

Ex-post Evaluation of 2007 & 2008 European Capitals of Culture

Executive Summary

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Introduction

The European Capital of Culture Action was introduced in 1999 by a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council¹, building on the European City of Culture event that had operated annually since 1985. This Decision created a specific Action, whose overall objective was to "highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, as well as to promote the greater mutual acquaintance between European citizens".

Article 3 of the Decision stated that the "nomination of each city shall include a cultural programme of European dimension, based principally on cultural co-operation". It also set out a number of objectives that each nominated city must address, which were to:

- highlight the artistic movements and styles shared by Europeans which it has inspired or to which it has made a significant contribution;
- promote events involving people active in culture from other cities in Member States and leading to lasting cultural cooperation, and to foster their movement within the European Union;
- support and develop creative work, which is an essential element in any cultural policy;
- ensure the mobilisation and participation of large sections of the population and, as a consequence, the social impact of the action and its continuity beyond the year of the events;
- encourage the reception of citizens of the Union and the widest possible dissemination of the various events by employing all forms of multimedia;
- promote dialogue between European cultures and those from other parts of the world and, in that spirit;
- optimise the opening up to, and understanding of others, which are fundamental cultural values; and
- exploit the historic heritage, urban architecture and quality of life in the city.

The 1999 Decision also set out a process for the designation of cities as ECOC, based upon an Order of Entitlement for Member States to nominate a city for the title. This process was used to designate two of the cities that form the subject of this evaluation – Luxembourg and Greater Region (GR) (2007) and Liverpool (2008). Article 4 of the Decision also introduced the possibility of non-Member States nominating a city. The other two cities that form the subject of this evaluation were thus nominated by their countries and subsequently designated by the Council as ECOC under the terms of Article 4 - Sibiu in Romania² (2007) and Stavanger in Norway (2008). As well as being awarded the title, each ECOC could receive EU funding of up to €1.5m for specific projects within their cultural programme. Whilst a further Decision was made in 2006, this

¹ 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.

² Romania was not yet a Member State when Sibiu was designated European Capital of Culture

Decision specifically stated that the requirements of the 1999 Decision would apply in the case of the 2007 & 2008 ECOC.¹

Approach taken by the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to satisfy the requirement of the 1999 Decision for 'a report evaluating the results of the previous year's events'. The four 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; a telephone survey of key stakeholders in each ECOC; and visits to each city. A comparative review and meta-evaluation exercise considered the conclusions emerging from all four 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 all four ECOC. To this end, the evaluation covered issues relating to the key themes of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. The issues were explored through a long list of evaluation questions as set out in Section 2.3 of the main report.

The main findings of the evaluation in relation to these topics were as follows:

Relevance of the ECOC Action

The evaluation considered the relevance of the ECOC Action to Article 151 of the Treaty. It found that the ECOC Action has been consistent with and relevant to the objectives of Article 151. Indeed, taking a long-term perspective it is clear that the broad objectives of “developing cultural activities” and “promoting the European dimension of and through culture” have featured strongly in the ECOC Action.

In addition, it appears from our findings that cities holding the ECOC title have adopted over the years a third broad objective that we have defined as “supporting social and economic development through culture” although such an objective does not explicitly feature in Article 151 of the Treaty. 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

¹ 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 2019

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. Indeed, there is a view that the introduction of economic and social objectives into cultural policy risks skewing policy and practice towards those activities that have maximum wider impacts, which arguably militates against the funding of ‘risky’ and/or avant garde cultural activities.

Relevance of the 2007 & 2008 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 ECOC Action and of Article 151 of the Treaty. All four ECOC were strongly relevant to at least one of the three specific objectives of “developing cultural activities”, “promoting the European dimension of and through culture” and “social and economic development through culture” and demonstrated some relevance to all of them. Whilst all four ECOC were relevant to the objective of “developing cultural activities”, this was most apparent in Stavanger; in the other three ECOC, this was seen through the lens of other overall aims, i.e. building a cross-border region (Luxembourg GR), raising the international profile of the city (Sibiu), and urban regeneration and inclusion (Liverpool). All four ECOC were relevant to the objective of “promoting the European dimension of and through culture”, primarily through their objectives of fostering co-operation with cultural operators, artists and cities in other Member States. All four ECOC were also relevant to the objective of pursuing “economic development through culture”, primarily through using the ECOC to improve the image of the city (the GR in the case of Luxembourg) and to the objective of pursuing “social development through culture” through widening access to culture.

Recommendation 1: the current objectives of the ECOC Action are relevant to the wider context in which it operates, e.g. cultural policy, aspirations of cities; it may be inevitable that each ECOC will tend to prioritise one of the three specific objectives over the others, but the Action should continue to allow “space” for cities to interpret the objectives of the Action in their own way.

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. All four ECOC faced difficulties in establishing efficient governance arrangements, particularly during the development phase. These difficulties primarily related to the challenge of establishing an organisational

structure and building a team with the appropriate skills to implement the cultural programme. In each case, this required a wider set of skills and thus a different structure from the team that had prepared the successful application, albeit retaining most of the key individuals. Issues that played an important role were: the need to balance artistic and political interests and to ensure that any new delivery mechanism was welcomed by the existing stakeholders as a co-operative partner; and getting the right mix of existing and seconded staff as well as new talent. Each ECOC did eventually establish an efficient governance structure, as was recognised by the majority of stakeholders. The experience of 2007 & 2008 demonstrates that a new and independent structure is usually advisable, one that is carefully customised to reflect the political and cultural context of the city and, indeed, the country more generally. Another important lesson of 2007 & 2008 has been the importance of the evaluations commissioned by the ECOC themselves. Since the designation of the 2007 & 2008 ECOC, the Commission has published a guide for applicant cities with recommendations on governance. The Commission also provides additional support in the form of information sessions with applicant and designated cities.

Recommendation 2: Future evaluations of the ECOC Action should consider the effectiveness of the support put in place since the designation of the 2007 & 2008 ECOC.

Recommendation 3: the Commission should require all ECOC to commission evaluations of the impact of their cultural programmes and associated activities.

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.

The 1999 Decision introduced a new selection process, for the 2005 title onwards, based on the formation of a selection panel to consider the nomination(s) for each year. Whilst all the 2007 & 2008 ECOC, perhaps unsurprisingly (since they were winners), expressed broad satisfaction with the new process, it is too early to draw robust conclusions on the efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality of that process. This is because of the specific circumstances of 2007 and 2008: the selection 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. In any case, this process is no longer operative, having been replaced by a new process introduced by the 2006 Decision.

Recommendation 4: future evaluations should consider the efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality of the selection process introduced by the 2006 Decision.

Although the Commission did not play a significant support and monitoring role in relation to the 2007 and 2008 ECOC, the predominant view from three of the four cities is that such a function would have brought benefits. Indeed, some monitoring points might have introduced important checks that would have highlighted potential problems and allowed for earlier remedial action. The networking between past, present and future ECOC is active and was welcomed by all four ECOC.

The 2006 Decision foresees a two-phase monitoring process for the ECOC as of 2010 which should help in this regard (two years and eight months before the start of the year). It should be noted that the Commission is currently trying to step up the support to cities further still. Indeed, as a result of feedback from stakeholders it is seeking to introduce voluntary informal monitoring six months after the designation. The Commission is also facilitating advisory visits by members of the panel to future cities requiring help.

Recommendation 5: future evaluations should consider the efficiency and effectiveness of the new monitoring process implemented by the Commission.

The criteria for the €1.5m EU funding per ECOC are clear and the administrative processes not dissimilar to those of other EU programmes. Each ECOC received funding from the EU's Culture Programme for specific projects. The EU funding formed a very modest proportion of the total expenditure on the cultural programme of each ECOC and in no cases did it significantly influence the decision to apply. In view of the modest amount provided from the EU budget, the ECOC designation, nevertheless, has a very effective leverage effect.

Since the designation of the 2007 & 2008 ECOC, the Commission has reviewed the EU funding mechanism. As a result, the 2006 Decision introduced the "Melina Mercouri Prize": a prize of €1.5m to be awarded to designated cities before the start of the year, on the basis of the reports delivered by the monitoring panel. This prize will be awarded for the 2010 titles onwards.

Recommendation 6: future evaluations should consider the effectiveness of the awarding of the prize including whether the award of the prize before the beginning of the year in a lump sum is appropriate. They should also examine the relevance of the prize concerning the decision of cities to apply and to the quality of the ECOC implementation. Consideration should also be given to other EU funds, such as the EU Structural Funds.

The ECOC Action generates high demand from candidate cities, substantial investment in the cultural programmes and in the cities more generally and high profile in the media and with the public. The ECOC title thus remains highly valued by cities, generates extensive cultural programmes and achieves significant impacts; it is doubtful if any other policy mechanism could have achieved the same impact for the same level of EU-investment in terms of financial resources and effort. However, it may be that "returns" start to diminish in future years and that alternative policy mechanisms are required, albeit drawing on many of the concepts underpinning the ECOC Action and the experiences to date.

Recommendation 7: future evaluations should consider 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.

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. In each ECOC area a more extensive cultural programme has been implemented than would have been the case in the absence of ECOC designation. Many genuinely innovative projects and new commissions have been undertaken, across a broad range of cultural genres. Audiences for cultural activities have in general been far greater than in the years preceding the ECOC and, where evidence is available it suggests a high level of audience satisfaction. The cultural scene of each city is now more vibrant and more recognised nationally and internationally than previously. Whilst each cultural programme has featured many established international and national artists, a significant number of local cultural operators has been supported in each case. As well as enjoying greater profile and contacts, one of the most important benefits reported across all four ECOC is the greater professionalism and operational capacity of such operators. In many cases, the mere fact of working more closely with cultural institutions and authorities has enabled greater support to be provided than would otherwise have been the case. For example, increased public funding has typically been accompanied by practical help to enable smaller organisations to enter into contracts and account for grant funding more effectively.

Overall, each ECOC, and thus also the ECOC Action more generally, was broadly successful in achieving its objectives relating to the development of cultural activities during the title year. Of course, not every element of the cultural programmes was completely successful and some stakeholders were disappointed (such as some cultural institutions for whom the ECOC offered limited relevance), some local artists felt there was an undue bias towards international artists, and the expectations of some local cultural operators for financial and other support could not be met. But the Action has enabled four extensive cultural programmes to be implemented that include many exciting and innovative projects.

Effectiveness in promoting the European dimension of and through culture

The 1999 Decision offers no explicit definition of the “European dimension” and the criteria of the “European dimension” as set out in the 2006 Decision are open to very different interpretations. Perhaps as a consequence, the European dimension of the ECOC Action was interpreted in very different ways by the 2007 & 2008 ECOC. The evaluation therefore allowed for such diversity when considering the effectiveness of the ECOC in promoting a European dimension.

Whilst all four ECOC were effective in implementing a wide range of activities with a European dimension, the nature of that dimension and the extent of effectiveness varied:

- the visibility gained by the title helped all four to be effective in generating a significant increase in tourism, although this had been an important objective for only two of them;
- all were effective in undertaking collaborations, co-productions and exchanges, although this activity was only extensive in Luxembourg GR; in the other ECOC, collaboration was peripheral to the main cultural programme and primarily took place only with the other title holder;

- similarly, all were effective in establishing transnational partnerships with other cities or regions, but this activity was only extensive in Luxembourg GR;
- three of the ECOC were effective in meeting their objective of attracting artists of European significance;
- in the other (Luxembourg GR), this was a less prominent objective although many European artists were attracted;
- activities related to "European history, identity and heritage already present in the city" were only extensively implemented in Luxembourg GR and Sibiu, although both were relatively effective; and finally
- all ECOC gave only modest attention to the development of European themes and issues.

Effectiveness in achieving economic, urban development and tourism impacts

The evaluation found that all four ECOC were effective in achieving impacts related to economic, tourism and urban development objectives; tourism increased in all four cases and there is evidence of impact on the local economy; all four ECOC either directly funded cultural infrastructure and urban development investments or gave them greater impetus. However, there are some reasons to believe that the economic impacts of future ECOC may be less certain in current economic circumstances in which there may be reductions in public expenditure and private investment as well as reduced consumer expenditure in the tourist and cultural sectors. Moreover, there may also be a natural limit to the extent that the ECOC concept can continually drive urban regeneration. In the future, it may therefore be that purely cultural objectives recover the prominence that they enjoyed in the early years of the ECOC – or that the ECOC concept requires to be revisited.

Recommendation 8: in forthcoming debates, the European Commission should explore the extent to which the ECOC concept (and culture more generally) can (continue to) and should be used to stimulate urban regeneration and economic development or whether to return to an approach that is more about culture as an end in itself – or whether to retain the flexibility for cities to strike their own balance.

Effectiveness in supporting social development through culture

The evaluation considered the effectiveness of the ECOC in respect of the social dimension of the Action. There is evidence that each was effective in implementing activities intended to achieve social objectives, notably the widening of access to culture and participation in volunteering (particularly in Sibiu and Liverpool). There is also evidence of an increase in attendance at cultural events and participation in cultural activities, including amongst target groups (in the case of

Luxembourg). Moreover, many new ways to involve such groups have been developed, for example, through the creation of new venues, the organisation of cultural events in different neighbourhoods and the creation of community arts projects. However, the social dimension of the 2007 & 2008 ECOC has consisted primarily of widening access to culture, rather than of cultural inclusion or social inclusion *per se*.

Recommendation 9: in forthcoming debates on the ECOC the European Commission should explore the extent to which the ECOC concept (and culture more generally) can (continue to) and should be used to stimulate the social renewal of cities, as opposed to merely widening access to and participation in culture, or whether to retain the flexibility for cities to strike their own balance.

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. Whilst the level of cultural activity has, naturally, decreased following the end of the title year, there is evidence in all four ECOC that many of the activities initiated in the title year have been sustained and, in some instances, public authorities have provided ongoing funding. There are also numerous examples of festivals, first initiated in the title year, continuing to be held in future years. In addition, there are many examples of cultural institutions and independent operators that are undertaking a higher level of activity than before the title year, although some opportunities have been lost in that respect.

The experience of 2007 & 2008 was that the end of the title year leads to the disbanding of the dedicated delivery agencies and inevitably some loss of the experience that has been built up. However, it is clear that the ECOC has brought about important shifts within the governance of culture within their respective cities. Not only is much of the experience retained (with many individuals remaining involved in the cultural governance of the city, having returned to their previous employers, e.g. municipalities, or taken up new posts, e.g. with cultural institutions); ECOC have also led to the introduction of new ways of working, new partnerships, and new strategies. In many cases, the ECOC has ushered in a new set of relationships between local municipalities and cultural operators, and pushed culture up the agenda of local political debate. Overall then, the ECOC have seen significant changes in the way cultural activities are brought about which have established new platforms for activity which are likely to be sustained into the future.

At this stage, it is too early to evaluate the sustainability of economic and tourism impacts. Whilst the 2007 & 2008 ECOC enjoyed increases in tourism and higher international profiles during their title years, there is a risk that these benefits will be difficult to sustain in current economic circumstances – though the title holders may, of course, enjoy more visitors than they would have done in the absence of ECOC designation and be in a better position to capture future benefits once the global economy recovers.

