



EUROPEAN CAPITAL  
OF CULTURE

**Aarhus**

**European Capital of Culture 2017**

**Second Monitoring Meeting**

**Report by the Monitoring and Advisory Panel**

**Brussels**

**April 2016**

## Introduction

This report follows the meeting<sup>1</sup> in Brussels on 21 April 2016 between Aarhus, one of the two European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in 2017, and the monitoring and advisory panel (the “panel”). Aarhus was selected in August 2012<sup>2</sup>; its bidbook is available on the Aarhus2017 website<sup>3</sup>. There was an informal meeting between Aarhus and the panel in October 2013 and a first formal monitoring meeting in November 2014<sup>4</sup>.

The report is addressed to the Aarhus 2017 Foundation (the “Foundation”) and will be published on the European Commission’s website<sup>5</sup>.

## Attendance

The panel members:

- Sylvia Amann and Cristina Farinha, appointed by the European Parliament 2015-2017
- Jiří Suchánek and Tamas Szalay, appointed by the Council of the European Union 2016-2018
- Ulrich Fuchs (chair) and Dr Suzana Žilič Fišer, appointed by the European Commission 2014-2016
- Dr Elisabeth Vitouch, nominated by the Committee of the Regions 2016-2018

For Aarhus 2017:

- Rabih Azad-Ahmad, Alderman of Aarhus
- Rebecca Matthews, Managing Director
- Lene Øster, Regional Manager
- Juliana Engberg, Programme Director
- Kirsten Jørgensen, Cultural Director, Aarhus Municipality and Member of Development Board
- Erik Sejersen, Head of Department Central Denmark Region and Member of Development Board
- Bent Sørensen, Head of Communication

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC).

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<sup>1</sup> European Capitals of Culture are governed by Decision 1622/2006 of the European Parliament and the Council. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32006D1622>

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/documents/ecoc/2017/panel-report-denmark\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/documents/ecoc/2017/panel-report-denmark_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.aarhus2017.dk/en/ansoegningen-om-titlen-som-europaeisk-kulturhovedstad>

<sup>4</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/documents/aarhus-nov-2014.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/capitals-culture\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/actions/capitals-culture_en.htm)

## Report from Aarhus2017

The Foundation submitted a detailed and comprehensive written report in advance of the meeting. The report outlined the progress made since the first monitoring meeting and the status of preparation for the year, including the current strategy, governance and management issues, the programme, the current and foreseen resources and the milestones for 2016. The report also outlined how the previous recommendations from the panel have been addressed.

At the meeting, the Aarhus delegation made a comprehensive presentation about the status and progress of the ECOC preparation and detailed thoroughly the programme, which included the following points:

- The Alderman presented the team and made an introduction on the importance of the ECOC for the city and the Central Denmark Region.
- The Managing Director presented the status of the project, which is on track, on budget and on time, driven by the same mission and the same vision as originally. A Strategic Business Plan was developed, completed by annual operating plans that ensure correct implementation and allow for corrections.
- The programme presents a strong European and international cooperation. The interest on the international level is growing and there is an increased awareness among citizens in the region.
- The programme is developing as planned and the full team is in place, with a good satisfaction level within the staff and good interaction with stakeholders. This is encouraged by the new offices in the new library building, which is very accessible and gives visibility to the ECOC in the very city centre. Around 85 % of the programme is produced by external project partners, and the Foundation is now currently gathering the final data from each project (final timetable, deadlines, content etc).
- The budget mixes public and private funds for an amount of 57.5 MM €, from which 69% is devoted to the programme. The communication budget is around 7 MM€. Only money which is secured is committed. While the State budget was confirmed at the end of 2014 yet at a lower level than initially expected, other funding has been sought for from Visit Denmark and other actors.
- The region brings a very substantial contribution, amounting to almost 30 MM €. The programme ensures coverage of the whole region and this is closely monitored by the Foundation and the Region.
- The new (higher) targeted figure for sponsorship is now 11.9 MM €, from which 9.4 MM have been confirmed. Negotiations are on-going for further 2.5, though not yet confirmed. There are contributions from outside Europe also.
- The communication for 2016 will focus on engaging and attracting the population to the ECOC project. There is a good awareness in the region and the media analysis is fairly positive. The communication includes in-kind support.

- The legacy is already being discussed at the Regional Steering Group, in particular in respect of the continuation of the collaboration among the 19 municipalities involved after 2017. The legacy is to be carried out by public authorities. Sustainability is at the core of the bidbook and the ECOC project.
- On the programme side, the main task in 2015 was curating the bidbook into an exciting cultural and artistic programme of international scope within the available budget. The final programme keeps 75% of the projects from the bidbook.
- Some of the narratives have been strengthened, within the conducting lines of Past, Present and Future under the overall "Rethink" concept, with three values pinned: Diversity, Democracy and Sustainability. The objectives are to rethink tomorrow's challenges such as ecology or migration through art and culture, while also celebrating, contemplating and provoking as a way to bring the audiences along.
- The highlights of the programme follow its main themes: Gastronomy, History, Belief, Liveability, Sport and Play, Nature, Generations. Four "mega" events are planned: opening Week across the region, Røde Orm, The Garden and the closing event. Twelve Full Moon events (including EUtopia in Gellerup, Røde Orm, etc.) will shed a light on customs and rituals and create opportunities for narratives and storytelling, showcasing the capacities of the various municipalities involved. The programme includes a strong visual arts programme across the region, giving the opportunity to local exhibition halls to work with international very high level artists.
- The programme includes many collaborations with most EOC (in particular Pafos 2017), Hull UK City of Culture, Istanbul, and others.

## Discussion

During the subsequent discussion the panel sought clarification on a number of issues and offered experience and advice. The following topics were addressed:

- The panel asked about the key message for communication and how this is translated for the general European public. The Foundation explained that the content with its three core values is the most important message to communicate, via several channels including Visit Denmark for the international communication and volunteers internally, among others.
- The panel was interested in the boat regatta project and who will participate. This is a community-based project that already happens but that will be raised to an international profile for 2017, and that is one of the Full Moon events. It will be a celebration of watercrafts and river art, and exemplifies the Foundation's endeavour to find a balance between excellence and inclusiveness for community-based projects.
- The panel mentioned the difficulty to involve different communities that might lead to accepting projects that are not completely in line with the programme and stressed the need to manage the disappointment of projects rejected.

- The Foundation mentioned the assessment of the regional coverage and the calculation of a ROI for all other municipalities. The panel asked if this was only an economic calculation or if a social component was also taken into account. The Foundation explained that impact of the ECOC will be evaluated at five impact-areas: economic, social, image and identity, political and organisational and cultural. The ROI calculation is more a measure of geographical spread of the programme as a guarantee for the municipal investments.
- The panel inquired about the involvement of the citizens, and in particular of disadvantaged groups or groups with little contact with culture. The Programme Director explained this is tackled by co-creation of a part of the projects in the programme, open calls where citizens participate as creators or partners, and social impact projects such as EUtopia.
- The panel stressed the importance to keep the attention of the public between the opening and the next big event. The Programme Director explained that the Full Moon Events will keep the attention on a regular basis, taking into account also the natural tempo of Aarhus.
- The panel also inquired about the strategies for the development of creative industries. This element of the programme has been lifted and brought to the front as part of the "soft city" project, with examples in film, fashion, food, digital communications and architecture. The programme includes the "More Creative" initiative and the Creativity World Forum, an entrepreneurial and innovation international meeting, expecting around 3000 participants. This big event is meant to question and debate the sector challenges and tendencies, but also to be a joyful happening that will explore the city as a laboratory, showcasing local/regional initiatives putting Aarhus in the creative economy map but also challenging them and provoking new collaborations.

Due to travel constraints at Brussels Airport, the discussion was shorter than foreseen, but gave an exhaustive overview of the preparation of the ECOC project.

### **The panel opinion**

The panel is very pleased to see the progress of Aarhus in the preparation of the ECOC year. The programme is well structured and balanced and time planning is very good. The Strategic Business Plan is a very good document and should be considered as a good practice. The project builds strongly upon previous experiences and a very good collaboration with the City Council and the Regional authorities.

The cooperation with the other municipalities is of added value. The evaluation of the benefit of these municipalities by the means of the Return on Investment could somehow be misleading and the use of the term ROI should be reconsidered.

The co-production strategies are very good, though attention should be paid to the control and communication of projects not directly under the responsibility of the Foundation.

The current communication strategy based on the artistic concept includes a wide variety of themes and sub-topics. As the programme of Aarhus 2017 is for good reasons

complex and ambitious, the communication strategy needs to develop very clear messages and use specific communication channels for different target groups (e. g. cultural experts, citizens), at local and national level as well as at international level. Interest from international audiences should be built.

Cultural and creative industries development is integrated in the ECOC programme with a wide range of activities, namely the “More Creative” programme, that is complementary to the previous local and regional investment in the sector culminating with the Creativity World Forum. These initiatives are meant to make visible and provoke crossovers with other sectors in the city and region so to boost the CCS capacity. In order to achieve sustainable long-term effects, the target values of the creative industries development in Aarhus and the region should be clearly defined.

Plans for legacy are already in implementation, but a clearer vision at this stage is needed for the period after 2017.

The panel appreciates the clear organisation structure and project management despite the turnover of staff during the preparation. The panel hopes that the current staff will remain in place throughout the ECOC year.

The panel considers that Aarhus 2017 has a very good European Dimension, clearly visible in the programme, and that the City and the Citizens priorities have been respected and enhanced during the preparation phase. The recommendations of the Panel at selection and during monitoring have been addressed in most cases.

**The panel recommends the award of the Melina Mercouri prize to Aarhus 2017.**

## Recommendations

In view of the last months of preparation for the ECOC year and to the year itself, the panel would like to make the following recommendations to Aarhus 2017:

- Pay particular attention to the continuous involvement of the citizens, in particular for groups that are not normally interested in Culture.
- Simplify the communication into key messages to be passed on and target them to the intended public. Focus on a few highlights and structure the priorities.
- The vision of the legacy should become clear during 2016 and guided by well-defined legacy objectives and strategy. It is important that the legacy is created in the same spirit as the projects, in a regional collaboration spanning from coast to coast.
- Advance asap with programme, production plan and expected outputs of the Creativity World Forum that is previewed for the Autumn 2017 so that such a big investment produces longer-term effects.
- Ensure that the activities are spread all over the year and that there are no gaps in the calendar, to keep attention and engagement of the public.
- Enhance the digital strategy.

- Ensure that the fact that the ECOC is a European Union initiative is made explicit in the communication activities and during the opening and other big public events.

The panel thanks the Foundation's delegation for their report and the open discussion and looks forward to a very successful year in Aarhus 2017.