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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels,
COM(2010) XXX final

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

Ex Post evaluation of the 2009 European Capital of Culture event (Linz and Vilnius)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is presented under article 12 of Decision n° 1622/2006/EC¹ of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community action for the European Capital of Culture event for the years 2007 to 2019, which requires that "each year the Commission shall ensure the external and independent evaluation of the results of the European Capital of Culture event of the previous year in accordance with the objectives and criteria of the action laid down in this Decision. The Commission shall present a report on that evaluation to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions by the end of the year following the European Capital of Culture event."

This report puts forward the Commission's position on the main conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation of 2009 European Capital of Culture that can be obtained via the link below:

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc485_en.htm

The external evaluation first evaluated individually both 2009 European Capitals of Culture (hereafter "ECOC"): Linz and Vilnius. It then compared findings and reached conclusions valid for both. Findings are based on data provided by both ECOC, feedback from stakeholders, and policy and academic literature at European level. In drawing conclusions and offering recommendations, the evaluation builds on the evaluation of the 2007 and 2008 ECOC carried out in 2009.²

2. BACKGROUND TO THE ACTION

2.1. The EU action for the European Capital of Culture event

The initial scheme of "The European City of Culture" was launched at intergovernmental level in 1985³ and later complemented by a "European Cultural Month".⁴ On the basis of these activities, Decision 1419/1999/EC established a Community Action for the European Capital

¹ OJ L304 of 3 November 2006

² Ex post Evaluation of 2007 and 2008 European Capitals of Culture ; study prepared for the European Commission, ECOTEC Research and Consulting; 2009.

³ The title "European Capital of Culture" was designed to help bring European citizens closer together. See Resolution of the Ministers responsible for Cultural Affairs regarding the annual organization of the 'European City of Culture' of 13.06.1985 <http://eur-ex.europa.eu/Notice.do?mode=dbl&lang=en&lng1=en.en&lng2=da.de.el.en.es.fr.it.nl.&val=117538:cs&page=1&hwords>

⁴ Conclusions of the Ministers of Culture meeting within the Council of 18 May 1992 concerning the choice of European Cities of Culture after 1996 and the 'Cultural Month' <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:41992X0616:EN:HTML>

of Culture event for the years 2005 to 2019,⁵ hereafter referred as "the Action". Member States were ranked in a chronological order of entitlement to host the event each year. European countries, which were not Member States could also apply, with no pre-defined chronological order.

Decision 1419/1999/EC was later replaced by Decision 1622/2006/EC⁶ which refined the objectives of the Action, modified the designation and monitoring process for the 2013 title onward and ended the possibility for non Member States cities to apply for the title. In contrast to the previous Decision which let Member States decide which procedure to adopt to select the cities, with no subsequent monitoring, the new Decision has introduced a two stage national competition with European criteria and monitoring meetings after designation.

As of the 2009 title, two Member States each year were entitled to host the event; they were expected to put forward cities and to submit their applications including their cultural programmes for the year to a European Selection Panel which recommended their designation to the Commission. In turn the Commission issued a recommendation to the Council of Ministers which formally designated the ECOC. Given the time-scale of ECOC implementation, preparation of which begins 6 years before the title year, the 2006 Decision maintains the application of the 1999 Decision to the ECOC for 2007, 2008 and 2009 and foresees transitional provisions for the titles for 2010, 2011 and 2012.

EU financial support is provided by the EU's Culture Programme. For 2007-13 it makes available a maximum of € 1.5 million each year per ECOC.⁷ For 2009, the financial support took the form of a co-financing grant for specific projects covering part of the ECOC cultural programmes.

2.2. 2009 European Capitals of Culture

The ECOC 2009 fell under the selection procedures set by the 1999 Decision. Austria and Lithuania were entitled to host the ECOC in this year and they proposed Linz and Vilnius respectively. The selection process took place in 2005. The European selection panel issued a report recommending both cities for the 2009 title, while making recommendations to help them achieve the proposed objectives. In 2005 the Council of Ministers formally awarded the title to the applicant cities on the basis of a Commission recommendation.

⁵ Decision 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 of 1.7.1999, p. 1). Decision amended by Decision 649/2005/EC (OJ L 117 of 4.5.2005, p. 20). http://www.europa.eu/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/1999/l_166/l_16619990701en00010005.pdf http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_117/l_11720050504en00200021.pdf

⁶ Decision 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 2019 (OJ L 304 of 3.11.2006, p. 1). <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:304:SOM:EN:HTML>

⁷ Decision 1855/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 the Culture Programme (2007-2013) (OJ L 372 of 27.12.2006, p. 1). Ref. Strand 1.3

3. THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

3.1. The terms of the evaluation

The Commission has entrusted Ecotec Research and Consulting to conduct the external evaluation⁸ of the ECOC in 2009. The evaluation aimed at assessing the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of these two ECOC against the objectives of the Action and against those objectives set by the ECOC themselves in their applications and during the implementation phase. The external evaluation was accompanied by reports for each ECOC and provided conclusions and recommendations on how to improve the implementation of the Action. Given the fact that each ECOC only bears the title for one year, conclusions and recommendations concerning the cities were given in the form of "lessons learnt" in order to help future ECOC in their implementation.

3.2. Methodology

Both ECOC were evaluated individually, drawing in part on evaluations commissioned by the ECOC themselves. Data was gathered at two levels: a small amount of data at EU-level; and more extensive data from the ECOC themselves. The key sources included the policy and academic literature at the European level; the original ECOC applications, studies and reports commissioned by the ECOC, events programmes, promotional materials and websites; quantitative data supplied by the ECOC on activities, outputs and results; interviews of managing teams for each ECOC; consultation of key stakeholders in each ECOC; and visits to each city. A comparative review and meta-evaluation exercise considered the conclusions emerging from both ECOC, compared and contrasted approaches, and verified the quality of the research. Conclusions relating to the ECOC Action more generally were drawn from considering the evidence and conclusions emerging from both ECOC.

3.3. The evaluator's findings

3.3.1. Relevance of the Action

The evaluation considered that the implementation of the Action had been relevant to Article 167 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union. The objectives of “developing cultural activities” and “promoting the European dimension of and through culture” have featured strongly in the Action.

The preamble to the 1999 Decision first introduced an explicit reference to the development of culture and tourism and to the need to mobilise large sections of the population. These references were later strengthened in the 2006 Decision by the inclusion of explicit criteria relating to “fostering the participation of citizens” and "long-term development". Many ECOC have gone further in stating explicit social, economic or tourism objectives. The introduction of such objectives into the ECOC Action has both shaped and reflected broader trends in cultural policy.

However, the growing importance of these objectives has been accompanied by a debate about balance between whether culture should be supported for its own intrinsic value or as a means to deliver tangible, quantifiable returns on investment.

⁸ Framework service contract n°EAC/03/06 on evaluation, evaluation-related services and support for impact assessment

3.3.2. *Relevance of the 2009 ECOC*

The evaluation considered the motivation of the cities in bidding to become ECOC and the relevance of their objectives in relation to the objectives of the Action and of Article 167. It also studied the process by which the motivation of the 2009 ECOC was converted into a set of workable objectives and the changes to those objectives during the development phase. Both ECOC embraced the objectives of the Action and customised them in line with their own particular contexts and priorities. Both planned diverse cultural programmes and associated activities (e.g. communications, volunteering, etc) that would support the objectives of "developing cultural activities", "promoting the European dimension of and through culture" and "social and economic development through culture".

The objectives and activities of Linz were very relevant to all three specific objectives and particularly relevant to the objective of developing cultural activities. With regard to Vilnius, for practical reasons it was unable to pursue the third objective to any great extent, though it always retained the aspiration to do so, and pursued instead activity that was principally relevant to the objectives of "promoting the European dimension" and of "developing cultural activities".

3.3.3. *Efficiency of Governance*

Consideration was given to the efficiency of the governance of the ECOC, including their organisational models, processes for selecting and implementing cultural activities and events, communications and promotions, and processes for raising finance.

Similarly to the evaluation of the 2007 and 2008 ECOC, the evaluation of the 2009 ECOC highlights that it is essential but can be challenging to establish an appropriate organisational structure and build a team with the appropriate skills to implement the cultural programme. This requires a broader set of skills and thus a different structure from the team that had prepared the original application. There is also the need to balance artistic and political interests and to ensure that any new delivery mechanism is welcomed by the existing stakeholders as a co-operative partner. A new and independent structure is usually advisable, one that is carefully customised to the political and cultural context of the city.

The 2009 ECOC illustrate these points in very different ways. Linz developed an efficient and effective governance structure and thus demonstrated how the main challenges can be met. The experience in Vilnius highlights the potential consequences of not fully meeting these challenges. It struggled to establish stable and effective arrangements, which led to difficulties for the cultural programme and the overall impact of the ECOC event.

Regardless of these difficulties, the ECOC title remains highly valued, generates extensive cultural programmes and achieves significant impacts. Cities make great efforts to secure the nomination and also make very explicit commitments at application stage regarding financial resources. However there is a need to ensure that ECOC fulfil their own commitments made at application stage. Indeed, the risk is that in very difficult economic circumstances and where political consensus may be lacking, the ECOC may struggle to compete against the other demands made on public budgets.

3.3.4. *Efficiency of ECOC mechanisms at EU level*

A key consideration was the efficiency of the selection, monitoring and financial processes operated by the European Commission. Whilst both ECOC expressed broad satisfaction with

the way the European selection panel operated, it is too early to draw robust conclusions on the efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality of that process, as in their case the panel was only required to give a view on the absolute merits of each bid, rather than its merits relative to competing nominations, since there were none. The 1999 Decision did not include a monitoring phase.

However, as the 2009 and other ECOC have shown, the development phase can be challenging, when the aspirations of the application need to be converted into a set of workable institutional arrangements and a credible cultural programme. Whilst Linz was able to convert its application into an effective ECOC, Vilnius encountered difficulties. As the 1999 Decision did not foresee a monitoring process, the European Commission had no formal means at its disposal with which to address its concerns. In the case of Vilnius, the monitoring process (had it been in operation) might have enabled potential problems to be identified and acted upon at an earlier stage. The monitoring process introduced by Decision 1622/2006/EC (replacing Decision 1419/1999/EC) should represent an improvement in comparison with the arrangements of Decision 1419/1999/EC.

The criteria for the €1.5m EU funding per ECOC were clear and the administrative processes similar to those for other EU programmes. Each ECOC received funding from the EU's Culture Programme for specific projects.

While the EU contribution from the Culture programme represent a very limited contribution to the operational budget of any Capital, the project co-funded with a Commission grant as part of Vilnius 2009 had a considerable impact in terms of European added value and audience.

The ECOC Action generates high demand from candidate cities, substantial investment in the cultural programmes and in the cities more generally and has a high profile in the media and with the public. It is doubtful that any other policy mechanism could have achieved the same impact for the same level of EU investment in terms of financial resources and effort.

3.3.5. Effectiveness in developing cultural activities

The evaluation considered the effectiveness of each ECOC in implementing its cultural programme and its impact on the long-term cultural development of the city.

Both 2009 ECOC hoped to use the opportunity of the ECOC to raise their profile through culture and as cultural cities. Linz already enjoyed international profile as an industrial city but hoped for greater recognition (nationally and internationally) as a cultural city – and one that could compete with Salzburg and Vienna, albeit on a different terrain (i.e. in contemporary rather than classical culture). Vilnius was already the established cultural centre of Lithuania, but sought international recognition as a cultural destination.

Both ECOC were certainly successful in implementing a more extensive cultural programme than would have taken place in the absence of ECOC designation. This programme was very extensive in Linz. In Vilnius, for budgetary and governance reasons, it was more modest and smaller than had originally been intended. Nevertheless, for both, the ECOC enabled them to implement larger and more ambitious events, more genuinely innovative projects and new commissions across a range of cultural genres than would have been possible in the absence of the designation. Both succeeded in attracting more international artists to their respective cities. Whilst cultural operators in both cities reported increased capacity and better co-operation with partners in other cities and countries, in Linz the ECOC appears to have made

the cultural scene more vibrant on a longer-term basis. During the event itself, Linz attracted audiences of nearly 3.5 million people.

3.3.6. Effectiveness in promoting the European dimension of and through culture

The 1999 Decision does not define the “European dimension” explicitly, but views it essentially in terms of cultural cooperation, including: the highlighting of artistic movements and styles shared by Europeans which the city has inspired or to which it has made a significant contribution; and the promotion of events involving people active in culture from other cities in Member States and leading to lasting cultural cooperation and fostering their movement within the EU.

The criterion of the “European dimension” set out in the 2006 Decision provides room for interpretation for cities. Illustrations are given in the Guide to candidate cities which has been available on line since 2007. As a consequence the two ECOC in 2009 have given their own interpretations to this dimension.

Both ECOC were successful in undertaking activities that feature artists of European significance. Although both already featured a significant number of international artists in their regular cultural offering - particularly Linz through, for example, the Brucknerfest and the Ars Electronica Festival – more such artists were attracted to the cities as a result of the ECOC. Whilst Vilnius had fewer events featuring artists of European significance than did Linz, they perhaps constituted a relatively larger proportion of its cultural programme. In contrast, events featuring artists of European significance were more numerous in Linz but less prominent in relation to the rest of its very extensive programme; indeed, the overall ethos of Linz was not to organise a large number of blockbusters aimed at international audiences but instead to provide a 365-day offer.

The cultural programmes of both ECOC featured a larger number of collaborations, co-productions and exchanges than would have been the case in the absence of ECOC designation. In the case of Linz, this was facilitated by the fact that the key staff in the delivery agency were already recognised operators in the international cultural sector and thus well connected to potential collaborators.

Neither of the 2009 ECOC gave very high prominence to specific European themes and issues. Both emphasised aspects of European history, identity and heritage already present in the city – but in very different ways. Vilnius, a city in a country that had recently acceded to the EU, put a strong emphasis on its long European history and cultural heritage. Linz, meanwhile, chose to explore its role in a darker chapter in European history: the Nazi era and, alongside that, the city’s (now much diminished) Jewish heritage. This was perhaps the first time that any ECOC has explored such a difficult issue in such an explicit way.

3.3.7. Effectiveness in achieving social, economic, urban development and tourism impacts

The evaluation found that both ECOC were successful in implementing a more extensive cultural programme than would have taken place in the absence of ECOC designation, though in Vilnius this was much smaller than had been intended. In both cities, the cultural programme complemented a programme of infrastructure investment, albeit funded from other sources (notably the structural funds in the case of Vilnius), but in the case of Linz given greater impetus by the ECOC. The Linz ECOC generated significant economic benefits for the city, as well as an increase in tourism, improvements in its internal and external image and wider participation in cultural activities. For example, data on overnight stays provided by

Linz shows that there was a 10% increase in overnight stays compared to 2008. In contrast, Vilnius appears less likely to secure significant economic or social impacts as a result of the ECOC.

3.3.8. Sustainability

Finally, the evaluation considered the sustainability of the activities of the ECOC and their impact on the cultural governance and long-term development of their respective cities.

In Linz, there are numerous examples of cultural activities newly initiated in the title year continuing beyond the life of the year but, quite understandably, not of the scale of the €40m or so invested during the title year. Nonetheless, the cultural scene of Linz can be said to be more extensive and vibrant as a result of the ECOC. In Vilnius, the examples of continuing activity are relatively few in number and there is limited evidence of the cultural scene being more extensive and vibrant than it would otherwise have been.

Both the 2009 ECOC have generated cultural activities that will enhance the capacity for undertaking better, more ambitious events and for undertaking international co-operation. In Linz they are more widespread, however. Governance and partnership working in Linz has been strengthened as a result of the ECOC, offering the potential for further positive development of that city's cultural sector.

At this stage, it is too early to evaluate the sustainability of economic and tourism impacts.

4. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSION

The Commission agrees with the overall gist of the recommendations by the evaluator, which are very close to the recommendations issued following the 2007-2008 ECOC evaluation.

4.1. Efficiency of Governance

The Commission agrees to recommend all ECOC to commission evaluations of the impact of their cultural programmes and associated activities.

4.2. Efficiency of ECOC mechanisms at EU-level

The Commission agrees that future evaluations should consider:

- the efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality of the selection and monitoring processes introduced by the 2006 Decision as well as their impacts on the quality of the event;
- the continued value of the ECOC “brand”, as viewed both by the title holders and by the wider world (media, cultural sector bodies and the general public); in the event that the value of the brand is perceived to be diminishing, the Commission should explore alternative approaches and compare their relative merits with those of the ECOC.

4.3. Effectiveness in achieving economic, urban development and tourism impacts and in supporting social development through culture

In forthcoming debates, the European Commission agrees to explore the extent to which the ECOC concept (and culture more generally) can (continue to) and should be used to provide incentives to cities to stimulate, for their long term development :

- urban regeneration and economic development or whether to return to an approach that is more about culture as an end in itself;
- the genuine social renewal of cities and outreach to all citizens, as opposed to merely widening opportunities for culture to already existing audiences;
- or whether to retain the flexibility for cities to strike their own balance

4.4. Sustainability

- The European Commission agrees to continue to find ways to promote the sustainability of the impact of ECOC, based on the experience to date.

5. THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS

The Commission concludes that the ECOC title remains highly valued, generates extensive cultural programmes and significant impacts. The EU title and financial contribution have a considerable leverage effect, making it a highly cost-effective and efficient initiative.

The Commission shares the evaluator's overall assessment and accepts its recommendations as formulated in the section above.

The Commission notes that most ECOC already have evaluation schemes covering all or parts of their cultural programme and will continue to recommend overall evaluations at local level. In order to promote the circulation of good evaluation practices, through the EU Culture Programme the Commission has supported a policy grouping which adapts the comprehensive evaluation model developed by Liverpool 2008 further to the needs of future ECOC.⁹ The Commission's guide for candidate cities has also been updated to include a section on evaluation. Furthermore, to mark the 25 year anniversary of the ECOC, the Commission organised a conference in March 2010 which focused on legacy and evaluation of the event. A summary of the discussions is available on the Commission's website.

Concerning the recommendation that future evaluations should look at the efficiency of ECOC mechanisms set by Decision 2006 and the recommendation that future debates should explore the various roles of the title the Commission has launched an evaluation on the new arrangements, which is due to be completed towards the end of 2010. Furthermore, an on-line public consultation is being launched in autumn 2010. These will both feed into the preparation of a Commission proposal for the initiative beyond 2019, which will seek to ensure that the initiative remains as attractive, relevant and effective as possible. These issues were also discussed at the 25 year anniversary conference mentioned above.

⁹ <http://www.liv.ac.uk/impacts08/>

Concerning sustainability, ensuring long-term effects from the event is already one of the criteria in the 2006 Decision and will continue to be a key consideration in the reflections of the prolongation of the initiative. Furthermore, the Commission already stresses the importance of embedding the event as part of a long-term culture policy strategy in its documents, information sessions and other conferences and will continue to do so.