2006, p. 1.

² Full text of the evaluation at: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/ecoc-2017-evaluation-en.pdf>.

³ Resolution of the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs, meeting within the Council, of 13 June 1985 concerning the annual event 'European City of Culture' (85/C 153/02).

⁴ Decision No 1419/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 1999 establishing a Community Action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019 (OJ L 166, 1.7.1999, p.1). That Decision was amended by Decision 649/2005/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (OJ L 117, 4.5.2005).

⁵ Decision No 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 establishing a Union Action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 (OJ L 132, 3.5.2014).

Decision No 1622/2006/EC. Three cities in Cyprus and two cities in Denmark entered the competition. The pre-selection and final selection rounds took place respectively in 2011 and in 2012 and at the end of the process the panel recommended that the title of ECOC 2017 be awarded to Pafos and Aarhus⁶. The two cities were formally designated by the Council of the European Union in May 2013⁷.

Subsequently, both cities were subjected to monitoring arrangements: the progress in the cities' preparations was monitored and guided by a panel consisting of the seven independent experts appointed by the EU institutions and bodies, which had the additional task of ensuring compliance with the programme and commitments on the basis of which the cities had been selected. The representatives of Pafos and Aarhus attended two formal monitoring meetings convened by the Commission, in autumn 2014 and spring 2016. Upon completion of the monitoring process, the panel made a positive recommendation to the Commission to award a €1.5 million prize in honour of Melina Mercouri to each of the two cities. The pecuniary prize – funded under the Creative Europe programme⁸ – was paid to the two ECOC in the autumn of 2016.

2.3. The themes and focus of the two ECOC 2017

Pafos in Western Cyprus dates back to the Neolithic Period. The city and the country as a whole are at the crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean making this region a multicultural melting pot. With a population of only 35,000, Pafos is also one of the smallest ECOC ever. The central idea of the Pafos 2017 programme was based on the ancient tradition, when culture developed in open spaces. The 'Open Culture Factory' (a term featuring heavily in the bid) that formed an important part of the cultural programme promised to travel to all areas and communities in Pafos, to display the activities of the Pafos2017 programme and to create a common space of communication and cooperation for everyone. This central idea was not only about open spaces but also about openness in terms of tolerance, acceptance, encouragement and integration of different cultures, ideas and beliefs.

The aim of the ECOC in Pafos was expressed in its motto "Linking Continents – Bridging Cultures". The motto reflected the need for interconnection and bridging the separated inhabitants of Pafos including permanent residents, visitors and immigrants. It also highlighted how important it was to interconnect the scattered areas of the city and to turn the entire province of Pafos into a common space shared by all its citizens, both literally and metaphorically. Finally, it stressed the need to bridge the differences between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities through various projects.

Aarhus was founded in the 8th century as a fortified Viking settlement in a natural harbour at the mouth of a river. In the past ten years, Aarhus has grown considerably, adding more than 15,000 new residents to its population (of now 335 000 inhabitants) and creating 20,000 new jobs, mostly within the knowledge, service and innovation industries. It is also the largest city of the Central Denmark Region, one of five regions created in 2007. Aarhus's ECOC application emerged as part of a bigger plan for the development of the city, which focussed on construction and infrastructure developments around the seafront, including "Dokk1" – a new public library and culture centre featuring artistic installations. The application also

⁶ All pre-selection, selection and monitoring reports of the panel are available at the following web-page: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en.htm.

⁷ Council Decision No 2013/286/EU of 17 May 2013 designating the European Capital of Culture for the year 2017 in Denmark and in Cyprus and the European Capital of Culture for the year 2018 in Malta (OJ L 162, 14.6.2013).

⁸ Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020) and repealing Decisions No 1718/2006/EC, No 1855/2006/EC and No 1041/2009/EC (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013).

aimed to promote more cohesive governance within the Central Denmark Region, which encompasses 19 municipalities.

Aarhus 2017 presented itself under the narrative “Let’s Rethink”. The overall aim was to change mind-sets in the city, in the Central Denmark Region and in Europe through cultural experiences and to highlight the three core values of sustainability, diversity and democracy, which are key to the EU project. The cultural programme was structured around four seasons, each of which opened with an outdoor, large-scale MEGA event. Each season also featured three Full Moon events, on a smaller scale than the MEGA events. Aside from these events, the programme presented more than 350 artistic and cultural projects, conferences and festivals.

3. EVALUATION

3.1. The terms of the evaluation

The evaluation explores the implementation and delivery of the two ECOC 2017 programmes throughout their lifecycle, from their early inception through to sustainability and legacy considerations.

Specifically, it assesses the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the two ECOC 2017. It also examines the EU added value and the coherence and complementarity of the ECOC Action⁹ to other EU initiatives. Finally, it draws conclusions emerging from the two experiences.

3.2. Methodology and limitations of the approach chosen

The evaluation and its methodology were designed to satisfy the requirements of Decision No 1622/2006/EC, and contribute to develop a more detailed understanding of the performance and achievements of the ECOC Action. In particular, it constitutes a valuable opportunity to critically reconsider the past year in order to highlight lessons and recommendations for reshaping current wisdom and insights in the light of the new experiences of the host cities.

As for previous evaluations, the intervention logic is based on a hierarchy of objectives corresponding to Decision No 1622/2006/EC.

In order for results to be comparable, the methodology for this evaluation followed the approach for evidence gathering and analysis adopted in previous assessments of the ECOC Action¹⁰.

The evaluation was grounded in two types of data and respective sources:

- Primary data included either data collected during fieldwork or provided by each ECOC such as interviews, online questionnaires and surveys; interviews in particular sought to gain a variety of perspectives on each ECOC, including those of the management teams, decision-makers at local and national levels, key cultural operators, a range of partners involved in the delivery of the programme and a sample of organisations either leading or participating in the actual projects. Contrary to previous ECOC evaluations, this evaluation also included a Public Consultation, which was an open inclusive and accessible route through which people and organisations could feed their thoughts and opinions into the ECOC evaluation;

⁹ Decision No 1622/2006/EC.

¹⁰ See previous evaluation reports at: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/capitals-culture_en.htm.

- Secondary data sources encompassed EU documents, original bids and applications, internal reports linked to the application processes, monitoring and evaluation reports, studies and reports produced or commissioned by the ECOC, events programmes, promotional materials and websites, statistical data on culture and tourism and quantitative data supplied by the ECOC on finance, activities, outputs and results.

As was the case with all previous ex-post ECOC evaluations, the Commission maintains that the adopted methodology is appropriate to produce a report providing a reasonably solid basis on which sensible conclusions may be inferred regarding the ECOC performance.

However, as was already highlighted in last year's report, the lack of baseline data to be integrated in a comparative study of the city prior to the win of the title, at the start of title-year and after the implementation of the ECOC year continue to be a limitation. These data are crucial to get a balanced perspective, supported by a cogent and ample data basis, of the actual impact of the ECOC Action on a city.

However the budget allocated to the evaluation work (approximately 75 000 € each year) – which is proportionate to the modest level of EU funding directly provided by the EU to each ECOC host (€1.5m Melina Mercouri Prize) – doesn't make it possible to have a before ('baseline') study and an after-picture ('ex-post') study. An additional consequence of the modest budget is that the primary evidence data gathering tends to be more of qualitative than quantitative nature; while qualitative data still holds a great importance in the evaluation, the lack of diversity of data sources translates into a lesser dependability, for instance, in the process of proving the objective outcomes and impacts of ECOC on widening participation in culture.

Furthermore, as a consultation tool, the public consultation – tested for the first time for an ex post ECOC evaluation – provided a relatively narrow set of findings as only 76 responses were received overall. This is perhaps understandable as completing the survey required the respondent to know (and ideally to have attended) ECOC activities in the cities.

Therefore, the report and its conclusions are substantiated by an ample basis of qualitative data (e.g. the views and opinions of various types of stakeholders) more than by a comprehensive quantitative set of data.

The Commission is fully aware of – and accepts – those limitations, which had been already identified and communicated in a staff working document accompanying the proposal for a Decision establishing a Union Action for the ECOC for the years 2020 to 2033¹¹ and in its previous reports on ex post evaluations of ECOC.

With regard to this difficulty, a subsequent Commission's proposal and the Decision ultimately adopted by the European Parliament and the Council¹² foresee that the designated cities themselves – which are the main funders and beneficiaries of the ECOC Action and better positioned to have baseline data and gather primary data on the impact of the title – become the main implementers of the evaluation process.

This new obligation puts on the ECOC – instead of the Commission – to perform an ex post evaluation of their title-year will however apply only from the 2020 titles. For the ECOC 2018 and 2019, the Commission will continue carrying out its own evaluation with the limitations described above. At a later stage, the Commission will also carry out an overall

¹¹ See SWD (2012) 226 final, point 2.4.4.

¹² Decision 445/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, see footnote n° 5.

evaluation encompassing several ECOC years, enabling to measure the long-term impact of the ECOC Action, as indicated in Decision No 445/2014/EU.

It is also worth underlining that Pafos and Aarhus commissioned local research activities – respectively by hand of the Neapolis University Pafos and Aarhus University – to improve their understanding of the impact of the ECOC and that the outcomes of these activities fed into the Commission’s evaluation whenever possible.

In conclusion, despite the deficiency of quantitative data and other independent evidence, the Commission finds a sufficient solidity in the evidence gathered to support the evaluation and shares its overall assessment and deductions, which are considered to provide a generally true and informed picture of the ECOC 2017 Action.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1. Relevance 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 Article 167 of 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, which is consistent with the aims of Decision No 1622/2006/EC.

The evaluation concludes that although Pafos's programme 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 articulated a programme 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 pro-active citizens' participation in cultural activities. The programme also had an important regional dimension in the context of the newly created Central Denmark Region.

4.2. Efficiency

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. Moreover, 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 (€1,5m per ECOC) in comparison to the overall costs of an ECOC: the operating expenditure of the ECOC 2017 were of approximately €66,7m for Aarhus and €8,5m 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.

Nevertheless, the evaluation also shows that hosting an ECOC remains a resource-intensive choice implying a long-term commitment all along the preparatory years that can be difficult to keep: for instance, Pafos saw a significant reduction in its actual budget compared to the original bid stage (a fall of over 60%), driven by an overly ambitious original proposal, but also a financial crisis putting a tight pressure on public budget sectors at all territorial levels.

4.3. Effectiveness

Both ECOC title-holders have proved successful in fulfilling the short-term objectives set out in their applications, most notably the implementation of extensive and innovative cultural programmes with a European dimension and with a pronounced citizens' involvement. The performance of Pafos against its objectives was however limited by the strong reduction in its budget compared to the figure proposed in the application. Despite having entirely dissimilar visions, programmes and implementation styles, both used the ECOC effectively to explore and articulate themes of local interest with a European resonance.

Both ECOC enhanced the range, diversity and European dimension of the cultural offer in their respective cities during 2017 and presented cultural programmes that were more extensive, diverse, innovative and international compared to the cultural baseline offering in previous years. As an example, 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. Both ECOC have helped strengthen the cultural capacity of the local cultural and creative sectors and their links with other sectors. As an example, Aarhus 2017 increased cultural sponsorship and brought positive economic benefits to the cultural and creative sectors. Pafos 2017 strengthened audience development, served as a catalyst for cultural infrastructure investments and developed the skills and capacity of local cultural operators. The ECOC raised the international profile of Aarhus through culture, whilst in Pafos, the ECOC helped make audiences for culture more international.

Finally, the evaluation comes to the conclusion that the two 2017 ECOC offer very different potentials for the sustainability of their activities and of improved cultural governance. For Aarhus, the ECOC project generated potential for long-term impact through the skills and experience gained by cultural operators, the involvement of citizens, increased audiences and greater international profile. Pafos will also see some long-term benefits but little has been done to ensure these benefits are maximised.

4.4. Coherence

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 (with its impact on capacity building for example) or tourism (the number of hotel bed-nights increased by 10.9% in 2017 in Aarhus region, for example).

The ECOC Action is also coherent with and complementary to the European Structural and Investment Funds, depending on the context of each city holding the title. In the case of Pafos, ERDF was used in the years leading up to 2017 to co-finance essential investments in the refurbishment of the city centre and renovation of key venues, such as a theatre and a cinema.

4.5. EU added value

As already mentioned and illustrated above, the ECOC Action has achieved an impact that would not have arisen through the actions of Member States alone.

The 'label' itself is a key aspect of the EU added value of the ECOC Action as it acts as a significant generator of interest from stakeholders not only from the city but also from far beyond and offers great scope for European cooperation in terms of partnership and transfer of good practices, for example in terms of building a solid governance for the delivery of the ECOC, increasing the capacity of local cultural organizations or attracting projects' ideas from local residents.

5. 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. It could be assessed at a later stage within the framework of the above-mentioned long-term evaluation.

The Commission also concludes that the programmes implemented by the two 2017 title-holders were consistent with the objectives of the ECOC Action; they reflected its European dimension, involved local residents and stakeholders and widened access to and participation in culture during 2017, although the evidence is stronger in Aarhus than in Pafos due – to a great extent – to the limited budget on which the latter operated. 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. In the two cases, the ECOC year may lead to some legacies (both physical and intangible), although a proper legacy planning is lacking in Pafos, illustrating that legacy will always be a challenge in small ECOC host cities.

These main findings confirm those that emerged from the 2016 and previous ECOC evaluations, i.e. ECOC title-holders carry out cultural programmes that are more extensive and innovative than the cities' usual annual cultural offer, with a strong European dimension and involving local citizens as well as international visitors, in line with the objectives of the Treaty and the ECOC Action.

A limited number of elements of improvement have emerged from the assessment, such as the need to establish institutional arrangements in good time, to build a stable and effective delivery team benefitting from a strong political support, to ensure national buy-in and involvement, to ensure the right balance between control and artistic independence, to keep the commitment of cultural stakeholders, to embed European co-operation into the cultural programme while also actively pursuing widening participation in culture, and to plan legacy at an early stage¹³.

The scope and length of the yearly evaluation the Commission carries out in accordance with Article 12 of Decision No 1622/2006/EC does not allow consideration of the long-term impact of ECOC. The Commission 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

¹³ See compendium of previous recommendations at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/ecoc-compendium-recommendations_en.pdf.

comparisons to be drawn and useful lessons to be learned for future European Capitals of Culture, as well as for all European cities”. Building on the results of the study published in December 2017 on "European Capitals of Culture: Success Strategies and Long-Term Effects"¹⁴, it will allow to analyse long-term impact.

Furthermore, more work is to be done to help designated and future ECOC in their approaches to evaluation, including on the use of big data. To do that, the Commission updated in mid 2018 its guidelines for cities’ own evaluations, which now also cover the notion of “big data”¹⁵. Furthermore it published in September 2018 a call for tenders with the view to creating a pool of expertise and providing capacity building services and peer-learning activities to upcoming ECOC delivery teams. Training packages foreseen in the call include the topic of monitoring and evaluation. The contractor will be selected in the first half of 2019.

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. The progress and monitoring reports produced by the panel already give explicit consideration to the issues covered by the selection criteria set out in Decision No 445/2014/EU.

Finally, concerning the visibility of the ECOC pages on Europa, the Commission highlights that it is in the process of revising both its Culture and Creative Europe websites and that consideration will be given to better present the ECOC Action in this context.

¹⁴ See: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/513985/IPOL-CULT_ET\(2013\)513985_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/513985/IPOL-CULT_ET(2013)513985_EN.pdf).

¹⁵ See: <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/sites/creative-europe/files/library/guidelines-for-cities-own-evaluations-modmai18.doc.pdf>.